



STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL

Frank J. Mautino, Auditor General

REPORT DIGEST

PROGRAM AUDIT

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Audit performed in
accordance with
**House Resolution
Number 418**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
Investigations of Abuse and Neglect**

House Resolution Number 418 directed the Auditor General to conduct a performance audit of the Department of Children and Family Services to review and assess the Department's protocols for investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. The resolution specifically required the audit to include a review of abuse and neglect investigations conducted by the Department in FY15, FY16, and FY17.

In this audit for the three-year period FY15-FY17, we reported that:

- The number of abuse and neglect investigations increased significantly, going from 67,732 in FY15 to 75,037 in FY17 or 10.8 percent. Within the three-year timeframe there was a notable spike in FY16 to 78,572 investigations. The increase in investigations between FY15 and FY16 represents an increase of 16.0 percent.
- The hotline is unable to take calls as they are received, resulting in call backs. The number of call backs increased substantially during FY15-FY17, from 39.6 percent of total calls in FY15 to 55.7 percent in FY17.
- Investigator caseloads were not in compliance with the B.H. Consent Decree. For FY15-FY17, 78.7 percent of investigators (729 of 926) had at least 1 month during the audit period in which they received more than 15 new assignments.
- Indication rates (the percentage of cases where there was credible evidence that the incident occurred) decreased during FY15-FY17, from 28.3 percent in FY15 to 24.8 percent in FY17.
- The Department did not always follow procedures in conducting investigations.
- The overall timeliness of completion for investigations declined significantly over the three-year period FY15-FY17. In FY15, 7.6 percent of investigations were not completed within 60 days. For FY17, 12.4 percent of investigations were not completed within 60 days.
- Investigators did not always accurately document that they assessed the need for services by completing the Level of Intervention field in the Department's information system known as SACWIS. Of indicated investigations sampled, 16 investigations (10.7%) had no Level of Intervention listed (services recommended). Further, 39 indicated investigations (26.0%) had "No Service Needed" as the Level of Intervention. Additionally, of the investigations sampled, for 64 (42.7%) we found that the Level of Intervention was inaccurate.
- For 65.3 percent of indicated investigations sampled, there was a lack of documentation regarding whether any services were received by the families involved and the duration of those services. The Department could not provide basic information for Intact Family Service cases, such as referral forms, to document that a formal referral for services was made.

The audit report contains a total of 13 recommendations to the Department.

AUDIT SUMMARY AND RESULTS

House Resolution Number 418 directed the Auditor General to conduct a performance audit of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS or Department) to review and assess the Department’s protocols for investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. The resolution specifically required the audit to include a review of abuse and neglect investigations conducted by the Department in FY15, FY16, and FY17.

According to data provided by the Department, for FY15-FY17 the number of abuse and neglect investigations increased significantly, going from 67,732 in FY15 to 75,037 in FY17 or 10.8 percent. Within the three-year timeframe, there was a notable spike in FY16 to 78,572 investigations. The increase in investigations between FY15 and FY16 represents an increase of 16.0 percent. As is shown in Digest Exhibit 1, indication rates (the percentage of cases where there was credible evidence that the incident occurred) decreased during FY15-FY17, from 28.3 percent in FY15 to 24.8 percent in FY17. (pages 5-13)

The Department has established administrative rules and extensive policies and procedures that delineate the investigations process and protocol to be followed during investigations.

Digest Exhibit 1 CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT STATISTICS FY15-FY17			
	FY15	FY16	FY17
Investigations	67,732	78,572	75,037
Indicated Reports	19,156	18,710	18,591
Percent Indicated	28.3%	23.8%	24.8%
Source: OAG analysis of DCFS data as of July 27, 2018.			

The Department did not always follow procedures in conducting investigations.

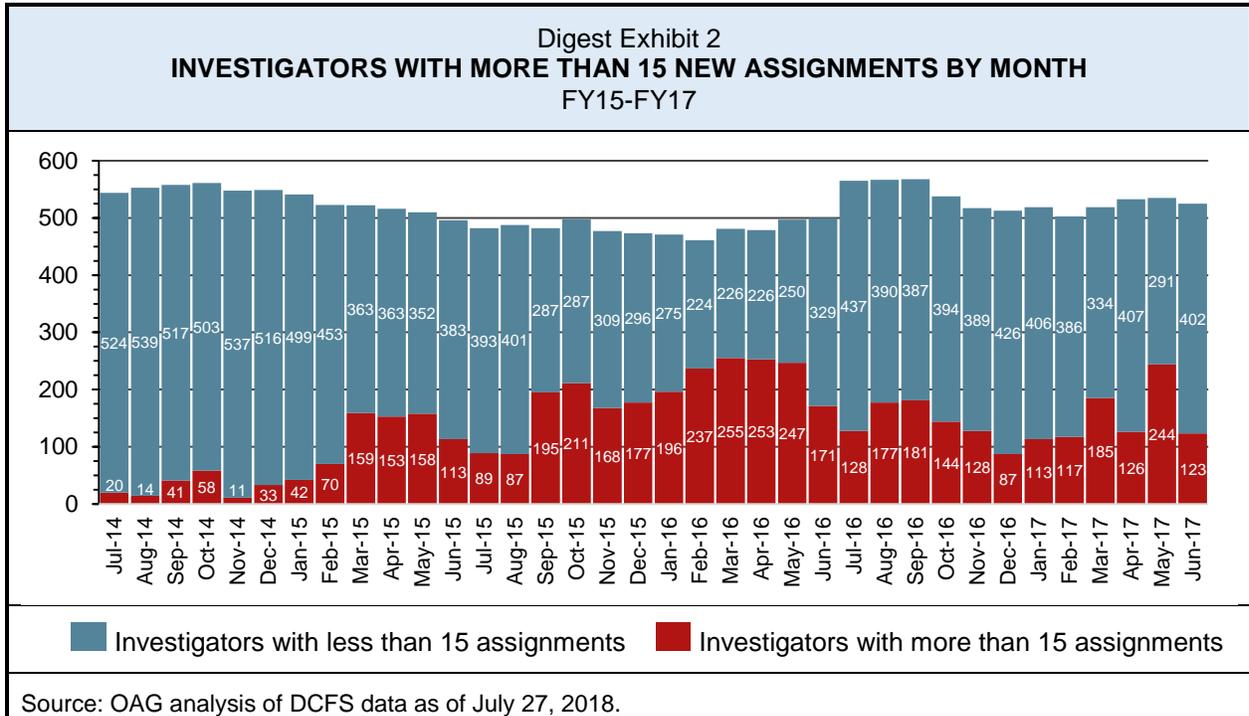
INVESTIGATION PROTOCOL

The Department has established administrative rules and extensive policies and procedures that delineate the investigations process and protocol to be followed during investigations. The protocol includes timelines to be followed, interviews to be conducted, forms to be completed, and documentation to be collected in completing investigations of child abuse and neglect. However, we found that the Department did not always follow procedures in conducting investigations.

For the audit period, the Department did not comply with investigator assignment requirements delineated in the B.H. Consent Decree. The B.H. Consent Decree requires that each child protective services investigator be assigned no more than 12 new abuse or neglect investigations per month during nine months of a calendar year and during the other three months of the calendar year, no more than 15 new investigations per month. Our analysis of primary assignments for FY15-FY17 showed that 78.7 percent of investigators (729 of 926) had at least 1 month during the audit period in which they received more than 15 new assignments. Further, our analysis showed that 32 investigators averaged more than 15 case assignments per month for the entire three-year period. In addition, there were 114 investigators who did not receive assignments for all 36 months and averaged more than 15 assignments per month for the months worked during the

Our analysis of primary assignments for FY15-FY17 showed that 78.7 percent of investigators (729 of 926) had at least 1 month during the audit period in which they received more than 15 new assignments.

period. Digest Exhibit 2 shows that as the total number of investigators decreased during FY16, the higher the percent of investigators who were out of compliance with the B.H. Consent Decree’s maximum allowable new assignments of 15 new assignments. The exhibit also shows that for February through April 2016 over half of all investigators were out of compliance.



We could not document that the Department had evaluated the reliability and validity of the Child Endangerment Risk Assessment Protocol (CERAP) as required by the Children and Family Services Act (20 ILCS 505/21(e)). The CERAP is a six-page safety assessment protocol designed to provide investigators with a mechanism for quickly assessing the potential for moderate to severe harm to children in the immediate or near future and for taking quick action to protect them. The Department also could not provide specific CERAP training procedures required by statute. (pages 16-25)

STATUS AND FINAL DETERMINATION

Our analysis for the three-year period FY15-FY17, as of July 27, 2018, showed that the status for a majority of cases, 142,766 of 221,341 investigations or 64.5 percent, was classified as expunged. Expunged investigations for the period were unfounded investigations in which most information, including the name of the alleged perpetrator, had been hidden or removed from the investigation information. An additional 78,520 (35.5%) investigations were classified as closed. For the remaining 55 investigations:

- 22 were undetermined (3 cases were FY16 and 19 cases were FY17);
- 18 were in appeal (15 cases were FY15, 1 case was FY16, and 2 cases were FY17);

- 9 were purged or concealed (all were FY15 cases);
- 3 were in review (one from each fiscal year);
- 2 were in a 20-day hold (both were FY17 cases); and
- 1 was pending approval (an FY17 case).

According to data provided by the Department, 25.5 percent of investigations (56,457 of 221,341) for the three-year period FY15-FY17 had a final determination or finding of indicated, meaning there was credible evidence that the allegation occurred. For 74.5 percent of all investigations the status was unfounded (164,864 of 221,341 investigations). As of July 2018, there were 20 investigations for FY16 and FY17 that were listed as pending. (pages 25-27)

INVESTIGATION TIMEFRAMES

We found that the Department needs to improve timeliness in several areas. The Department is not timely in completing intakes from callers reporting allegations of abuse and neglect. The hotline is unable to take calls as they are received, resulting in call backs. The hotline did not meet targets, and call backs increased substantially during FY15-FY17, from 39.6 percent in FY15 to 55.7 percent of total calls in FY17. The Department also does not have written procedures regarding the process for calling back individuals who report allegations of abuse or neglect that do not complete the intake process at the time of their initial call. Further, the Department does not maintain call back information electronically in its information system, known as SACWIS, for more than 90 days, which makes any long-term analysis of call back timeliness difficult.

According to investigations data provided, the Department was timely in initiating investigations for approximately 99 percent of investigations. However, required interviews with the alleged victim and perpetrator were not always completed in a timely manner. With data provided by the Department, we reviewed the timeliness of interviews with the alleged victim(s) based on whether actual contact was made and found that the alleged victim was not interviewed within 24 hours in 29.1 percent of cases for the audit period FY15-FY17. The alleged perpetrator was not interviewed within 7 days in 24.5 percent of cases for the audit period.

The overall timeliness of completion for investigations declined significantly over the three-year period FY15-FY17. In FY15, 7.6 percent of investigations were not completed within 60 days. For FY16, the percentage of investigations not completed within 60 days increased to 16.0 percent. It remained elevated in FY17 at 12.4 percent of investigations not completed within 60 days.

We reviewed the timeliness of submission of the completed investigation to the supervisor and found that for the audit period FY15-FY17, 44.2 percent of all reports without extensions were not submitted within 55 days. The highest rate of noncompliance was for FY16, in which 51.2 percent of reports did not meet the 55 day requirement for submission to the supervisor, according to data provided by the Department.

The Department’s difficulty in completing investigations in a timely manner during the audit period is further demonstrated by the number and percentage

The hotline did not meet targets, and call backs increased substantially during FY15-FY17, from 39.6 percent in FY15 to 55.7 percent of total calls FY17.

The overall timeliness of completion for investigations declined significantly over the three-year period FY15-FY17.

of investigations that received a 30-day extension. The percentage of cases receiving one or more extensions increased from 7.5 percent in FY15 to 16.1 percent in FY16 and 12.7 percent in FY17. Further, the number of investigations receiving multiple extensions also increased significantly. For instance, the number of investigations that received three extensions (an additional 90 days) increased from 274 investigations in FY15 to 1,263 investigations in FY16 and 719 investigations in FY17. In our review of cases involving an extension, it was also not always clear what the cause for the extension was or whether it rose to the level of “good cause.” (pages 30-40)

SERVICES

Conducting an analysis of all recommendations for services and services provided by the Department was not possible for the audit period because of inherent limitations in the data provided by the Department as well as other data reliability and consistency issues. In order to assess the services recommended and services provided, we selected a sample of 150 indicated investigations (50 each year for FY15, FY16, and FY17) and reviewed the investigations for recommended services and any services received. (pages 42-44)

Recommendations for Services

The Department’s policies and procedures require that during an investigation the need for services for the family involved in the investigation be assessed by the Child Protection Specialist (investigator) and the Child Protection Supervisor. Our review of 150 indicated investigations found that investigators did not always document that they assessed the need for services by completing the Level of Intervention field in the Department’s information system (SACWIS). Of the 150 indicated investigations sampled, 16 investigations (10.7%) had no Level of Intervention listed. Further, 39 investigations (26.0%) had “No Service Needed” as the Level of Intervention. For most of these cases there was no rationale regarding why no services were being recommended even though the case had been indicated. Additionally, of the investigations sampled, for 64 (42.7%) we found that the Level of Intervention was inaccurate.

