

# VOTE NO ON HB 4385 PENALTY ENHANCEMENTS DON'T PROTECT WORKERS.

The preventable deaths of two DCFS employees have created a justified sense of urgency to address real problems around worker safety at DCFS, but doing something isn't the same as doing something that works.

The General Assembly should NOT pass laws that will create a false sense of security that action is being taken when those actions actually will not improve worker safety.

- Everyone wants DCFS workers to be safe, but HB 4385 offers only the illusion of safety, not real solutions.
- Despite DCFS' repeated claims that the proposed penalty enhancement will deter criminal acts against Department employees, research shows that increasing the severity of sentences does little to reduce crime, and can actually harm public safety in communities where the impact of incarceration is concentrated.
- Threats against caseworkers, social workers, and investigators employed by DCFS or a DCFS contractor/grantee are already subject to enhanced penalties (720 ILCS 5/12-9), yet threats against staff continue.
- While this bill will not improve safety, it has the potential to do harm. The biggest drivers of Illinois' prison population have been sentencing policies increasing the length of prison sentences.

There are many actions DCFS can and should take to better protect workers and DCFS needs to put in place safety measures that caseworkers and investigators have been asking for to protect their safety. The legislature should consider changes to:

- Mandate that DCFS implement and adhere to a Worker Environmental Risk Assessment Protocol, an objective pre-visit safety assessment/decision-making matrix meant to allow a worker and supervisor to assess their own risk and safety and make any precautionary decisions prior to initiating an investigation or home visit.
- Require workers to have access to an array of individuals trained and experienced in de-escalation and provision of clinical care who can accompany child welfare professionals in response to any specific and acute safety risks or needs identified.
- Require DCFS to take concrete, measurable actions to address workforce challenges – worker recruitment, retention, and turnover – such as those recommended by the statutorily established Child Welfare Workforce Task Force so that staffing levels can work safer in teams.
- Require DCFS to provide specific in-person enhanced training to mitigate risk to child welfare professionals and provide additional and effective tools for the Department, supervisor, and/or workers to ensure their safety.

**For safety alternatives provided by the ACLU of Illinois, Illinois Collaboration on Youth, Shriver Center, ChildLaw Policy Institute and NASW-Illinois Chapter goto: <https://bit.ly/36rVaHU>**

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