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Exploring the Role of Guardianship in Effective and Equitable Permanency

Report of Findings for the Survey of Permanency Professionals

CHILDREN AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTER
TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH - OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND CHILD WELL-BEING

Exploring the Role of Guardianship in Effective and Equitable Permanency

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Table of Contents

Project Background and Purpose	i
Executive Summary	iv
Chapter 1. Introduction and Methods for the Survey of Permanency Professionals.....	1
Chapter 2. Factors Affecting Permanency Planning	7
Chapter 3. Comparison of Guardianship and Adoption as Permanency Goals for Relative and Fictive Kin Placements	10
Chapter 4. Circumstances Supporting Guardianship	21
Chapter 5. Other Factors Related to Guardianship and Adoption	25
Chapter 6. Factors Contributing to Race Disparities in Permanency Goals and Outcomes	29
Chapter 7. Professional Development and Support	35
Chapter 8. Discussion	37
Appendix A. Survey Instrument	42
Appendix B. Promotional Material	55
Acknowledgments and Suggested Citation	56



Project Background and Purpose

This report presents findings from a survey of Illinois permanency caseworkers and supervisors. The survey captured permanency professionals' perspectives on the permanency process, adoption, and guardianship. The survey of permanency professionals was one component of a study of subsidized guardianship, an infrequently used but promising alternative for finding permanent homes for children in foster care. In the overall study, we gathered data from both permanency professionals and caregivers who have at least one Black child in substitute care with the goal of becoming that child's permanent caregiver. We collected data through interviews and surveys with each group.

We sought to understand the following:

1. How professionals have experienced different permanency options, with a particular focus on guardianship, and how they perceive these options.
2. How caregivers have experienced permanency planning and how they perceive different permanency options.
3. Professionals' and caregivers' perceptions of racial issues in permanency planning and outcomes.

Our aim is to inform efforts to use guardianship wisely to increase the number of children placed in loving, stable, permanent homes, especially Black children.

Funding

This research was supported in part by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC) as part of its Call to Action to Address Racism and Social Injustice Research Program. **The program aims to “enhance exceptional cross-disciplinary research strengths and expand collaborations to build cultures of research and scholarship that address structures of racism and injustice.”**¹ The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at UIUC launched the program to address the root causes of racial disparities with generative ideas, imaginative strategies, and productive collaborations. The research was also supported as part of a DCFS contract with UIUC that funds the Office of Translational Research in the School of Social Work.

Collaboration with DCFS

An advisory team of administrators and analysts from DCFS guided and supported the implementation of this research. The advisory team included staff from the DCFS Division of Strategy

1. Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (2022) [Call to Action to Address Racism & Social Injustice Research Program : Request for Proposals 2022-2023](#). University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

and Performance Execution, the Office of Research and Child Well-being, the Office of Racial Equity Practice, and the Permanency Division. The advisory team assisted the research team with research design, data collection, and preparation of reports and presentations. This support included providing DCFS administrative data to support recruitment for interviews and surveys, providing data to assist with determining the representativeness of the survey sample, offering feedback on the development of the surveys, and promoting survey completion with permanency staff.

The Context for the Study

When children are removed from their homes because of maltreatment, the goal of DCFS is to return them to a loving, safe, stable, and permanent home as soon as possible. Ideally, children are reunified with their birthparents, but when this cannot be done safely, DCFS seeks to place children and adolescents in other permanent homes. Unfortunately, the most recent statistics show that 47.3% of children and youth who entered substitute care from DCFS in 2018 were not placed in a permanent home within three years. Some never find permanent homes: in 2020, 598 Illinois youth aged out of substitute care without ever returning to a permanent home during their childhood.² The difficulty of placing children in permanent homes is worse for Black children in substitute care. While a majority of White children entering substitute care with DCFS in 2018 reached a permanent home within three years (57.2%), less than half of Black children did (46.7%).

Enhanced use of guardianship has the potential to increase the number of children reaching permanent homes and reduce racial disparity in permanency. With guardianship, a caregiver becomes the permanent caregiver of the child but does not adopt the child. Usually, the guardian receives a subsidy from DCFS to support the care of the child, which is referred to as subsidized guardianship. Typically, the guardian is kin to the child, such as their aunt/uncle, grandparent, or older sibling. Fictive kin (non-family members with a relationship to the child, such as a teacher, neighbor, etc.) may also take on this role and associated responsibilities. At the time that guardianship is awarded, the guardian has already been providing stable and loving foster care for the child. Guardianship in Black families is consistent with “the value placed on extended family and taking care of one’s own,” and draws on deeply rooted traditions of kinship networks in African cultures and in African American communities. With guardianship, birthparents’ rights do not need to be terminated, so typically, one or both of the birthparents will retain some parental rights, including the right to visitation. Birthparents can also, at a later time, petition the court to regain custody of their children. Many kin caregivers are committed and able to provide children permanent homes, but they do not want to terminate the parental rights of the birthparent, who is often a close relative such as their son, daughter, or sibling.

Part of the context of this study is a longstanding debate about the value of adoption versus guardianship. This context is described in detail in our [Policy Context and Lessons Learned](#) report. Some experts have claimed that adoption represents a greater commitment and is more stable,³ and a preference for adoption has been codified in both Federal and Illinois law,⁴ as well as the guidelines of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.⁵ But recent research finds no difference in stability between adoption and guardianship.⁶ Moreover,

2. This is the most recent statistic available from the federal Children’s Bureau. Children’s Bureau (2022). [Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data](#).

3. Murray, K. J., Bartlett, J. D., & Lent, M. C. (2021). The Experience of Children and Families Involved with the Child Welfare System. *Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Across the Lifespan: A project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan* (NPEIV), 1441-1462. Takas, M. (1993). Permanent care options involving kin in child welfare cases. *Current Issues in Pediatric Law*, National Association of Counsel for Children, 91–105.

4. Testa, M. (2022) [Disrupting the foster care to termination of parental rights pipeline: Making a case for kinship guardianship as the next best alternative for children who can’t be reunified with their parents](#). *Family Integrity & Justice Quarterly*, 1(1), 74-82.

5. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (2000). [Adoption and Permanency Guidelines](#). Reno, NV.

6. Rolock, N., & White, K. R. (2016). Post-permanency discontinuity: A longitudinal examination of outcomes for foster youth after adoption or guardianship. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 70, 419-427.

some experts argue that the preference for adoption can obstruct stable guardianships with kin caregivers who can provide children with permanent homes within their extended family.⁷

Description of the Overall Study

The overall study gathered data from both professionals and caregivers, using both semi-structured interviews and online surveys for each. This yielded four components of the study. We have produced a research report for each component. Below we list the four components of the study,

1. Interviews with 40 Illinois professionals working on permanency cases (including 13 permanency supervisors, 11 permanency caseworkers, 6 DCFS attorneys, 5 guardians *ad litem*, and 5 judges).
2. A survey of Illinois permanency caseworkers and supervisors, with 267 respondents (including 158 caseworkers, 68 supervisors, and 41 other staff; 52% DCFS staff and 48% private agency staff).
3. Interviews with 11 kin and fictive kin caregivers caring for Black children.
4. A survey of 137 caregivers caring for at least one Black child with an adoption or guardianship goal.

In addition, we have written two research briefs presenting key findings from professionals and caregivers, respectively, and a report on the policy context of the study and the lessons learned across all four components. The research briefs and Policy Context and Lessons Learned report also present our recommendations for enhancing the use of subsidized guardianship in Illinois. All products associated with this research project are available on our [subsidized guardianship webpage](#). This includes reports on each component of the study and associated research briefs.



7. Creamer, K. & Lee, A. (2022). [Reimagining permanency: The struggle for racial equity and lifelong connections](#), *Family Integrity & Justice Quarterly*, 1(1), 62-71. Gupta-Kagan, J. (2015). The new permanency. *UC Davis Journal of Juvenile Law & Policy*, 19, 1. Milner, J. & Kelly, D. (2022). [The need to replace harm with support starts with The Adoption and Safe Families Act](#). *Family Integrity & Justice Quarterly*, 1(1), 6-7. Sankaran, V.S. (2022). [Ending the unnecessary pain inflicted by Federal child welfare policy](#), *Family Integrity & Justice Quarterly*, 1(1), 26-33.



Executive Summary

The Illinois Permanency Professionals Survey was designed to capture permanency professionals' perspectives on the permanency process, adoption, and guardianship. This includes questions on 1) factors affecting the permanency process, 2) the comparison of adoption and guardianship, 3) circumstances supporting guardianship, 4) race disparities in the permanency process, and 5) professional development and supports. The survey also asked questions about their observations about racial biases and inequities in the permanency process. The survey was sent to permanency professionals throughout the state of Illinois. This summary highlights select findings from the survey and five areas where focused change may lead to improved and more equitable outcomes for children in care. See our [subsidized guardianship webpage](#) for other data reports.

Valuing Safe, Permanent Families, that Meet the Needs of the Child

Permanency professionals place the highest value on the permanency goal that is associated with the safest and most stable home for that child. Under most circumstances, most permanency professionals did not indicate a preference for adoption or guardianship, stating that there is no difference or it depends on the case. This suggests that permanency professionals ground their recommendations for a case based on the unique circumstances and needs of the child. There were five factors that more than half of permanency staff felt were extremely important in permanency planning. These were a) avoiding disruption, b) keeping the child with their current caregiver, c) avoiding the child being returned to unsafe parents, d) maintaining sibling relationships, and e) support for the child as an adult (e.g., 18+). Additionally, permanency staff emphasized the importance of the child's or adolescent's wishes when examining different permanency options. Other key factors in the decision-making process included maintaining the child's relationship to loving parents and preserving the kin caregiver's relationships with the child's parents.

Comparing Adoption and Guardianship

Under most circumstances, most of the permanency professionals indicated that there is no difference or it depends on the case when comparing adoption and guardianship. Where there was a preference, it mostly favored adoption. Specifically, among the 34 case circumstances presented to permanency professionals, adoption was favored over guardianship in 20 of the case circumstances, even when the most common response was no difference or it depends on the case. Nearly two-thirds of professionals indicated that DCFS will support whatever permanency goal is in the best interest of the child. However, nearly half indicated that DCFS prefers adoption over guardianship whenever possible. The circumstances where permanency professionals prefer adoption and where they prefer guardianship were distinct.

Promoting the Effective Use of Guardianship

Effective communication is key to promoting the effective use of guardianship. This starts with effective communication and professional development on the use of guardianship for permanency professionals. About two-thirds of permanency professionals indicated that training on guardianship would be useful. Respondents suggested that training include guidance on the decision-making process around permanency, the timing and information permanency professionals should provide caregivers, and the steps involved in reaching permanency for children with guardianship goals. Additionally, this training should encourage them to have conversations with kin and fictive kin caregivers about the possibility of guardianship early in the case. About half of the permanency professionals indicated that they wait to begin discussions about guardianship with the caregiver until after the reunification goal has been deemed not in the child's best interest.

Earlier conversations about guardianship provide a timely opportunity to encourage kin and fictive kin to engage earlier with the licensing process, which might help reduce delays in achieving guardianship. This is critical because over a third of permanency staff indicated that licensing significantly delays attaining guardianship. This likely inequitably impacts Black families, as 20% of permanency staff indicated that licensing requirements tend to disadvantage Black families more than White families. The survey results indicate that many permanency professionals did not perceive licensing as a fair and reasonable standard for all families. The concerns permanency staff expressed about delays related to licensing and about the potential inequity of the licensing requirement suggest the need for close examination of licensing processes and practices for guardianship. This examination should include a review of the licensing waiver process and the effects of licensing on permanency outcomes for older youth.

Racial Disparities

There are racial disparities in the permanency process that impact Black children and their families⁸. Consistently, Black professionals identified disparities more frequently than White professionals and endorsed the need for a higher level of support to address these. Their responses to the survey items highlighted racial disparities in permanency planning and the use of adoption and guardianship and underscore the need to address racial disparities.

Racial Disparities in Permanency Planning

Permanency staff were asked about perceived differences in permanency planning, use of adoption and guardianship, child welfare system supports, between Black and White families. Over half of Non-Black respondents perceived no differences in permanency planning with Black children and families compared to White children and families, but only about a fifth of Black professionals felt this way. Nearly half of Black professionals thought that children are more likely to be reunified in White families than in comparable Black families, and 40% of them felt that White children were reunified more quickly, compared to much smaller percentages of Non-Black professionals who had these perceptions. Nearly a third of Black professionals thought that the courts give Black birthparents less time than White birthparents before moving to terminate parental rights, compared to 8.5% of Non-Black professionals.

Racial Disparities in the Use of Adoption and Guardianship

Non-Black permanency staff were more than 13 times more likely than Black permanency staff to indicate that

8. See, e.g., Osterling, K. L., Lee, P. A., & Hines, A. H. (2012). The influence of family reunification services on racial/ethnic disparities in permanency outcomes for children in the child welfare system. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 6(3), 330-354.

there is no difference in the use of adoption and guardianship for Black and White families. Black caseworkers were 2.6 times to feel Black families are more likely to experience challenges advocating for their child(ren) and family (Black permanency staff = 63%, Non-Black permanency staff = 24%), 2.6 times to feel that many Black families have more difficulty meeting the requirements for guardianship subsidies (Black permanency staff = 51%, Non-Black permanency staff = 20%), and 2.6 times more likely to feel that Black families are more likely to favor guardianship over adoption (Black permanency staff = 49%, Non-Black permanency staff = 19%).

Racial Disparities in Supports Available for Black Children and Families

Half of Non-Black professionals felt that there was no difference in support for White and Black families, as compared to only 14% of Black professionals who indicated no difference. The most common difference in supports between White and Black families identified by permanency professionals were a) not enough services are available in communities or neighborhoods with large proportions of Black families (47%), b) Black professionals are underrepresented in some professional roles dealing with child permanency (31%), c) not enough resources are provided to support Black caregiving families (26%), and d) not enough resources are provided for Black birthparents (25%). There was no significant difference between Black and Non-Black permanency staff on these items. In text responses they wrote, respondents mentioned a variety of specific supports they felt were needed. In reference to the underrepresentation of Black professionals, responses included a need for more Black supervisors, Black providers (mental health, substance abuse, LGBTQIA supports), Black administrators, and Black legal professionals (DCFS attorneys, guardians *ad litem*, public defenders, and judges). Respondents also shared other factors they perceive as impacting racial disparities in permanency, including a) the impacts of systemic racism and implicit biases on Black families, b) Black families are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system, and c) licensing requirements disproportionately affect Black families due to housing concerns (e.g., limited bedroom space) and the presence of multi-generational households.

Support to Address Racial Disparities

Permanency staff provided information about what supports they have received regarding racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality. Almost three quarters (74%) had received relevant training from their agency and 32% had received training from outside their agency. Forty-four percent indicated that they receive support from colleagues in their agency, and 23% indicated that they had received support from a colleague outside their agency. Thirty-five professionals provided comments on the resources that they would find helpful. They suggested trainings on 1) raising transracial children (for foster parents) 2) racial issues across the state (highlighting the need to look beyond Cook County), and 3) cultural competency and implicit bias training. Respondents suggested that these trainings include family voices and experiences. Additional trauma-informed services and supports for families were highlighted as a need. Respondents also noted the negative impacts of long waiting lists and gaps in services.

This analysis suggests that racial inequities affect Black families and children during the permanency process, and that it is critical that we elevate the voices of Black permanency staff, who, in this study, recognized and identified racial inequities. The responses of Black permanency staff suggest that these inequities are prevalent despite high engagement among permanency professionals in professional development on racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality. While additional training is likely beneficial, this analysis suggests that a systematic review of practices and policies that contribute to these inequities is needed and that more systemic changes are necessary to achieve more racially equitable permanency outcomes.





Chapter 1

Introduction and Methods for the Survey of Permanency Professionals

The Illinois permanency staff survey gathers information regarding the values, principles, and practices these stakeholders apply to planning and decision-making regarding permanency for children in substitute care. It also explores whether permanency staff perceive differences in practice for Black children in care. Within the broader framework of the study, the survey of permanency casework and supervisor staff was designed to measure their responses on the questions listed below.

1. What is the relative value of adoption and guardianship for different case goals and circumstances?
2. What factors are the most important in determining a permanent home for children involved with the child welfare system?
3. How important in deciding on permanency plans are the wishes of the different parties (e.g., birthparents, kin caregivers, the adolescent or child)?
4. Under what circumstances is guardianship a better permanency option than adoption?
5. What is the best timing for discussing guardianship with caregivers?
6. How do licensing requirements affect the use of guardianship?
7. How familiar are they with recent changes in the legislation (Illinois Public Act 10-0193, 2021) governing guardianship, and what impact do they think these changes will have?
8. What are their perceptions of DCFS and judicial preferences regarding adoption and guardianship?
9. What factors do they consider most important in contributing to racial disparities in permanency outcomes, particularly for Black families compared to White families? To what extent are there differences in opinion between Black and White permanency staff on these factors?
10. How do permanency planning and level of supportive resources differ between Black families and White families?

11. To what extent do Black and White permanency staff perceptions differ regarding racial differences in permanency planning and support for Black families versus White families?
12. How helpful would training be to support reducing race disparities in permanency outcomes?

Survey Development, Administration, and Analysis

The development of the survey was informed by the interview components of the project. By March 2022, the research team had completed 51 interviews with permanency supervisors and caseworkers, caregivers, judges, DCFS attorneys, and guardians *ad litem* (see [subsidized guardianship webpage](#)). All research team members contributed to the coding and analysis of interview transcripts and used the knowledge they gained to design the permanency staff survey. The DCFS Advisory Team assisted by reviewing the draft instrument and providing feedback. We received approval for this study from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. See Appendix A for the Survey instrument.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was administered throughout the month of June 2022. Survey data were collected through an online survey platform, Qualtrics. The DCFS Permanency Division and the Office of Race Equity Practice promoted the survey with permanency staff via DNET (an online and email bulletin board), reminders at Division meetings, and direct emails. Throughout June, several reminders were issued. The DCFS Permanency Division leaders sent weekly email reminders to encourage completion. See Appendix B for a copy of the summary flyer and DNET announcement distributed to promote the completion of the survey by all permanency staff. Permanency staff completed the survey anonymously. The permanency staff survey closed on June 30, 2022.

