



OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE EMPLOYEE LICENSURE  
Department of Children and Family Services

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# Annual Report to the General Assembly Fiscal Year 2024



## Office of Child Welfare Employee Licensure

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# Annual Report

### **Purpose**

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is required to submit an annual report to the General Assembly on the implementation of the Child Welfare Employee Licensure Program as required by P.A. 90-0608 and P.A. 92-0471 on or before January 1, 2000, and each year thereafter. This Report covers July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

### **Legislative Background**

P.A. 90-0608 directed DCFS, in consultation with private child welfare agencies, to develop and implement a licensing program for direct child welfare service employees. This consultation and planning resulted in the establishment of the Child Welfare Employee Licensure (CWEL) Office. The CWEL Office is located within the DCFS Office of Learning and Professional Development. P.A. 90-0608 also authorized DCFS to promulgate such rules as necessary to implement the licensure program. 89 Ill. Adm. Code 412 (Licensure of Direct Child Welfare Service Employees and Supervisors) (DCFS Rule 412) implements the direct child welfare service program required by P.A. 90-0608.

The Illinois Legislature passed P.A. 92-0471 in 2001, which amended P.A. 90-0608. P.A. 92-0471 gave the Child Welfare Employee Licensure Board (CWEL Board) the authority to make recommendations to the DCFS Director regarding licensure rules and final determinations concerning the revocation and suspension of an employee's direct child welfare service license after a hearing conducted under the Department's rules and reinstatement of an employee's direct child welfare services license. This nine-member Board, appointed by the DCFS Director, began work in November 2001.

*Authority is reflected in the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5c and 5d, and a revised, promulgated DCFS Rule 412, Direct Child Welfare Services Employee and Supervisor Licensure, as of May 15, 2015.*

### **Direct Child Welfare Service Employee Licensure Requirements**

A Child Welfare Employee License issued by DCFS is mandatory for all individuals who provide or supervise direct child welfare services for DCFS or any of its contracted community-based service providers, formerly referred to as purchase-of-service (POS) agencies. "Direct services" encompasses casework managers, supervisors and caseworkers who carry assigned cases and/or provide case management services for the purpose of investigation, casework, intact/family preservation, permanency, or foster care licensing.

The Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5c, and DCFS Rule 412.40 (Licensing Requirements) require that all direct child welfare services employees and supervisors obtain and maintain a child welfare employee license to be employed as a direct child welfare service employee. "Direct Child Welfare Service Employee" means a contractual staff member or individual employed by DCFS or any of its contracted community-based service providers (i.e., child welfare agency, group home, child care institution, maternity center, and child care facility) who carries assigned cases, conducts child protective investigations, makes recommendations or approves placement decisions, recommends or approves family reunification decisions, provides casework to intact/family preservation cases, or makes licensing decisions, or anyone who provides direct supervision to any of these contractual staff members and employees or makes case-related decisions.

The qualifications for licensure require that each CWEL applicant:

- Complete an application for a Child Welfare Employee License on the prescribed form and not provide false information.
- Complete a prescribed DCFS pre-service course of training prior to the prescribed licensing examinations. "Pre-service" courses are those that are required as a prerequisite to licensure.
- Pass required licensure examinations with a score of at least 70%. Licensing examinations are administered by DCFS and cover essential knowledge and skills including, but not limited to, understanding of child welfare laws and regulations applicable in Illinois, methods of protecting the safety and well-being of children, and the importance of and techniques for the coordination of services. CWEL applicants are allowed two attempts within one year to pass a written examination required for licensure.
- Graduate from an accredited college or university with a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree or provide documentation of foreign equivalency as determined by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and meet the requirements of his or her position as defined in 89 Ill. Adm. Code 401 (Licensing Standards for Child Welfare Agencies).
- Receive a DCFS background check clearance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Illinois State Police, the Child Abuse and Neglect Tracking System, and the sex offender registry in accordance with 89 Ill. Adm. Code 385.
- Verify compliance with laws regarding any outstanding student loans and child support enforcement order.
- Not pose a possible danger to State resources or clients.
- Not have engaged in conduct described in DCFS Rule 412.50 (Grounds for Suspension, Revocation, or Refusal to Reinstate a License).
- Not have relinquished the applicant's license during a licensure investigation or after the commencement of a licensure hearing or had the applicant's license revoked after the commencement of a licensure hearing. An applicant whose license has been revoked or relinquished under these circumstances must first go through the

reinstatement process, file a new application, and comply with other CWEL qualifications reflected in DCFS Rule 412.40 b).

- Hold a valid driver's license and has not been convicted of two or more moving traffic violations under the Illinois Motor Vehicle Code, 625 ILCS 5 et seq., and has not been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs within the year prior to application for licensure.

A CWEL does not allow licensees to represent themselves as a licensed social worker or licensed clinical social worker as defined under the Clinical Social Work and Social Work Practice Act, 225 ILCS 20, et seq. A CWEL is required and issued solely for the purpose of employment with DCFS or its contract community-based service providers or a temporary services agency as a direct child welfare service employee.

The Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5c et seq., requires that the Department, in consultation with private child welfare agencies, develop and implement a direct child welfare service employee license and promulgate such rules as necessary to implement the statutory mandate. DCFS Rules 412.20-412.50 vests the authority to determine licensure qualifications, when licensure requirements have or have not been met, and the final administrative decision on a CWEL application, i.e., issuance or refusal to issue a license, in the DCFS CWEL Office.

