

The **Ethics Program** which developed a Code of Ethics for the Department and an **Ethics Panel** to assist public and private workers and supervisors in resolving ethical dilemmas and in reinforcing the responsibilities and professionalism of each child welfare worker, supervisor and administrator. The Inspector General was appointed Ethics Officer for DCFS in September, 1997. For assistance in resolving ethical issues call 312-433-3000.

Best Practice and Management Training which combines outside professionals and internal experts to create an innovative training approach using a group of motivated public and private supervisors to field test best social work practice.

Academic Credentials and Training: The OIG distributed to all private agencies and to DCFS officials, and has available, a set of guidelines for verification of academic credentials and school accreditation status. The OIG has coordinated a training for DCFS personnel who work directly with private agencies. The training focused on the not-for-profit child welfare organizations. Presenters represented the Internal Revenue Service, office of Attorney General, Illinois Department of Labor, United Way and the Nonprofit Financial Center. These initiatives followed numerous investigations which revealed fraudulent credentials for staff.

When Can OIG Not Help Me?

If you wish to modify or overturn a court ruling, you must use the court's appeal process. This includes juvenile court decisions, domestic relations decisions regarding custody in divorce cases, and court decisions on the review of Final Administrative Decisions by DCFS. In addition, the OIG will not investigate complaints that are or should be handled through the Department's Administrative Review Process—unless the complaint focuses on the process itself. (For further information on the DCFS Service Appeal process or to initiate such an appeal, you may contact the Bureau of Quality Assurance

at 312-814-6800 or the Advocacy Center for Children and Families Office 1-800-232-3798.) The OIG also does not investigate issues that are the responsibility of other state or federal agencies, such as medical assistance.

What Can I Do To Help?

Ask yourself if you could become a foster parent, or someone who provides time-off care to existing foster parents. Have you considered providing a loving home to an adopted child? Consider that social justice requires volunteers. Call your local United Way to see how you can help, possibly in a community more needy than your own. Open your heart to the children you see. . .and be alert to signs of abuse or neglect. Read up on and stay informed about child welfare issues.

It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL



The fellowship of human beings is more important than the fellowship of race and class and gender in a democratic society.

—Children's Defense Fund

Denise Kane, Inspector General
Department of Children
and Family Services
(312) 433-3000

Foster Parent Hotline
1-800-722-9124

Why An Inspector General?

The position of Inspector General was created by unanimous vote of the Illinois General Assembly in June 1993 to do more to reform the child welfare system and to strengthen the people who exist within it—DCFS employees, foster parents, private agencies, and most importantly, the children and their biological families.

The Office was given jurisdiction to investigate Department employees, foster parents and private agencies with which the Department contracts. Because the Department stands in a special fiduciary relationship with the children of this State and is invested with the public trust, investigations may include private agencies that mismanage facilities, programmatic complaints, board culpability or professional misconduct of workers.

What Does the Office of Inspector General Do?

The Office addresses complaints from the general public concerning Illinois child welfare services. In addition, it investigates all child deaths in the State in which the child was the victim of abuse or neglect and in which the family had previous involvement with the Department within the last year. The Office has additional responsibilities for investigation or oversight as assigned by the Director of the Department. The OIG conducts objective inquiries to identify and analyze problems that face the Illinois child welfare system, and detract from the ability of the system to act in the best interests of the State's abused and neglected children.

The OIG is an investigative office. When someone calls or writes and certain criteria are met, then a formal Request for Investigation is mailed. When it is returned with supporting documents, the OIG reviews it to see if an investigation is warranted. An investigation may result in a report to the Director, which can include recommendations that shape policy for the child welfare system. The OIG then monitors implementation of the recommendations. The Inspector General endorses early mediation of child welfare cases and otherwise serves as a bridge between DCFS, family members, foster parents, and other child care agencies that seek a common ground when misconduct issues are involved.

But Isn't the Inspector General Part of DCFS?

Yes and no. By law, the Inspector General is independent of the operations of DCFS. Although OIG is an office within DCFS, its work, staff, and budget are separate. The Inspector General reports to the Director of DCFS and to the Governor. Once a year, the Inspector General submits a summary of investigations and reports to the Illinois General Assembly, along with recommendations for legislative action and consideration. The Inspector General is appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate for a term of four years.

Does OIG Operate Alone?

Its independence is what makes the Office of Inspector General able to stand apart from DCFS, which it is charged with investigating. In many cases the OIG's work begins with careful scrutiny of information and papers that have been compiled by DCFS or private agencies. When criminal acts are alleged, the OIG works with the Illinois State Police or other law enforcement agencies. When it sees the need, OIG works cooperatively with the Department of Human Services, the Department of Public Aid, and other state agencies and entities. It can seek the assistance of the Illinois Attorney General and any of Illinois' 102 State's Attorneys; it also works with guardians ad litem around the state, who represent the rights of children in court.

How Does OIG Get At the Facts?

To do its work, the OIG can access DCFS and private agency files and by law, is able to subpoena files and records, conduct interviews, and make unannounced visits to DCFS and private agency facilities or foster homes. In 1996, a new law was enacted that allows the OIG access to confidential mental health records under certain circumstances. Evidence is gathered in a manner that will allow it to be used in any prosecution that may result. All inquiries and investigations are handled in a confidential manner, in compliance with the law.

How Do I Reach the Office of Inspector General?

When the position of Inspector General was created, the legislature also created a new statewide, toll-free tele-

phone number to link the state's nearly 16,000 foster homes to the Inspector General. The line's purpose: to report suspected misconduct or violations of rules or laws by DCFS employees, service providers, or contractors. The toll-free number is:

1-800-722-9124

I'm a Foster Parent. When Should I Use the OIG Hotline/Foster Parent Hotline?

You should call after you have tried but failed to resolve your issue with your caseworker or supervisor or the Advocacy Center for Children and Families, or you believe a formal investigation is required. A trained worker will answer your call. If you are reporting suspected misconduct or violations of rules or laws by DCFS employees or other providers of child care services under contract to DCFS, the Office of the Inspector General will send an official Request for Investigation to you.

I'm a DCFS Case Worker. I'm a Private Agency Case Worker. Can the Inspector General Help Me?

The Office strives to identify root causes of problems and to devise recommendations that strengthen the ability of the Department and private agencies to respond appropriately in the future. The OIG operates proactively so that the field can develop more practice wisdom and training programs to anticipate problems before they happen. The Office advocates for systemic changes when needed to protect DCFS wards and to provide effective and humane responses to the needs of the children. Often, OIG recommendations for systemic reforms include program initiatives to assist the child welfare system in meeting its fiduciary obligations to children. Current examples of a few initiatives which benefit and assist the case worker are:

The Mental Health Task Force and the **Parenting Assessment Teams** that assists supervisors and workers in evaluating cases that involve mentally ill parents and children.