



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Administration on Children, Youth & Families | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201
www.acf.hhs.gov/acyf

July 28, 2026

Nancy Buckner
Commissioner
Alabama Department of Human Services
51 Ripley Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Commissioner Buckner:

Thank you for submitting Alabama's Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) for fiscal year (FY) 2027 and the CFS-101 forms requesting funding for FY 2027.

The Children's Bureau (CB) has reviewed your APSR submission for FY 2027 and we approve the FY 2027 request for funding. We appreciate your participation in the streamlined APSR approach we implemented for the FY2027 funding request. We welcome your feedback on this process as we explore other opportunities to create more efficient and effective processes.

The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Grants Management (OGM) will issue a grant notification award letter with pertinent grant information, which will be sent to the email address listed on the FY 2027 CFS-101 forms. Grant recipients are required to submit the SF-425 Federal Financial Report at the close of the expenditure period according to the terms and conditions of the award.

The CB looks forward to our ongoing joint planning efforts with you and your staff. Should you have any questions, concerns, or feedback; please contact Dianne Kelly, Child Welfare Regional Program Manager in Region 4, at (404) 562-2781 or by e-mail at dianne.kelly@acf.hhs.gov. You may also contact Latoya Wright, Child and Family Program Specialist, at (404) 562-2929 or by e-mail at latoya.wright@acf.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,

Cody Inman
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families
(delegated)
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

cc: Karen Smith, Deputy Commissioner, Child and Family Services; DHR, Montgomery, AL
Shea Cobb-England, Deputy Commissioner for Quality Assurance; DHR; Montgomery, AL

In accordance with this Program Instruction and its definition of “critical updates,” the state/territory/insular area incorporates by reference the information and data contained in its prior year APSR as if fully set forth herein. Accordingly, this submission provides only critical updates since the prior year APSR, consistent with the reporting requirements of 45 C.F.R. § 1357.16.

Alabama’s performance, as reflected in February 2025 and February 2026 CFSR4 Data Profiles, demonstrates measurable progress in key safety outcomes; the department noted areas with permanency and stability that require continued work. The state continued to perform better than national standards in recurrence of maltreatment, with rates improving from 4.6 percent to 4.3 percent, and sustained strong performance in achieving permanency for children entering foster care, exceeding the national target in both years. Maltreatment in foster care showed notable improvement, shifting from worse than the national standard in 2025 to better in 2026; reentry to foster care similarly improved, moving from worse to better relative performance. Despite these gains, outcomes declined for children experiencing longer stays in care, as permanency within 12 months for those in care 12 to 23 months fell below the national standard, and performance for children in care 24 months or more remained consistently below target. Placement stability is an area that Alabama DHR continues to work on as the number of moves is above the national performance; however, we do note that many of these moves are due to progress in behavior and planned step downs to lesser restrictive placements.

Statewide practice performance reflects similar patterns of strength and challenge. Timely first victim contacts remained strong, though delays were noted in intake timeliness, documentation, and data entry. Based on the Practice Performance Report for FY2025 from the CFSR OMS, risk and safety assessment and management (Item 3) performed better in foster care cases (76% Strength rating in 84 applicable cases) compared to in-home cases (52% Strength rating in 66 applicable cases). Specific concerns noted included lack of private, individual interviews with children in cases; lack of thorough, on-going assessment of all living environments for identified children; and lack of on-going discussions with every caregiver regarding issues related to safety. Overall, there was observed improvement in ratings from cases reviewed from FY2024 to FY2025 in both foster care and in-home services cases.

Based on OSRIs completed, most counties demonstrated strength in maintaining family and community connections, but there were some gaps with sibling placement and visitation due to the treatment needs of individual children, large sibling groups that could not be accommodated in the same foster home and siblings with different fathers that were placed with their father or other paternal relatives. Well-being outcomes were mixed, with challenges in parent engagement and service provision, significant improvement in educational outcomes, and ongoing concerns related to physical and behavioral health, including gaps in trauma-informed care, medication monitoring, and service coordination.

Systemic improvements have strengthened the state’s framework, particularly through enhancements to data systems, expanded continuous quality improvement processes, and

increased investment in workforce training and development. Case review findings indicate timely case planning and strong judicial oversight; however, systemic barriers continue to affect permanency, including delays in achieving timely termination of parental rights and challenges related to workforce turnover and communication. The service array remains robust, with expanded in-home, prevention, and behavioral health supports, and no waitlist for intensive in-home services. Stakeholder engagement structures are well established. The Department continues to maintain a partnership with a local non-profit agency, to expose youth to individuals with lived experience. Additionally, there is also constant engagement with our Youth Advisory Council, Dream Ambassadors.

Foster parent recruitment efforts have shown progress, supported by targeted strategies and increased licensure, while retention and community partnerships continue to be areas of focus.

Progress toward identified goals reflects targeted efforts to improve practice and outcomes. Timeliness of First Victim Contacts improved for child abuse and neglect cases, accompanied by a reduction in overdue cases and increased use of Plans of Safe Care, though prevention case timeliness declined. Efforts to achieve permanency for children without identified resources resulted in over half exiting the Adoption/No Identified Resource list, including finalized adoptions and placement matches, supported by intensive case reviews and ongoing coordination. Foster parent recruitment initiatives in pilot counties produced measurable increases in training participation and licensure, supported by expanded partnerships and the implementation of a statewide recruitment data portal. The Department also continued to enhance access to information for youth through system integration efforts and strengthened cross-divisional collaboration to support CFSR readiness, data-informed decision-making, and consistent case practice.