The CWEL Office may refer applicants to the DCFS Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for pre-licensure investigation during the licensing process if the CWEL application and/or supporting documents indicate that the applicant has engaged in acts which may constitute grounds for the suspension, revocation, or refusal to reinstate a license described in DCFS Rule 412.50. The OIG completes limited pre-licensure investigations of applicants within 30 days after the referral and provides the investigation findings to the CWEL Office. The CWEL Office may extend the time of the limited pre-licensure investigation for good cause. The CWEL Office may refuse to issue a license to an applicant if it finds that the information from the OIG investigation provides a basis for refusal to do so. The CWEL Office may also recall a license that was issued in error within ten (10) days after issuance.

Licensed direct child welfare service employees are responsible for remaining current with changes in law, rules, and procedures governing child welfare services. Licensees are also required to notify the CWEL Office of any changes in their address. Licensees who fail to notify the CWEL Office of any address change will have waived their right to object to improper service when the Department provides service to the last address reported to the CWEL Office by the licensee.

DCFS Rule 412.30 a) (Organization and Administration of Licensing Program) requires that DCFS:

- 1) verify that individuals applying for a license meet the requirements of DCFS Rules 412.40 (b) and (f);
- 2) authorize examinations that fairly test the knowledge and skills of applicants to be a direct child welfare service employee;
- 3) maintain licensing files for applicants and persons licensed by the Department to be direct child welfare service employees;

- 4) maintain rosters of names and addresses of all currently licensed direct child welfare service employees and all persons whose licenses have been suspended or revoked;
- 5) provide Licensing Action and Pending Licensing Action concerning specific individuals to prospective employers within three business days after a request is received. Licensing status information shall include, but not be limited to, date of issuance and pending or implemented licensure action against the licensee within the prior 10 years, including charges issued by the Department;
- 6) provide known child welfare employers with information within three business days concerning any licensure action or any final administrative decision;
- 7) obtain written statements from the applicant that attest that he or she is not in default of an educational loan in accordance with the Educational Loan Default Act [5 ILCS 385/2] and that he or she is not more than 30 days delinquent in paying a child support order as specified in the Illinois Administrative Procedure Act [5 ILCS 100/10-65(c)];
- 8) determine whether to issue licenses; and,
- 9) accept relinquishments of licenses and record in the CWEL file if the relinquishment was received during an open CWEL investigation or CWEL proceeding and any subsequent appeals.

DCFS Rule 412.30 b) requires both DCFS and community-based service providers to:

- 1) request a child abuse and neglect prior history check and a criminal background check on a prospective direct child welfare service employee prior to hiring the employee or as soon afterwards as is reasonably practicable;
- 2) verify the license status of job applicants/newly hired direct child welfare service employees with the CWEL Office prior to assigning a caseload to the employee;
- 3) report licensure violations by direct child welfare service employees to the CWEL Office in accordance with DCFS Rule 412.50; and,
- 4) prohibit unlicensed workers from providing or supervising case management services, investigating or supervising child protection investigations, making licensing decisions or supervising licensing workers or otherwise performing direct child welfare services work as set out in DCFS Rule 412.

### **Illinois Child Welfare Pre-Service Training**

The DCFS Child Welfare Employee Licensure Program Pre-Service training for new child welfare direct service employees is the Foundations Training Program. Pre-service Foundations training is mandatory and open to all new direct service staff and their supervisors, whether they work in the public or private community-based provider sector.

The goal of the Foundations Pre-Service training is to provide consistent, comprehensive foundational training to both public and private sector staff. It provides an opportunity for all child

welfare direct service staff to acquire sufficient knowledge and skills in child welfare practice before they take the licensing exams.

Foundations Pre-Service training also provides staff with knowledge about the practice of child welfare required by specific state and federal mandates, the basic competencies in child welfare in Illinois, ethics and equal employment opportunity training, and the tools necessary to effectively coordinate services for children and families. Because Foundations provides training on the required skills and knowledge for child welfare practice, its content is the basis for the Child Welfare Employee Licensure (CWEL) and Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP) certification exams. Additionally, Foundations Pre-Service training includes instruction and testing on individual areas of specialty in child welfare, e.g., child protective services, placement/permanency, foster care licensing, adoptions, or intact/ family preservation services.

DCFS has used the CERAP to assess risks to child safety since 1994-1995. The CERAP is designed to provide a tool for workers and investigators to quickly assess the potential for moderate to severe harm to a child in the immediate or near future. Direct child welfare services workers and investigators use the CERAP to determine whether a child is safe or unsafe based on an analysis of safety threats, family strengths, and mitigating circumstances.

As part of a modernization plan to improve the health and safety of youth and families statewide, DCFS is transitioning from using the CERAP to assess child safety to the Safety Assessment & Family Evaluation (SAFE) Model in collaboration with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago over the next 3-5 years. The SAFE Model offers a guide to assess caregiver protective capacities, provides structured interrelated assessments throughout the life of a case, and defines practice objectives and standardized decision-making criteria. The SAFE Model includes six core components for facilitating caregiver behavioral change: intake assessment, initial family assessment, protective capacity family assessment, change-focused contact, progress assessment, and SAFE@ Home Safety Management. These components are designed to function in an interrelated manner to create a cohesive process. Each subsequent assessment relies on the decision-making from the previous assessments to assist caregivers in resuming their protective role in ensuring child safety.

In collaboration with DCFS direct services supervisors and administrators, the CWEL Office routinely reviews all curricula to ensure fidelity to DCFS rules, policies, and procedures and that trainings remain relevant to the needs and level of understanding of direct services employees in the Field. These internal quality assurance best practices also encompass the CWEL Office's customary analysis of exams to validate that they continue to fairly test the knowledge and skills required for licensure and accurately assess learning progress. Accordingly, the CWEL Office will be continuously reviewing Program trainings and exams to make the adjustments necessary to assure that they align with the SAFE Model.

