



## MANAGEMENT TEAM BIOGRAPHIES (June 2017)

### **LISE T. SPACAPAN** **Acting Director**

Governor Bruce Rauner appointed Lise T. Spacapan acting director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services effective June 16, 2017. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Spacapan served as the department's general counsel, overseeing a law department with nearly 100 members throughout the state. Over the past 30 years, she has been a litigation partner in the Chicago offices of three major law firms: Husch Blackwell, Jenner & Block and Kirkland & Ellis. Over the course of her career, she has handled cases across the country focused on complex commercial litigation and products liability; and has worked with many scientists and physicians on cases involving healthcare and ethics. Ms. Spacapan received her L.L.M. in Health Law in 2014 and serves on the board of the Mary and Michael Jaharis Health Law Institute at DePaul University's College of Law. She served as a national director on the Board of DRI, chair of the DRI Publications Board and chair of DRI's Toxic Tort and Environmental Law Committee. She has authored numerous articles and book chapters on litigation issues. Ms. Spacapan is AV Peer Review Rated, Martindale-Hubbell's highest peer recognition for ethical standards and legal ability.

### **LAURA ROCHE** **Acting Chief Deputy Director**

Laura joined the senior leadership of DCFS as chief of staff in July 2016 after spending 18 months as the House legislative liaison in the Governor's Office of Legislative Affairs. In that role, she served as Governor Rauner's direct liaison to members of the Illinois House of Representatives. Additionally, Laura was the main point of contact and supervisor in the Governor's Office for legislative departments at 17 state agencies, including DCFS, DHS, HFS, DNR, EPA and ISBE. Prior to joining the Rauner administration, she was the deputy director of research and appropriations for the Illinois House Republican Staff under Leader Jim Durkin, where she worked with legislators and advocates on a wide range of policy issues. A native of Robinson, IL,

Laura received a bachelor's degree from Marquette University and a master's degree from the University of Illinois-Springfield. Laura resides in Springfield.

## **ALEJANDRO MATEOS**

### **Chief of Staff**

Alejandro joins DCFS in the Director's Office and will work with the Administrative Hearing Unit in the review of cases as well as other legal matters and special projects. He has a J.D. from Stetson University College of Law and is certified for fluency in Spanish legal document review. His core strengths include compliance, quality control and review as well as legal research. He has served in many capacities including working with the Cook County State Attorney's office and he also served as Chief Financial Officer for a private company. He is a member of the Chicago Bar Association and the Illinois State Bar Association. Alejandro believes in service and making a difference.

## **NEIL SKENE**

### **Senior Deputy Director for Strategy and Performance**

Neil Skene joined DCFS in April 2016 as deputy chief of staff after completing a major book, *The Florida Supreme Court: A Journey Toward Justice, 1972-1987*, to be published in mid-2017 by University Press of Florida. After graduating from law school in 1977, Neil was a reporter and editor for the *St. Petersburg Times*. For seven years (1990-97) he was president of Congressional Quarterly Inc., a nationally respected Washington publisher of books, journals and newsletters, including *Governing* magazine, after serving three years as executive editor. Neil was a trustee of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies for 14 years, and for 10 years served on the board of directors of the Times Publishing Co. in St. Petersburg. A management consultant and writer since 1998, he served for 2008-2010 as special counsel to Secretary Bob Butterworth and successor George Sheldon at the Florida Department of Children and Families. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the nationally recognized PACE Center for Girls and chairs the National Advisory Board of the Center for Collaborative Journalism at Mercer University.

With a political science degree from Vanderbilt University and a law degree from Mercer University, Neil is a member of the Bar in Florida and Georgia. For 10 years he coached the undergraduate mock trial team at Florida State, which won the national championship in 2013. Two of his three children earned degrees from Chicago universities.

**JANET AHERN****Acting General Counsel**

Janet Wukas Ahern has worked as an attorney for DCFS for over 20 years. Prior to her role as acting general counsel, Janet was deputy general counsel and managed the Cook County Juvenile Court. She has previously served as deputy general counsel of the DCFS Northern Region and acting downstate deputy general counsel. In addition to juvenile law, Janet has advised the department in numerous areas of law including immigration, child welfare licensure, dually involved youth and interstate issues. Janet received her JD from Arizona State University, MA in education from the University of Illinois and BS from Illinois State University.

