

Fact Sheet

for LEGISLATURES

HISTORY of the REVIEWS

The 1994 Amendments to the Social Security Act authorize the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to review state child and family service programs to ensure conformity with the requirements in titles IV-B and IV-E of the Act. The Children's Bureau, part of the Department of Health and Human Services, administers the review system, known as the Child and Family Services Reviews.

In 2000, the Children's Bureau published a final rule in the Federal Register to establish a process for monitoring state child welfare programs. Under the rule, states are assessed for substantial conformity with federal requirements for child welfare services.

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico completed their first review by 2004 and their second review by 2010. After each review cycle, or "round," no state was found to be in substantial conformity in all of the seven outcome areas and seven systemic factors. States developed and implemented Program Improvement Plans after each review to correct those areas not found in substantial conformity.

The third round of reviews runs from 2015 to 2018.



PURPOSE

The Child and Family Services Reviews enable the Children's Bureau to: (1) ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is actually happening to children and families as they are engaged in child welfare services; and (3) assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

The reviews are structured to help states identify strengths and areas needing improvement within their agencies and programs. Ultimately, the goal of the reviews is to help states improve child welfare services and achieve the following seven outcomes for families and children who receive services:

Safety

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Permanency

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for families.

Family and Child Well-Being

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.



The Child and Family Services Reviews also assess the following seven systemic factors that affect outcomes for children and families:

- statewide information system
- case review system
- quality assurance system
- staff and provider training
- service array and resource development
- agency responsiveness to the community
- foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention

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 decision-making, both states and counties may lack the resources to do so or to provide oversight. The Child and Family Services Reviews require that states and counties renew their efforts to work together as partners to make lasting systemic improvements. The reviews offer states a way to manage their child welfare systems by focusing on continuous quality improvement. The reviews can provide a valuable source of information for legislators through:

- **National benchmarks:** The reviews offer a set of national standards against which state child welfare agencies' performance is assessed.
- **Comprehensive results:** The reviews provide a comprehensive picture of state systems through statewide assessments of the child welfare data; onsite reviews 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 Program Improvement Plan 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. Program Improvement Plans are monitored to determine whether each state has made adequate improvements.

HOW LEGISLATORS CAN SUPPORT *the* REVIEWS

In addition to obtaining information about their state's performance from the previous rounds of reviews, state legislators should be aware of how their state child welfare agency is preparing for the upcoming review 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 Program Improvement Plan. For example, some states are moving toward continuous improvement and 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

Additional information on the reviews is available on the Children's Bureau's website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews> or from the Child Welfare Reviews Project, JBS International, Inc., 5515 Security Lane, Suite 800, North Bethesda, MD 20852; 301-565-3260; e-mail: cw@jbsinternational.com. Round 3 resources are available at <https://training.cfsrportal.org/resources/3044>.

