# FreeWIS: frequently asked questions

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## FreeWIS

### What is FreeWIS?

FreeWIS is a child welfare data system built to the CCWIS rule. CCWIS stands for Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System. The CCWIS rule is the federal rule that sets what a state or tribal agency's child welfare information system must do for that system to receive federal funding. It is in title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations, sections 1355.50 to 1355.59. In FreeWIS you describe the work in plain language to Dio, FreeWIS's artificial intelligence (AI) assistant, the child welfare dog. You review what Dio proposes and approve what goes into the record.

FreeWIS's core architecture is patent pending. FreeWIS is made by Hudson Consulting and Training (HCT), a private company. HCT is not a child welfare agency and does not run any agency's case records. FreeWIS has three doors:

- **PLAY**: a free working system you can try with made-up families
- **GET**: the FreeWIS code that a qualifying public child welfare agency can request
- **CHAT**: coming soon, Dio as a standalone AI child welfare subject matter expert you can talk with about practice and requirements across jurisdictions

### What is Dio?

Dio is FreeWIS's AI assistant, the child welfare dog. In PLAY, Dio reads the record, drafts what should be stored and shows you exactly what it will write. Nothing is written until you review it and confirm. The audit log, FreeWIS's record of changes, ties each change to your confirmation. You can also ask Dio why a federal data element is required or what a rule says. Dio draws on HCT's child welfare knowledge materials and can point you to the material it used. Check the source and its date before you rely on it.

Dio is artificial intelligence, not a human. It is not a caseworker, lawyer or other professional adviser, and it can be wrong, so check what it proposes before you confirm. Your messages, and the conversation context Dio needs to answer, are sent to Anthropic, the company whose AI service generates Dio's responses. The Privacy Notice explains how that works.

### What does Dio know? Does it cover my state?

In part. PLAY's Dio is the same Dio and just as capable, but it is tailored down to PLAY's made-up Kansas-style agency, so it focuses on federal and Kansas materials. Its knowledge materials come from HCT's child welfare resource collection, which includes federal law, regulation and guidance on:

- AFCARS, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System
- NCANDS, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System
- NYTD, the National Youth in Transition Database
- CAPTA, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
- Family First, the Family First Prevention Services Act

- ICWA, the Indian Child Welfare Act
- titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act
- the CFSR, the Child and Family Services Reviews
- the CCWIS rule

The collection also holds the child welfare statutes of all 50 states and the District of Columbia (Puerto Rico in summary), and state plans, federal reviews and policy manuals for many states. CHAT, coming soon, is planned as the place to talk with Dio about child welfare practice and policy across jurisdictions. Dio does not search the web, so its materials can lag behind later changes in law, policy or guidance. Check your state's current law and policy directly when it matters. A GET package includes the knowledge-base materials named in its list of contents, and an agency confirms its own current law and policy when it configures FreeWIS.

# PLAY

## What is PLAY?

PLAY is a working FreeWIS system that Hudson Consulting and Training (HCT) built and hosts so people can try it. It is free to use today for adults 18 and older, starting at freewis.com/play. After you sign in, accept the PLAY terms and are admitted, you choose a role: caseworker or state administrator. A caseworker's desk holds a caseload of made-up families with their cases, placements, relationships, court dates and documents, and you work it with Dio the way a caseworker would. The state administrator role is for reviewing statewide operations totals across the made-up records. Access lasts for a limited period. PLAY has a limited number of desks for each role, and the role screen lets you pick only roles that have a desk open. If the role you want is full, try again later or choose a different role.

PLAY is set up to resemble Kansas. It is HCT's demonstration, not a government or real agency system, and it is not a certification of anything. The state administrator role is open now, but it is an early version. Expect it to keep changing until more PLAY roles are set up. Intake, investigation, prevention and adoption roles are still being built or planned, and appear on the role screen as Coming soon. PLAY as a whole, and anything in it, can change or be reset at any time.

## Is anything in PLAY real?

The case data is not. Every family, case, name, note and document that HCT supplies in PLAY is made up, on purpose, so you can work a caseload from start to finish without putting a real family at risk. HCT cannot guarantee that every participant follows the rule against real information. Your account information is real: the account you sign in with, your account name, your IP addresses, and HCT's records of what you accepted and of account security.