The data was captured in Qualtrics and downloaded with an original unaltered copy retained for data preservation. Most of the report is based on descriptive statistics of the survey responses. Univariate frequencies were presented in frequency tables and bivariate frequencies in crosstabs. The mean and median were calculated as appropriate to measure central tendency. Null hypothesis significance testing was conducted using the chi-square goodness of fit test, the Pearson chi-square test of independence, and the Fisher Exact Test. This analysis utilizes both SPSS statistical software and Microsoft Excel. Graphs were developed utilizing Microsoft Excel, with some graphs edited with digital design software to provide a more transparent presentation.

Survey Population and Response Rate

The population consisted of permanency caseworkers and supervisors working in Illinois in private child welfare agencies or DCFS at the time of the survey. DCFS' Division of Strategy and Performance Execution provided administrative data about the population of caseworkers and supervisors in the state. We used this data to assess the sample's representativeness compared with the population of permanency caseworkers and supervisors in the state.

A total of 378 staff from across Illinois participated in the survey. We removed 111 participants from the sample before analysis for two reasons. We removed 80 respondents who did not answer any of the survey questions on adoption and guardianship. Most of these respondents only answered the first few questions related to their background before ending their participation. We also removed 31 respondents who worked outside of permanency work; the majority worked in roles related to investigations or support of intact families (i.e., families receiving DCFS services whose children remain in the home and are not under court supervision). While the team valued their perspectives, the decision was made to limit analysis to those whose roles directly supported permanency. After the 111 participants were removed from the sample, we were left with 267 responses for analysis.

The sample represented 14% of the population of 1,876 Illinois permanency caseworkers and supervisors as of May 12, 2022. The response rate for DCFS permanency staff, 27% (139 of 516), was higher than the rate for those employed by a private child welfare agency, 9% (127 of 1,360). Table 1 shows the counts and percentages of the sample and population of permanency staff as of May 12, 2022, by agency affiliation and region. As is anticipated with surveys, some participants started but did not complete the survey, and some participants elected not to answer every question. The number of individuals responding to any question is indicated in the findings described below.

An analysis of the sample by region and agency affiliation shows that the sample did not reflect the regional distribution of permanency staff in the state. Table 2 shows the ratios of permanency staff by agency affiliation and region. It also presents a series of chi-squared goodness of fit tests by region and overall. DCFS permanency workers were overrepresented in the sample, nearly twice the anticipated rate (1.9 times). DCFS permanency workers were overrepresented in the Northern region (3.4 times the anticipated rate), Southern region (2.0 times the anticipated rate), and Central region (1.9 times the anticipated rate). Permanency staff from private agencies were underrepresented in the sample (0.7 times the anticipated rate). For Cook County, representation from private agencies was less than half of the anticipated rate (0.4 times the anticipated rate).

Table 1
Comparison of Survey Sample to Population by Region and Agency Type

DCFS Region	The population of permanency caseworkers and supervisors as of May 12, 2022			Permanency caseworkers and supervisors in sample			x ² DCFS vs. POS	p
	DCFS	Private Agency	Total	DCFS	Private Agency	Total		
Central	178 29.9%	417 70.1%	595 100%	48 48.5%	51 51.5%	99 100%	15.50	<.001
Cook	138 22.5%	476 77.5%	614 100%	17 39.5%	26 60.5%	43 100%	-	NS
Northern	87 26.3%	244 73.7%	331 100%	42 63.6%	24 36.4%	66 100%	49.52	<.001
Southern	113 33.6%	223 66.4%	336 100%	32 58.2%	23 41.8%	55 100%	16.19	<.001
Multiple regions	-	-	-	0 0%	3 100%	3 100%	-	NS
Total	516 27.5%	1,360 72.5%	1,876 100%	139 52.3%	127 47.7%	266 100%	82.13	<.001

Table 2
Representativeness of the Sample by Agency Type and Region

DCFS region	DCFS	Private Agency
Central	1.90	0.86
Cook	0.87	0.39
Northern	3.40	0.69
Southern	2.00	0.73
Multiple regions	-	-
Total	1.90	0.66

Note: Overrepresented subgroups (1.2+) are highlighted in yellow. Accurately represented subgroups (0.8-1.19) are highlighted in green. Underrepresented subgroups (0.79 and under) are highlighted in blue with red text. “-” indicates a subgroup not in the population (zero).



Description of Survey Respondents

The survey included demographic questions and questions about the permanency staff’s role, professional experience, and caseload. Table 3 provides a cross-tabulation of the number and percentage of respondents

by gender, age, race, and ethnicity. As is anticipated based on the field, the majority of the 200 respondents for whom we have demographic data were White women (67%), with the second largest subgroup being Black women (15%). White men were 8% of the sample, and Black men were 3%. We did not have any American Indian/Alaska Natives or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander staff participate in the survey. The largest non-White subgroup was the 35 (17.5%) Black permanency staff. Most of the Black respondents ($n = 35$) work in the Northern region (11) and Cook County (15). Just four and five of the black respondents worked in the Central and Southern regions respectively. About 7.0% ($n = 200$) of the sample identified as Hispanic, Latina, Latino, Latinx, or Latine. The mean age for the sample is 41.4 years ($n = 173$, $SD = 11.1$ years), and the largest age group (34%) was between 30 – 39 years of age. The median age was 39 years ($n = 173$), with a wide range, 23 – 70 years old.

Table 3
Respondents' Gender and Age by Race and Latinx Status

	Race ¹							Latinx Status			
	Asian	Black or African American	White or Caucasian	Multiple Races	Other	Unknown	Total	Latinx	Not Latinx	Unknown	Total
Gender											
Man	2 1.0%	5 2.5%	15 7.5%	1 0.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	23 11.5%	1 0.5%	22 11.0%	0 0.0%	23 11.6%
Non-binary	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.5%	0 0.0%	1 0.5%	0 0.0%	1 0.5%
Woman	1 0.5%	30 15.0%	134 67.0%	5 2.5%	1 0.5%	3 1.5%	174 87.0%	13 6.5%	160 80.0%	0 0.0%	174 86.9%
Prefer to self-identify	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 1.0%	0 0.0%	2 1.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.5%	1 0.5%	2 1.0%
Total	3 1.5%	35 17.5%	150 75.0%	6 3.0%	3 1.5%	3 1.5%	200 100%	14 7.0%	184 92.0%	2 1.0%	200 100%
Age											
20-29	1 0.6%	4 2.3%	21 12.1%	1 0.6%	1 0.6%	0 0.0%	28 16.2%	4 2.3%	24 13.9%	0 0.0%	28 16.2%
30-39	0 0.0%	3 1.7%	52 30.1%	2 1.2%	0 0.0%	1 0.6%	58 33.5%	2 1.2%	56 32.4%	0 0.0%	58 33.5%
40-49	1 0.6%	9 5.2%	29 16.8%	0 0.0%	1 0.6%	0 0.0%	40 23.1%	3 1.7%	36 20.8%	1 0.6%	40 23.1%
50-59	1 1.6%	10 5.8%	25 14.5%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	36 20.8%	0 0.0%	36 20.8%	0 0.0%	36 20.8%
Over 60	0 0.0%	3 1.7%	7 4.0%	1 0.6%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	11 6.4%	2 1.2%	9 5.2%	0 0.0%	11 6.4%
Total	3 1.7%	29 16.8%	134 77.5%	4 2.3%	2 1.2%	1 0.6%	173 100%	11 6.4%	161 93.1%	1 0.6%	173 100%

1. There were no respondents who selected the racial choice options of American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

Respondents' Professional Background

The respondents shared information about their specific role in permanency work, how long they have been in their current role, and their experience working in the child welfare field. Their responses are summarized in Table 4 and Figure 1. The majority (59%) were permanency caseworkers, and a quarter (26%) were supervisors of permanency casework. A few respondents indicated that they wrote adoption and guardianship subsidies; in other words, they developed and documented the details of the subsidy agreement for caregivers receiving

adoption and guardianship subsidies (3%). Over one-tenth of respondents had multiple roles; most (20 out of 28) did permanency casework and wrote subsidies.

Nearly half (50%) of the respondents were relatively new to their current position, having held it for two years or fewer (Figure 1). However, almost half of the sample (47%) had more than ten years of experience working in the child welfare field, and only 8% of the sample had less than two years of experience in child welfare.

Table 4
Respondents' Role in Permanency Planning by Race (n = 267)

Role/Race ¹	Asian	Black or African American	White or Caucasian	Multiple Races	Other	Unknown	n	%
Permanency caseworker	0	17	86	6	3	46	158	59.2
Supervising permanency caseworkers	2	13	35	0	0	18	68	25.5
Writing subsidies	0	1	6	0	0	1	8	3.0
Multiple roles	1	4	19	0	0	4	28	10.5
Other types of Work ²	0	0	4	0	0	1	5	1.9
Total	3	35	150	6	3	70	267	100

1. There were no respondents who selected the racial choice options of American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

2. Other types of work include post-adoption and guardianship services, family development specialists, and licensing specialists.

Figure 1
Length of Time in Current Position and Working in Child Welfare (Count)



Respondents' Caseload by Goal

Respondents shared information about the types of cases they are working on and have worked on throughout their careers. Table 5 provides descriptive statistics for the number of cases by permanency goal they are currently working on and the number for each goal they have worked on throughout their career. In addition to cases in which they have done casework, this includes cases they have supervised, written subsidies for, or done other work. In each goal category, one or two individuals reported numbers of cases substantially higher than the mean. For example, one respondent reported 1,583 current cases focusing on adoption, which is 13 standard deviations from the mean of 18.9 cases. These outliers likely reflect individuals with either specialized roles (e.g., writing subsidies) or supervisors overseeing large teams of permanency caseworkers. They are substantially different from other respondents. These outliers inflate the mean. For this reason, in Table 5, the median is more reflective of the number of cases for most respondents. The medians reveal that the most common permanency goals are reunification and continued substitute care, and adoption is a more prevalent goal than subsidized guardianship and unsubsidized guardianship combined.

Table 5
Respondents' Current and Career Caseload by Permanency Goal

Permanency Goal	Current Cases			Cases Over Career ¹		
	Range	Median	<i>n</i>	Range	Median	<i>n</i>
Adoption	1 - 1,583	5	175	1 - 2,400	20	166
Guardianship (with subsidy)	1 - 1,583	2	117	1 - 1,000	5.5	132
Guardianship (without subsidy)	1 - 37	1	28	1 - 750	2	50
Independence	1 - 35	3	160	1 - 1,000	10	155
Reunification	1 - 300	10	201	1 - 3,000	30	183
Continued substitute care	1 - 450	5	122	1 - 22,000	20	119
Other	1 - 200	2	26	1 - 200	3	26

1. This table includes respondents who indicated they had at least one case in the category (i.e., zeros were treated as null and excluded from analysis).





Chapter 2

Factors Affecting Permanency Planning

Permanency staff were asked to rate different factors they might consider in permanency planning. They rated importance using a 5-point Likert-type rating (*not at all important, slightly important, somewhat important, moderately important, extremely important*). They also had the option of choosing a) *I prefer not to answer* or b) *it depends on the case*. Figure 2 illustrates the respondents' rating by topic area and item. There were five items that 60% or more of the respondents selected as *extremely important*. These items are:

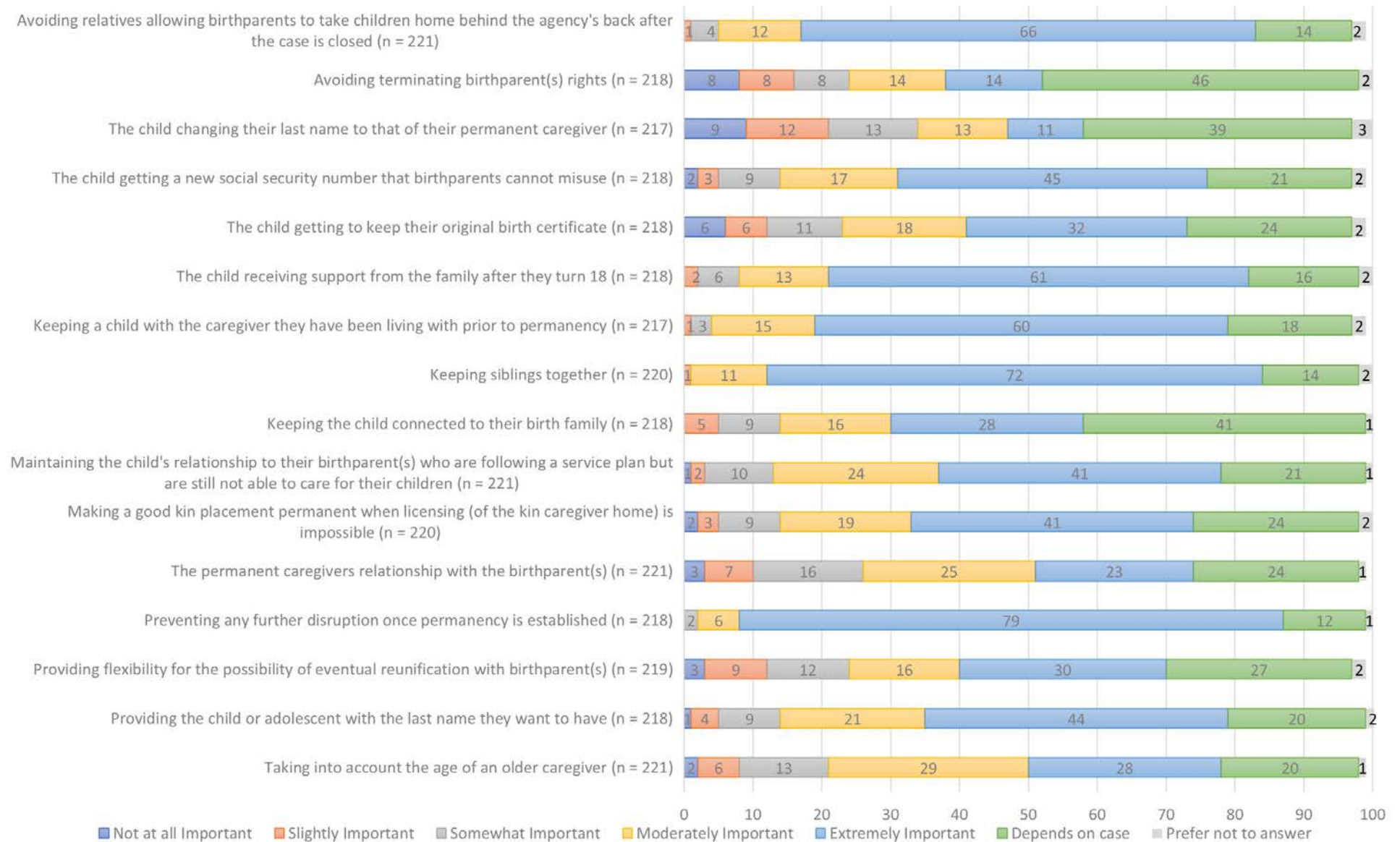
- o Preventing any further disruption once permanency is established (extremely important = 79%, $n = 218$),
- o Keeping siblings together (extremely important = 72%, $n = 220$),
- o Avoiding relatives allowing birthparents to take children home behind the agency's back after the case is closed (extremely important = 66%, $n = 221$),
- o The child receiving support from the family after they turn 18 (extremely important = 61%, $n = 218$),
- o Keeping a child with the caregiver they have been living with prior to permanency (extremely important = 60%, $n = 217$).

There were three items where the most frequent answer was *it depends on the case*. These items are:

- o Avoiding terminating birthparent(s) rights (it depends on the case = 46%, $n = 218$),
- o Keeping the child connected to their birth family (it depends on the case = 41%, $n = 218$),
- o The child changing their last name to that of their permanent caregiver (it depends on the case = 39%, $n = 217$).

Figure 2

Importance of Different Factors When Planning for a Kin Caregiver to Adopt or Become a Guardian Percentage of Responses



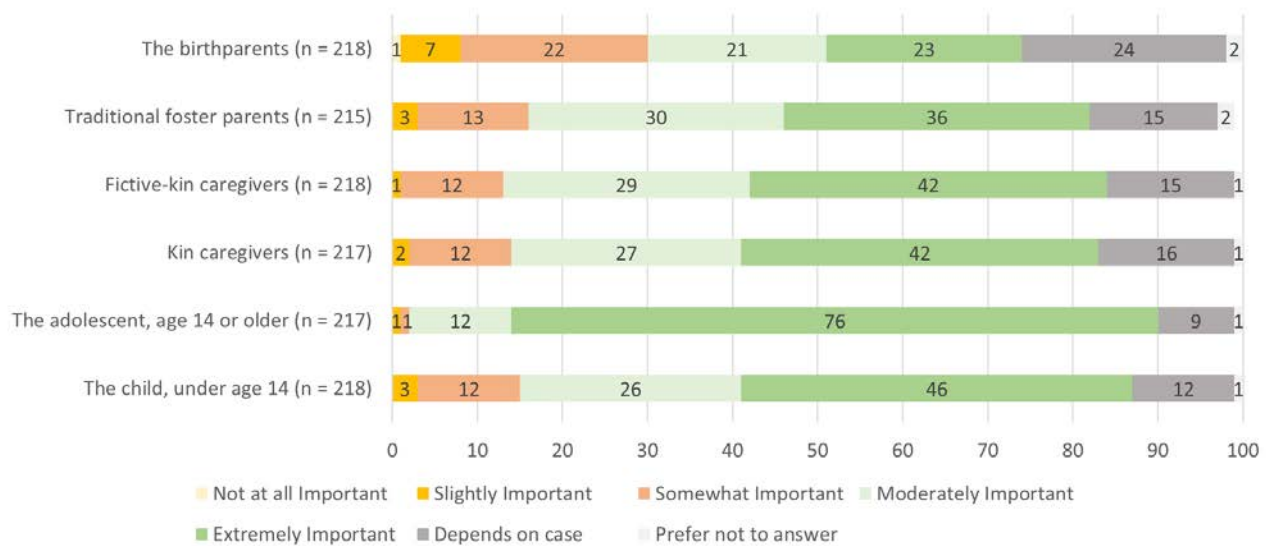
Note. The percentage total on the graph is plus or minus one due to rounding errors (e.g., 99 – 101).

Valuing Stakeholders' Wishes in Permanency Planning

Respondents rated the importance of the wishes of six different stakeholders (birthparents, traditional foster parents, fictive-kin caregivers, kin caregivers, adolescents aged 14 or older, and children under age of 14) when deciding on a permanency plan for a child or adolescent (Figure 3). They rated importance using a 5-point Likert-type rating (*not at all important, slightly important, somewhat important, moderately important, extremely important*). They also had the option of choosing a) *I prefer not to answer* or b) *it depends on the case*. For all stakeholders except birthparents, the most common answer was *extremely important*. For birthparents, the percentage of respondents who said *it depends on the case* (24%) was slightly higher than those who responded *extremely important* (23%). More than three-quarters (76%) said that the wishes of adolescents aged 14 and older are *extremely important*. For the remaining five stakeholders, the percentage that chose *extremely important* ranged from 23% (birthparents) to 46% (children under age 14).

