

NOTICE

Decision filed 02/03/16. The text of this decision may be changed or corrected prior to the filing of a Petition for Rehearing or the disposition of the same.

2016 IL App (5th) 150130-U

NO. 5-15-0130

IN THE

APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS

FIFTH DISTRICT

NOTICE

This order was filed under Supreme Court Rule 23 and may not be cited as precedent by any party except in the limited circumstances allowed under Rule 23(e)(1).

---

<i>In re</i> DEMONQUEZ M., DEJAHNAY S.,	)	Appeal from the
TIASHAUNTI S., IKARION H.,	)	Circuit Court of
IZARION H., KAZONTRE H.,	)	Jackson County.
TRINAE H., KEONTRE H., and	)	
TAJAUNAE H., Minors	)	
	)	
(The People of the State of Illinois,	)	
	)	
Petitioner-Appellee,	)	
	)	
v.	)	Nos. 12-JA-9, 13-JA-6, & 13-JA-9
	)	
Katrina H.,	)	Honorable
	)	Christy W. Solverson,
Respondent-Appellant).	)	Judge, presiding.

---

JUSTICE STEWART delivered the judgment of the court.  
Justices Chapman and Moore concurred in the judgment.

**ORDER**

¶ 1 *Held:* The trial court's determination that the respondent was an unfit person was not against the manifest weight of the evidence where there was clear and convincing evidence that she failed to maintain reasonable responsibility for her children's welfare.

¶ 2 On April 3, 2012, the Jackson County State's Attorney filed a juvenile petition for adjudication of wardship, alleging that the respondent, Katrina H.'s, seven children, Demonquez M., Dejahnay S., Tiashaunti S., Ikarion H., Izarion H., Kazontre H., and Trinae H., were abused and neglected. At an adjudicatory hearing, Katrina admitted that Demonquez M. was an abused minor because his stepfather, Isaac, inflicted excessive corporal punishment on him and that the seven children were neglected minors because she was unable to stop the excessive corporal punishment Isaac consistently inflicted on Demonquez M. Based on Katrina's admission, the court found that the children were neglected minors. An order of disposition was entered placing the children in the custody/guardianship of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Two children, Keontre H. and Tajaunae H., born later, were also taken into custody. The State filed a petition to terminate Katrina's parental rights as to all nine children. Following a hearing, the trial court granted the petition, finding that Katrina was unfit to parent the nine children and that termination of her parental rights would be in their best interests. She filed a timely notice of appeal. We affirm.

¶ 3 BACKGROUND

¶ 4 Katrina H. is the mother of the nine children: Demonquez M. (born March 3, 2001); Dejahnay S. (born September 5, 2002); Tiashaunti S. (born May 14, 2004); Ikarion H. (born April 15, 2006); Izarion H. (born February 22, 2007); Kazontre H. (born April 11, 2009); Trinae H. (born July 20, 2011); Keontre H. (born May 28, 2012); and

Tajaunae H. (born June 27, 2013). DCFS took the older seven children into protective custody on April 2, 2012. On April 5, 2012, the trial court entered a shelter care order, finding that there was probable cause to believe that the minors were neglected; that there was an immediate and urgent necessity to remove them from the home; and that, for their health, safety, and best interests, they were placed in the temporary custody of DCFS.

¶ 5 DCFS took Keontre H. into protective custody when he was about four months old and Tajaunae H. into protective custody a few days after her birth. Katrina had a tenth child, Kalisha H. (born at 30 weeks gestation on July 15, 2014), who was taken into custody soon after her birth and died in foster care on May 20, 2015. Demonquez M., Dejahnay S., and Tiashaunti S. all have different fathers, and their fathers are different from the other children's father. Isaac H., the father of all the other children, voluntarily surrendered his parental rights on November 20, 2013.

¶ 6 These proceedings began following a hotline call from Demonquez M.'s school. The reporter stated that Demonquez M. came to school with two bright pink marks on his back, a six-inch very dark scar that had scabbed over in the middle of his back, a discolored back and right leg, a bright pink half-dollar-sized circular mark on his right leg, and scars and bruises on his right leg. The reporter stated that Demonquez M. said that his stepfather, Isaac, beat him with an extension cord with exposed wires.

¶ 7 On May 23, 2012, DCFS filed an integrated assessment. Mark Schloemann, a licensed clinical social worker, interviewed Katrina, Demonquez M., Ikarion H., Kazontre H., Dejahnay S., Dejahnay S.'s caregivers, Trinae H., Trinae H.'s caregiver, Isaac, and two other foster parents. His colleague, Teresa Eytalis, interviewed the other

children. Schloemann wrote in the report that, when Katrina was asked why she thought her children were in foster care, she curtly replied that it was because Demonquez M. "got a whoopin'." She denied knowing that he was injured because the whipping was excessive and said that "all kids have marks or scars."

¶ 8 In the trauma/adverse experiences history portion of the report, Schloemann wrote that Demonquez M. had been exposed to numerous incidents of domestic violence; frequent parental arguments; criminal activity by Isaac, who took him on drug deals to sell pills and cannabis; frequent severe punishments, which included whippings; and that he had been confined to a locked room when punished without access to a bathroom. Demonquez M. reported a significant pattern of abuse, including having to stand against a wall spread-eagle while Isaac gave him blows to the lower back and punched his hands. He stated that Isaac hit him with an extension cord with exposed wires and whipped him with a belt 20 to 30 times in a row. He reported being made to stretch his arms out and hold dumbbell weights. Dejahnay S. was tasked with telling Isaac if Demonquez M. lowered or released the weights and could hit him in the face. He said that he and his siblings were sometimes locked in a room and were not permitted out to use the bathroom. He expressed fear of Isaac.

¶ 9 The integrated assessment includes notations that Tiashaunti S. had scars on and between her legs from being whipped and a scar on the back of her neck. Tiashaunti S. reported that if she or her siblings got in trouble they would get a "whooping" with an extension cord that would leave marks on them. She stated that she was frightened when

at her home with her parents. She indicated that when at home both Katrina and Isaac got drunk and smoked.

¶ 10 Schloemann wrote that Ikarion H. reported that the scar on his back came from Katrina whipping him with an extension cord or wire.

¶ 11 It was noted in the integrated assessment that Izarion H. was very small for his age and was unable to hop because he was too frail to lift his leg. He had scars from abuse by Isaac. The assessment team opined that the fact that Izarion H. had not gained any weight in two years and was eating massive amounts of food in the substitute caregiver's home suggested that he had been severely deprived and neglected.

¶ 12 Schloemann wrote that Kazontre H. was very timid during the screening and that he was almost nonverbal. The first substitute caregiver reported that he had a significant fear of bathing. He also often stuffed food, such as an entire cheeseburger, into his mouth. He appeared to be in a hurry to eat, and his brother told his foster caregivers that they "only had five minutes to eat." He exhibited tantrums lasting up to several hours.

¶ 13 Schloemann noted that Trinae H. exhibited an intense fear or reaction to bathing in the tub. She also exhibited moderate fear of adult males.

¶ 14 Katrina told Schloemann that Isaac limited her contact with her family and others. She described an incident where he choked her, dragged her by her hair, and physically struck her multiple times. She stabbed him and went to her grandmother's residence. He came to her grandmother's residence and broke the windshield of her car, broke the mirrors, and tore the wind guard off the car's sunroof. She stated that he routinely

referred to her in vulgar terms, would tear the house up in rages, and once threatened to blow the house up with the gas oven.

¶ 15 In the clinical summary and impressions of Katrina, Schloemann expressed concern that she minimized the children's abuse and neglect and blamed Isaac for all their abuse. She claimed to not know Demonquez M. was injured. She denied abusing her children despite the fact that some of her children had reported that she had caused their scars by whipping them with an electrical cord. Some of her children had also reported being locked in a bedroom overnight as punishment and not being allowed access to the bathroom. Her six eldest children had displayed multiple symptoms of trauma since they entered protective custody. Katrina described one of Isaac's best qualities as his willingness to work and listed various jobs he had worked in the past. She stated that she could not protect her children because she feared her husband's physical abuse if she intervened. Schloemann believed she was fearful of Isaac but noted that she had opportunities to report his abuse of the children when he was working or the numerous times she said she left him during their relationship. Schloemann noted that Katrina had never worked, instead relying on government assistance and Isaac for survival. Schloemann wrote that Katrina appeared to "have placed her own needs, romantic and financial in front of her children's."

