

## CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW TECHNICAL BULLETIN #14

December 19, 2025

On November 13, 2025, President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Order No. 14359, titled “Fostering the Future,” with a goal of improving child welfare outcomes throughout the United States. Among its provisions, President Trump tasked the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to:

update applicable regulations, policies, and practices to improve the collection, publication, utility, and transparency of State-level child welfare data, including by improving collection of data and information indicative of child well-being and safety, eliminating duplicative or unnecessary high-cost and low-value reporting requirements, and expanding and expediting child welfare data publication.

This Technical Bulletin (TB) is the first phase of delivering on this call to action. Specifically, it provides an opportunity to revisit the current high-cost, low-value Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) and associated Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) while improving the utility of child welfare data to drive lasting improvements.

Since 2001, ACF has completed three rounds of CFSRs, and a fourth round is currently underway. In 25 years, no states have been found to be operating in substantial conformity with all outcome measures and systemic factors during an initial or subsequent review; consequently, every state has been placed on a required PIP.

Data across CFSR rounds show that no state has ever passed all seven performance outcomes and all seven systemic factors. While CFSR rounds are not directly comparable due to minor differences in measurement across years, the degree of substantial conformity has seemingly declined over time:

- In Round 1, states met an average of 5.4 measures (out of 14) per state.
- In Round 2, this declined to 4.4 measures per state, with 27 states losing ground, 12 states staying even, and 12 states improved.
- In Round 3, this further declined to 2.8 measures per state, with 32 states losing ground, 13 states staying even, and 5 states improved.

Unfortunately, these trends appear no different midway through Round 4. At a minimum, performance is stagnant. When viewed alongside other available data, the CFSR results appear inconsistent with what many believe to be real-world improvements in child welfare practice. This disconnect raises important questions about the CFSR’s ability to accurately capture system performance and to produce meaningful and well-measured change. If the goal is sustainable performance improvement, then the CFSRs may not be effectively assessing state child welfare agency performance in ways that are truly indicative of promoting child safety, permanency, and well-being.

As part of a broad effort to focus on durable outcome improvement, supported by strong evidence, ACF is launching its initiative—*A Home for Every Child*—to orient improvement efforts around outcomes that matter most: ensuring every child has access to a safe, stable, and loving home, and that states are supported in building the capacity and systems to make that possible. **In support of this initiative and in an effort to strengthen the CFSR process, this administration is creating a pilot opportunity for states in various stages of CFSR Round 4 to center their program improvement efforts around the *A Home for Every Child* goal, excusing them from the PIP development and measurement process outlined in Technical Bulletin 13A.**

This initial phase is but the first step in a broader, ongoing effort to generate meaningful data that can inform efforts to institute substantial modernization to the CFSR process. While the existing process drives improvement, current PIP requirements can be overly prescriptive, creating lengthy, unfocused plans that divert resources to administrative compliance rather than to meaningful practice change. The changes outlined in this TB aim to maintain state accountability for achieving meaningful outcomes for children and families, enhance transparency and public accountability, reduce administrative burden, and provide states with greater flexibility to innovate and build capacity to manage and improve child welfare systems and outcomes, centered around the goal of *A Home for Every Child*. All states—and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico—may avail themselves to the PIP flexibilities afforded in this TB, subject to conditions specified herein that reflect a commitment to performance improvement.

## **Section I. Guidance Based on Phase of CFSR/PIP Process**

*This section provides information on how to apply this TB for states in various stages of the Round 4 CFSR/PIP process. The guidance contained in this TB should be applied in accordance with other relevant CB-issued guidance for CFSR Round 4. CB will work to provide state-specific support on how to apply this TB for interested states; CB is not specifying a deadline for state interest in this TB.*

### ***For states with an approved PIP and/or PIP Measurement Plan***

States that have an approved PIP and/or PIP Measurement Plan may request renegotiation of the PIP and the PIP Measurement Plan, regardless of where the state is in implementing those plans. All renegotiations will be oriented around the goal—*A Home for Every Child*, and the renegotiated PIP measurement plan will focus on measuring progress toward achieving related goals.

