

REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY ANALYSIS

1. Effect on Small Business and Local Governments:

These proposed regulations will apply to public and private child welfare agencies that contract with social services districts to provide foster care, adoption and preventive services. Currently, 236 agencies have been provided with personal and laptop computers, printers, servers and other hardware and software necessary to access and use CONNECTIONS. Of those agencies, 112 agencies provide foster care and preventive services, 79 agencies provide preventive services only, 37 agencies provide foster care only, and 3 agencies provide adoption services only. The regulation also will affect the 58 social services districts in the State.

2. Compliance Requirements:

Applicable public and private child welfare agencies and social services districts will be required to comply with the standards and requirements set forth in the regulations for implementing the statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS), known as CONNECTIONS in New York State, in accordance with State and federal law. The standards include mandated reporting, internal and external data confidentiality standards, and record retention requirements.

3. Professional Services:

Social services districts and the applicable public and private child welfare agencies will not have to hire additional staff to implement the regulations. Existing case workers and other staff who will be required to enter data into CONNECTIONS will be comprehensively trained to use the automated tools and capabilities the system provides.

In addition, current training programs will be enhanced to emphasize the casework support that CONNECTIONS will bring. The social services districts and applicable public and private child welfare agencies already have staff acting as security coordinators for CONNECTIONS.

4. Compliance Costs:

Section 446 of the SSL requires both the implementation of CONNECTIONS and the promulgation of regulations for the timely recording of child welfare services data in CONNECTIONS. The fiscal impact of the development and operation of CONNECTIONS is the result of these statutory requirements. The costs of developing and operating CONNECTIONS have already been budgeted, and are a combination of State and federal funds. To date, State funds have been used to cover the costs that are not federally reimbursable.

Caseworkers are currently required to document in other computer systems and/or paper format the information that these regulations require be inputted into CONNECTIONS. Therefore, there is no fiscal impact anticipated for social services districts or other public and private child welfare services agencies as a result of the reporting requirements included in the proposed regulations. All other requirements are administrative in nature and, as a result, are not anticipated to have a fiscal impact.

5. Economic and Technological Feasibility:

The small businesses and local governments affected by the proposed amendments will have the economic and technological ability to comply with the proposed regulations. Social services districts and the applicable public and private child

welfare agencies already have been provided the personal and laptop computers, printers, servers and other hardware and software necessary to access and use CONNECTIONS..

6. Minimizing Adverse Impact:

As previously mentioned, social services districts and the affected agencies already have the equipment needed to implement these regulations. CONNECTIONS will enable the federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) reporting requirements to be accommodated in a way so that the prescribed data is interwoven within the case flow process, while the actual reporting is compiled and accomplished by the State. Automated cues and reports will assist and remind workers, supervisors and administrators of coming due and overdue activities, assisting not only with AFCARS reporting, but in verifying compliance with other federal and State legal requirements.

7. Small Business Participation:

Since the inception of CONNECTIONS, information on the system's development and operation has been shared with social services districts and the applicable public and private child welfare agencies through written materials, face-to-face focus groups and meetings, teleconferences, surveys and questionnaires. In addition, OCFS established Executive Steering and Management Committees and numerous work groups to assist in developing the conceptual and detailed design of the CONNECTIONS' software applications. The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA), an organization that represents most of the private child welfare agencies as well individual representatives from some of those agencies participated on the Committee and work groups. Representatives of social services districts also

participated in the design process. The ideas, opinions, suggestions and assistance of these stakeholders were instrumental in the decisions made at every phase of this project. The reporting and record keeping requirements set forth in the regulations will be implemented according to the design decisions that have been made through that process.