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Contact Person:

Jim Martin, Commissioner  
Georgia Department of Human Resources  
2 Peachtree Street, Suite 29th Floor  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Direct Program Improvement Plan Questions to:

Wilfred Hamm, Director  
Social Services  
Division of Family and Children Services  
2 Peachtree Street, 18<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303  
404.657-3400

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# Introduction

## Georgia's Approach to the Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

Child welfare programs in Georgia are state supervised and county administered by the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and the state Office of Adoptions (SOA). The Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) conducted in Georgia, July 15-22, 2001 provided an opportunity for Georgia to identify and support strengths in the child welfare system and develop strategies to improve services and outcomes for children and families where indicated.

Georgia recognizes that many of the improvements present challenges that will require clarification of some programs, policies and procedures; additional resources; careful review and evaluation of current resources and programs; additional training for staff and providers and more effective inter/intra agency collaboration and monitoring. Georgia has already started down the path with the creation of a child welfare reform agenda, "Safe Futures for Georgia's Children". Safe Futures has evolved from recommendations made by the Governor's Task Force on Child Protective Services and findings from internal management reviews. The results of the federal review have been incorporated into the Safe Futures Initiative agenda as reflected in the Cross Reference Table (see page 3).

The Program Improvement Plan (PIP) lifts from Safe Futures those goals, strategies and detailed work plans that directly respond to findings from the federal review. The PIP was developed in an open and inclusive process that included technical advisors, staff representing county departments, consumers, providers, child welfare advocates, and other stakeholders (see listing of these participants in the Appendix). These participants formed work groups to respond to each area needing improvement. Work groups will continue to monitor and assess Georgia's child welfare strategies and results. As required, the Title IV-B Advisory Committee will assist the Department of Human Resources (DHR) in developing and monitoring the annual Title IV-B State Plan. The comprehensive scope of the PIP reflects the commitment of the participants and extensive collaboration that will be required to implement the plan over the next five years.

Reform initiatives currently underway in Georgia, that support PIP achievement include the following: Community Partnerships to Prevent Child Abuse; Family-Centered Practice Training for Residential Providers (in collaboration with Annie E. Casey Foundation); the Transitional Living Program (in collaboration with Casey Family Programs); and the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta. Additionally, Georgia will continue its partnership with the Freddie Mac Foundation to recruit foster and adoptive families.

Georgia is committed to continue working with Region IV staff of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to implement and closely monitor the PIP. We believe that this partnership will result in a more responsive child welfare system for Georgia's children and families. DHR will maintain an open process in sharing results, progress and needs with Region IV staff, communities, stakeholders and the general public.

## Georgia's PIP Layout

Georgia developed a narrative plan to address each area needing improvement. The appendices include a detailed work plan of each narrative description that will be used as a tool to manage

and track step-by-step progress and implementation of the PIP.

Georgia's Plan addresses each outcome and systemic factor that fell below the threshold for substantial conformity. The systemic factors addressed are Statewide Information System, Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention, and Service Array in addition to all seven outcomes. Priorities have been established for correcting areas that directly affect safety, permanency and child and family well-being.

The State has included a specific percentage of improvement that will be achieved over the duration of the plan for each statewide aggregate data indicator. Georgia will utilize technical assistance from the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency, the National Resource Center for Information and Technology, the National Resource Center for Youth Development, the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, the Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Georgia State University and other technical advisors listed in the appendices.

### **Safe Futures: A Framework for Change in Georgia**

To respond to the results of the CFSR Final Report, Georgia developed overall goals, action strategies and timelines to provide a framework, establish priorities and to build on Georgia's strengths. The broad and far-reaching scope of these strategies will require a minimum of five years to complete. The following is an overview of action strategies involving critical systemic changes impacting the child welfare system:

1. Review and revise laws, policies, procedures and develop if necessary, any standards to assure that safety, permanency and child and family well-being are clearly addressed. Provide training to all staff and providers on revisions and standards. **Expected completion date is June 2004 and ongoing.**
2. Post copies of all policies, policy updates and standards on the Internet for easy access by staff, providers, judges, agency attorneys, prospective/current foster and adoptive parents and other stakeholders. **Expected completion date is June 2003 and ongoing.**
3. Establish a baseline of current and future placement needs and resources (foster families, relative, adoption, group and emergency). Assure that resources are available and accessible to serve children and families. Increase the number of placement resources at all levels by 50% assuring that the additional resources match the needs, service areas and demographics of the children in care. A campaign will be launched to develop additional foster and adoptive home resources for children. **Expected completion date is June 2004 and ongoing.**