### ***For states issued a CFSR Final Report and in the PIP development process***

States that have received their CFSR Final Report and are in the process of developing their PIP may opt-in to this opportunity and incorporate this guidance in their PIP and PIP Measurement Plan. Both the PIP strategies and actions steps as well as the Measurement Plan should be oriented around the goal—*A Home for Every Child*—to ensure alignment with ACF’s strategic focus on emphasizing prevention, improving foster care capacity and achieving timely permanency.

## ***For states pending issuance of their CFSR Final Report or that have not started the CFSR***

States that are in the early stages of PIPs/PIP Measurement Plan development or that have not started their CFSR may opt in and should anticipate developing their PIPs/PIP Measurement Plans in accordance with this TB and other relevant CB-issued guidance for CFSR Round 4. These efforts should be oriented around the goal—*A Home for Every Child*—to ensure alignment with ACF’s strategic focus on emphasizing prevention, expanding foster care capacity, and improving permanency outcomes.

## **Section II. Objectives of Pilot for PIP Flexibilities**

Key objectives for this pilot are described below:

- Continue focus on improved outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- Continue to promote public accountability by enhancing public visibility of performance.
- Provide states greater flexibility to innovate and build capacity.
- Implement Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) effectively.
- Reduce administrative burdens.
- Generate data for meaningful CFSR updates.

The Children’s Bureau (CB) is committed to partnering with states in decision-making processes informed by implementation experience, stakeholder feedback, and evolving priorities in the child welfare landscape to support the consistent development and finalization of CFSR PIPs. *In doing so and in pursuing the objectives above, CB will ensure that the PIPs adhere to the current regulations (45 CFR § 1355.35-36 and 42 U.S.C. 1320a-2a) and utilize best practice principles of measurement and CQI.*

## **Section III Benefit to States for Participating in Pilot**

Two primary benefits accrue to participating states.

First, states will no longer be expected to meet or exceed specific goals associated with either case review or the Statewide Data Indicators (SWDI). However, states will be required to establish goals related to *A Home for Every Child* and report monthly progress until either the established goals are met or the end of the post-PIP evaluation period, whichever occurs first. This change is intended to maintain accountability for states, while also supporting adaptive and responsive approaches to improve their child welfare systems, programs, and practices. It also encourages continued measurement to ensure progress is tracked and accountability is sustained. Our goal is to foster a more supportive environment that encourages innovation in the states’ CQI process while improving outcomes and system functioning.

Second, under this pilot, CB is revising its approach to determining when a PIP is successfully completed to ensure that federal funding is withheld **only** when a state fails to implement the agreed-upon strategies and key activities as specified in the state’s approved or renegotiated PIP and/or fails to fully implement the corresponding approved or renegotiated PIP Measurement Plan. If a state completes both the CB-approved PIP and the PIP Measurement Plan as agreed

upon by the state and CB and according to the provisions noted below, federal funds will not be withheld.

The PIP pilot opportunity outlined here will be available immediately, signaling this administration’s commitment to implement meaningful improvements to child welfare outcomes and reduce state administrative burden as soon as possible. This will enable state child welfare agencies to focus resources on areas of program and practice that support safety, permanency, and well-being for children, youth, and families in their communities.

#### **Section IV. PIP and PIP Measurement Plan Flexibilities**

Given the stagnacy of state improvement within the current CFSR framework, CB will tie PIPs to meaningful outcomes to drive lasting performance improvements. The pilot PIP will prioritize measurable progress toward the goal *A Home for Every Child*—safely decreasing the number of children entering care through effective prevention; ensuring that every child entering foster care has access to a safe, stable, and licensed family home; and promoting timely permanency. *A Home for Every Child* provides a unifying construct that reflects the full continuum of good practice in child welfare—from prevention and family strengthening to permanency and post-permanency support—offering a cohesive framework for aligning state efforts with what works. The initiative prioritizes prevention alongside increasing the number of homes through diligent recruitment, prioritizing kin, and improving the retention of existing caregivers. Its purpose is to offer states a simplified organizing framework that shifts attention from numerous reporting measures to the key outcomes of the initiative.

