



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

CERTIFIED MAIL RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

November 9, 2017

Valerie Davidson
Commissioner
Department of Health and Social Services
PO Box 240249
Anchorage, AK 99503

Dear Commissioner Davidson:

The Children's Bureau (CB), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), in collaboration with Alaska Office of Children Services completed a review of key areas of Alaska's child welfare programs and practice to ensure substantial conformity with the State plan requirements found in titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process was initiated with an analysis of Alaska's child welfare data and the development of a Statewide Assessment of areas seen as critical to the effective functioning of Alaska's child welfare system. The week of May 22-26, 2017 the Children's Bureau completed an on-site review of 65 cases and conducted interviews with the state's stakeholders and partners.

As you know, the CFSR process is a large undertaking. The Children's Bureau appreciates the amount of time and effort that you, your staff, and others committed to the development of the Statewide Assessment and the planning and implementation of the on-site review and interviews. While this is a joint federal/state team effort, we particularly compliment the work of Christy Lawton, Director; Tracy Spartz-Campbell, Deputy Director; and Bernita Hamilton, Quality Assurance Manager in leading the CFSR review process. We also want to recognize the Alaska Case Review Team (Karilee Pietz, Kim Guay, Kristie Swanson, Coleen Turner and Jennie McGarrigan) for their work coordinating the logistics of the onsite case reviews.

Alaska should take great pride in those areas found to be strengths in its child welfare system. We have determined that the state is in substantial conformity with one of the seven systemic factors.

As indicated in the report, we also have determined that Alaska is not in substantial conformity with all seven outcomes (Safety Outcome 1 & 2, Permanency Outcome 1 & 2, and Well-Being Outcomes 1, 2, & 3) and six of the seven systemic factors (Statewide Information System, Case Review System, Quality Assurance System, Service Array & Resource Development, Staff & Provider Training, Foster & Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, & Retention). Finally, we have included information in the report about your performance on the statewide data indicators for context.

A Program Improvement Plan (PIP) is required to address each outcome and systemic factor determined not to be in substantial conformity. The PIP must be submitted to the Children's Bureau Regional Office no later than 90 calendar days after receipt of this letter. In accordance with 45 CFR 1355.36, an estimated minimum potential withholding of \$306,284 for federal fiscal year 2017 is applicable to this level of non-conformity. A detailed summary of this calculation is provided as an enclosure with this letter. However, we are suspending the withholding of funds associated with this penalty during the PIP implementation period and the subsequent year of non-overlapping data. If we determine that Alaska is successful in rectifying the areas that are in non-conformity per regulation we will rescind the withholding of federal funds associated with those respective areas at that time.

The Regional Office will assist you in developing the PIP to ensure that Alaska establishes effective action strategies for achieving the level of improvement agreed upon for each of the identified areas in accordance with 45 CFR 1355.35. To the extent possible, those involved with the CFSR planning process and onsite review, including the OCS's external partners, should be actively involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of the PIP. Please work with your Regional Office to access technical assistance support if needed for you to develop and implement your PIP.

Major elements of the PIP include the priorities assigned to Alaska's work on each area of non-conformity, the necessary key activities associated with improving each of these areas, establishment of timeframes for completing the required improvements, how the state will report progress as well as ways to measure the improvement (45 CFR 1355.35(a) and (e)). The CB staff will work with your designated staff to jointly determine the specific content and the processes for evaluating progress and achievements with respect to the PIP. Most importantly, the PIP must address areas of non-conformity impacting child safety (45 CFR 1355.35(d) (2)). To do this, Alaska should establish short-term goals that will immediately minimize the negative effects on children and families, and long-term goals that establish plans for lasting reforms. Once the PIP is developed and approved, Alaska must incorporate the improvement plan into its existing Child and Family Services Plan and provide updates in the Annual Progress and Services Reports (45 CFR 1355.35(f)).

We wish to remind you that federal regulations at 45 CFR 1355.37 require that each state make available for public review and inspection the Statewide Assessment, the Final Report, and the PIP developed as a result of the CFSR. Therefore, we urge you to consider how you will respond to inquiries concerning these documents and how you will make the information available as required. The CB is also obligated to respond to public inquiries regarding this

information. We have enclosed Alaska's final report. The final report will also be posted on the CB's website.

We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with you in your efforts to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of children and families in Alaska. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Tina Naugler, Child Welfare Regional Program Manager, at (206) 615-3657 or tina.naugler@acf.hhs.gov, or Paula Bentz, Child Welfare Program Specialist, at (206) 615-3662 or paula.bentz@acf.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jerry Milner".

Jerry Milner
Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

Enclosure

cc: Christy Lawton, Division Director, Office of Children's Services; Alaska DHSS
Linda Mitchell, Acting CFSR Team Lead, CB, Washington, DC
Tina Naugler, Child Welfare Regional Program Manager; CB, Region 10; Seattle, WA
Paula Bentz, Child Welfare Program Specialist; CB, Region 10; Seattle, WA