

TO: Tana Senn, Secretary, Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)
FROM: Officers of the WFSE DCYF Policy Committee
DATE: October 11, 2026
SUBJECT: Concerns of Discriminatory Hiring, Retaliation, and Systemic Institutional Instability

Secretary Senn,

On behalf of the thousands of dedicated public servants represented by the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE) across DCYF's Child Welfare and Licensing Divisions, we, the officers of the WFSE DCYF Policy Committee, are writing to express our profound alarm regarding the ongoing trajectory of this agency.

Ongoing sudden leadership changes – which have been compounded by deeply troubling, public reports of racial bias and cronyism at the executive level – have forced a crisis of confidence. Our members are a diverse coalition of public servants who risk their safety daily to serve Washington's most marginalized children and families. The WFSE DCYF Policy Committee is fiercely committed to opposing injustice, whether it originates from within or outside our agency, and whether it impacts represented or unrepresented workers.

The current culture of top-down exclusion, disregard for professional expertise, and institutional retaliation must end. We demand an immediate pivot toward transparency, equity, and operational stability.

For years, DCYF has fostered a culture that devalues the expertise of frontline staff. Planning meetings are routinely kept inaccessible to regular workers, and monumental operational changes are handed down from above without employee input.

This pattern was starkly illuminated by the sudden removal of Natalie Green from her role as Assistant Secretary of Child Welfare. We did not always agree with Ms. Green, but we shared an understanding that DCYF's staff are the agency's most valuable resource in achieving positive outcomes for the families we serve. Ms. Green chose to dedicate over two decades of her life to supporting the children and families of our state; she built a more inclusive work environment while gaining the trust of frontline staff. She did this by working collaboratively with our union, even when it meant changing and adapting her own practices. Willingness to change, collaborate, listen, reflect, and trust are not things that can be developed through the onboarding process or by completing a few trainings, and this loss in our agency leadership is immeasurable.

Replacing a highly qualified Black woman who possesses decades of specialized child welfare experience with an interim appointment – without good cause – sends a chilling message. To claim that these individuals are "similarly qualified" simply because they sat in the same meetings devalues our complicated, high-stakes work. It signals to every worker that our hard-earned experience is meaningless and that we are entirely disposable.

Ms. Green's abrupt displacement is not an isolated incident; it reinforces a highly toxic, fear-based culture that has permeated DCYF since its inception. We have been tracking a troubling pattern where

leaders who choose to listen to staff, communicate transparently, and collaborate with our union are systematically pushed out or demoted.

This chronic instability strips the agency of institutional knowledge and critical cultural diversity at a time when we need it most. Casting aside those who strive to change DCYF for the better destroys employee morale and leaves frontline workers asking a dangerous question: What reason do we have to stay?

While leadership protects an insular inner circle, frontline staff are collapsing under a severe workload crisis. Case-carrying workers and supervisors are often expected to work double, triple, or quadruple their agency-recommended workload without any assistance, recognition, or – in some circumstances – compensation.

Our members are disrespected in courtrooms, injured and threatened in the community, and exposed to severe trauma. We are unfairly blamed for chronic understaffing and decisions made far above our heads. We do not stay for the money; we stay because we care. But a public agency cannot sustainably run on the exploited good intentions of its workforce. If top leadership treats executive-level staff with hostility when workload issues arise, a brand-new line worker will never feel safe enough to take their lunch break or to refuse to work off the clock.

The agency's continued silence and lack of meaningful accountability reinforce the belief that DCYF's stated commitment to racial equity and social justice and culture change is merely performative. If a Black woman with decades of unmatched institutional experience can be displaced without advance notice or a similarly qualified successor, frontline staff of color have zero reason to believe they are safe, valued, or supported by your administration.

We are asking for honest conversations about our organization's culture, not sanitized productions where workers are talked down to from an ivory tower. We are, as we often have to prove in court, the experts in our areas of work. We are frustrated with continued hiring decisions that place unidentified factors above effectiveness, communication, representation, diversity, and experience. We want to see change.

As Natalie Green stated, "There are not enough words to describe the impact social workers have on the lives of others... They consistently use advocacy, empathy, and hard work to help those feeling hopeless, unworthy, and lost, putting their compassion and expertise into action to be a change agent, problem solver, and to support social justice for all."

We hope that the long path towards addressing these concerns, which are shared by so many across the Department, can begin at the next All-Hands through an open and transparent conversation with the staff you lead.

In Solidarity,

Officers of the WFSE DCYF Policy Committee

Jeanette Obelcz, Committee Chair

Shauna Lowery, Eastern Washington Vice Chair

Reef Landrum, Western Washington Vice Chair

Michelle Sety, Committee Secretary