States that opt-in to this pilot will be expected to develop a PIP that employs *A Home for Every Child* as the framework for addressing areas of nonconformity highlighted in the CFSR findings. In furthering efforts to achieve the 1:1 ratio of licensed foster homes to children in foster care, states **will not** be required to address every item or practice area identified in the CFSR Final Report as an area needing improvement individually in the PIP. Instead, states are encouraged to address the findings in the Final Report by focusing on a limited number of well-conceived, overarching, outcome-based goals to achieve the ratio.

States may choose to test, innovate, or invest in program or operational changes they believe will result in improvement both on selected improvement measures and, importantly, the ratio. However, it is critical that a well-articulated rationale for the selected goals, measures, and interventions is provided. PIP development discussions will be guided by recognition that states are best positioned to understand and address the unique needs of their populations.

Performance measurement associated with the PIP should be focused on metrics that chart progress toward achieving *A Home for Every Child* goals and action steps, spanning the spectrum of child welfare from prevention to permanency and ensuring child and family safety and well-being. This includes system processes that are necessary to ensure strong outcomes, such as those represented in the seven systemic factors. Case review will not be required, although states may choose to continue case review as part of their PIP and may include such plans in their PIP Measurement Plan. States must include, as a core element of their PIP Measurement Plan, specific metrics tied to the goal for states to create a home for every child:

achieving and maintaining a 1:1 or greater ratio of licensed foster homes to children in foster care. The 1:1 ratio does not preclude states from pursuing placements outside of foster homes or from placing multiple children, for example, siblings, in one home but rather is intended to serve as an indicator spanning the full child welfare spectrum.

States must also include wraparound measures related to safety, permanency, and child and family well-being, such as adverse placement scores. Wraparound measures should be chosen such that they will show performance improvement in areas that are expected to lead to improvements in the ratio of homes to child. Through the focus on *A Home for Every Child*, CB expects states to address areas identified in their CFSR Final Report as requiring improvement.

States will be asked to establish valid baseline measures, as part of their PIP negotiations, that link to actions they intend to take and that will have associated interim and final targets or goals. The expectation is that reporting will be monthly, as negotiated and approved by CB.

Pilot states will also have greater flexibility in methods used for the PIP Measurement Plan. To streamline reporting related to the ratio and associated safety measures in the PIP, negotiations should focus on automated data available in AFCARS and NCANDS, as well as data housed in their child welfare information systems that may be considered for future federal data.

CB seeks to use this as a learning lab to determine which automated measures can be reported more frequently to enhance transparency and augment cross-state analysis. To further enhance transparency, CB will also begin publishing all statewide data indicators publicly.

## **Section V. Looking Ahead: A Phased Approach to System Improvement**

The changes outlined in this TB are intended as a foundational step in a longer-term strategy to reduce state burden and modernize the CFSR and PIP processes. CB will assess the effectiveness of these revisions and engage with states to identify additional opportunities for improvement.

PIP development discussions will be guided by recognition that states are best positioned to understand and address the unique needs of their populations. These actions reflect a shift toward a more flexible, collaborative, and iterative approach centered around a shared goal of *A Home for Every Child*. CB anticipates that additional refinements will be made as states implement changes and share feedback on what works in practice. While we are affording states greater flexibility to determine, design, and implement solutions, we expect plans to be based on rigorous and thoughtful analysis. We recommend that states leverage their CQI systems, agency structures, and priorities to identify areas of focus and develop innovative program improvement solutions under the shared goal of *A Home for Every Child*. The intent is for PIPs to align with the state's vision and strategic plan and be designed to produce meaningful improvements in practices, outcomes, and system functioning centered around this initiative. Federally funded technical assistance and capacity building services are available to states to assist with this work.