Figure 3

Importance of Different Parties' Wishes When Deciding on a Permanency Plan for a Child or Youth - Percentage of Responses



Note. The percentage total on the graph is plus or minus one due to rounding errors (e.g., 99 – 101).





Chapter 3

Comparison of Guardianship and Adoption as Permanency Goals for Relative and Fictive Kin Placements

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship in relation to different case circumstances and goals. Respondents rated each circumstance or goal using a 5-point scale (*adoption is much better, adoption is somewhat better, no difference, guardianship is somewhat better, and guardianship is much better*). They also had the option of choosing a) *it depends on the case* or b) *I prefer not to answer*. For each item, permanency staff were asked to consider cases in which a relative or close friend (fictive kin) is taking care of the child or children and would become a permanent caregiver. The items were arranged in the following categories: a) placement stability, b) specific case circumstances, c) goals for children under the age of 14, d) goals for adolescents aged 14 and older, e) family dynamics, f) birthparent circumstances, and g) factors affecting placement. Figures 4 through 10 illustrate the respondents' ratings.

Time to Permanency and Placement Stability ($n = 267$)

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship in relation to time to permanency and to three items related to placement stability (Figure 4). The four items were 1) length of time to permanency, 2) likelihood of placement lasting through age 18 without disruption, 3) likelihood that caregiver would try to "give children back" to DCFS, and 4) supporting children after they turn 18. Across all four items, the largest percentages either felt that it depends on the case or that there is no difference between adoption and guardianship (49% to 57%). Those respondents who expressed a preference favored adoption. The proportions who felt that adoption was much better or better ranged from 25% to more than 40%, while the percentages favoring guardianship were consistently 15% or less. Adoption was most notably favored in response to item 2, *likelihood of placement lasting through age 18 without disruption*, with 40% indicating adoption is better and only 9% indicating a preference for guardianship.

Specific Case Circumstances (n = 267)

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship in relation to three specific case circumstances raised in interviews with permanency staff (Figure 5). These case circumstances include 1) achieving permanency when caregivers are unwilling or unable to be licensed, 2) the birthparents have a cognitive or intellectual disability that precludes their ability to safely care for their child, and 3) when children have complex behavioral and/or medical needs that the birthparent(s) are not equipped to handle. Consistently across the three items, 40% to 46% either chose *it depends on the case* or *no difference* between adoption and guardianship. Across the three items, 27% to 39% of respondents selected *adoption is somewhat better* or *much better* than guardianship, whereas only 12% to 22% selected *guardianship is somewhat better* or *much better*. Adoption was most notably favored in response to item 2, *the birthparents have a cognitive or intellectual disability that precludes their ability to safely care for their child*, with 39% indicating that adoption is better and 12% indicating a preference for guardianship in this circumstance.

Permanency Goals for Children Under the Age of 14 (n = 267)

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship in relation to outcomes for children under the age of 14 (Figure 6). These outcomes included 1) child well-being; 2) the child's sense of being part of a family; 3) maintaining the child's relationship with their birthparents; 4) protecting the child from abusive parents; and 5) providing assurance to the child of having a permanent home. The percentage who chose *it depends on the case* or *no difference* ranged from 32% to 57% of responses. On items 1, 2, 4, and 5, larger percentages chose adoption is somewhat or much better than guardianship (33%, 60%, 53%, and 60%, respectively). Where 4%, 4%, 2%, and 3%, respectively, chose guardianship is somewhat or much better than adoption for these items. The exception to this trend was item 3, *maintaining the child's relationship with their birthparents*. For this item, 37% indicated guardianship was either much better or somewhat better, whereas 9% indicated that adoption was much better or somewhat better than guardianship.

Permanency Goals for Adolescents Aged 14 and Older (n = 267)

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship in relation to outcomes for adolescents aged 14 and older (Figure 7). These outcomes included 1) adolescent well-being; 2) adolescent's sense of being part of a family; 3) maintaining the adolescent's relationship with their birthparents; 4) persuading an adolescent to accept a permanency plan involving a permanent caregiver rather than hold out for independent living; 5) protecting the adolescent from abusive parents; and 6) providing assurance to the adolescent of having a permanent home. The percentage who saw no difference between adoption and guardianship or chose *it depends on the case* ranged from 38% to 65%, with the 65% being for item 1, *adolescent well-being (e.g., physical health, behavioral health, educational progress)*. When considering permanency goals for adolescents aged 14 and older, preferences mirrored those for younger children. Items 1, 2, 5, and 6 notably favored adoption, with 21%, 43%, 40%, and 44%, respectively, choosing adoption is somewhat or much better than guardianship. In contrast, 6%, 7%, 4%, and 9%, respectively, chose guardianship is somewhat or much better than adoption on these items. As with younger children, permanency staff favored guardianship (40% somewhat or much better) over adoption (6% somewhat or much better) for item 3, *maintaining the child's relationship with their birthparents*. This category included an item not included for younger children, item 4, *persuading an adolescent to accept a permanency plan involving a permanent caregiver rather than hold out for independent living*. Regarding this item, permanency staff indicated a preference for guardianship (26% somewhat or much better) over adoption (17% somewhat or much better).

Family Dynamics (n = 267)

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship in relation to different family dynamics (Figure 8). The items on family dynamics included 1) avoiding relatives allowing birthparents to take children home behind the agency's back after the case is closed; 2) ensuring that the permanent caregiver is the one taking care of the child day-to-day; 3) responding to families that had long-standing informal kin caregiving before DCFS became involved; and 4) supporting permanent caregivers' relationship with birthparents. The percentage indicating *it depends on the case* or *no difference* ranged from 40% to 49%. Respondents were split on their valuation of adoption and guardianship on these items. Adoption was favored (42% somewhat better or much better) over guardianship (6% somewhat better or much better) for item 1, *avoiding relatives allowing birthparents to take children home behind the agency's back after the case is closed*. Similarly, more

respondents indicated that adoption was somewhat or much better (38%) than guardianship (3%) for item 2, *ensuring that the permanent caregiver is the one taking care of the child day-to-day*. In contrast, guardianship was slightly favored (25% somewhat or much better) over adoption (18% somewhat or much better) for item 3, *responding to families that had long-standing informal kin caregiver before DCFS became involved*. Likewise, more respondents indicated that guardianship was somewhat or much better (31%) than adoption (8%) for item 4, *supporting permanent caregivers' relationship with birthparents*.

Birthparent Circumstances (n = 267)

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship in relation to circumstances involving the birthparent. (Figure 9). These circumstances include 1) the birthparent(s) have done everything they needed to, but the child does not want to return home; 2) the birthparent is incarcerated; 3) the birthparent is taking steps to overcome an alcohol or drug problem, but needs more time; 4) birthparent(s) are following a service plan, but are not able to care for their children at this time; 5) enabling birthparents' visitation with their child; 6) getting birthparents to accept a permanency plan; and 7) in cases where terminating birthparent(s)' rights would be difficult. The percentage who chose *it depends on the case* or *no difference* between adoption and guardianship ranged from 29% to 45%. Guardianship was favored for six of these seven items among those with a preference. Across these six items, 34% to 43% of respondents selected *guardianship is somewhat better* or *much better*, whereas only 5% to 10% selected *adoption as somewhat better* or *much better*. In contrast, on item 2, 22% reported that adoption was *somewhat* or *much better* when a birthparent is incarcerated, compared to 17% who selected guardianship.

Additional Factors Related to Placement (n = 267)

Permanency staff were asked to rate the relative value of adoption and guardianship on five items related to the quality of placements (Figure 10). These items included 1) helping kin caregivers feel comfortable with the permanency decision, 2) helping permanent caregivers understand their responsibility to the child, 3) maintaining contact with siblings, 4) making a good kin placement permanent when licensing is impossible, and 5) taking into account the age and/or health of an older caregiver. The majority of respondents indicated that there was *no difference* between adoption and guardianship or that *it depends on the case* (45% to 60%) in response to these items. Adoption (28% somewhat better or much better) was favored over guardianship (5% somewhat better or much better) for item 2, *helping permanent caregivers understand their responsibility to the child*. Likewise, respondents indicated that guardianship was somewhat or much better (17% and 21%) as compared to adoption (7% and 7%, respectively) for item 3, *maintaining contact among siblings*, and item 5, *taking into account the age and/or health of an older caregiver*. Item 4, *making a good kin placement permanent when licensing (of the kin caregiver home) is impossible*, was equally favored for guardianship (19%) and adoption (19%).



Figure 4

Permanency Staff Perspectives on Adoption and Guardianship for Time to Permanency and Placement Stability (n = 267)

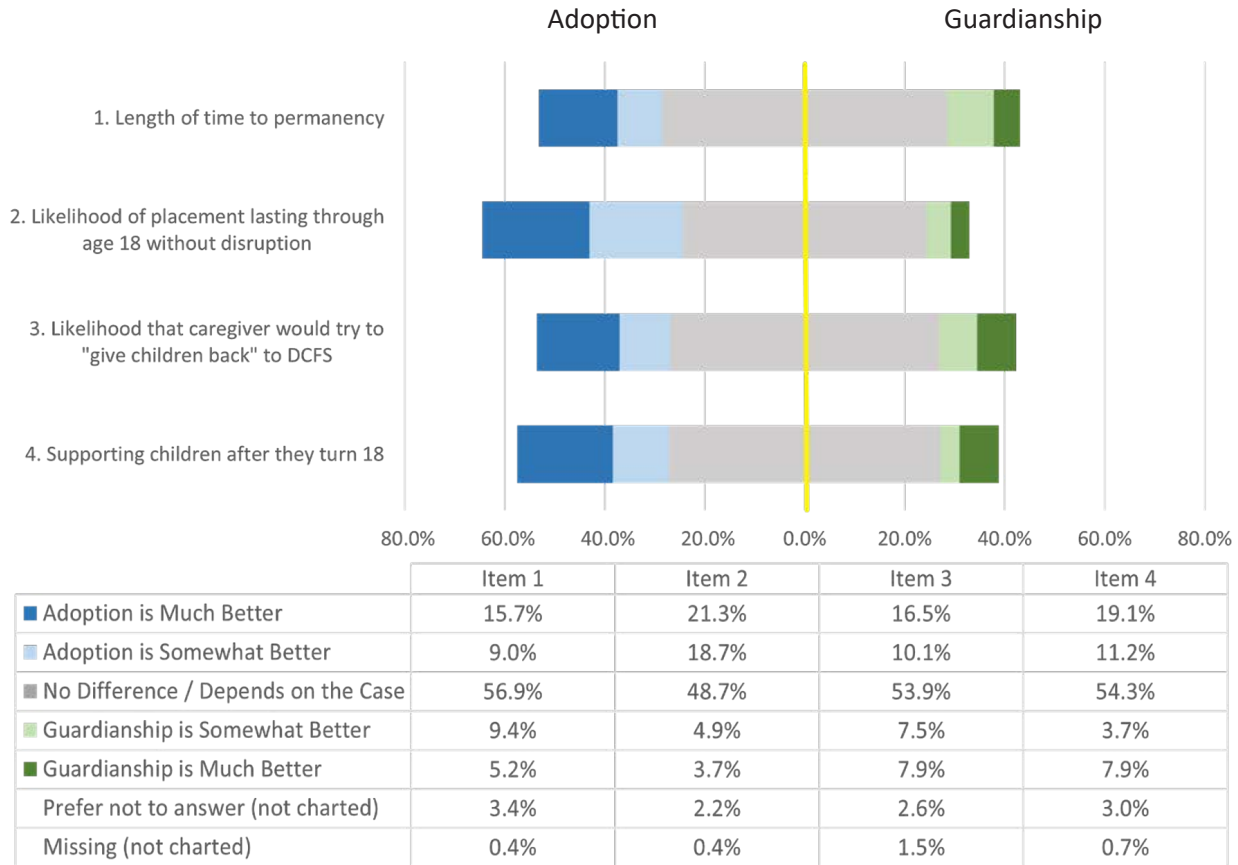


Figure 5

Permanency Staff Perspectives on the Value of Adoption and Guardianship Under Specific Case Circumstances (n = 267)

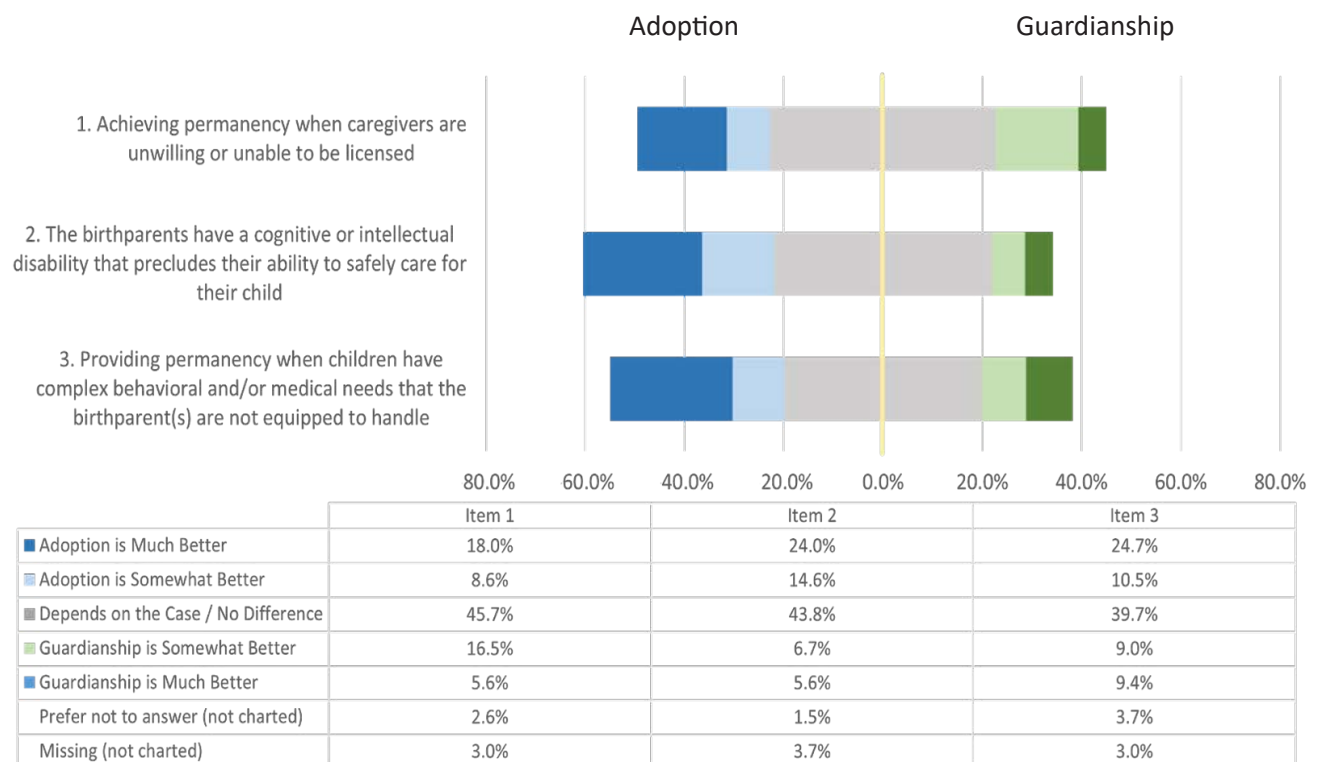


Figure 6

Permanency Workers' Perspectives on Adoption and Guardianship for Children Under the Age of 14 (n = 267)