PLAY is shared and is not confidential. When you take a desk, the made-up worker at that desk takes on your account name. Your name can then appear with the work you do and in reports and charts made from the shared records, and other participants may see those. Team is PLAY's messaging space. It shows the name, and any photo, from the account you sign in with, and people in a Team conversation can see the messages in it. HCT is changing Team in PLAY so that participants can message only Matt Hudson at HCT, not each other. Until that change is finished, treat anything you send in Team as something other participants may see, as the PLAY Evaluation Access Agreement says. Authorized HCT administrators and service providers can also access PLAY content, including Team messages, for operations, support and security.

Never enter or upload information about a real person or a real case. That means no real names with case facts, addresses, contact details, identifiers, health or financial information, abuse or neglect reports, or real files, screenshots, images or audio. Doing so breaks the PLAY terms. The PLAY Evaluation Access Agreement and Privacy Notice say that when your access period ends, ordinary content from that period is deleted, or the made-up records you changed are reset. That includes your conversations with Dio, uploads, edits and generated documents. Do not count on that cleanup to remove real information. PLAY does not anonymize what you type. Backups and copies held by service providers, including Anthropic, follow separate rules. Messages other participants wrote in Team, including replies to you, are kept under their own retention rules.

## What if real information gets into PLAY by mistake?

Stop using it and email freewis.support@hudsonct.com to say where it is, without repeating it. HCT restricts it promptly, keeps only the evidence it needs, and later deletes or returns it lawfully, as the Privacy Notice describes. It is not erased the moment you report it.

PLAY and support email are not monitored for emergencies or child abuse reports. If someone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services. Report a concern about a child's safety to your local child protective services or law enforcement agency. For a suicide or mental health crisis in the United States, call or text 988.

## Can I use PLAY on my phone?

Yes, on Android. The FreeWIS app for Android is on Google Play in the United States. It is free, for adults 18 and older, and includes PLAY with Dio and Team messaging. It has no ads, subscriptions or in-app purchases, and you sign in with Google. If the app gives you any trouble, PLAY also works in your phone's web browser.

The app is the same PLAY you use on the web, with the same made-up caseload, the same Dio and the same rule against real information. It adds no casework or Dio features of its own. FreeWIS was built with phones in mind from early on, not as an afterthought, so it already works on phones. The app code comes with GET. An agency that wants its own app uses its own app store accounts, configures the app and releases it to its own staff. Installing HCT's app gives you no rights to the code.

The app has its own Native App Supplement. The app asks your permission before your first message to Dio is sent to the AI service, and you can say no or stop it later. An iPhone and iPad app is coming to the App Store. No date has been announced. Until then, use PLAY on the web or on Android.

# GET

## What is GET?

GET is how a qualifying public child welfare agency asks Hudson Consulting and Training (HCT) for the FreeWIS code. Inquiries at freewis.com/get are open now, and an inquiry is not a download. The GET form asks you to accept the Terms of Service for your own use of the inquiry process only. That does not bind your agency or create a license. Before any license, HCT reviews the request and an authorized agency official completes the agency's own review. If HCT approves and both sides sign a separate source license, the agency receives a specific version of the FreeWIS source code at no charge. Each delivered package comes with a written list of the application, database and knowledge-base materials it actually includes, with their versions, what they depend on, and anything left out.

The code is jurisdiction-neutral by design and comes without any jurisdiction's setup. Federal codes (the fixed lists of answers that federal reports use) are kept apart from a jurisdiction's own codes, and the jurisdiction it serves is a setting your agency chooses. Your agency loads its own values and configures FreeWIS to its own law and policy. Some form and rule logic is written as program code, so fitting your jurisdiction's forms can mean adding form logic alongside the Kansas-style forms PLAY uses. That work is part of your agency's implementation, along with validating, hosting and running its own FreeWIS.

## Is GET the same as PLAY?

No. PLAY is HCT's own working demonstration of FreeWIS. GET is the code an agency receives to set up and run itself. Both come from the same code. PLAY's limits are choices made for the demonstration: made-up families, a Kansas-style setup, a limited set of roles and a limited access period. PLAY also stands in for a few things so one person can see the whole system. For example, where a step would normally wait for a supervisor's approval, PLAY lets the work keep moving. Those are not limits of the code an agency receives through GET.