## **Progress on Staff Licensure**

Since the beginning of the CWEL Program, 18,846 Child Welfare Employee Licenses have been approved. In FY2024, 893 licenses were approved. The CWEL Office works continuously with field operations and private agencies to ensure all child welfare staff in positions requiring a CWEL complete the required application, training, and testing process. Direct service child welfare

employees do not receive access to the databases that allow case assignments until after they receive their license.

The Table below shows the number of CWEL applicants who applied for and were approved for a CWEL in FY2024. The number of applicants completing Foundations classes differs from the number who received licenses for two reasons: 1) applicants may be transferring from one specialty area to another (e.g., from placement/permanency to child protection) and have already received their CWEL prior to taking the course and 2) some applicants may have gone through Foundations Training but not received a license due to other reasons, such as failing to pass the required exams, background check, invalid driver’s license, or their college degree was not conferred at the time of application. Other reasons also include some CWEL applicants no longer remaining employed in a direct services role or employed in the child welfare profession.

<b>Class/Exam</b>	<b># Completed/ Passed</b>
CWEL Exam	938
Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol Exam	955
SCR Exam	30
Intact Exam	165
Placement/Permanency Exam	620
Child Protection Exam	304
Child Care Act Licensing Exam	113
Rule 402 Licensing Exam	107
Adoption Exam	42
<b>TOTAL EXAMS PASSED</b>	<b>3274</b>

## The Child Welfare Employee Licensure Board

### **Responsibilities of the CWEL Board**

The CWEL Board is responsible for making recommendations to the DCFS Director regarding licensure rules. The Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5c-5d, and DCFS Rules 412.30 c) and 412.60-412.80 also vest final administrative decision-making authority in adverse licensure actions exclusively in the CWEL Board. The CWEL Board’s responsibilities include making final determinations regarding the revocation or suspension of a CWEL after an administrative hearing conducted under DCFS rules and reinstatement of an employee’s direct child welfare services license. “Final administrative decisions/determinations” mean the Board’s final decision, order, or determination in a particular case that affects the legal rights, duties, or privileges of participants and that may be further appealed to the circuit court under the Administrative Review Law, 735 ILCS 5/Art. III.

Final administrative decisions include the name of the person responsible for compliance, if applicable, and advise the parties that, under the provisions of the Administrative Review Law, they may seek judicial review of the final administrative decision if it is unfavorable to them, within the

statutory time frame. The Board's final administrative decisions are distributed to the licensee, OIG, Department representative, employer of the licensee, DCFS Administrative Hearings Unit, and the presiding administrative law judge.

Additional responsibilities of the CWEL Board include:

- The Board may preliminarily suspend the license of a direct child welfare service employee without a hearing, simultaneously with the receipt of a complaint that contains sufficient indications of reliability and suggests that the licensee may pose an imminent danger to the public if allowed to continue practicing direct child welfare services pending investigation or licensure action or pursuant to Section 412.50 (a) (2) (a charge or criminal conviction of any offenses stipulated under the Criminal Code of 2012 and listed in Section 4.2 of the Child Care Act; a pending charge may result only in suspension or temporary refusal to reinstate) or (12) (being named as an alleged perpetrator in a pending child abuse or neglect report). "Imminent Danger to the Public" means there is harm or immediate risk of harm to an individual, public funds, or a child, family, or community.
- The Board may accept voluntary relinquishments.
- The Board assesses DCFS administrative law judge's recommendations, findings of fact, and conclusions of law as to whether to suspend or revoke a CWEL, allow a CWEL to continue in good standing, or take any other action regarding the license after a administrative hearing.

Board members must recuse themselves from sitting on any matter involving an employee of a child welfare agency at which the Board member is an employee or contractual employee or any matter involving a person known by the Board member, or if the member has a personal or professional interest in the matter that would interfere with the Board member's ability to exercise objectivity or if the member has any bias against the involved person.

CWEL Board members must complete the mandatory DCFS ethics, harassment, and DEI discrimination prevention trainings annually. The State Officials and Employees Ethics Act, 5 ILCS 430/5-10 (c) and 5-10.5 (a-5), require that new Board members complete their initial ethics, harassment, and discrimination prevention trainings within 30 days after appointment. The Open Meetings Act, 5 ILCS 120/1.05 (b), requires Board members to successfully complete the electronic Open Meetings Act Training developed and administered by the Illinois Office of the Attorney General Public Access Counselor no later than the 90<sup>th</sup> day after the member joins the CWEL Board.

### **CWEL Board Member Liability**

CWEL Board members are not personally liable in any action based upon any proceeding or other activity performed in good faith as a member of the Board.

Board members are considered "employees" for purposes of indemnification under the Illinois State Employee Indemnification Act, 5 ILCS 350 et seq., which defines an "employee" to include "individuals or organizations who perform volunteer services for the State where such volunteer relationship is reduced to writing, [and] individuals who serve on any public entity (whether created by law or administrative action)."

If a CWEL Board member is sued, the Illinois Attorney General will provide legal representation and the State will pay any claims, unless the actions of the Board member are considered willful and wanton or intentional. Neither the Indemnification Act nor any of the immunities shield a Board member from criminal liability.

## **CWEL Board Composition**

The CWEL Board consists of nine (9) members appointed by the DCFS Director pursuant to the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5d, and DCFS Rule 412.30 c). All Board members must be residents of the State of Illinois. CWEL Board membership is comprised of:

- Five (5) licensed professionals from the field of human services with a human services, juris doctor, medical, public administration, or other relevant human services degree and who are in good standing within their profession, at least two (2) of which must be employed in the private not-for-profit sector and at least one (1) of which is employed in the public sector.
- Two (2) faculty members of an accredited university who have child welfare experience and are in good standing within their profession.
- Two (2) members of the general public who are not licensed under the Children and Family Services Act and Rule 412 or a similar rule and will represent consumer interests.

