

For Immediate Release

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Illinois DCFS Launches Child Welfare Dashboard and Study of Child Protection Services to Increase Transparency and Accountability

Department publishes metrics online; partners with the University of Kentucky, supported by Northwestern University and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, to study agency practices for investigating and responding to allegations of abuse and neglect

CHICAGO – Keeping with his pledge to bolster Illinois’ child welfare system, Governor JB Pritzker unveiled today a new online data dashboard featuring unprecedented insights and performance indicators maintained by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

The Illinois Child Welfare Insights Tool is the latest innovation supported by the Pritzker administration at DCFS, which is responsible for investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect; licensing Illinois’ childcare centers, adoptive and foster homes, and adoption agencies; and providing community resources to families experiencing social and economic hardships.

The launch of this new Insights Tool marks the first time that Illinois residents, child welfare advocates and the families receiving these services have near real-time access to information used by DCFS administrators, including:

- The number of reports of abuse and neglect filed with the agency and how quickly DCFS staff responded.
- Percentages of youth under DCFS care who have met with medical teams or enrolled in development programs.
- Engagement activities, including a breakdown of how often and the means used by caseworkers to interact with families served by the department.

Data is updated daily and can be viewed at the county or state level, spanning the past 30 days or the past 12 months. It is available at <https://dcfs.illinois.gov>.

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“Rebuilding the child welfare system in Illinois is not a single nor simple task; it requires innovation and a commitment to hard work,” **said Governor Pritzker**. “DCFS is continuously seeking new ways to engage the public and be transparent with its information while maintaining a careful balance of protecting the confidentiality of our children and families. It is our intention that this Insights Tool will serve as a resource for those who have a genuine interest in learning more about this tremendous operation that impacts thousands of children and families.”

To further advance DCFS’ mission of developing and improving a proactive system for investigating allegations of abuse and neglect and providing supports for children and families in need, the department is also initiating a systems focused study of its Child Protection Services. The department is partnering with the Center for Innovation in Population Health (IPH Center) at the University of Kentucky to conduct the study. The project team, led by Michael Cull, PhD at the IPH Center, will be supported by Richard Epstein, PhD at Northwestern University, and Tamara Fuller, PhD at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The IPH Center is comprised of three programs—Precision Analytics, Safe Systems and Workforce Development. The project team will leverage resources and experiences from all three programs to conduct a thorough systems review of Illinois DCFS’ child protection operations and prepare and deliver a final report of findings and recommendations. The study is expected to take approximately 24 months to complete, with recommendations provided to DCFS throughout this timeframe to ensure immediate action can be taken where necessary. The overarching frame for the review is informed by Safety Science, which is a framework used in other safety-critical industries, like aviation and healthcare, to change organizational culture, improve practice, and reduce frequency of tragic outcomes and improved public safety.

“Tapping into the skills and expertise from this group will provide us with valuable insights,” **said Illinois DCFS Director Marc D. Smith**. “We have made significant progress in the past four years and using the feedback we receive from the independent review is an important next step in ensuring we are providing the most appropriate services to every child and family we serve.”

With Governor Pritzker’s support, since 2019 Illinois DCFS has made significant strides to rebuild the child welfare ecosystem in Illinois that had been hollowed out and underfunded for more than 10 years, including:

- Achieving the highest DCFS headcount in 15 years with 3,1480 employees; compared to 2,481 in FY17.
- Providing a 58% increase to child welfare residential providers and cost-of-living increases to private child welfare staff four consecutive years.
- Adding more than 100 residential beds equipped to serve children with complex medical needs.
- Expansion of intact service programs and community-based resources.
- Eliminating the backlog of hotline complaints regarding abuse and neglect, which ranged from 50-500 per day, and launching a new online reporting system so individuals can report suspected child abuse or neglect faster and simpler than at any point in DCFS history.

“An independent, third-party look into the organization and structure of DCFS is long overdue. We owe it to the children served in this long-troubled agency to take a serious look at how the agency can improve,” said **State Senator Julie Morrison** (D-Lake Forest). “I appreciate the governor’s office for working with the University of Kentucky to ensure the study is done in such a way that does not allow for interference from those bogged down by political policy and procedure.”

The project team will also benefit from an advisory board including 13 national leaders, reflecting a diverse mix of backgrounds, including individuals with lived experience, academics at the forefront of research, public policy experts, individuals with medical child abuse and public health backgrounds and individuals dedicated to reducing racial disproportionality in the child welfare system.

“Our families and child advocates are demanding agencies and systems be reformed, even reimaged,” said **State Representative Carol Ammons**. “This is the first step in addressing concerns that members of the General Assembly have been working on through individual pieces of legislation. I am thankful that the department’s response to advocates is to study the entirety of the child welfare system and develop strategies with stakeholders to transform the system’s approach to family safety.”

The advisory board members will meet quarterly and provide input and leadership to the project team as they identify critical issues facing the child welfare system in Illinois. Additionally, they will assist with the development of recommendations to initiate change to the current system and further advance the safety, permanency and well-being of all children and families in, or at risk of, being involved in the child welfare system.

Advisory Board Members

1. Romero Davis – senior program manager, Social Current.
2. April Allen, PhD – lived experience; founder and CEO, Spark Learning.
3. Kara Georgi – parent advocate, Children’s Trust Fund Alliance.
4. Amanda Byassee Gott – circuit judge, Williamson County.
5. John Fluke, PhD – associate director systems research and evaluation/professor, University of Colorado Denver.
6. Jon Ebert, PsyD – associate professor in clinical psychiatry and behavioral health and associate professor of human and organizational development, Vanderbilt University.
7. Nia Cantey, PhD – managing director, Casey Family Programs.
8. Robin Leake, PhD – research professor and acting executive director, Butler Institute for Families.
9. Christopher Bellonci, MD, FAACAP – vice president of policy and practice, chief medical officer, Judge Baker Children’s Center.
10. Jessica Strolin-Goltzman, PhD – professor, College of Education and Social Services, University of Vermont.
11. Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, PhD – professor and associate dean of research, College of Social Work, The Ohio State University.
12. Antwan Turpeau – chief operating officer, One Hope United; appointed by Governor Pritzker to the Holistic Mental Health Taskforce for Youth in Care, 2023.
13. Regina Parnell – advocate; instructor, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS): Founded in 1964, DCFS is responsible for protecting children from abuse or neglect by responding to reports received by the Child Abuse Hotline at childabuse.illinois.gov (non-emergency situations) or 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). With the goal of keeping children safe, DCFS strengthens and supports families with a wide range of services. When keeping a child safe means removing them from the home, DCFS makes every effort to reunite them with their family. When the best interest of the child makes this impossible, DCFS is committed to pursuing guardianship or adoption by loving families to provide children with a safe and permanent home. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.

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