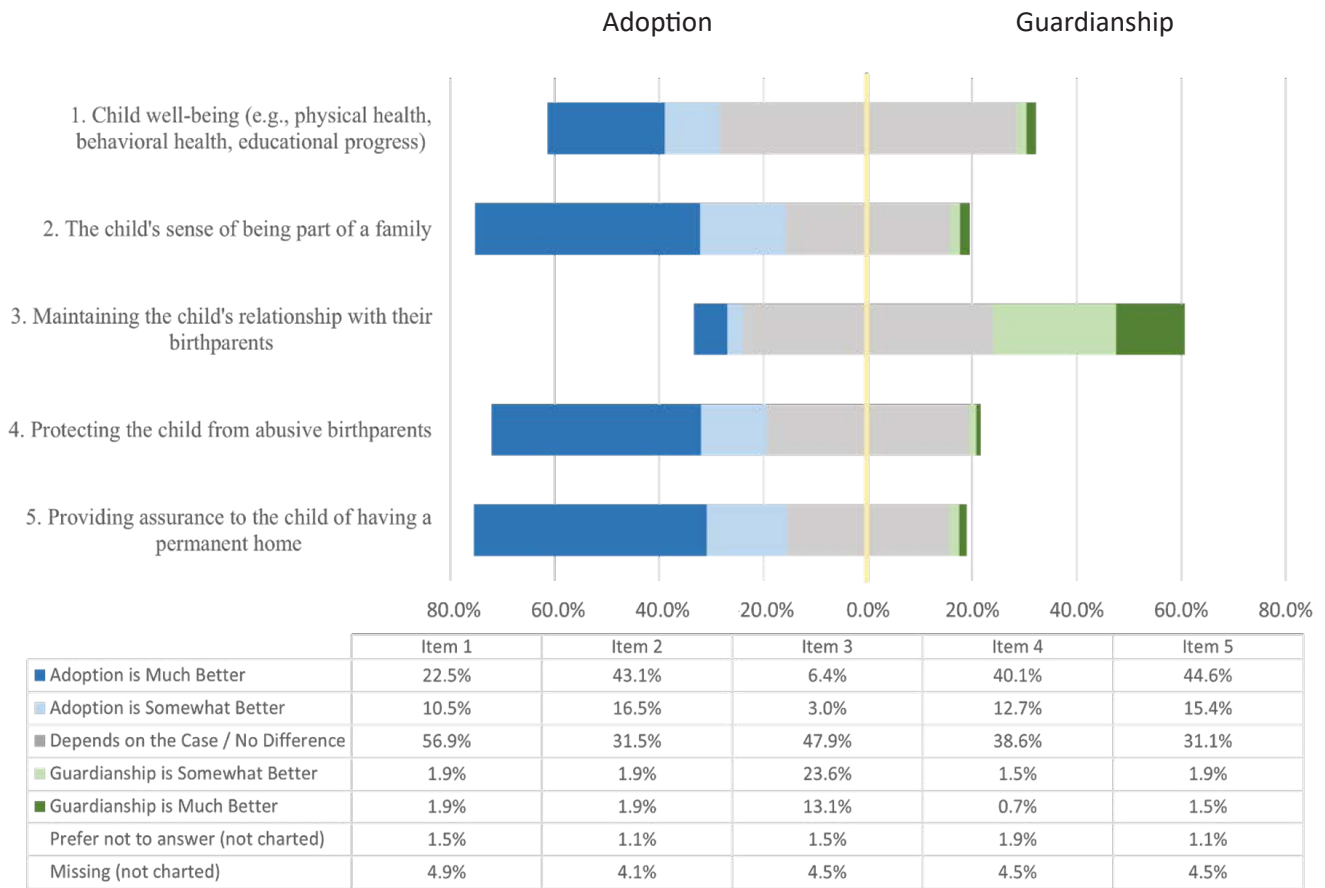
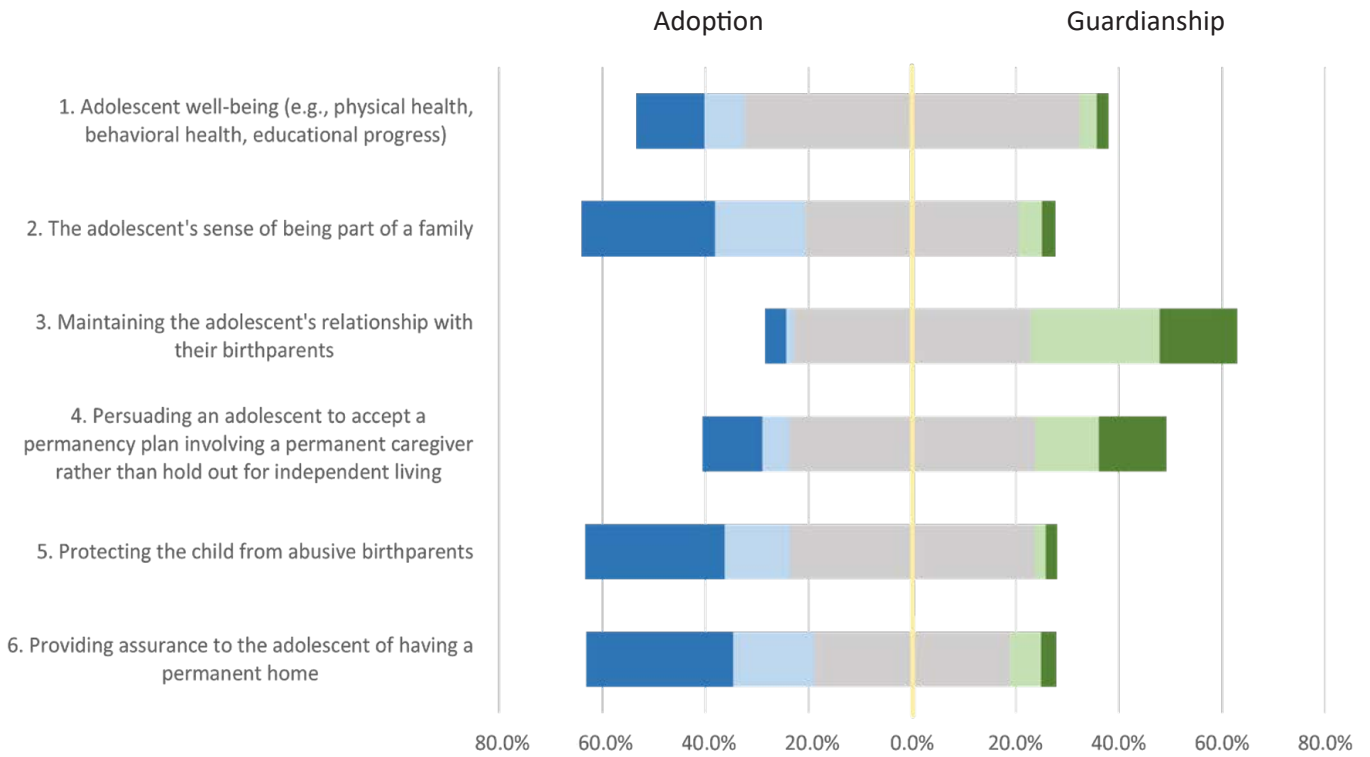


Figure 7

Permanency Workers' Perspectives of Adoption and Guardianship for Adolescents Aged 14 and older (n = 267)



	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6
■ Adoption is Much Better	13.1%	25.8%	4.1%	11.6%	27.0%	28.5%
■ Adoption is Somewhat Better	7.9%	17.6%	1.5%	5.2%	12.7%	15.7%
■ Depends on the Case / No Difference	64.8%	41.2%	45.7%	47.6%	47.2%	37.8%
■ Guardianship is Somewhat Better	3.4%	4.5%	25.1%	12.4%	2.2%	6.0%
■ Guardianship is Much Better	2.2%	2.6%	15.0%	13.1%	2.2%	3.0%
Prefer not to answer (not charted)	1.5%	1.1%	1.5%	1.9%	1.1%	1.5%
Missing (not charted)	7.1%	7.1%	7.1%	8.2%	7.5%	7.5%



Figure 8

Permanency Workers' Perspectives on Adoption and Guardianship Relative to Family Dynamics (n = 267)

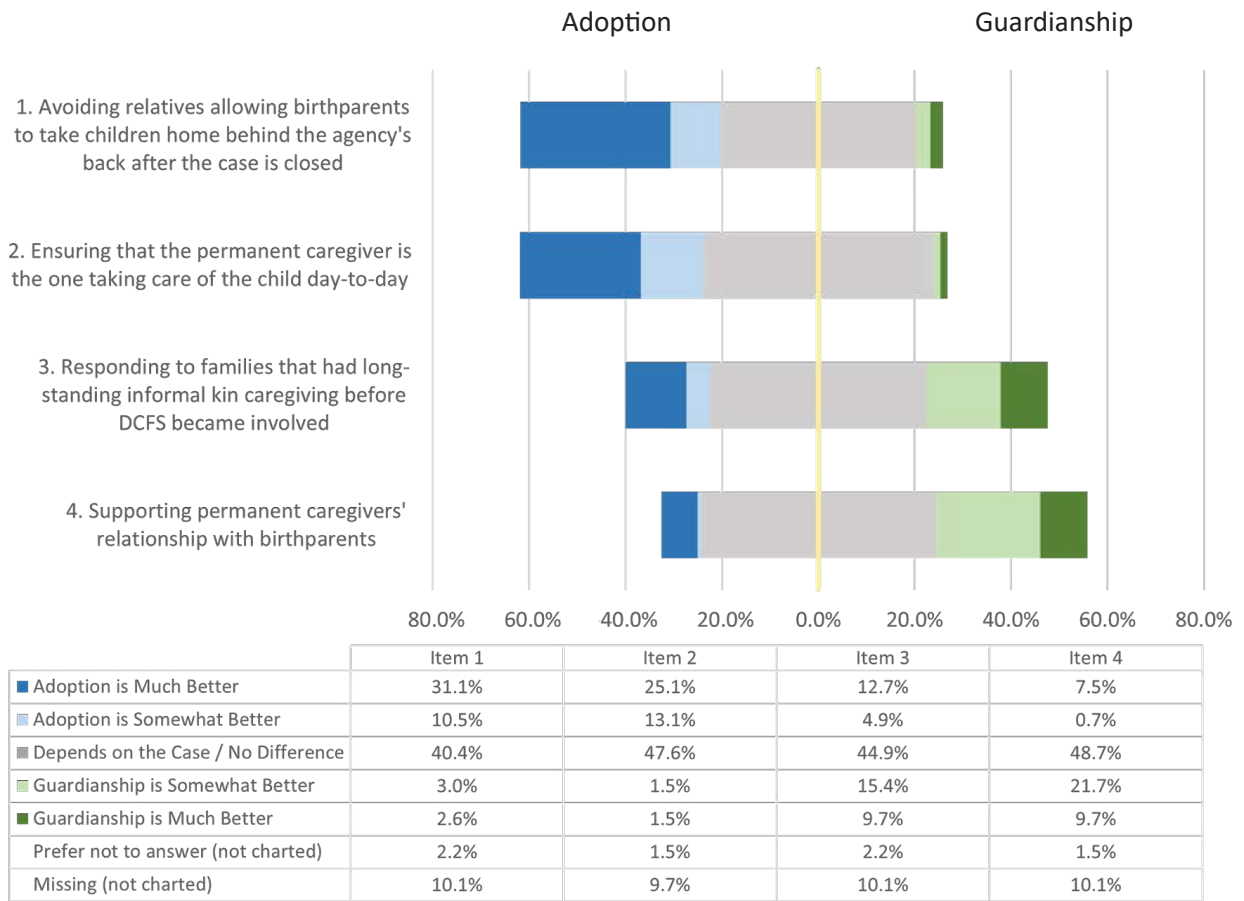
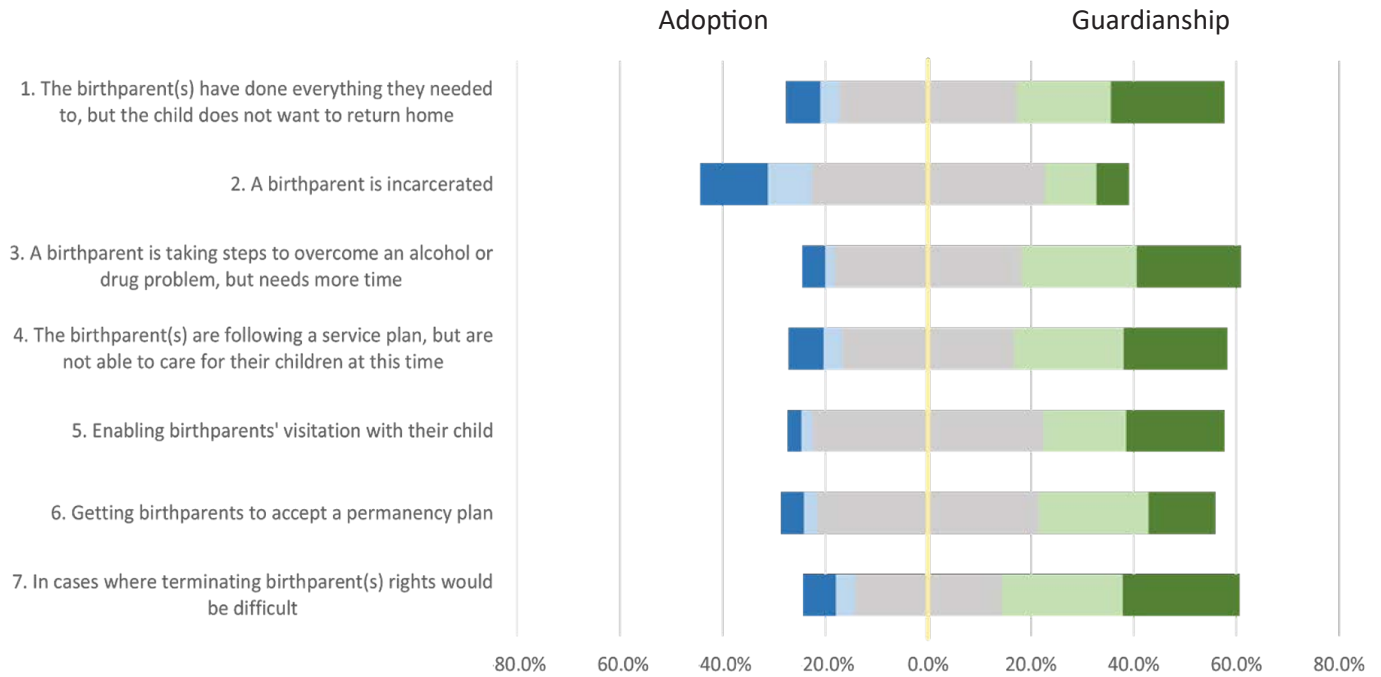


Figure 9

Permanency Workers' Perspectives on the Value of Adoption and Guardianship Relative to Birthparent Circumstances (n = 267)



	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7
■ Adoption is Much Better	6.7%	13.1%	4.5%	6.7%	2.6%	4.5%	6.4%
■ Adoption is Somewhat Better	3.7%	8.6%	1.9%	3.7%	2.2%	2.6%	3.7%
■ Depends on the Case / No Difference	34.5%	45.3%	36.3%	33.3%	44.9%	43.1%	28.5%
■ Guardianship is Somewhat Better	18.4%	10.1%	22.5%	21.3%	16.1%	21.3%	23.6%
■ Guardianship is Much Better	22.1%	6.4%	20.2%	20.2%	19.1%	13.1%	22.8%
Prefer not to answer (not charted)	1.5%	2.2%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.9%	1.9%
Missing (not charted)	13.1%	14.2%	13.1%	13.1%	13.5%	13.5%	13.1%

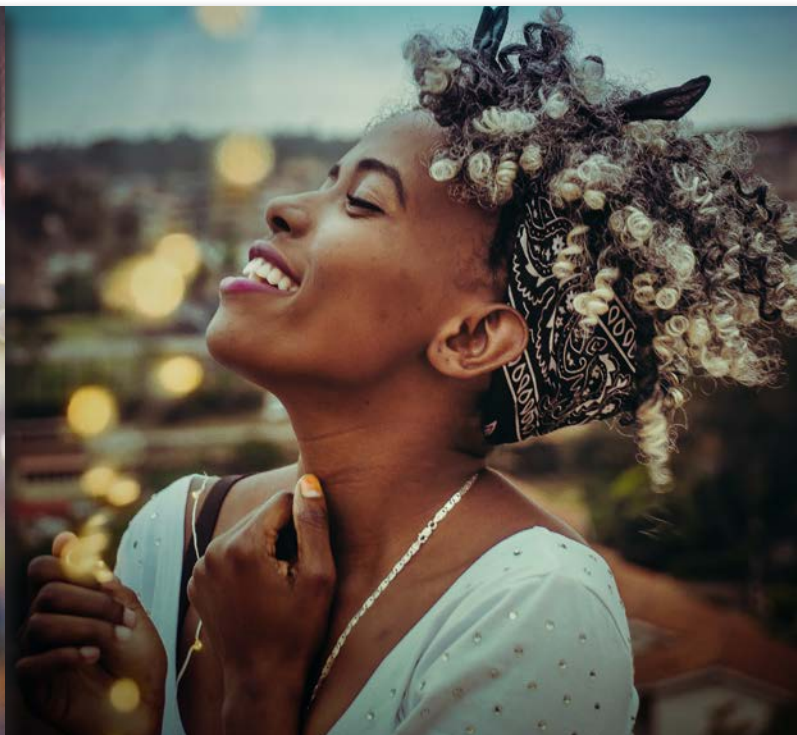
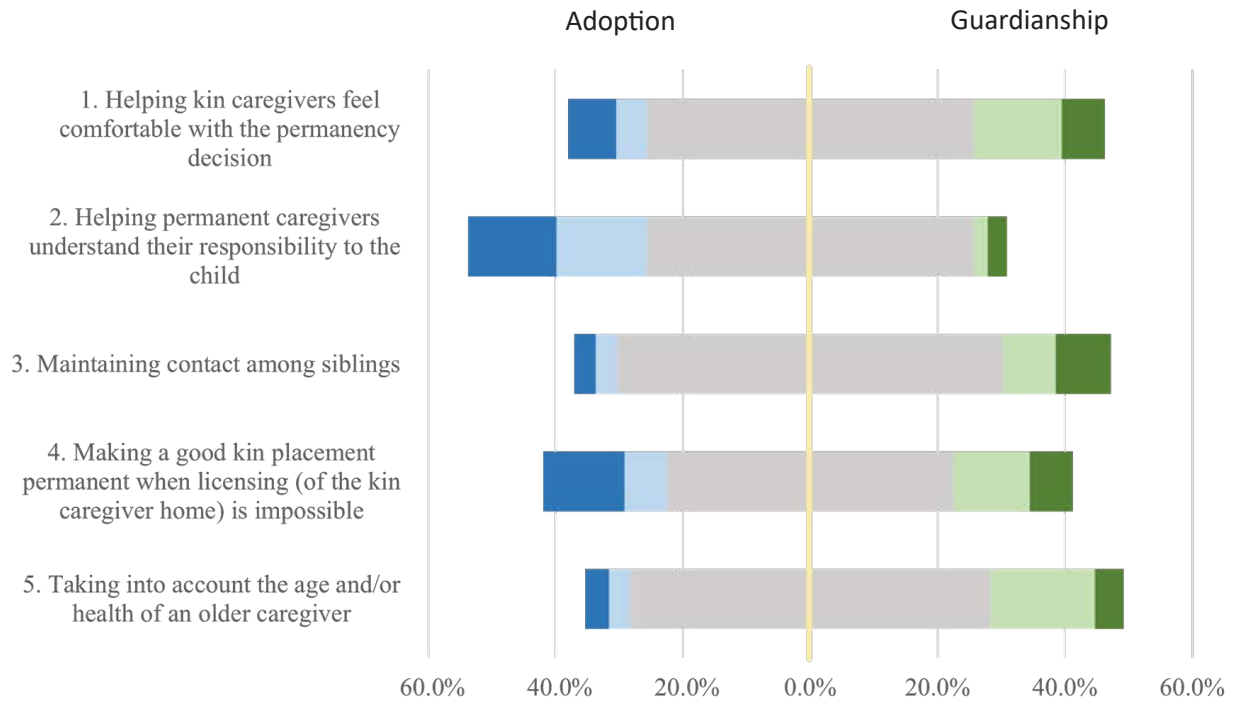


Figure 10

Permanency Workers' Perspectives on Adoption and Guardianship and the Quality Placement (n = 267)



	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5
■ Adoption is Much Better	7.5%	13.9%	3.4%	12.7%	3.7%
■ Adoption is Somewhat Better	4.9%	14.2%	3.4%	6.7%	3.4%
■ No Difference	51.3%	51.3%	60.7%	44.9%	56.6%
■ Guardianship is Somewhat Better	13.9%	2.2%	8.2%	12.0%	16.5%
■ Guardianship is Much Better	6.7%	3.0%	8.6%	6.7%	4.5%
Prefer not to answer (not charted)	1.9%	1.1%	1.5%	2.6%	1.1%
Missing (not charted)	13.9%	14.2%	14.2%	14.2%	14.2%



Comments Comparing Adoption and Guardianship.