**ROBERT T. BLACKWELL****Liaison, Office of Racial Equity Practice**

Bob re-joined DCFS in 2004 as the regional administrator for the Central Region. He had previously served the department in various central office executive functions from 1984 to 1992. As a staunch proponent of racially equitable treatment for children and families, Bob led the Central Region's service delivery for eight years. In 2012, he was tapped to oversee the Office of Racial Equity Practice as the liaison for DCFS. In this role, he is responsible for leading the department's efforts in addressing race-based disparities and disproportionality practices and outcomes experienced by children and families of color in the Illinois child welfare system.

Bob holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He serves as the co-chair of Public School District 186's Minority Recruitment Advisory Council, is a member of the Springfield Dominicans Antiracism Team and a member of SCoDR (Springfield Coalition on Dismantling Racism). Bob and his wife Carolyn have three daughters and five grandchildren. Bob is a Dominican Associate and worships as a member of Abundant Faith Christian Center.

**DIANE COTTRELL****Deputy Director, Division of Permanency**

Diane Cottrell is the acting deputy bureau chief of the Permanency Division and has been employed with Illinois state government for 34 years. She began working for DCFS in 1987 as a case manager. She worked in Quality Assurance for six years as a management operations analyst until she became a quality improvement manager in Administrative Case Review (ACR) in 1999 and worked her way up the career ladder to the associate deputy of ACR. Diane brings a wealth of knowledge and skills in relation to understanding systems, analyzing, developing and implementing policies and enhancing programs to better serve children and families. She was a vital participant in the development of the department's first self-study and provided technical assistance to the field offices seeking accreditation. She also served as a management operations analyst for the Division of Quality Assurance. Diane has a master's degree in the area of management and policy from the University of Illinois-Chicago, Jane Addams School of Social

Work. She has been a long-standing vital member of the DCFS African American Advisory Council, which advocates for African American children, families and communities and has chaired several committees, including the annual conference planning committee.

**PETER DIGRE**

**Deputy Director, Division of Placement and Community Services**

Gerald Peter (Pete) Digre has over 40 years of experience in public child welfare and other human services, including deputy director and assistant director for operations for the Florida DCF; consulting services for more than 30 states and large counties as president of the Child Welfare Division and vice president of the Revenue Maximization Division for MAXIMUS and president of QMS: Quality Management Services; director of the Los Angeles County DCFS; director of the Philadelphia County Children and Youth Agency; and executive director of Omni Youth Services, a juvenile justice, substance abuse prevention and child welfare agency in Cook County. Pete has a MPA from Roosevelt University, MSW from George Williams and a D.Mn. from the University of Chicago. He loves Chicago and DCFS and feels like he is coming home.

**DEBRA DYER**

**Deputy Director, Office of the DCFS Guardian**

Prior to her current post, Debra Dyer served for eight years as the chief deputy general counsel of DCFS. In this capacity she directed and supervised the activities of staff attorneys engaged in conducting extensive legal research, writing legal opinions and drafting legislation and department rules and procedures while assisting the general counsel in the development and implementation of legal strategies designed to minimize litigation risks. Ms. Dyer has also served as an assistant state's attorney in the State's Attorney Office of Cook County. As the lead prosecutor in a juvenile justice/child protection courtroom, she was responsible for conducting trials and hearings, training prosecutors and managing the day-to-day prosecutorial activities of the courtroom.

Previously, Dyer served as deputy director of External Affairs for DCFS. In that role, she collaborated with internal and external partners; resolved problems and improved relationships with external constituents; and managed the Communications, African American Services and Latino Services offices. Dyer has also served as supervisory legal counsel, technical advisor, public service administrator, child protective service investigator and child welfare specialist for DCFS. She holds a juris doctorate degree from the Chicago Kent College of Law at the Illinois Institute of Technology, a master's degree from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago and a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in social science from Jackson State University.

