

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)

**OMB Information Collection Request
0970 - 0422**

Supporting Statement Part A - Justification

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Type of Request: Revision

Submitted By:
Children's Bureau
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

1. Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary

State and tribal title IV-E agencies are required to report Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) case-level information on all children in foster care and children who have been adopted or placed in a guardianship with title IV-E agency involvement. AFCARS is a data collection system for national adoption and foster care data authorized under section 479 of the Social Security Act (the Act). Section 479(c)(3)(A) of the Act requires the collection of comprehensive national information with respect to the demographic characteristics of children in foster care and those who are adopted with state involvement and their biological, foster, and adoptive parents. The regulation at [45 CFR 1355](#) sets forth the requirements of the Act for the collection of uniform, reliable information on children who are under the responsibility of the state or tribal title IV-B/IV-E agency for placement, care, guardianship, and adoption.

States have been required to submit the AFCARS data since 1993. The regulations were updated via the final rule published in May 2020 ([85 FR 28410](#)) and again in December 2024 ([89 FR 96569](#)) with the requirement for additional data related to the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA). The first submission of the new data related to ICWA is May 15, 2029.

2. Purpose and Use of the Information Collection

AFCARS is the only nationally mandated collection of data on children in foster care and those who have been adopted with involvement of the title IV-E agency. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) uses the information submitted by title IV-E agencies for congressionally required reports, monitoring of the title IV-B/IV-E programs, awarding adoption and guardianship incentive awards, and developing budgets.

3. Use of Improved Information Technology and Burden Reduction

Since AFCARS was established, regulations have required electronic submission of AFCARS data to HHS on a semi-annual basis (twice a year). Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) approved software is used that allows for a secure direct communication between the title IV-E agencies and the Federal Government.

4. Efforts to Identify Duplication and Use of Similar Information

AFCARS is the only Federal data collection of information on children in foster care and who have exited to adoption or legal guardianship.

5. Impact on Small Businesses or Other Small Entities

This information collection does not impact small businesses or other small entities because the requirements are on state and tribal child welfare agencies who receive title IV-E funding.

6. Consequences of Collecting the Information Less Frequently

Information must be collected on an on-going basis in order to provide effective trend analysis and other programmatic information. In order to reduce the burden on title IV-agencies, and still gather data on a timely basis, a semi-annual reporting period is 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 allows for a preliminary analysis within a sixty-day timeframe after data submission.

7. Special Circumstances Relating to the Guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5

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

8. Comments in Response to the Federal Register Notice and Efforts to Consult Outside the Agency

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulations at 5 CFR Part 1320 (60 FR 44978, August 29, 1995), ACF published a notice in the Federal Register announcing the agency's intention to request an OMB review of this information collection activity. This notice was published on March 30, 2026 (91 FR 15622) and provided a sixty-day period for public comment. During the notice and comment period, 17 comments were received.

Of the 17 comments, 9 were from tribes or tribal organizations, 5 were from state or local title IV-E agencies, 2 were from college professors, and one was from a non-profit organization. Most commenters, particularly tribes and national tribal organizations, strongly support adding ICWA-focused data to AFCARS, citing long-standing gaps that obscure Native children's experiences and hinder accountability and policy improvement. Each of the 5 state and local agencies raised burden and resource concerns about the increased amount of data to be collected and the difficulty of obtaining the data that is outside of the child welfare systems, especially in low-volume ICWA jurisdictions. Four of those jurisdictions explicitly asserted that the federal burden estimate was understated. Two of those calculated the specific burden for their state with one as 12,216 hours (plus 1,650 hours for the first year of implementation) and the other at 22,000 hours per year. One state agreed with the estimate.

No changes were made to the burden estimates based on the public comments, as the estimates already considered a varied range of estimates for the different jurisdictions and only one commentator specifically stated that their specific estimate is higher annually (3,894 hours). Additionally, no changes were made to the information collection because the data to be reported as part of AFCARS has been through the rulemaking process and would require a change to the regulation in order to revise it.

9. Explanation of Any Payment or Gift to Respondents

No gifts are made. Payments, in the form of Federal financial participation (FFP), are made to state and tribal title IV-E agencies for a portion of the costs incurred for the maintenance and development of an information system.

10. Assurance of Confidentiality Provided to Respondents

All data on adoption, guardianship, and foster care are collected with the assurance of confidentiality. Title IV-E agencies must send the child-level data using a method of encryption. The agency encrypts the identifier to transmit the data confidentially to the Children's Bureau. The encrypted ID must be a 12-character identifier that cannot be linked to the child except at the agency or local level. An agency is responsible for its own encryption routine using modern and accessible encryption tools and the information and following the specifications described in AFCARS Technical Bulletin #21: XML File Structure and Encryption. 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 is known only to the reporting title IV-E agency.

11. Justification for Sensitive Questions

Section 479(c)(3)(A) of the Social Security Act requires the collection of comprehensive national information with respect to the demographic characteristics of children in foster care and those who are adopted with state involvement and their biological, foster, and adoptive parents. While the topic is of a sensitive nature, AFCARS does not collect information directly from individuals, all information is received from title IV-E agencies. The information that title IV-E agencies report to AFCARS is aggregated and de-identified at the national level, meaning it does not include names or numbers. To ensure the confidentiality of the data, each title IV-E agency encrypts its identifiers. No actual case or individual identifiers are submitted. Each agency ensures that its data meet a standard of encryption.

