
INFORMATIONAL LETTER

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TO: Commissioners of
 Social Services
 Directors of
 Voluntary Agencies

DIVISION: Services and
 Community
 Development

DATE: May 11, 1994

SUBJECT: Improving Automated Support for
 Child Welfare Information Systems

SUGGESTED

DISTRIBUTION: Directors of Services
 System Coordinators
 Child Welfare Staff
 Fiscal Staff
 Staff Development Coordinators

CONTACT PERSON: Any questions concerning the focus groups should be
 directed to the appropriate Regional Office of the
 Office of Family and Children Services.

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ATTACHMENTS: None

FILING REFERENCES

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	Dept. Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law & Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref.	Misc. Ref.
					OBRA of 1993 PL 103-66 SSA 427 SSA 429

This release provides information on the Federal Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1993 which contains new child welfare legislation and entitlement funding for family preservation and support services. Under these rules federal funding will be available to provide improved automated support for development of comprehensive statewide child welfare information systems.

The enhanced funding provides this Department with an opportunity to develop a comprehensive, automated system as part of the Department's Family Preservation priorities and the Families for Kids and Decade of the Child initiatives, and to merge the new federal support with our child welfare reform initiatives and the demands of the future.

New York State will take this opportunity to re-evaluate our approach to systems support of its child welfare program. To address the new federal requirements, we intend to fully explore re-engineering current child welfare systems while taking advantage of state-of-the art user friendly technology. Among other options, the increased federal support will also provide the potential for funding developments already in the planning stage such as the Statewide Services Payment System and the Cross Machine Clearance project.

To assure that New York State is fully responding to this opportunity, we want to extend an invitation to all districts and voluntary agencies to join us in exploring the needs of the child welfare community for improved automated support.

For this purpose the Department plans to conduct a series of regional focus groups and conduct a statewide survey. The results of these meetings and survey will be used to identify how New York State should proceed with improved automation to provide better casework and management tools for child welfare service delivery, such as:

- o improved case decision-making and planning;
- o better overall tracking of cases;
- o increased accuracy and timeliness of information available;
- o an opportunity to integrate across all services systems;
- o ready access to case file and resource information;
- o supervisory and management assistance in monitoring and evaluating casework;
- o more efficient case management at all levels.

NEW FEDERAL REGULATIONS

On December 22, 1993, the HHS Administration for Children and Families issued two rules that together make federal reimbursement available for a comprehensive child welfare information system. The administration's vision is for a system that acknowledges and supports the complex and interwoven factors in the successful delivery of services to families. The impact on child welfare systems as we know them will be extraordinary.

These two rules are described as the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE ANALYSIS AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS (AFCARS)

The purpose of AFCARS is to collect basic data on each child receiving child welfare services. This information will assist the local, state and federal governments in addressing policy development and program management issues such as, short- and long-term budget projections, trend analysis, and short- and long-term planning.

As part of the AFCARS requirements, submission of specific foster care and adoption information for all children receiving these services from the states is included. The submission of this information begins on May 15th, 1995 for the period October 1, 1994 through March 31, 1995. The first six semi-annual reporting periods from October 1, 1994 through September 30, 1997 will be penalty free. However, there will be penalties thereafter for submissions which do not meet accuracy and timeliness criteria. We want to explore with you the best means for collecting the new data and ensuring its accuracy and timeliness in order to avoid such penalties. We will continue to share our ideas and seek your input throughout the requirements, design and implementation process.

STATEWIDE AUTOMATED CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS (SACWIS)

For the first time in over a decade, increased federal funding is now available for system development or improvement. Section 13713 of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 provides enhanced funding available at 75% federal financial participation for the planning, design, development and installation of SACWIS. Enhanced funding at the 75% match is also provided for all SACWIS hardware components. This enhanced funding is authorized effective October 1, 1993 through September 30, 1996. New York State plans to conduct a needs assessment and explore how these potential funds can be used to provide significant improvements in the delivery of child welfare services. Through expanded system support we intend to work with you to define program needs which can be met through this funding.

In order to be eligible for the federal reimbursement New York State must have a comprehensive system which addresses the following:

- Meet AFCARS requirements as contained in section 479 of the Social Security Act (SSA) and its implementing regulations;
- Be capable of electronic exchanges of information and interfaces, where practicable, with other state data collection systems, such as, WMS, SCR, IV-D, MA;
- Provide more efficient, economical and effective administration of the programs carried out under Titles IV-B or IV-E.

Other SACWIS options include providing support in meeting the following program functions: automated procedures to assist in managing service providers, facilities, contracts and recruitment activities associated with foster and adoptive families; tracking and maintenance of legal and court information, and preparation of appropriate notices to relevant parties; risk assessment; licensing verification; and administration and management of staff and workloads.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR USER COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON NEW YORK STATE'S RESPONSE TO THESE NEW FEDERAL REGULATIONS

As previously mentioned, staff from this Department plan to conduct a series of regional focus groups and a statewide survey. This is an important step toward obtaining maximum input and gathering advice and counsel from you and your staff so that any system changes are designed to meet local district and voluntary agency needs, and in doing so help to promote better outcomes for the families and children you serve. Regional Office staff will be communicating with you again about our plans in more detail.

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