

the Office of the Inspector General are:

The Mental Health Task Force and the **Parenting Assessment Teams** that assisted supervisors and workers in evaluating cases that involve mentally ill parents and children.

The Ethics Program which developed a Code of Ethics for Child Welfare Professionals.

Error Reduction Training which uses lessons learned from in-depth OIG investigations to inform training for the child welfare community. Error Reduction Training combines outside professionals and internal experts to create an innovative training approach to address common errors in the field.

Academic Credentials and Training: The OIG distributed a set of guidelines for verification of academic credentials and school accreditation status to all private agencies and to DCFS officials. The OIG has coordinated training for DCFS personnel who work directly with private agencies. The training focused on the not-for-profit child welfare organizations. Presenters represented the Internal Revenue Service, Office of the Attorney General, Illinois Department of Labor, United Way and the Nonprofit Financial Center. These initiatives followed numerous investigations which revealed fraudulent credentials for staff.

How Are OIG investigations Different From Department Investigations or Court Process?

The Office of the Inspector General does not investigate incidents of suspected abuse or neglect of a child. If you believe a child is being abused or neglected, contact the **Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline** at **1-800-252-2873**. If you wish to modify or overturn a court ruling, you must use the court's process. This includes juvenile court decisions, domestic relations decisions regarding custody in divorce cases and court decisions on the review of Final Administrative Decisions by DCFS. In addition, the OIG will not investigate complaints that are or should be handled through the Department's Administrative Appeal Process—unless the complaint is that the process is flawed. For information on the DCFS Service Appeal process or to initiate such an appeal, you may contact the Department's Advocacy Office for Children and Families at 1-800-232-3798. The OIG cannot investigate

issues that are the responsibility of other state or federal agencies, such as medical assistance. The OIG does not investigate allegations of employment discrimination as those cases are handled exclusively by the DCFS Office of Affirmative Action, which can be reached by contacting 312-808-5000. The OIG also does not investigate matters that are in the grievance process or with the Civil Service Commission.

What Can I Do to Help?

Ask yourself if you could become a foster parent or someone who provides time-off care to existing foster parents. Have you considered providing a loving home to an adopted child? Consider that social justice requires volunteers. Call your local United Way to see how you can help, possibly in a community more needy than your own. Open your heart to the children you see and be alert to signs of abuse or neglect. Read up on and stay informed about child welfare issues.

It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

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OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL



*Promoting excellence in the
child welfare community by
establishing and encouraging
adherence to quality standards.*

Meryl Paniak,
Acting Inspector General

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OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

Why an Inspector General?

The position of Inspector General of the Department of Children and Family Services was created by unanimous vote of the Illinois General Assembly in June 1993 to reform the Illinois child welfare system and to strengthen the people who exist within it—Department of Children and Family Services employees, foster parents, private agencies, and most importantly, the children and their biological families (20 ILCS 505/35.5 – 35.7).

The Office was given jurisdiction to investigate Department employees, foster parents and private agencies with which the Department contracts. Because the Department stands in a special fiduciary relationship with the children of this State and is invested with the public trust, investigations may include private agencies that mismanage facilities, programmatic complaints, board culpability or professional misconduct of workers.

What Does the Office of the Inspector General Do?

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) addresses complaints from the general public concerning Illinois child welfare services. In addition, it investigates all child deaths and serious injuries of children in Illinois in which the child was the victim of abuse or neglect and the family had involvement with the Department within the last year. The OIG advances the integrity and accountability within the Department through independent oversight. The OIG conducts objective inquiries to identify and analyze problems that detract from the ability of the child welfare system to act in the best interests of the State's abused and neglected children. The OIG investigates and prosecutes complaints against Child Welfare Employee Licenses (CWEL).

The Office of the Inspector General investigates allegations of misconduct against DCFS and privately contracted agency employees. Misconduct is defined as a violation of a law, DCFS Rule, Procedure or Ethics. The OIG, with limited exceptions, requires a written request for investigation with specific details of the suspected misconduct. The OIG Request for investigation form is available by contacting the OIG's toll-free number (1-800-722-9124) or by accessing the OIG's website (www.illinois.gov/dcfs/aboutus/oig). Following receipt of the written request for investigation, a preliminary review

of the complaint is conducted which includes reviewing supporting documents and existing case records. If it is determined that a full investigation is warranted, additional records and interviews will be conducted. A full investigation may result in a report to the Director, which can include case-specific recommendations or policy reform recommendations. The OIG then monitors implementation of the recommendations. Rules of the Office of the Inspector General are published at 89 Ill. Admin. Code 430.

But Isn't the Inspector General Part of DCFS?

Yes and no. By law, the Inspector General is independent from the operations of DCFS. Although the OIG is an office within DCFS, its work, staff and budget are separate. No one at the Department, including the Director, has access to OIG files. The Inspector General provides reports to the Director of DCFS and to the Governor. The Inspector General and the Department are mandated to ensure that no one will be retaliated against for making a good faith complaint or providing information in good faith to the Inspector General. Because much of the information accessed by the OIG is highly confidential, the public does not have access to our files and our reports are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act. Once a year, the Inspector General submits a summary of investigative reports with names redacted to the Governor and Illinois General Assembly. The Annual Reports are public information and can be accessed at the OIG's website (www.illinois.gov/dcfs/aboutus/oig).

Does the OIG Operate Alone?

Its independence is what makes the Office of the Inspector General able to stand apart from DCFS, which it oversees. In many cases, the OIG's work begins with careful scrutiny of information and records that have been compiled by DCFS or private agencies. When criminal acts are alleged, the OIG works with the Illinois State Police or other law enforcement agencies. The OIG works cooperatively with other state and federal agencies. The OIG can seek the assistance of the Illinois Attorney General and any of Illinois' 102 State's Attorneys to enforce recommendations that have been accepted by the Department. The OIG also works with guardians ad litem around the state, who represent abused or neglected children in court.

How Does the OIG Get at the Facts?

To do its work, the OIG can access DCFS and private agency files and by law, is able to subpoena persons, files and records, as well as conduct interviews and make unannounced visits to DCFS and private agency facilities or foster homes. Evidence is gathered in a manner that will allow it to be used in any prosecution that may result. All inquiries and investigations are handled in a confidential manner, in compliance with the law.

How Do I Reach the Office of the Inspector General?

When the position of Inspector General was created, the legislature also created a statewide, toll-free telephone number to the Inspector General to report suspected misconduct or violations of rules or laws by DCFS employees, service providers or contractors. The toll-free number is: **1-800-722-9124**.

Are There Other Resources Available to Me?

If you have an issue or concern that does not rise to the level of misconduct and you have tried to resolve the issue with the caseworker or supervisor, you should contact the DCFS Advocacy Office for Children and Families at 1-800-232-3798. You should contact the OIG when you believe that a DCFS or private agency employee has committed misconduct or to report a systemic problem.

Does the Inspector General Do More Than Investigate Misconduct?

The Office strives to identify root causes of problems and to devise recommendations that strengthen the ability of the Department and private agencies to respond appropriately in the future. The OIG operates proactively so that the field can develop more practice wisdom and training programs to anticipate problems before they happen. The Office advocates for systemic changes when needed to protect DCFS youth in care and to provide effective and humane responses to the needs of the children. Often, OIG recommendations for systemic reforms include program initiatives to assist the child welfare system in meeting its fiduciary obligations to children. Some examples of initiatives developed by