No Board member may have a pending or indicated report of child abuse or neglect or a pending complaint or criminal conviction of any of the offenses set forth in paragraph (b) of Section 4.2 of the Child Care Act of 1969.

CWEL Board membership is voluntary and Board members do not receive compensation. Each Board member is appointed to serve a three-year term. No member may be reappointed if a reappointment would cause any conflict of interest or that member to serve on the Board for longer than six (6) consecutive years. Appointments to fill vacancies are made in the same manner as original appointments. The Director of DCFS may terminate the appointment of any CWEL Board member for good cause, including, but not limited to: (i) unjustified absences from Board meetings or other failure to meet Board responsibilities, (ii) failure to recuse oneself when required by the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5d (c) or DCFS Rule 412, or (iii) failure to maintain the professional position required by DCFS Rule 412.

The CWEL Board had seven (7) members in good standing and serving unexpired terms and two (2) unfilled vacancies as of June 30, 2024. The vacancies were for Public/Private Not For Profit and Accredited University Faculty representatives. The Public/Private Not For Profit Representative vacancy was advertised three (3) times during the fiscal year. The Accredited University Faculty Representative vacancy was advertised twice (2) during the fiscal year. Each vacancy announcement was posted for 30 days. An Accredited University Faculty Representative was appointed 10/22/2024. As a result, the CWEL Board currently has eight (8) members in good standing and serving unexpired terms as of the date of this report. Interviews with applicants to fill the remaining Public/Private Not For Profit vacancy are scheduled to occur in January 2025. Announcements to fill the vacancy will continue until the seat is filled.

CWEL Board membership has reasonable representation from different geographic areas of the State of Illinois. Board members are reimbursed for all authorized legitimate and necessary expenses incurred in attending Board meetings.

Current Board members are identified on the chart below.

**Child Welfare Employee Licensure Board Members**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>End of Term</b>
Shea Kamp Chairperson	DCFS	Public Sector	2nd Term ends 7/1/2027
LaTasha Roberson- Guifarro Vice Chairperson	Lutheran Child and Family Services	Private Not-for-Profit Sector	1 <sup>st</sup> Term ends 3/15/2026
Alnita Myles	UCAN	Private Not-for-Profit Sector	1 <sup>st</sup> Term ends 3/15/2026
Tina Ruiz	UCAN	Private Not-for-Profit Sector	1 <sup>st</sup> Term ends 5/30/2027
Vacant		Public/Private Not- for-Profit Sector	
Giesela Grumbach	Governor's State University, School of Social Work	Accredited University Faculty	1st Term ends 10/22/2027
Anne Elizabeth Glassgow	University of Illinois-Chicago, School of Medicine	Accredited University Faculty	1 <sup>st</sup> Term ends 3/31/2026
Mariann Jordan	J & P Consulting Group, LLC	General Public	1 <sup>st</sup> Term ends 5/18/2026
Carolyn Riddle	Housing Authority of St. Louis County	General Public	1 <sup>st</sup> Term ends 5/23/2027

**CWEL Board Meetings in FY2024**

The CWEL Board meets a minimum of quarterly. The Board also schedules meetings as needed to address time-sensitive business between quarterly meetings. A schedule of regular meetings for each calendar year is prepared and distributed annually. Meeting agendas are posted on the DCFS website at least 48 hours in advance of each Board meeting. Quarterly CWEL Board meetings in 2024 were held on March 11, 2024, June 10, 2024, September 9, 2024, and December 9, 2024. All Board meetings were held on a virtual platform as authorized by the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5d (c), which provides that, upon notification of the manner of the vote to all the members, votes on a final determination may be cast in person, by telephonic or electronic means, or by mail at the discretion of the chairperson. A simple majority of the members appointed and serving is required when Board members vote by mail or by telephonic or electronic means.

A majority of the currently appointed and serving Board members constitutes a quorum. A majority of a quorum is required when a recommendation is voted on during a Board meeting. A vacancy in Board membership does not impair the right of a quorum to perform all the duties of the Board.

CWEL Board meetings are open to the public. Any member of the public can attend meetings and address the Board. The Board maintains written minutes of all Open and Closed session meetings. Minutes are approved by the Board within 30 days after a meeting or at the Board's second subsequent regular meeting, whichever is later. Minutes are approved by a majority vote.

Minutes of Open sessions are public records and made available to the public within ten (10) days after the Minutes have been approved by the Board and remain posted on the DCFS website for at least 60 days after their initial posting. The Board discusses confidential licensure complaints, disciplinary and other adverse personnel actions, pending or probable litigation, professional ethics or performance actions, and related information/documents pertaining to specific individuals in Closed sessions. As a result, Minutes of Closed sessions are not posted and publicly available pursuant to the Illinois Open Meetings Act, 5 ILCS 120/2, but are subject to disclosure pursuant to the requirements reflected in the Open Meetings Act, 5 ILCS 120/2.06, typically by subpoena or other legal process.

