

**Engaging State Legislators in the  
Federal Child and Family Services Reviews:  
An Information-Sharing Tool for  
Child Welfare Agency Administrators**

**December 2006**

# **Engaging State Legislators in the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews: An Information-Sharing Tool for Child Welfare Agency Administrators**

## **Tips for Using the Tool**

The first round of the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSTRs) has been completed; all States, and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have been reviewed. States currently are working on their Program Improvement Plans (PIPs), developing strategies for sustaining the momentum between PIP closeout and the next review, or planning for or undergoing their second Statewide Assessment and onsite review.

During the first round of reviews and PIPs, many State child welfare administrators worked closely with the legislative committees responsible for child welfare oversight in their States. They shared information about the CFSTRs, participated in legislative hearings and briefings about the results of the reviews, and developed systems for routinely updating their legislatures on their PIP progress.

As the Children's Bureau Central and Regional Offices prepare for the second round of reviews, States are encouraged to actively engage their external partners, including members of the legislative branch, who play a key role in child welfare oversight and appropriations. To that end, the Children's Bureau produced the attached information-sharing tool that State child welfare agency administrators can use to reach out to legislators in their States.

The document is designed to be adapted for use by each State. State child welfare administrators will see notes to the person who adapts the document instructing them to enter State-specific information. They also might consider:

- Determining, on the basis of the State's protocol for engaging the legislative branch, the most appropriate process for using the tool below to share information with their State legislators.
- Assessing the most effective points at which the State should submit the document to the legislators on the basis of the following: (1) the schedule of their legislative session and (2) the point(s) in the State's process when it would be most effective to engage the legislature (for example, during the development of a new PIP or when the agency is considering requesting new legislation or making changes to existing legislation).
- Using the document in its current form or as a starting point from which to create the State's own vehicle for sharing information with State legislators.
- Limiting the information provided in each section to two to three sentences; consider the document as a tool for creating further discussions with State legislators.
- Drawing on the expertise of administrative staff to reformat the document before distributing it to State legislators; because it is designed to be adaptable, the cells into which text is entered will expand, thus affecting the formatting.

- Reviewing the final document carefully to ensure that the information included supports the messages that the State agency wishes to convey to the legislature.
- Adapting the tool for use in communicating with other stakeholders, such as State agencies, court personnel, tribes, and advocates.

As everyone learned from the first round of CFSRs, States that actively engaged their stakeholders benefited from their insights on agency policy and practice and their willingness to enhance existing or create new collaborations on behalf of children and families. To that end, the information-sharing tool is designed to support States in communicating with their legislators during their current program improvement efforts and the next round of CFSRs.

In developing new or refining existing strategies for engaging legislators, States might note the following general principles, outlined by a State representative at the Children’s Bureau’s 2006 Annual Meeting of States and Tribes:

- Keep legislators continually informed about new developments related to the work of the child welfare agency to avoid “surprises.”
- Keep information and messages brief.
- Identify which State legislators are likely allies on child welfare issues, and which are likely to be less supportive.
- Provide legislators with talking points that they can use to address constituent concerns.
- Develop an overall strategy for communicating with legislators.

To assist States in using the information-sharing tool to communicate with legislators, a sample of a completed tool appears immediately following the blank tool. Inclusion of specific strategies or goals in the sample should not be construed as an endorsement of those approaches. In addition, the contents of the sample are fictitious and do not reflect any State’s CFSR results or PIP.

Finally, States interested in enhancing links between State legislators and child welfare agencies can request technical assistance (TA) to support those efforts. The TA is funded by the Children’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. States interested in arranging the provision of TA should go to the [Children’s Bureau Funded Projects for Child Welfare Review](#) page and scroll down to the heading “Technical Assistance to State Legislatures on the Child and Family Services Reviews.”