¶ 16 Schloemann found Katrina defensive when asked about her children's food intake. She denied ever withholding food as punishment or not having enough food to feed her family. He wrote that "[h]er statements showed either a lack of empathy or denial." The eldest children all exhibited eating behaviors consistent with neglect. Demonquez M.

habitually stole food and said he did it because he was not fed at home. Katrina blamed her father for setting that example because he would take food off store shelves and eat it. Katrina alleged that Isaac stole her Link card to fund his crack habit, which Schloemann felt lent credence to the children's reports of lacking food.

¶ 17 Katrina expressed a strong desire for her children to return to her care. Schloemann rated her prognosis as fair at best because she severely minimized the abuse and suspected neglect of her children and portrayed herself as unaware that her children were being harmed. He noted that Katrina needed to demonstrate a calmer, more rational approach when interacting with the staff. She specifically needed to stop yelling and verbally abusing the staff. He opined that Katrina's angry tirades suggested that she cannot control her temper, which was not conducive to the return of her children to her care because her lack of self-control presented concerns for the children's safety.

¶ 18 Keontre H. was born on May 28, 2012. He was taken into protective custody while at the hospital on May 29, 2012, and released back to Katrina on May 30, 2012.

¶ 19 On June 6, 2012, the court entered an order of protection that for the health, safety, and best interest of the seven eldest children, Isaac should have no contact with the children. On June 21, 2012, Katrina filed a petition to vacate the plenary order of protection. On the petition, she wrote that she requested it be vacated because she no longer felt the order was necessary and because she felt "DCFS made [her] get the order of protection in the first place."

¶ 20 On June 25, 2012, a supplemental juvenile petition was filed alleging, in part, that Keontre H. was a neglected minor because on June 11, 2012, despite the order of

protection prohibiting contact between Isaac and Katrina and Isaac's guilty plea to aggravated battery of Demonquez M., Isaac was seen at Katrina's residence, thus allowing Isaac access to Keontre H. The State requested a shelter care hearing.

¶ 21 At the shelter care hearing on June 25, 2012, Lynn Stoner from DCFS testified that Keontre H. was originally taken into protective custody when he was born but that he was returned to Katrina once she obtained an order of protection. On June 21, 2012, when Katrina petitioned the court to vacate her order of protection, Stoner and her supervisor decided to take protective custody of Keontre H. Stoner testified that she discussed this with Katrina, who stated that she wanted the order of protection vacated because she no longer felt that she needed protection from Isaac. DCFS had informed Katrina that she needed to add Keontre H. to the order, but she did not do that. Stoner stated that she tried to give Isaac notice by going to the last address he had given the court, but that the whole block consisted of vacant lots. The shelter care hearing was suspended to give Katrina the opportunity to withdraw her petition to vacate and to add Keontre H. as a protected party to the order of protection. He was returned to Katrina on June 26, 2012, when she added him to the order of protection. Katrina was arrested on August 10, 2012, for attempted aggravated battery, mob action, and obstructing a peace officer, and Keontre H. was taken back into custody. Katrina was released from jail on September 24, 2012, when Isaac posted her bail. She went to live with him. The charges against her were eventually dropped.

¶ 22 On June 19, 2012, the State filed an amended juvenile petition alleging that the seven eldest children were neglected minors and that Isaac consistently inflicted



excessive corporal punishment upon them while Katrina was aware of the punishment and had been unable to stop it. The State alleged that Kathy Swofford, medical director of the Children's Medical Resource Network, found that all the children were underdeveloped in both height and weight suggesting malnutrition or emotional/psychosocial mistreatment by their caregivers. The State further alleged that Ikarion H. had a badly damaged earlobe as a result of Katrina tearing an earring from his ear when he was younger. At a June 2012 adjudicatory hearing, Katrina admitted that Demonquez M. was an abused minor because Isaac inflicted excessive corporal punishment on him and that all the children were neglected minors because she was unable to stop the excessive punishment Isaac consistently inflicted on Demonquez M. The court found that the children were neglected minors and ordered DCFS to prepare a social investigation and service plan, to be submitted to the court prior to the dispositional hearing.

¶ 23 On July 18, 2012, DCFS filed a dispositional hearing court report. Demonquez M., Dejahnay S., and Ikarion H. had problems in their placements due to behavioral issues. Demonquez M. had been hospitalized from April 25 through May 3, 2012, for flashbacks and from May 25 through June 3, 2012, for hearing "dead people telling him to kill himself so he could join them." He was diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. It was determined that the Catholic Children's Home residential setting would be best for him. Ikarion H.'s negative behaviors resulted in his hospitalization from June 18 until June 28, 2012. He was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and oppositional defiance disorder. He was placed into a

specialized foster home through Illinois Mentor. On June 14, 2012, Dejahnay S. had a mental health assessment and was diagnosed with child neglect, child abuse, phase of life problem, adjustment disorder with mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct, and impulse control disorder. It was noted that, beginning at age four, she started using self-harming behaviors to regulate her emotions. Izarion H. had gained weight and started rebuilding his leg muscles, so he was now able to run, jump, and hop. Kazontre H. was referred for a developmental screening, and it was determined that he was two months behind on his speech. Trinae H. was behind on her immunizations. All of the children had gained weight and started growing. They visited weekly with their siblings and Katrina.

¶ 24 On October 17, 2012, DCFS filed an updated service plan initiated on October 1, 2012. Since the initial service plan, Isaac pleaded guilty to the charges related to the abuse of Demonquez M. On September 27, 2012, Demonquez M. was arrested for throwing a brick through a window at school and trying to hit a teacher. He was psychiatrically hospitalized. Caseworker Merri Seals evaluated the permanency goal of returning the children home within 12 months and found that Katrina had made unsatisfactory progress. The service plan goal was updated to returning the children to Katrina within 12 months pending her completion of recommended services by April 4, 2013.

¶ 25 On the same day, DCFS filed an integrated assessment prepared by Seals and Pamela Gillespie on October 9, 2012. Katrina was interviewed by the assessment team, consisting of Seals and Schloemann. Katrina was extremely angry and loud when

approached for the interview. She challenged Schloemann for being there, often resisted answering interview questions, and refused to sit during the interview. She eventually calmed down and cooperated with only occasional outbursts. She was unemployed and occasionally styled hair to earn extra money. She reported that she had become involved with Isaac six years earlier and that they had married about two years earlier. She alleged that Isaac routinely used drugs, primarily crack cocaine. She reported that Isaac provided emotional support and love to her. She indicated that all of her children loved him like a father and that they did everything together as a family. She stated that "[h]e just made the mistake of whoopin' my son." She recanted prior statements about his history of violence against her, saying that they "had a fight a long, long time ago" and that it was the only incident of physical violence. She angrily stated that she felt that the threat of Keontre H.'s removal from her care at birth if she did not add him to the order of protection was used to force her to comply with the order of protection against Isaac. She initially resisted answering how many weeks premature Keontre H. was but eventually stated that he was one week premature. Hospital reports indicate that he was born nine weeks premature.

¶ 26 Katrina reported participating in substance abuse treatment prior to being incarcerated. She attended at least two sessions and perhaps more. She stated that she had been receiving domestic violence counseling and individual psychotherapy. However, she had only been to counseling twice, had missed appointments, and her counselor was preparing to close her case due to noncompliance. Katrina reported participating in parenting training but admitted to missing a couple of times. She

reported depression, loss, and grief due to her separation from her children. Seals wrote that it was clear that she feels that she and her children were being punished for Isaac's maltreatment of the children.

¶ 27 The clinical impression of Katrina was that she had made a degree of progress on her service plan goal but that she continued to be a victim of Isaac's domestic violence against her. Additionally, she violated the order of protection around the time Keontre H. was born and recanted her reports of Isaac's significant abuse that she had given during the initial integrated assessment. She exhibited significant problems managing her anger, particularly with service providers. She denied alcohol or drug use, which contradicted reports given in the initial integrated assessment. She continued to deny the severity of abuse that Isaac had perpetrated on the children. Both parents reported childhood physical abuse in their respective homes, which may have contributed to their difficulties distinguishing between discipline and abuse. Her prognosis was guarded because she dropped the order of protection against Isaac and planned to reunite with him, which demonstrated a lack of insight as to how serious a safety concern he posed for her children and a lapse in her protective capacity. Her denial related to the abuse Isaac inflicted on her and Demonquez M. indicated that she was not ready to place her children's needs before her own. She failed to accept responsibility for the impact of her behavior on her children. The assessment team felt that, although she had made some progress in services, given the seriousness of the abuse in the family system, her progress was not sufficiently significant.

