

Child Welfare Advisory Committee

May 7, 2025, 1:00 PM

Updated Minutes

Members Present:

Christopher Cox (Co-chair)	Ronica Patel (Co-chair)	Kara Teeple
Annetta Wilson	Elena Xhalexington Duncan Velez	Malia Arnett
Arthur Anderson	Emily Medere	Mary Savage
Andrea Durbin	Evelyn Smith	Melissa Smith
Cassandra Williams	Ivelisse Del Valle Roman	Mitchell Sandy
Clete Winkelman	Jason Keeler	Rebecca Agnitsch
Dr. Tiffany Johnson	Jere Murry	Sarah Tunning
Elaine Karris	LaTasha Roberson-Guifarro	Stephanie Franklin
Nancy D. Schwartz	Andrea Hall	

I. Welcome and Call to Order

- Chris Cox called the meeting to order.
- Kara Hamilton 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 February 2025. The minutes were approved as submitted by all members present.

III. Co-Chair Report (Chris Cox)

- Chris announced that the CWAC Summit will be held on June 24 at the I-Hotel in Champaign Illinois.
- Chris explained that the goal of the summit would be to:
 - Make recommendations to improve the well-being and outcomes of the youth, children, and families we serve in our systems.
 - Provide private sector advice and counsel within the process of child welfare.
 - Identify and address emerging programs' policy issues.
 - Assist in the development and articulation of the strategy and the vision for child welfare within Illinois.

IV. Director's Remarks (Director Heidi Mueller)

- Director Mueller opened this part of the meeting by welcoming everyone.
- She then noted that the agenda was restructured to incorporate more discussions and dialogue with CWCA partners.
- The new DCFS Logo was acknowledged and presented.

V. FY26 DCFS Budget (Director Heidi Mueller)

- DCFS has introduced a proposed budget to the governor's office, and they have approved it.
- The budget has also been proposed to the legislature.
- DCFS is waiting for a vote from the legislature on the proposed budget.
- CWCA partner agency staff salaries are tied to the salaries of our DCFS employees.
- Per the collective bargaining agreement, as our employees receive increases and raises, so will CWCA partners.
- Director Mueller acknowledged that she anticipates some negotiation with the proposed budget because there is still uncertainty surrounding federal funding.
- DCFS budget includes an increased rate to help defray the cost of liability insurance, more information will be shared later.

- It was asked if the proposed rate increases would be consistent with the current rate.
- Yes. However, the proposed raise is only dedicated to the insurance increase.
- Considering the liability increased costs, will this also be used for accommodations within the KINDACT compliance payment for equitable board payments for 7/1 effective dates?
 - Yes, we have built an increase into our budget to comply with the KINDACT.
 - For uncertified relative caregivers, we are looking to increase the board payment to 90 % of the license rates.
 - For certified relative caregivers, we are looking to increase the board payment to 100 % of the license rates.
 - We are hoping that this creates an incentivizing effect.
- Monico provided a KINDACT update: information sessions have started. One was recently completed for the Permanency CWAC subcommittee.
- She closed by stating that the team will post general information from the session on the DNET for a draft of the FAQs and talking points.

VI. Update on Liability Insurance (Director Heidi Mueller)

- 5 providers received non-renewal notices.
- 3 have secured alternate coverage; we are awaiting updates from the remaining two: LSSI and LCFS (coverage expires July 1).
- Berkley Insurance appears to be leaving the market.
- Some new carriers are showing interest, but quality and coverage vary.
- The proposed legislation includes:
 - Creation of a statewide task force to develop a long-term insurance solution by the end of 2026.
 - Proposal to extend state indemnification to provider employees.

- Department of Insurance supports exploring a state-supported pooled insurance model as a potential solution.
- Premium increases are not driven by specific provider risk but largely by national trends, especially long-tail sexual abuse claims.
- Illinois is considered plaintiff-friendly, further increasing exposure for insurers.
- DCFS Action Plan
 - Collecting claims data from providers to develop a statewide risk profile.
 - Connecting providers who lose coverage with those who have secured alternate carriers.
 - Collaborating with the Department of Insurance and legislative partners to inform long-term solutions.
- Action Items for Providers
 - Share Insurance Package Details.
 - If you've received non-renewal notices or recently changed carriers, send details so we can support others and track trends.
 - Complete National Survey.
 - Please be sure to complete the national liability insurance survey shared by Andy Munemoto.
 - Ensure that your internal rules and regulations are current, as outdated policies can hurt your defense in liability cases.
 - Providers with zero claims over 20 years are still seeing premium hikes, highlighting how national market instability is affecting all providers.
 - A formal follow-up letter will be sent soon with more guidance on data submission (including how far back to go) and points of contact.
 - Director Mueller closed by thanking CWCA members for their continued partnership and transparency as we work toward both immediate and long-term solutions.

