

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) is thankful for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the burden and benefits of the AFCARS elements described in the Final Rule published on December 14, 2016. DCS is responsible for statewide administration and delivery of child protection and permanency services in Arizona, including child abuse and neglect investigations; child safety assessments; family support, preservation, and reunification services; family foster care and kinship care services; services to promote the safety, permanence, and well-being of children with foster and adoptive families; adoption promotion and support services; and health care services for children in out-of-home care.

The Arizona Department of Child Safety is a proponent of data to identify areas for improvement, analyze causes, measure outcomes, and produce evidence of effective practices and programs. Given the extensive data already gathered and available, DCS is concerned about the collective burden of 153 new data elements, for the following reasons:

- Caseworkers are typically responsible for the collection and entry of data into a SACWIS or CCWIS system. When the data to be collected does not fit naturally into family engagement activities and is not directly supportive of casework practice, it places demands on caseworkers that leave less time to interact with families. Parents who are successful in making behavioral changes often say that the relationships with their caseworkers were the most influential factor in their success. Further, Arizona recently recovered from a backlog of open reports for investigation and reversed a trend of out-of-home care population growth that had occurred, in part, because workload exceeded staff capacity. Having recently witnessed the real effects to children and families when workload exceeds capacity, DCS vigilantly protects caseworker time. As an example, entering whether a report to law enforcement of sex trafficking was made and the date [1355.44(d)(7)(i) and (ii)] supports quality assurance but does not directly support casework practice.
- Caseworker initial training currently includes approximately 25 hours on documentation in the State's SACWIS system, much of which pertains to AFCARS elements. DCS estimates that this training time would increase by more than 60%, to more than 40 hours. This projection may underestimate the actual hours of classroom training needed to achieve data quality in elements requiring knowledge and judgement, such as identification of the reason for a change in school enrollment [1355.44(b)(16)]. DCS estimates that the total cost of caseworker wages for new employee training on documentation in the State's SACWIS system with the new AFCARS elements added would have been \$290,000 in 2017. This estimate is the product of the hourly starting wage for a DCS caseworker, 40 hours of training, and the number of newly hired staff trained in 2017. Each hour of classroom training carries additional costs of trainer salaries, curriculum development, scheduling, employee travel, physical space, and training materials.
- Expanding the AFCARS elements by 56% will increase the AFCARS related workload of information technology (IT) staff who support AFCARS data quality and file transmission. The state pays roughly \$90 for each hour of employee time to develop and maintain code for AFCARS, and currently employs one full time equivalent (FTEs) to do this work and another FTE to support data quality and file transmission. With the expansion, additional IT staff would be required to review and distribute data quality reports and answer Help Desk calls related to data entry.

DCS is also concerned that several proposed new AFCARS data elements extend the scope of measurement into procedural compliance. This information will be most reliable and useful when

obtained through a case review conducted by quality assurance staff or external parties (such as through the Child and Family Services Review).

The following proposed non-ICWA-related elements will be particularly burdensome due to the issues described above and because the data is not currently or completely captured in Arizona's SACWIS system:

- 1355.44(b)(13)(i) through (xi) pertaining to health, behavioral or mental health conditions
- 1355.44(b)(16)(i) through (vii) pertaining to educational stability and reasons for changes in school enrollment
 - These data elements require that the caseworker complete data fields to document information that is typically already recorded in the case record in hard copy or narrative form. The additional data entry does not add immediate value in the casework process.
 - The data elements require a level of knowledge and judgement that will diminish data accuracy unless there is extensive investment in training and quality assurance. Continued support to States to develop CCWIS systems and successful data exchanges between the child welfare agency and educational, behavioral health, and court systems should occur so that data is obtained from the source agency and errors from caseworker interpretation are avoided.
- 1355.44(d)(7)(i) and (ii) pertaining to report to law enforcement and date when a child has been a victim of sex trafficking prior to entering foster care
- 1355.44(d)(8)(i) and (ii) pertaining to report to law enforcement and date when a child has been a victim of sex trafficking prior to entering foster care
 - These data elements require that the caseworker complete data fields to document information that is typically already recorded in the case record in hard copy or narrative form. The additional data entry does not add immediate value in the casework process.
 - These data elements extend the scope of measurement into procedural compliance that is better measured through a qualitative case review process in order to understand the reasons why a procedure was, or was not, followed.
- 1355.44(f)(8) and (9) pertaining to a child's transition plan and date of the plan
 - These data elements require that the caseworker complete data fields to document information that is typically already recorded in the case record in hard copy or narrative form. The additional data entry does not add immediate value in the casework process.
 - These data elements extend the scope of measurement into procedural compliance that is better measured through a qualitative case review process in order to understand the reasons why a procedure was, or was not, followed; and whether standards of quality were met.
- 1355.44(e)(18), (e)(19), (e)(24), (e)(25), (h)(7), (h)(8), (h)(13), and (h)(14) pertaining to the gender identity and sexual orientation of foster parents, adoptive parents, and guardians
 - These data elements require that the caseworker complete data fields to document information that is typically already recorded in the case record in hard copy or narrative form when it is important to decisions affecting a child. The additional data entry does not add immediate value in the casework process.