**Adaptable Text for Use by  
State Child Welfare Administrators  
When Disseminating Information to State Legislators Using the  
CFSR Information-Sharing Tool**

Dear [enter title and name of the State legislator]:

As you may know, in [enter year], [enter name of State child welfare agency] participated in its first Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The CFSRs are a Federal-State collaborative effort to review State child welfare agencies' performance in achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

The attached summary provides information about the results of [enter name of State]'s [enter year] CFSR and our efforts to identify and make needed program improvements. It also provides highlights of the State's recent accomplishments and information about upcoming key CFSR-related activities. As you will note, because the CFSRs emphasize continuous quality improvement, we have negotiated a specific amount of improvement necessary for each program improvement goal whenever possible and/or appropriate. Our overall plan, however, is to achieve conformance with Federal requirements through ongoing improvements to our child welfare system.

[Note to the State: You might wish to add a paragraph here highlighting some of the information in the attached summary document.]

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss the information in the summary with you further. During those discussions, we also would be happy to explain the approach that we have taken toward establishing goals for needed improvements and the strategies that we have selected to enhance services to children and families.

Please feel free to call me at [enter telephone number] if you have questions.

Sincerely,

[enter name, title, and agency]

**Results of the [Enter the Name of the State Child Welfare Agency]'s  
Federal Child and Family Services Review  
Prepared for Members of the  
[Enter Name of State Legislature Child Welfare Oversight Committee]  
[Enter Date]**

In [enter year], [enter the name of the State child welfare agency] participated in its first Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The CFSRs were designed to measure the effectiveness of State child welfare systems by examining how children and families served by the agencies fared and by assessing the status of key agency systems. (See the "Background on the CFSRs" section at the end of this document for more information about the reviews.)

The chart below provides information on [enter State]'s last CFSR and the [enter the name of the State child welfare agency]'s efforts to make improvement in the areas identified through the review.

The information is intended for State legislators' use in conducting child welfare oversight activities and making informed decisions about how to best support agency efforts to improve critical policies, practices, and systems and therefore outcomes for children and families. The [enter the name of the State child welfare agency] will update this chart regularly and distribute it via [enter the method by which the State prefers to make the chart available to legislators, such as via e-mail or as a handout at regularly scheduled legislative briefings].

**State Review Cycle**

Date of Last Review:

Date Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Was Approved:

Date PIP Is Anticipated To Be Completed:

Date of Next CFSR: [enter the date of the next onsite review (if it is scheduled) or the anticipated month and year of the next review]

**Findings From the Last CFSR**

The [enter the name of the State child welfare agency] CFSR was held in [enter month] [enter year]. The State was reviewed for substantial conformity with seven outcome areas and seven systemic factors. See the attached Key Findings Report for the review results. [Note to the State: The Key Findings Reports and the Final Reports are available on the Children's Bureau Web site at [http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb\\_web/SearchForm](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm); the compiled results of the fiscal years 2001–2004 CFSRs are available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/results/index.htm>.]

## State's Approach to the PIP

[Note to the State: You may insert a short summary of the State's approach to the PIP to set the stage for the information that follows.]

Below are [enter State]'s key strategies for improving the performance of its child welfare system. A copy of the [enter the name of the State child welfare agency]'s PIP is available on the Children's Bureau Web site at [http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb\\_web/SearchForm](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm).

[Note to the State: If the State identified cross-cutting strategies in the PIP, you may include those below.]

Key Strategy 1:

Key Strategy 2:

Key Strategy 3:

## State's Process-Related PIP Goals

As part of its PIP, the [enter the name of the State child welfare agency] identified process-related goals for improving system performance. The following are the key process-related goals in the PIP.

[Note to the State: Include the top three process-related goals, the baselines (current circumstances), the key action steps, and the key internal and external partners with whom you collaborated and/or will collaborate in making these improvements. In addition, it is best if the strategies that appear under "State's Approach to the PIP" above link to the process-related and data-related goals noted below.]

Process-Related Goal	Baseline	Key Action Step(s)	Key Partner(s)
1.			
2.			
3.			

