

# **Children's Bureau Child and Family Services Reviews Fact Sheet for Legislatures**

## **History and Purpose**

The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) are conducted by the Children's Bureau, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The CFSRs are a valuable tool for State legislators to enhance their oversight of the State child welfare system. The CFSRs are designed to help States improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families who receive services through State child welfare systems. The CFSRs monitor States' conformity with the requirements of title IV-B of the Social Security Act. The first round of reviews took place between 2000 and 2004, and all States were required to implement Program Improvement Plans (PIPs). The second round of reviews began in early spring 2007. The CFSRs enable the Children's Bureau to (1) ensure conformity with Federal child welfare requirements, (2) determine what is actually happening to children and families receiving child welfare services, and (3) assist States in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

Specifically, the CFSRs measure seven outcomes and seven systemic factors. The outcomes measured include whether children under the care of the State are protected from abuse and neglect; whether children have permanency and stability in their living conditions; whether the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children; whether families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs; and whether children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs. The systemic factors measured by the CFSRs include the effectiveness of the State's systems for child welfare information, case review, and quality assurance; training of child welfare staff, parents, and other stakeholders; the array of services that support children and families; the agency's responsiveness to the community; and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention. Significant financial penalties may be assessed for failure to make the improvements needed to achieve substantial conformity.

## **A Resource for Oversight**

Local accountability for the achievement of positive outcomes in child welfare is an issue for all States, especially those with systems that are county-administered. While most States and counties in county-administered systems are interested in improving communication, coordination, and decisionmaking, both States and counties may lack the resources to do so or to provide oversight. The CFSRs require that States and counties renew their efforts to work together as partners to make lasting systemic improvements.

The CFSRs offer States a new way to manage their child welfare systems: a focus on continuous improvement. The reviews can provide a valuable source of information for legislators through the following:

- National benchmarks: The reviews offer a set of national standards against which the State child welfare agencies' performance is assessed.
- Comprehensive results: The reviews provide a comprehensive picture of the State system through a Statewide Assessment of the child welfare data and an onsite review of individual case records and interviews with stakeholders, caseworkers, parents, and children.
- Results and process: The reviews provide information about both the outcomes for children and families and the underlying systemic factors that influence those outcomes.
- Framework for reform: The PIP notes strengths and areas needing improvement that were identified during the review, and provides a structured and targeted plan for improving conditions for children and families served by State child welfare systems. States then must address the areas needing improvement within 2 years. States that do not make the required improvements may be assessed significant financial penalties in those areas.

### **How Legislators Can Support the Reviews**

In addition to obtaining information about their State's performance from the previous round of reviews, State legislators should be aware of how their State agency is preparing for the upcoming reviews and involving counties in the planning process.

Legislators may work with their State child welfare agency on legislation that is needed to support the State's PIP. For example, some States are moving toward a results-based accountability system by providing counties with flexible funding and other financial incentives. In many States, implementing such a system may require legislation.

### **More Information**

Legislators and their staff can obtain more information about the reviews, including reports from the first round, on the Child Welfare Monitoring section of the Children's Bureau Web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwmonitoring/index.htm#cfsr>. In addition, see "Supporting Improvements in Child Welfare Systems Through the Child and Family Services Reviews: A Resource for State Legislators," available from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/CFSRQuestions.htm>.

JBS International, Inc.'s State Team Training Project manages the overall planning for and provision of technical assistance (TA) to State legislators on the CFSRs, under a subcontract with the NCSL. Under this project component, NCSL promotes and provides TA to State legislators and State child welfare agencies on working together to strengthen State child welfare systems through the CFSRs. This project component also produces

materials for distribution on a range of topics related to agency-legislator collaboration through the CFSRs. Finally, under this component, NCSL makes presentations at national meetings on agency-legislator collaboration through the CFSRs.

For more information about the State Team Training Project or the CFSRs, please call (301) 565-3260.