**DANIEL IBARRA FITZGERALD****Deputy Director, Office of Affirmative Action**

Daniel Ibarra Fitzgerald has had a longstanding career in social services working to ensure brighter futures for children and families. He is currently a deputy director at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and directs the Office of Affirmative Action. Daniel also led the Office of Community Services, was the deputy director of the Division of Service Intervention and served as deputy director of Programs and Services with the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse. He has more than 25 years of experience in child welfare through his work with Casa Central and Youth Guidance. He also serves as an instructor at the Northeastern Illinois University Undergraduate School of Social Work, where he has taught for more than 18 years. He holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Southern Illinois University and two master's degrees: one from the School of Business and Management from North Park University and the other from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago.

**MATTHEW A. GRADY, III****Chief Fiscal Officer**

Matt Grady is returning to DCFS after serving almost four years with DHS as chief operating officer and a year as director of fiscal services. Matt is a highly respected, decisive leader with 30 years of experience providing fiscal stewardship of local and state government entities complemented by nine years of private industry management experience. Prior to joining the state, Matt served in various finance and accounting leadership roles for two municipalities before his appointment as finance director for the City of Evanston, Illinois. Each year the municipalities received the coveted Government Finance Officers Award for their preparation of the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). He also spent nine years at both General Motors and Ford Motor Companies in their financial departments.

He was recruited by the University of Michigan in Flint while employed as that city's finance director to be an adjunct accounting professor to teach in the evenings in the Master of Public Administration Program. Matt earned his MBA in finance and BSBA in accounting from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He and his wife Lueida have three children and five grandchildren.

**TAMMY GRANT****Deputy Director, Office of Employee Services**

Tammy Grant was appointed deputy director of the Office of Employee Services in September 2013. Tammy began her career with the department in 1990 in Licensing. She then served the Central Region in numerous administrative capacities, including nine years of personnel liaison responsibilities. After serving 20 years in the field, she became an HR specialist with the Office of Employee Services working in Labor Relations. She provided technical assistance to management

regarding Labor Relations and was also assigned as the DCFS representative for the Illinois Nurses Association contract negotiations. Tammy brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to this position. She lives in Central Illinois with her two children.

**NORA HARMS-PAVELSKI**

**Deputy Director, Division of Child Protection**

Nora Harms-Pavelski began her career in social work as the adolescent services coordinator for a local community mental health agency overseeing services for youth and working closely with DCFS. She joined the Department of Children and Family Services in 1995 as a placement/intact caseworker and has served as a child protection supervisor, site manager, intact manager and assistant regional administrator for the Child Protection Division, working across Central and Southern Regions. Since 2012, she has held the position of administrator of the State Central Register and oversees the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline as part of those duties. Ms. Harms-Pavelski brings many years of child welfare and child protection experience with her. She has participated in the training and implementation of the SACWIS database, state and federal work groups and assisted with the development and updating of agency policy. In addition she is a certified trainer for DCFS and has guest-lectured at local universities for both social work and law specialties. Over the years, Ms. Harms-Pavelski has represented DCFS as a presenter at several regional and statewide conferences and conventions, and has also been a reviewer for the Council on Accreditation, a national organization that assesses child welfare agencies to ensure they meet set standards for accreditation. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and Master of Social Work degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**JEREMY HARVEY**

**Deputy Director, Strategic Planning and Innovation**

Jeremy joined the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in 2015 and was named deputy director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Innovation in January 2017. From 2008-2015 Jeremy worked in the Office of the Cook County Public Guardian, where he coordinated efforts on representation for dually-involved youth and services available for older adolescents. Jeremy is a national public speaker on issues facing older youth in care as they transition to adulthood, a liaison to the American Academy of Pediatrics on foster care issues and a member of the Council for National Child Trauma Stress Network. He is proud to work for the Department of Children and Family Services and help shape the future of child welfare in Illinois.

**DEREK A. HOBSON**  
**Chief Accountability Officer**

Derek A. Hobson is the chief accountability officer for the Illinois Department of Children Family Services. He has served the department for over 31 years in a number of roles, including regional administrator of the Southern Region, statewide contracts and grants administrator for the Southern Region, administrative services manager, regional contracts administrator, social service program planner and child protection investigator. Derek holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri, and a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He maintains a high level of dedication, efficiency and professionalism to child welfare and a strong commitment to the department's mission and its goal of securing the well-being of children and families.

