



State of Illinois  
Governor's Office Academy of Leadership



Governor's Office  
Academy of Leadership  
**Advancing  
Excellence**  
in  
**Public Service  
Leadership**



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**2026 Cohort**

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## About G.O.A.L.

The Governor's Office Academy of Leadership (G.O.A.L.) is a premier leadership development program and strategic investment in the future of Illinois State Government. These leaders are the backbone of State government and play critical roles in providing stability through transitions and maintaining the operations that serve the State's mission. The G.O.A.L. program provides an opportunity to:

- develop leadership skillsets
- build long-term relationships across agencies
- broaden perspectives to lead effectively in a diverse and changing environment.

This program has been created with the purpose of advancing excellence in public service leadership. Leaders in public service organizations share many traditional roles and responsibilities with business leaders, but there are some significant differences: Public Service leaders are the stewards of citizen trust and their overarching purpose is to provide for the common good, applying fiscal responsibility but not exclusively focused on a financial bottom line.

G.O.A.L. is a 11-month cohort program with a monthly in-person session facilitated by a mix of industry leaders, academics, agency leaders, and The Governor's Staff. Sessions alternate between Chicago and Springfield area locations and are followed by a monthly virtual session to reinforce and deepen understanding.

Sessions focus on core leadership competencies essential for public service, combining skill-building workshops with panel discussions featuring senior leaders from agencies, boards, and commissions. These conversations provide critical perspectives that shape how State government functions in practice and broaden participants' perspectives on leadership. The program sessions help develop leaders prepared to provide excellence in government services.

The program culminates in team-based projects that address an existing challenge in state government and provide solutions with measurable operational impact. Projects are proposed by the agencies, worked outside of sessions and presented to agency leaders and stakeholders.

~ ★ ~  
*The motivation that calls leaders to public service and the unique and tremendous responsibility they are entrusted with shapes how they lead and innovate to provide for the public welfare.*

# G.O.A.L. Programming Overview

## **Session One: Becoming the Leader Others Want to Follow**

The unique aspects of a public service leader and how life experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and style affect leadership actions and accountabilities.

## **Session Two: Building High Performing Teams**

The key leadership actions needed to create teams that are inclusive, create an engaging workplace culture, and maximize the potential of the team members.

## **Session Three: Creating and Communicating Purpose, Vision, Strategic Direction and Action**

The skills needed to create and communicate a compelling and guiding purpose, vision, and mission and establish and translate strategic objectives into action.

## **Session Four: The Leader as Coach**

The ability to coach for high performance to ensure teams remain on the path, are inclusive and healthy, and the collective energy stays focused and moving forward.

## **Session Five: Coaching Skills**

Building skills to effectively coach team members, conduct accountable/crucial conversations, and provide effective feedback that can help team members reach their full potential.

## **Session Six: Positively Resolving Difficult Situations**

Discovering the value in creative conflict and exploring effective ways to prevent the negative impacts of unresolved conflict.

## **Session Seven: Problem-Solving, Rapid Results, and Continuous Improvement**

A structured approach to continuous improvement to understand and address agency opportunities for improvement.

## **Session Eight: Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving, and Decision-Making**

Broaden perspectives to think more critically and creatively to identify and address opportunities for improvement and innovation to make, and own, data-driven decisions.

## **Session Nine: Leading in Times of Crisis – Leadership Lessons From Lincoln**

The leadership lessons revealed by examining the experiences and challenges faced by President Abraham Lincoln as he led the nation through crisis and transformation

## **Session Ten: Perspectives on Political Savvy in Public Service Leadership**

Explores the importance of developing the political savvy needed to successfully advocate for and influence decisions that impact the services we provide.

## **Session Eleven: Pulling it all Together: Next steps**

Reflections on leadership lessons and how to effectively employ them to create inclusive and productive cultures and help achieve public service excellence. Project presentations are also delivered in this session.