¶ 28 In a March 4, 2013, letter from Cardinal Glennon pediatric endocrinologist David Dempsher, which was filed on March 7, 2013, he wrote that he had examined Izarion H. on September 6, 2012, and that his colleague had examined him on February 28, 2013. He noted that, without any medical treatment, Izarion H. had grown 6.2 inches and gained 12 pounds since his last medical examination on April 6, 2012. He felt that this was a dramatic improvement considering that children Izarion H.'s age typically only grow two inches per year. He opined that, based on Izarion H.'s examination, laboratory data, and recent growth, his profound growth failure was related to his home environment. He averred that Izarion H. "suffered severe growth retardation from profound neglect." He further wrote that he felt it was unsafe for Izarion H. to return to his former home unless substantial supports to the family were instituted and Izarion H. was monitored carefully.

¶ 29 In the permanency hearing report to the court filed on March 12, 2013, DCFS caseworker Madonna Spann wrote that Katrina had not made significant progress toward the goal of return home. She noted that Katrina continued to minimize the children's abuse and stated that it was "a cultural thing—we whoop our children." She noted that on March 12, 2013, the case went to legal screening and that it was determined that there were grounds to terminate Katrina's parental rights.

¶ 30 On March 20, 2013, the court held a permanency hearing, where the goal was changed to substitute care pending termination of parental rights. On April 23, 2013, the guardian *ad litem* filed an amended petition for termination of parental rights and for appointment of a guardian with power to consent to adoption alleging that Katrina was an

unfit person because she failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to her children's welfare pursuant to section 1(D)(b) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2014)); failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for removal of the children from her pursuant to section 1(D)(m)(i) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2014)); and failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of the children to her within nine months after the adjudication of neglect or abuse pursuant to section 1(D)(m)(ii) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2014)).

¶ 31 Illinois Mentor filed a therapy report on July 31, 2013. Ashley Galloway wrote that from December 2012 to April 2013, Dejahnay S. had been displaying an abundance of behaviors. She had been getting in trouble at school for fighting, yelling, cussing, throwing books, and not following directions. At her foster home, she tried running away from her placement, made verbal threats, and kicked holes in the walls. In April, her foster parent could no longer handle her behavior, and she was moved to another foster home. At the end of the school year, she became upset while on the playground with her friends, tried running from the school, and acted aggressively toward her teacher.

¶ 32 Illinois Mentor filed a permanency hearing report on December 30, 2013. Child welfare specialist Alyssa Cline wrote that Dejahnay S. continued to have behavioral issues at school. She had an attitude problem and threatened to kill or harm other students when mad. Cline wrote that Ikarion H. was in a specialized foster care home with his sister Tajaunae H. and, in the past few months, he had been exhibiting behavioral issues. He threatened his foster mother if she would not let him eat cereal for dinner,

becoming irate and trying to hurt her. Cline wrote that Kazontre H. struggled in his placement. In August 2013, he was hospitalized for seriously aggressive behaviors. He continued to display very angry, defiant, and aggressive behaviors when he did not get his way. He had been seeing a counselor, but she had made little to no progress with him. He had an inability to communicate his frustrations and automatically began screaming and acting aggressively when things did not go his way.

¶ 33 In a permanency hearing report filed by Cline for Kazontre H., Ikarion H., and Dejahnay S. on February 13, 2014, she wrote that the foster parents for all three children indicated that the children's behaviors worsen after each visit with their mother. The children become hyper and aggressive, and Ikarion H. and Kazontre H. act violently with no indication as to why.

¶ 34 On April 2, 2014, Cline filed a court progress report on Kazontre H., Ikarion H., and Dejahnay S. On one visit, Ikarion H. had gotten hurt before his mother arrived. He had an ice pack on his ear and sought nurturing. Katrina began talking to Demonquez M. and Dejahnay S. but ignored Ikarion H. He climbed next to her on the couch, but she never looked at him. He then climbed on the back of the couch behind her, and she still did not notice. After a few minutes, he sat in the corner on the floor, sad and tearful, until Cline comforted him. He said all he wanted was a hug. Cline felt Katrina was too busy talking to Demonquez M. and Dejahnay S. about who they had a crush on to recognize that she had a child in need. Cline also noted that Katrina did not deal with Trinae H., Kazontre H., Izarion H., or Keontre H. She had the older children take care of them and give them a snack. Cline wrote that Kazontre H. continued with behavioral issues. He

had recently taken feces from the toilet and smeared it all over the bathroom, had taken his pants off when lying down with other people, and had behaved inappropriately with stuffed animals. On February 26, 2014, he became out of control at Head Start, punched his teacher in the face, continued to be aggressive and defiant the rest of the day, and was hospitalized. She noted that he struggled with being told no, constantly attacked people when in a vehicle, and threw tantrums and harmed other people when in a confined space. During visits, he played with Tiashaunti S. and his brothers but never spoke to Katrina.

¶ 35 On May 8, 2014, at a motion hearing for a bonding assessment requested by Katrina, Michael Shelton-Montez testified that he was the associate administrator of the Catholic Children's Home where Demonquez M. resided. In October 2012, Demonquez M. reported that on a visit Katrina whispered in his ear that "[s]he was going to beat his ass." Shelton-Montez said that Demonquez M. reported feeling responsible for the family not being together because Katrina told him it was his fault. When he first came to the home, Demonquez M. had almost daily phone conversations with Katrina. After several months, the staff noticed that his behaviors escalated after contact with his mother. He would throw chairs, act aggressively toward peers, hit staff, and express a desire to leave the program. Shelton-Montez testified that, in Demonquez M.'s best interest, the phone calls with Katrina were stopped due to her negative influence.

¶ 36 In the permanency hearing report to the court filed May 30, 2014, Spann wrote that return home was not recommended for the children because Katrina's loyalty to Isaac overrode her loyalty to her children. Isaac had proven to be an extremely abusive parent



figure, and the children would be in danger living with him. Katrina had made no plans to transport, house, or support her nine children. Spann opined that substitute care pending termination of parental rights was in the children's best interest.

¶ 37 On June 9, 2014, Kerie Fowler, the youth program coordinator, outpatient counselor, for Family Counseling Center, Inc., prepared a progress report for Izarion H. She noted that, due to his increase in problem behaviors including anger, defiance, and self-injurious behavior of picking at his skin until it scarred, visitation with Katrina was suspended. He had made moderate progress in his ability to identify appropriate coping skills and the understanding and expression of his feelings, although he still struggled. Incidents of physically aggressive or destructive outbursts, especially toward the other children in the home, had continued.

¶ 38 In an evaluation by DCFS of Katrina's permanency plan on October 9, 2014, it was noted that, although she stated she was separated from Isaac, a DCFS supervisor had seen her with him in the community on several occasions.

¶ 39 In March 2015, the court heard the amended petition for termination of parental rights regarding all nine children. The court took judicial notice of the criminal case against Isaac in Jackson County related to the abuse of Demonquez M.

¶ 40 Schloemann testified that he had been a licensed clinical social worker for about 25 years, that he worked at the Southern Illinois University School of Social Work Integrated Assessment Program, and that he conducted an integrated assessment for the purpose of driving the service plan and assessing the children's needs and the parents'

needs to correct the condition that brought the children into care. Prior to the assessment, he reviewed the investigation completed by DCFS in April 2012.