Permanency staff were invited, in an open-ended question, to share their thoughts on the comparison between adoption and guardianship. A total of 57 staff provided comments that fell roughly into six topic areas. Table 6 presents the topic areas, a representative quote, and a summary of the content for each topic area.

Table 6
Permanency Staff Comments on the Comparison Between Adoption and Subsidized Guardianship (n = 57)

Topic Area	Description	Count (Percentage) of Responses	Representative Quote	Summary of the Content
It depends on the case	Which permanency option (adoption or guardianship) is in the child's best interest varies from case to case and is based on multiple factors.	17 (29.8%)	<i>A lot depends on the case, the children's age, if the caregiver is related or is traditional, the reason for removal, why the children cannot go back home, what the children want, and what is appropriate and safe. Adoption is looked at when children are younger to ensure they can be provided with permanency. Guardianship is a way we can provide permanency if a parent is struggling or unable to provide care all the time. It all truly depends on the case.</i>	Comments highlighted... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every case is different, and there is a complex interplay among different factors that go into deciding the best permanency option for a child.
Maintaining family relationships	Guardianship allows for maintaining ties to children's birthparents and families.	15 (26.3%)	<i>Guardianship should be explored first with relative/fictive kin caregivers as this allows autonomy for parents to be reunified with their children if the family's dynamics change in a positive trajectory. Moreover, adoption is a more permanent arrangement and may preclude the biological parents from maintaining/developing a healthy relationship with their child(ren). Guardianship allows for more autonomy in the parent/caregiver and parent/child relationships.</i>	Comments highlighted... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guardianship supports maintaining relationships with relatives, including the birthparents. • The importance of adoption if maintaining a relationship with the birthparents is not healthy or safe for the child. • Guardianship supports retaining family roles and being less disruptive to family structures.
Case disruption	Avoiding disruption is a crucial factor in the decision between adoption and guardianship.	14 (24.6 %)	<i>With either permanency plan, I still find that adoption and subsidized plans fail because we coerce people to make a permanent home for the children we serve. They eventually return to DCFS for one reason or another. More resources are needed to prevent placements from disrupting.</i>	Comments highlighted... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief is that adoption is the more permanent outcome. • Both adoptions and guardianships have disruptions, and resources are needed to support post-adoption or post-guardianship to avoid unnecessary disruptions.

Table 6

Permanency Staff Comments on the Comparison Between Adoption and Subsidized Guardianship (n = 57) - Continued

Topic Area	Description	Count (Percentage) of Responses	Representative Quote	Summary of the Content
Time to permanency	A key factor in permanency planning is time to permanency.	6 (10.5%)	<i>At one time, I thought guardianship was the faster route to get a child out of care. However, that is definitely NOT the case, as more steps have to be taken if parental rights remain intact in the case of subsidized guardianship, and it takes longer to complete.</i>	Comments highlighted... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that permanency needs to be achieved in a timelier manner, regardless of the goal. One factor mentioned that impacts this is the lack of foster homes. • The observation that guardianship can seem faster than adoptions, but this may not always be the case.
Additional information and training are needed	Additional training and information are needed to assess their cases' best permanency option (adoption versus guardianship).	3 (5.3%)	<i>There should be a direct list of the difference between guardianship, subsidized guardianship, adoption, and independent living. Adoption and guardianship are great for these children who have been through so much trauma. Illinois is one of the worst states that hold out for years with no progress, child counseling has spiked, and we are losing foster parents because they have raised these kids for three years, and nothing is changing. Things need to change, these children are suffering due to their parents needing to better themselves, and they do not make an effort or make a billion excuses.</i>	Comments highlighted... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional training and information are needed to clarify the differences between guardianship, subsidized guardianship, adoption, and independent living. • The need for support in examining what permanency outcome is in the children's best interests in their cases.
Licensing as a barrier	Licensing is a barrier to guardianship in some cases.	2 (3.5%)	<i>A caregiver has to be licensed to complete a subsidized guardianship. Guardianship is sometimes challenging if the fictive kin or family member does not want or cannot get licensed.</i>	Comments highlighted... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That licensing can be a barrier to guardianship in some cases.



Chapter 4

Circumstances Supporting Guardianship

Permanency staff were asked, what circumstances would lead you to choose guardianship over adoption as a permanency plan for a child? Permanency staff were provided with fourteen case circumstances and asked to select all that apply. They could also choose Other and write in a response. Seven of the items were selected by more than 50% of the respondents, and all of them (except the optional Other) were chosen by at least 35% of respondents (Table 7). With 88% of respondents selecting it, *an adolescent (age 14 or older) does not want to be adopted* was the most common item selected. The following three items were selected by at least 60% of respondents a) the caregiver will provide care until the child is 18 but does not want to adopt the child, b) an adolescent (age 14 or older) desires an ongoing relationship with their birthparent and c) birthparent(s) have a loving relationship with the child but cannot provide for the safety and well-being of their child. The least selected items were a) *a child (under age 14) desires an ongoing relationship with their birthparents* (35%) and b) *the birthparents have a cognitive or intellectual disability that precludes their ability to safely care for their child* (35%). Other circumstances written in by respondents were *maintaining the relationship with the caregiver (e.g., grandparents remain grandparents)* and *adoption makes people feel more like parents*. There was a difference by respondent race in the number of items selected by respondents. Respondents selected an average of 7.4 items reflecting the reasons for choosing guardianship. Black respondents selected an average of 6.6 items, where Non-Black respondents selected an average of 7.7 items. A Mann-Whitney U confirmed a significant difference in the number of these items selected between Black and non-Black respondents ($n = 196$, $U = 2204$, $p = .042$).

Permanency staff were then asked to share any additional circumstances that would lead them to choose guardianship. A total of 31 staff listed additional circumstances, and we divided their responses into four categories:

- o The child does not want to be adopted, or the child wants guardianship (39%).
- o The caregiver will provide care until the child is 18 but does not want to adopt the child (26%).

- o DCFS and the caregiver want to give the birthparent(s) the opportunity to petition for custody in the future (26%).
- o Adoption is not possible because termination of parental rights is unattainable (10%).

Table 7

Reasons for Choosing Guardianship Over Adoption (check all that apply), n = 213

	Count	Percentage
An adolescent (age 14 or older) does not want to be adopted	188	88.3
The caregiver will provide care until the child is 18 but does not want to adopt the child	140	65.7
An adolescent (age 14 or older) desires an ongoing relationship with their birthparent	134	62.9
Birthparent(s) have a loving relationship with the child but cannot provide for the safety and well-being of their child	129	60.6
Birthparent(s) are complying with the service plans but cannot provide for the safety and well-being of their child	123	57.7
The child's current caregiver wants to provide permanent care but wants to respect the birthparents	115	54.0
DCFS and the caregiver want to give the birthparent(s) the opportunity to petition for custody in the future	111	52.1
A child (under age 14) does not want to be adopted	105	49.3
Terminating birthparents' rights would be difficult	101	47.4
Birthparent(s) agree to surrender parental rights if the permanency goal is guardianship but not if it is adoption	91	42.8
The child is young but is part of a sibling group in the placement that includes an older youth who is refusing adoption and choosing guardianship	79	37.1
A child (under age 14) desires an ongoing relationship with their birthparent	75	35.2
The birthparents have a cognitive or intellectual disability that precludes their ability to safely care for their child	75	35.2
Other ¹	2	0.9

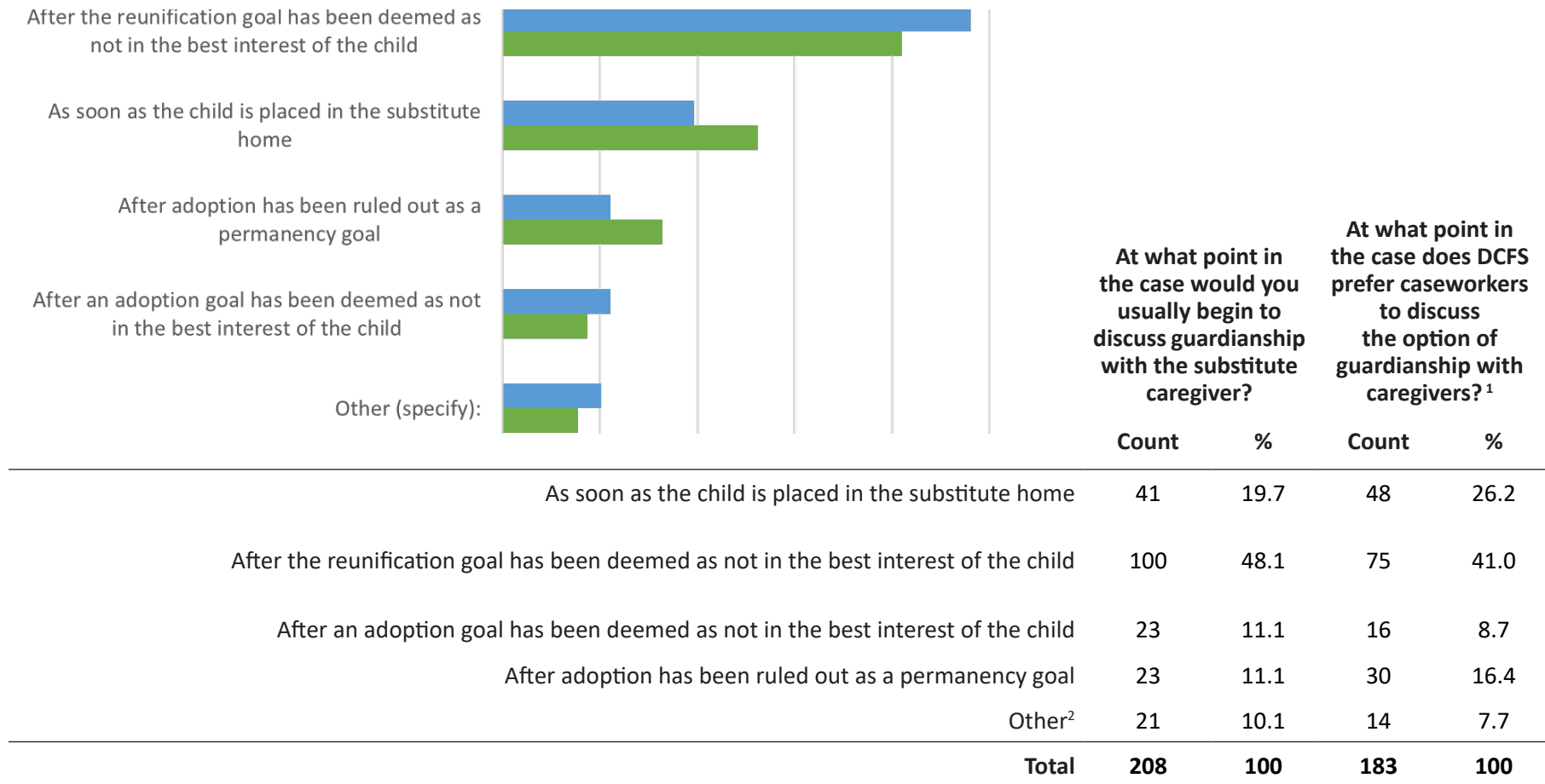
1. Other includes a_ maintaining the relationship with the caregiver (e.g., grandparents remain grandparents) and b) adoption makes people feel more like parents.

Timing of Discussing Guardianship

Permanency staff were asked two questions about the timing for discussing guardianship with caregivers. These were 1) At what point in the case would you usually begin to discuss guardianship with the substitute caregiver? and 2) At what point in the case does DCFS prefer caseworkers to discuss the option of guardianship with caregivers? About half of the respondents (48%) indicated that they begin to discuss guardianship with the substitute caregiver after the reunification goal has been deemed not in the child's best interest (Figure 11). One-fifth of survey respondents (20%) indicated that they begin to discuss guardianship with the substitute caregiver *as soon as the child is placed in the substitute care home*. Some permanency staff begin to discuss guardianship after an adoption goal has been deemed not in the child's best interest (11%) and after an adoption has been ruled out as a permanency goal (11%). A tenth of caseworkers and supervisors chose *Other* and then described in a text response nuances in the timing of discussing guardianship. Some of these answers indicated that concurrent planning starts at case opening or that the timing depends on the characteristics of each case, such as the child's age, the degree of parental engagement, and the possibility of reunification. Permanency staff's perceptions of when DCFS prefers caseworkers begin discussing guardianship paralleled their practice. A slightly smaller percentage of permanency workers indicated that DCFS prefers for them to initiate conversations *after the reunification goal has been deemed as not in the best interest of the child* (41%). A slightly higher percentage of permanency staff feel DCFS would like them to initiate the conversation *as soon as the child is placed in the substitute home* (26%) or *after adoption has been ruled out as a permanency goal* (16%). Other (8%) answers were a) before proceeding to legal screening, b) 6 to 9 months post-adjudication if parents are not making progress, and c) only if reunification and adoption have been ruled out.

Figure 11

Timing for Discussing Guardianship with Caregivers, Implementation of Concurrent Planning



1. Respondents were provided the choice, *I don't know*, regarding DCFS preference on timing. This option is not included in the table as it had zero responses. 2. See text for a description of other timing.

The Effects of Licensing Requirements on the Use of Guardianship

Respondents were asked, how do you think the requirement that guardians be licensed has affected the use of guardianship? and asked to select all that apply from a list of ten options (Table 8). Sixty-three percent of respondents selected more than one of the items provided. The percentage of respondents for each provided item was 11% to 36%, with *other* chosen by 8% of respondents. The three most frequently selected items were *licensing significantly delays attaining guardianship* (36%), *licensing holds caregivers to an appropriate standard* (35%), and *other licensing requirements prevent guardianships that are in the child’s best interests* (34%). The least selected items were *licensing requirements have resulted in families receiving lower subsidies* (11%) and *licensing has no effect on the use of guardianship* (11%). Six respondents provided *other* responses to this inquiry that fell into two categories. Four respondents stated that licensing is only required when the youth is under thirteen. Two respondents stated that adoption is an alternative for families for whom licensing is a barrier to guardianship.

Table 8

How Requiring Licensing Affects the Use of Guardianship (check all that apply, n = 202)

	Count	Percentage
Licensing significantly delays attaining guardianship	72	35.6
Licensing holds caregivers to an appropriate standard	71	35.1
Other licensing requirements prevent guardianships that are in the child’s best interest	69	34.2
The requirement that household members not have a criminal record prevents guardianships that are in the child’s best interest	61	30.2
Licensing improves the care of children in guardian homes.	50	24.8
Physical environment requirements prevent guardianships that are in the child’s best interest	49	24.3
Licensing requirements tend to disadvantage Black families more than White families	40	19.8
Licensing requirements interfere with guardians’ access to subsidies	34	16.8
Licensing requirements have resulted in families receiving lower subsidies	22	10.9
Licensing has no effect on the use of guardianship	22	10.9
Other ¹	17	8.45

1. See text for a description of other ways licensing affects the use of guardianship.





Chapter 5

Other Factors Related to Guardianship and Adoption

Permanency staff were asked their perspectives on a recent change to the Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Public Act 10-0193 passed July 2021). Specifically, they were asked about their familiarity with the change in legislation and if they felt that this change in legislation will affect the use of guardianship. Permanency staff were also asked to share their perceptions about DCFS and judicial preferences related to adoption and guardianship. We discuss each in turn below.

Perspective on the Legislation on Guardianship and Adoption (Public Act 10-0193)

Permanency staff were asked three questions about Illinois Public Act 10-0193, filed as HB 1068 30, an amendment to the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 that became law in July of 2021. It includes clauses that change regulations related to guardianship. It establishes updated conditions under which the court can decide on guardianship. One key provision is that subsidized guardianship can only be undertaken if adoption is “deemed inappropriate and not in the child’s best interests.” The text just quoted replaces the bill’s previous text in that section: “ruled out” The Act also requires that “the court shall confirm that the Department has discussed adoption, if appropriate, and guardianship with the caregiver prior to changing a goal to guardianship.” Specifically, Public Act 10-0193...

Amends the Juvenile Court Act of 1987. Provides that at the permanency hearing, the permanency goals shall include that the guardianship of the minor will be transferred to an individual or couple on a permanent basis provided that the permanency goals have been deemed inappropriate and not in the child’s best interests (rather than ruled out). It provides that adoption and guardianship must be discussed with the current caregiver prior to selecting the guardianship goal. Provides that the court shall confirm that the Department of Children and Family Services has discussed adoption, if

Respondents were asked how familiar they were with the new law, if they felt it was in children’s best interest, and how they thought it would affect guardianship use (Figure 12 and Table 9). Most frequently, respondents reported that they were moderately familiar with the law (33%), followed by those who were somewhat familiar (22%) and extremely familiar (20%). More than half of the respondents indicated that the law is at least moderately in the children’s best interest (extremely 30%, moderately 28%). Permanency staff were asked how they think Public Act 10-0193 will affect the use of guardianship. Forty-three percent of respondents indicated that Public Act 10-0193 would not affect the use of guardianship for their agency because their current practices were already consistent with the act before it was passed. Slightly more permanency staff indicated they think the number of guardianships will decrease (19%) because of the act, compared to those who indicated guardianship would increase because of the act (17%).

Figure 12

Permanency Workers’ Familiarity with and Perspectives on Public Act 10-0193 (5-point Likert-type scale, 1- Not at all, 2-Slightly, 3-Somewhat, 4--Moderately, 5-Extremely, n = 195)

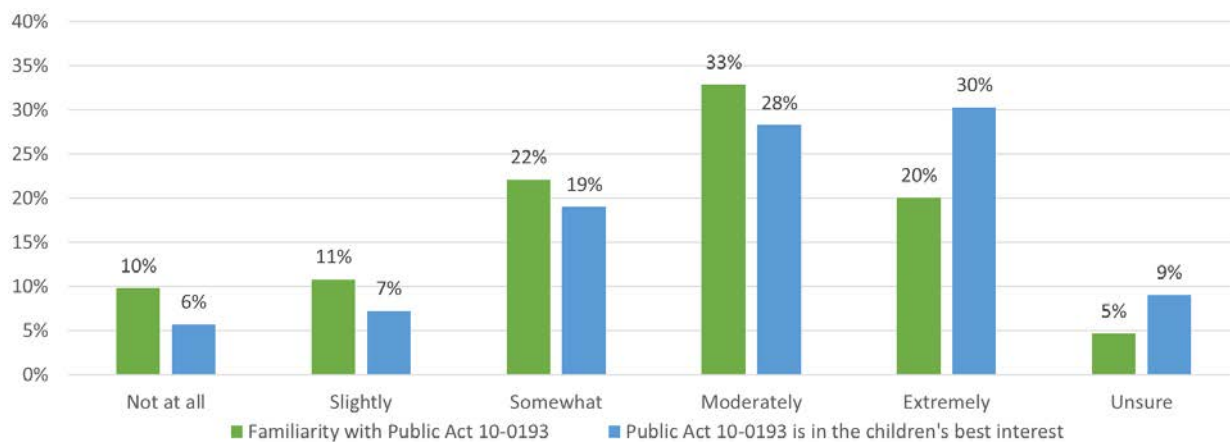


Table 9

The Effect of Public Act 10-0193 on the Use of Guardianship

	Count	Percentage
No effect - our agency already follows this procedure	84	43.1
Decrease the number of guardianships	37	19.0
I don’t know	34	17.4
Increase the number of guardianships	33	16.9
No effect (other reasons) ¹	7	3.6
Total	195	100

1. No effect-other reasons: a) The new act will delay permanency! b) Court service plans have always asked if all other options have been ruled out, and c) Guardianships will change if DCFS pulls the licensing requirements.