**For more information on G.O.A.L. visit [www.illinois.gov/goal](http://www.illinois.gov/goal)**

**Lauren Aceves, Testing Lead**  
*Department of Innovation and Technology*



Lauren Aceves is a public-sector technology and transformation leader with over a decade of experience advancing enterprise systems and operational excellence for the State of Illinois. An Eastern Illinois University graduate, she currently oversees the Testing Division within the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) program at the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT), where she provides quality management oversight across both Human Capital Management (HCM) and Finance domains. In this role, she establishes testing strategy, governance, and execution standards for business-critical systems that support statewide operations and services.

Lauren is widely regarded for her ability to translate complex technical initiatives into practical, people-centered outcomes. Her leadership reflects a balance of accountability and empathetic collaboration, with a focus on strengthening long-term institutional capability, improving user experiences, and delivering lasting public value. Through her work, she exemplifies the State of Illinois' commitment to modern, reliable, and effective government.

**Adrian Atwater, Assistant General Counsel**  
*Human Rights Commission*



Adrian Atwater is an Illinois-licensed attorney serving as Assistant General Counsel at the Illinois Human Rights Commission, an independent state agency dedicated to promoting freedom from unlawful discrimination and providing a neutral forum for resolving complaints under the Illinois Human Rights Act. In his role, Adrian reviews investigative records and legal issues, conducts legal research, drafts recommendations and published decisions, and advises the Commission on matters involving employment discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and other prohibited practices.

He also contributes to policy development and administrative rulemaking that guide the Commission's work to ensure fair and impartial outcomes for people across Illinois. Prior to joining the Commission, Adrian practiced law in Chicago, representing clients in employment, real estate, civil, and regulatory matters. He earned his Juris Doctor from the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Law and his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Heath Barone, Administrative Manager**  
*Department of Transportation*



Heath Barone is a husband, father, and a values-driven individual rooted in family and service. He believes that effective leadership begins with accountability, integrity, and commitment. Heath currently serves as a Senior Public Service Administrator – Administrative Manager for the Illinois Department of Transportation, District 9 in Carbondale, Illinois. In this role, he provides public service and oversees daily transportation administrative support operations. Prior to his position with IDOT, he worked with for Illinois Secretary of State's Office and is a former Deputy Sheriff with the Jackson County Sheriff's Department. Heath is a graduate of Southern Illinois

University- Carbondale and outside of work, Heath values time outdoors, staying active, and spending quality time with his family.

**Kevin Beck**, *Director of Constituent Services and External Affairs*  
*Office of the Lieutenant Governor*



Kevin Beck proudly serves the State of Illinois as Director of External Affairs and Constituent Services in the Office of Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton. His career reflects a steady rise built on dedication, relationship-building, and a deep commitment to public service. Beginning as a Scheduling Coordinator, Kevin earned each opportunity through hard work, trust, and a clear passion for serving others. In his current role, he oversees Constituent Services, Community Engagement, External Affairs, and Scheduling, while managing a dedicated team of four. Beyond titles, Kevin is driven by his belief in the power of connection. He values

networking, collaboration, and using his voice and platform to advocate for underserved communities across Illinois. His work is grounded in real relationships and lived experience, and he remains committed to creating access, amplifying voices, and making government more responsive to the people it serves.

**Angelo Bommarito**, *Bureau Chief Cannabis Testing*  
*Department of Agriculture*



Angelo Bommarito is a public-sector science and regulatory leader with 23 years of service to the State of Illinois. Over 21 years with the Illinois State Police Division of Forensic Services, he advanced from forensic scientist to Director of Quality Assurance, overseeing laboratory quality systems that supported accredited forensic operations statewide.

In 2023, Angelo joined the Illinois Department of Agriculture's Division of Cannabis Regulation as the Bureau Chief for Cannabis Testing, where he leads the development of the State of Illinois Cannabis Reference Laboratory and oversees cannabis testing activities that ensure

product safety and regulatory compliance. Throughout his career, Angelo has focused on strengthening scientific integrity, implementing robust quality assurance, and promoting effective regulation in highly scrutinized, public-facing programs.