### State's Data-Related PIP Goals

As part of its PIP, the [enter name of State child welfare agency] identified data-related goals for improving system performance. The following are the key data-related goals in the PIP.

[Note to the State: Include the top three data-related goals and baselines, the negotiated amount/ percentages of improvement, and the key internal and external partners with whom you will collaborate in making these improvements.]

Data-Related Goal	Baseline Data	Negotiated Amount of Improvement	Key Partner(s)
1.			
2.			
3.			

### Highlights of the [enter name of State child welfare agency]'s Achievements

Since implementing its CFSR-related program improvement process, the agency has made significant and measurable improvements in the following areas. [Note to the State: Provide one- or two-sentence summaries of the top three areas in which the State made improvements.]

1.

2.

3.

### Future CFSR Activities

The following CFSR-related activities will occur in [enter name of State].

[Note to the State: Enter the top three CFSR-related activities, for example, ongoing program improvement activities or meetings to begin planning for the next review.]

Activity	Date

## Child Welfare Areas Requiring Legislative Support

The [enter the name of the State child welfare agency] has identified the following areas in which legislative support would contribute to the achievement of program improvement goals.

[Note to the State: Enter issues that require new legislation, legislative changes, or new or expanded appropriations. State agency administrators should, of course, follow the State's protocol regarding communicating with legislators.]

## Contact Information

Please feel free to contact [enter name and title] at [enter contact information] for more information about the [enter the name of the State child welfare agency]'s CFSR-related efforts to improve outcomes for children and families.

## Background on the CFSRs

The 1994 Amendments to the Social Security Act (SSA) authorized the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to review State child and family service programs to ensure conformity with the requirements in titles IV-B and IV-E of the SSA. The Children's Bureau, part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS, administers the review system, known as the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs).

Through the reviews, States are assessed for substantial conformity with certain Federal requirements for child protective, foster care, adoption, family preservation and family support, and independent living services. The goal of the reviews is to help States to improve child welfare services and achieve positive outcomes for children and families who receive such services.



Each CFSR is a two-phase process that comprises a Statewide Assessment and an onsite review of CFSR outcomes and agency systems. The Statewide Assessment provides States an opportunity to examine data and qualitative information related to their child welfare programs in light of their programmatic goals and desired outcomes for the children and families that they serve.

After the Statewide Assessment, a joint Federal-State team conducts an onsite review of the State child welfare program. The onsite portion of the review includes the following: (1) case record reviews, (2) interviews with children and families engaged in services, and (3) interviews with community stakeholders, such as the courts and community agencies, foster families, and caseworkers and service providers.

During the Statewide Assessment and onsite review, the review team assesses the following seven outcomes in three domains (safety, permanency, and child and family well-being) by examining practices within each:

- Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.
- Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.
- Child and Family Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Child and Family Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Child and Family Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

The review team also assesses the following seven systemic factors, by examining the agency's functioning in practice areas within each:

- Statewide Information System
- Case Review System
- Quality Assurance System

- Training
- Service Array
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

At the end of the onsite review, States determined not to have achieved substantial conformity on one or more of the outcomes or systemic factors are required to develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan addressing the areas of nonconformity. States that do not achieve their required improvements successfully will sustain penalties as prescribed in the Federal regulations.

## Sample Completed CFSR Information-Sharing Tool

Below is a sample of a completed CFSR information-sharing tool. The sample is designed to assist States in determining the best approach to using the tool to communicate with legislators. Inclusion of specific strategies or goals in the sample should not be construed as an endorsement of those approaches. In addition, the contents of the sample are fictitious and do not reflect any State's CFSR results or PIP. (Please see "Tips for Using the Tool" above for additional considerations in completing the tool.)

**Results of the Anystate Department of Children and Families'  
Federal Child and Family Services Review  
Prepared for Members of the  
Anystate Joint Legislative Committee on Child Welfare  
September 2, 2008**

In 2003, Anystate Department of Children and Families participated in its first Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The CFSRs were designed to measure the effectiveness of State child welfare systems by examining how children and families served by the agencies fared and by assessing the status of key agency systems. (See the "Background on the CFSRs" section at the end of this document for more information about the reviews.)