### **Board Decisions on CWEL Actions**

DCFS Rule 412.50 a) specifies the following fourteen (14) grounds on which the CWEL Board may suspend, revoke, or refuse to reinstate a CWEL and DCFS may refuse to issue a CWEL:

- 1) violation or negligent disregard of this Part.
- 2) a charge or criminal conviction of any offenses stipulated under the Criminal Code of 2012 and listed in Section 4.2 of the Child Care Act (a pending charge may result only in suspension or temporary refusal to reinstate).
- 3) making any material misrepresentation relevant to obtaining a license, including, but not limited to, failure to certify on the form, or a false statement, that the applicant is not more than 30 days delinquent in complying with a child support order.
- 4) an egregious act that demonstrates incompetence, unfitness, or blatant disregard for one's duties in providing direct child welfare services.
- 5) a pattern of deviation from a standard of child welfare practice that could result in an injury to a child or a pattern of dishonesty that places State funds or records at risk.
- 6) aiding or assisting another person in violation of any provision of this Part.
- 7) failing to provide information or documents regarding a licensure investigation or license within 30 days after a written request by the OIG or the Department.
- 8) habitual or excessive use of, or addiction to, alcohol, narcotics, stimulants, or any other chemical agent or drug that results in a worker's inability to practice with reasonable judgment, skill or safety. This shall not include any person who has sought, will seek, or is receiving substance abuse treatment if it does not impact on his or her ability to practice with reasonable judgment, skill, or safety.
- 9) discipline by another state or national licensing entity when the grounds for suspension, revocation, or refusal to reinstate are substantially the same as at least one of the grounds established in this Section.

10) falsification of case records, court reports, or court testimony.

11) failing to report an instance of suspected child abuse or neglect as required by the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA) [325 ILCS 5].

12) being named as an alleged perpetrator in a pending child abuse or neglect report.

13) being named as a perpetrator in an indicated report by the Department under ANCRA unless or until the indication is reversed on appeal or administrative court review in accordance with 89 Ill. Adm. Code 336 (Appeal of Child Abuse and Neglect Investigation Findings).

14) having convictions of more than two offenses against traffic regulations governing the movement of a vehicle within a 12-month period or being convicted of reckless driving, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or manslaughter or reckless homicide resulting from the operation of a motor vehicle.

DCFS Rule 412.50 b) identifies four (4) additional grounds for licensure action or DCFS refusing to issue a CWEL:

1) Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities

Involuntary admission of a licensee to a mental health facility as provided in the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Code [405 ILCS 5] shall result in an automatic suspension of his or her license by the Board. The license may be reinstated by the Board after a court finding that the licensee is no longer subject to involuntary admission.

2) Delinquent Compliance with a Child Support Order

Upon a final finding of delinquency or failure to comply with a subpoena or warrant, the Department shall refuse to issue a license to, or the Board shall refuse to reinstate or shall suspend or revoke the license of, a person who is more than 30 days delinquent in paying a child support order as specified in Section 10-65 of the Illinois Administrative Procedure Act. The license may be reinstated by the Board after a finding that the licensee is no longer delinquent in paying a child support enforcement order.

3) Default of Educational Loan

The Department shall refuse to issue and the Board shall refuse to reinstate, or shall suspend or revoke, the license of a person who is found to be in default of an educational loan in accordance with Section 2 of the Educational Loan Default Act. The license may be reinstated by the Board after a finding that the licensee is no longer in default of the educational loan.

4) Transporting a Child Without a Valid Driver's License

The Board shall immediately revoke the license of any employee who, in the course of performing his or her duties, has transported a child or children with a motor vehicle without having a valid driver's license.

## **Board Decisions on Preliminary CWEL Actions**

The CWEL Board may preliminarily suspend the license of a direct child welfare service employee without a hearing, simultaneously with the receipt of a complaint that contains sufficient indications of reliability and suggests that the licensee may pose an imminent danger to the public if allowed to continue practicing direct child welfare services pending investigation or licensure action or pursuant to Section 412.50 (a)(2) or (12). The CWEL Office notifies the licensee and the licensee's known child welfare employer of the preliminary suspension within two business days.

Preliminary suspension notices contain a short statement explaining the basis of the CWEL Board's decision, including the applicable grounds for adverse licensure action specified in DCFS Rules 412.50 and 412.90. The notices further inform licensees that:

- if requested within 14 days after the date of the Notice, a post-preliminary suspension hearing will be scheduled with the DCFS Administrative Hearings Unit within 30 calendar days after the request for a hearing and explain how to request a post-preliminary suspension hearing.
- the post-preliminary suspension hearing will be limited to the question of whether the CWEL preliminary suspension is warranted.
- the preliminary suspension will expire at the conclusion of the OIG investigation and any administrative or court action following the investigation.

A full administrative hearing is provided if the OIG files a complaint/charges of suspension or revocation following completion of its licensure investigation.

Licensees can petition the administrative law judge at the post-preliminary suspension hearing for access to the CWEL complaint based on a showing that examination of the complaint is relevant to the post-preliminary suspension hearing.

After a post-preliminary suspension hearing concludes, the administrative law judge prepares a written recommendation with findings of fact and conclusions of law as to whether the preliminary suspension was warranted and submits it, along with the hearing record, to the CWEL Board. The administrative law judge also submits the recommendation to all parties and notifies them of the availability of the hearing record. The CWEL Board has the decision-making authority.

If the OIG decides not to pursue charges at the conclusion of its licensure investigation after a preliminary suspension has been issued, the OIG provides written notification to the CWEL Office of the outcome of its investigation, intent not to file charges, and closure of the investigation. The CWEL Office then, in turn, provides written notice to the licensee and the licensee's employer, if the licensee's employer was notified of the preliminary suspension, that the temporary suspension has been lifted and CWEL reinstated.

