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Gov. Pritzker and DCFS's Acting Director Smith Commit to Overhaul of Intact Family Services Program

In Embracing Chapin Hall Recommendations to Improve Services, Acting Director Smith Also Outlines Immediate Steps to Keep Children Safe, DCFS Launches Review of 1,100 Open Cases and Crisis Intervention Team

Springfield, IL – Governor JB Pritzker and DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith embraced the findings of the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall, committing to overhaul DCFS' Intact Family Services program with a research-based approach and taking immediate steps to keep children safe.

At the Governor's request, Chapin Hall performed an initial analysis of challenges facing the Intact Family Services program, which is designed to keep families together. The report reviewed the long-standing systemic issues that have plagued DCFS for decades and made nine recommendations for short-term and long-term changes. The report can be found [here](#).

"Under my administration, we will change the direction of DCFS. I am committing the full force of this office to this work. There is nothing more important to me as governor than getting this right," **said Gov. JB Pritzker**. "We have the opportunity right now to make dramatic improvements in how DCFS functions and dedicate ourselves every day to improving this work. I am committed to carrying out this overhaul as quickly and effectively as possible, and ensuring that DCFS has the necessary resources and support to do that work."

Intact Family Services is a unit within DCFS; its mission is to provide families with support while they remain together so that the child welfare system can engage and observe a family while avoiding the trauma associated with separating children from their parents.

Marc Smith, acting director of DCFS, agreed with the report's recommendations and pointed to the importance of having an independent review to help identify ways to correct the longstanding challenges the department faces.

“In the weeks I’ve been at DCFS, it’s clear that the department is facing a number of challenges, many that are decades old, but our team is committed to serving the state’s most vulnerable children – and I know that everyone in the child welfare system wants to do better,” **Smith said.** “The experts at Chapin Hall provided a strong guide for changing our culture, structure and approach, and we’ll move swiftly on these recommendations. My team has also developed immediate action to keep children safe.”

In addition to addressing the recommendations included in the Chapin Hall report, DCFS has also launched several initiatives that will have an immediate impact.

DCFS Immediate Actions

Action: Review of Open Investigations. DCFS is prioritizing the highest risk cases by taking a close look at investigations where young children are involved and certain allegations of abuse and neglect are present. This urgent review by some of DCFS’ most senior staff will cover more than 1,100 open investigations and focuses on reviewing compliance with key safety measures. Investigations found to be out of compliance will be rectified immediately and receive an additional qualitative review. DCFS expects to have findings from this internal investigation in coming weeks. These findings will help determine the scope of future reviews of investigation work.

Action: Crisis Intervention Team. In the tragic event of a child death, this 8-member team will initiate an immediate review when the death occurs during an open investigation or involves a child with an extensive history of contact with DCFS. The team will examine the family’s full history of involvement with DCFS and all relevant investigations and casework, including other current and previous cases that staff involved are handling. Their scope includes both human and systemic failures that may exist. The Crisis Intervention Team is tasked with quickly developing recommendations following their investigation and when appropriate, implementing changes in training or protocols that will rapidly lead to improving our work of protecting children.

Action: Expanding Training Programs and Retraining Caseworkers. Starting in June, veteran investigations staff will have access to the department’s newest and most advanced simulated (SIM) lab training facility in Englewood. This initiative will give key veteran front-line workers access to the latest tools and techniques being used in training. DCFS is also introducing a re-training program for all child welfare workers across the state. All staff licensed with DCFS, whether they work for the department or for a private agency, will be required to participate in ongoing training. The first re-training will be launched this summer and will focus on safety training, including identifying risks and warning signs.

DCFS Responses to Chapin Hall’s Recommendations

1) Recommendation: Develop and refine protocol for closing Intact cases. When caseworkers are properly supported and they have the right tools, they make good decisions. DCFS will address this problem immediately and develop new standard protocols for closing Intact cases in the next 60 days.

2) Recommendation: Clarify goals and expectations across staff roles. DCFS will clearly articulate expectations for every actor and agency involved in the work of promoting child safety. Defining roles for DCFS investigators, supervisors, Intact providers and staff will be addressed over the next 60 days through training, changes in policy and through communications with staff.

3) Recommendation: Utilize evidence-based approaches to preventive case work. DCFS will examine models that have been piloted and tested in Illinois and other states. We will work closely with Chapin Hall to address this recommendation over the next six months.

4) Recommendation: Improve the quality of supervision. DCFS will develop a new structure for supervision within the agency that provides more clear lines of authority and accountability. DCFS will also work with supervisors to ensure that their teams are openly communicating. Following this report, we will prioritize Intact teams to receive training on the new practice model within the next 30 days.

5) Recommendation: Adjust the preventive service array to meet the needs of the population. We will continue to work with Chapin Hall to identify the services to best support the populations Intact is serving. This process will take 12 months to implement.

6) Recommendation: Restructure preventive services (generally) and Intact (specifically). DCFS has convened a working group to develop a restructuring plan so that there is better collaboration between Intact services (which provides services) and the Investigations division (which is responsible for case investigations). DCFS will develop this plan over the next 30 days, followed by a 30-day rollout across the department.

7) Recommendation: Work with courts and State's Attorneys to refine the criteria for child removal in complex and chronic family cases. DCFS will work to build consensus among courts and State's attorneys concerning removal of children who have experienced multiple incidents of abuse. The department will work with partners like Casey Foundation and Chapin Hall to help us implement this system change over the next 12 months.

8) Recommendation: Redesign the assessment and intake process based on systemic review to: a) reduce redundant information collection and data input; b) support decision making with youth and families; and c) improve effective communication across child serving systems. DCFS has introduced several recent changes that eliminate some redundancy in information collection and data input. Over the next 60 days, the department is putting into place a re-training of staff to improve the efficiency, reliability, and accuracy of assessments across screening, intake, service planning, and care transitions.

9) Recommendation: Direct attention to cases at greatest risk for severe harm. DCFS, in consultation with Chapin Hall, will revisit predictive models for help identifying cases with a high risk for maltreatment. Chapin Hall has identified that other child welfare systems are increasingly making use of administrative data to speed the detection of cases that may require additional attention or intervention. This process will take 12 months to complete.