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DCFS LAUNCHES HI-TECH CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE SYSTEM

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services announced the launch today of a computerized, state-of-the-art Child Abuse Hotline system, responding to complaints that its 30-year-old system was unable to handle the more than 250,000 calls reporting child abuse and neglect that DCFS receives each year.

Last year the department received 253,444 calls to its hotline at (800) 25-ABUSE, but the outdated system meant more than 60 percent of callers had to be called back rather than speaking immediately to a child abuse expert. The delays meant longer gaps in sending child abuse investigators into the field and getting children and families the help they need, a condition which new DCFS Director Richard Calica called “simply unacceptable.”

“The hotline is the front door of the department, and that front door needs to be open every minute of every day of the year,” says Calica. “Replacing our old system is a smart investment that moves us one step closer to ensuring that every child in Illinois is as safe as possible.”

DCFS is currently working with lawmakers for both chambers and both sides of the aisle to reallocate \$38,048,200 to the department’s budget for frontline staff, to ensure that once hotline calls are received, the department can investigate allegations of abuse and neglect as quickly as possible. The reorganization plan also includes additional staff to help coordinate services that enable kids to remain at home safely, recruit and support foster families when children must be removed from the home, and support adoption into permanent, loving families when reunification simply is not an option.

“Lawmakers share our goal of protecting children and families, and this reorganization plan will help ensure that children and families get the help they need, particularly in areas outside of the Chicago region where child abuse reports are rising,” says Calica.

(more)

About the new Child Abuse Hotline system

Cost: \$474,019

Phone System Improvements

- Built in measurement and management tools to ensure all calls are being answered quickly and effectively;
- Incoming calls now go in to a queue so that call center staff, supervisors and even the director can monitor wait times in real time;
- New digital system includes dual computer monitors so that call center staff can handle data entry for current calls and view the flow of incoming calls simultaneously;
- Enables staff and supervisors to measure, monitor and manage the length of each call and the data entry time required;
- Restores ability to record each call, capturing important details and aiding in staff training and accountability;
- Callers hear various greetings to indicate status of their call and hold times, unlike the old system where callers heard ringing or were sent directly to a manual message taker.

Enabled Management Improvements

- System allows DCFS management to study calls handled by each worker, improving performance evaluations and training;
- Digital data capture enables management to study system usage and call volume, increasing the efficiency of staffing;
- By setting clear, measurable standards for all staff, the system encourages self-evaluation and self-improvement as well as peer-to-peer support.

DCFS encourages anyone who suspects that a child under 18 is being abused or neglected by a parent, relative, or other caregiver to call its toll-free hotline at 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873) so that children and their families can get the help they need to ensure children's safety and well-being. The hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Founded in 1964, DCFS has the primary responsibility of protecting children and strengthening families through the investigation and intervention of suspected child abuse or neglect by parents and other caregivers. Over the last four years, DCFS received more than one million calls to our Child Abuse Hotline, offering and coordinating services wherever needed to help children remain in their homes safely. In instances where children must be removed from the home for their safety and well-being, DCFS makes every effort to return them safely to their homes as quickly as possible. When that simply is not possible, DCFS is equally committed to pursuing adoption by loving families to provide children with the permanent, safe, and nurturing homes they need and deserve to reach their fullest potential. As part of its duties, DCFS licenses and monitors all Illinois child welfare agencies and more than 14,000 day care centers, homes, group homes and day care agencies in the state.

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