The chart below provides information on Anystate's last CFSR and the Department of Children and Families' efforts to make improvement in the areas identified through the review.

The information is intended for State legislators' use in conducting child welfare oversight activities and making informed decisions about how to best support agency efforts to improve critical policies, practices, and systems and therefore outcomes for children and families. The Department of Children and Families will update this chart regularly and distribute it as a handout at the department's regular legislative briefings.

### State Review Cycle

Date of Last Review: April 16, 2007–April 20, 2007

Date Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Was Approved: September 2, 2007

Date PIP Is Anticipated To Be Completed: September 2, 2009

Date of Next CFSR: October 2009 (tentative)

### Findings From the Last CFSR

The Anystate Department of Children and Families CFSR was held in April 2007. The State was reviewed for substantial conformity with seven outcome areas and seven systemic factors. See the attached Key Findings Report for the review results.

## State's Approach to the PIP

Anystate Department of Children and Families established an Executive Steering Committee to manage the PIP. The committee comprised the committee co-chairs from the Statewide Assessment process (the first phase of the CFSR) and individuals who had participated in the State onsite review team. The committee was co-chaired by State and county child welfare agency staff. After receiving the Final Report on the review, the committee categorized the findings into major subject headings and corresponding key strategies. They then reconvened the work groups created during the Statewide Assessment process to address each key strategy, and these groups developed goals and action steps under each strategy. In developing the strategies, goals, and action steps, the groups received technical assistance from several national organizations and convened a wide range of public and private partners from across the State to define effective child welfare practice.

Below are Anystate Department of Children and Families' key strategies for improving the performance of its child welfare system. A copy of the department's PIP is available on the Children's Bureau Web site at [http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb\\_web/SearchForm](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm).

Key Strategy 1: Enhance child safety by increasing staff capacity to respond timely to reports of maltreatment.

Key Strategy 2: Expedite permanency for children, particularly those in rural areas.

Key Strategy 3: Increase staff retention, focusing particularly on intake and investigation staff.

## State's Process-Related PIP Goals

As part of its PIP, the Anystate Department of Children and Families identified process-related goals for improving child welfare system performance. The following are the key process-related goals in the PIP.

Process-Related Goal	Baseline	Key Action Step(s)	Key Partner(s)
1. Improve training of case managers and supervisors on State child welfare policies and procedures, especially those regarding timely response to reports of maltreatment.	At the time of the CFSR, the State was assessed to be out of conformity in providing ongoing training for staff that addressed the skills and knowledge they needed to carry out their duties. Specifically cited was the need to improve training for case managers and supervisors on State policies and procedures regarding timely response to reports of maltreatment.	All case managers and supervisors will participate in three training sessions on State policies and procedures, one of which will focus on timely response to maltreatment reports; all new staff will participate in all three sessions before being assigned cases (completed in February 2008).	Child and Family Training Institute

2. Expand mental health services to families in rural areas to help promote permanency for children in foster and adoptive placements in these areas.	The CFSR finding was that mental health services are not always available to families in rural areas.	Develop and implement a State plan for reducing service gaps in rural areas by partnering with the State Mental Health Division to provide consultation services to children and families in rural areas (completed in April 2008).	State Mental Health Division
3. Reduce vacancies in intake and investigation positions.	The CFSR finding was that timely investigations of reports of maltreatment were hampered by vacancies and turnover among intake and investigation workers.	By October 15, 2007, the department will begin working with the Office of Personnel Management regarding adjustment of hiring criteria for intake and investigation positions. By October 15, 2008, the department will receive permission from the office to hire individuals with related degrees for those positions (completed in August 2008).	Office of Personnel Management

**State's Data-Related PIP Goals**

As part of its PIP, the Anystate Department of Children and Families identified data-related goals for improving child welfare system performance. The following are the key data-related goals in the PIP.

