

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council  
Draft MINUTES  
June 10, 2022, 9:00 a.m. – 2:18 p.m.  
Hybrid Option In person and WebEx videoconference**

<b>SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT</b>	<b>SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT</b>	<b>GUESTS</b>	<b>STAFF</b>
Gladys Boyd	Kathryn Adrian	Debbie Freke	Godwin Aluyor
Arrelda Hall		Tina Haynes	Jamie Blakeman
Kelly Elleman		Maria Leavengood	Gwenn Eyer
Molly Hamilton		Crystel Rekart	Charlotte Gallagher
Dr. Tiffany Johnson		Tammy Step	Michelle Grove
Harriet Kersh		Arlene Woods	Tiffany Norton
Samella Taylor-Lewis			Kim Willis
Susan McConnell			Godwin Aluyor
Audrey Reynolds			Michelle Grove
Kate Monte			
Mary Savage			
Phyllis Summers			
Rebecca Thomas			

**Welcome/Introduction**

Arrelda Hall, SWFCAC chairperson, called the meeting to order via Webex and she welcomed everyone and noted that this meeting is being recorded. Susan McConnell, vice - chair, conducted the SWFCAC voice roll call in person.

**Approval of March 18, 2022, Meeting Minutes**

*Motion: Arrelda Hall made the motion to accept the 4/22/22 meeting minutes at 9:14 am. Gladys Boyd seconded. The motion carried via voice vote.*

**9:30 a.m. Office of Caregiver and Parent Support Michelle Grove**

Michelle is very happy about meeting in person and seeing everyone who was able to make it in person. This June’s meeting is very important and DCFS has started seeing everyone in person. The Office of Caregiver and Parent Support (OCPS) will offer a WebEx, but important to try and meet in person. It is very important to have engagement during this meeting. The top issues have been put on the agenda. The top two items will hopefully help generate some goals for the next year. This council is the voice of foster parents and there are a lot of ongoing issues in foster care this year. OCPS provides ongoing support to the council and provides all the logistics to help support the council. Michelle recognized OCPS staff: Tiffany Norton, Godwin Aluyor, Gwenn Eyer, Charlotte Gallagher, and Kim Willis, administrator.

Michelle noted that the OCPS provides continued support to foster parents, adoptive parents, and birth parents. The birth parents have started a council and we have a notice of funding to pick up the Partnering with Parents program. There is a focus on developing the Partnering with Parents program and there will be an administrator and a coordinator for this statewide program.

There are thirty-eight Foster Parent Support Specialists, four pending, and three vacancies. There is approval for two additional Home of Relative support specialists per county. Foster Parent Support Specialists are not required to hold college degrees and are required to be experienced foster parents. Foster Parent Support Specialists can serve private agencies but must have permission from the private agency to provide support. The Adoption Support and Preservation Specialists will mirror the Foster Parent Support Specialist program and will be supervised by Elizabeth Richmond. Post Adopt has a lot of cases and staff are very well versed in adoption and guardianship services. It is very important for all the council members to be well integrated into DCFS.

DCFS updates: Tim Snowden had a meeting with management and brought in numerous experts to share their initiative On May 14<sup>th</sup>. A vision for permanency was developed by the new Deputy of Permanency Suzanne Isenberg-Chhabra. This vision has numerous focus areas. Susan McConnell met with the team for the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) and she reported that Illinois is the worse in the nation. Children are being put in the next available home and not the best fit. The State of Illinois has a very low high school graduation rate for youth in care. She stated that there is no oversight of the courts that make the decisions about permanency. There are concerns that cases get delayed due to the high turnover of caseworkers.

CCWIS is the new electronic documenting system for DCFS. It is for use by case managers, DCFS lawyers, DCFS POS, agency leadership, and investigators. It requires less documentation and more family engagement. There are numerous modules on CCWIS. DCFS has an under-construction team with Jackie Dort Acting Deputy of Clinical, and they are reconstructing the clinical division and who this unit services.

Staff stressed the importance of using the DCFS.StatewideFosterCareAdvisoryCouncil mailbox or calling [217- 524-2422](tel:217-524-2422) for assistance.

### **Regional Administrators Update**

### **RA Jamie Blakeman**

Jamie is going to try to be present at most council meetings. Central Region is going to have six Area Administrators (AA), which includes a new position in Rock Island. The AA's are providing ongoing supervision and trainings and to make sure that all staff are meeting all expectations. They are making sure that all departments are meeting together and to stop any delays in permanency. They hold monthly meetings with the departments and quarterly meetings with administration. The current staffing ratio for central is at about eighty percent. The training piece is very important to all new staff which goes along with staff retention. Positions are being added based on case load to meet the needs. There is a focus on accountability and supervision of all staff. Jamie is open to being contacted with any concerns from foster parents to work towards collaboration. Jamie is always working toward recognizing hard working staff by having shout outs for all their efforts. Please contact her with any questions at [Jamie.I.blakeman@illinois.gov](mailto:Jamie.I.blakeman@illinois.gov)

## **Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans: Then and Now Increasing the Impact of the Foster Parent Law**

**Gwen Eyer**

The Foster parent law has been around since 1996 and legislates fifteen foster parent rights and seventeen responsibilities. Implementation plans must be prepared annually, and these plans must be reviewed and approved by the council. Fifty-two plans were reviewed in 2022 and foster plan awards are given out to the top three agencies. Rule 340 appendix B has the guidelines for scoring plans. Gwenn reported that Agency Reviews were discontinued by the council because they were not producing results. There is an on-demand training Foster Parent Law for caregivers and staff. She stated that the statewide Foster Parent Law grievance procedure template came from the council.