A licensee may voluntarily relinquish a CWEL at any time. However, a license voluntarily relinquished during a pending CWEL or disciplinary investigation, administrative proceeding, or subsequent court action is recorded in the licensee's CWEL file as relinquished during

licensure or disciplinary investigation, administrative proceeding, or subsequent court action. Voluntary relinquishments are filed with the CWEL Office on a prescribed form, which includes an acknowledgment by the licensee that reinstatement will be subject to consideration of the facts disclosed in any pending licensure investigation or administrative proceeding. Voluntary relinquishment does not divest the OIG of jurisdiction to complete a pending investigation. A licensure application from an applicant who previously relinquished his or her license is considered a request for reinstatement in addition to an application for licensure.

DCFS Rule 412.30 b) 3) requires DCFS and community-based service providers to report licensure violations by direct child welfare service employees to the CWEL Office. The CWEL Office received 73 complaints in FY2024. Of those 73 complaints, 58 were referred to the OIG for monitoring and/or investigation. Three (3) complaints were referred to the OIG for licensure action. Additionally, there were five (5) license preliminary suspensions, zero (0) license suspensions, three (3) license revocations, 15 license voluntary relinquishments, and three (3) license reinstatements.

**Licensure Actions in FY2024**

<b>Licenses Issued</b>	<b>893</b>
<b>License Complaints Received</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Cases referred to OIG for Investigation/Monitoring</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Cases referred to OIG for Licensure Action</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>License Preliminary Suspensions</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>License Suspensions</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>License Revocations</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>License Voluntary Relinquishments</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>License Reinstatements</b>	<b>3</b>

**DCFS Rule 412 Revisions**

DCFS Rule 412 was not revised during FY2024.

## Administration of the CWEL Program

The Mission of the CWEL Program is to:

- Protect children, families, and the public engaged in the Illinois child welfare system.
- Ensure that child welfare direct services staff can demonstrate sufficient knowledge and skills to obtain and maintain licensure in good standing.
- Ensure that competent child welfare professionals are licensed to provide direct child welfare services in compliance with DCFS Rule 412.
- Effectively provide the core knowledge and skills necessary for child welfare professionals to competently perform direct child welfare services to accomplish DCFS' Mission.
- Continuously reinforce core competencies, good Field practice, and ethical standards to child welfare direct services staff and providers in a safe, supportive learning environment so that they become more knowledgeable and proficient in their roles.
- Consistently implement the requirements of the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/5c-5d, and DCFS Rule 412 in a timely, unbiased, and professional manner.
- Champion a learning culture which promotes continuous professional growth and development at every level within DCFS and its partners to ensure that learning and professional development are integrated into key business/operational decisions and embodied in leadership.

The CWEL Office also continuously builds relationships with stakeholders and the public to promote a positive image of the CWEL Program, develops materials, and engages in systemwide education regarding DCFS Rule 412 requirements and the necessity and benefits of on-going professional development.

The CWEL Office's on-going responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Coordination of the license application process with applicants, DCFS, and the private community-based service providers which perform direct child welfare services.
- Maintenance of electronic and/or hard copy CWEL application, licensure, complaint, and professional development records.
- Determination of if and when applicants have met CWEL requirements and it is appropriate to approve the issuance of a license.
- Assurance that licensure examinations fairly test the knowledge and skill of applicants to be direct child welfare service employees.
- Review the circumstances of any current and/or previous licensure action and notify the appropriate parties as required by DCFS Rule 412.

- Manage and oversee the administration of the CWEL complaint process, including serve as the singular entry point for all CWEL complaints, reviews, and actions, and coordinate adverse licensure actions with the DCFS OIG, Administrative Hearings Unit, Office of Legal Services, licensees, and the CWEL Board.
- Provide the CWEL Board professional support, guidance, and the tools necessary and appropriate for the Board to effectuate its statutory decision-making authority and duties.
- Manage the day-to-day administrative operations and implementation of the CWEL Program, including responding to licensure and complaint inquiries, processing time-sensitive licensure applications and complaints, providing support to the CWEL Board, processing CWEL complaints, and ensuring that DCFS Rule 412 requirements are understood and met.

### **CWEL Office Administration**

In FY2024, the CWEL Office was staffed by the Office of Learning and Professional Development Chief Learning Officer and Associate Deputy Director, with administrative support from three (3) temporary employees. The Chief Learning Officer manages and oversees the review, processing, and approval of all CWEL applications, as well as applicant licensure recordkeeping. The Associate Deputy Director serves as the Acting CWEL Administrator, managing and overseeing the daily administrative operations and implementation of the CWEL complaint process. The Associate Deputy Director also provides administrative support to the CWEL Board, manages CWEL complaint recordkeeping, schedules and facilitates Emergency Licensure Review Team (ELRT) and CWEL Board meetings, conducts research, and serves as the Board's liaison to the OIG, DCFS Office of Legal Services, Administrative Hearings Unit, and other stakeholders on all CWEL complaint-related matters.

The Office of Learning and Professional Development is in the process of expanding the CWEL Office's staff and administrative capacity. It is anticipated that the Unit will be expanded in FY2025.

### **Office of the Inspector General**

The CWEL Office forwards all complaints received to the ELRT, which is comprised of the OIG, Acting CWEL Administrator, a representative from the Office of Legal Services, and the Chairperson of the CWEL Board. The ELRT reviews each formal complaint received to determine whether the complaint meets the description of one or more of the grounds for licensure action in DCFS Rule 412.50. If a majority of the ELRT determines that the complaint meets the description of one or more of the grounds for licensure action, the complaint is referred to the OIG for investigation and CWEL Board concurrently for consideration as provided in DCFS Rule 412.

The ELRT met biweekly in FY2024 to review complaints and determine if the complaints met the criteria for referral to the OIG for investigation and concurrently to the CWEL Board. The Acting CWEL Administrator also provided the CWEL Board ELRT summary reports on the status of complaints at each Board meeting.

