



CWLA Selects Seasoned Child Welfare Leader as Next President & CEO

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), the nation's oldest and largest membership-based child welfare organization, is thrilled to announce the appointment of Linda S. Spears, MSW, as its next president and CEO.

Spears will succeed current president and CEO Christine James-Brown, who has led CWLA since 2007, when James-Brown retires from this role in October 2023.

Spears previously served at CWLA from 1992 to 2015—most recently (2012-2015) as the organization's Vice President of Policy, Programs, and Public Affairs. Since 2015, Spears has been the longest-serving Commissioner for the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. Known for her ability to establish shared accountability through partnerships with social workers and their union leadership, youth, families, foster parents, service providers, and policy leaders, she has been responsible for managing a budget of \$1.2 billion and employing 4,200 social workers, supervisors, managers, and related staff. Spears has led innovative, system-wide reforms including redesigning protective intake, investigations, and family assessment and action planning processes; expanding in-house clinical supports for social workers in domestic violence, substance abuse/plans of safe care, and mental health; advancing adoption and specialty clinical supports; revamping foster and kinship care recruitment, preparation, licensing, and support services; and more. Her commitment to core equity-minded practices has led to the establishment of inclusive programs and practices for children and families who are LGBTQIA+ and for individuals with disabilities, including gender-affirming care and disabilities policies.

During Spears's tenure as Commissioner, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts saw a 115% increase in the utilization of kinship care placements; a nearly 100% increase in adoptions (between 2015 and 2019); and a nearly 20% reduction in the number of children in the state's care. Spears leaves the agency having built a robust infrastructure to support data-driven management and a culture of continuous quality Improvement.

Vicky Kelly, CWLA Board Chair, in making the announcement, recognized Spears's commitment to improving outcomes for children and families involved in child welfare: "At this critical inflection point in the history of the field, we are delighted to have someone committed to continuing to build the network of coordinated partnerships and urgent advocacy initiatives needed to address racial and social inequities while promoting true well-being for children, parents, their families, and communities."

Keith Liederman, Co-Chair of the Search Committee, added, "Seeking a new leader at this critical time for child welfare has been an arduous but reaffirming process. While we considered some truly extraordinary candidates, the depth and breadth of Linda Spears' experience and expertise in child welfare is unparalleled. I couldn't be more excited about the future of CWLA under her leadership!"

"Linda Spears brings vast experience to the role of President and CEO, both public and private. Her commitment to the well-being of families and children is demonstrated by the work she has done. I am so pleased she is returning to CWLA as President and CEO," stated Carnitra White, Co-Chair of the Search Committee.

"Eight and a half years ago I returned to the front lines as Commissioner of a state child welfare system serving more than 40,000 children on a given day. I am grateful to the staff of the Department who partnered with me on this tremendous journey and deeply honored to have the opportunity to return to CWLA in this leadership role to address the unprecedented challenges facing children and families at the national level," says Spears.

CWLA is a powerful coalition of hundreds of private and public agencies that since 1920 has worked to serve children and families who are vulnerable. The organization's expertise, leadership, and innovation on policies, programs, and practices helps improve the lives of millions of children across the country. In 2020, CWLA celebrated 100 years of leadership in creating and advancing standards of practice, advocacy, and information sharing to enhance the well-being of families, children, and youth.

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