



# Youth in Care

Dr. Cheli M. Thomas  
State Coordinator (SEA), Youth in Care



A child for whom the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is legally responsible through temporary protective custody, custody, or guardianship via court order, or children whose parent(s) have signed an adoptive surrender or voluntary placement agreement with the department.

*Procedure 314 – DCFS Educational Services*

# Who are Youth in Care?

- Parents **lose custody** of their children for a variety of reasons.
- Students under the placement and care of the **Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)** include children in the following placements:

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**Foster Homes**

**Relative Placements**

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**Group Homes**

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**Emergency Shelters**

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**Residential Facilities**

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**Childcare Institutions**

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**Pre-Adoptive Homes**

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**Trial-Return-Home Placement**

# Informal Placements

- Students are frequently placed through more **informal means**, without a court order or DCFS guardianship.
- These children are generally considered to be *eligible* for *homeless services* under **McKinney-Vento** guidelines. Those situations meet the definition of informal placements:

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**Relative Care**

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**Non-Relative Care**

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**Emergency Shelter Care**

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**Transitional Living**

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**Unaccompanied Youth**

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# Youth Safety & Preservation of Family

## Intact Family Services

- “Informal”
- Youth remain in the home (credible threat but not enough to remove them)
- Services are provided (substance abuse, parent coaching, individual counseling, violence prevention)
- Intact caseworker assigned

# Youth Safety & Preservation of Family...

“Intact Goal” – To avoid temporary or long-term foster care placement

Family Preservation: while still addressing the issues that led to abuse or neglect

Improving family functioning, stability, and safety

- Services may be voluntary *or* court ordered
- [DCFS](#) – *Illinois Intact Family Services Program*

# Why are Youth in Foster Care?

- **Abuse**
  - Emotional
  - Verbal
  - Physical
  - Sexual
- **Neglect**
  - Basic needs (food, hygiene, safe environment)
- **Abandonment**
- **Substance abuse/addiction**
- **Death (of a family member)**
- **Exposure to family violence**
- **Incarceration of a parent**
- **Severe illnesses**
- **Juvenile offenses**

# Challenges Faced by Students in Care

- **Trauma**
- Displacement
- Instability & disruption
  - Emotional
  - Learning (lower grades)
  - Safety & neglect
- Substance abuse
- Incarceration of parent(s)
- Severe illnesses
- Depression
- Compassion fatigue (of caregivers)
- Racial disproportionality
- Youth is reliant upon care that is inconsistent, unstructured, and complex

**This list is NOT exhaustive**



**There are currently over  
16,159  
Youth in Care in Illinois**



## Review of the Federal and State Provisions

# Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) & Foster Care

- [The Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) introduced, for the first time in federal education law, **explicit protections for students in foster care**.
- These provisions aim to address long-standing challenges — such as **frequent school moves, disrupted learning, and lack of coordinated support** — by requiring states, school districts, and child welfare agencies to collaborate to ensure educational stability and success for foster youth.



# Laws to Protect Youth in Care in Schools

**Dec. 2015**

ESSA was signed in December 2015. It reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and included changes that provide school stability and immediate enrollment to children in foster care.

105 ILCS 5/10-20.59 became effective in July 2022. It requires each district to appoint (at least) one liaison and includes responsibilities.

**July 2022**

# Key Provisions of ESSA



Collaboration



School Placement  
Best Interest  
Determination (BID)



Immediate  
Enrollment and  
Record Transfer



Transportation

# Data Collection & Reporting

- **Academic achievement** of Foster Students
- Graduation rates
- Data is essential to improving academic outcomes for students in Foster Care.
  - Who is in foster care?
  - Attendance rates?
  - Why/how do students fall through the multi-year/multi-district crack?
  - Robust bi-directional exchange (CWS & LEA)

# Emphasis: Cross-System Data Integration

- **Determine gaps** in identification, and service access
- **Improve accountability** efforts
- Data sharing practices that **drive systems-level change**
- CTE and college preparation programs
- How are youth getting information?

# Educational Stability Requirements

## School of Origin

- ESSA mandates that students in foster care should **remain in their school of origin (SOO)** whenever it is in their best interest. Keeping students in the same school reduces academic disruptions that occur with placement changes. Research shows foster youth **can lose 4-6 months of academic progress** with each school move, making stability essential.

# What is a change in placement?

The student moves to a new foster home

The student transitions to a residential facility or group home

The student enters/exits a medical facility

## Educational Stability Requirements...

### Best Interest Determination

- If staying in the **school of origin (SOO)** is not appropriate, a formal **best interest determination** must be made collaboratively between education and child welfare agencies. This ensures that decisions prioritize the student's educational continuity and well-being.