**Melissa Brandenburg**, *Chief of Staff*  
*Prisoner Review Board*



Melissa was named PRB's first Chief of Staff in 2024. In her role she provides direction and oversight to staff executing PRB's statutory functions. She also facilitates the agency's long-term goals, and evaluates policies and practices to ensure efficiency, consistency, and compliance. Prior to PRB, Melissa spent 12 years at the Office of Executive Inspector General serving as an Investigator and then a Supervising Investigator leading and supervising confidential investigations aimed at combatting fraud, waste, and abuse in State government. Melissa began her professional career in the field of criminal justice, working six years a Probation Officer in Christian and

Vermilion Counties. While at Christian County Probation, Melissa helped implement and facilitate that county's first Adult Drug Court Treatment Program. Melissa received her MA in Criminal Justice from Loyola University Chicago in 2006, and BAs in Sociology and Psychology from Greenville University in 2004.

**Diane Casas**, *Community Outreach Manager*  
*Department of Financial and Professional Regulation*



Diane Casas is a seasoned Community Outreach Manager with more than 25 years of experience advancing community engagement through strategic public speaking, marketing, and relationship-building. She brings a solutions-oriented mindset to every initiative and is deeply committed to advocating for underrepresented communities. Diane proudly serves as Board President of the Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees, where she is recognized for building trust, credibility, and meaningful partnerships that drive measurable outcomes. At the core of her work is the ability to forge strong relationships with leadership, frontline staff, and key stakeholders. Guided by a clear philosophy: “be part of the solution, not the problem,” she leads with integrity, collaboration, and purpose. Diane is a proud first-generation daughter of Mexican immigrants and a lifelong resident of Little Village, Chicago’s historic port of entry for Latinos and the city’s second-largest revenue-generating area after Michigan Avenue.

**Brittney Chitwood**, *Business Administrator*  
*Department of Veteran’s Affairs*



Brittney has been in the position of Business Administrator for the State of Illinois for over 8 years. Her service began over 15 years ago with the Department of Human Services, working as a mental health technician with the developmentally disabled population. During her 12 years with IDHS, she went back to school for Business Administration and Project Management, while also moving up the ranks, working and learning different areas of state service. After a brief stint as the payroll administrator with IDES, she moved to the position of Business Administrator for the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2023. As a disabled Army Veteran, she was able to find another place that ignited her passion, helping her brothers and sisters in arms. She stands proud in the fact that her passion aligns with the mission and goals of IDVA and looks forward to what she can learn in the future.

**Darnell Cloud**, *Forecasts Program Manager*  
*Department of Employment Security*



Darnell L. Cloud, PhD, is the Forecasts and Data Innovations Program Manager for the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES). A visionary leader with over a decade of experience, Dr. Cloud specializes in transforming complex economic data into actionable policy insights for the State. He oversees the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund Solvency Modeling Program, utilizing advanced analytics to manage fiscal integrity through multi-billion dollar economic cycles. Beyond statutory reporting, Dr. Cloud has championed strategic pivots in labor market equity, such as restructuring the Women and Minorities Labor Force Progress Report into a tool for root-cause analysis and policy change. As a member of the G.O.A.L. cohort, he is dedicated to advancing data storytelling and interagency partnerships to drive measurable social and economic impact across Illinois.

**Marla Courts, Statewide Chief of LGBTQI+ Affairs**  
*Department of Children and Family Services*



Marla Courts is a dedicated leader guided by compassion and driven by purpose. With over 26 years dedicated to strengthening and uplifting communities and families, Ms. Courts continues to strive for success through discipline, accountability and lifelong learning. Ms. Courts has worked for DCFS for 17 years, with experience in Investigations, Permanency, Monitoring, and Human Rights. Ms. Courts holds a Master's Degree in Social Work (MSW) from UIC Jane Addams and a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) from Saint Xavier University. She's received Humanitarian Awards throughout the years for her many contributions to at-risk communities. Marla Courts continues to embrace

each opportunity with determination, accountability, and a clear vision for herself while turning goals into lasting impact.