Perceived DCFS and Judicial Preferences Around Adoption and Guardianship

Permanency staff were asked for their perceptions of DCFS' preferences around adoption and guardianship. Likewise, they were asked about their perceptions of judicial preferences. Respondents were provided five items describing different possible perceptions of DCFS and judicial preferences and instructed to select all that apply (Figure 13). These items stated that they 1) support whichever permanency goal is in the best interest of the child; 2) prefer adoption over guardianship whenever possible; 3) prefer adoption when the child is under a certain age; 4) prefer which permanency goal results in permanency faster; 5) prefer guardianship over adoption when the permanent caregiver is kin. Respondents were also given the option to select *other* and specify their perception of DCFS and judge preferences. The most frequent choice was that they will *support whichever permanency goal (adoption or guardianship) is in the best interest of the child*, for both DCFS preference (61%) and judge preference (67%). The second most common item selected was *prefer adoption over guardianship whenever possible*, DCFS preference (47%) and judge preference (28%).

The third most frequently item selected by permanency staff concerned preferring adoption for children under a certain age, for both DCFS' preference (40%) and judges' preference (28%). Respondents who felt that DCFS or judges prefer adoption when a child is under a certain age were asked to specify the age. The ten respondents who indicated that adoption is preferred over guardianship by DCFS varied on the age thresholds they reported (10 years – 2 responses, 12 years – 6 responses, 13 – 1 response, 14 – 1 response, 5 – 1 response). In a text response, one respondent indicated that the DCFS attorneys and supervisors in the adoption unit create barriers to guardianship, stating,

DCFS policy says that adoption and guardianship should be considered the gold standard of permanency. ... DCFS attorneys and supervisors in the adoption unit view adoption as preferable and are unwilling to consider reasons as to how guardianship is a better option, even when it would result in achieving permanency faster and is in the best interest of the child.

Another respondent indicated that DCFS prefers adoption over guardianship for younger children due to concerns that issues may arise with the birthparents after guardianship is complete. One respondent indicated that their judges have a "preference for adoption always, but especially when the child is five or under." Another indicated that their judge considers age in conjunction with other case circumstances, such as current placement. Three respondents indicated that judges prefer adoption for youth ten and under, with two indicating that the cut-off is 13 years of age. One respondent believed that judges' reluctance is rooted in not seeing guardianship as permanent:

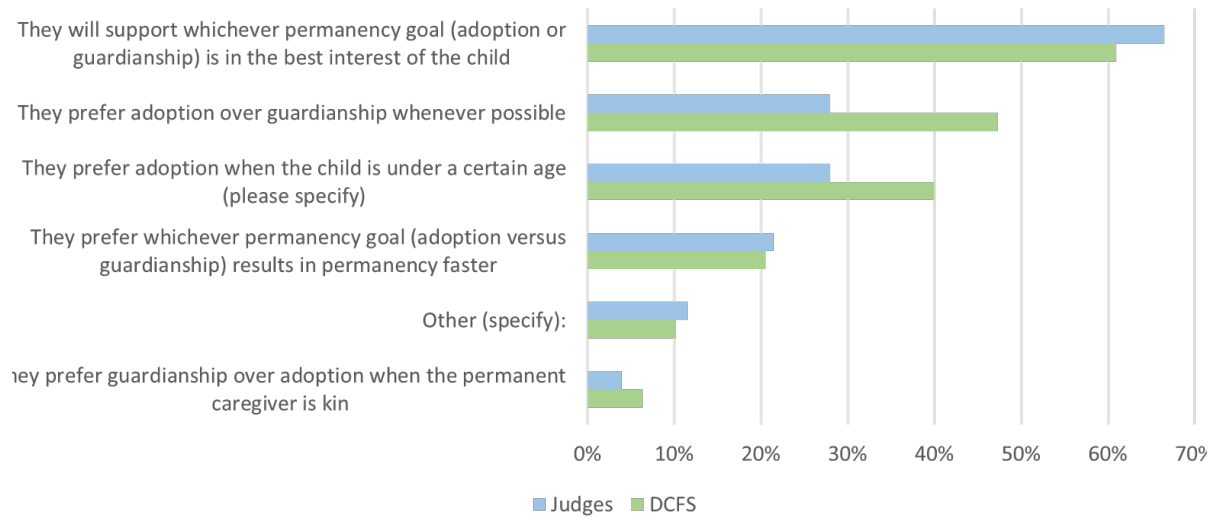
When the child is under ten, most judges want a reason why the child is not being adopted. Again, I believe this is because guardianship is not seen as a permanent home.

Another respondent indicated that the preference is rooted in the judges' views on birthparents: "Depends completely on the judge. Some judges are pro-birthparent and prefer guardianship; some are anti-birthparent and prefer adoption." Lastly, two respondents indicated that they perceive the courts to prefer guardianship because it is easier; one stated this is because "termination hearings are a lot of work."

About ten percent of the 205 respondents selected *Other* for their perception of DCFS preferences. These respondents did not further specify these preferences. Twelve percent of the 200 permanency staff who rated judges' preferences selected *Other*. Six of these respondents specified their perceptions of judges' preferences. Three of these respondents expressed that preference varies by individual judge and county. Three respondents expressed that judges delay permanency, including giving parents excessive time to work on reunification (count = 3).

Figure 13

Perceived DCFS and Judicial Preferences around Adoption and Guardianship



	Perceived DCFS Preference (n = 205)		Perceived Judicial Preference (n = 200)	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
DCFS will support whichever permanency goal (adoption or guardianship) is in the child's best interest	125	61.0	133	66.5
DCFS prefers adoption over guardianship whenever possible	97	47.3	56	28.0
DCFS prefers adoption when the child is under a certain age ¹	82	40.0	56	28.0
DCFS prefers whichever permanency goal (adoption versus guardianship) results in permanency faster	42	20.5	43	21.5
DCFS prefers guardianship over adoption when the permanent caregiver is kin	13	6.3	8	4.0
Other ¹	21	10.2	23	11.5

1. See text for a description of DCFS and judicial preference regarding the child's age and adoption versus guardianship and a description of other perceived preferences held by DCFS and judges.



Chapter 6

Factors Contributing to Race Disparities in Permanency Goals and Outcomes

Permanency staff were asked their perspectives on racial disparities in permanency goals and outcomes. Specifically, they were asked about perceived differences in permanency planning, use of adoption and guardianship, child welfare system supports, between Black and White families. The following outlines the results of those inquiries.

Racial Differences in Permanency Planning

Permanency staff were asked how permanency planning differs for Black families compared to White families (Table 10). They were provided nine items presenting potential differences and instructed to select all that apply. Black and Non-Black professionals differed substantially in their responses. Over half of Non-Black respondents perceived no differences in permanency planning with Black children and families compared to White children and families, but only a little more than one-fifth of Black professionals felt this way. Nearly half of Black professionals thought that children are more likely to be reunified in White families than in comparable Black families, and 40% of them felt that White children were reunified more quickly, compared to much smaller percentages of Non-Black professionals who had these perceptions. Nearly a third of Black professionals thought that the courts give Black birthparents less time than White birthparents before moving to terminate parental rights, compared to 8.5% of Non-Black professionals. The proportions of Black professionals endorsing “Adoption is pushed more for Black than for White caregiving families”, and “Guardianship is pushed more for White than Black caregiving families” were 14.3% and 11.4% respectively, compared to 2.6% and 2% for Non-Black professionals.

The responses for Black and Non-Black permanency staff were compared using two-tailed Fisher Exact Tests. There were statistically significant differences between the responses of Black and non-Black permanency staff on the following six of the eleven statements:

- o Non-Black permanency staff were 2.4 times more likely than Black permanency staff to choose *no difference* in permanency planning between Black and White families,
- o Black permanency staff were 2.76 times more likely to check off *children are more likely to be reunified in White families than in comparable Black families*,
- o Black permanency staff were 4.71 times more likely to check off *children are reunified more quickly in White families than in comparable Black families*,
- o Black permanency staff were 3.69 times more likely to check off *the courts give Black birth families less time than White families before moving to terminate parental rights*,
- o Black permanency staff were 5.5 times more likely to check off *adoption is pushed more for Black than for White caregiving families* (percentages were small), and
- o Black permanency staff were 5.7 times more likely to check off *guardianship is pushed more for White than Black caregiving families* (percentages were small).

Respondents selected an average of 1.69 items reflecting how permanency planning differs between White and Black families (the ten items in the question, excluding no difference). Black respondents selected an average of 2.37, where Non-Black respondents selected an average of 1.48. A Mann-Whitney U confirmed a significant difference in the number of these items selected between Black and Non-Black respondents ($n = 104$, $U = 612$, $p < .001$).

Racial Differences in the Use of Adoption and Guardianship

Permanency staff were asked how the use of adoption and guardianship differs for Black families as compared to White families, based on their experience. They were presented with ten items presenting potential differences and instructed to select all that apply (Table 11). Again, Black and Non-Black professionals differed substantially in their responses. Majorities of Black professionals agreed that Black families are more likely to experience challenges advocating for their children and family, and that many Black families have more difficulty meeting the requirements for guardianship subsidies, but only about fifth of Non-Black professionals agreed for each. Almost one-half of Black professionals felt that Black families are more likely to favor guardianship over adoption, but less than a fifth of Non-Black professionals agreed with this. More than a third of Black professionals felt that a lack of trust in Black families impacts professionals' decision-making around permanency, but only 11% of Non-Black professionals agreed with this. A fifth of Black professionals agreed that Black families are more likely to receive lower subsidy rates, but only 6.1% of Non-Black professionals agreed. The responses of Black and non-Black permanency staff were compared using two-tailed Fisher Exact Tests. As Table 8 shows, there were statistically significant differences in the responses of Black and Non-Black permanency staff on six of the ten statements:

- o Non-Black permanency staff were more than 13 times more likely than Black permanency staff to report *no difference* in the use of adoption and guardianship for Black and White families,
- o Black caseworkers were 3.39 times more likely to check off *Black families are more likely to receive lower subsidy rates*,
- o Black caseworkers were 3.12 times more likely to check off *a lack of trust in Black families impacts professionals' decision-making around permanency*,
- o Black caseworkers were 2.64 times more likely to check off *Black families are more likely to experience challenges advocating for their child(ren) and family*,
- o Black caseworkers were 2.57 times more likely to check off *Black families are more likely to favor guardianship over adoption*, and
- o Black caseworkers were 2.56 times more likely to check off *many Black families have more difficulty meeting the requirements for guardianship subsidies*.

Respondents selected an average of 2.23 items reflecting differences in the use of adoption and guardianship between White and Black families (the ten items in the question, excluding no difference). Black respondents selected an average of 2.82, where Non-Black respondents selected an average of 2.03. A Mann-Whitney U confirmed a significant difference in the number of these items selected between Black and non-Black respondents ($n = 136$, $U = 1181$, $p = .003$).

Table 10. *Perceived Differences in Permanency Planning with Black Children and Families Compared to White Children and Families (check all that apply, n = 188)*

	<u>Count (Percentage)</u>			Fisher Exact test between Black and Non-Black Responses (two-tailed)
	All Responses n = 188	Black Permanency Staff Responses n = 35	All Non-Black Permanency Staff Responses n = 153	
No difference	93 (49.5%)	8 (22.9%)	85 (55.6%)	$p < 0.001$
Children are more likely to be reunified in White families than in comparable Black families	44 (23.4%)	17 (48.6%)	27 (17.6%)	$p < 0.001$
Children are reunified more quickly in White families than in comparable Black families.	27 (14.4%)	14 (40.0%)	13 (8.5%)	$p < 0.001$
The courts give Black birth families less time than White families before moving to terminate parental rights	24 (12.8%)	11 (31.4%)	13 (8.5%)	$p < 0.001$
Do not know, not enough experience to answer (write-in response)	19 (10.1%)	3 (8.6%)	16 (10.5%)	NS
Adoption is pushed more for White than for Black caregiving families	16 (8.5%)	5 (14.3%)	11 (7.2%)	NS
Guardianship is pushed more for Black than White caregiving families	16 (8.5%)	3 (8.6%)	13 (8.5%)	NS
Adoption is pushed more for Black than for White caregiving families	9 (4.8%)	5 (14.3%)	4 (2.6%)	$p = 0.01$
The courts give Black birth families more time than White families before moving to terminate parental rights	4 (2.1%)	1 (2.9%)	3 (2.0%)	NS
Guardianship is pushed more for White than Black caregiving families	7 (3.7%)	4 (11.4%)	3 (2.0%)	$p = 0.02$
Other ¹	6 (3.2%)	1 (2.9%)	5 (3.3%)	NS

1. *Other* includes: a) African American families have higher poverty levels, making it more difficult to afford to raise a child and adopt/become a guardian. b) It is harder to reunify Black families because more fathers are incarcerated. The mothers have difficulty with consistent stability because often, everyone they want to move in with has a background we disapprove of, so they cannot get stabilized. c) Within Cook County, I have observed a higher percentage of Black families/children in the child welfare system in comparison to White and other races. d) I have noticed that more Black families choose guardianship over adoption. But have not seen the length of the court case adversely affected due to race. e) I see the extended family and fictive kin of Black families being more willing to take in their family members, even if the relationship is not as intimate. f) I also find Black families do not like to sever family roles (i.e., avoid adoption as someone else is legally mom).

Table 11

Perceived Differences in Use of Guardianship and Adoption for Black Children and Their Families Compared to White Children and Their Families (check all that apply, n = 199)

	<u>Count (Percentage)</u>			Fisher Exact test between Black and Non-Black Responses (two-tailed)
	All Responses <i>n</i> = 199	Black Permanency Staff Responses <i>n</i> = 35	Non-Black Permanency Staff Responses <i>n</i> = 164	
No difference	64 (32.2%)	1 (2.9%)	63 (38.4%)	<i>p</i> < 0.001
Black families are more likely to experience challenges advocating for their child(ren) and family	61 (30.7%)	22 (62.9%)	39 (23.8%)	<i>p</i> < 0.001
Many Black families have more difficulty meeting the requirements for guardianship subsidies	51 (25.6%)	18 (51.4%)	33 (20.1%)	<i>p</i> < 0.001
Black child(ren) are more likely to have extended family members who are open to providing permanency for them	49 (24.6%)	10 (28.6%)	39 (23.8%)	NS
Black families are more likely to favor guardianship over adoption	48 (24.1%)	17 (48.6%)	31 (18.9%)	<i>p</i> < 0.001
A lack of trust in Black families impacts professionals' decision-making around permanency	30 (15.1%)	12 (34.3%)	18 (11.0%)	<i>p</i> < 0.001
There are fewer people who want to adopt Black children	30 (15.1%)	9 (25.7%)	21 (12.8%)	NS
Black families are more likely to receive lower subsidy rates	17 (8.5%)	7 (20.0%)	10 (6.1%)	<i>p</i> = 0.015
Do not know, not enough experience to answer (write-in response)	16 (8.0%)	0	16 (9.8%)	NS
Other ¹	6 (3.0%)	1 (2.9%)	5 (3.0%)	NS

1. *Other* includes: a) Black families often want to keep their relatives but have many barriers to licensure, in my experience.; White families have the same issues; it is just that they did not go to jail or get caught up as easily, so there is no record on LEADS (Law Enforcement Agencies Data Systems – criminal background check); b) Black families get arrested for breathing in the wrong direction; c) There are fewer people who want to adopt black children, but only marginally. I have only known a few families in my 9-year career that refused placement of black children; d) They have a bad perception of DCFS; we need to rebrand; e) I do not think there is a difference except for guardianship; if the child is over 12, they must be licensed, which is why I selected the one choice I did.

Racial Differences in Support for Children and Families

Permanency staff were asked how child welfare system supports differ for Black families compared to White families, based on their experience. They were given ten potential differences and instructed to select all that apply (Table 12). On most of these items, Black and Non-Black professionals did not differ significantly. Nearly half of the entire sample (47%) indicated that not enough services are available in communities or neighborhoods with large proportions of Black families, and nearly a third (31%) have observed that Black professionals are underrepresented in various roles related to child permanency. However, 49.6% of Non-Black professionals felt that there was no difference in support for White and Black families, but only 14.3% of Black professionals agreed with this. The responses for Black and Non-Black permanency staff were compared using two-tailed Fisher Exact Tests. The only statistically significant difference in the responses of Black and Non-Black permanency staff was the item *no difference*. Non-Black professionals were 3.57 times more likely to select *no difference* in child welfare system supports than Black professionals (50% vs. 14%). Respondents selected an average of 2.59 items

reflecting how child welfare system supports differ for White and Black families (the ten items in the question, excluding no difference). Black respondents selected an average of 3.23, where Non-Black respondents selected an average of 2.33. A Mann-Whitney U confirmed a significant difference in the number of these items selected between Black and non-Black respondents ($n = 125$, $U = 1025$, $p = .025$). Respondents were provided the option to specify the roles for which Black professionals are underrepresented. Nine respondents highlighted the need for more Black professionals in child welfare positions, and five indicated that Black professionals are underrepresented across the professions impacting child permanency. One respondent stated,

We need more African American child welfare professionals at the table to advocate and discuss racial biases associated with Black children in care. This includes the lack of resources for Black biological parents (specifically fathers being considered as the reunified parent) and other systemic issues/barriers that adversely affect permanency outcomes for Black children.

Five of the nine respondents who highlighted the need for more Black professionals in child welfare positions specified the need for Black supervisors, with one respondent sharing,

There appears to be a proportional number of non-Caucasian caseworkers. However, I would like to see more people of color in supervisory positions and policy writing. Also, more men are needed in social work overall.

