



### Why OIG Did This Audit

In response to the declaration of a public health emergency for COVID-19, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provided flexibilities to States charged with administering the Federal foster care program. These flexibilities allowed for name-based criminal records checks for prospective foster parents until fingerprint-based checks could safely be done and for videoconferencing visits to count toward the requirement that caseworker visits take place in a child's home. We performed this audit because Kentucky adopted flexibilities and faced numerous challenges within its foster care program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our objective was to determine whether Kentucky complied with Federal and State foster care program requirements related to background checks and caseworker visits during the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify any vulnerabilities or gaps in policies or procedures that could place children at risk.

### How OIG Did This Audit

Kentucky approved 454 foster care homes from January 1 through December 31, 2020. We randomly selected 50 foster homes for review that were approved from April 1 through December 31, 2020. We reviewed documentation of background checks for foster parents and other household members, caseworker visits, and home studies.

## Kentucky Experienced Challenges in Meeting Federal and State Foster Care Program Requirements During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### What OIG Found

Kentucky did not always comply with State and Federal requirements related to background checks and caseworker visits to foster homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when those requirements had been modified to provide flexibility. Specifically, Kentucky did not conduct required background checks on all applicants and other household members for the 50 foster care homes and did not return to fingerprint-based checks when it was safe to do so. In addition, Kentucky did not document all the required monthly caseworker visits. These issues occurred because Kentucky did not consistently follow its policies and procedures for ensuring that background checks were conducted before approving foster homes, experienced technical issues that delayed implementation of its system for completing background checks, and had challenges performing monthly caseworker visits due to insufficient caseworker staffing levels. Kentucky completed and documented home studies in accordance with State regulations.

### What OIG Recommends and Kentucky's Comments

We recommend that Kentucky (1) conduct the name-based checks on the one applicant and one adolescent household member identified by our audit as lacking the required checks and reiterate to staff the importance of adhering to the policies and procedures requiring background checks to be completed before approving foster homes; (2) conduct FBI fingerprint checks on the five applicants and other household members identified by our audit as lacking completed checks; and (3) identify ways to address the challenges related to meeting the requirements for conducting monthly caseworker visits, including consulting with ACF.

In written comments on our draft report, the State agency did not indicate concurrence or nonconcurrence with our recommendations. The State agency did concur with our findings and provided information on actions that it had taken or planned to take to address them. The State agency stated that our audit findings on the two name-based checks and five FBI fingerprint checks for applicants and household members have been resolved. The State agency has planned regulatory changes to ensure that required checks are completed at the time of the initial placement with relatives. The State agency also indicated that training on how to use the new background check system was provided in March 2023 and education of staff on background check requirements was ongoing. The State agency also described steps taken to address challenges in completing caseworker visits.