# Placement and the School of Origin

- LEAs must ensure that a child in foster care enrolls or remains in his or her school of origin unless a determination is made that it is not in the child's best interest. (ESEA section 1111(g)(1)(E)(i)).
- If a child's foster placement changes, the school of origin would then be considered the school in which the child is enrolling at the time of the placement change.

# Contextualizing the BID

Student either (1) enters foster care OR (2) experiences a change in their living placement

Education and child welfare agency stakeholders hold a BID to determine the student's appropriate school placement.

BID indicates the student should remain at their school of origin

Transportation provisions are triggered

BID indicates student should attend the new district of residence

Immediate enrollment provisions are triggered

# Educational Stability Requirements...

## Immediate Enrollment and Records Transfer

When a foster youth must switch schools, ESSA requires:

- **Immediate enrollment**, even if typical documents (immunization records, transcripts) are missing.
- The new school must **promptly contact** the previous school for records, and the previous school must **immediately transfer** them. This prevents school gaps during placement changes.

# Transportation Protections

Develop **collaborative, written transportation procedures** to ensure foster youth can remain in their school of origin.

- Provided
- Arranged
- Funded

Ensures transportation costs or logistical challenges no longer become barriers to school stability.

## Challenges...

- Difficulty arranging and funding transportation
- High turnover leading to poor continuity: can hinder full compliance and effectiveness.



# Agency Collaboration and Points of Contact

- Requires a **state-level point of contact (POC)** dedicated to foster care education issues.
- **Local education agency (LEA)** POCs coordinate with child welfare counterparts when notified. The **POC system improves communication** and oversight for foster youth's educational needs.
- Collaboration is ongoing.



# Data Reporting and Accountability

ESSA requires states to:

- Disaggregate data for students in foster care
- Report achievement outcomes, including graduation rates
- These metrics increase visibility into performance gaps and help states design better interventions.

# Additional Federal Guidance and Support

- The U.S. Departments of Education and Health & Human Services issued **joint guidance**: foster care provisions and improving collaboration between agencies.
- Legal Center for Foster Care & Education's **ESSA Toolkit**:
  - ✓ School stability
  - ✓ Transportation planning
  - ✓ Data sharing
  - ✓ Best interest decision-making

# Why These Protections Matter

Students in foster care experience

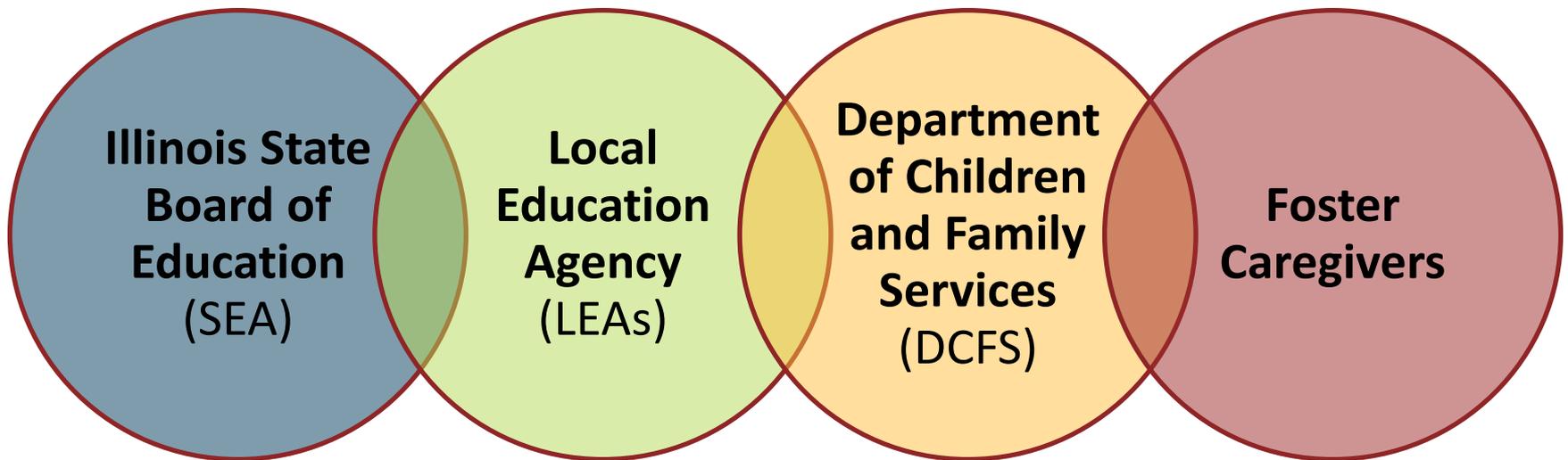
- ✓ High mobility
- ✓ Increased dropout risk
- ✓ Lower academic achievement
- ✓ Emotional and social challenges tied to trauma and instability

ESSA's foster care provisions directly target these barriers, aiming to **make school a consistent, supportive anchor** during a time of personal instability.