These ongoing improvement efforts align with the Department's broader commitment to strengthening family preservation practices and ensuring that children are not unnecessarily separated from their families due to poverty-related circumstances. Alabama DHR's Child Protective Services (CPS) policies incorporate the Code of Alabama, 1975 § 12-15-71(a)(6), emphasizing that poverty alone cannot be the basis for removing a child from parental custody. Agency policy further requires that staff receive training to properly assess child welfare reports and conduct investigations of alleged neglect, with particular attention to distinguishing the effects of poverty from true neglect related to living arrangements and subsistence needs. Employees are trained to recognize when families are utilizing available resources yet remain unable to meet basic needs, and to respond by prioritizing service provision rather than separation. Consistent with this approach, CPS staff are directed to make reasonable efforts to connect families with support services that address immediate needs—such as housing, food, and financial assistance—before pursuing court intervention, thereby reducing the risk of unnecessary child removal solely due to economic hardship.

Alabama Department of Human Resources will continue to ensure that children, as developmentally appropriate, and their parents, legal guardians, or legal custodians are informed

of the availability of legal representation in specified child welfare proceedings. Department policies, staff training, and practice guidance support timely communication regarding legal rights and access to counsel during key stages of child protective services and foster care proceedings, including removal actions, dependency hearings, permanency hearings, and termination of parental rights proceedings. Child welfare staff are trained to provide clear and understandable information, document notification efforts, and coordinate with courts and legal partners to facilitate access to legal representation when applicable. Alabama DHR also collaborates with juvenile courts, guardians ad litem, attorneys, and other stakeholders to ensure children and families receive age-appropriate, and trauma-informed information regarding legal representation and court processes, supporting meaningful participation throughout the child welfare system.

For children under the age of five, there was significant improvement in timeliness of permanency, reflected and a slight decrease in average length of stay in care. While the proportion of young children exiting care declined, the rate of entry remained stable, indicating continued demand on the system for this population. Parental substance abuse remains the primary reason for removal with children ages 0-9 years of age, however, increases in neglect and physical abuse as contributing factors suggest shifting dynamics in the circumstances leading to foster care entry for children ages 10-17 years of age. Children in this age group's reason for removal involved relinquishment (abandonment, child's behavioral problem, parent's inability to cope). Overall, Alabama continues to demonstrate progress in strengthening safety and aspects of system performance, while ongoing efforts continue to address delays in permanency, improve placement stability, and enhance service delivery for children and families.

Alabama's Independent Living/Chafee program continues to operate as a state-administered, county-managed system serving youth ages 14–20, with aftercare supports available through age 23. As of March 1, 2026, 1,772 youths in foster care were within this age range. Recent updates include expanded youth engagement through regional meetings, improvements to funding processes for more timely access, and strengthened life-skills development using standardized tools and curricula. While transitional housing remains highly utilized, lower participation in independent living placements has prompted increased emphasis on skill-building. The program continues to prioritize youth voice through initiatives such as the Alabama Dream Ambassadors, enhanced staff training, and data-informed practices. Services are delivered consistently statewide through key contracts and include strong support for education, housing, Medicaid coverage through age 26, and aftercare financial assistance, with a continued focus on individualized transition planning and interagency collaboration. Through our Chafee program, our lived-experienced voice has provided improvements to our Transitional and Independent Living placements by recommending consistent skill development that better prepares youth for these placements. Through these insights, the Department has begun using an educational based skill building program, state-wide, called WhyTry. Use of this program state-wide allows youth to have access to the same skill building program regardless of where they are placed. This also promotes consistency within the Transitional and Independent Living placements.

There have been no substantive changes to state laws or regulations affecting eligibility for the CAPTA State Grant. The Citizen Review Panel is undergoing restructuring to improve participation and strengthen oversight and accountability. CAPTA funds continue to support personnel and core functions, including the Administrative Record Review (ARR) process, which ensures due process and system accountability; 1,695 reviews were completed in FY2025, with the majority upheld. The State Central Registry completed over 48,000 background clearances, and differential response services reached 9,825 families, involving 13,785 children. Plans of Safe Care continue to be integrated within Safety Plans and Individualized Service Plans and are monitored through established review processes. Referrals to Early Intervention remained consistent, with 504 referrals for children under age three. Efforts addressing substance-exposed infants remain aligned with federal requirements, with 1,305 related cases reported. Workforce development remains a priority, including specialized training on substance use and safety, while policies governing child fatality disclosure remain in effect. The CPS workforce is estimated at 1,370 staff with standard caseload expectations, and all children in court proceedings are assigned trained Guardians ad Litem.

In addition to these ongoing statewide child welfare initiatives and compliance efforts, Alabama DHR continues to strengthen collaboration with Tribal partners to ensure adherence to federal requirements related to Indian children and families involved in child welfare proceedings. Representatives from Alabama DHR and Tribal staff met in person on May 7, 2026. There was discussion of procedures for ensuring timely notification to the Tribe regarding state custody proceedings and placements involving Indian children, as well as case record documentation related to transfers of jurisdiction, termination of parental rights (TPR), and active efforts requirements. During the meeting, it was reported that when a family identifies possible Indian ancestry, the county DHR office contacts the Tribe's Family Services Department. Following notification, an official request is submitted to verify whether the individual is an active enrolled member of the Tribe. Tribal legal staff are then engaged to facilitate the transfer of jurisdiction through the Tribal Court, as appropriate.

There were no barriers to service provision for Tribal families or collaboration with the Department identified. PCI reported that there are currently no children in care and no children receiving services at this time. Additionally, discussion occurred regarding Tribal Youth Counselors partnering with the Alabama Dream Ambassadors to attend the 38th Annual National Independent Living Conference in Washington, D.C., in August 2026.