¶ 41 Schloemann testified that Katrina told him that the children had been removed from her care because Isaac had whipped Demonquez M. She described Isaac as controlling and, at times, physically abusive. He described her demeanor as cooperative but angry. He felt that she extensively minimized the extent of the children's neglect and abuse. Demonquez M. reported a significant pattern of abuse, which included being locked in his room without access to the bathroom; being made to stand against the wall spread-eagle while Isaac punched him in the lower back and hands; being hit with an extension cord with exposed wires; being whipped with a belt 20 to 30 times in a row; and being made to hold weights above his waist while Dejahnay S. hit him in the stomach at Isaac's instruction and slapped him in the face if he lowered the weights. Demonquez M. reported that he witnessed Dejahnay S. being lashed with a belt and an extension cord and being choked by Isaac while he held her up against a wall. Katrina never acknowledged that Isaac abused any of the children other than Demonquez M., and she described his treatment as "excessive whippings." She blamed Isaac for what happened to her children and never accepted personal responsibility. Despite the fact that the eldest children were diagnosed with failure to thrive and gained weight after they were placed in care, Katrina became angry that Schloemann questioned the quantity of food that she provided. She offered that they had routine meals at her house for dinner and said she fed them spaghetti, pizza, and chicken. She categorically denied that the children had not been fed adequately and never acknowledged that the children had been locked in their

rooms. He testified that Katrina's potential problematic personality traits included emotional dependent features. She displayed classic defense mechanisms including rationalization, denial, and repression. She did not show empathy for the children. He opined that Katrina's prognosis with regard to reunification was poor.

¶ 42 Schloemann testified that, in July 2012, he interviewed Katrina again after the birth of Keontre H., who was placed in foster care. She was angry that DCFS still had her children. He opined that Katrina greatly minimized the situation because she clung to the idea that the children were placed in custody because on one occasion Isaac whipped Demonquez M. excessively. Schloemann concluded that, although Katrina was capable of verbalizing appropriate parenting techniques, she had a nonexistent capacity to take responsibility for her past deficits as a parent. He felt that she remained in denial and continued to use rudimentary defense mechanisms such as accusing the DCFS staff of lying to explain away the evidence that indicated that she and Isaac abused and neglected the children. He opined that, until she could take more responsibility, her capacity to change remained an illusion.

¶ 43 Brittany Thomas, case manager for Illinois Mentor, testified that she worked with Dejahmay S. and Kazontre H. She stated that Kazontre H. had severe tantrums with kicking, screaming, cursing, biting, hitting, throwing, and breaking things. He turned five in April and had been hospitalized three times for mental health issues. She testified that, in her opinion, he did not know Katrina as his mother.

¶ 44 Rosemary Nelson, a counselor for Lutheran Social Services, testified that as part of Katrina's service plan, she met with Katrina six times between February 8 and April

12, 2013, to provide mental health services. She opined that Katrina did not have a full understanding of the impact her and Isaac's parenting practices had on the children. Katrina continued to state that the children went into care because of one incident where Isaac punished one child.

¶ 45 Bonnie Tebelak, the director of the Hope Unlimited Family Care Center, testified that she provided parenting classes to Katrina on an individual basis. The program was a high school child development class entitled parenting with rewards and responsibilities. She first met with Katrina on November 14, 2012. The class met every two weeks to cover one or two chapters. Katrina claimed not to be able to attend every class due to transportation issues. Tebelak testified that, at the May 7, 2013, class, they covered 10 chapters so that Katrina could complete her class before a court date.

¶ 46 Spann testified that she was Katrina's DCFS caseworker from January 23, 2013, until August 2014. She set up and monitored service plans for Katrina. She stated that Katrina never made sufficient progress in her service plans to be rated satisfactory. She rated Katrina unsatisfactory on the October 2013 through April 2014 service plan for demonstrating an increased awareness of the children's nutritional needs. She testified that Katrina brought the children junk food with no nutritional value. On November 1, 2013, the individual monitoring visitation observed Katrina telling Izarion H. to stop eating the snacks and to save some for Isaac. The other children then policed Izarion H. and informed Katrina if he tried to take a snack.

¶ 47 Spann testified that she rated Katrina unsatisfactory for failing to demonstrate an increased understanding of child development and appropriate discipline and supervision

of the children based on their age. Katrina continued to maintain that the children were in care because Isaac "whooped" one child. Spann stated that, in reality, the children were in care because they were locked in a room without bathroom privileges, they were not fed, the oldest three were beaten with cords, and five of them had to take psychotropic medications because of the effects of the trauma they suffered in Katrina's home.

¶ 48 Spann testified that she graded Katrina unsatisfactory with respect to being honest and cooperative with educators providing parenting services. She stated that Katrina initially described domestic violence between her and Isaac but later recanted. She stated that she received a letter dated November 18, 2013, from the Cairo Women's Shelter, who provided Katrina with eight weeks of domestic violence counseling, stating that Katrina told them that she was not in a domestic violence relationship but that she was willing to learn more about the subject. She testified that Katrina was not cooperative with people working on her case. Although Katrina sometimes spoke respectfully to the caseworkers, on other occasions she shouted, insulted, and deflected instead of attending to the task at hand. She also did not always provide the information requested. For example, when Spann asked for proof of employment to provide for the welfare of her children, Katrina responded that it was none of Spann's business whether she had a job. Katrina eventually said that she occasionally styled hair. Katrina was supposed to inform Spann of changes in address and phone number within 24 hours but only updated Spann when she needed something or when she wanted to complain about the children's treatment in foster care. Katrina was consistently not open and honest with service

providers. They were unable to discuss the conditions that brought the children into care because she denied that they occurred, and she blamed the children's trauma on foster care and the caseworkers. Demonquez M., Tiashaunti S., Dejahnay S., and Ikarion H. all reported that Katrina participated in beating them and locking them up.

¶ 49 Spann testified that Katrina did not exercise increased empathy for her children's feelings or physical and emotional needs. She continued having contact with Isaac and trying to expose the children to him. On November 1, 2013, she filmed the children and told them to say hello to Isaac. Throughout her visitation with the children, she made statements to them about returning home to her and Isaac. When Izarion H. told her he would miss a visit because he was going on vacation with his foster family, she told him he was not going on vacation but was coming home to her and Isaac. In September 2013, she called Demonquez M. at the Catholic Children's Home and attempted to persuade him to tell them that he wanted to come home to her and Isaac. She and Demonquez M. got into a shouting match, and the call was terminated. Eventually, the phone calls were stopped because they interfered with Demonquez M.'s treatment. Spann stated that Katrina never once expressed empathy for what the children had been through. She merely said, "It was a whooping. I was whooped and they got whooped. I have scars and they have scars." Izarion H. was therapeutically excused from visits with Katrina because of the effect it had on him. Five of the children were on psychotropic medication, and Katrina objected to it on the ground that they did not need it when they lived at home. She stated that the children had been diagnosed with PTSD due to what was happening to them in foster care. Despite Katrina's claims that she and Isaac were

separated and that she wanted nothing further to do with him because nothing was more important to her than the return of her children, she had a baby with him in 2014. Spann opined that Katrina never made reasonable efforts to correct the condition that brought the children into care.

¶ 50 Seals testified that she was the DCFS caseworker assigned to the case in April 2012. After the initial integrated assessment and before the second integrated assessment, Katrina said she was not around Isaac because of the order of protection. Seals expressed doubt about the truthfulness of this statement because one day during this time she had seen Isaac standing on Katrina's front porch. Two addresses Isaac had given her turned out to be vacant lots, and, when she went to a third one, no one answered the door. She mailed some releases to Isaac at that address, and they were returned as undeliverable. Seals testified that she rated Katrina unsatisfactory with respect to domestic violence counseling because she reconciled with Isaac.

¶ 51 Seals testified that Katrina displayed a lot of anger toward DCFS. She would become mad at the staff if something happened during a visit and would take it out on whoever was around. One of the people who transported the children felt her safety was at issue due to Katrina's behavior. Katrina yelled and expressed anger in front of the children at the visits. Seals testified that no one wanted to monitor Katrina's visits with her children because she would get mad at them.

¶ 52 Cline testified that she was the primary caseworker for Dejahnay S., Kazontre H., and Ikarion H. at Illinois Mentor and that she attended Katrina's visitation with the children from September 2013 through March 2014. She testified that, because of the

number of children, the noise level in the room was loud and the children would get overstimulated and cry. Katrina blamed staff when this happened. She opined that Katrina was unable to engage with and interact with all the children in the way a caring, loving parent should. She stated that there was a limited bond between Katrina and the younger children, that Katrina tended to focus more on Demonquez M. and Dejahnay S., and that the visits involved very little parenting. She described the contact with the children as more of a friend talking about Facebook or who they liked. She stated that the staff made sure the children were not getting into trouble or making messes. Katrina delegated taking care of the younger children to the older children and did not do it herself. Cline stated that Tiashaunti S. migrated toward the younger children and did not interact much with Katrina. Usually Tiashaunti S. or a staff member took care of Keontre H. Izarion H. avoided Katrina. In Cline's opinion, Trinae H. and Keontre H. did not really know who Katrina was.

