

Division of Safety and Permanence

DSP Informational Memo Series 2026 – 29i

July 1, 2026

To: DCF/DMCW Administrator
DCF Area Administrators
Child Placing Agency Directors
Child Welfare Agency Directors
County Departments of Community Programs Directors
County Departments of Human Services Directors
County Departments of Social Services Directors
Group Home Providers
Private Child Placing Agencies
Residential Care Center Providers
Shelter Care Providers
Tribal Chairpersons



From: John Elliott
Administrator

Re: Wisconsin's Round 4 Child and Family Services Review

PURPOSE

This memo notifies local child welfare agencies and external partners that Wisconsin's 2026 federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) will occur October 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027. The review is Wisconsin's first State-Led CFSR; preparation began on April 1, 2026.

It supersedes DSP Numbered Memo Series 2018-05.

BACKGROUND

Section 1123A of the Social Security Act requires the Children's Bureau (CB) to conduct reviews of state child welfare systems every five to ten years to achieve three goals:

- Ensure conformity with federal child welfare requirements,
- Determine what children and families experience within the child welfare system, and
- Assist states in helping children and families achieve positive outcomes.

The CFSR is a requirement for states to receive federal funding under titles IV-E and IV-B. It focuses on program outcomes for child safety, permanency, and well-being and assesses state-level capacity to deliver child welfare services. The review consists of a Statewide Assessment to demonstrate how well Wisconsin's child welfare system is functioning, case reviews, and external partner interviews.

Following completion of the CFSR, Wisconsin will develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address areas identified for improvement.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE REQUIREMENTS

In Round 4, Wisconsin will conduct the case review portion of the CFSR using a state-led approach. Beginning in May 2026, Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff and contracted Professional Services Group (PSG) partners will conduct approximately fifteen case reviews per month using the federal Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) to review a random statewide sample of in-home and out-of-home care cases. Unlike prior CFSRs, which relied on a one-week onsite review of 65 cases in three counties, Wisconsin's state-led approach conducts reviews remotely, statewide, and over several months, reducing local administrative burden while providing a broader assessment of statewide child welfare practice. The case review is not intended to evaluate individual worker or agency performance.

Consistent with federal requirements, case reviews include interviews with key case participants to ensure family voice is represented. In recognition of the importance of this lived experience, DCF will provide compensation to parents, youth, and caregivers who participate. When feasible, interviews will be conducted in person, particularly for children and youth, to support meaningful engagement.

Local agencies and external partners play a critical role in supporting Wisconsin's CFSR. When cases are selected, local agencies are expected to assist with providing case documentation and clarifying case information, participate in interviews, and support engagement with parents, youth, and caregivers. External partner focus groups, including the courts and service providers, will be conducted in January 2027 to gather input on case practice and system functioning.

ACTION SUMMARY

Once a case is identified for review, the assigned child welfare professional and supervisor will be notified by DCF or PSG and provided with guidance and next steps. Participation is expected to require approximately three to four total hours over a six-week period.

DCF appreciates the continued partnership of local agencies and external partners in supporting this effort to better understand Wisconsin's child welfare system and improve outcomes for children and families. This work reflects DCF's broader Putting Families First approach, which prioritizes strengthening families, supporting children safely in their homes, and improving outcomes through collaboration across Wisconsin's child welfare system.

REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT: DCF Area Administrator

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MEMO WEB SITE: [Wisconsin Child Welfare Policies and Standards](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy)
(<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>)

ATTACHMENTS: [Child and Family Services Review Handout](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5943.pdf)
(<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5943.pdf>)