**PAULA KIENBERGER JAUDES, MD**  
**Medical Director**

Dr. Jaudes is a Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Chicago and a board-certified pediatrician. Since 2005, she has been involved at the national level in policy initiatives on foster care and sits on the Executive Committee of the Council of Foster Care, Adoption and Kinship Care of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She has held the post of medical director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services since 1993. She helps ensure that Illinois' foster children have access to the health services they require. Dr. Jaudes was the first physician in the United States to be named medical director of a state child welfare agency. She has devoted herself to the health and protection of children who are underserved as a hospital administrator, practicing pediatrician and medical researcher, educator and public servant. Dr. Jaudes received her MD from Rush Medical College, Chicago, and was chief resident at the University of Chicago Wyler Children's Hospital. She also performed a fellowship in pediatric ambulatory care at the University of Chicago.

**VICTOR JONATHAN**  
**Chief Information Officer**

Victor Jonathan has over 30 years of information technology experience encompassing application development, database management, data governance, infrastructure management, information architecture, information security and program and project management. Prior to joining DCFS as deputy director and chief information officer he served as program management consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation on an enterprise ERP implementation project. Victor has served as consultant to fortune 500 companies on their Information technology management and operations. Previously he served as the president/CEO of Pixel Information Technology Corporation and vice president of technology and director of information technology for other major corporations. Victor has a MBA from Governors State University, Bachelor of Science in aerospace engineering from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, certificate in executive

management from Clark Atlanta University, certified project manager from the Project Management Institute, and DPT from Masters International University of Divinity.

**ROYCE KIRKPATRICK**

**Deputy Director, Contract Administration**

Royce Kirkpatrick has 29 years of experience working for DCFS in several positions of increasing responsibility. He earned his master's degree in social work from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is a licensed clinical social worker. Royce was initially hired as a child welfare specialist in 1987. Promotions led to his work as a children's program analyst, downstate quality assurance supervisor and casework supervisor. In 2000 he became an administrative services manager for the Central Region and has most recently served as the department's grant budget officer since 2008. Mr. Kirkpatrick has been called upon frequently throughout the years to testify on behalf of the department's budget and fiscal impact of legislative proposals. He is currently a member of the state's Illinois Single Audit Commission; and he brings a unique skill set to his new position, understanding both the direct service challenges within child welfare and also the intricacies of the department's financial and payment systems.

**ROXANNE LIZCANO**

**Senior Deputy for Administration**

Roxanne Lizcano joins DCFS as senior deputy for administration overseeing budget and finance, IT, employee services, licensing, contracts and facilities management. She has a Master of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science in engineering from University of Illinois at Chicago and an Executive Education from Harvard and Duke University. Her core strengths include quality assurance and regulatory compliance, as well as budget implementation and cost control. She has served in many capacities including as project operations manager, consultant and marketing director for AT&T and Women's Initiative for Self Employment in California. She has worked with many Fortune 1,000 companies in leadership roles but her passion has always been service. Roxanne joins DCFS with the hope of positively affecting change and serving the most vulnerable.

**KIMBERLY A. MANN**

**Deputy Director, Office of Child Well-Being**

Kimberly A. Mann, PhD, LCSW, currently serves as the deputy director for the DCFS Office of Child Well-Being. Since joining the department in 2008, she has guided the development of trauma-informed practices, served as project director for the Illinois Birth-Three Title IV-E Waiver and currently leads the implementation of the Early Childhood Court Team initiative. Her practice, program development and research interests include clinical practice with children and their families and the impact of trauma in the lives of youth. Dr. Mann has more than 20 years of graduate and undergraduate teaching experience in social work; and 30 years' experience working with youth and families, primarily in child welfare, public school and community-based



settings. Within her current role, she promotes the physical, cognitive, social and emotional well-being of youth served by the child welfare system and administers programs that support the developmental needs of children aged 0-6.