**Karen Dudek-Brannan, Product Manager, Prevention, Community Connection, and Intact**  
*Department of Children and Family Services*



Dr. Karen Dudek-Brannan is a Product Manager at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in the Division of Prevention, Community Connection, and Intact. She leads a product team supporting Illinois' CCWIS implementation, focused on building a caseload management solution that helps frontline staff connect families with services and supports that keep children safely at home and reduce future child welfare involvement. Her work centers on using technology to improve access to services and expand preventative supports for families across Illinois. Prior to her work with the state, Karen spent 14 years as a school-based speech-language pathologist, providing direct clinical and case management

services and consulting with multidisciplinary teams and families. She has also designed training programs and products that have supported thousands of clinicians and education professionals throughout the United States and other English-speaking countries.

**Jashay Fisher-Fowler, Program Manager**  
*Criminal Justice Information Authority*



Jashay Fisher-Fowler is a dedicated and accomplished leader with a demonstrated commitment to education, community engagement, and strategic development. In her role as a Program Manager with the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Ms. Fisher-Fowler oversees statewide initiatives that support thousands of families, organizations, communities, and professionals. Ms. Fisher-Fowler has spoken extensively to numerous community service organizations, serves as a board member of the Mini O'Beirne Crisis Nursery, and is actively involved in multiple community committees and initiatives, strengthening her leadership,

governance, and public speaking expertise. A native of Springfield, Illinois, she earned her Bachelor of Science in Marketing Management from Drake University, A Master of Science in Business Administration and Leadership from Lindenwood University and is currently completing doctoral studies in Strategic Leadership at Regent University. She is an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Outside of her professional and civic commitments, she enjoys traveling with family and friends, engaging in community service, mentoring youth, attending concerts, spending time with family, and participating in church activities.

**Lindsey Freeman, Manager, Encounter Data Unit**  
*Department of Healthcare and Family Services*



Lindsey Freeman is a healthcare leader with extensive experience in clinical quality, managed care, and data-driven decision making. She began her career in hospital billing, gaining firsthand insight into healthcare operations, access, reimbursement and patient impact, which shaped her career commitment to quality and equity. She has led initiatives in process improvement, practice transformation and value-based care. Lindsey now serves as Manager of the Encounter Data Unit in the Bureau of Rate Development and Analysis at the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. She leads a team responsible for ensuring data integrity, coding compliance, and actionable encounter reporting to strengthen statewide Medicaid performance and policy decisions. Lindsey holds an MBA from Benedictine University and is pursuing a Doctorate in Public Administration at the University of Illinois Springfield, where her research examines how documentation and coding denials may contribute to delayed care and patient harm.

**Scott Gauvin, Manager of Strategic Operations and Preparedness**  
*Emergency Management Agency — Office of Homeland Security*



Mr. Gauvin serves as the Manager of Strategic Operations and Preparedness at the Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security. In this role, he leads the Inter-Agency Strategic Planning Cell, coordinating planning efforts across state government to develop disaster response plans. Mr. Gauvin also serves as one of the primary managers of the State Emergency Operations Center. Mr. Gauvin has played a key role in numerous complex and high-visibility operations, including Illinois' response to the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest missions, the Asylum Seeker Mission in Chicago, and statewide planning efforts for the 2024 solar eclipse, national political conventions, and the 2024 General Election. Mr. Gauvin holds a bachelor's degree in political studies from the University of Illinois Springfield and numerous emergency management credentials, including graduation from the National Emergency Management Executive Academy. He will graduate this spring from Jacksonville State University with a master's degree in emergency management.

**Mariel Hamer-Sinclair, Associate Director of Program & Policy**  
*Council on Development Disabilities*



Mariel Hamer-Sinclair is a senior policy leader and advocate serving as Associate Director of Program and Policy at the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (ICDD). She leads the Program and Policy Unit, overseeing statewide grantmaking, cross-systems initiatives, and policy strategy spanning education, employment, health, housing, and systems change affecting people with developmental disabilities across Illinois. Mariel is recognized for her expertise in state and federal disability policy, legislative analysis, and implementation oversight. She regularly advises on legislation, supports statutory compliance, and testifies before the Illinois General Assembly and Chicago City Council. She also led the development and implementation of ICDD's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategic plan. She has been appointed by the Governor as a Commissioner of the Guardianship and Advocacy Commission and serves on the Community & Residential Services Authority Board and the Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force. Mariel holds a Master's degree in Human Service Administration from the University of Illinois at Springfield.