- DCS is concerned this data element will require caseworkers or foster/adoptive licensing staff to ask about the caregiver's gender identity and sexual orientation and that this may be perceived as intrusive to all caregivers, and worrisome to those who have experienced trauma and discrimination as a result of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

There are 21 American Indian tribes in Arizona, and an estimated 920 American Indian children were placed in out-of-home care in Arizona on June 11, 2018. DCS supports the expansion of data about the tribal affiliation of American Indian children in foster care, and their living arrangements and permanency outcomes. DCS is currently involved in a project with the Capacity Building Center for States to improve relations with American Indian tribes in Arizona, including a goal of improving data pertaining to American Indian children. While DCS is generally supportive of this expanded data collection, the following data elements will be burdensome in relation to their usefulness toward improving outcomes for American Indian children due to the issues described above, and because the data is not currently or completely captured in Arizona's SACWIS system:

- 1355.44(b)(3)(1) through 1355.44(b)(3)(v) pertaining to inquiry about the reason to know a child is an "Indian child" as defined in the Indian Child Welfare Act.
- 1355.44(b)(4)(i) through 133.44(b)(7) pertaining to application of ICWA.
- 1355.44(c)(6) and (7) pertaining to involuntary and voluntary termination/modification of parental rights under ICWA
- 1355.44(d)(3) pertaining to removals under ICWA
- 1355.44(e)(8) pertaining to available ICWA foster care and pre-adoptive placement preferences
- 1355.44(e)(9), (10), and (11) pertaining to foster care and pre-adoptive placement preferences under ICWA, and good cause under ICWA
- 1355.44(f)(10) pertaining to active efforts
- 1355.44(h)(20)(i) through (iv) pertaining to available ICWA adoptive placements
- 1355.44(h)(21), (22), and (23)(i) through (v) pertaining to adoption placement preferences under ICWA and good cause under ICWA
 - These data elements require that the caseworker complete data fields to document information that is typically already recorded in the case record in hard copy or narrative form. The additional data entry does not add immediate value in the casework process.
 - Several of these data elements extend the scope of measurement into procedural compliance that is better measured through a qualitative case review process in order to understand the reasons why a procedure was, or was not, followed.
 - Several of the data elements require a level of knowledge and judgement that will diminish data accuracy unless there is extensive investment in training and quality assurance. Continued support to States to develop CCWIS systems and successful data exchanges between the child welfare agency and educational, behavioral health, and court systems should occur so that data is obtained from the source agency and errors from caseworker interpretation are avoided.

DCS recommends that the instructions for current AFCARS element 56, Date of Discharge from Foster Care, be revised so that the date of exit is the date of a court order that the child is placed in the care of a parent, regardless of whether the child remains in the placement and care responsibility of the state agency via continued dependency court orders. Including children in the total out-of-home care population who are, in fact, living with a parent provides an inaccurate description of the number of children experiencing a living arrangement of out-of-home care and underestimates the rate of re-entry into out-of-home care

The Arizona Department of Child Safety appreciates the opportunity to comment on these AFCARS rules and is available to provide further input.