

Child Welfare Advisory Committee
February 29, 2024, 1:00 PM
Members Present

Glenda Lashley (DCFS Staff Liaison)	Emily Rawsky
Beverly Jones – CoChair	LaTasha Roberson-Guifarro
Christopher Cox – CoChair	Alexandria Ryan
Malia Arnett	Mary Savage
Rich Bobby	Jackie Sharp
Kim Cobb	Prestina Singleton
Nancy Dorfman - Schwartz	Evelyn Smith
Dr. Tiffany Johnson	Phyllis Summers
Kimberly Jones	Elena Thompson
Jason Keeler	Kara Temple
Aneliya Kosovo	Rick Velasquez
Jere Murry	Duncan Velez
Lisa Nicklas	Annetta Wilson
Audrey Pennington	

I. Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Glenda Lashley, DCFS Staff Liaison, at 1:10 PM.
A quorum was established, allowing the meeting to proceed.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes

Approval of May and August Minutes – Chris motioned for approval of the minutes from the previous meetings due to lack of an in-person quorum. Andy approved the motion and Rich seconded the motion. After a brief discussion and no objections, the minutes were approved with corrections by all members present.

III. Co-chair Report

Director's Welcome:

- Special acknowledgment and welcome extended to the director.
- Expressed enthusiasm for collaborative work ahead on behalf of children and families.



- Beth, a cochair, emphasized the committee's dedication to diligently working for the benefit of children and families, aiming for comprehensive solutions.
- Chris, a co-chair Warm welcome to the Director and four new members joining the committee. Their upcoming contributions and fresh perspectives were highlighted as valuable to the collective effort.
- Positive Impressions of the Director:
- Cochairs shared commendable impressions from a recent interaction with the director, praising her passion, willingness to engage, and focus on collaborative work.

Chris acknowledgment of Challenges and Opportunities:

- Recognized the myriad challenges facing child welfare.
- Identified the current period as a crucial opportunity for transformative change, welcoming the director's leadership at this critical juncture.
- Emphasized the need for unity and collective effort to address challenges.
- Stressed the importance of seizing opportunities for transformation in child welfare services.

IV. Director's Report

A new director shared their vision for the committee, emphasizing collaborative efforts to improve the child welfare system in Illinois. Highlighting that DCFS and CWAC Partners path is marked by a shared commitment to transformative action, driven by a purpose that transcends individual roles. Together, DCFS and CWAC Partners stand on the brink of extraordinary change, united in our mission to make a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve. Thank you all for all of your work and I'm excited for collaboration and I'm excited today to talk about our budget because I know that's what everybody wants. The fact that, and, you know, answer questions. And I hope that you feel like. The Director was met with optimism and support from the committee members.

- Embracing Transformation: The concept of transformation is at the heart of our mission, signifying our readiness to take bold, significant steps forward in serving children and families in Illinois.
- Driven by Purpose: From the outset, my purpose has been clear—to serve children and families. This mission is not just a job; it's a calling that has defined my entire life.
- Unity and Collaboration: The strength of our mission lies in our unity. By linking arms, listening, learning, and growing from one another, we amplify our impact and deepen our understanding.
- A Journey of Learning and Contributing: As I navigate this role, I am both a learner and a contributor, keenly aware of the valuable insights I can offer and the lessons I can glean from our collective experiences.
- Inspired by Commitment: Joining this team, I was met with an infectious dedication—a group of individuals committed to a body of work that is dynamic, thriving, and bold.
- Privilege and Responsibility: I recognize the privilege of championing and supporting the foundational work laid before my arrival. It's an honor that comes with a deep sense of responsibility to propel our mission forward.
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V. Background Check Update by Shontee Blankenship, DCFS Deputy Director of Licensing

Shontee Blankenship provided a comprehensive update on the background check process. Efforts to address the backlog and improve system accuracy were discussed, including the introduction of mobile fingerprint scanners and new protocols for address changes. The background check process has seen significant improvements and resolutions to previous issues. Efforts are underway to further enhance the process, including addressing logistical challenges with biometric impressions and exploring new technologies. Agencies are encouraged to ensure accuracy in submitted forms and to communicate any changes in mailing addresses promptly.

Current Status Update:

- No backlog exists currently for agency and institution background checks.
- Minimum processing time is 10 business days for an applicant to appear on the portal.
- Forms from biometric impressions are processed within 3 to 5 business days after receipt.

Assistance for Delays:

- Patricia Stokes is available for assistance if processing exceeds a two-week timeframe.

Portal Issues Resolved:

- Portal showing ineligible applicants incorrectly was fixed on December 21st, 2023.
- Link to the background check portal access request form issue resolved on February 22nd.

Completing Forms Correctly:

- Emphasized the importance of fully completing and providing legible Form 718 for background checks.
- Incomplete forms or missing provider ID numbers lead to processing delays.

Data Update:

- As of February 26, 2024, 931 Form 718 applications received, 832 processed, 86 incomplete, and 23 notices sent out.

Addressing Mailing Address Issues:

- A workgroup was created to address issues with receiving background check correspondence.
- Agencies confirmed correct mailing addresses via email to ensure proper delivery of notices.
- A protocol developed for changing mailing addresses through the application page.

Certified Mail for Correspondence:

- Background check correspondence will now be sent via certified mail.
- Agency CEOs are responsible for notifying the payment division of any mailing address changes.

