

Fourth SIM Lab Coming to Northern Illinois

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CARBONDALE — Governor JB Pritzker joined child welfare and university leaders today to announce that Southern Illinois University will be the university partner for the Department of Children and Family Services’ third simulation training center statewide.

“I’m proud to announce the partnership with SIU-Carbondale to spearhead a new Southern Illinois simulation lab. This brings best-in-the-nation training to the southern region of our state, and it furthers our ability to better serve the children and families of Southern Illinois,” **said Gov. JB Pritzker.** “These labs aren’t just an investment in child welfare – they’re also an investment in education and job training. And they are

investments that will make a real difference to students in every region of Illinois and in our DCFS frontline workers.”

“Continuing to move the Department of Children and Family Services forward will take new ideas that come from partnerships with the best minds in Illinois,” **said DCFS Acting Director Marc Smith.** “Working together, we can build a child welfare system in Illinois that our children deserve and that we can be proud of.”

“SIU is proud of its commitment to the region through its teaching, research and service mission,” **said SIU Carbondale Chancellor John M. Dunn.** “This initiative, in collaboration with the Department of Children and Family Services and the University of Illinois at Springfield, will have a meaningful and positive impact on how we care for our most vulnerable residents, our children. The university is pleased to bring all of its resources to bear on this project, including involvement from the schools of medicine, law and social work, among many other outstanding academic programs that will have a direct tie-in to this work.”

After years of devastating budget and staffing cuts under the prior administration, the Pritzker administration has begun to rebuild the Department of Children and Family Services, with an emphasis on enhanced training and education for caseworkers on the ground. Over the past year, all caseworkers have been retrained – over 3,000 in total – and additional trainings are required for both DCFS staff and private agency partners each year.

To meet the increased demand for training, Gov. Pritzker secured a 7.9% increase in funding for DCFS in FY20 and proposed a \$147 million increase in FY21, a 20% increase over FY19 funding levels. Those investments allow the department to open two new simulation labs in northern and southern Illinois.

First launched in 2015 in Springfield, simulation labs offer caseworkers an opportunity to get hands-on training in real-world environments so they can better protect Illinois’ most vulnerable children. In addition to the Springfield center, DCFS opened a second location in Chicago in April 2019, which the Governor toured with Acting Director Smith on his first day on the job.

Overseen by the Child Protection Training Academy (CPTA) at the University of Illinois at Springfield, each simulation center has a public university partner to provide cutting-edge academic research and a pipeline of talent to the state’s child welfare system – UIS at Springfield, UIUC in Cook County and SIU in Carbondale.

While it will take time to fully undo the short- and long-term damage that has taken place, the Pritzker administration made several investments in DCFS in FY20:

- Added 301 positions, including core frontline staff like investigators, caseworkers, hotline call center staff.
- Provided a 5% rate increase to Foster Care, Institutions, Group Homes and Intact Family Services, only the second comprehensive rate increase in 19 years. More than two decades ago, the state provided regular rate increases to attract a skilled workforce and sustain a strong child welfare system.
- Increased funding for community-based providers, who manage 85% of child welfare cases in Illinois, to attract and retain qualified staff.

In addition, Gov. Pritzker has proposed a \$147 million increase in funding for DCFS in FY21. That would allow the department to hire an additional 123 direct service staff, which along with the 301 new staff hired in 2019 and 2020 would be an increase of 16% since 2018. The Governor's budget proposal also would continue to modernize child welfare data and provide real-time information to caseworkers, increase the number of children coming into the Foster Homes program, expand the Family Preservations Program and cover proposed rate increases for institutions, group homes and other DCFS providers.