¶ 53 Katrina testified that, when the children were removed from her home, she had not protected her children as she should from the "whoopin'" her ex-husband, Isaac, gave them. She stated that she had only one-hour visits with all of her children, and she had to split her time between them, but she did her best to give attention to each of them. She denied that she ever told her children not to eat food that she brought to the visitation or to save some for Isaac. She stated that on one occasion she brought a birthday cake for Dejahnay S. and after everyone had a piece Dejahnay S. told her to save some for Isaac. She denied only bringing the children junk food. She also denied ever showing her children photos of Isaac on her telephone during visitation. She testified that she allowed



her children to play games on her telephone and that on one occasion Tiashaunti S. found photos of Isaac and said "here go my daddy." Katrina testified that she never whipped her children. She denied intimidating caseworkers or drivers.

¶ 54 Katrina testified that, when the case first began in 2012, she admitted to domestic problems between her and Isaac. She stated that she now realizes that the methods Isaac used to punish the children constituted abuse. In 2012, there was a second assessment where it was reported that she recanted the domestic violence. She denied ever having recanted the domestic violence. She clarified that she told people they had problems and domestic issues.

¶ 55 Katrina denied withholding food from her children. She stated that Izarion H. was just a small child. She stated that she always fed her children "normal full-course meals." She testified that the Carbondale school sent food home with her children. She asked the school not to because she found it offensive, and she did not want her children to beg, but the school continued to send it, and she accepted it.

¶ 56 Katrina denied ever placing her relationship with Isaac above her relationship with her children. She stated that she and Isaac divorced on February 19, 2015. She said that it took her so long to divorce Isaac because she could not afford it and because the caseworkers put them in classes together and encouraged them to work together on parenting and marriage counseling to put their family back together. She stated that she and Isaac fought together for the return of the children and that if he had not been making an effort she would not have stayed with him.

¶ 57 Katrina testified that she did not know why she received unsatisfactory marks for her service plan. She stated that she completed all her classes and did everything required.

¶ 58 When asked why Demonquez M., Dejahnay S., and Ikarion H. stated that she beat them with electrical and extension cords, Katrina stated that they were probably coached to make those accusations. When asked why the children said that they were frequently locked in their rooms at night, she said that the information in the record was fabricated. She stated that Demonquez M. was locked in his room one time. When asked why the doctor at Cardinal Glennon said Izarion H. was too frail to lift his leg and could not hop, she said that was fabricated. When asked why Ikarion H. said the children only had five minutes to eat, she said it was a lie. When asked why Izarion H. gained no weight between 2009 and 2012, she stated that he was just little, and she did not withhold food from him. She stated that when Demonquez M. said that when he was punished he often did not get fed, he was lying. She said that the case note that on November 9, 2012, she put the children on the phone with Isaac was not true.

¶ 59 Brittany Thomas testified that, since she started working on the case in July 2014, she had been present for most of the visits. She opined that Katrina interacted a lot with the oldest three children and that there was some engagement with the younger children. She stated that Ikarion H. was generally left out and that he usually played by himself or interacted with staff.

¶ 60 Clinical psychologist Jean Cunningham testified that she completed a psychological evaluation of Katrina on February 27, 2013. Prior to her assessment, she

received the DCFS referral form, the DCFS integrated assessment and social history form, a feedback form from a meeting DCFS had about the case, a psychological evaluation of Demonquez M. prepared by Dr. Kosmicki, an initial therapy report from a counselor, and a statement written by Katrina. When she met with Katrina, Katrina was open about some topics but very guarded about other topics. Katrina reported that her children were in care because Demonquez M. had received a "whooping" from Isaac and that school authorities found marks on him and called DCFS who removed the children. Katrina had been attending parenting classes and stated that she understood that the whoopings were no longer an acceptable way of disciplining children but that was the way she had been raised. She never indicated that she thought the whooping Demonquez M. had received was excessive or abusive. She minimized the severity of the incident because she did not seem to regard it as abuse. She objected strongly to DCFS's characterization of Isaac and her as bad parents and abusive. She also said that Demonquez M. was in a residential school setting because of an isolated incident that occurred in foster care as opposed to his treatment by Isaac.

¶ 61 Dr. Cunningham testified that she gave Katrina a personality assessment inventory and that Katrina measured high as to positive impression management. This indicated that she answered the questions in a way to make the most positive impression and not to admit to even common failings. Because the positive management scale was so high, the clinical portions of the test were invalidated. Dr. Cunningham found the high level positive management scale consistent with Katrina's demeanor in terms of being highly defensive and not wishing to admit any guilt, culpability, or fault in the case of her

children. Dr. Cunningham explained that this typically indicates that the person sees herself as a very good person who does not need to make any changes. Dr. Cunningham administered a parent stress inventory to Katrina to complete with reference to Demonquez M. The parent stress inventory is used to identify dysfunctional parenting and predicts the potential for parental behavior problems and child adjustment difficulties within the family setting. Katrina's raw score on the defensive responding index indicated that she was unwilling to admit to any problem related to her son or to her relationship with him. This extremely defensive score rendered the test uninterpretable. Dr. Cunningham stated that, unless Katrina showed a different attitude than she did during the assessment, she would not likely benefit from services enough that she could make the necessary changes to have her children returned to her care.

¶ 62 Dr. Cunningham testified that Katrina had very limited insight and poor judgment. She stated that Katrina met most of the criteria for antisocial personality disorder because she lied, was aggressive, and lacked remorse. Dr. Cunningham stated that her examination was nearly one year after the children had been taken into DCFS care and there was very little evidence that Katrina had cooperated on a consistent basis with DCFS recommendations, she still externalized blame, she was not taking any responsibility, and she was making accusations against DCFS. Dr. Cunningham felt that there had not been any shift in Katrina's attitude over the past year. She stated that simply attending the parenting classes only conveyed information and did not necessarily change a person's attitude. During the interview, Katrina indicated support of Isaac by talking about his positive qualities and the things he had done for the family. Her loyalty

and her time spent with Dr. Cunningham were directed more toward Isaac than her children. Dr. Cunningham testified that Katrina did not show any emotion regarding her separation from her children. She found that Katrina did not indicate any distress concerning the length of time she had been separated from her children; nor did she indicate any empathy for any of them at any time. Dr. Cunningham diagnosed Katrina with borderline intellectual functioning, unspecified personality disorder with features of paranoid and antisocial personality disorders.

¶ 63 Dr. Frank Kosmicki testified that on September 17, 2012, he performed a psychological evaluation of Demonquez M. on referral from DCFS. In preparation for the evaluation, he received a copy of the integrated assessment from DCFS and a referral form for psychological evaluation from DCFS. Prior to the time Dr. Kosmicki examined Demonquez M., he had been hospitalized for symptoms including outbursts of anger and aggressions; hallucinations, including auditory hallucinations of a voice telling him to kill himself; visual hallucinations, including seeing dead people; intrusive thoughts; and nightmares, including a nightmare of Isaac killing his biological father with a gun. Dr. Kosmicki stated that, in the records, Demonquez M. had thoughts in the past about hurting himself and hurting Isaac prior to his hospitalization. Demonquez M. had two broken teeth, and he told Dr. Kosmicki that it happened when he was holding weights as part of a punishment by Isaac, his sister attempted to slap him, he moved out of the way and knocked his teeth with one of the weights. Katrina testified that Demonquez M.'s front teeth were broken when her nephew threw a toy during a car ride and it hit Demonquez M. in the mouth. Dr. Kosmicki opined that the history in Katrina's home had

caused significant trauma in Demonquez M.'s life. He presented with symptoms of PTSD most likely related to the abuse he suffered in Katrina's home. Dr. Kosmicki testified that the failure of a mother to protect her children is a particularly strong form of betrayal and is very significant to a child since the mother is the person most trusted to provide care, protection, housing, and food. Demonquez M. told Dr. Kosmicki that his foster parent's adult son pushed him to the ground, and he fought back. After the incident, he went outside and tried to kill himself with a paint scraper. The next day, he and his brother were removed from the foster home. Dr. Kosmicki opined that, because of Demonquez M.'s long history of abuse and neglect, he had problems regulating his emotions, so he experienced emotions like anger, sadness, and desperation more intensely than others. Dr. Kosmicki averred that Demonquez M.'s prior trauma contributed to his reaction to the incident at the foster home. Dr. Kosmicki opined that Demonquez M.'s psychological problems and his behavioral problems were related to the abuse and trauma in Katrina's home. Dr. Kosmicki averred that a stable nonviolent environment might decrease Demonquez M.'s behavioral problems and somewhat relieve his psychological problems.