Eight respondents mentioned the need for more Black providers. Most of these respondents focused on Black mental health providers, including counselors, therapists, and psychologists. Substance abuse services and LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex) supports were also mentioned as areas where Black representation is needed. Finally, four respondents indicated that Black individuals are underrepresented in legal roles, including DCFS attorneys, guardians *ad litem*, public defenders, and judges. About a quarter of respondents indicated that resources were lacking for Black caregiving families (26%) and for Black birthparents (25%). Thirteen percent of respondents indicated that there are other ways that the child welfare system impacts Black families differently, beyond those listed in Table 12. Respondents were provided the opportunity to write additional observations about how the system impacts Black children and families differently than White children and families. Eight respondents highlighted the impact of systemic racism and racism in systems related to child welfare, with several respondents underlining the intersecting role of the criminal justice system. One respondent shared,

There are not enough services for any of the families, especially those where mental illness impacts the ability to parent. The bias I have witnessed is in the criminal justice system. Black parents are incarcerated for longer than White parents with comparable backgrounds and charges against them. Socioeconomic standing influences DCFS cases, whether the parents are black or white. Their profession and financial resources seem to influence the courts' decisions on DCFS cases more often in the parents' favor. They are given more allowances than parents in a lower socioeconomic classification.

Six respondents highlighted biases within the child welfare system as harming Black children and families. Half of these responses were specific to transracial placements, with one respondent sharing,

Black children are placed in White homes more than White children are placed in Black homes. Their culture is not always looked at. They do not look at whether the White caregivers can care for the minors' hair or skin and ensure that they are involved with their ethnic communities.

The remaining three respondents highlighted the impact of biases, with one respondent sharing,

In my experience, families of color are "expected" to have a case in the system. However, people are shocked when a Caucasian family has a case. I've seen this with some of my co-workers who have created excuses for white parents who are not meeting requirements but have an eagle eye on a Black family. This appeared to be an unrecognized bias, but it was disturbing to witness.

Just over ten percent of respondents indicated that DCFS requirements around the suitability of potential permanent placements burden Black families. They shared that: a) Black families are less comfortable with adoption than White families as they consider it disrespectful to the birthparents, b) Black families are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system, resulting in criminal histories that prevent permanency, and c) space limitations in housing and the presence of multi-generational households impact permanency outcomes for children.

Table 12

Perceived Differences in Child Welfare System Supports for Black Children and Their Families Compared to White Children and Their Families (check all that apply)

	<u>Count (Percentage)</u>			Fisher Exact test between Black and Non-Black Responses (two-tailed)
	All Responses n = 167	Black Permanency Staff Responses n = 34	Non-Black Permanency Staff Responses n = 133	
Not enough services are available in communities or neighborhoods with large proportions of Black families	79 (47.3%)	21 (60.0%)	58 (43.6%)	NS
No difference	71 (42.5%)	5 (14.3%)	66 (49.6%)	$p < 0.001$
Black professionals are underrepresented in some professional roles dealing with child permanency ¹	52 (31.1%)	14 (41.2%)	38 (28.5%)	NS
Not enough resources are provided to support Black caregiving families	43 (25.7%)	13(37.1%)	30 (22.6%)	NS
Not enough resources are provided for Black birthparents	41 (24.6%)	12 (34.3%)	29 (21.8%)	NS
Some professionals are less likely to respect the views of Black families about adoption and guardianship	37 (22.2%)	12 (34.3%)	25 (18.8%)	NS
Some professionals are biased against Black families seeking guardianship of a child	30 (18.0%)	7 (20.0%)	23 (17.3%)	NS
Other ways the system impacts Black families differently ¹	22 (13.2%)	6 (17.1%)	16 (12.0%)	NS
DCFS requirements around the suitability of potential permanent placement place more burden on Black families ¹	17 (10.2%)	7 (20.0%)	10 (7.5%)	$p = 0.05$
Caseworkers are less likely to search for kin caregivers for Black children	8 (4.8%)	3 (8.6%)	5 (3.8%)	NS

1. See text for a description of roles where Black professionals are underrepresented, other ways the system impacts Black families differently, and DCFS requirements around the suitability of potential permanent placements that burden Black families.

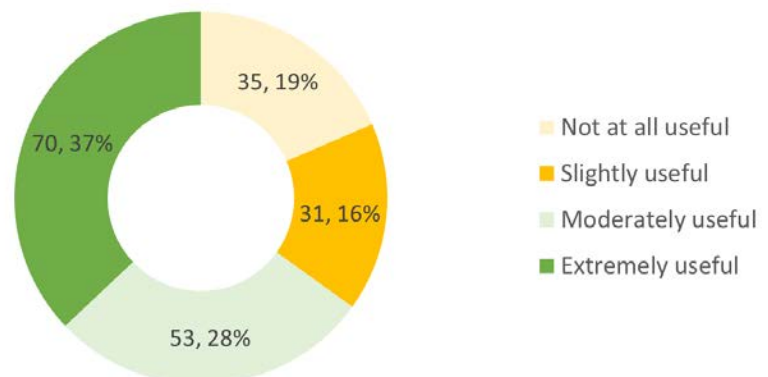


Chapter 7

Professional Development and Support

Permanency staff were asked how useful training on guardianship as a permanency option would be to them personally (Figure 14). They were provided a 4-point Likert-type scale (1-Not at all useful, 2-Slightly useful, 3-Moderately useful, 4- Extremely useful) to answer. The most common response was extremely useful (37%), with the second most common being moderately useful (28%).

Figure 14
Permanency Staff Perceptions on How Useful Training on Guardianship as a Permanency Option Would Be to Them (n = 189)



Supports Received Around Racial Bias, Disparities, and Disproportionality

Respondents were asked what support they received around racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality issues. They were provided with eight items and asked to select all that apply. Table 13 shows the results. Almost three-quarters had received training from their agency. Almost half reported receiving support from colleagues in their agency, and almost a third received training from outside their agency. Just over one-fifth had received support from colleagues outside their agency. Other types of support were less common.

Table 13

Supports Staff have Received to Address Racial Bias, Disparities, and Disproportionality (check all that apply n = 195)

	Count	Percentage
Training from my agency	142	73.6
Support from colleagues in my agency	85	44.0
Training from outside my agency	61	31.6
Support from colleagues outside my agency	44	22.8
Assistance with a specific incident	33	17.1
Support from a professional organization	32	16.6
None	21	10.9
Other ¹	5	2.6

1. *Other* includes: a) The African American Advisory Council has highlighted black youth being overrepresented in Illinois' child welfare system. b) There is a need for Black social work education and mentors. c) I have not seen an issue based on racial bias, but I do have colleagues that can provide support.

Supports Wanted to Help Address Racial Bias, Disparities, and Disproportionality

Respondents were asked what additional support around racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality issues would be helpful. Thirty-five permanency staff answered this open-ended question (Table 14). The majority of their responses fell into three categories: 1) no recommendations (15 responses), 2) additional training is needed (10 responses), and 3) additional services and supports are needed (10 responses). Permanency staff who advocated for additional training provided some insight into the types of training they feel are needed. Suggested training topics included: 1) training for transracial foster parents, 2) an overview of racial issues across the state (highlighting the need to look beyond Cook), and 3) cultural competency and implicit bias training with support for identifying and addressing bias. It was also suggested that training and education opportunities where parents and relatives are provided a platform to share their experiences would help promote more equitable practices. Several responses expressed a need to identify more trauma-informed services and supports for families. These responses highlighted long waiting lists and gaps in services, the need for substance abuse services, mental health services, transportation services, and support for single mothers. Suggestions were made to seek out more diverse service providers, identify services to support cultural development for youth in transracial homes, and develop services specific to Black families.

Table 14

Supports Staff Want to Address Racial Bias, Disparities, and Disproportionality (n = 31)

Topic Area	Count (percentage)	Sample quote
No recommendations	15 (42.9%)	<i>Unknown, not sure.</i>
Additional training is needed	10 (29.0%)	<i>Training for parents to help children adjust in racially diverse foster homes.</i>
Additional services and support are needed	10 (29.0%)	<i>Recruiting more diverse service providers, providing legal assistance, and increasing financial resources for reunification assistance, transportation, housing, and employment assistance.</i>



Chapter 8

Discussion

This chapter discusses conclusions we can draw from this survey of permanency professionals. The reports from each of the four components of the larger study will have similar chapters. However, we do not in this report describe the policy context of these results, nor do we discuss here the implications for policy and practice, nor do we in this report make recommendations for change. A separate report on the policy context and lessons learned from the research draws on findings of all four components of the larger study. It discusses implications and recommendations. We have also prepared a compact research brief on the findings from the professional interview and survey data, which includes capsule information on context, implications, and recommendations. All of our publications are available through our study [subsidized guardianship webpage](#).

Safe, Permanent Families, that Meet the Needs of the Child

There were five factors that more than half of permanency staff felt were extremely important in permanency planning. A common theme across these factors was the value that permanency staff placed on stable and safe family environments. First and foremost, most permanency staff thought that it was extremely important to avoid disruption following a permanent placement (79%). Similarly, majorities favored keeping the child with the caregivers they had been living with (60% extremely important) and avoiding the child being returned to birthparents “behind the agency’s back after the case after the case was closed” (72% extremely important). Permanency staff also felt it was extremely important to maintain sibling relationships (72%) and for the family to support the child after they turn 18 (66%).

Permanency staff emphasized the importance of understanding the needs and wishes of the child as the driving factor influencing permanency decision-making. Specifically, when asked to compare adoption and guardianship on 34 different circumstances, the most popular choice in 31 of the circumstances presented was *it depends on the case or no difference*. This indicates to us that most professionals focus on the unique needs of the child

when choosing between adoption and guardianship. This was reinforced by the comments respondents provided in an open-ended question comparing adoption and guardianship. Nearly 30% of the comments reflected the view that each case is different, and that there is a complex interplay of factors that contribute to the decision of which permanency goal is in the child's best interest. Moreover, other comments noted that disruption is a concern for both adoption and guardianships, indicating that resources are needed for both post-permanency to avoid disruptions.

Permanency staff rated the importance of the wishes of six different stakeholders (birthparents, traditional foster parents, fictive-kin caregivers, kin caregivers, adolescents aged 14 or older, and children under age 14). The highest rated wishes were that of adolescents (76% rated as extremely important) and the children (46% rated as extremely important). This is higher than the ratings regarding the wishes of kin and fictive-kin caregivers (both 42% extremely important), traditional foster parents (36% extremely important), and birthparents (23% extremely important).

Comparing adoption and guardianship

More permanency staff see no difference between adoption and guardianship than favor one permanency goal over the other. Permanency staff were presented with 34 different circumstances where they were asked if adoption or guardianship would be better. They were also invited, in an open-ended question, to share their thoughts on the comparison between adoption and guardianship. This was reinforced by the comments respondents provided. Nearly 30% of the comments reflected the view that each case is different, and that there is a complex interplay of factors that contribute to the decision of which permanency goal is in the child's best interest.

Where a preference was shown, adoption was favored over guardianship in most circumstances. Across the 34 circumstances where a comparison was made, adoption was favored over guardianship for 20 of the circumstances. Furthermore, adoption was preferred on the three items where *it depends on the case* or *no difference* were not the most common answers; these three items all involved cases with children under the age of 14.

The belief that DCFS prefers adoption over guardianship is common among permanency staff. Sixty-one percent of staff indicated that DCFS will support whichever permanency goal (adoption or guardianship) is in the best interest of the child. However, nearly half of permanency staff (47%) indicated that DCFS prefers adoption over guardianship whenever possible. Further, 40% of staff indicated that DCFS prefers adoption for children under a certain age, specifying anything from 5 to 14 years of age. In contrast only 6% of permanency staff indicated that DCFS prefers guardianship over adoption.



Permanency staff were asked three questions about Public Act 10-0193, filed as HB 1068 30, an amendment to the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 that became law in July of 2021. Over half of the permanency staff indicated that they were at least moderately familiar with the new law (53%) and further indicated that they feel that the law is at least moderately in children's best interests (58%). Forty-three percent of respondents indicated that Public Act 10-0193 would not affect the use of guardianship because their agency's current practices were already consistent with the act before it was passed. Slightly more permanency staff indicated they think the number of guardianships will decrease (19%) because of the act, compared to those who indicated guardianship would increase because of the act (17%).

Most permanency staff favored guardianship when adolescents do not want to be adopted (88%) or desire 38

an ongoing relationship with their birthparents (63%). They also commented that guardianship can be effective for persuading an adolescent to accept a permanency plan. Guardianship was favored in cases where the child has a stable caregiver who is willing to provide for the child but does not want to adopt (66%) or is interested in providing a permanent home but wants to respect the birthparents (54%). Respondents favored guardianship in cases where the birthparents are unable to provide for the safety or well-being of the child but have a loving relationship with the child (61%) or are complying with their service plan (58%). More than half of permanency staff indicated that guardianship is better than adoption for maintenance of family relationships, including the child's relationship with their birthparents, siblings, extended-kin, and fictive-kin.

Other results also supported the value of guardianship. Half of respondents thought it was moderately or extremely important that a child got to keep their original birth certificate, which is what would happen with a guardianship. Almost two thirds (65%) of respondents felt that it was a moderately or extremely important consideration in permanency planning to maintain a child's relationship with birthparents, when the birthparents are following a service plan but are still not able to care for their child. Almost half (48%) thought that the kin caregivers' relationship with the birthparents was a moderately or extremely important factor.

Considerations for Promoting the Effective Use of Guardianship

The survey asked permanency staff about the timing for when they initiate the discussion of guardianship with caregiver. Almost half of the respondents (48%) indicated that they begin to discuss guardianship with the substitute caregiver after the reunification goal has been deemed not in the child's best interest. But one-fifth of survey respondents (20%) indicated that they begin to discuss guardianship with the substitute caregiver *as soon as the child is placed in the substitute care home*. Permanency staff's perceptions of when DCFS prefers caseworkers to begin discussing guardianship nearly parallels their practice. Discussing guardianship as an option earlier in the case may avoid delays in permanency in cases where reunification is not achieved.

Earlier conversations about guardianship provide a timely opportunity to encourage kin and fictive kin to engage earlier with the licensing process, which might help reduce delays in achieving guardianship. Over a third of permanency staff indicated that licensing significantly delays attaining guardianship (36%). Nearly equal proportions of permanency staff indicated that licensing holds caregivers to an appropriate standard (35%) and indicated that licensing requirements prevent guardianships that are in the child's best interests (34%). Many respondents specifically indicated that licensing requirements around the criminal history of household members (30%) and physical environments (24%) prevent guardianships that are in the child's best interests. Finally, 20% of permanency staff indicated that licensing requirements tend to disadvantage Black families more than White families. These results indicate that many permanency professionals did not perceive licensing as a fair and reasonable standard for all families. The concerns permanency staff expressed about delays related to licensing and about the potential inequity of the licensing requirement suggest the need for close examination of licensing processes and practices for guardianship. This examination should include a review of the licensing waiver process and the effects of licensing on permanency outcomes for older youth.

Professional development for permanency staff may also be useful in promoting the effective use of guardianship. About two-thirds of permanency staff indicated that such training would be extremely useful (37%) or moderately useful (28%), and another 16% thought it would be slightly useful. Nineteen percent indicated that such training would be *not at all useful*. Respondents suggested that training include guidance on the decision-making process around permanency, the timing and information permanency professionals should provide caregivers, and the steps involved in reaching permanency for children with guardianship goals.



Racial Disparities in Permanency Planning and Outcomes

Permanency staff were asked about perceived differences in permanency planning, use of adoption and guardianship, child welfare system supports, between Black and White families. Over half of Non-Black respondents perceived no differences in permanency planning with Black children and families compared to White children and families, but only about a fifth of Black professionals felt this way. Nearly half of Black professionals thought that children are more likely to be reunified in White families than in comparable Black families, and 40% of them felt that White children were reunified more quickly, compared to much smaller percentages of Non-Black professionals who had these perceptions. Nearly a third of Black professionals thought that the courts give Black birth families less time than White families before moving to terminate parental rights, compared to 8.5% of Non-Black professionals. Black permanency staff were 2.8 times more likely to feel that children are more likely to be reunified in White families than in comparable Black families, 4.7 times more likely to feel that children are reunited more quickly in White families than in comparable Black families, and 3.7 times more likely to feel that the courts give Black birthparents less time than White birthparents before moving to terminate parental rights.

Non-Black permanency staff were more than 13 times more likely than Black permanency staff to report *no difference* in the use of adoption and guardianship for Black and White families. Black permanency staff were 2.6 times more likely to feel Black families are more likely to experience challenges advocating for their child(ren) and family (Black permanency staff = 63%, Non-Black permanency staff = 24%), 2.6 times more likely to feel that many Black families have more difficulty meeting the requirements for guardianship subsidies (Black permanency staff = 51%, Non-Black permanency staff = 20%), and 2.6 times more likely to feel that Black families are more likely to favor guardianship over adoption (Black permanency staff = 49%, Non-Black permanency staff = 19%).

In terms of support, the most common differences reported by permanency professionals were a) not enough services are available in communities or neighborhoods with large proportions of Black families (47%), b) Black professionals are underrepresented in some professional roles dealing with child permanency (31%), c) not enough resources are provided to support Black caregiving families (26%), and d) not enough resources are provided for Black birthparents (25%). There was no significant difference between Black and Non-Black permanency staff on these items. In reference to the underrepresentation of Black professionals, respondents indicated a need for more Black supervisors, Black providers (mental health, substance abuse, LGBTQIA supports), Black administrators, and Black legal professionals (DCFS attorneys, guardians *ad litem*, public defenders, and judges). Respondents also shared other factors they perceive as impacting racial disparities in permanency including a) the impacts of systemic racism and implicit biases on Black families, b) Black families are disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system, and c) licensing requirements disproportionately affect Black families due to housing concerns (e.g., limited bedroom space) of multi-generational households.

Permanency staff provided information about what supports they have received regarding racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality. Almost three quarters (74%) had received relevant training from their agency and 32% have received training from outside their agency. Forty-four percent indicated that they receive support from colleagues in their agency, and 23% indicated that they have received support from a colleague outside their agency. Thirty-five professionals provided comments on the resources that they would find helpful. They suggested trainings on a) raising transracial children (for foster parents) b) racial issues across the state (highlighting the need to look beyond Cook), and c) cultural competency and implicit bias training. Respondents suggested that these trainings include family voices and experiences. Additional trauma-informed services and supports for families were highlighted as a need. Respondents also noted the negative impacts of long waiting lists and gaps in services.

