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## Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Will Adopt All Recommendations in Audit of Hotline

*DCFS Releases Expert Audit of Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline  
DCFS Already Begun Work on Key Recommendations to  
Increase Staffing and Improve Technology*

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will adopt all recommendations from an audit of the agency's Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline, and has already started efforts to address key recommendations, particularly increasing staffing and upgrading technology.

DCFS released the findings from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) after a five-month review of the hotline's operations. Because the hotline is critical to all DCFS operations, the department commissioned the CFRC to conduct a comprehensive review focusing on call volume, staffing levels and training, business processes and technologies and data systems.

To view the complete report, click [here](#).

"The DCFS hotline is often the first interaction families and concerned individuals have with our department, and I am committed to ensuring we are responding efficiently and accurately to every report we receive," said **Marc Smith, Acting Director of DCFS**. "This roadmap will help us continue to make impactful improvements to better serve the state's most vulnerable children after years of disinvestment and neglect. The department is already hard at work to bring on additional hotline staff thanks to the Governor and bipartisan members of the General Assembly, who approved increasing our funding. Over the coming weeks, we will be adopting all recommendations included in this report with urgency."

The hotline (1-800-25-ABUSE) is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and serves as the "front door" of the Illinois child welfare system and is the first way most children who are abused or neglected are identified. In FY19, the hotline received 268,406 calls, a 20% increase from 222,719 in FY15; and during peak volume times, the Hotline receives over 950 calls a day.

DCFS has already launched several initiatives to improve the Hotline, including:

**Increased Staffing.** The allocation of more resources to DCFS in Governor Pritzker’s FY20 budget – passed by bipartisan majorities in the General Assembly – allowed the department to add 20 new positions to the hotline. Those positions are in the hiring process now. In order to reduce the number of messages taken by call floor workers, DCFS also created new staffing patterns that will ensure more efficient staffing. In addition, the department has been meeting monthly with AFSCME to reduce the reliance on mandatory overtime to safely staff the hotline. Because of this strengthened partnership, the month of October saw a dramatic shift from mandatory to volunteer overtime by hotline staff.

**Technology Improvements.** DCFS is working with the Illinois Department of Innovation & Technology to overhaul the hotline’s website for online reporting. The new site will be easier to use and is being rebuilt on a platform capable of handling a much higher number of reports. DOIT also performed a comprehensive review of the hotline to improve the tools available to call floor workers and we are currently exploring additional features, such as online chatting, texting and voice to text.

**Rapid Results.** In September, DCFS engaged Illinois Central Management Services’ Office of Rapid Results team to create a rapid results program for the hotline. The Rapid Results team uses proven methods from the private sector to address operational efficiency issues within departments around the state. The Rapid Results team has been tasked with developing a plan to ensure that DCFS will handle all calls in real time on the callers first attempt to reach the Hotline. DCFS expects the review process to be completed this year.

The CFRC review made the following 11 recommendations, which are drawn from the audit:

1. Improve the online reporting system by moving it to a new platform. Other states with online reporting systems report that Call Floor Workers (CFW) are able to process between four to nine online reports in an hour, which is much more efficient than the current processing capacity in Illinois, which is approximately 1.75. Each person we spoke with agreed that SharePoint is not the appropriate platform to host the online reporting system, and that the quickest solution to this problem would be to move it to a web-based application that was developed “in-house” by the Illinois Office of Information Technology Services (OITS).
2. Incorporate additional instructions and features into the online reporting system to make it more “user friendly.” Mandated reporters find the current online reporting system difficult to use and hard to understand, which leads to errors in the information provided. Instructions should be built into the reporting system itself (through the use of pop-up instructions or a chat box) rather than located in a user’s manual that reporters may or may not read. The Department may benefit from learning about the online reporting systems that have been successfully implemented in other states. In addition, feedback from mandated reporters who make frequent reports should be incorporated into the design of the online reporting system.
3. Once the online reporting system has been upgraded, a public awareness and education campaign should be developed and presented to mandated reporter groups throughout the state to increase its use. To date, there has been little in the way of awareness or education campaigns about the online reporting system, and reporters are finding it by accident or through word of mouth.
4. Eliminate the requirement for CFWs to document the complete Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) and The Child and Youth Centered Information System (CYCIS) case history in the intake narrative for child abuse and neglect reports. The requirement for the extensive documentation of SACWIS and CYCIS histories should be replaced with a simpler (and less time consuming) requirement for them to document whether there is a “positive or negative”