An agency configures its FreeWIS to its own jurisdiction's law and policy. Some parts of FreeWIS are still being built, and those parts are unfinished in PLAY and in the code alike. Each delivered package lists exactly what it includes and what it leaves out.

## Who can request GET?

A public child welfare agency that will honestly use FreeWIS for its own work. That can be a state, a territory, a tribe, the District of Columbia, a county working under a state plan, or another public child welfare entity. Size and budget do not matter to HCT. The agency's own employees lead and do the implementation work. An agency does not qualify while it pays an excluded vendor for ongoing CCWIS or SACWIS work (SACWIS, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, is the older federal model); "Excluded vendors" below explains. The type of entity only starts the review: an authorized agency official must complete the agency's review of the facts, and HCT decides whether to grant a license.

HCT licenses each agency separately, so the agency next door makes its own request. A county working under a state plan can request FreeWIS without its state, and a state without its counties. The separate source license sets the actual terms.

### Who hosts an agency's FreeWIS, and who has its data?

The agency does. Under GET, your agency hosts and runs its own FreeWIS. It uses its own cloud hosting, AI account, sign-in provider and staff. It also pays for and runs its own security, validation and operations. When you make a GET request, leave out real case data, credentials and sensitive attachments. Any HCT access to real agency data is governed by separate agreements.

PLAY is different: HCT hosts PLAY, with made-up case data. The Privacy Notice lists the services PLAY uses, including Microsoft Azure and MongoDB Atlas for hosting and storage and Anthropic for AI responses.

## Cost

### What is free, and what still costs money?

PLAY is free to use today, on the web or in the Android app. The FreeWIS code comes at no charge to a qualifying agency. There is no license fee from Hudson Consulting and Training (HCT), one-time or recurring, and no HCT service your agency has to buy. Your agency gets one specific version of the code. Later releases, security patches and knowledge-base updates come only if HCT agrees to them in writing. Help from HCT is optional and, if both sides want it, comes under a separate contract. Your agency pays for everything needed to run FreeWIS:

- its own staff to implement and operate it
- its own cloud hosting for the application, database, knowledge-base search index, file storage, and the services that run Dio conversations and Team messaging
- its own AI account, billed by use, because every answer Dio gives is AI usage (Dio runs on Anthropic's Claude models)
- its own sign-in provider
- its own data migration, configuration, security review and day-to-day operations

### About how much does the AI cost to run?

It depends on how much your staff use Dio. **These are rough estimates, not quotes.** AI services charge by the token, a small unit of text. In HCT's tests on made-up cases, at Anthropic's list prices for the Claude Sonnet models Dio was tested on, most Dio answers cost about 20 cents and the most expensive cost about 40 cents. Rough monthly estimates per caseworker, over a month of working days:

- light use, a handful of questions a day: roughly $20
- typical use, about 15 questions a day: roughly $60 to $100
- heavy use, dozens of longer questions a day: a few hundred dollars

So an agency with 10 caseworkers might spend roughly $200 to $1,000 a month at light to typical use, and one with 50 caseworkers roughly $1,000 to $5,000. If every caseworker were a heavy user, those figures would be several times higher. AI cost grows with the number of caseworkers, so for a large agency it can run to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year or more.

These estimates cover only the Claude models Dio was tested on. HCT has not tested Dio on other AI models, so it cannot say what they would cost or what they would offer. AI providers may also change their prices. Agency setups that let Dio hold longer conversations can cost more per answer. The estimates also leave out other AI calls FreeWIS makes on its own, such as naming each

conversation and automated case reviews. Anthropic's prompt caching, which charges less when the same text is sent again, could bring these figures down. Your agency's own AI bill is the real figure.

