

**Georgia Department of Human Services  
Child and Family Services Federal Review**

**Addendum to the Statewide Assessment**

**1. Page 17 – Quality Assurance System – What are the services provided to children to protect their health and safety?**

**What are the critical issues that were identified in the reviews? What were the recommendations?**

We began the Child Safety Initiative with the review of Fulton County in February 2000. The Initiative involved other urban counties beginning in April 2000. We will complete the reviews of all urban counties at the end June 2001. The Quality Assurance System in Georgia is comprised of thorough and comprehensive reviews that look at case level activities as well as county level management operations to ensure improved social services delivery. Individual county information is shared as well as statewide trend analysis to have a direct impact on social services policy and procedures. The Child Safety Initiative is specifically designed to address child safety and permanency issues. Child well being is an indirect part of the review through the case record reading process. The review does not address specific child well being issues. Any child that is determined to be in immediate danger is brought to the attention of local and state management. A response is required.

A formal Trend Document outlining the critical findings and statewide recommendations will be completed by August 15, 2001. To date, our critical findings are as follows:

**Safety:**

The Child Safety Initiative is looking at the federal indicators as they relate to the Federal review. Currently, the state has a significant problem with reoccurrence of maltreatment. The review addresses how these subsequent CPS referrals are handled. In 106 applicable cases, 48 or 45% were not completed in accordance with CPS policy.

In cases of substantiated abuse/neglect in the foster home, 7 or 33% of the 21 applicable cases reviewed did not have approval from the state office for the cases to remain as active foster homes. In 26 of the cases reviewed where a corrective action plan was in place, 12 or 46% were not adequately monitored.

In 3783 CPS cases, response times were not met in 1363 or 36% of the cases. In 446 or 29% of the 1557 cases reviewed where there were allegations of physical/sexual abuse and the parent/caretaker was the alleged maltreater, the case manager did not interview the child in a setting away from the parent/caretaker.

**Case Management:**

In ongoing CPS cases, collateral contacts were not made in 877 or 61% of the 1430 cases reviewed. Contact requirements with parents/caretakers were not met in 798 or 55% of the 1446 cases reviewed. Contact requirements with children were not met in 877 or 51% of the 1704 cases reviewed. When subsequent referrals were received in open cases, they were not completed according to policy in 48 or 45% of the 106 cases reviewed. Policy guidelines were not followed in completing the assessment in ongoing

CPS cases in 647 or (39%) of the 1664 cases reviewed. Parents/caretakers were not involved in the case planning process in 820 or 32% of the 2570 cases reviewed. When closing an ongoing CPS case, there was no face-to face contact with the family to inform them of case closure in 227 or 38% of the 605 cases reviewed. The closure decision was not supported by a supervisor's signature in 321 or 48% of 667 cases reviewed.

**Case Review System:**

The Child Safety Initiative does look at the case review process for timeliness. This is not a problem area for this state. Case reviews are conducted in a timely manner in 85% of the cases.

The Child Safety Initiative monitors the notification of caregivers to panels/reviews that involve the children in their care. Timely notice is being given to caregivers in 81% of the cases reviewed. No negative trends are noted.

**Permanency:**

Court orders extending custody failed to identify the permanency plan goal in 983 or 53% of the 1871 cases reviewed.

Permanency hearings were not held within 12 months that identified reasonable efforts in 306 or 43% of the 704 cases reviewed. Extensions of custody hearings were not held in 634 or 38% of the 1657 cases reviewed. In non-reunification cases, no petition for TPR was filed or no permanency hearing was held in 142 or 37% of the 380 cases reviewed. Documentation to support the agency's authority for initial removal/placement was not found in 304 or 28% of the 1092 cases reviewed. For children ages 16 and older, a Written Transitional Living Plan (WTLP) was not completed in 70 or 27% of the 264 cases reviewed.

In cases identified as children free for adoption, Life histories were not completed and approved within 60 days of TPR as outlined in policy in 107 or 89% of the 120 cases reviewed. Monthly contact was not made in preparation for adoption or other plan in 364 or 52% of the 702 cases reviewed. In cases where the children were not placed within 6 months, updates were not completed in 274 or 50% of the 544 cases reviewed.

**2. Page 19 – Staff and Provider Training– What is the name of the contractor that provides the pre-service training?**

**How many hours of in-service training are required for workers?**

During the period of review, the contractor was the Georgia Academy that provided training to new employees. Currently, an RFP has been sent to vendors and the State anticipates an award to be made in early August 2001. There are six training modules, each has a different topic of study. The duration and number of trainees will differ; however, the Department does not intend on scheduling more than 25 participants for any class.

The modules are:

- Module 1: Foundation of Child Welfare
- Module 2: Child Protective Services
- Module 3: Foster Care Services
- Module 4: Adoption Services
- Module 5: Domestic Violence Training

## Module 6: Supervisors on the Front Line

Although, there is not a minimum hour requirement for in service training of workers, nine weeks of training are provided to new social services employees. There are opportunities for in service training such as the Annual Child Abuse and Neglect Conference; Basic Investigative Training and Education (BITE); Foster Parent and Child Development Institutes; Annual Child Placement Conference; and Adoptive and the Foster Parent Association of Georgia to name a few. Please see additional training courses listed under Staff and Provider Training in the Statewide Assessment.