**Dr. Tanisha Hankerson, Center Director of Ann Kiley Center**  
*Department of Human Services*



Dr. Tanisha Hankerson is a licensed clinical psychologist with more than 15 years of extensive experience spanning forensic, correctional, inpatient, and community-based mental health care. She is known for her ability to lead in high-demand clinical environments, promoting excellence in psychological services, program innovation, and organizational efficiency. Her leadership consistently reflects a commitment to quality care, clinical supervision, program evaluation, and trauma-informed practices. Guided by principles of advocacy, empathy, and clinical integrity, Dr. Hankerson is a dedicated leader committed to advancing mental health systems and supporting the development of emerging professionals in the field.

**Briana Jacobs, Assistant Legal Counsel**  
*Department of Employment Security*



Before joining the Office of Legal Counsel for the Illinois Department of Employment Security, Briana worked as an Assistant Attorney General for the State of Illinois. Prior to her time as an Assistant Attorney General, she clerked in the Circuit Court of Cook County. Originally from Indianapolis, Briana moved to Chicago to attend Loyola University Chicago and subsequently, Chicago-Kent College of Law. Briana currently works as an Assistant Legal Counsel for the Illinois Department of Employment Security where her responsibilities range from representing the agency at hearings to drafting legal documents on behalf of the Director of IDES. In her free time, she volunteers with the Chicago based mentor program, Horizons for Youth.

**Kristen Kennedy, Disability Policy Advisor**  
*Department of Healthcare and Family Services*



Kristen started her career at Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) in 2017 as a part-time Graduate Public Service Intern (GPSI) with the Bureau of Behavioral Health (BBH) through the Graduate Public Service Internship Program at the University of Illinois at Springfield. Through this internship, Kristen discovered a passion for helping Illinoisians access critical behavioral health services. At the conclusion of her internship, Kristen joined HFS in the Bureau of Behavioral Health full time in 2019, serving many different roles across many different programs. While in BBH, Kristen served as the Crisis Services Program manager, overseeing behavioral health crisis services for youth experiencing a behavioral health crisis, worked on the transition of the Family Support Program, led the implementation of the Pathways to Success Program to satisfy the State's requirements under the N.B. Consent Decree, and worked on the launch of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs). In June 2025, Kristen moved positions to the Disability Policy Advisor position within the Division of Medical Programs at HFS, beginning work on the Williams and Colbert Consent Decrees. In this position, Kristen oversees the Community Transition Initiative and is working on the implementation of the next phase of Williams and Colbert with the Targeted Care Management Program set to launch in 2027.

**Nicholas Klein**, *Assistant Deputy Director of Operations*  
*Capital Development Board*



Nicholas Klein is the Assistant Deputy Director of Operations at the Capital Development Board. He is a Licensed Professional Engineer (PE), a Certified Project Management Professional (PMP), and a member of the Adjunct Faculty at Lincoln Land Community College. Nicholas serves on the Land of Lincoln Goodwill Board of Directors, Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce Leadership Springfield program, FBI Springfield Citizens Academy, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Pastoral Council, and his local Homeowners Association Board of Directors. He has over a decade of capital project experience in private and public energy, gas, and facility sectors. Nicholas received a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering as a James Scholar and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from the University of Illinois.

