



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
330 C Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

March 22, 2019

Jennifer Nichols
Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Children's Services
315 Deaderick Street
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Commissioner Nichols:

This letter acknowledges the receipt and approval of Tennessee's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Tennessee is required to develop a program improvement plan per 45 CFR 1355.35(a) to address the outcomes and systemic factors that were identified as not having achieved substantial conformity in the final report following the state's review during April 1, 2017 through September 30, 2017.

The CFSR Final Report was issued on January 17, 2018 and Tennessee submitted an initial PIP to the Children's Bureau on April 6, 2018. After the Children's Bureau and Tennessee engaged in additional discussions, negotiations and revisions to the PIP, the state submitted a final version of the PIP on February 13, 2019.

In accordance with 45 CFR 1355.36, an estimated minimum penalty of \$1,385,543.00 for Fiscal Year 2018 is applicable to this level of non-conformity. However, we are suspending the withholding of funds associated with this penalty during the PIP implementation period and the subsequent period of non-overlapping data. If it is determined that Tennessee is successful in rectifying the areas of nonconformity during that time, we will rescind the withholding of Federal funds associated with those respective areas.

The final Tennessee PIP, inclusive of the measurement plan, is approved effective as of February 20, 2019. Tennessee will begin implementing their PIP on April 1, 2019. Consistent with 45 CFR 1355.35(d)(4), the state and the Children's Bureau have agreed that the period under review (PUR) for each region will correspond to the sampling period, beginning on April 1 of the year prior to the review year and ending the week of each service region's CFSR review. The length of the PUR will vary depending on the review date with the first regions PUR being 12 months and the last region's PUR being 18 months. The reviews will be conducted in each of the twelve service regions each year between April 1, and September 30. These reports will support the monitoring and evaluation of the program improvement plan completion per 45 CFR 1355.35(e)(2). Consistent with CFSR Technical Bulletin #9, we encourage the state to monitor its performance on statewide data indicators to provide additional context for the state's continuing work. The state must also keep us informed of progress and challenges around the implementation and achievement of the program improvement plan strategies, key activities and improvement goals through routine calls and onsite meetings between us during the program improvement period.

Tennessee has been very proactive in refining practices that will lead to improved outcomes within their Child Welfare system. Initiatives such as Safe Baby Courts (SBC) have led to short-term and long term strategies that have enhanced their practice. The SBC initiative recognizes the critical stages of child

development and uses a specialized judicial approach to coordinate and expedite services, and to engage community partners to support and sustain families. This approach has strong support from the Juvenile Court Judges and the infant mental health community to ensure that services to the infant and the parents/caregivers are tailored to their unique circumstances and to support critical timeframes unique to infant development to reduce trauma, custodial episodes and future involvement from CPS.

Stakeholder interviews and observations during their state conducted Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) supported the strength rating for the Quality Assurance (QA) systemic factor. Tennessee was able to demonstrate that their QA System is functioning effectively throughout the state. In addition to operating statewide, the state's QA system also has standards to evaluate the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, and provides relevant feedback/reports. During the monitoring of their Program Improvement Plan (PIP), Tennessee will utilize their QA system to monitor their CFSR cases.

Thank you for your commitment to improving Tennessee's child welfare system. Enclosed is a copy of the approved PIP and the PIP Agreement Form. If you have any questions regarding this or other related matters, please contact Shalonda Cawthon, Child Welfare Regional Program Manager, at (404) 562-2242 or by email shalonda.cawthon@acf.hhs.gov, or Antonette Rollins, Child and Family Program Specialist, at (404) 562-2833 or by email antonette.rollins@acf.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,



Jerry Milner
Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

Enclosure

cc: Michael Leach, Deputy Commissioner, Office of Child Programs, TN DCS; Nashville, TN
Anthony Nease, Director, Office of Continuous Quality Improvement, TN DCS; Nashville, TN
Linda Mitchell, Acting Supervisory Program Specialist, CFSR Unit, CB; Washington, DC
James Gregory, Child and Family Program Specialist, CFSR Unit, CB; Washington, DC
Shalonda Cawthon, Child Welfare Regional Program Manager; CB, Region 4; Atlanta, GA
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