

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814



October 17, 2003

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-51-03

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: CHILD WELFARE SERVICES/CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM DATA AID CODES

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by
One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

The purpose of this letter is to bring to your attention and ask for your assistance to resolve a significant problem with aid code data entry related to aid codes in the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS).

Specifically, more than 14,000 foster children (one out of seven in out-of-home care) are entered in CWS/CMS as having an unknown or undetermined aid code. It is not known whether the out-of-home costs for these children are supported with Title IV-E foster care, non-federal foster care benefits, CalWORKs assistance, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) payments, or county-only funds. Because CWS/CMS is the primary tool for capturing valuable data for cost and caseload projections as well as program evaluation, it is important that the data is accurate. Loss of reliable data severely limits the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS') ability to estimate program funding needs accurately and to analyze program trends and populations for policy purposes.

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System

Most recently, the lack of accurate data in CWS/CMS impacted the sampling of county cases for the federal Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews. The list of cases for the review was drawn from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data which is transmitted by the State agency to the federal Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. There are 66 separate foster care data elements and 37 separate adoptions data elements for AFCARS that are derived from CWS/CMS. The Title IV-E Review sample consisted of cases with children who were coded federally eligible foster care cases during the reporting period as reflected in California's most recent AFCARS data submission.

However, due to inaccurate coding of cases in the primary sampling, it was determined that many cases coded as receiving federal funds were in fact not federally eligible, requiring additional cases to be sampled. The Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews will be ongoing, so it is imperative that counties ensure that cases are coded correctly for efficient case reviews and to assure that California's AFCARS data reporting is correct.

Commentary recently published by the Child Welfare League of America addresses data quality issues of the AFCARS and provides a comprehensive improvement proposal to increase the reliability and validity of the data generated by AFCARS. As improvements to the AFCARS are considered at the federal level, it is critical that California concurrently consider the consistency and accuracy of its CWS/CMS data.

CWS/Foster Care Eligibility

In order to be sure that aid codes are being properly entered into CWS/CMS, it is important that each county determine who is responsible for entering this information into the system. In many counties the eligibility workers who make the decisions regarding eligibility and payment, do not have access to the CWS/CMS. Therefore, it is important that procedures be established for this information to get back to CWS staff for entry. The State discourages the use of unknown or undetermined aid codes as place holders unless there is a follow-up process in place to change the aid code when foster care eligibility is determined. It is the entry of the correct aid code which drives the accuracy of data generated from the system. The CDSS is prepared to work with counties to bring about necessary corrections in order to facilitate accurate county reporting, with corresponding improvements in data. Again, accurate data is critical for budgeting, estimates, policy development, and statutory and regulatory development. I am confident that we can work collaboratively to resolve this important issue.

One long range solution for improvements to the Title IV-E eligibility process will be the development of new and important automation. Recently, a series of intensive meetings were convened in Sacramento to develop a set of requirements for an automated eligibility determination system. The meeting involved eligibility workers, social workers, and program administrators from around the State who provided essential input to its concept and future design. By working together we can address these data issues through the interim measures described above and in the future efforts to design efficient methodologies and automation.

If you have any questions regarding input into the CWS/CMS please contact the Case Management System Support Branch at (916) 445-2888, and if you have any questions regarding appropriate aid types please contact the Funding & Transitional Youth Programs Bureau at (916) 657-1912.

Sincerely,

SYLVIA PIZZINI
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services

c: County Welfare Directors Association