VII. IllinoisConnect Update (Jim Daugherty)

- The self-build initiative for case management is gaining traction, with the product teams producing more output.
- A release in late April addressed improvements in intake processes and foster parent recruitment.
- A second release is planned for May to further update the following features.
- Integration discussions with Illinois' systems have not yet started.
- Jim expects a framework for system integration to be in place within the next two months, aiming to reduce inefficiencies like copy-pasting and retyping.
- The team is working to finalize the framework for integration discussions in the next two months.

VII. Foster Care Flex Funds (Tim Snowden/ Jason House)

- The flex funds approval process was moved from contracts to field-level decision-makers (caseworkers and supervisors). This change allows caseworkers to make decisions based on children's needs, such as permanency, step-down, and disability support.
- Flex funds are seen as a key tool for providing community-level support for children, particularly in stabilizing placements and addressing various needs.
- While the department has been increasing the use of flex funds, there are still some issues with tracking and measuring how these funds are spent and what they are used for. There is a need to better understand trends in usage (e.g., which services are funded through flex funds).
- A flex fund pilot has been implemented to test how flex funds are accessed and used. This includes tracking the types of services funded, such as mentoring, and refining the process.
- There are ongoing challenges, such as the difficulty in cashing checks at major stores or the time it takes to approve and distribute funds. These delays are particularly problematic when funds need to be replenished.
- There are also discussions about the different types of expenses—whether they should be categorized as flex funds, exceptions to policy, or non-recurring expenses.

- Flex funds have been a topic of conversation for over a decade, and there have been ongoing debates about how best to manage these funds for youth in care.
 - The finance team will present a new concept they believe has the potential to address many of the challenges and inefficiencies discussed above. This concept will aim to streamline the process and provide better solutions for the use and tracking of flex funds.

IX. Foster Care Caseload Dialogue

- There has been a continuous review of the foster care caseload structure, especially for youth transitioning through various care levels (e.g., TLP, ILO, residential).
- Current Models:
 - YV Model: Carries 6 cases.
- The Treatment Foster Care is currently set at 10, with a suggestion to reduce it to 8 due to the demands of regular visits and case complexity.
- The aim is to reduce staff burnout and prevent turnover by adjusting caseloads to a manageable size.
- Agencies with both foster care and intact services were discussed as having the potential to share caseload capacity.
- Staffing levels may fluctuate between programs (e.g., foster care down, intact care up), making it difficult to align caseloads effectively.
- HYFS is currently managing 165 cases but facing challenges maintaining staffing levels. The board is considering whether to continue offering foster care services due to financial strains.
- Insurance costs have surged by \$500,000, exceeding budget expectations.
- A noticeable decline in youth entering foster care (particularly in 2024–2025), is affecting overall caseload numbers.
- While foster care needs are decreasing, there is a growing demand for prevention services and therapeutic residential care.

- Melissa Box acknowledged an increase in referrals to prevention services is being observed.
- Future planning and data updates will focus on understanding these changes and resource allocation.

X. Background Process (Patricia Stokes)

- The transfer of files to the new print vendor, Accurate Biometrics has caused a few issues in processing, but the Background Check Unit (BCU) is working diligently to reduce the numbers.
- Federal regulations require the completion of out-of-state CANTS on employees working with children. This requirement went into effect in 2024 but has not been implemented. DCFS is now required to implement the requirement.
- BCU reviewed a small sample of employees indicated out of State residency during the previous 5 years.
- It was noted that 9% of employees required out-of-state CANTS clearance. States will have 45 days to respond, if no response, we'll move forward with issuing the Clearance Letter.

XI. Public Comments

- A question was asked about the training services provided to agencies that offer extended services through contracted workers.
 - Monico responded by stating that the DCFS Safety team does offer CPR & First Aid training, information is available on the DNET. Additional training is available at the provider's request.
- Chris thanked all participants of this meeting for their time.

XII. Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:01 PM.