# Information Sharing: How Youth in Care are Served

# Advocacy & Coordination of Services



# ISBE State Youth in Care Coordinator...

## Communication

- Situationally-based **problem solving & clarification**
- Establishing a **repository of information and resources**: LEAs, agencies, foster caregivers, and students
- Knowledge of LEA and foster caregivers' (FCG) rights and responsibilities (i.e., special needs)

# ISBE State Youth in Care Coordinator...

## Training & Professional Development

- Ongoing: **Statewide** district/school training
- Evaluation and **assessment** of LEA knowledge and needs

## Interpreting Law

- *Coordinating agency guidelines*
- *Federal & state guidelines*
- *ESSA*
- *Non-regulatory*
- *Title 1 Part A help*

## Collaboration with ISBE Departments

- Title Grants
- **Consolidated District Plans**
- Funding
- Special education
- Transportation

## Coordination with DCFS

- Identify Youth in Care (YIC)
- Connect with social workers

## External Committees & Agency Partnerships

- *As required per the Office of the Governor of the State of Illinois*

# Youth in Care Local Liaisons

- Every school district in Illinois is **required** to designate a **Local Education Agency (LEA)** liaison who serves as the “point of contact.”
- This is **updated yearly** through the **Consolidated District Plan (CDP)** and **MUST** be amended if there is a change in this role.
- The **liaison is the point of contact** whom ISBE and DCFS talk to about YIC students in the district.
- Youth in Care is **referred to as “foster care” in federal law.** The YIC liaison serves ALL Youth in Care in a district.



[Youth in Care Liaison Locator](#)

# YIC LEA Liaison Responsibilities

Initiate **transportation and enrollment** for foster care students

Ensure foster care children are **attending school regularly**

Assist with **record transfer**, credit recovery, and timely graduation

**Facilitate Best Interest Determination (BID)** meetings and advocate for educational stability

Encourage postsecondary opportunities

**Coordinate with child welfare partners**

Ongoing **foster care training** for school/district staff

**Familiarity with FCG rights and responsibilities**

# YIC LEA Liaison Responsibilities...

Know the provisions for students in foster care

Understand the child **welfare system (CWS)**

Facilitate the transfer of **student records**

Attend **training and professional development** opportunities to improve district implementation of foster care best practices

**Train staff** on state and federal law related to foster care education

# How Do I Determine if a Student is YIC?

- Who can tell you if a student is YIC...
  - ISBE YIC State Coordinator
    - Provide the student's SIS ID# and DOB
  - Your caseworker
  - DCFS Database (UPDATED: Due to launch 2026)
  - School lunch program
  - Enrollment paperwork
  - School counselor or social worker

# Quick Facts & Resources

- **DCFS requirements for school enrollment**
  - Must be immediate with or without paperwork
  - Until they graduate, reach age 18, or complete IEP (up to age 22)
- **Transportation**
  - DCFS will split the cost of transportation (50/50)
- **Residency *outside* of Illinois**
  - If placed by DCFS outside Illinois (school district that provided the last 45 days of educational service)
  - Until student either returns to IL or is no longer under guardianship of an IL public agency

