

Children's Bureau

Round 4 Child and Family Services Reviews

Fact Sheet for Elected Officials



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.

As part of this work, the reviews provide states an opportunity to consider and critically analyze evidence of disparities in decision-making processes, 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.

As an elected official, you are a key decision-maker in policy structure for your state's child welfare systems and systemic improvements. You can promote interagency coordination; provide political support; and encourage the participation of courts, Tribes, youth, parents, and others. The CFSRs provide you, as an elected official, with an important opportunity to improve your understanding of the child welfare system and the needs of children and families, including persons of color and other underserved and marginalized populations, and how you can support improved outcomes for the children and families being served.

The CFSRs provide transparency about how systems in your state, and other states, are operating. They increase public knowledge and provide information to encourage the participation of important

stakeholders and partners in the state. The reviews are designed to focus on outcomes, not just on process issues.

The reviews help states identify strengths and areas needing improvement within their agencies and programs. 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.

Well-Being

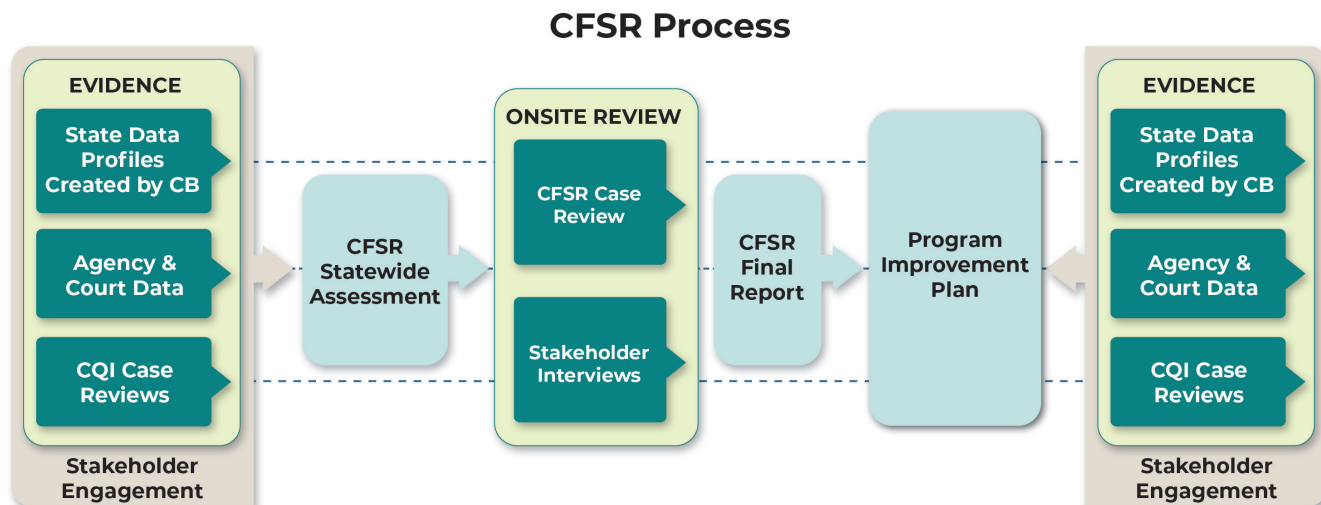
- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

As an elected official, you are encouraged to make investments in improving the system where there are areas of challenge. The CFSRs offer states a way to manage child welfare systems by focusing on continuous quality improvement. The CFSRs provide a valuable source of specific information for governors, other elected officials, and their staff through:

- **Comprehensive results:** The reviews provide a comprehensive picture of the state system by using a statewide assessment of the child welfare data in addition to an onsite review 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:** For those states determined not to be in substantial conformity with one or more of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors listed below, a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is required. The PIP is developed with input from key stakeholders and partners and builds on strengths to address the areas needing improvement identified during the review. PIPs provide a structured and targeted plan for improving practices, policies, and systemic gaps affecting children and families served by state child welfare systems. PIPs are monitored to determine whether each state has made adequate improvements, including meeting established PIP measures for outcomes.

The CFSR Process

The CFSRs are a partnership between federal and state staff. The process is explained below.



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

Statewide Assessment. The statewide assessment provides an opportunity for states to gather and analyze qualitative and quantitative data and evidence to evaluate their child welfare programs and practices. The statewide assessment begins with the consideration of a state’s performance on the CFSR data profile. The Children’s Bureau creates the data profile using the state’s administrative data (from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System [AFCARS])

and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System [NCANDS]) and sends it to the state. The CFSR data profile includes performance information on the state’s child safety and permanency outcomes provided by CFSR statewide data indicators (SWDI).

The SWDI performance calculations are based on observed performance, Risk-Standardized Performance (RSP), and national performance.²

- **National performance** is a measure of how the nation as a whole performed on a given indicator.
- **Observed performance** is a measure of a state’s actual performance on a given indicator.
- **Risk-Standardized Performance** is a comparison of state performance on a given indicator to national performance, but which considers factors over which a state has little or no control before making comparisons to national performance.

In addition to the CFSR data profile, states use their own qualitative and administrative data along with relevant data from agency partners and stakeholders to examine performance and systemic factor functioning. 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. The information captured in the statewide assessment informs the Children’s Bureau’s substantial conformity determinations and is used to inform subsequent phases of the CFSR.

Onsite Review. A joint federal-state team conducts the onsite review of the state child welfare program. The onsite review phase of the CFSR includes (1) case reviews, which include interviews with key case participants, and (2) interviews with child welfare system stakeholders and partners, such as courts, community agencies, foster families, caseworkers, service providers, and parents and youth served by the child welfare system. The extent of stakeholder interviews varies depending on the information provided in the statewide assessment.

States meeting certain criteria may conduct their own case reviews and case-specific interviews using the federal Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions and submit the results to the Children’s Bureau in lieu of a Children’s Bureau-led review conducted in a 1-week timeframe.

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

² Capacity Building Center for States. (n.d.). CFSR statewide data indicators. <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/topics/cqi/cfsr-data-syntax-toolkit>

Program Improvement Plan. 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 PIP to address all areas of nonconformity as specified in the CFSR Final Report. The PIP provides an opportunity for the state child welfare agency, partners, stakeholders, and persons with lived experience 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. Stakeholders, partners, and youth and parents served by the child welfare system should be involved in improvement planning efforts and can assist the agency in developing, supporting, and monitoring the PIPs.

States must successfully complete their PIPs to avoid financial penalties for nonconformity. Federal regulations require withholding a portion of title IV-B and IV-E funds for the year under review and each succeeding year until the state either successfully completes a PIP or is found to be in substantial conformity with federal requirements. These financial penalties increase if states fail to complete a PIP and are found to remain in nonconformity on the next full review.

Get Involved

As an elected official, you can get involved in the CFSRs by:

- Attending an exit conference that provides the results of the review
- Reading the Final Report to learn about the CFSR findings
- Reading the PIP to learn what the agency is doing to address the findings
- Learning how you can support implementation of the PIP
- Reviewing the national aggregate reports to see how your state's results compare with the national results/findings



More Information

Elected officials can learn about the review process by becoming familiar with the outcomes of their state's last review.

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> and the CFSR Information Portal at <https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources>.

Information about the CFSR in your state and opportunities for your involvement may be available on the state child welfare agency's website. A list of state child welfare agency websites is at https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?CWIGFunction=rols:main.dspList&rolType=Custom&RS_ID=16