Child Welfare Advisory Committee

Members Present

February 26, 2025, 9:30 AM

Glenda L. Lashley, DCFS Liaison	Christopher Cox, Co-chair	Ronica Patel, Co-chair
Evelyn Smith	Dr. Tiffany Johnson	Andrea Hall
Stephanie Franklin	Nancy Dorfman-Schwartz	Kara Teeple
Kimberly Jones	Andrea Durbin	Annetta Wilson
Jason Keeler	Jere Murry	Evelyn Smith
Patrick M. Phelan	Jackie Sharp	Andrea Hall
Clete Winkelmann	Sarah Tunning	Kara Teeple
Dr. Mitchell Sandy	Elaine Karris	Emily Medere
Mark Becker	Ivelisee Del Valle	Elena Xhalexington Duncan Velez
Mary Savage	LaTasha Roberson-Guifarro	

I. Welcome and Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order by Chris Cox.
- Glenda Lashley proceeded with the member roll call. An in-person/virtual quorum was established.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes

- **Approval of Minutes** – Chris requested a motion for approval of the minutes from November 2024. The minutes were approved as is by all members present.
- **Introduction of New CWAC Co-Chair**

Director Mueller introduced Ronica Patel, Director of CAMELOT as the new Co-chair of the CWAC committee.

III. Co-Chair Report

- Chris announced that April 16 will be the date of the next CWAC summit.
- The summit will take place in the Chicagoland area.
- Chris announced that there are several new members on the committee.

IV. Director's Remarks (Director Heidi Mueller)

- Director Mueller opened this part of the discussion by stating that she will be speaking about the proposed budget for DCFS and to the priorities of the governor's budget for FY26.
- Also stated that February 1, 2025, made one year in her role as the Director.
- Spoke to the DCFS' core values:

  A Family-Focused
    - Integrity
    - Respect
    - Empathy
    - Equity
- Garden of Prayer success story:
    - Teenage youth in care was fostered by a staff member, after developing a great relationship with them after the loss of his mother.
- Director Mueller expressed gratitude to Tim for his contributions in improving the data at DCFS.

DCFS FY25 Accomplishments:

- Hiring
    - 3840 staff are currently employed by the agency, the highest number in 15 years.
    - This is a 30% increase from 06/30/20 - 12/31/24.
    - This increase resulted in the reduction of investigator caseloads by 13%.
    - This increase also helped investigators exceed federal performance standards in 2024 by seeing 97% of all youth in less than 7 days.
- Hotline improvements
    - The State Central Registry (SCR) migrated to IllinoisConnect and launched the SAFE Model on 8/11/24.

    - SCR has reduced the percentage of cases being "screened in" from 42% to 37%, by generating more information up front to identify high-risk cases and investigations.
    - Hotline calls continue to be answered in real time, callers are connected to a call floor worker at an average of 15 seconds.
  - Permanency
    - In 2024, more youth in care found permanent homes compared to any year within the last decade.
    - DCFS increased permanencies by 42% from 2023-2024 and exceeded BH consent decree targets.
    - Adoptions increased by 13%
    - Reunifications increased by 2%.
  - Improving Placement Options for Youth
    - Capital grant investments in FY23 and FY24 allowed DCFS to add 80 specialty residential treatment openings, preserve 76 existing openings for youth, reducing the number of times youth remained in psychiatric hospitals beyond medical necessity by 28%.
    - In fiscal year 2025, Emergency Resource homes were also added to eliminate the need for youth to sleep in DCFS offices.
  - Technology
    - IllinoisConnect is transforming child welfare services in Illinois through the development of a user-friendly system that incorporates time saving automations with data security.
    - In 2024, IllinoisConnect developers released a software program that automates and streamlines the assessment and approval of more than 1000 annual consent requests for psychotropic medications within the DCFS Guardian Offices.
    - This technology saved staff 5000 hours of manual processing time and was awarded the ISM Award of Excellence for Best Use of Technology with internal focus from the American Human Service Association in September of 2024.

V. FY26 DCFS Budget (Director Heidi Mueller)

    - Total budget- $2.47 billion
    - Increase of 4.75% from FY25
    - Workforce Investments
    - $53.7M will be designated to increase DCFS staff by 100 Positions.

- $24.0M will be designated in salary increases for private partners.
- High Acuity Programs- Additional $29.5M allocated for serving youth in residential settings.
- Home & Community Based Services
- Increase of $15.8M will be designated to support relative caregivers and homebased alternatives to residential care.
- GRF- $1,610,462.6 (+9%)
- Other State- $846,568.9 (-2.3%)
- Federal- $15,816.6 (-2.9%)
- Total $2,472,848.1 (+4.7%)

- FY26 Goals- Flow from DCFS' 5 Strategic Pillars:
  - Right Size
  - Center Children and Families
  - Equip and Empower Staff
  - Better Care for Youth with Complex Needs
  - Support Youth Transitioning Out of Care
- Stephanie asked if an after-care model for transitional living would be considered for youth in care, post 21 years old.
- Tim replied to Stephanie by stating that the notion to support youth in care post 21 is there, Family Advocacy Centers are currently being considered to support this population.
- Governor's Proposed Fiscal Year Budget
- Health and Human service fiscal year investment budget

VI. IllinoisConnect Update (Jim Daugherty)

- Jim opened this part of the meeting by announcing that there would be a release in April that will include updates to the intake module that has already been released, making the module more usable and understandable.
- Additional updates include, C-Well updates, foster parent recruitment release, CFS542, Mobile app.
- Jim also stated that they will be making progress to the service taxonomy, which will reorganize how services are described. Resultantly, making it easier for caseworkers.
- WMA will automate some processes that are manual by using technology to make them more efficient.