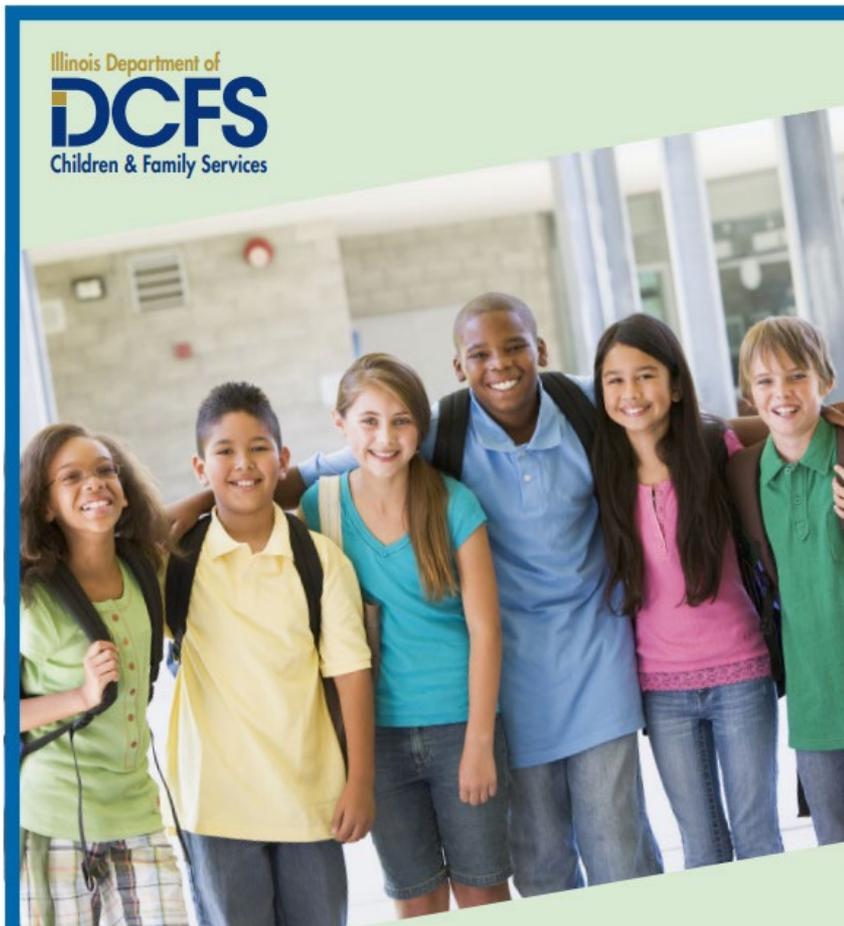
# Who Qualifies for Both McKinney Vento & YIC?

- Youth under the care of DCFS who **lack a fixed, regular nighttime residence** (doubled up circumstances, motels, cars, and other types of impermanent placement)
- **Unaccompanied youth** with no placement (such as kicked out of or run away from a foster home)
- When foster **placement ends abruptly** before the youth is placed into another home
- Youth (ages 16-17) in **unstable independent living** arrangements

# Signs of Foster Care Placement

- Things to look for
  - **Behavioral** indicators (*heightened anxiety, withdrawal, changes in behavior, absenteeism, emotional distress, attachment issues, hoarding food*)
  - **Trauma**-related behaviors
  - **Attachment** and **trust** issues
  - **Physical** and **emotional** signals
  - **Academic** and **social indicators**

# Important Resources



## School Enrollment and Placement Guidelines for Children and Youth in DCFS Care



# Department of Children and Family Services Form 906

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

## PLACEMENT / PAYMENT AUTHORIZATION FORM

PRIVATE AGENCY  
INSTITUTION  
GROUP HOME

NO.

PCD #/Date/   :    AM  PM

<input type="text"/>						
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CHILD NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (MI) CYCIS CLIENT ID # RG ST FD

<b>TYPE OF TRANSACTION</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. INITIATE PLACEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> 3. FINAL LIVING ARRANGEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> 5. CHANGE AMOUNT
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. CHANGE PLACEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> 4. PRIOR PLACEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> 6. CORRECTION

PLACEMENT DATA				SIGNATURES	
TYPE <input type="text"/>	REASON <input type="text"/>	DATE <input type="text"/>	TIME <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> <input type="radio"/> AM <input type="radio"/> PM	OUT OF STATE PLACEMENT <input type="checkbox"/>	PROVIDER <input type="text"/>
PROVIDER ID <input type="text"/>	TYPE SERVICE <input type="text"/>	CONTRACT # <input type="text"/>	RATE SEQUENCE <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> LICENSED IN THAT STATE? <input type="checkbox"/> INTEND TO RETURN CHILD TO ILLINOIS?	DATE <input type="text"/>
AMOUNT \$ <input type="text"/>	AMOUNT DATE <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> CHECK IF PLACEMENT NOT TO BE PAID		ID # <input type="text"/>	TELEPHONE # <input type="text"/> EXT. <input type="text"/>
PROVIDER NAME - A. <input type="text"/>	SSN-A <input type="text"/>	SUPERVISOR'S NAME <input type="text"/>		DATE <input type="text"/>	
PROVIDER NAME - B. <input type="text"/>	SSN-B <input type="text"/>	ID # <input type="text"/>		SUPERVISOR'S TELEPHONE # <input type="text"/> EXT. <input type="text"/>	
AGENCY NAME <input type="text"/>					
STREET ADDRESS <input type="text"/>					
CITY <input type="text"/>	STATE <b>IL</b>	ZIP CODE <input type="text"/>			
COUNTY <input type="text"/>	TELEPHONE # ##### or (###) ###-####	<input type="text"/>	EXT. <input type="text"/>		



# Best Interest Determination (BID)

## Checklist: Best Interest Determination

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Current Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are required to keep records of best interest determinations. All reviewed information should be notated and/or included within the record.

