

Hearing Into Illinois' Problem-Plagued Child Welfare Agency Set For Friday

by Greg Bishop
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The Center Square – It's unclear how deep Friday's Illinois House hearing into mounting problems at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services will go.

For weeks, Republicans have been calling for a hearing into mounting issues with the child welfare agency.

State Rep. Camille Lilly, D-Oak Park, announced last week that a hearing will be held in the House Appropriations-Human Services Committee. Her office said the hearing comes amid reported department shortcomings so lawmakers can better understand the needs of the children and “form holistic, long-term solutions.”

“The current concerns with the DCFS have made it necessary to call a hearing so we can better understand the needs of the children and form holistic, long-term solutions,” Lilly said in a statement. “These problems have been going on for years and our focus is on the children and workers, so I request everyone in the hearing to conduct themselves in a serious, bipartisan fashion without losing focus.”

Committee member, state Rep. C.D. Davidsmeyer, R-Jacksonville, said issues like children being kept in psychiatric facilities rather than being with families is alarming.

“The reality is if the system isn't working, it's time to change,” Davidsmeyer told The Center Square. “And we may have to look at a completely different system.”

He said in his conversations with frontline workers, the agency has a very top-down approach.

“And the top is not providing the leadership to the bottom, who's actually there doing the work and that's where we need to make changes,” Davidsmeyer said.

The hearing is virtual, and Davidsmeyer hopes it's productive.

“We could certainly start to scratch the surface in a long subject-matter hearing, an actual committee hearing, rather than an hour-long Zoom meeting,” Davidsmeyer said.

In talks he's had with frontline DCFS workers, Davidsmeyer feels they should be part of the conversation.

“Hearing from the people that are actually being affected by these policies and how they're trying to help people in these jobs would go miles,” he said.

Lilly's office didn't immediately respond Tuesday when asked for a list of who will be testifying at the committee. The House hearing is at noon Friday.

Earlier this month, state Sen. Julie Morrison, D-Lake Forest, announced a hearing in a Senate committee.

“Immediately following the tragic on-the-job stabbing of DCFS worker Deidre Silas, I spoke with Director Marc Smith’s office and requested a meeting about DCFS staff safety,” Morrison said. “He has agreed to participate in a Senate Health Committee Subject Matter hearing at Feb. 3 at 8:30 a.m. regarding the topic.”