



Center for Mental Health Services  
Center for Substance Abuse  
Prevention  
Center for Substance Abuse  
Treatment  
Rockville MD 20857

Name  
Title  
Department of  
Address  
Address

Dear [Child Welfare/Substance Abuse/Mental Health Director]:

This letter is being sent jointly by the Children's Bureau of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), to demonstrate our commitment to collaborate at the Federal level to improve services for families involved in the child welfare system that are experiencing substance use and mental health disorders. Our current efforts include strengthening collaboration between child welfare, substance abuse and mental health agencies with respect to the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). We firmly believe that State agencies, providers of mental health and substance abuse services, and families must all be part of the CFSR process, from the earliest stages of the State self-assessment through the development of the Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

In order to demonstrate our commitment and mutual interest in providing coordinated, high quality care, ACF and SAMHSA have established a connection between the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW) and the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. These technical assistance centers will be working together to help States address the issues of substance abuse and mental health services in their CFSR planning and on the development and implementation of PIPs. We encourage you to take advantage of these resources to strengthen your work and improve collaboration among child serving organizations.

### ***Background***

The focus of the CFSR is on States' capacity to create positive outcomes for children and families and on the results achieved, in part, by the provision of appropriate services. The CFSR assesses the safety, permanency and well-being for children and supportive services to families. However, it is not just an assessment of a State's child welfare agency. The CFSR is an assessment of the entire system of services provided to children and families. This includes services such as educational supports as well as physical and mental health services. As such, the CFSR requires the Children's Bureau to review a broad range of outcomes that cut across child serving systems, and to identify indicators that include service and system factors as well as individual child and family factors. It is the comprehensive nature of the CFSR that helps

determine if resources are in place to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of vulnerable children and families.

The CFSR includes a Statewide Assessment that requires the State to take a comprehensive look at its direct and support services to determine their appropriateness. The Statewide Assessment is provided to the Children's Bureau by the State in preparation for the week-long on-site review. Following the on-site review, Federal staff then compile their findings and produce a report detailing those areas that were found to be in substantial conformity and areas in need of improvement. The State then must develop a PIP to address corrective actions for the areas not in substantial conformity that are in need of improvement.

The Children's Bureau completed its first round of CFSRs for all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico between 2001 and 2004. At the conclusion of the first round, no State was found to be in substantial conformity in all of the outcome areas or systemic factors. Since that time, States have been implementing their PIPs to improve those outcome areas not found in substantial conformity. The second round of reviews began in the spring of 2007. Results from the first round and preliminary findings from the second round tell us that mental health services and substance abuse treatment continue to be primary areas in need of improvement.

The mental health and substance abuse treatment findings are consistent with other research that has been conducted in the child welfare field. An extensive body of evidence on the prevalence of mental illness and substance use disorders among the child welfare population makes clear how seriously these problems can affect a family's stability. Too often, these problems weaken parents' ability to care for their children and keep them safe, and vulnerable children have higher rates of mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Many of the CFSRs have commented on the lack of adequate services to respond to the needs of families. Stronger linkages between agencies can support better use of existing resources. Numerous academic studies have shown how reunifications are affected by timely, effective treatment services, and how the time that children remain in the child welfare system is reduced by better links to treatment. Recurrence of abuse and neglect is also reduced when parents are helped to enroll in effective treatment programs that address the needs of the whole family. Disruptions in placement are also reduced when a child's full range of mental health needs are part of a treatment plan based on a close working relationship between the systems and ensuring that these children will receive priority attention.

### ***Summary and Technical Assistance Resources***

ACF and SAMHSA are working in partnership to address the mental health and substance abuse issues for children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system, and are interested in promoting these collaborations across the country. Toward that end, we are making joint technical assistance available from the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare and the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. Together, these

Centers can provide information and offer valuable suggestions to prepare for the Child and Family Services Review or to address issues related to the PIP. If you are interested in accessing these resources, please contact either of these Centers:

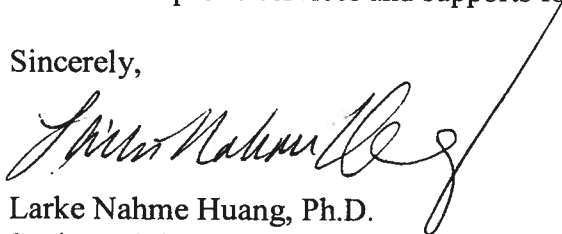
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Center for Children and Family Futures  
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National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health  
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[http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/programs/ta\\_center/](http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/programs/ta_center/)


The CFSR process offers an opportunity for child welfare policy leaders and their counterparts from mental health and substance abuse treatment agencies to assess their current working relationships and review options for stronger links. If the child welfare system is to be successful, we believe that there must be involvement and support across child serving agencies and that there must be shared responsibility for the State's CFSR goals, outcomes and improvement plans.

We hope the Federal collaboration provides a valuable resource that helps in your continued efforts to improve services and supports for children, youth and families across America.

Sincerely,



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Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
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Christine M. Calpin  
Associate Commissioner  
Children's Bureau  
Administration on Children,  
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