¶ 64 Tricia Stottler testified that she served as the mental health counselor for Dejahnay S., Tiashaunti S., Kazontre H., and Izarion H. from May until September 2012. Dejahnay S. and Tiashaunti S. both disclosed that Katrina hit them with a wet belt and extension cords. Dejahnay S. reported that, when Demonquez M. was in trouble, he was instructed to hold weights out to the side, and she was ordered to hit and kick him when he lowered the weights. She reported that Demonquez M. was sometimes responsible for punishing

her. The foster parents reported that Dejahnay S. pulled her hair out. When Stottler tried to address it with Dejahnay S., she would smile and deny doing it. Stottler testified that, when she provided services to Kazontre H., he was three and had limited verbal skills. She stated that he would often mimic drinking by guzzling things and falling around. He would mimic police cars coming and fighting and would then become very scared and hide behind chairs. Izarion H. indicated that he was scared of Dejahnay S. and talked about whoopings in the house.

¶ 65 Stottler testified that the children showed symptoms of PTSD. Tiashaunti S. wanted to please everyone, which shows a fear of retribution and is a symptom of PTSD. She had a very inappropriate affect when talking about abuse or fear. She said she was scared of Dejahnay S. and would giggle as she described things Dejahnay S. would do to her as punishment and when she was mad at her. Dejahnay S. had a very flat affect, described everything in a monotone, and did not show emotion, which is also a symptom of PTSD. Kazontre H.'s behavior of running and hiding was symptomatic of PTSD. All four children were very conscious of loud noises and would react to them.

¶ 66 Stottler testified that the children's foster parents reported that they all hoarded their food. In therapy, if Kazontre H. ate his entire snack, he used the mother doll to mimic yelling and spanking for eating all the food.

¶ 67 Anganetta Terry testified that she was a child support specialist with DCFS. She made an unannounced visit to Katrina's home in July 2014. Katrina told her Isaac was Kalisha H.'s father. Katrina claimed that she was not living with Isaac and that they were not together, but she admitted that he had visited her in the hospital when she gave birth.

Terry testified that Katrina was unable to provide her with contact information for Isaac. When Terry walked around Katrina's residence, she saw four pairs of men's shoes at the bottom of the stairs and men's clothes hanging in the closet of what Katrina identified as her bedroom. There was also an ashtray with cigarette butts in it in the bedroom, and Katrina told her that she did not smoke. Katrina told her that the clothes belonged to Isaac and that he had not retrieved them. Katrina claimed to live alone. Terry testified that the morning after her visit to Katrina, Isaac came to her office, asked for her by name, and indicated that he knew she was looking for him. When she asked for his address, he would not give it to her. She stated that, to her knowledge, there was no one in the community other than Katrina who knew she was looking for Isaac. She stated that she was not surprised that Isaac came to her office because she believed he was living in the home with Katrina and that Katrina told him she needed to speak with him.

¶ 68 Noting that it had been involved with the case since its filing on April 3, 2012, that it had heard testimony and reviewed exhibits, and that it took judicial notice of all reports in the file and reviewed the entire court file involving all nine children, the court found by clear and convincing evidence that Katrina was an unfit parent. The court found that she had not maintained a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the children's welfare pursuant to section 1(D)(b) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2014)); had failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis of the removal of the children from her pursuant to section 1(D)(m)(i) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2014)); and had failed to make reasonable progress toward the return of the children to her within nine months after the adjudication



of neglect pursuant to section 1(D)(m)(ii) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2014)).

¶ 69 The trial proceeded to the best interest stage. Stottler testified that Tiashaunti S., Dejahnay S., and Izarion H. all expressed fear of returning home to Katrina. Izarion H. reported that the children were made to do pushups and sit-ups until exhaustion. All three children said Katrina gave them five minutes to eat their food and whatever they did not eat in that time was taken away. The foster parents reported that the children hoarded food, ate very quickly, and expressed surprise that food was available all the time.

¶ 70 Cline testified that, as the caseworker for Dejahnay S., Ikarion H., Kazontre H., and Tajaunae H., she believed it would be in the best interest of the children that Katrina's parental rights be terminated. She said that the children did not have a significant bond with Katrina. She testified that Kazontre H. had multiple psychiatric issues for which he was hospitalized numerous times. She felt that they needed stability and needed to move forward to find a permanent home with someone who takes an interest in their care and nurturing.

¶ 71 Kerie Fowler Moore testified that she provided mental health services to Izarion H. from May 2013 to September 2014. In December 2013, she identified that visits with his mother were a potential trigger for him. The foster mother voiced some concerns she had about behaviors he exhibited after visits, which included anger, refusing to speak, and self-harming by pinching himself. Izarion H. made statements that he felt Katrina did not like him, called him names, and discussed him coming to live with her. In February and March 2014, his behavior became more severe. He picked at his skin on

his neck, face, hands, and arms; started having urinary incontinence; expressed anxiety about visiting Katrina; and begged his foster parents not to make him go to the visits. On April 29, 2014, Moore recommended that visitation with Katrina stop, and the visits were suspended shortly thereafter. After the visits stopped, Moore saw an improvement in his behavior, namely the incontinence, picking of his skin, and a decrease in anger and aggression overall. She believed that the behavioral changes were related to the cessation of visitation with Katrina. She stated that she believed it would be in the best interest of Ikarion H. that Katrina's parental rights be terminated.

¶ 72 Christine Raben testified that she has been the counselor for Ikarion H. since November 2014. She opined that Ikarion H. felt emotionally safe with his foster mother and that he is very bonded with her and calls her "mom." She stated that Ikarion H. rarely talks about Katrina. She opined that returning to Katrina would not be conducive to Ikarion H.'s treatment.

¶ 73 Thomas testified that she worked with Dejahnay S. and Kazontre H. She said Kazontre H. did not recognize Katrina to be his biological mother. After Dejahnay S. visited with her mother, she became very defiant for one to two days. Thomas stated that Kazontre H. had been psychiatrically hospitalized on multiple occasions, that he is on medication, and that he requires a lot of in-home help. At school, he gets physical and occupational therapy and counseling. Additionally, he gets counseling through Illinois Mentor. She stated that she felt it was in Dejahnay S. and Kazontre H.'s best interests to terminate Katrina's parental rights and free them up for adoption.

¶ 74 Esther Mead testified that she had been the caseworker for Demonquez M., Trinae H., Keontre H., Tiashaunti S., and Izarion H. since December 2014. She testified that she felt that Katrina's parental rights should be terminated. She stated that, in the short time she had been involved, she noticed Katrina is "very, very angry." She stated that the children have been in care for a long time and needed permanency and to feel that they belong to a family. Mead stated that Katrina had failed to learn from the services she completed. Mead stated that, at a recent meeting with Katrina, she brought up the fact that her supervisor had seen Katrina with Isaac in the community, and Katrina responded that just because they were seen together in the community did not mean they were together.

¶ 75 Mead reported that Tiashaunti S. was living with her biological father and was doing well. She attended counseling and a program for severely emotionally disabled children. There had been no hospitalizations for her since she moved in with her father. She appeared to be in a loving home and had a bond with her father. Mead testified that it would be in Tiashaunti S.'s best interest to stay with her biological father and for Katrina's parental rights to be terminated. Mead testified that she believed that Demonquez M.'s home with his grandmother was a loving, appropriate home for him and that Katrina's rights to him should be terminated. Izarion H. had formed a bond with his foster family and had been with them for some time. He was doing well although he had a few behavioral issues that were being addressed with medication. His foster family had indicated that they want to adopt him. Mead testified that it would be in his best interest that Katrina's parental rights be terminated. Trinae H. and Keontre H. live in the same

foster home and were well bonded with the family. The foster family is the only family they know because they were placed in care so young. The children were bonded to the foster parents, and the foster parents wished to adopt them. The foster parents offered opportunities for growth, stability, and love. She testified that it would be in the best interest of Trinae H. and Keontre H. that Katrina's parental rights be terminated.