**BRAD MANSFIELD**

**Deputy Director, Office of Child and Family Policy**

Brad Mansfield brings the knowledge gained from over 30 years with the department to his role as chief of the Office of Child and Family Policy. He has worked as a child welfare specialist, children's program analyst, regional day care coordinator, child and adolescent local area network liaison, contracts monitor, SASS/ITS monitor and policy writer. Under Brad's leadership the policy office has significantly expanded stakeholder involvement in the policy review process and he is passionate about continuing to move the policy office toward even greater transparency and involvement of those affected by department rules and procedures, especially youth in care. He holds a bachelor's degree from Harvard University.

**THERESA MATTHEWS**

**Acting Deputy Director, Office of Monitoring**

Ms. Matthews possesses a wealth of varied and valuable professional child welfare experience and has dedicated the past 28 years to serving children and families at the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). She has served as a DCFS child welfare specialist, child welfare supervisor, child protection investigator, child protection supervisor, child protection regional administrator, Consent Unit supervisor, assistant guardian, acting deputy for the Guardian's Office, associate deputy for Licensing and as the associate deputy for Residential Monitoring. Ms. Matthews is currently the acting deputy director for the Office of Monitoring.

Ms. Matthews is a licensed clinical social worker and holds a master's degree in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. She represented Illinois as the recipient of The Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) 2012 Commissioner's Award.

**RODRIGO REMOLINA**

**Deputy Director, Advocacy Office**

Rod Remolina has 24 years of experience working with youth in social services. He began his career as a Screening Assessment and Support Services (SASS) worker for DCFS youth in care through Metropolitan Family Services in Chicago. Having covered the south side of Chicago for two years in that role, he moved to Springfield to start a family. Remaining youth-focused, Rod worked with Kemmerer Village Residential Center as a cottage manager and a campus supervisor. Rod was also a certified CPI instructor for non-violent crisis intervention and restraints. He began his career with the Department of Children and Family Services in 1997 as a bilingual call floor worker at the

Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline. He then worked as a child welfare investigator in Bloomington before returning to Springfield and serving in the Advocacy Office as a bilingual advocate. Rod has had the pleasure of serving the department as the administrator of the Advocacy Office since 2014. He holds a bachelor's degree in sociology and an MSW from Illinois State University.

## **VERONICA RESA**

### **Deputy Director, Office of Communications**

Veronica Resa is deputy director of communications with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and serves as its spokeswoman. She is a media, marketing and public relations professional with 10 years of experience in journalism and 14 years in government. She has worked in radio, television, print and social media. During her tenure with the Chicago Mayor's Office of Special Events, now known as DCASE, she was entrusted with brand management and creating promotional campaigns for corporate sponsors on the local, national and international level. Resa has also served as an executive level community and government relations expert as well as a public affairs liaison for various non-profits. She has substantial experience in multicultural marketing using integrated marketing techniques that include story-telling and placement. She is also an expert in crisis management, research, digital marketing, media buying and planning, speech writing, news writing and strategic communications. Resa also serves on the board of Women in Film Chicago, a 501 C 3.

## **CYNTHIA RICHTER-JACKSON**

### **Deputy Director, Division of Quality Assurance and Research**

Cynthia Richter-Jackson began her career in child welfare as a foster care/relative licensing worker for Catholic Social Services in Canton, Illinois. Upon completion of two years as a direct service caseworker, she was recruited to join DCFS as a child welfare specialist. She then served as a child protection investigator before advancing to the Division of Quality Assurance. During her tenure with Quality Assurance, Ms. Richter-Jackson served as a leader in Council on Accreditation activities, as a COA peer reviewer to other states and as a site leader in Federal Child and Family Service Reviews. She was also an active participant in the CQI working meeting for the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement in Washington DC. She has received intensive training in racial justice, dismantling racism and building social justice institutions, through Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training workshops, and was a leader in the development of the first DCFS Anti-Racism Transformation Team. She is known as an innovative leader with a vision for Statewide Quality Assurance and Improvement efforts. Ms. Richter-Jackson holds a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She resides in Bloomington, Illinois with her husband, the Reverend Dr. Donald Jackson. Together they are the parents of seven adult children and six beautiful grandchildren.