This analysis suggests that racial inequities affect Black families and children during the permanency process, and that it is critical that we elevate the voices of Black permanency staff, who, in this study, recognized and identified racial inequities impacting the permanency process. The responses of Black permanency staff suggest that these inequities are prevalent despite high engagement among permanency professionals in professional development on racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality. While additional training is likely beneficial, this analysis suggests that a systematic review of practices and policies that contribute to these inequities is needed and that more systemic changes are necessary to achieve more racially equitable permanency outcomes.

Conclusion

In this survey, permanency professionals shared their perspective on the permanency process with a focus on equity and permanency outcomes. They shared their perspectives on what factors are key in making permanency decisions, the circumstances under which adoption or guardianship are the preferred permanency outcome, their practices and views of guardianship, and perceived difference in permanency practices for Black children and their families. Based on the information they provided we can make some overarching conclusions.

First, permanency professionals place the highest value on permanency goals that lead to safe and stable homes for children. Guardianship is highly valued in cases where maintaining a relationship with the child's birth family is in the child's best interest, and where a willing and stable home with family or close friends is available. Adoption provides a safe and permanent home, when the family cannot provide these things.

Second, there is limited value in comparing adoption and guardianship as permanency outcomes. Under most circumstances, permanency professionals indicated that there is no difference in the relative value of adoption and guardianship. Where there was a preference, adoption was preferred over guardianship in most circumstances. This may be reflective of the prevailing belief that adoption is more stable, or the prevailing belief that DCFS prefers adoption. As we will discuss in a report we are preparing on the implications of this research program, the evidence suggests that neither of these beliefs are true. The circumstances where permanency professionals prefer adoption and where they prefer guardianship are distinct. In fact, other permanency options may be the more likely alternative to adoption and guardianship, outcomes such as remaining in substitute care and aging out or independence. As such discussions comparing adoption and guardianship, may distract from the overarching goal of providing children with permanent safe and stable homes.

Third, effective communication around guardianship is key to promoting the effective use of guardianship. This starts with effective communication and professional development on the use of guardianship for permanency professionals. About two-thirds of permanency professionals indicated that training on guardianship would be useful. This training should encourage them to have conversations with kin and fictive kin caregivers about the possibility of guardianship early in the case. Early conversations about guardianship would allow caregivers to engage in a timelier way with the licensing process and potentially avoid unnecessary delays. Additionally, having family who advocate for guardianship may allow children to retain a relationship with their parents and be spared the trauma associated with the termination of their parents' rights.

Fourth, our data suggest that there are racial inequities throughout the permanency process and in order to address these we need to engage with Black professionals and learn from their experiences and observations. Permanency professionals highlighted a range of inequities impacting Black children and their families throughout the permanency process. Consistently Black professionals identified more inequities and a higher level of support needed to address these. Black professionals indicated that White children are more likely to be reunited with their families, and reunited faster, than comparable Black children and their families. They also told us that not enough resources are provided to Black parents or Black caregivers, and that there are not enough resources in communities or neighborhoods with a large proportion of Black families.



Appendix A Survey Instrument

Survey of Caseworkers and Supervisors on Adoption and Guardianship

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The purpose of this study is to learn about planning for permanency for children in the custody of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Participating in this study will involve completing an online survey that will take about 30 minutes.

Principal Investigator

Dr. Theodore P. Cross, Senior Research Specialist Department and Institution: Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Contact Information: tpcross@illinois.edu or 781-640-4532. Sponsor: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Why am I being asked?

You have been asked to participate in this research because of your role in the planning process for children in DCFS custody. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Withdrawing from the study will not have negative consequences for you.

What procedures are involved?

The study involves completing an online survey. You will be asked questions about your perceptions and opinions about different aspects of permanency planning. The survey will take about 30 minutes to complete.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

There is little risk. You may feel sad or uncomfortable if you have had negative experiences related to permanency planning. We are keeping your information confidential, but there is a small risk that private information may be released by accident.

Are there benefits to participating in the research?

Your views will be included in a study that may improve services and supports for children and families.

Will my study-related information be kept confidential?

Your name is not collected in this survey. Since we do not collect your name, no personally identifying information will be used in any report (formal or informal, verbal or written) that is provided to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services or any private agencies.

Will I be paid for my participation in this research?

No, you will not.

Can I stop being in the study if I want to?

Yes, you are free to stop being in the study at any time. You can choose not to answer a question or stop your work on the survey at any time.

Do I have to complete the survey at one time?

You can leave the survey if you need to and resume later, as long as you return to the same browser where you started the survey.

Will my answers be used for any other research?

Your answers will not be used in other studies.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the study director, Dr. Theodore P. Cross, at 781-640-4532 or tpcross@illinois.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, or if you have concerns or complaints about the research.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu.

Do you consent to complete this survey?

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

Do you work directly for Illinois DCFS or an agency that contracts with DCFS?

- I work directly for Illinois DCFS
- I work for an agency that contracts with DCFS
- Other (specify): _____

What DCFS region do you work in?

- Northern
- Cook
- Central
- Southern

What work do you currently do related to adoption and guardianship of children and youth in DCFS custody (select all that apply)?

- Permanency casework
- Supervising permanency casework
- Writing adoption subsidies
- Writing guardianship subsidies
- Other (specify): _____

Please estimate the number of cases you have worked-on or supervised both currently and over the course of your career with the following primary goals.

	Current Cases	Cases Over Career
Reunification		
Adoption		
Guardianship (with subsidy)		
Guardianship (without subsidy)		
Independence		
Substitute Care		
Other		

Consider cases in which a relative or close friend (fictive kin) is taking care of the child or children and would become the permanent caregiver. Compare adoption and guardianship as permanency goals in relation to placement stability:

	Adoption is much better	Adoption is somewhat better	No difference	Guardianship is somewhat better	Guardianship is much better	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
Length of time to permanency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Likelihood of placement lasting through age 18 without disruption	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Likelihood that caregiver would try to "give children back" to DCFS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supporting children after they turn 18	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Consider cases in which a relative or close friend (fictive kin) is taking care of the child or children and would become the permanent caregiver. Compare adoption and guardianship in the following case circumstances:

	Adoption is much better	Adoption is somewhat better	No difference	Guardianship is somewhat better	Guardianship is much better	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
Child well-being (e.g., physical health, behavioral health, educational progress)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintaining the child's relationship with their birthparents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Protecting the child from abusive birthparents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing assurance to the child of having a permanent home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The child's sense of being part of a family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Consider cases in which a relative or close friend (fictive kin) is taking care of the child or children and would become the permanent caregiver. Compare adoption and guardianship as permanency goals for adolescents aged 14 and over:

	Adoption is much better	Adoption is somewhat better	No difference	Guardianship is somewhat better	Guardianship is much better	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
Adolescent well-being (e.g., physical health, behavioral health, educational progress)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintaining the adolescent's relationship with their birthparents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Protecting the child from abusive birthparents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing assurance to the adolescent of having a permanent home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The adolescent's sense of being part of a family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Persuading an adolescent to accept a permanency plan involving a permanent caregiver rather than hold out for independent living	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Consider cases in which a relative or close friend (fictive kin) is taking care of the child or children and would become the permanent caregiver. Compare adoption and guardianship relative to the following family dynamics:

	Adoption is much better	Adoption is somewhat better	No difference	Guardianship is somewhat better	Guardianship is much better	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
Supporting permanent caregivers' relationship with birthparents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responding to families that had long-standing informal kin caregiving before DCFS became involved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensuring that the permanent caregiver is the one taking care of the child day-to-day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Avoiding relatives allowing birthparents to take children home behind the agency's back after the case is closed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Consider cases in which a relative or close friend (fictive kin) is taking care of the child or children and would become the permanent caregiver. Compare adoption and guardianship as permanency options in relation to the following birthparent circumstances:

	Adoption is much better	Adoption is somewhat better	No difference	Guardianship is somewhat better	Guardianship is much better	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
The birthparent(s) are following a service plan, but are not able to care for their children at this time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A birthparent is incarcerated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A birthparent is taking steps to overcome an alcohol or drug problem, but needs more time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The birthparent(s) have done everything they needed to, but the child does not want to return home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In cases where terminating birthparent(s) rights would be difficult	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enabling birthparents' visitation with their child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting birthparents to accept a permanency plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Consider cases in which a relative or close friend (fictive kin) is taking care of the child or children and would become the permanent caregiver. Compare adoption and guardianship on the following factors affecting placement:

	Adoption is much better	Adoption is somewhat better	No difference	Guardianship is somewhat better	Guardianship is much better	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
Helping kin caregivers feel comfortable with the permanency decision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintaining contact among siblings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making a good kin placement permanent when licensing (of the kin caregiver home) is impossible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taking into account the age and/or health of an older caregiver	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping permanent caregivers understand their responsibility to the child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please share any additional thoughts about the comparison between adoption and subsidized guardianship below:

When considering planning for a kin caregiver to adopt or become their guardian, how would you rate the importance of the following?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Moderately important	Extremely important	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
Providing flexibility for the possibility of eventual reunification with birthparent(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The permanent caregiver's relationship with the birthparent(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintaining the child's relationship to their birthparent(s) who are following a service plan but are still not able to care for their children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Avoiding terminating birthparent(s)' rights	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making a good kin placement permanent when licensing (of the kin caregiver home) is impossible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping siblings together	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taking into account the age of an older caregiver	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Avoiding relatives allowing birthparents to take children home behind the agency's back after the case is closed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you rate the importance of the following factors in deciding on adoption or guardianship as a permanency plan for a child or youth?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Moderately important	Extremely important	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
Keeping the child connected to their birth family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The child receiving support from the family after they turn 18	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The child getting to keep their original birth certificate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The child changing their last name to that of their permanent caregiver	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The child getting a new social security number that birthparents cannot misuse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping a child with the caregiver they have been living with prior to permanency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preventing any further disruption once permanency is established	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing the child or adolescent with the last name they want to have	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you rate the importance of the wishes of the following parties when deciding on a permanency plan for a child/youth?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Moderately important	Extremely important	Prefer not to answer	Depends on the case
The child, under age 14	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The adolescent, age 14 or older	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kin caregiver(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fictive-kin caregiver	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traditional foster parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The birthparents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**What circumstances would lead you to choose guardianship over adoption as a permanency plan for a child?
(check all that apply)**

- The child's current caregiver wants to provide permanent care but wants to respect the birthparents
- DCFS and the caregiver wants to give the birthparent(s) the opportunity to petition for custody in the future
- The caregiver will provide care until the child is 18 but does not want to adopt the child
- Birthparent(s) are complying with the service plans, but cannot provide for the safety and well-being of their child
- Birthparent(s) have a loving relationship with the child, but cannot provide for the safety and well-being of their child
- A child (under age 14) does not want to be adopted
- A child (under age 14) desires an ongoing relationship with their birthparent
- An adolescent (age 14 or older) does not want to be adopted
- An adolescent (age 14 or older) desires an ongoing relationship with their birthparent
- The child is in a good kin placement where licensing (of the kin caregiver home) is impossible
- Terminating birthparents' rights would be difficult
- Birthparent(s) agree to surrender parental rights if the permanency goal is guardianship but not if it is adoption
- The child is young but is part of a sibling group in the placement that includes an older youth who is refusing adoption and choosing guardianship
- The birthparents have a cognitive or intellectual disability that precludes their ability to safely care for their child
- Other (specify): _____
- I don't know

Please share your thoughts circumstances that would lead you to choose guardianship:

**At what point in the case would you usually begin to discuss guardianship with the substitute caregiver?
(select one answer)**

- As soon as the child is placed in the substitute home
- After the reunification goal has been deemed as not in the best interest of the child
- After an adoption goal has been deemed as not in the best interest of the child
- After adoption has been ruled out as a permanency goal
- Other (specify): _____

At what point in the case does DCFS prefer caseworkers to discuss the option of guardianship with caregivers? (select one answer)

- As soon as the child is placed in the substitute home
- After reunification goal has been deemed as not in the best interest of the child
- After an adoption goal has been deemed as not in the best interest of the child
- After adoption has been ruled out as a permanency goal
- Other (specify): _____
- I don't know

How do you think the requirement that guardians be licensed has affected the use of guardianship? (select all that apply)

- The requirement that household members not have a criminal record prevents guardianships that are in the child's best interest
- Physical environment requirements prevent guardianships that are in the child's best interest
- Other licensing requirements prevent guardianships that are in the child's best interest
- Licensing requirements have resulted in families receiving lower subsidies
- Licensing requirements interfere with guardians' access to subsidies
- Licensing significantly delays attaining guardianship
- Licensing requirements tend to disadvantage Black families more than White families
- Licensing holds caregivers to an appropriate standard
- Licensing improves the care of children in guardian homes
- Licensing has no effect on the use of guardianship
- Other (specify): _____

Do you perceive that DCFS has any of the following preferences around adoption and guardianship? (select all that apply)

- DCFS prefers whichever permanency goal (adoption versus guardianship) results in permanency faster
- DCFS prefers adoption over guardianship whenever possible
- DCFS prefers guardianship over adoption when the permanent caregiver is kin
- DCFS prefers adoption when the child is under a certain age (please specify)
- DCFS will support whichever permanency goal (adoption or guardianship) is in the best interest of the child
- Other (specify): _____

Do you perceive that the judges in your cases have any of the following preferences around adoption and guardianship? (select all that apply)

- The judges prefer whichever permanency goal (adoption versus guardianship) results in permanency faster
- The judges prefer adoption over guardianship whenever possible
- The judges prefer guardianship over adoption when the permanent caregiver is kin
- The judges prefer adoption when the child is under a certain age (please specify)
- The judges will support whichever permanency goal (adoption or guardianship) is in the best interest of the child
- Other (specify): _____

Based on your experience, how does the use of adoption and guardianship differ for Black families compared to White families? (select all that apply)

- Black child(ren) are more likely to have extended family members who are open to providing permanency for them
- A lack of trust of Black families impacts professionals' decision making around permanency
- Many Black families have more difficulty meeting the requirements for guardianship subsidies
- Black families are more likely to receive lower subsidy rates
- Black families are more likely to favor guardianship over adoption
- There are fewer people who want to adopt Black children
- Black families are more likely to experience challenges advocating for their child(ren) and family
- No difference
- Other (specify): _____

Based on your experience, how does permanency planning differ for Black families compared to White families? (select all that apply)

- The courts give Black birth families less time than White families before moving to terminate parental rights
- The courts give Black birth families more time than White families before moving to terminate parental rights
- Children are more likely to be reunified in White families than in comparable Black families
- Children are reunified more quickly in White families than in comparable Black families
- Adoption is pushed more for Black than for White caregiving families
- Adoption is pushed more for White than for Black caregiving families
- Guardianship is pushed more for Black than White caregiving families
- Guardianship is pushed more for White than Black caregiving families
- Other (specify): _____
- No difference

Based on your experience, how do child welfare system supports differ for Black families compared to White families? (select all that apply)

- Not enough resources are provided for Black birth parents
- Not enough resources are provided to support Black caregiving families
- Not enough services are available in communities or neighborhoods with large proportions of Black families
- Black professionals are under-represented in some professional roles dealing with child permanency (specify): _____
- Caseworkers are less likely to search for kin caregivers for Black children
- Some professionals are biased against Black families who are seeking guardianship of a child
- Some professionals are less likely to respect the views of Black families about adoption and guardianship
- DCFS requirements around suitability of potential permanent placement place more burden on Black families (specify): _____
- No difference
- Other ways the system impacts Black families differently (specify): _____

What supports have you received around issues of racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality? (select all that apply)

- None
- Training from my agency
- Training from outside my agency
- Assistance with a specific incident
- Support from a professional organization
- Support from colleagues in my agency
- Support from colleagues outside my agency
- Other (specify): _____

What additional supports around issues of racial bias, disparities, and disproportionality would be helpful?

How useful would training on guardianship as a permanency option be to you?

- No at all useful
- Slightly useful
- Moderately useful
- Extremely useful
- I don't know

A new law (HB1068) that passed in July of 2021 includes clauses that change the regulations around guardianship. The law states that before selecting guardianship as a goal that all other permanency goals, including adoption, have been deemed to be not in the child's best interest. It also requires that both adoption and guardianship must be discussed with caregivers prior to selecting guardianship as a goal.

How familiar are you with the changes to guardianship described here and do you believe these changes are in children's best interest?

	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Extremely	Unsure
Familiar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In children's best interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How do you think the new law (HB1068) will affect the use of guardianship?

- Increase the number of guardianships
- Decrease the number of guardianships
- No effect—our agency already follows this procedure
- No effect-other reasons (specify): _____
- I don't know

How long have you worked in your current job?

- Less than one year
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 4 years
- 5 to 6 years
- 7 to 10 years
- More than 10 years

How long have you worked in child welfare?

- Less than one year
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 4 years
- 5 to 6 years
- 7 to 10 years
- More than 10 years

How do you identify your gender?

- Man
- Non-binary
- Woman
- You prefer to self-identify (write description): _____

Are you of Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, or Spanish origin?

- Yes
- No

How would you describe your race? (*check all that apply*)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other (specify): _____

What is your age?

Appendix B Promotional Material

Contribute to Survey Research about Permanency Planning, Utilization of Guardianship, and Reducing Race Disparities

In this important survey, perspectives of all caseworkers and supervisors doing permanency planning with children and youth in care are needed to help our Illinois child welfare system to better understand supports and barriers to using guardianship as a permanency option for children and youth in care. Your help is also needed in promoting completion of caregiver survey on this topic – stay tuned for more information.

By participating in the survey, you contribute to an improved understanding of workers' views –

- o Comparing adoption and guardianship options for youth outcomes
- o How permanency planning varies for Black families compared to White families
- o Differences in permanency planning supports for Black families compared to White families
- o Importance of different criteria for adoption and guardianship
- o Reasons for choosing adoption compared to guardianship
- o Supports and barriers for using guardianship
- o Supports and barriers to reducing racial disparities in permanency outcomes

The survey may take up to 30 minutes to complete. We hope the questions support you in reflecting in your permanency planning work with children and youth, and inspire some helpful ideas. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential. Individual responses are summarized as a group and not personally identifiable.

The results will be available this fall 2022. An advisory team from DCFS is working with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign research team to review results of the study to improve permanency planning.

On your computer, please take the survey here:

https://uiucsocialwork.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a5z9omyO3bGjhHg

On your phone, you may use the QR code:



Thank you very much for contributing to this study!

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