



Transmitted via email to infocollection@acf.hhs.gov

May 29, 2026

Ryan Hanlon, Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Comments on Proposed Information Collection Activity – Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)

Dear Associate Commissioner Hanlon:

On behalf of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, I am writing in response to your request for public comments on "*Proposed Information Collection Activity; Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)*," listed in the Federal Register, March 30, 2026. Tribal Nations have a unique political status with the United States, and our citizens are included as citizens of Tribal governments with Federal laws, such as the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). While we appreciate that consideration to include Tribal data in AFCARS is being discussed, we have concerns and request that you convene formal consultation with Tribes on the items listed under the "Comments" section of the notice. This will allow for all discussions and comments to be vetted in the appropriate forum and have transparency going forward. In the meantime, we offer the following comments and concerns for the record.

Our Indian Child Welfare program is dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of Native American children and families within the Jamestown S'Klallam community. Through a series of carefully structured support services and collaborative efforts, we aim to address and mitigate the challenges faced by these families, promoting a healthy, secure, and culturally connected community. From preventive support initiatives to fostering partnerships with state and Federal agencies, our efforts are rooted in the principle of active engagement and support. Extending the team's dedication beyond direct service provision, our team is highly present in advocacy efforts within state and Federal circles to shape policies favoring Tribal families. The involvement spans multiple essential workgroups, reflecting a commitment to strong Tribal collaboration and government-to-government partnerships. This includes the ICW Subcommittee, the AD Hoc Active Efforts and Licensing Work Group, the ICW Court Steering Committee, and the Region 5

& 6 Work Group, all embodying the philosophy of collaboration and emphasizing the importance of Tribal input and self-determination in policy development. The Tribe also provides training for local agencies, to ensure the laws of ICWA are understood and upheld.

In the 21st century there should not be a request or comments on “burden calculations to state agencies” when it comes to policies and priorities assessing the needs, care, and placement of children in a foster care system that is in much need of repair and short on resources. Like the industrial revolution spanning the mid-18th to mid-19th centuries, today we are in the “generative AI and immersive communication revolution”. What that means is we are shifting from basic information sharing to human-machine interaction with search engines that make information instantly available. The trickle-down effect results in budget and program cuts attributable to waste, inefficiency, and the newest reason – duplication of services due to the absence of reliable, accurate, and timely data on Native children and families. While this request for comments seeks only to address the collection burden for state child welfare agencies, the Federal government’s constitutional, statutory and treaty-based trust obligations to sovereign Tribal nations must override state administrative convenience. It is about protecting Native children and families and our Tribal communities.

Comprehensive data tracking is the only way to hold states accountable and ensure the survival of our Native children and families. The demand for data will not diminish, instead the justification will dictate who gets what and how much and Tribal data sovereignty needs to be included in the equation. We need more resources to expand services and protect the progress made to date under the ICWA. Congress passed ICWA explicitly to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability of Indian Nations. The cultural survival of a Tribe and the safety of a child cannot be weighed on the same scale as the financial cost or staff hours a state spends updating a computer database. State data collection is not a bureaucratic luxury; it is the fundamental mechanism required to verify that the Federal government is fulfilling its promise to keep Native families together. Therefore, the focus of this inquiry should not be about the burden of data collection by state agencies. More aptly, we should be examining how Tribes will benefit from the increased collection by the state agencies – or if there will be a greater burden or dismissal of Tribal needs and involvement in the foster care system.

Historically, only state governments could directly access Title IV-E funds to build automated, statewide data systems. Tribes were entirely excluded from this direct funding source. In 2024 there were only eight Title IV-E Tribes with data in AFCARS, representative of 544 children, yet the dashboard does not show percentages of foster children from these Tribes. It is not clear if Native children are included in the state data even though Tribes, whether they had a collection system or not, had to develop one or upgrade what they had to meet the standard identified by the Administration and they did so without Federal support and funding.¹ Because Tribes lacked decades of direct infrastructure funding, they had to piecemeal together their own software and

¹ The Imprint Youth and Family News, October 10, 2025, Author Nancy Marie Spears

internal tracking mechanisms using limited Tribal resources. When the Federal government finally allowed Tribes to build these systems, the financial and regulatory barriers to integrate them with the Federal database AFCARS remained prohibitive.

Currently, ICWA is the only major Federal child welfare law that does not have a structured and regular data collection system that tracks implementation. Tribes built their own systems out of absolute necessity for cultural and political survival because the Federal system failed to accurately count Native children. Collaborative data tracking between Tribes, states, and the Federal government is essential because the current fragmented system actively harms Native children and creates administrative waste. A unified approach is necessary to eliminate systemic bureaucratic cracks that erase Native children, to reduce the administrative burden, ensure legal compliance and accountability and direct Federal funding where it is needed. We will encourage the Washington state welfare agency to also submit comments emphasizing that the collective administrative effort is justified by the critical need for data in ICWA implementation.

If you have questions or would like to discuss these comments, please contact me at lgreninger@jamestowntribe.org or at (360) 681-4660. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alonah R. Greninger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Alonah "Loni" R. Greninger, Vice-Chair, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe