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Governor Quinn Signs Child Welfare Reform Laws
Bills Begin New Era of Protecting Children, Strengthening Families

CHICAGO – August 25, 2009. Governor Pat Quinn today signed a series of bills that enhance and improve child welfare services in Illinois. Together, these bills enable the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to better support families in need, strengthen relationships between parents and children, and build better futures for youth transitioning from state care to adult independence.

“We best protect children when we support and strengthen families,” said Governor Quinn. “These important bills begin a new era of child welfare in Illinois, where we reach out to families to provide a helping hand before a crisis occurs, and help each child in our care achieve their dreams.”

The Differential Response Program Act (SB 807), sponsored by Rep. Mary E. Flowers (D-Chicago) and Sen. Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago), allows DCFS to take a more flexible, supportive approach to helping families in need. In cases where a family is in need of help but the risk of harm to children is low, DCFS will be authorized to conduct a less disruptive family assessment, rather than a formal departmental investigation.

The Department can then tailor additional, individualized services to support the family and protect the children. The bill is effective January 1, 2010.

“This legislation brings us closer to the day when families voluntarily turn to DCFS for help in raising their children safely and successfully,” said DCFS Director Erwin McEwen. “When DCFS is seen as a resource for positive change, children and families win.”

The Foster Child Successful Transition into Adulthood Act (HB 4054), sponsored by Sen. Hunter and Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago), allows emancipated youth who are still under the age of 21 to receive assistance from DCFS.

Research has shown that young adults coming out of foster care have better outcomes when they continue to receive state support during their transition to adult independence.

DCFS programs for 18 to 21 year olds reduce the incidence of homelessness and incarceration, and increase achievement in education and employment, also saving taxpayers further expense in the future. In addition, it assigns a case manager to each eligible youth to develop a personal

development plan to increase their self-sufficiency skills. The bill is effective January 1, 2010.

The DCFS Service Plans Improvement and Foster Permanency Changes Act (HB 529) allows the court and DCFS to review children who are age 13 and over to determine whether the parents whose rights have been terminated can be restored.

Reinstatement will not automatically return a child to the custody of the parent, but will allow the court to oversee services and visitation, helping the child understand and manage relationships with their biological family.

The Act recognizes the importance of lifelong bonds between parents and child, and allows the child welfare system to work with biological parents toward the child's best interests, even in cases where placement of a child with the parent is not possible. The bill, sponsored by Sen. William Delgado (D-Chicago) and Rep. Flowers, is effective immediately.

“We are honored that Governor Quinn chose SOS Children's Villages Illinois as the site to sign these important pieces of legislation. These bills will continue Illinois' proud tradition of leading the nation in providing the highest quality services to transform children's lives.” Tim McCormick, CEO of SOS Children's Villages Illinois.