Complaints are confidential within the CWEL Office, Board, ELRT, OIG, and the DCFS Office of Legal Services, unless otherwise ordered by a court or administrative law judge of competent jurisdiction.

The OIG has the sole statutory authority to investigate CWEL complaints pursuant to DCFS Rule 412.60. The OIG investigates each formal complaint involving the actions of a licensee or applicant for licensure. The OIG reviews documents and interviews relevant persons to determine whether a licensed employee violated any provision of DCFS Rule 412. If, after an investigation, the OIG determines that licensure action may be appropriate, the OIG provides a Notice of Administrative Hearing to the licensee pursuant to DCFS Rule 412.60 c), provided, however, that no adverse licensure action (other than preliminary suspension in accordance with DCFS Rule 412.90) can be made before the employee has been notified of the allegations in accordance with DCFS Rule 412.60 b) and given an opportunity to respond. After the required notice and opportunity to respond have been provided, the OIG then proceeds with the administrative hearing process.

When the OIG requests, the DCFS Administrative Hearings Unit identifies the date, time and place for an administrative hearing and assigns an administrative law judge to the case. The OIG then notifies the licensee in writing at least 30 calendar days before the scheduled hearing date of DCFS' intent to revoke or suspend his or her license and of the licensee's right to an administrative hearing. The notice is sent to the Administrative Hearings Unit and the licensee at the most recent address the licensee provided to the CWEL Office or the address the licensee provided to the OIG during the investigation. The notice to the licensee is served by personal delivery, certified mail, or registered mail.

Administrative hearings based on OIG CWEL charges/complaints of suspension or revocation are full administrative hearings. Licensees may proceed pro se or retain an attorney to represent them at their own expense, file an answer to the complaint/charges, present and question witnesses, present relevant evidence, question or disprove any information, including an opportunity to question opposing witnesses, exchange discovery, file motions, and dispose of any disputed issue by stipulation, agreed settlement, consent order, or default pursuant to DCFS Rule 412.60.

The OIG represents DCFS in CWEL administrative hearings and carries the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, grounds for suspension, revocation or refusal to reinstate a license in an administrative hearing.

The OIG has several options available if it determines after an investigation that licensure action is not warranted or appropriate:

- If, after an investigation, the OIG determines that licensure action is inappropriate but that there is a basis for disciplinary action, it may recommend sanctions or disciplinary actions against DCFS employees or service providers under contract to the Department to the DCFS Director as provided in the Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/35.5 et seq.
- If the investigation discloses possible criminal acts or violations of rules, the OIG may also refer the investigative findings or the investigation to the appropriate law enforcement or regulatory agency.

- If the investigation does not provide a basis for adverse licensure action, disciplinary action, or referral to law enforcement or other regulatory enforcement, the OIG will provide written notice of the investigation outcome to the CWEL Office and the licensee if the licensee was informed of the investigation. The CWEL Office will also inform any known child welfare employer of the closure of the licensure investigation if the employer had been notified of the investigation.

If the CWEL Board issued a preliminary suspension prior to the conclusion of the OIG's investigation and determination that the results of the CWEL investigation do not provide a basis for adverse licensure action, the CWEL Office provides written notice of the outcome of the OIG's licensure investigation to the licensee and the licensee's employer, if the licensee's employer was notified of the preliminary suspension. The notice informs the recipients that the OIG has completed its investigation, the results of the investigation do not provide a basis for adverse licensure action, the preliminary suspension has been lifted, and CWEL reinstated.

### **DCFS Administrative Hearings Unit**

The Administrative Hearings Unit conducts all hearings related to allegations of licensure violation, as detailed in Rule 412.60. The qualifications for DCFS administrative law judges include, but are not limited to:

- be an attorney licensed to practice law in the State of Illinois;
- possess knowledge and information acquired through training and/or experience relevant to the fields of child and family welfare law and administrative law, including familiarity with Department rules, procedures and functions;
- not have been involved in the decision to take the action being contested or have rendered legal advice to the decision-maker on the issue; and,
- not have a personal or professional interest that interferes with exercising objectivity or have any bias against the parties or issues contested. An adverse ruling, in and of itself, shall not constitute bias or conflict of interest.

At the conclusion of a hearing, the administrative law judge prepares a written recommendation, along with findings of fact and conclusions of law, as to whether to suspend the respondent's license, revoke the respondent's license, allow the respondent's license to continue in good standing, or take any other action regarding the license. The administrative law judge is required to submit the hearing record and recommendation to the CWEL Board and all parties. The chief administrative law judge or presiding administrative law judge is also required to maintain the record of the administrative hearing and the final administrative decision.

Confidentiality is preserved throughout the administrative hearing process, the transmittal of the administrative law judge's recommendation to the CWEL Board and the release of the final administrative decision. None of the documents, including the administrative law judge's recommendation to the CWEL Board, is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 ILCS 140. The final administrative action, however, is public information. All final administrative decisions are available to any party for public inspection during regular business hours. Confidential information is

deleted from publicly-available final administrative decisions in accordance with 89 Ill. Adm. Code 431 (Confidentiality of Personal Information of Persons Served by the Department of Children and Family Services).

## **Learning Development Center**

The Office of Learning and Professional Development is a customer-service oriented Division. The accessibility and functionality of professional development services and resources are priorities. To improve efficiency and the user experience, the Office of Learning and Professional Development is moving from a paper-based system in which CWEL applicants submit physical forms to a digital platform on which applicants and their supervisors can complete and submit licensure applications and other required documents on-line to streamline the licensure process. This transition began in FY2024 as part of a statewide technology modernization initiative and will continue in phases over the next several years. The benefits of the technology updates include faster processing times, enhanced accessibility and efficiency, and a more cohesive, user-friendly experience for applicants, licensees, supervisors, and administrators alike.