Number of school districts/schools the youth has attended: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of placement changes: \_\_\_\_\_

What type of placement:

- Home of Relative       Fictive Kin       Traditional Foster Home  
 Congregate Care (Group Home or Residential)

### STEP 1: Meeting Participants

DCFS/private agency representative \_\_\_\_\_ Agency \_\_\_\_\_  
 LEA point of contact \_\_\_\_\_ School District \_\_\_\_\_  
 LEA point of contact \_\_\_\_\_ School District \_\_\_\_\_  
 Others (name/position) \_\_\_\_\_

### STEP 2: Identify School Options

**Option 1:** School district/building where student is currently attending (school of origin).

School District: \_\_\_\_\_ School Building: \_\_\_\_\_

**Option 2:** School district/building where student is living in foster care placement (district of residence).

School District: \_\_\_\_\_ School Building: \_\_\_\_\_

**Option 3:** School district/building of other options considered.

School District: \_\_\_\_\_ School Building: \_\_\_\_\_

### STEP 3: Select Key Indicators for Best Interest Determination

- Distance from new home placement       School calendar year (semester vs. trimester)  
 DCFS placement decisions (case pending)       Proximity to end of grading period  
 Student, parent preference       Availability of school support staff  
 Relationships with peers, teachers, and adults       Extracurricular activities

(Additional factors are listed below.)

Other considerations: \_\_\_\_\_

School Placement Decision: \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 4: Transportation Plan

School of placement is responsible for arranging the transportation, billing, contracting for service provided, etc. when more than one school district is involved.

- Student will live in the district of origin and transportation will not be required.  
 Student will live in the district of origin and transportation will be required (intra-district).  
      Established route (different building, in district)  
      Specialized transportation (special program transportation)  
 Student will not live in the district of origin and transportation will be required between contiguous districts.  
 Student will not live in the district of origin and transportation will be required between non-contiguous districts/out of state.  
 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

DCFS and ISBE established an intergovernmental agreement in 2018 to split costs of additional transportation incurred 50/50. This takes the stress off the district to fund transportation for our youth who no longer live in the district.



Guided by **ESSA**, multiple agencies converge to provide support for students in care

# Northern Illinois University

## Center for Child Welfare and Education:

Educational professional development (PD) model

- *Technical assistance through individual systems intervention*
- *Support and collaboration*
- *Training/professional development (e.g., child protection training academy)*



[NIU Center for Child Welfare and Education mission](#)



# NIU Educational PD Model

- Provides expert guidance that shapes **policy, training, and practice improvements**
- Centers **equity** and fosters **strong communication and collaboration** across universities, state agencies, communities, and families
- Delivers **data and insights** that clarify system realities and strengthen support for vulnerable youth and families

Areas of **support** are needed

# Most Common Needs of Support for LEAs

- Navigating shared responsibilities between districts and district disputes
- Youth transition, employment, and college
- Failure to conduct best interest determinations (BID) on behalf of students for appropriate placement
- Not knowing which students are YIC (and who has aged out)
- Enrollment requirements for students and/or providing the correct services (e.g., IEP/504)
- Cost sharing/splitting with DCFS
- Critical nature of reciprocal interaction with social and caseworkers

# How Long Do Kids Stay in Foster Care?

“The federal government’s Children’s Bureau provides additional foster care statistics such as the length of time children spend in care.

In **2025**, they reported that, among children who exited foster care in 2023, over **a third (35%)** were there less than a year, while nearly **half (46%)** spent 1 to 3 years in care and **20%** stayed in foster care 3+ years.

See the Child Welfare Information Gateway a service of the Children’s Bureau, for additional foster care data summaries.”

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2025, November). Child welfare and foster care statistics.

# Keeping Up With Changes in Policy

- Knowledge of the child welfare system
- Improving outcomes (educational stability)
- Impact of foster instability and transfer on a child's social emotional learning
- Interpretations of Non-Regulatory Guidance
- Title 1 Part A
- ESSA

# Intergovernmental Support Structures for Youth in Care

Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)

Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)

U.S. Department of Education (ED)

Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS)

Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC)

Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA)

Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)

Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ)



[ISBE Youth in Care webpage](#)