

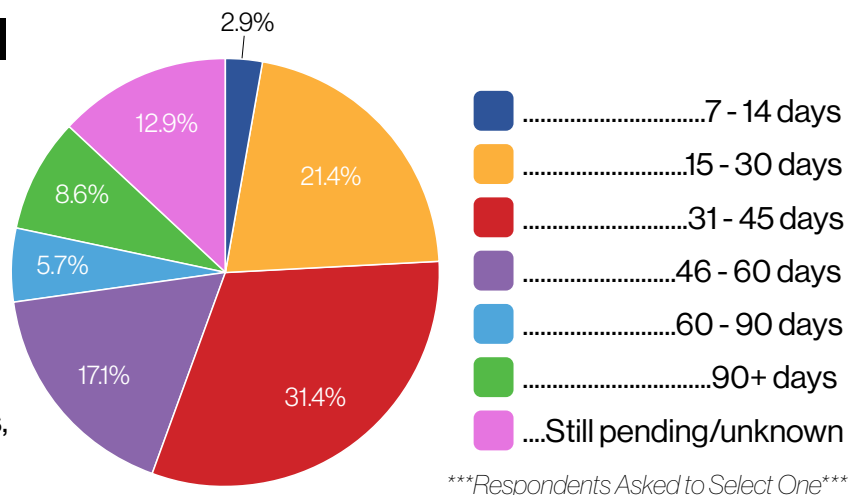
Illinois Head Start Programs are Experiencing MAJOR D.C.F.S Background Check Delays

Head Start/Early Head Start programs are required for their employees to pass through rigorous state and federal background checks prior to working.

The data collected from an April 2026 Illinois Head Start Association Survey strongly indicates that D.C.F.S background check delays are creating a statewide workforce bottleneck for Head Start/Early Head Start and related early childhood programs. **Delays are slowing hiring, closing classrooms, reducing enrollment, increasing staff turnover, and causing financial strain.**

On average, the typical number of calendar days from submission to D.C.F.S. approval...

73% of responding programs still have pending background checks, with many programs experiencing waits of 3 – 4 months, with some reporting 6 months or more.



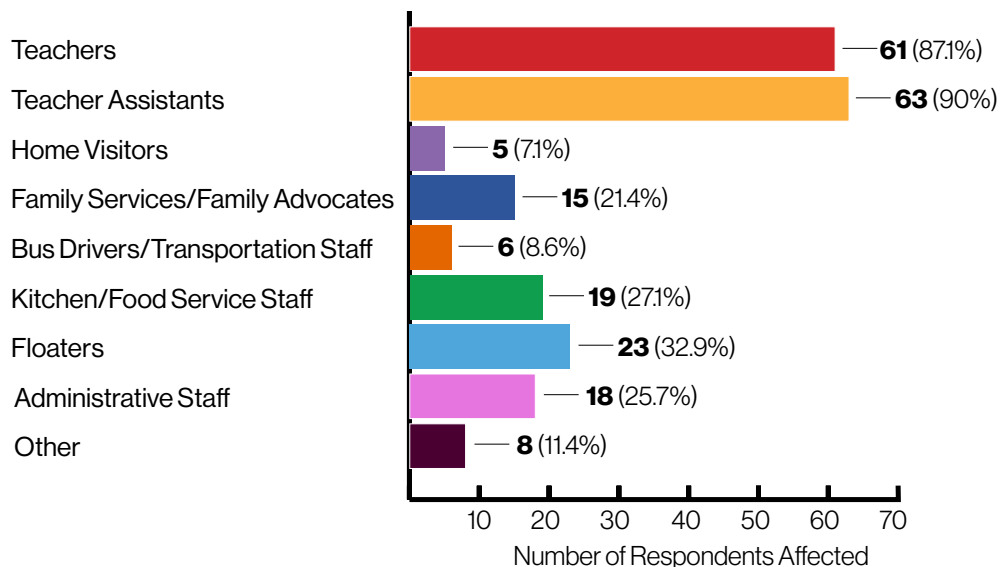
Respondents Asked to Select One

Position applications most affected by D.C.F.S. delays...

Over 90% of respondents say that teaching positions are most impacted by delays caused by background checks.

Without a teacher, a classroom cannot open. A majority of delays are costing real money and causing centers to say this is no longer just an HR inconvenience—it is disrupting services to children and families.

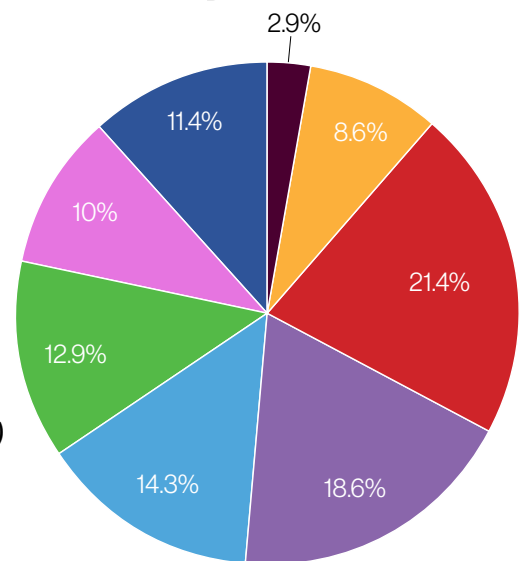
Respondents Asked to Select All that are Affected



Data was collected in a voluntary April 2026 survey conducted by Illinois Head Start Association with 70 responses.

Types of “issues” experienced most often by respondents...

- Fingerprints not being processed timely
- Applications stuck “in review”
- Difficult to reach D.C.F.S. staff
- No status updates available
- Other
- Delays due to fingerprint appointment availability
- Application returned for missing information (*even when included*)
- Confusing and inconsistent responses



Respondents Asked to Select One

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Despite passing Public Act 104-0307 in August 2025, this issue is not getting any easier

At this moment, there’s a simple “push of a button” needed at IL State Police’s level to allow for third-party’s fingerprinting to be used for D.C.F.S. purposes. However, the I.S.P. is not willing to push that button because D.C.F.S. is advising them not to.

D.C.F.S. has told Head Start that when I.D.E.C. opens their department in July, this service will be taken over by them. However, if this transfer of powers does not happen, OR IS DELAYED as expected, Head Start services will continue to suffer.

No new law is needed. The existing laws already requires background checks. The problem is agency execution. **We are asking legislators to exercise their oversight and hold agencies accountable for timely processing of background checks for Head Start workers.**



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