**James Kowalsky**, *Integrated Recovery Support*  
*Services Administrator*  
*Department of Human Services*



James Kowalsky has worked for the State of Illinois since 2019, managing grants that fund drug overdose prevention, HIV prevention, and recovery services. He currently serves as the Integrated Recovery Support Services Administrator for the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (IDHS/DBHR). In this role, he promotes the integration of substance use treatment and recovery into health and social service systems. James previously spent seven years working for a PATH Outreach team in Chicago, linking people experiencing homelessness to housing, mental health care, and other support services. Throughout his career, James has focused on promoting respect, acceptance, and a better quality of life for people who use drugs or have a mental illness. He graduated from the University of Chicago's Crown School of Social Work in 2019. James takes pride in supporting work throughout Illinois that improves the health and well-being of people who use drugs, people with a mental illness, and people in recovery.

**Shannon Leake**, *Operational Excellence Manager*  
*Department of Central Management Services*



Shannon Leake has served as an Operational Excellence Manager with the Office of Operational Excellence at the Department of Central Management Services since 2024. Prior to working with the Department of Central Management Services, Shannon worked in Human Resources performing hiring duties for the Illinois Department of Corrections, the Department of Innovation and Technology, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Before joining the State of Illinois, Shannon served with the Springfield Park District developing new software systems and leading district-wide training programs to encourage continuous improvement.

Shannon holds a Master of Business Administration as well as graduate certifications in both Business Process Management and Business Analytics.

**Sophia Manuel**, *Policy Advisor for Reform Initiatives*  
*Department of Corrections*



Sophia Manuel serves as Policy Advisor for Reform Initiatives at the Illinois Department of Corrections. In collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, she identifies opportunities to advance meaningful reform, and manages or advises on strategic, programmatic, and operational initiatives, both internally and across state agencies. Prior to joining IDOC in June 2023, Sophia spent five years at READI Chicago, a community violence intervention program of Heartland Alliance, where she designed and managed projects serving men returning from incarceration and at the highest risk for gun violence involvement. Sophia previously worked as an investigator of police misconduct with the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board and as a social work intern with Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities (TASC), conducting assessments and reentry case planning inside Cook County Jail. Sophia holds a bachelor's degree from Brown University and dual master's degrees in social work and public policy from the University of Chicago.

**Sean Martschinke**, *Bureau Chief Programs, Projects and Safety Outreach*  
*Department of Transportation*



Sean Martschinke is a marketing and communications expert with 20 years of experience elevating the importance of what makes organizations an essential part of their industry. Currently Sean leads a team of communicators and outreach gurus based in all five IDOT regions. Together, the team works closely with IDOT's nine district offices, the central office and outside stakeholders to ensure IDOT is providing critical information on how the agency makes Illinois a better place to work, live and visit. Sean brings years of experience in the private sector where he directed marketing and product development for national and international B2B manufacturing companies.

**Sheila Nelson**, *Local Office Administrator*  
*Department of Human Services*



Dr. Sheila Nelson is a dedicated Public Service Administrator serving as a Local Office Administrator with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). A lifelong learner and servant leader, Dr. Nelson earned her Doctor of Education in Leadership in October 2025, further strengthening her commitment to ethical, people-centered leadership. Throughout her career, she has remained deeply committed to empowering underserved and underprivileged individuals, helping them achieve self-sufficiency and become productive members of society. Her work is grounded in compassion, equity, and accountability, and she consistently strives to create meaningful, sustainable outcomes for the communities she serves. Helping others is not only central to her professional role but also a personal passion that guides her leadership philosophy and daily practice.

**Logan Pappenfort**, *Director of Tribal Relations*  
*Department of Natural Resources*



Logan Pappenfort is Director of Tribal Relations at the Illinois State Museum and a descendant of tawaahkwahkinanka (Trail of the Storms), a hereditary chief of the Piankashaw within the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma. Passionate about Illinois history and his Native heritage, Logan is committed to sharing overlooked Indigenous narratives. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Anthropology from Kansas State University. After graduation, he served six years as Director of Cultural Preservation for the Peoria Tribe, protecting cultural and sacred sites across ancestral lands. He later served four years as Second Chief on the Peoria Tribe's Business Committee and coordinated the Peoria Annual Pow-wow from 2015 to 2021.