Biometric Impressions and Mobile Scanners:

- Addressed issues with biometric impression locations and announced the exploration of mobile fingerprint scanners.
- Working with procurement to research options and specifications for equipment.

Future Procurement Opportunities:

- The state master contract for biometric scans ends in March, opening opportunities for new procurement methods.

CWAC member question will this process, also include the relatives, like the foster parents, or is this specifically just going to be for employees?

Jassen: discussed exploring mobile fingerprinting solutions to streamline background checks during family placements, avoiding later inconvenience. Deloitte is tasked with exploring effective in-home fingerprinting to initiate background checks promptly.

Current Initiatives in Foster Care:

- Highlighted successful on-site fingerprinting during foster parent recruitment fairs and training sessions, suggesting potential models for broader application.
- Encouraged reaching out for assistance with foster parent background checks, indicating existing mechanisms to address issues statewide.
- Described biometrics teams using portable equipment for on-site fingerprinting at events like foster family recruitment picnics, indicating a move towards more flexible, mobile solutions.
- Emphasized the potential for mobile fingerprinting to extend to living room settings, enhancing convenience and efficiency.

Incremental Implementation Plan:

- Projected a 9-month timeline for rolling out the new system, starting with a limited number of sites and expanding gradually.
- The rollout will include training and certification for staff to conduct fingerprinting, ensuring quality and compliance.

Future Expansion to Community Providers:

- Discussed potential future phases where mobile fingerprinting could be extended to community providers, emphasizing the need for feedback and collaboration.
- Plans to involve regional representation in discussions to address accessibility and service gaps across the state.

Commitment to Partnership and Feedback:

- Stressed the importance of partnering with community stakeholders and incorporating unique state-wide needs into the planning process.
- Scheduled follow-up discussions to further refine the approach based on regional input and the unique challenges faced by different areas.
- Mobile fingerprinting is being explored as a solution to streamline the background check process, particularly at the time of family placements.
- Successful on-site fingerprinting initiatives in foster care settings suggest a model for broader application.
- A 9-month incremental implementation plan is in place, with the potential for future expansion to community providers, emphasizing the importance of feedback, collaboration, and regional representation in the development process.

VI. FY'24 Budget by Brian Turner, DCFS Chief Financial Manager

Brian Turner presented the FY 2025 budget for DCFS, highlighting significant increases and allocations. Brian provided a detailed walkthrough of budget allocations, highlighting the largest increases in foster care, state salaries, and capital grants.

- The total introduced budget for DCFS is \$2.36 billion, marking a 16.3% increase over the FY 2024 level.

Departmental Staff Investments:

- Funding for salary increases and growth in staff numbers.

Illinois Connect Funding:

- Allocation of \$23.3 million for IT enhancements related to Illinois Connect implementation.

Foster Care and Youth Care:

- \$237 million directed towards foster care, with \$87 million for additional level of care support through capital grants.

Residential Support:

- \$61.3 million for residential side rate increases and capacity support.

Scholarships:

- Increase of \$5.5 million to allow up to 350 new scholarships in FY 2025.
- Adoption and Guardianship Services.
- An additional \$2.1 million supporting adoption and guardianship services.

Budgetary Growth Perspective:

- Compared to an overall 4.3% increase in state agency budgets under the governor, DCFS enjoys a significant 16.3% growth.
- This growth is heavily supported by the Children Services Fund and federal reimbursements.

Capital Appropriation:

- \$100 million from the Build Illinois Bond Fund for multi-year capital grants, ensuring continued support over the coming years.

Salary Benchmarking:

- Benchmarked provider funding at 82.5% of the state's starting salary, with adjustments for cost-of-living increases and contractual changes leading to a 10% growth in benchmarked salaries for providers.

Rate Increases:

- Application of a similar rate increase formula to budget-based contracts, resulting in an overall 6% increase for FY 2025.
- The proposed budget reflects a substantial increase in funding, supporting various DCFS initiatives and operational needs.
- The budget is subject to approval by the house and Senate.

The proposed budget supports equal funding levels for all foster parents, removing financial disparities based on licensing status.

Care Startup Funds:

- Introduction of a new initiative to provide immediate startup funds for initial child placements, offering a more efficient support system for caregivers.
- Plans include issuing prepaid cards with an initial amount of \$500 to address immediate needs without waiting for the first board payment.
- The initiative aims to replace the current clothing voucher process, demonstrating a responsive approach to caregiver needs.

Child Welfare Referrals and Services:

- Discussion on improving the intake process and support services, focusing on family unification and increasing support for families in the first year.
- Lashley highlighted the importance of early intervention and connecting families with necessary services without resorting to investigations.
- Mentioned the potential transformative impact of the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation and the Care Portal in providing early support to families.

Residential Care and Workforce:

- Inquiry about budget allocations for increasing residential care capacity and direct care staff salaries to address workforce challenges.

- Confirmation of plans to set a new minimum salary for frontline direct care staff in residential programs, aiming to improve capacity and care quality.

Public Comments:

- The meeting concluded with a reminder of the importance of public comments and engagement in shaping the department's initiatives and budget allocations.

XI. Next Meeting Date

Tentatively May 16, 2024, 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm

XII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Co-chair Chris Cox and Phyllis Summers adjourned the meeting at 3:46 pm.