



CDSS

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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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July 18, 2013

ALL COUNTY LETTER (ACL) NO. 13-36

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL COUNTY CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS  
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS  
ALL CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (CDSS)  
ADOPTIONS DISTRICT OFFICES

SUBJECT: COMPLETE, ACCURATE, AND TIMELY ADOPTION AND  
FOSTER CARE ANALYSIS AND REPORTING SYSTEM  
(AFCARS) DATA ENTRY AND UPDATES TO THE CHILD  
WELFARE SERVICES/CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM  
(CWS/CMS)

REFERENCE: 45 CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATION (CFR) 1355.40  
SECTION 479 OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT; MANUAL OF  
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (MPP) SECTION 31-206.361;  
MPP SECTION 31-206.361; WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS  
CODE (W&IC) 16501; ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE  
(ACIN) NO. I-03-13; ACIN I-44-05.

This ACL provides direction to the counties on how to record complete, accurate, and timely case information updates into the CWS/CMS, in order to meet required Child Welfare Services Program documentation, data reporting, and program performance measurements. In December 2012, the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) reviewed the AFCARS data submitted by the state, for the reporting period April 1, 2012 through September 30, 2012, and determined that California did not substantially comply with the AFCARS reporting requirements (per 45 CFR 1355.40 and section 479 of the Social Security Act) due to missing or incorrect data for several data fields. This ACL will highlight areas considered not to be in substantial compliance as reported in the most current federal AFCARS report.

Counties are reminded that insufficient data negatively affects the state's performance outcomes and can result in federal funding penalties.

The following actions must be followed to ensure improved data accuracy: In CWS/CMS, supervisors and staff should review and update all AFCARS data fields from the AFCARS Navigation Tool.

(Select AFCARS after starting the "Navigation Tools" from the "Tool" drop down menu or the Tool Man button.) Once in the AFCARS navigation screen, incomplete AFCARS fields display a green background; completed AFCARS fields display a white background; shadowed fields do not yet apply to the case. To update the green AFCARS fields, click on the "Open File" button next to the field and follow the instruction steps. The updated AFCARS fields will display a white background when you return to the AFCARS navigation screen.

Supervisors should ensure that staff correctly enter and update information as it is obtained. Please note that functionality in the AFCARS Navigation Tool for placement-related information corresponds to the current AFCARS reporting period only. As a result, staff may view green fields from the AFCARS Navigation Tool and then navigate to the AFCARS field and find the fields containing data entered for a different reporting period. The data in these fields needs to be updated for the current AFCARS reporting period. The following data elements were found to not be in substantial compliance with the Title IV-E plan requirements:

### **Clinical Diagnosis of Disability**

When a child first enters foster care, a physical exam must occur within 30 days (MPP section 31-206.361). All open foster care cases must identify if a child has been clinically diagnosed as having a disability. The diagnosis indicator values are:

- *Yes*
- *No*
- *Not Yet Determined.*

If the diagnosis indicator is "Yes," then the client condition field requires a start date. This field cannot be left blank. If a diagnosis has not yet been made or recorded, the accurate option is "*Not Yet Determined.*" The field can be updated at a later date, once the child has received an examination. Without this information, the county is unable to provide the full range of services to which a child may be eligible. Additionally, insufficient information limits ability and resourcefulness of the county and the caretaker or provider, to the child.

Note: Prior to the AFCARS reporting period of April 1, 2012 through September 30, 2012, the blank field for this data element defaulted to “*Unable to Determine.*” However, ACF has determined that this practice is no longer acceptable. As a result, a significant number of records are now reported as errors due to missing data.

### **Adoptions Status of Child**

Part of the pre-placement assessment is identifying the Adoption Status of Child data element, which helps provide a historical context or perspective that can assist in determining the appropriate level of care and services.

For all children entering foster care the adoption status of a child must be identified. The indicator values are:

- Yes
- No
- *Unable to Determine.*

“*Unable to Determine*” is allowable only if the child was abandoned or the child’s parent(s) are otherwise not available (e.g., deceased).

Lack of this information may impact the quality of care the child receives and impact the determination of appropriate services and placement.

### **Case Plan Goals (Most Recent)**

This is a fundamental element for directing service activities. A Case Plan must be developed within 60 days of opening a case, updated every six months, and/or when a significant change in the case occurs (W&IC 16501). The Case Plan is the foundation for information that drives and determines services for a child.

The Case Plan Goal indicator values are as follows:

- *Adoption*
- *Adoption with Sibling(s)*
- *Legal Guardianship*
- *Long Term Foster Care with Non-Relative*
- *Long Term Foster Care with Relative*
- *Remain Home*
- *Return Home*
- *Maintain Minor with Guardian*
- *Self-Maintenance*
- *Tribal Customary Adoption*

- *Permanent Connections for Independence.*

### **Caretaker Family Structure**

In order for the Caretaker Family Structure to be determined, each adult caretaker from whom the child was removed from the current foster care episode must have marital status and gender data entered. At least 30 days from the removal date, all children in foster care must have one of the following identified for the adult caretaker(s) from whom the child was removed for the current foster care episode:

- *Married Couple*
- *Unmarried Couple*
- *Single Female*
- *Single Male*
- *Unable to Determine.*

“*Unable to Determine*” is allowable only if the child has been abandoned or the child’s caretakers are otherwise unknown.

### **Caretaker Year of Birth**

To determine the Caretaker Year of Birth, at least 30 days from the removal date, all children in care must have the year and place of birth identified for the adult caretaker(s) from whom the child was removed for the current foster care episode. The age of the caretaker can inform relevancy of services.

Note: In some cases the caretakers’ date of birth was not missing but entered incorrectly, indicating the caretaker was younger than the child or in excess of 100 years of age.

### **Adoptive Parent Family Structure**

All finalized adoption records need a category entered that best describes the nature of the adoptive parent(s) family structure. In order for the Adoptive Parent Family Structure to be determined, each Substitute Care Provider must have marital status and gender data entered.

The four indicator value alternatives are:

- *Married Couple*
- *Unmarried Couple*
- *Single Female*
- *Single Male*

**Child Was Placed From (within state, another state, another country)**

All finalized adoption records need to identify the location of the individual or agency that had custody or responsibility for the child at the time of initiation of adoption proceedings.

The three indicator values are:

- *Within State*
- *Another State*
- *Another Country*

This data element is not included in the CWS/CMS AFCARS Navigation Tool. Counties must navigate to the Client Adoption Information page to ensure one of the three “location” indicators above is selected.

Complete, accurate, and timely data entry in CWS/CMS is a critical factor impacting federal and state outcome measures and funding. It is also extremely important that workers have access to current, accurate records for the children and families they serve to ensure appropriate and effective services. The CDSS stands ready to collaborate closely with counties toward enhancements in data accuracy overall. To this end, CDSS will sponsor the following activities:

- Annual reporting of AFCARS submission error rates, both statewide and for individual counties;
- Inclusion of AFCARS reporting highlights in quarterly interactions between counties and their assigned consultants from the Outcomes and Accountability Bureau; and
- Development and implementation of a formal data clean-up plan for CWS/CMS, in preparation for adoption of a replacement system.

If you have any questions, please contact Deborah Williams, Chief, Child Welfare Data Analysis Bureau, at (916) 654-1192, or by sending an email to [CWSData@dss.ca.gov](mailto:CWSData@dss.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

***Original Document Signed By:***

GREGORY E. ROSE  
Deputy Director  
Children and Family Services Division

c: CWDA