

Children's Bureau

Round 4 Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs)

Fact Sheet for Legal and Judicial Communities



What Are the Child and Family Services Reviews?

The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) enable the Children's Bureau to: (1) determine conformity with federal child welfare requirements; (2) learn about the experiences of children, youth, and families receiving child welfare services; and (3) assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

Child welfare agencies and the legal and judicial communities have many common goals. Among them are enhancing families' capacity to safely care for their children, preventing the unnecessary removal of children, achieving timely and appropriate permanency (and strengthening the case review system), promoting and maintaining family relationships and connections, and meaningfully engaging families. Legal and judicial communities consist of attorneys for children and youth, parents, and agencies, judges, court administrators and personnel, and Court Improvement Program (CIP) directors. These professionals are an integral part of every state's child welfare system, which works to address the needs of children who have been maltreated and to achieve positive safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for them and their families.

As part of this work, the CFSR provides the Children's Bureau with an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to advancing the equitable treatment of all children and families. The reviews help states use the data and information collected to identify strengths and areas needing improvement within their agencies and programs. The reviews also provide states an opportunity to consider and critically analyze evidence of disparities in decision-making, programs, and policies that may contribute to inequity in services and outcomes for

people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the child welfare system.

The Children's Bureau encourages the involvement of a wide range of individuals in the review process. In addition to legal and judicial representatives, those with lived experience provide different and important perspectives that can contribute to the development and implementation of an equity and inclusion framework that can reduce disparities and promote system and outcome improvements for all children and families served in the child welfare system.

The reviews specifically assess states on the following seven outcomes for families and children who are involved in the child welfare system:

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 children.

Federal statutes mandate legal and judicial involvement and oversight in child welfare cases, ensuring the child welfare agency is in compliance with child welfare laws and regulations. The courts' role in children's welfare is part of what is monitored by the CFSRs. The following areas are examined by the CFSRs and are opportunities for systemic and case improvement:

- The timeliness of hearings that affect the permanency goals of reunification, guardianship, and adoption
- The appropriateness of permanency goals to the circumstances of a case
- The effectiveness of notification to foster care parents and other caregivers of permanency hearings and opportunities to be heard in court proceedings about the children in their care
- The effectiveness and availability of the array of services made available to children and families
- The use of data by legal and judicial stakeholders to examine child welfare outcomes

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.

Through the CFSRs, the Children's Bureau also determines states' performance on seven systemic factors. The systemic factors refer to systems within a state that should be in place to promote positive child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. The seven systemic factors reviewed are:¹

1. Statewide Information System
2. Case Review System
3. Quality Assurance System
4. Staff and Provider Training
5. Service Array and Resource Development
6. Agency Responsiveness to the Community
7. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

¹ For more information on the outcomes and systemic factors, see the CFSR Quick Reference Items List, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cfsr_quick_reference_list.pdf

The CFSR Process

The CFSR begins with a statewide assessment. The statewide assessment provides an opportunity for states to gather and analyze data to evaluate their child welfare programs and practices. The statewide assessment is written by the state in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders, including those with lived experience, to demonstrate how well the systems are functioning.

Next is the onsite review, where a joint federal-state team reviews the practices within a state. The onsite review process includes: (1) case reviews, which include interviews with key case participants, and (2) interviews with child welfare system stakeholders and partners, such as legal and judicial representatives (i.e., attorneys, judges, court administrators and personnel, and CIP directors), community agencies, foster families, caseworkers, service providers, and parents and youth served by the child welfare system.

After the onsite review, states determined not to be in substantial conformity with one or more of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors are required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address all areas of nonconformity. The PIP provides an opportunity for the state child welfare agency, the legal and judicial systems, and other stakeholders to use information from the statewide assessment and the onsite review to develop, implement, and monitor a state-specific plan to strengthen the functioning of the systemic factors and improve outcomes for the children and families served.

Get Involved

The child welfare, legal, and judicial systems play integral roles in ensuring a well-functioning child welfare system that serves to improve the lives of the children and families it touches. The Children's Bureau encourages legal and judicial professionals to participate in all phases of the CFSR, PIP, and continuous quality improvement processes. As a member of the legal and judicial communities, you can help improve the child welfare system by taking part in the planning of the state's CFSRs, including participating in activities aimed at engaging other legal and judicial professionals in the CFSR and PIP processes. The CIP can serve as a coordinating entity for legal and judicial involvement in the CFSRs. You can get involved in the CFSRs in several ways:

Statewide Assessment



Members of the legal and judicial communities can help develop the statewide assessment by providing data, information on relevant legal and judicial issues, and/or sharing their experiences.

Onsite Review



Judges and attorneys can participate in the onsite review by reviewing individual cases. They can also participate in stakeholder interviews with the CFSR team.

Program Improvement Plan



Members of the legal and judicial communities can support program improvement planning by developing and implementing judicial strategies to address areas needing improvement. They can also partner with other stakeholders to approach the state legislature for needed legislative changes.

Other Ways To Get Involved



Members of the legal and judicial communities can also organize and participate in regularly scheduled meetings with the agency and other system stakeholders to address challenges affecting children's safety, permanency, and well-being.



More Information and Resources

CFSR Round 3 Report for Legal and Judicial Communities, which highlights CFSR Round 3 results that are most relevant to the legal and judicial communities. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/cfsr-legal-judicial-communities-report>

Child Welfare Information Gateway's section on "Court-Child Welfare Agency Collaboration," which provides additional information about getting involved on behalf of children in your state. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/courts/ccwa/>

Children's Bureau's website, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews>, and CFSR Information Portal, <https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources>

Child Welfare Monitoring section of the Children's Bureau website, which includes reports from the first, second, and third CFSR rounds. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews>

Capacity Building Center for Courts. <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/courts/>

State Child Welfare Agency Websites, which may include information about the CFSR in your state and opportunities for your involvement. https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunctionsaction=rols:main.dspList&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=16