¶ 76 Spann testified that, through visits, she had come to know all nine of the children. She testified that it would be in the best interest of all the children if Katrina's parental rights were terminated because, although Katrina has attended the classes, she demonstrated no benefit of services or satisfactory progress in the service plan. Spann was involved with Demonquez M.'s placement with his grandmother and felt that it was a loving, stable, and appropriate home for him. She testified that it would be in Demonquez M.'s best interest that Katrina's parental rights be terminated and that he remain in his current placement with his grandmother. She was also involved in Tiashaunti S.'s placement with her biological father. She believed Tiashaunti S. was well supported in her placement and that it was in her best interest that Katrina's parental rights be terminated and she remain with her father. She testified that Izarion H. has a strong bond with his foster family and that it is a safe, loving, and appropriate home. They offered him support for his issues and psychological problems. She opined that it would be in Izarion H.'s best interest that Katrina's parental rights be terminated and that he be freed up for adoption by his foster family. She stated that she felt it would be in Trinae H. and Keontre H.'s best interest that Katrina's parental rights be terminated.

¶ 77 Serenity Meadows testified that she has been a child welfare specialist for Illinois Mentor for Ikarion H. and Tajaunae H. since December 19, 2014. She testified that Ikarion H. is very bonded to his foster family, and they are a very tight-knit family and have made Ikarion H. and Tajaunae H. part of that family. Ikarion H. went to this foster home in June 2012. In the beginning of his placement, he had behavioral issues. His foster family worked with him, and he was happy and no longer needed medication. She felt that to remove Ikarion H. from the home would have a devastating effect on him. Tajaunae H. was placed with the family when she was four days old. Ikarion H. and Tajaunae H. have a strong bond. She stated that these two children need permanency and a home where they know that they belong.

¶ 78 Patty Estes testified that Izarion H. had lived with her since April 2012. She stated that he quickly bonded to her, her husband, and her daughter. She was committed to keeping him. When he moved in with her at age five, he wore size 18-to-24-month clothes. His doctor said that he was now physically and developmentally on target with his peers.

¶ 79 Michael Nave testified that he is the foster parent of Trinae H. and Keontre H., who have lived with him for the vast majority of their lives. Trinae H. was 8½ months old when she came into his care. She had grown from having an extreme fear of water to loving to swim. She was also antisocial when she first came to his family and is now very social. Keontre H. was five months old when he came into Nave's care. He was behind the appropriate stages for his age. He is now on target for his age.

¶ 80 The court found that the children had been out of their home for three years, that they needed permanency, and that permanency was in their best interest. The court found that it was in the best interest of the children that Katrina's parental rights be terminated.

¶ 81 On March 30, 2015, the court entered an order finding Katrina an unfit parent as to the children. The court found that she did have a reasonable degree of interest and concern for her children, but she did not maintain a reasonable degree of responsibility as to their welfare. She also failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal and failed to make reasonable progress toward their return within the nine months after the adjudication of neglect or abuse.

¶ 82 That same day, the court entered the best interest order finding that Katrina had not had the best interests of the children in mind during the pendency of the case, in that although she completed the recommended services, she did not do so in a timely manner and she failed to demonstrate any benefit of having completed those services. The court terminated Katrina's parental rights.

¶ 83 ANALYSIS

¶ 84 Pursuant to Illinois Supreme Court Rule 311(a)(5) (eff. Feb. 26, 2010) this court is required to issue its decision on an appeal involving the termination of parental rights within 150 days after the filing of the notice of appeal or granting of leave to appeal. However, in this case, there was good cause for this court to issue its decision after the 150-day deadline. Katrina filed a timely notice of appeal on April 20, 2015. Thus, the original filing deadline was September 3, 2015. On May 22, 2015, this court entered an order finding that the record on appeal was due May 11, 2015, and Katrina failed to file

it. She was granted seven days to file the record on appeal or a motion for an extension of time to file it. New counsel was appointed for Katrina, and she was given until June 8, 2015, to file the record on appeal. The court reporter filed a request for additional time to complete the record, and Katrina was granted until July 20, 2015, to file the record. The court reporter filed an additional request for additional time to complete the record. This court granted Katrina until September 18, 2015, to file the record on appeal. On October 13, 2015, Katrina filed a motion for an extension of time to file her brief. On October 27, 2015, a show cause order was entered granting Katrina until November 3, 2015, to file her brief. She filed her brief on October 30, 2015. On November 19, 2015, the State filed a motion for an extension of time to file its brief. It was granted until November 27, 2015. Katrina filed her reply brief on December 9, 2015. Oral argument was heard on January 19, 2016. The delays in filing the briefs resulted in the issuance of the decision after the original filing deadline.

¶ 85 Katrina argues that the trial court's finding that the State proved by clear and convincing evidence that she was an unfit parent was against the manifest weight of the evidence. A court's statutory authority to involuntarily terminate a parent's rights is governed by the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (705 ILCS 405/1-1 *et seq.* (West 2014)) and the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/0.01 *et seq.* (West 2014)). Because termination of parental rights constitutes a permanent and complete severance of the parent-child relationship, a higher evidentiary standard must be applied to reduce the risk that the parent's fundamental rights to her child will be improperly terminated. *In re Cornica J.*, 351 Ill. App. 3d 557, 566 (2004). Under the Juvenile Court Act, a parent's rights cannot

be terminated without consent unless the court first determines, by clear and convincing evidence, that the parent is an unfit person as defined in section 1(D) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D) (West 2014)). *In re Gwynne P.*, 215 Ill. 2d 340, 354 (2005). The State bears the burden of proof. *Id.* Every matter concerning parental fitness is *sui generis*; therefore, each case must be decided on the particular facts and circumstances presented. *Id.* "Only one ground of unfitness needs to be proved by clear and convincing evidence in order to find a parent unfit." *In re R.L.*, 352 Ill. App. 3d 985, 998 (2004). We accord a trial court's finding of unfitness great deference and will not overturn it unless it is contrary to the manifest weight of the evidence and the record shows the opposite conclusion is clearly apparent. *Id.*

¶ 86 The Adoption Act lists grounds under which a parent may be found unfit. 750 ILCS 50/1(D) (West 2014). The trial court found Katrina unfit on the grounds that she (1) failed to maintain a reasonable degree of responsibility as to the children's welfare; (2) failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis of the removal of the children from the parent; and (3) failed to make reasonable progress towards the return of the children to the parent within nine months after they were adjudged abused and neglected. "As the grounds for finding unfitness are independent, we may affirm the judgment if the evidence supports the trial court's finding of unfitness on any one of the statutory grounds alleged." *In re E.O.*, 311 Ill. App. 3d 720, 726 (2000). A trial court's finding of unfitness is afforded great deference because it has the best opportunity to view and evaluate the parties and their testimony and, therefore, its



determination of unfitness will not be reversed on appeal unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d 1052, 1064 (2006).

¶ 87 The court found that Katrina failed to maintain a reasonable degree of responsibility for her children. A parent's failure to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to her child's welfare is a ground for finding the parent unfit. 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2014). This language is in the disjunctive, so any of these elements may be considered on its own as a basis for unfitness. *In re Jaron Z.*, 348 Ill. App. 3d 239, 259 (2004). In examining allegations under subsection (b), the trial court must focus on a parent's reasonable efforts and not her success. *Id.* However, a parent is not fit merely because she has demonstrated some interest toward her child; rather, her interest, concern, and responsibility must be reasonable. *Id.*

¶ 88 The trial court found that Katrina did have a reasonable degree of interest and concern for her children but that she did not maintain a reasonable degree of responsibility for them. The court found that Katrina did not take responsibility for her children's welfare because she continued to have a relationship with the children's abuser. In the first integrated assessment, Katrina admitted that there was domestic violence with Isaac, yet she continued to go back to him even though the children were at risk. The children were originally taken into custody because of a hotline report that Demonquez M. had injuries consistent with abuse. Demonquez M. disclosed that Isaac abused him. The seven eldest children were taken into custody on April 2, 2012. After the oldest seven children were removed from her care, Katrina had three more children with Isaac:

Keontre H. (born May 28, 2012), Tajaunae H. (born June 27, 2013), and Kalisha H. (born on July 15, 2014, at 30 weeks gestation).

¶ 89 In the initial integrated assessment, Katrina admitted that she had a pattern of leaving Isaac and returning to the relationship. This pattern continued throughout the course of the case. Katrina dismissed an order of protection against Isaac and only reinstituted it in order to regain custody of her newborn, Keontre H. Shortly thereafter, she was arrested; Isaac posted her bond; and she moved back in with him. Even when Katrina claimed to be separated from Isaac, caseworkers doubted the veracity of that claim. When caseworkers attempted to discover where Isaac resided, he gave them numerous false addresses. In a permanency hearing report to the court, Alecia Butler wrote that Spann documented that on June 26, 2014, the social worker at the hospital where Katrina was hospitalized for high blood pressure told her that Isaac was at the hospital with Katrina and was very demanding of the staff. In the DCFS referral form for Kalisha H. completed shortly after her birth on July 15, 2014, it was noted that Isaac visited Katrina and Kalisha H. in the hospital using a false name. Terry testified that she made an unannounced visit to Katrina's residence in July 2014. Katrina claimed that Isaac was not living with her and that she did not know his address or phone number. However, Terry saw four pairs of men's shoes at the bottom of the stairs in Katrina's home, men's clothing hanging in Katrina's bedroom closet, and cigarette butts in an ashtray in the bedroom although Katrina did not smoke. The morning after her visit to Katrina, Isaac came to Terry's office, asked for her by name, and said he knew she was looking for him. Terry testified that no one in the community other than Katrina knew

she was looking for Isaac. When she asked Isaac for his address, he would not give it to her. Terry stated she believed Isaac came to her office because he was residing with Katrina and that Katrina told him she wanted to speak with him. In a DCFS evaluation of Katrina's service plan on October 9, 2014, it was noted that a DCFS supervisor had seen Katrina in the community with Isaac on several occasions.

¶ 90 There was testimony from numerous people, including Schloemann, Dr. Cunningham, and Spann, that Katrina did not show empathy for her children. She continued to have contact with Isaac and tried to expose the children to him. There were testimony and reports that she filmed the children at visits and told them to say hello to Isaac, she showed the children photos of Isaac, and she encouraged them to speak to Isaac on the telephone. She told Izarion H. that he could not go on vacation with his foster family because he was coming home to her and Isaac, and she called Demonquez M. at the Catholic Children's Home and attempted to persuade him to ask to go home to her and Isaac.

¶ 91 Katrina minimized the seriousness of the abuse. Throughout much of the case, she contended that the children were taken into custody because of one incident where Isaac "whooped" Demonquez M. In the integrated assessment on October 9, 2012, she stated that Isaac provided her with love and emotional support and that all the children loved him. She stated that "[h]e just made the mistake of whoopin' my son." In a permanency hearing report filed on March 12, 2013, Spann wrote that Katrina continued to minimize the abuse of the children, stating that it was "a cultural thing—we whoop our children." In a letter from the Cairo Women's Shelter dated November 18, 2013, Debra Thomas

wrote that Katrina completed eight weeks of domestic violence counseling, but that at the first meeting she stated she "was not in a domestic violence relationship, but was willing to learn more about the subject." Dr. Cunningham testified that Katrina strongly objected to DCFS's characterization of her and Isaac as bad parents and abusive. She stated that Katrina externalized the blame for why her children were in custody. Katrina claimed that the children had been diagnosed with PTSD due to what was happening to them in foster care. Dr. Cunningham further testified that, based on the personality assessment inventory she gave Katrina, Katrina viewed herself as a good person who did not need to make changes. During her interview with Katrina, Katrina indicated support for Isaac by talking about his positive qualities and the things he had done for the family. Dr. Cunningham found that Katrina's loyalty was directed toward Isaac as opposed to her children.

¶ 92 At the fitness hearing, Katrina admitted that Isaac abused the children but continued to deny that she ever abused them. Shelton-Montez testified that in October 2012, Demonquez M. reported that during a visit with Katrina she whispered in his ear that "[s]he was going to beat his ass." Stottler testified that Dejahnay S. and Tiashaunti S. disclosed to her that Katrina hit them with a wet belt and extension cords. Spann testified that Demonquez M., Tiashaunti S., Dejahnay S., and Ikarion H. all reported that Katrina beat them and locked them up. When Katrina was asked why Dejahnay S., Tiashaunti S., and Ikarion H. stated that she beat them with electrical and extension cords, she stated that they were probably coached to make those statements. When she

was asked why the children said that they were frequently locked in their rooms at night, she claimed that the information in the record was fabricated.

¶ 93 Throughout the case, including at the fitness hearing, Katrina denied ever limiting her children's food. Schloemann testified that the children told him that Katrina limited their food intake. In the integrated assessment, Schloemann wrote that Demonquez M. habitually stole food because he was not fed at home. Katrina denied that Demonquez M. stole because he was hungry and, instead, blamed it on her father setting the example of eating food off store shelves. Stottler testified that Tiashaunti S., Dejahnay S., and Izarion H. all said that they had five minutes to eat their food and that Katrina took away whatever they did not eat in that time. She stated that Dejahnay S., Tiashaunti S., Kazontre H., and Izarion H.'s foster parents all reported that the children hoarded their food, ate quickly, and expressed surprise that food was available all the time. Stottler testified that, in therapy, if Kazontre H. ate his entire snack, he used the mother doll to act out yelling and spanking for eating all the food. In a letter dated March 4, 2013, Dr. Dempsher wrote that Izarion H. had "suffered severe growth retardation from profound neglect," and that, based on Izarion H.'s examination, laboratory data, and recent growth, his profound growth failure was related to his home environment. Katrina testified that Izarion H. was just a small person. On November 1, 2013, Katrina was observed telling Izarion H. to stop eating the snacks and to save some for Isaac. The other children then policed Izarion H. and informed Katrina if he tried to take a snack. Katrina denied that this occurred. She stated that she brought a birthday cake for Dejahnay S. and after

everyone had a piece, Dejahnay S. asked her to save a piece for Isaac. Katrina testified that she always fed her children "normal full-course meals."

¶ 94 Katrina argued that she completed her domestic violence classes, parenting classes, and drug classes and that she visited the children. While she completed the classes, she did not learn from them. She continued to have a relationship with Isaac after completing the domestic violence classes. The court found it significant that she continued to deny that there was a problem in the home.

¶ 95 Noncompliance with an imposed service plan may be sufficient to warrant a finding of unfitness for failing to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the child's welfare. *In re Konstantinos H.*, 387 Ill. App. 3d 192, 204 (2008). Seals testified that that she became the caseworker for the family in April 2012. She set up the original service plan that covered April 4 through October 4, 2012. She reviewed the service plan with Katrina, and Katrina did not express any difficulties understanding what was expected. Seals testified that from April 2012 to January 2013, she never rated Katrina satisfactory in complying with any of the service plan tasks and that Katrina had not made reasonable progress toward the return of her children. Spann testified that she had been monitoring service plans since 2006, and during the time she monitored Katrina and her children, Katrina did not meet the minimum standard of parenting. She testified that from June 2012 until the end of March 2013, despite the services available, she never found that Katrina made reasonable progress or efforts toward the return of her children. Katrina's failure to comply with even the most basic

aspects of the service plan demonstrated that she had not maintained a reasonable degree of responsibility toward the welfare of her children.

¶ 96 The trial court's determination that Katrina failed to maintain reasonable responsibility for her children's welfare is not against the manifest weight of the evidence. There is sufficient evidence in the record to show that Katrina had no behavior change. Katrina failed to comply with her service plans. She continued to stand by Isaac and, during visits, encouraged the children to look at his photos, speak to him on the telephone, and send him taped messages. Dr. Cunningham testified that Katrina's loyalty to Isaac outweighed her loyalty to her children. At the fitness hearing, Katrina denied that she abused the children or limited their food. She blamed DCFS and the foster homes for the children's need for medication and for their PTSD. There was clear and convincing evidence that Katrina failed to maintain reasonable responsibility for her children's welfare. Because we find the evidence sufficient to establish Katrina unfit on the basis of failing to maintain a reasonable degree of responsibility for her children, we need not discuss the other grounds relied upon by the court.

¶ 97

#### CONCLUSION

¶ 98 For the reasons stated, we affirm the judgment of the circuit court of Jackson County.

¶ 99 Affirmed.