**Jeffrey Parga**, *Operations Manager*  
*Department of Central Management Services*



Jeff Parga has been the Operations Manager with Illinois Department of Central Management Services Division of Vehicles since June of 2023. Jeff brought over 25 years of vehicle and equipment service experience to the Division of Vehicles. With a diverse background, starting as a mechanic and eventually a manager, Jeff has excelled leading several high priority projects. Recently, Jeff successfully led the first fleet management software upgrade for DOV in over ten years. With the team at DOV, Jeff also worked on the successful implementation of the new maintenance and repair program (MRP). Jeff lives in Divernon IL. His greatest joy is spending time with his wife and kids, especially road trips, grilling out, and music. One of the reasons Jeff is successful in his professional life is the unwavering support from his family. He believes one of the keys to his professional success, is having worked in many diverse roles. Jeff's love of automobiles started early in life. Jeff raced in various forms of motorsports from the age of five into his early twenties, and from this he channels the competitive desire to win the day every day.

**Chad Phillips**, *Federal Policy Manager*  
*Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity*



As the Federal Policy Manager for the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, Chad Phillips leads the Department's federal affairs and works to help organizations access federal resources that foster economic growth across Illinois. In this role, he manages the Department's federal cost-share support program, offers strategic guidance to external partners, and collaborates closely with Illinois' congressional delegation to drive impactful outcomes. Before joining the State of Illinois, Chad served as a strategic initiatives coordinator for U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth and as a member of U.S. Senator Dick Durbin's legislative team in Washington, D.C. A proud native of the Metro-East region, Chad grew up in Valmeyer, Illinois.

**Oscar Piña, Chief of Business Prosecutions**  
*Department of Financial and Professional Regulation*



Oscar serves as the Chief of Business Prosecutions at IDFP's Division of Professional Regulation. In this role, he supervises a team of attorneys charged with enforcing regulations for the cannabis, engineering, architecture, accounting, athletics, physical therapy, and private security professions, among others.

Oscar previously worked at the City of Chicago Department of Law, where he represented the City and its officials in a broad range of constitutional and commercial litigation matters in state and federal court, and handled various constitutional challenges to the City's zoning ordinances, ethics laws, and defended the City's Fair Workweek Ordinance and Covid-19 regulations. He also worked at the Illinois Attorney General's Office, where he litigated civil cases against alleged perpetrators of fraud in the automobile sales, mortgage modification, and home repair industries, and he helped secure millions of dollars in debt relief to students enrolled at a for-profit school.

**Greg Richards, Deputy Director of Finance**  
*Department of Insurance*



Greg Richards is the Deputy Director of Finance at the Illinois Department of Insurance, where he leads budgeting, fiscal management, and financial strategy to ensure compliance and operational excellence. With deep expertise in accounting, grant administration, and financial analysis, he drives data-informed decision-making using tools like Excel, SQL, Power BI, Tableau, and SAP. Greg holds an MBA from the University of Illinois at Chicago and dual degrees in Business Administration and Economics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Beyond his public service work, he is passionate about supporting veterans through GoldenWolf, his nonprofit organization focused on service dog training and veteran assistance.

Greg combines strategic financial oversight with a commitment to social impact, helping organizations operate efficiently while making a meaningful difference in the community.

**Amanda Shanbaum, Laboratory Director**  
*Illinois State Police*



Amanda Shanbaum is the Laboratory Director of the Illinois State Police Forensic Science Center at Chicago, overseeing nearly 150 staff across all forensic disciplines. During her 22 years at ISP, she began her career as a Forensic Scientist in Drug Chemistry and chaired the discipline's statewide policy and technical committee. Prior to becoming Laboratory Director, Ms. Shanbaum served in all levels of laboratory management including Group Supervisor, Drug Chemistry Section Chief, and Deputy Laboratory Director. She is a nationally recognized expert in seized drug analysis.