Phase 1 launched July 10, 2023. At that time, the Office of Learning and Professional Development began transitioning the CWEL application and complaint processes from the Virtual Training Center (VTC), a web-based training and information center used since 2009, to a new Learning and Development Center (LDC). CWEL applicant and licensee accounts which existed in the VTC prior to July 10, 2023 were transferred electronically to the LDC. All new accounts created on or after July 10, 2023 were initiated in the LDC.

The goals of the LDC include simplifying the CWEL application and complaint processes. Like the VTC, the LDC is used to track all required components of a CWEL application, the status of that application, CWEL complaints, and the outcomes of CWEL actions. Features of the LDC track all training registrations and completions electronically and allow applicants, licensees, and their supervisors to self-register for courses and complete them on-line. Exams can be scheduled and administered, appropriate notices sent directly, and CWEL applicants and licensees can view and print transcripts within the LDC.

Each CWEL applicant and licensee has an account in the LDC, which they can access from their office or home computers. CWEL applicants and licensees can readily access their individual licensure information, including license status and completion of the required elements of their licensure application. They can also upload documents to the LDC. An "Administrators" component of the LDC allows supervisors and managers to access CWEL information about their subordinate employees. Supervisors and managers can view the training transcripts of their subordinate employees and monitor their progress. However, access to CWEL complaint information is limited to CWEL Office staff and administrators.

Phase I also included the creation of a CWEL Resource Hub, which provides applicants, licensees, supervisors, and managers a singular interactive platform for training news, general information, and requesting technical support to resolve common questions and issues. The available resources include tools which enable CWEL applicants, licensees, and their supervisors/managers to access available trainings, annual training schedules, continuing education units, and download course materials for use in class or as a resource after a course is completed.

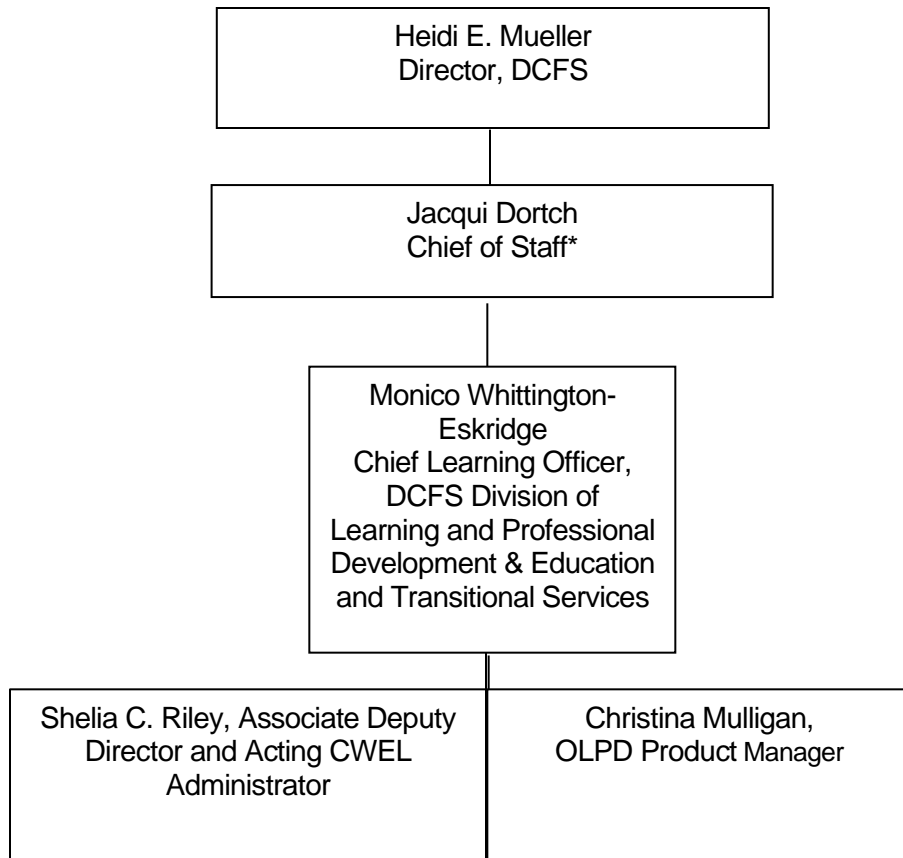
Supplemental CWEL-related technology enhancements will continue in FY2025. Phase II will include administrative tools which enable the CWEL Office to efficiently track CWEL complaints, licensure actions/outcomes, ELRT and Board decisions, and licensure status electronically. The CWEL Office will also be able to upload complaint records directly to each CWEL applicant's and licensee's administrative file in the LDC. Phase II is expected to launch in December 2024. Subsequent phases will focus on further enhancing the LDC's overall functionality and user experience.

## **FY2025 Child Welfare Employee Licensure Program Goals**

FY2025 goals for the CWEL Program include the following:

1. Complete recommended updates to DCFS Rule 412 to reduce the time required to apply for a CWEL after two exam failures in one year.
2. Continue drafting an accompanying DCFS Procedure 412 that will address standard operating protocols for the CWEL Program.
3. Streamline the CWEL application process for greater efficiency.
4. Continue the transition from the Virtual Training Center to the new Learning Development Center.
5. Enhance the CWEL Office's capacity to meet Program needs.

## **Organizational Chart**



\*The Chief Learning Officer reported to Chief of Staff Jassen Strokosch as of June 30, 2024. Jassen Strokosch left DCFS in October 2024. Jacqui Dortch was appointed Chief of Staff December 6, 2024, effective December 16, 2024.