Investigators did not always document that they assessed the need for services by completing the Level of Intervention field in the Department’s information system.

For Intact Family Services (IFS) provided through the Department, investigators have the responsibility to discuss and offer these services if the final investigation finding of indicated has been recommended. The Department did not document that Intact Family Services were discussed and offered to all families with indicated investigation findings as is required by Department procedures. Only 20 of 150 (13.3%) indicated investigations reviewed contained documentation of a recommendation for Intact Family Services (IFS). An additional 3 investigations had recommendations for multiple services, which included IFS; therefore, 23 of 150 indicated investigations had a recommendation of IFS. For 33 of 150 investigations (22.0%), community services were recommended. We could not determine whether any services were recommended or what the specific services were for 67 of 150 (44.7%) indicated investigations reviewed. The remaining 27 investigations included recommendations for placement, already receiving

services, no services needed, multiple services, Intact Family Recovery, and Norman Cash Assistance. (pages 44-48)

Services Provided

We sampled 150 indicated cases for the audit period and found that for 98 cases (65.3%), there was a lack of documentation regarding whether any services were received by the families involved and the duration of those services. The Department could not provide basic information for Intact Family Service cases, such as referral forms, to document that a formal referral for services was made. The Department also could not provide auditors with the number of families served by each IFS contractor each year for the audit period. For investigations involving the Norman Cash Assistance program, the Department could not provide all approval forms. For community services, there are no formal forms for referrals to community based services, and the Department is not documenting these services as required by procedures. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if the families actually received services from community providers. (pages 48-56)

The Department could not provide basic information for Intact Family Service cases, such as referral forms, to document that a formal referral for services was made.

VICTIM DEMOGRAPHICS

During the audit period, the number of indicated children decreased every year while the total number of alleged victims increased. According to data provided by the Department as of July 27, 2018, for the three-year period FY15-FY17 there were 221,341 investigations involving a total of 358,545 children, 96,576 of whom had at least one indicated allegation.

Auditors could not obtain a reliable count of the number of unique victims because of limitations with the data provided by the Department. Each person in the SACWIS system is assigned a unique PersonID. However, auditors found that there were over 8,000 instances where the same child had been assigned multiple PersonIDs. Therefore, auditors could not obtain a reliable count of the number of unique child victims over the audit period because of data limitations.

For the 221,341 investigations for FY15-FY17, there were 450,483 total allegations, with an overall indication rate of 25.5 percent. The most common allegations were “Substantial Risk of Physical Injury/Environment Injurious to Health and Welfare by Neglect” and “Inadequate Supervision.” A total of 52,502 children were the alleged victims of sexual abuse during FY15-FY17, and 32,439 children were the alleged victims of serious harm.

Age

Children under the age of one were the most frequent alleged victims of abuse or neglect (8.1% of all victims) and also the most likely to be indicated victims (13.3% of all indicated victims). After the age of one, the number of indicated allegations of abuse or neglect trends downward.

Race and Ethnicity

For race, children who were identified as White or Black/African-American made up 96.4 percent of all alleged victims (62.5% White and 33.9% Black/African-American) and 97.1 percent of all indicated victims (62.4% White and 34.7% Black/African-American). Data provided by the

Department showed that 2.3 percent of alleged victims did not have a race recorded. For ethnicity, children with a Hispanic ethnicity comprised 15.6 percent of all alleged victims and 16.7 percent of indicated victims.

Gender

For gender, there was an even split between male and female victims. Males accounted for 49.7 percent of all alleged victims and females were 49.6 percent. For indicated victims, males accounted for 49.4 percent and females were 50.3 percent.

Geographic Location

Auditors found that 25.6 percent of all investigations occurred in Cook County, followed by Lake County with 4.1 percent. There were investigations of alleged abuse or neglect in all 102 counties in Illinois. (pages 58-67)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The audit report contains a total of 13 recommendations to the Department of Children and Family Services. The Department generally agreed with the recommendations in the report. Appendix H to the audit report contains the agency responses.

This performance audit was conducted by staff of the Office of the Auditor General.

SIGNED ORIGINAL ON FILE

JOE BUTCHER
Division Director

This report is transmitted in accordance with Sections 3-14 and 3-15 of the Illinois State Auditing Act.

SIGNED ORIGINAL ON FILE

FRANK J. MAUTINO
Auditor General

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