**MICHAEL RUPPE****Senior Deputy Director, Operations**

Michael Ruppe brings more than 30 years of direct service and supervisory experience with the department to his role as senior deputy director of operations. Prior to this appointment, he served as the deputy chief for child protection. He joined DCFS in 1986 as a caseworker, moving up to supervisor positions in child welfare and child protection. He has also served as manager of field services, assistant regional administrator and regional administrator in regions across the state. Ruppe is a licensed clinical social worker and has served as a peer reviewer and team leader for the Council on Accreditation for Children and Families. He has an MSW from the University of Illinois at Chicago, a Bachelor of Science in law enforcement administration from Western Illinois University and an Associate of Arts in general studies from Kaskaskia Junior College.

**MOLLY UHE-EDMONDS****Deputy Director, Office of Education and Transition Services**

Molly joined the Department of Children and Family Services in June 2017. She began her career in education as an elementary school teacher in inner-city Houston. She went on to receive her master's in educational administration from Sam Houston State University. Molly has been a principal in Central Illinois since 2008. She has led a primary school and more recently a career and technical center. Her focus has been on finding programming and resources for at-risk student populations. In 2016, Molly received an educational specialist advanced degree in school leadership from University of Illinois-Springfield. Her belief that education is not a one-size-fits-all model has led her to work with staff and students on eliminating barriers for student success. Molly resides in the Springfield area with her husband and two boys.

**GEORGE VENNIKANDAM****Acting Deputy Director, Division of Licensing**

George Vennikandam was named acting deputy director of the Division of Licensing in October 2016. Prior to this appointment, Mr. Vennikandam was the associate deputy director of the DCFS Central Office of Licensing and chief licensing enforcement officer, and also served as the acting deputy director from March 2014 to March 2015. George joined DCFS in 1995 as a caseworker, and has served in various capacities throughout his career, including in direct service as a caseworker, supervisor, site administrator, regional program manager and acting regional administrator. In 2001, George was appointed as the associate deputy director of Monitoring and Quality Assurance. In 2006 he came to the director's office as the special assistant to the director and administrator of the director's office, a position he held until December 2011. Along with those responsibilities, George also assumed the leadership of the Division of Child Protection as the acting deputy director from February 2008 to June 2012. George holds a master's degree in sociology and a master's degree in social work from the prestigious Kerala University in India.

**GWEN WALSH****Deputy Director, Office of Legislative Affairs**

Gwen Walsh joined DCFS as the deputy director in the Office of Legislative Affairs in August, 2016. Previously, Gwen worked as a legislative liaison in the Legislative Affairs office at the Department of Healthcare and Family Services. Prior to working for the state, Gwen worked at Brother James Court as a qualified intellectual disabilities professional. She also served as a transitional manager at Primed for Life, Inc., where she worked with parents and DCFS to help with the reunification of families. Gwen received a Bachelor of Science in family and consumer sciences specializing in family services from Eastern Illinois University and a Master of Social Work degree from Governor's State University. Gwen has been a licensed social worker since 2011. Originally from the south suburbs of Chicago, Gwen has settled down in Springfield with her husband and two children.

**MONICO WHITTINGTON-ESKRIDGE****Associate Deputy Director, Office of Professional Development**

Monico Whittington-Eskridge was named associate deputy director of the Office of Professional Development in May, 2016. Monico joined the department in 1993 and has held various positions including child welfare specialist, PSA supervising intact family and child protection priority 1 teams. Monico left the department in 1996 to join the Office of Professional Development as a foundations trainer. While there she served as a content expert, curriculum developer, project manager, train-the-trainer and peer-coach. Prior to joining DCFS she worked in the field of domestic violence as the women's program coordinator and counselor at Family Rescue's outreach center. Monico received her MSW degree from the University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration, where she has served as a member and vice president of the Alumni Board of Directors, the co-chair of the African American Alumni Committee and chair of the Professional Development subcommittee. She received her bachelor's degree in psychology from the College at University of Chicago. She has been a certified trainer for over 17 years and has received numerous awards, including the DCFS African American Advisory Council's Outstanding Achievement Award for her work serving the children and families of the state of Illinois; and President Obama's Volunteer Service Award for helping to address the most pressing social needs in her community and in the nation.