### **3. Page 51 – Foster Care Population Flow (Point-in-Time Data Element I & Cohort Data Element I) –The information provided in this section discussed point-in-time data only. The section should also discuss the cohort group data.**

The First-Time Cohort data show a 34% increase from 1997 to 1999 in the number of children entering care for the first time (800 children), close to the 31% overall increase in admissions. From 1997 to 1999 the First-Time Cohort increased slightly as a percentage (89% to 91%) of all children entering care in the first six months. The Point-in-Time cross-section and the First-Time Cohort appear to have experienced similar increases in admission rates to foster care (approximately 800 additional children per six months in each group). These increases may be the result of slight changes in interpretation and clarifications due to ASFA or the competing interests of safety and reunification. Increases may also be evidence of a DFCS response to criticism following high-profile incidents in 1998 and 1999. The Point-in-Time data admissions outpaced discharges by 53% (5523–3611) in 1997. In 1999, admissions outpaced discharges by 15%, a very significant improvement.

Corrections to the Point-in-Time statements:

- First sentence: The number of admissions increased from 5523 to 7218 which equals a 31% increase and not a 23% increase as stated in the original document.
- Second paragraph, first sentence, same problem: The increase in discharges was 3,611 to 6,267, a 74% increase and not 42%.

### **4. Page 53 – Placement Types for Children in Foster Care (Point-in-Time Data Element II & Cohort Data Element II) same as above, cohort data was not addressed.**

Replace the first sentence of this answer with: The Point-in-Time element 11 data show little change in the proportion of "family-like" settings, from 83% of children in 1997 to 84% in 1999. The proportion "institution-like" placements also held steady at approximately 15%. In contrast, the First-Time Entry Cohort data show an increase in the proportion of family-like placements, from 77% in 1997 to 83% in 1999, primarily due to a 3% decrease in the proportion of "institution-like" placements. These data suggest that the types of placements at initial entry have been brought into parity with placements made late in the foster care stay. Of the children placed in family-like

settings, 23% are currently placed with relatives (in both the Point-in-Time cross section and the First-Time Cohort).

**5. Page 54 – Permanency Goals for Children in Foster Care (Point-in-Time Data Elements III & VIII and Cohort Data Elements III & V), the first sentence contains percentage from the cohort group, however, all the other statistics in the paragraph contains point-in-time data. In addition, there is no data referencing the cohort group.**

There has been very little change in the reunification/relative placement permanency goals from 1997 to 1999, with 67% overall and 90% of the First-Time Cohort having this goal. The proportion seeking adoption as a permanency goal has increased in the overall group from 16% in 1997 to 20% in 1999, while remaining nearly constant at about 6% in the First-Time Entry Cohort. This increase is attributable to ASFA and state policy changes

The proportions of children discharged to reunification/relative placement have remained nearly constant from 1997 to 1999 at 64% overall (Point-Time group) and 86% for the First-Time Entry Cohort. Similarly, the proportions discharged to adoption have remained nearly constant at 17% overall and 2% for the First-Time Entry Cohort. Children removed for the first time are inherently more likely to be reunified and less likely to be adopted within the cohort's six month observation time.

The median length of stay for children who were reunified or placed with relatives increased 35% from 3.94 months in 1997 to 5.32 months in 1999. This increase is somewhat related to the large increase in the number of discharges from 1997 to 1999. The effort to discharge many children who had been in foster care for extended periods has had the side effect of increasing the median length of stay in 1999. Of course the high rate of case manager turnover (44% annual) and attendant decrease in the level of experience (3.5 months, on average) are also likely causes for this increase in reunification times.

The 11% decrease in the median length of time to adoption (41 months in 1997 to 37 months in 1999) and the large increase in the number of children adopted (84% from 1997 to 1999) are indicative of Georgia's efforts and investment into our state Office of Adoptions.

**6. Page 57 – Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) (Point-in-Time Data Element VI). Need a statement detailing how GA is complying with ASFA regulations. Discuss process for TPR. Identify and discuss issues that affect timely TPR.**

Georgia has implemented Section 475 (5) (E) TPR provisions to "current foster children" within ASFA's specified timeframes. Georgia has an 18-month phase in approach to implementing ASFA. The method used by the State to apply Section 475 (5) (E) to current foster children to meet ASFA requirement were that each county department office is required to:

- 1.) Complete a desk review of all children in care on 7/1/98;

- 2.) Review child characteristics, i.e. length of time in care, permanency plan, etc.;
- 3.) Identify subset priorities, i.e. children in care the longest, Adoption as the plan;
- 4.) Initiate TPR proceedings, document relevant exception in an Addendum (attach to the case plan) and submit for next Judicial Review or Citizen Panel Review;
- 5.) Sign Assurance Statement (Co-Director and Field Coordinator) that review, identification of priority children and action on behalf of current children completed prior to 1/1/99;
- 6.) Submit documentation to State Office for state review;
- 7.) State Office submitted documentation to Region IV HHS, ACF for approval

A letter (dated February 16, 2000) acknowledging that all 159 county departments are in compliance with the transition rules is attached as supporting documentation. This letter verifies that the county departments have applied the transition rules for implementing the third and final phase of the termination of parental rights provision of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.