Data-Related Goal	Baseline Data	Negotiated Amount of Improvement	Key Partner(s)
1. 88 percent of all cases reviewed will receive a timely response to reports of maltreatment.	The CFSR results were that in 77 percent of all cases reviewed, the case received a timely response.	11 percent	None
2. Permanency hearings will be completed by 12 months after children enter foster care in 91 percent of cases.	The CFSR results were that permanency hearings were completed by 12 months in 82 percent of cases.	9 percent	Anystate Administrative Office of the Courts, State Adoption and Foster Care Task Force

3. Decrease the proportion of children who have been in care for 17 of the last 22 months without a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) to 35 percent.	At the time of the CFSR, 39 percent of children who had been in care for 17 of the last 22 months were without a TPR.	4 percent	Anystate Administrative Office of the Courts, Anytribe Tribal Child Welfare Council
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**Highlights of the Anystate Department of Children and Families' Achievements**

Since implementing its CFSR-related program improvement process, the agency has made significant and measurable improvements in the following areas:

1. From September 2007 to the present, the proportion of cases reviewed receiving a timely response to reports of maltreatment has increased from 77 percent to 83 percent.
2. Since September 2007, the State has increased the proportion of permanency hearings held by 12 months after children enter foster care from 82 percent to 88 percent.
3. Since September 2007, 77 percent of case managers and supervisors, and all new child welfare agency staff, have participated in the training sessions on State policies and procedures, including one session focusing on timely response to maltreatment reports.

**Future CFSR Activities**

The following CFSR-related activities will occur in Anystate.

Activity	Date
The agency will launch an Intranet-based job assistance site offering guidance to caseworkers and supervisors on State child welfare policies and procedures regarding timely response to maltreatment reports.	October 2008
Agency supervisors will participate in a technical assistance event on staff retention conducted by a national child welfare resource center.	January 2009
Agency leaders will participate in a national-level training regarding involving key stakeholders in child welfare reform.	February 2009

## **Child Welfare Areas Requiring Legislative Support**

The Anystate Department of Children and Families has identified the following areas in which legislative support would contribute to the achievement of program improvement goals:

1. Consider addressing delays and continuances in dependency court proceedings to promote timely permanency for children.
2. Explore options for providing additional resources for a comprehensive continuum of child welfare services in rural areas, in coordination with the State agency's plan for addressing gaps in mental health services in rural areas.
3. Consider options for providing resources for pay adjustments and bonus payments that would support the department's strategies for retaining intake and investigation staff.

## **Contact Information**

Please feel free to contact Joan Doe, Director, Anystate Department of Children and Families, at 123/456-7890 for more information about the Anystate Department of Children and Families' CFSR-related efforts to improve outcomes for children and families.

## **Background on the CFSRs**

The 1994 Amendments to the Social Security Act (SSA) authorized the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to review State child and family service programs to ensure conformity with the requirements in titles IV-B and IV-E of the SSA. The Children's Bureau, part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS, administers the review system, known as the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs).

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Each CFSR is a two-phase process that comprises a Statewide Assessment and an onsite review of CFSR outcomes and agency systems. The Statewide Assessment provides States an opportunity to examine data and qualitative information related to their child welfare programs in light of their programmatic goals and desired outcomes for the children and families that they serve.

After the Statewide Assessment, a joint Federal-State team conducts an onsite review of the State child welfare program. The onsite portion of the review includes the following: (1) case record reviews, (2) interviews with children and families engaged in services, and (3) interviews with community stakeholders, such as the courts and community agencies, foster families, and caseworkers and service providers.

3. Decrease the proportion of children who have been in care for 17 of the last 22 months without a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) to 35 percent.	At the time of the CFSR, 39 percent of children who had been in care for 17 of the last 22 months were without a TPR.	4 percent	Anystate Administrative Office of the Courts, Anytribe Tribal Child Welfare Council
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