- There will also be a guardian consent portal, which will allow consents to be completed within the portal.

VII. Background Process Update (Shontee Blankenship)

- A survey was sent out to licensed CWCA staff via D-NET and direct e-mail blast
    - 149 participated to share details of the department's functionality.
- The average background clearance takes 10-20 days, which exceeds the expected average of up to 10 business days.
- If background checks exceed a month, it was stated that this needs to be brought to the attention of the background unit.
- The survey was able to target participants that are designated as authorized personnel to verify fingerprint clearances.
- Majority of the participants stated that the portal was user friendly
- Shontee stated that the survey was a standard format, that did not allow additional input from CWAC partners.
- As a result, a follow up survey will be needed to gather additional information.
- Shontee also stated that the BCU team is aware that the portal needs improvement and is working to enhance the portal.
- From January 2nd - January 31st
    - 1033 applications were received by the BCU
    - 881 applications were returned to facility
    - 89 applications were incomplete
    - 14 applications are pending
    - The team is currently working on authorizations from the week of 2/17.

VIII. Caseload Percentage between Private Partners and DCFS (Timothy Snowden)

- Over the last four years the ratio of CWAC and DCFS is trending in favor of DCFS, 77% in comparison to 71%.
- Director Mueller acknowledged that the trend pattern is small, but steady.
- Post Covid, intake is trending downward statewide.
- DCFS caseload average is slightly under 12 to 1.
- CWAC caseload average is 13 to 1.
- Collaborative Conversations:

    - At the halfway point of the fiscal year, we have more agencies on track to reach a 40 percent achievement rate.
    - Every 18 months there is an agency that shifts their mission focus and no longer provides foster care service.
    - KIND Act Legislation will increase the number of youth eligible for guardianship in July.
- Caseloads are driven by the number of cases that we receive.
- Question was asked, “What is the intention of DCFS of how to maintain the cases that are shifted?”
    - There is no specific strategy, the shift was organic.
    - Unique emergency in a particular community where CWCA move cases to DCFS.
- Chris asked if the contract model ratio be changed based on the need of providers.
- Director Mueller acknowledged there is not currently any data that tells us exactly what the ideal balance should be.
- Director Mueller continued this conversation by stating that one of the organization’s goals is to keep the CWAC partner network healthy.
- She also stated that she is currently working alongside Tim to find out what the ideal balance looks like.
- Director Mueller stated that during the period of 2020- 2021 DCFS reunifications increased.
    - This data suggests: That we know how to adjust in these ways when it is necessary.
    - Example: DJJ during that height of COVID, our population really decreased, and it was because courts and DJJ other people found alternative things to do.
- Chris stated that I need to get a sense of where we're going to be able to help you share more of the pressures within the various organizations.
- Chris followed up by stating that I can't say that it's a small drastic increase or decrease in caseload that is significant in my organization.
- Tim replied by stating that this conversation is going to have to be multi-level, because the dynamic that just shared will shape the core of the current system.
- Director Mueller asked, “how do we get to a point where we project, I feel at a loss of understanding from the system’s perspective, what is the balance, but I think we also need to be informed”.
- Chris replied by stating I think the finance and administration committee needs to be engaged.
- Chris acknowledged that the PRO is not currently a recognized committee

- Tim stated the PRO committee had their first meeting yesterday.
    - He followed up by stating that the meeting was intentional to bring together the providers to promote more conversations about the caseloads, the caseload sizes, and the impact of these variables.
- Chris asked is there any conversation or discussion about pulling together clusters by region?
    - This could help study, identify trends, predict and be proactive in shifting the focus.
- Clustering by regions could also provide insight to unique data that only occurs geographically, opposed to statewide.
    - Tim responded that he would be open to that suggestion.
- To support statements made by Chris and Tim, Hope stated that the amount of youth in care has gone down over the years.
- Chris stated that he is hopeful that this will be ongoing communication and conversation to share more thoughts about how we can continue to work together.

IX. CFSR 4 & CFSP Goals (Jennifer Eblen-Manning)

- Jennifer announced the Official kick off for next Child and Family Services review Round 4, in April. Invitations are still being distributed.
- Period under review for the CFSR begins April 1, 2025.
- Case reviews will begin in April 2026.
- Jennifer announced that the official CFS will be launched October 1, 2025, with a data profile that will provide progress updates based on statewide data indicators.
- Due to time constraints, Jennifer was asked if she would be willing to present the rest of the data intended for this meeting at the next CWAC meeting (May 7).

X. Public Comments

- Chris opened the floor for public comments, there were no comments made during this part of the meeting.
- Chris thanked all participants of this meeting for their time.

XI. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:15 PM