SACWIS and CYCIS history in the intake narrative. The exception to this recommendation would be for death investigations where all SACWIS and CYCIS history would be documented in the narrative. The reasoning for this recommendation is that once the report is transmitted to the Child Protection Specialist for investigation, they are required to search and document the same information in their report, which results in duplicative work. State Central Registry (the hotline) (SCR) administrators and the CFWs report that the SACWIS and CYCIS documentation process adds approximately 10 minutes to the time it takes a CFW to complete the intake narrative, which is time that could be more efficiently spent serving other reporters.

5. Eliminate the requirement for afterhours call outs on normal response investigations. It is estimated that this process, which was described in the results section, adds approximately seven minutes to the amount of time required to complete an intake. CFWs would still be required to call out all “action needed” and emergency response investigations, Related Information, and Information Only intakes.
6. Continue to prioritize and implement SACWIS improvements that will decrease manual processes during intake processing. Over the past year, the SCR administrators and SACWIS developers have established a collaborative process through which they identify and triage current SACWIS-related issues that are impacting CFWs; this process has already yielded several useful and more are expected to be completed in the near future.
7. Explore the feasibility and usefulness of adding certain enhancements to the current telecom system (Finesse), such as adding a code identifier to the existing 800 number that would allow certain groups of mandated reporters (e.g., medical personnel or law enforcement) to be sorted into a different queue (for example “press 1 if you are police, press 2 if you are medical personnel”). The possibility of a second dedicated telephone number for mandated reporters was explored in February 2018 and the results of the analysis were included in a report.<sup>1</sup> The recommendations at the time of the analysis were to increase staffing and implement the online reporting system rather than adding a dedicated line or code identifiers for law enforcement and medical personnel. Once the additional staff have been added and trained and the online reporting system is functioning more efficiently, it may be worthwhile to revisit the idea of code identifiers.
8. Other states have implemented “talk to text” technology that could potentially save time currently spent on typing the details of the call into the intake narrative. Observations on the call floor revealed that some CFWs spend several minutes transcribing handwritten notes into SACWIS or cut and paste them from a Word document. The Department may wish to explore the use of productivity-enhancing technology such as talk to text.
9. Other states have allowed certain groups of workers to telecommute, which has resulted in higher worker satisfaction, better worker retention and recruitment. The additional of 20 new CFWs brings the current physical location of the Hotline to maximum capacity. The Department should explore the feasibility of allowing some CFWs to telecommute from home. A telecommuting option would require an initial investment in equipment (laptops and soft phones), but the potential benefits would include increased staff retention, the ability to recruit staff in parts of the state where recruitment is not currently possible, reduce the number of staff time lost to weather-related absences, strengthen the SCR disaster recovery plan, and reduce the need for physical office space in the long-term.

10. Several CFW expressed concerns about the difficult nature of their work and their inability to process particularly difficult intakes with colleagues. The Department should explore resources to support CFWs who are dealing with secondary trauma.
11. The results of any system reform efforts at the Hotline should be monitored and examined by conducting a follow-up review in 18–24 months.

**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 calls received on the Child Abuse Hotline, 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 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.

**The Children and Family Research Center (CFRC) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** is an applied research center that engages with child and family-serving agency partners to design and conduct applied research to improve the lives of vulnerable children, families, and communities throughout Illinois and the Midwest.

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