There was extensive discussion about utilizing the implementation plans to make them the more beneficial for both the foster parents and the agencies and regions.

- Concerns were expressed about foster parents filing/not filing allegations that the implementation plan is not being followed.
- The council scores what is written, but shared concern that it is not actually what is taking place in the agency/region.
- The implementation plans have no effect if foster parents are unaware of the law.
- Foster parents often don't understand the importance of the plans. They get so much information at the beginning of the licensing process that they are overwhelmed.
- Respite is a major concern that is covered in the law.
  - Respite rates are so low that there is no motivation to do it.
  - Respite rates don't even cover the cost of food.
  - There is no way to track respite requests versus respite services actually being provided to foster parents.
- Foster parents are not given phone numbers for the chain of command when they believe their rights have been violated.

There were number of ideas on how to better use the implementation plans to better address ongoing issues with the foster parents and agency.

### **Reports from Other Councils/Committees/Workgroups:**

#### **Council Reports:**

##### **CWAC**

Harriet Kersh/Mary Savage/Phyllis Summers

The last meeting was on 5/19/22 and it was the best CWAC meeting in a long time. Foster parents will receive an increase in board payment. CWAC is working to address ongoing staffing issues. They are trying to make salaries more competitive for private agency workers. They discussed the budget issues that are affecting all areas of child welfare. The emergency foster care program is being updated.

##### **IFAPA**

**Gladys Boyd/Arrelda Hall**

Gladys reported that foster parents not being called back by staff, case workers having poor attitudes towards foster parents and that they are being blacklisted because the foster parents are not liked by the agency. There are extensive foster parent concerns, but there is a need to identify the most concerning issues.

**Northern****Rebecca Thomas**

SASS continues to be an issue with workers sometimes refusing to come out at all. There is a severe lack of foster homes. Lake County has no available foster homes. Homes are not taking placements due to their experiences with workers/agencies and trying to take a break. Some foster parents are trying to decide whether to even keep their licenses.

**Central****Kelly Elleman**

Central held their Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner in person. Meetings are moving back to in person. The clothing vouchers have turned into debit cards which has had positive feedback that it makes it much easier to obtain clothes. There is a lack of homes which has led to letting foster kids shower at other foster homes or at truck stops. Adoptions are taking extremely long. Foster parents are not aware of what can be reimbursed for extra activities or day camps. Foster parents are not able to get consent for surgeries or medical procedures. Important medical procedures are being cancelled due to not having consent. Waivers are taking extremely too long for things such as sibling waivers.

**Southern****Audrey Reynolds**

There have been issues with 906 not being in the system for placements. This stops daycare from being paid. There are no openings in daycares. Foster parents are unable to accept placements of daycare age children because there are no daycare openings. There are issues getting ahold of the post adoptive worker. There was a child death in southern region. This child was in care and went over a night visit and was murdered. This was preventable but was ordered by the judge.

**Cook Central****Molly Hamilton**

The court system is the most frustrating. There are continued complaints with case workers not calling foster parents back and the lack of respite. There is lack of daycare in the area which makes it harder to find placements.

**Training****Harriet Kersh**

HMR trainings is being revamped and Harriet has been invited to attend these meetings.

**Daycare****Rebecca Thomas**

This workgroup continues to meet weekly at 9:30 am. The change management form is not back from the SPICE Committee. The issues in getting daycare approved have been made easier.

**Policy and Legislature- Needs members****Respite-**

The same issues are ongoing, and nothing is being done. Continues to be a challenge.

**Permanency committee-**

They had a joint meeting with the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council. Illinois ranks last in getting our kids adopted into foster care. They do not track their outcomes. The PIP report is complicated to understand and the meeting made it easier to understand. The lack of concurrent

planning and the goals for the children are not correct. The permanency goal cannot be changed until adjudication and there is no oversight by the judges. It takes more for the children to come into care compared to other states.

Stakeholder Discussion: Possible Goals for Council

- Daycare
- Therapeutic daycare
- Respite
- Updated Contact information for agencies
- Better utilizing implementation plans
- Respite beds

Public comments:

none

*MOTION: Susan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Rebecca Thomas seconded, and the motion carried by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 2:18 pm.*

**Next Meeting: July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 9:00-3pm, via hybrid model of in person and WebEx for the health and safety of our members.**