Implement a continuum of services for children and families by developing a service array and placement options for children and families, which ranges from prevention to reunification, relative care, adoption and transitional living services. **Expected completion date is June 2004 and ongoing.**

4. Georgia has accepted the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) staffing standards of caseworker to client ratio for CPS and foster care. Annual efforts will be made to request and advocate for caseworkers to meet these standards by June 2004. **Expected**

**completion date is June 2004 and ongoing.**

5. Continue on-going work agreements and relationships with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Georgia Supreme Court (Court Improvement Project), Special Assistant Attorneys General, (SAAGS), Juvenile Courts, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA's), providers, consumers and all other stakeholders in the child welfare system. **Expected completion date is 2001 and ongoing.**

Continue annual cross training with the above agencies to provide and share information that leads to a common understanding of how to expedite permanency for children in care. **Expected completion date is October 2002 and ongoing.**

6. Utilize Quarterly Reports sent to the Region IV ACF Office to monitor and assess progress and to revise strategies as needed. AFCARS data and other measurable benchmarks identified in the PIP will be addressed in each quarterly report. **Expected completion date is ongoing.**
7. Conduct an annual qualitative evaluation, similar to the CFSR, of a representative number of preventive (from the Federal Promoting Safe and Stable Families grant), child protective service (CPS), foster care, adoption, and independent living cases utilizing the Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group, county supervisors, Social Service Consultation and Support, Program Staff, IV-B Advisory Members, stakeholders and other contractors. **Expected completion date is June 2004 and ongoing.**
8. Continue child safety reviews of county CPS and foster care cases records conducted by the DFCS Evaluation and Reporting Section (E & R). **Expected completion date is 2002 and ongoing.**
9. Contingent upon Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) PAPD and IAPD approvals, continue initial steps to build a SACWIS that supports and monitors child welfare case management services. **Expected date of completion for Release 1 is December 2003.**
10. Develop a campaign to increase public awareness regarding progress on implementing the PIP. **Expected completion date is January 2003 and on going.**

**Cross Reference Table: Safe Futures Initiative, CPS Task Force Recommendations, and CFSR Outcomes**

Safe Futures	CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors	CPS Task Force
Improve state and local accountability for improving positive outcomes for children and families	Items 30, 31, 38, 39	Perform an independent management audit of DFCS;  Assure uniform implementation of DFCS policies and procedures;  Assure accountability with

Safe Futures	CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors	CPS Task Force
		<p>appropriate rewards and sanctions;</p> <p>All elements under transformation and accountability;</p> <p>Creating the cabinet council</p>
<p>New community partnerships focus on the prevention and early intervention of child abuse and neglect</p>	<p>Items 3, 38, 39, 40</p>	<p>Promote robust partnerships that strengthen the ability of local communities to keep children safe;</p> <p>Require support and invest in local;</p> <p>Examine all federal and state funding sources for access to prevention funding without supplanting existing investments;</p> <p>Enhance the first call for help (211) help line for statewide use</p>
<p>Responsive child protective services investigations</p>	<p>Item 1-Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment;</p> <p>Items 02, 04</p>	<p>Establish a statewide 1-800 abuse reporting system;</p> <p>Fund, automate and implement SDM;</p> <p>Improve investigative skills; public awareness and education for mandated reports</p>
<p>Redesign child welfare practice</p>	<p>Items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16;</p> <p>WB1-all items</p>	<p>Create stronger linkages between child protection, substance abuse treatment and domestic violence initiatives</p>
<p>Well trained stable workforce</p>	<p>Items 32-34</p>	<p>Increase the number of case workers, pay, training and supervision;</p> <p>Provide caseworker tools to perform at high levels</p>
<p>Fully developed continuum of services and supports for children and their families</p>	<p>P2-Items 11, 12, 15;</p> <p>WB2-all items;</p>	<p>Expanding resources available for substance abuse treatment and home visitation as part of an increased commitment to prevention programs</p>

<b>Safe Futures</b>	<b>CFSR Outcomes and Systemic Factors</b>	<b>CPS Task Force</b>
(whether birth, foster or adoptive)	WB3-all items; Items 35, 36, 37, 40	and services
Expedited permanency for children in foster care	Items 5-10, 25-27, 29, 41-45	Improve court skills
Integrated information systems	Item 24	<b>Contingent upon SACWIS PAPP and IAPP approvals</b> , establish a statewide, integrated, comprehensive information system