## About how much does hosting cost?

It depends mostly on the size of the database and computing capacity your agency runs, which grows with how many people use it at once and how much it stores. **These are rough estimates, not quotes.** PLAY is a useful yardstick. HCT runs it on Microsoft Azure, Microsoft's cloud service. On November 3, 2026, PLAY's live database held about 6,000 made-up cases, 15,800 people, 3,700 investigations, 143,000 casework encounters (visits, calls and meetings) and records of 10,600 documents, in about 1 gigabyte of data. (PLAY stores records of its documents, not the files themselves; an agency's scanned files add storage.) Priced at Microsoft's published Azure rates, before any discounts, rough monthly hosting ranges are:

- a caseload around PLAY's size: under $1,000 a month
- a larger agency, with more people using it at once and a bigger database: roughly $1,500 to $2,500
- a very large system with hundreds of thousands of cases and heavy use: roughly $4,000 to $10,000

The database is the largest part of the bill. HCT expects a small tribe with hundreds of cases could run a smaller database and pay less, and a state with hundreds of thousands of cases would need a larger database and more computing power, so it would pay more. HCT has not tested FreeWIS at those sizes. These figures cover Azure hosting only. They leave out the chat-history database (MongoDB Atlas), AI usage, staff, and any separate test or training copy. Your agency's own discounts would lower them, and Azure Government or other clouds are priced differently.

## Why doesn't FreeWIS cost tens of millions of dollars?

In HCT's view, the expensive parts of a typical CCWIS project are licensing, a vendor build and years of paid development. FreeWIS has no license fee and no vendor build, and the code already exists. For comparison, Kansas expects its new CCWIS to cost $100 million over four years, about half state funds and half federal title IV-E funds. Nationally, a June 2026 report by ASPE, an office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, counts $2.28 billion in federal and state claims since 2016 across 75 state and territory projects: 41 new CCWIS builds and 34 transitional systems. As of February 28, 2026, 30% of those projects were fully operational, and 10% of the new CCWIS builds were. The money map on freewis.com shows these ASPE figures in its national box, alongside its own separate count of state budget figures.

Every system, including the most expensive ones, still leaves the agency with costs it owns: hosting, staff, ongoing maintenance and, with FreeWIS, AI usage. The estimates above show what AI and hosting can look like; staff and maintenance depend on your agency. What FreeWIS removes is the license fee and the vendor build. In HCT's view, FreeWIS is inexpensive enough that an agency's own staff can implement and run it. HCT expects that to cost less than what many agencies pay today to keep their current systems going. HCT sees no reason this work should take tens of millions of dollars and several years.

# Excluded vendors

## Why are some vendors excluded?

The no-charge path is built for agency-led work. Under the Terms of Service, the agency's own employees lead and do the implementation, using permitted tools and ordinary infrastructure. Help from Hudson Consulting and Training (HCT) is optional, under a separate contract, and the Terms offer no commercial implementation-partner program. On this path, an agency does not qualify while it has an ongoing paid CCWIS or SACWIS engagement with an excluded vendor. That is true even if the vendor would have no role in its FreeWIS work. SACWIS, the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, is the older federal model that CCWIS replaced.

An excluded vendor also may not take part in an agency's FreeWIS request, restricted evaluation, planning, implementation or support. It may not receive the code, changes to the code, nonpublic delivery materials, repository, build or deployment access, or related credentials. These rules cover the agency code path only. Ordinary use of PLAY is open to adults, including people who work for these firms, and gives no access to the code or to an agency's restricted FreeWIS work.

## Who is an excluded vendor?

In plain terms, an excluded vendor is a company, other than HCT, that has been paid to design, build, host, run, support, check or advise on a CCWIS or SACWIS. The Terms of Service give the full definition, under the name Excluded CCWIS Vendor, and that definition controls. A company that only supplies ordinary, generally available computing, storage, networking, security or developer tools is not excluded for that alone. That holds as long as it provides no services specific to CCWIS, SACWIS or FreeWIS. HCT looks at the actual services, who would have access, the company's history and its affiliates.

The GET page names some firms as examples from state and legislative records. The names are examples, not the boundary, and HCT assesses each request on its facts. A past engagement that has ended does not, by itself, disqualify an agency for good. The agency must still disclose it, with any payments, services, support, access or planned work that continue, so HCT can decide whether the vendor is still involved.

