

AFCARS SUPPORTING STATEMENT

A. Justification

1. Statutory Requirements

The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is mandated by 42 U.S.C. 679. The regulation at 45 CFR 1355 sets forth the requirements of section 479 of the Social Security Act for the collection of uniform, reliable information on children who are under the responsibility of the State title IV-B/IV-E agency for placement, care, and adoption.

2. Purpose and Use of Information

The AFCARS is the only nationally mandated collection of data on children in foster care and those who have been adopted under the auspices of the State child welfare agency. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) uses the information submitted by States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to respond to questions and requests for current data on children in foster care or who have been adopted. These requests may be received from Congress, other Departments, national advocacy organizations, States and other interested organizations. The Department aggregates the data by State and nationally.

In addition, the Department uses the data submitted through AFCARS to address policy development and program management issues at both the State and Federal levels. The data will enable the Federal government to more effectively direct and manage the national foster care and adoption programs. Specifically, the Department uses the data for:

- the Child Welfare Outcomes Report to Congress;
- the National Standards used for compliance monitoring in the Child and Family Services Reviews;
- as the data source for samples drawn of case records for various program reviews conducted by ACF;
- allocating Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) funds to States;
- to identify the number of finalized adoptions for which a State may be awarded adoption incentive funds;
- short and long-term budget projections;
- trend analyses and short and long-term planning;
- targeting areas for greater or potential technical assistance efforts, for discretionary service grants, for research and evaluation, and for regulatory change; and
- background and justification for policy changes and legislative proposals;

The data will enable policymakers to assess the reasons why children are in foster care and develop remedies to prevent it. The data will provide information about foster care placements, adoptive parents, length of time in care, delays in termination of parental rights and placement for adoption, and identify geographic areas with special problems.

The data will also be useful for research. The ultimate purpose is to gain a better understanding of the

foster care program and the causes and other factors contributing to its expansion and other changes and, eventually, to make suggestions and proposals for change to improve the child welfare system.

3. Electronic Submission

AFCARS data are required to be submitted electronically to the Department on a semi-annual basis. The electronic file transfer method preferred by ACF is Connect:Direct. This method provides a secure direct mainframe to mainframe or PC to mainframe communication between States and the Federal Government.

4. Duplication

AFCARS is the only Federal system of data collection on adoption and foster care.

5. Impact on Small Businesses or Other Small Entities

This information collection is required of State agencies only and does not impact small businesses or other small entities. The Department requires reporting only on those children for whom States have responsibility for placement and care.

6. Consequence of Less Frequent Collection

Information must be collected on an on-going basis in order to provide effective trend analysis, and other programmatic information for children in foster care and children who have been adopted. As the only nationally mandated child welfare information collection system, AFCARS is the primary source of information. In order to reduce the burden on States, and still gather data on a timely basis, a semi-annual reporting period has been required in the regulation.

If AFCARS were to be submitted on an annual basis, information up to at least 15 months old would have to be used for policy purposes before the next year's data would be available. By contrast, information provided on a semi-annual basis will receive a preliminary analysis within a thirty to sixty day timeframe.

7. Special Circumstances

There are no special circumstances required in the collection of this information in a manner other than that required by OMB.

8. Comment to Federal Register Notice

The 60 day notice published January 30, 2008 on page 5573.
No comments were received to the first Federal Register Notice.

9. Payment to respondents

No payments, other than Federal financial participation (FFP), will be made to States for the

maintenance and development of an information system.

10. Confidentiality

All data on adoption and foster care will be collected with the assurance of confidentiality. The data must be kept confidential as the purpose of its collection is to conduct program and policy analyses and not to track individual children at the national level. The identity of individual children and families will be known to the reporting State only. ACF has approved two methods for the creation of an AFCARS record number, encryption or sequential numbering. ACF has assisted States in developing an algorithm to encrypt.

11. Sensitive Questions

There are no questions of a sensitive nature in the application requirements.

12. Information Collection Burden

ANNUAL BURDEN ESTIMATES

Instrument	Number Of Respondents	Number Of Responses/ Respondent per year	Average Burden Hours/Response	Total Burden Hours
AFCARS	52	2	3,005	312, 513

Burden hour estimates are based on the number of children in care at the start of the year, as well as those children who entered and those who exited care during the year.

ANNUAL COST ESTIMATES

Item	Hours	Cost per hour	Total Cost
Annualized cost to respondents for collection of AFCARS	3,005	\$30	\$90,150

The estimated cost for the collection of information is based on an average caseworker and systems analysts wage.

13. Estimate of Annual Cost Burden to Respondents and Record Keepers

There are no AFCARS only data collection systems. States utilize existing computer systems to record and collect information pertaining to the case work associated with children in foster care. The cost of collecting and submitting data to AFCARS for States is subsumed under States’ expenses for personnel.

14. Estimate of Annualized Federal Costs

Item	Hours/Activities	Cost per hour	Annual Total Cost
Implementation of AFCARS	10, 400	\$39	\$405,600
AFCARS Reviews	4 site visits	\$2,700/review	\$10,800
Federal Annual Total			\$416,400

The average annual Federal costs associated with overseeing implementation and data analysis is based on five full time employees (one grade 14, two grade 13s, one grade 12, and one grade 9). The cost for ACF to conduct periodic monitoring visits in States is based on two positions at the grade 13 level.

15. Changes in Burden

The burden hours focus on data collection for children in care at the start of the year, those who entered and those children who exited care. The estimated number of burden hours has decreased from previous estimates.

There will be variability in the average burden hours over the years and the actual decreases may be nominal. While States will become more proficient technologically and implement faster data systems, decreasing the actual time of inputting data and transmitting data, this may be offset by the caseloads of children in foster care increasing.

The decrease in the cost to the Federal government is an adjustment to earlier estimates. The contributing factor to the decrease is a change in staff personnel.

16. Publication for Statistical Use

There is no timetable or end date for the project, as collection of adoption and foster care data will be ongoing. Tabulation of the data will consist of frequency distributions by State. Statistics generated from the data will include at a minimum the relationship of child demographics and case characteristics to case outcomes: e.g., length of placement. In addition, child demographics, case characteristics, and case outcomes will be tracked over time and by State. Also, ACF is required to submit annual data reports to Congress.

17. Display of Expiration Date

The Department is requesting that the OMB number and expiration date not be displayed, as there is no form that the States use to submit AFCARS data. All data are submitted electronically. The OMB number is displayed at 45 CFR 1355.40.

18. Exceptions to Certification Statement

There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

B. Collection of Information Employing Statistical Methods

The information collected in AFCARS does not require the use of statistical methods.