

AFCARS Overview

June 2025



For accessible formats of this information or assistance with additional equal access to human services, email dcyf.ssishelp@state.mn.us, call 651-431-4801, or use your preferred relay service.

Table of Contents

What is AFCARS	3
AFCARS Reporting Periods.....	3
Why is AFCARS Data Important?	3
AFCARS Elements.....	4
Reporting Populations	4
AFCARS Elements and SSIS	5
AFCARS Tips/Resources	5

What is AFCARS

The **Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS)** is a federally required data collection system. Data includes case-level information collected from state and tribal Title IV-E agencies on children entering and exiting foster care and adopted with involvement of a Title IV-E agency.

Child welfare practice changed significantly since implementing AFCARS. The federal Administration for Children and Families engaged in a multi-year effort to update requirements for data collection; the initial rule was published in 1993 with the final rule being published in May 2020.

AFCARS Reporting Periods

Two 6-month reporting periods exist based on the federal fiscal year:

- **A Submission:** October 1 – March 31 (due May 15)
- **B Submission:** April 1 – September 30 (due November 14)

Data must be submitted within **45 days** of each reporting period's end.

Resubmission & Compliance

Title IV-E Agencies (in this case, the state of Minnesota) can re-submit corrected data for previously submitted periods within 6 months of the original submission due date, if the initial submission was non-compliant.

Penalties for Non-Compliance

Non-compliant submissions that remain non-compliant after the final re-submission will result in fiscal penalties for the state agency.

The DCYF SSIS Business Operations unit provides technical assistance and has implemented tools within SSIS—including improved screens, screen rules, data cleanup messages, and repository error notifications to help support agencies.

For more on **compliance and penalties**, see [AFCARS Technical Bulletin 23: Compliance & Penalties](#).

Why is AFCARS Data Important?

AFCARS data is used at the federal level for several reasons, including but not limited to:

- Determining awards for the Adoption and Guardianship Incentives program
- Preparing the Child Welfare Outcomes report
- Conducting Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR)

- Conducting Title IV-E foster care eligibility reviews
- Determining allotment of funds for the STAY program
- Conducting trend analyses and short- and long-term planning efforts
- Targeting areas for initial or increased technical assistance efforts, discretionary service grants, research and evaluation, and regulatory changes.
- Responding to requests for data from federal, state, tribal, and private agencies

AFCARS Elements

There are 220 total AFCARS elements:

- 186 Foster Care elements
- 34 Adoption & Guardianship elements

The data elements include information related to race and ethnicity, disability and health status, family and sibling relationships, placement details and types, along with key information about the child, parents/guardians, foster and adoptive parents.

For more details on the individual reporting elements, refer to: [Technical Bulletin 20: Data Elements for Out-of-Home Care & Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Data Files](#)

Reporting Populations

Out-of-Home Care

Children in this group include those who:

- Are in foster care and Title IV-E agency has placement authority
- Receive Title IV-E foster care maintenance payments under a Title IV-E agreement
- Have run away or are missing when the agency has placement authority (also known as care and control responsibility per AFCARS)
- Remain in this population until the agency's placement authority or Title IV-E agreement ends

Adoption & Guardianship Assistance

Children in this group include those:

- Whose adoption or guardianship was finalized during the reporting period
- Whose adoptive parents or guardians have a Title IV-E adoption assistance agreement with the reporting agency

AFCARS Elements and SSIS

AFCARS data elements are embedded in fields and screens throughout SSIS. Accurate data entry in SSIS is essential to ensure accurate AFCARS reporting. The following job aid is a helpful tool for agency staff to reference when entering placements into SSIS. It explains when, where, and what should be entered; [Entering Child Foster Care Placement in the Social Service Information System](#).

Many of the required AFCARS elements are linked to SSIS Repository Errors to assist agencies with identifying and correcting missing information. See the SSIS Worker Repository: Overview & Cross-Reference Guide for details on AFCARS specific Repository Errors, and how to correct each.

AFCARS Tips/Resources

Children's Bureau - AFCARS [Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System \(AFCARS\) | The Administration for Children and Families \(hhs.gov\)](#)

AFCARS Bulletins

- [Technical Bulletin 20: Data Elements for Out-of-Home Care & Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Data Files](#)
- [AFCARS Technical Bulletin 23: Compliance & Penalties](#)

Federal Register: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (FINAL RULE) [Overview of the AFCARS 2020 Final Rule | The Administration for Children and Families \(hhs.gov\)](#)

AFCARS 1 and 2 Side by Side comparison [AFCARS Data Elements Side-by-Side Comparison \(hhs.gov\)](#)

SSIS Worker Repository Overview & Cross-Reference Guide

Placement Entry in SSIS [Entering Child Foster Care Placement in the Social Service Information System](#)