# Federal funding and approval

## How does FreeWIS relate to ACF and federal financial participation (FFP)?

ACF, the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), decides whether an agency's own system is a CCWIS, and only for that agency. FFP, federal financial participation, is federal money that pays a share of an agency's approved costs. A title IV-E agency is the state or tribal agency that runs its title IV-B and IV-E plans. Building a CCWIS is optional for that agency. ACF says an agency that builds one meeting the rule gets a more favorable cost share.

Receiving the FreeWIS code costs nothing and triggers no filing. Hudson Consulting and Training (HCT) expects your agency to get FreeWIS and start with its own funds. In HCT's view, your agency has no reason to file an Implementation Advance Planning Document for FreeWIS. That is the plan an agency files to ask for federal money to design, build and install a system. Nor is there a reason to claim FreeWIS development costs on Form CB-496, the quarterly report a title IV-E agency files to claim federal title IV-E funds. The form's development-cost lines are 11b, 13 and 14. The code

already exists, and your own staff do the implementation.

Once FreeWIS is running, your agency may choose to claim a federal share of its ongoing operating costs. That is a choice, not a requirement. Those costs go on the form's operating-cost lines, such as line 11a, or line 12a or 12b if ACF has classified the system as a CCWIS. A claim may bring its own federal filings. If your agency decides to claim, settle the details first with ACF and your agency's counsel. The Terms of Service treat federal participation as a separately assessed choice, so raise it with HCT too. When CHAT opens, you can ask Dio to help you think it through. Dio is AI, not a lawyer. FreeWIS promises no funding, reimbursement or CCWIS status.

### Is FreeWIS CCWIS-certified or approved by ACF?

No. There is no CCWIS certification for a vendor's code. FreeWIS claims no CCWIS status or ACF approval. FreeWIS is built to the CCWIS rule: the way it stores data, its federal reports and its record of approvals are designed to the rule, and parts are still being built. It is also built to federal reporting specifications. Its fields map to AFCARS, NCANDS, NYTD and Family First elements, with title IV-E, CFSR and ICWA evidence alongside.

### Our agency already has a federally funded system. Can we switch to FreeWIS?

Your agency can request FreeWIS through GET, and HCT reviews each request. In HCT's view, as long as your agency sets up and runs FreeWIS with its own funds, the federal rules that come with federal system funding don't reach FreeWIS itself. An agency still paying an excluded vendor for ongoing CCWIS or SACWIS work does not qualify; see "Excluded vendors" above.

The caution is about your current system. If federal funds helped build it, federal rules require it to stay in use for the period set in its Advance Planning Document, unless HHS decides a shorter period is justified. That document is the plan your agency filed to get those funds. If it is an approved CCWIS and your agency stops running it, ACF may take back the title IV-E funds claimed for it. Talk with ACF before you retire it. The Terms of Service also say not to interrupt necessary services or break an existing agreement because of a FreeWIS request that may not be approved.

## CHAT and help

### What is CHAT?

CHAT is planned as a standalone Dio: a place to talk through child welfare practice and requirements across jurisdictions, without working a made-up caseload. It is not available yet, and no opening date has been announced. Like Dio in PLAY, it will be AI, not a professional adviser, and it will answer from HCT's curated materials without searching the web. You will be asked to accept its terms before you can use it, and any price would be disclosed before any charge. You can talk with Dio inside PLAY now, where it is tailored to PLAY's Kansas-style caseload. Entering PLAY does not sign you up for CHAT.

### Where can I get help or read the full terms?

For help with the website, PLAY or the FreeWIS app, email freewis.support@hudsonct.com or see Support. Do not send real case information, passwords or sensitive files. To ask Hudson Consulting and Training (HCT) to delete your account and data, see the Account and Data Deletion Notice. If you work for an agency that runs its own FreeWIS, use the support contacts your agency gives you.

The Terms of Service and the PLAY Evaluation Access Agreement govern. The Native App Supplement also applies to the FreeWIS app, and the Community Content Guidelines apply to content you share. Any code delivery is governed by a separate source license. The Privacy Notice describes how HCT handles information. This FAQ explains these documents in plain language and does not change them; if it differs from them, they control. The cost estimates and summaries of federal rules here are HCT's explanations, not terms.