She is a core member of the Scientific Working Group for the Analysis of Seized Drugs (SWGDRUG), an international group dedicated to improving the quality of seized drug analysis around the world. Ms. Shanbaum holds a Bachelor's of Science in Chemistry and a Master of Science in Chemistry and Teaching from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**Michael Sullivan, Legal Counsel**  
*Department of Innovation and Technology*



Michael Sullivan is Legal Counsel for the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology where he provides legal guidance on employment practices, data breach response, and technology procurements. Previously, he has served as a progressive prosecutor, a dedicated public defender, counsel to the Mayor's Office in Indianapolis, and a White House intern. Beyond his legal work, Michael is devoted to strengthening his community. He has volunteered pushing wheelchair-bound children in half marathon races and has been active in organizations such as November Project and Back on My Feet where he personally supported individuals working to overcome homelessness and addiction. Michael is passionate about learning languages. He speaks Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and is currently learning Gujarati. He is also an avid musician and during his college years played in a band that opened for Walk the Moon and Mac Miller.

**Jaclyn Thompson, Warden**  
*Department of Corrections*



Jaclyn Thompson currently serves as the Warden at Decatur Correctional Center, bringing over a decade of experience within the Illinois Department of Corrections, where she has worked since 2013 in a variety of roles. She is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) with a strong clinical background, having held numerous mental health positions both within correctional settings and in the community. Jaclyn earned a Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology from Eastern Illinois University. Throughout her career, she has remained deeply committed to trauma-informed care and to expanding meaningful opportunities for justice-involved individuals in an effort to reduce recidivism.

**Tangy Williams, Quality Assurance Manager**  
*Department of Human Services*



Tangy Williams is a public service professional with 26 years of service to the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). She began her career on November 4, 1998, as a Social Service Trainee with the Family Community Resource Center (FCRC) and was promoted to Human Service Caseworker in 1999, serving in that role for 13 years. She later advanced to Regional Staff Development Specialist and Human Service Case Manager, gaining experience in training, operations, and leadership. Tangy then served four years as an Assistant Local Office Administrator, providing administrative and supervisory oversight. For the past two and a half years, she has served as a Quality Assurance Manager with the Division of Rehabilitation Services, overseeing statewide quality assurance and compliance efforts. Tangy is a 10-year National Guard veteran, holds a Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Services from Southern University in Baton Rouge, La and is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. She has been married to her husband Patrick for 27 years, has two sons and a French bulldog name Shaka Danny.

**Brandon Woudenberg**, *Deputy General Counsel*  
*Department of Early Childhood*



Brandon Woudenberg serves as the Deputy General Counsel for the Illinois Department of Early Childhood Education where he provides strategic legal guidance in support of the agency's mission to serve Illinois' youngest residents and their families. Previously, Brandon served as Legal Counsel for the Department of Innovation and Technology as a subject matter expert in data security and held the role of the State's Electronically Stored Information Officer. Prior to joining State, Brandon was the Labor Relations Manager for the City of Springfield where he negotiated over 23 CBA's and help manage many special issues during the Covid Pandemic.

Brandon also worked as a prosecutor in Union and Sangamon County trying hundreds of felony and misdemeanor cases. Outside of work, Brandon is a active in the State Bar Association since 2016, sitting on multiple leadership committees. In 2020, he helped establish Carbondale's first homeless shelter, reflecting his belief in servant leadership and community-driven solutions.



## Acknowledgements

The G.O.A.L. program is supported by the efforts and contributions of many individuals and teams across the state who dedicate their time and resources.. We want to express our deepest gratitude for their commitment to the G.O.A.L program and their desire to help advance excellence in public service leadership.



Governor Pritzker, Anne Caprara, Andy Manar, Amanda Elliot,  
and the entire Budget + Economy Team



Evaluation and Selection Team: Matt Berry, Dr. Atiera Coleman,  
Adnan Khayyat , Mona Noriega, Natashee Scott, Alexis Sturm, Aundra Williams, and José Burgos



CMS Leadership Development Steering Team:  
Dr. Victoria Davis, Joseph Gillespie, Noureen Hashim-Jiwani, and Katy Straub



CMS Director Raven A. DeVaughn



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**Governor's Office Academy of Leadership: Advancing Excellence in Public Service Leadership**