12. Estimates of Annualized Burden Hours and Costs

Estimated Burden Hours

Title IV-E state and tribal child welfare agencies report semi-annually, as required by regulation. Burden hour estimates are based on the number of children in care at the start of the federal fiscal year, as well as those children who entered and those who exited care during the year. It also includes a six percent increase of burden for states to implement the new ICWA-related data for applicable children. The burden for recordkeeping involves searching data sources, gathering information, and entering the information into the system, developing or modifying procedures and systems to collect, validate, and verify the information and adjusting existing ways to comply with AFCARS requirements (including testing), administrative tasks associated with training personnel on the AFCARS requirements (e.g., reviewing instructions, developing the training and manuals), and training personnel on AFCARS requirements. The burden for

reporting includes extracting the information for AFCARS reporting and transmitting the information to ACF, which includes modifying, or developing a new data file for reporting. ACF understands that actual burden hours and costs will vary due to sophistication and capacity of information systems and availability of staff and financial resources, thus this is an average across states.

The total estimated burden of 1,250,485 hours is broken up into recordkeeping and reporting. The recordkeeping burden estimate is 1,248,105 hours. This was estimated as 1,161,736 hours for searching and gathering information, 41,936 hours for developing or modifying IT systems, and 44,433 hours for administrative tasks. The total reporting burden estimate is 2,380 hours.

Estimated Cost to Respondents

ACF assumes that there will be a mix of the below positions working to meet the annual requirements of this rule. To inform this estimate, ACF reviewed 2025 Bureau of Labor Statistics data for job roles in categories of information technology (IT) and computer programming, administrative, management, caseworkers, subject matter experts, and legal staff and used the average hourly wage for each job role. ACF used the job roles for social services and legal staff who may be employed by the child welfare agency and systems/engineer staff who may be employed by the agency or retained by a contract to build or revise case management systems. The roles and wages are Office and Administrative Support Occupations (43-0000) (e.g., Administrative Assistants, Data Entry, Legal Secretaries, Government Program Eligibility Interviewers, Information and Record Clerks) at \$24.79; Social and Community Service Managers (11-9151) at \$42.73; Community and Social Service Occupations (21-0000) at \$30.49; Social Workers (21-1020) at \$32.47; Child, Family, and School Social Workers (21-1021) at \$30.77; Paralegals and Legal Assistants (23-2011) at \$33.51; Computer and Information Systems Managers (11-3021) at \$92.39; Computer and Mathematical Occupations (15-0000) at \$57.73; Information Security Analysts (15-1212) at \$63.71; Computer Hardware Engineers (17-2061) at \$78.21; Database Administrators (15-1242) at \$52.93; Database Architects (15-1243) at \$69.44; and Computer Programmers (15-1251) at \$50.56. The average labor rate for these wages is \$51. To account for associated overhead costs, ACF doubled this rate, which is \$102.

Information Collection Title	Total Number of Respondents	Annual Number of Responses Per Respondent	Average Burden Hours Per Response	Annual Burden Hours	Average Hourly Wage	Total Annual Cost
State Recordkeeping	53	2	9,035.97	957,813	\$102	\$97,696,908
Tribe Recordkeeping	17	2	8,538	290,292	\$102	\$29,609,784
Reporting	70	2	17	2,380	\$102	\$242,760
Estimated Annual Burden and Cost Totals:				1,250,485		\$127,549,452

13. Estimates of Other Total Annual Cost Burden to Respondents and Record Keepers

States and tribes utilize existing electronic case record 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 title IV-E agencies is subsumed under the agency's expenses for personnel.

14. Annualized Cost to the Federal Government

The estimated cost to the federal government is \$23,956,520. ACF has a contract for operation and maintenance of the National Child Welfare Management System which is an enterprise-wide data collection system, designed to enhance the collection and reporting of administrative data for AFCARS at \$5 million a year.

The estimated annualized cost to the federal government for administering this information collection is based on the time of federal staff responsible for oversight, review, and management activities. Assuming work is performed by a mix of GS-12, GS-13, and GS-14 employees in the Washington, DC locality area, the average fully loaded compensation rate (salary plus benefits) is estimated at \$189,130 annually, or approximately \$90.62 per hour. This estimate incorporates an assumed benefits rate of 36 percent. The total annualized cost to the federal government is calculated by multiplying the estimated number of federal staff hours devoted to the collection by the average hourly compensation rate for a total of \$756,520.

States are able to claim FFP under title IV-E of the Act for system development, operation, and maintenance cost. The federal share of title IV-E claims made by all States is approximate \$18.2 million.

15. Explanation for Program Changes or Adjustments

This information collection is a regulated dataset. The AFCARS dataset recently underwent a revision with a final rule in December 2024 (89 FR 96569) which added 55 data elements to require reporting of more detailed information related to Indian Child Welfare Act's procedural protections. This increased the reporting burden for state title IV-E child welfare agencies only.

16. Plans for Tabulation and Publication and Project Time Schedule

Statistics are generated from the data on an ongoing basis and on an as needed basis to respond to requests for information. The data are then transformed into an interactive AFCARS Dashboard at https://tableau-public.acf.gov/views/afcars_dashboard_main_page/mainpage. Additionally, tabulations include the congressionally mandated Child Welfare Outcomes Report at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/cwo>. The analysis includes 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 are tracked over time and by state.

17. Reason(s) Display of OMB Expiration Date is Inappropriate

Consistent with prior approvals, the Department is requesting that the OMB number and expiration date continue to not be displayed as there is no form that the title IV-E agencies use to submit AFCARS data. All data are submitted electronically. The OMB number is displayed at 45 CFR 1355.

18. Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions

No exceptions are necessary for this information collection.