NOTICE
This Order was filed under Supreme Court Rule 23 and is not precedent except in the limited circumstances allowed under Rule 23(e)(1).

2026 IL App (4th) 260512-U

NO. 4-26-0512

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF ILLINOIS

FOURTH DISTRICT

FILED
September 30, 2026
Carla Bender
4th District Appellate
Court, IL

In re A.E., a Minor	)	Appeal from the
	)	Circuit Court of
(The People of the State of Illinois,	)	Rock Island County
Petitioner-Appellee,	)	No. 25JA92
v.	)	
Jodie E.,	)	Honorable
Respondent-Appellant).	)	Tionn F. Carter
	)	Judge Presiding.

JUSTICE LANNERD delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Knecht and Cavanagh concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held*: The appellate court affirmed, holding the trial court did not err in (1) determining A.E. was a neglected minor because she was in an environment injurious to her welfare or (2) entering a dispositional order finding Jodie E. was unable to care for A.E. and that it was in A.E.'s best interests to be made a ward of the court.

¶ 2 On November 10, 2025, the State filed a petition for adjudication of wardship for A.E. (born in October 2022), the daughter of respondent, Jodie E. Goldie E., the father of A.E., is not a party to this appeal. On April 1, 2026, the trial court found A.E. was a neglected minor because she was in an environment that was injurious to her welfare. On April 30, 2026, after a dispositional hearing, the court found A.E.'s parents were unable to care for the minor and that it was in A.E.'s best interests to be made a ward of the court. Respondent appeals, arguing the trial court erred by (1) finding A.E. to be a neglected minor and (2) entering a dispositional order making A.E. a ward of the court and removing her from respondent's care. We affirm.

¶ 3 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4 On November 10, 2025, after A.E.'s sibling, J.E., reported Goldie abused her, the State filed both a petition for adjudication of wardship with regard to A.E.—alleging she was neglected because she was in an environment injurious to her welfare (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2024))—and a petition for A.E.'s temporary custody. That same day, the trial court found probable cause existed that J.E. was abused, J.E. and A.E. were neglected, and an urgent and immediate necessity existed to remove the minors from their home. The court gave the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) temporary custody of the minors. Then, on November 14, 2025, the court issued a juvenile warrant to take A.E. into immediate custody, noting the parents' refusal to disclose A.E.'s location.

¶ 5 On December 9, 2025, the State filed a motion for an order for access to A.E., which alleged DCFS took protective custody of J.E. on November 6, 2025, but was unable to take A.E. into protective custody because respondent refused to turn the child over and stopped responding to DCFS after a temporary custody hearing. The motion also stated Goldie told DCFS he could not locate respondent and A.E., claiming the last time he saw them was before November 10, 2025.

¶ 6 On December 12, 2025, the trial court ordered Goldie, respondent, or whoever had physical custody of A.E. to produce the minor in order for DCFS to take temporary custody of her. One week later, the court issued a warrant, commanding law enforcement officers to take A.E. into temporary custody and place her with an authorized agent of DCFS.

¶ 7 At a hearing on January 8, 2026, respondent appeared, and the trial court appointed an attorney to represent her. The State indicated respondent had been served with the order to produce A.E., but she had not produced the minor. The State also advised the court that DCFS was given temporary custody of A.E. at a contested hearing held on November 10, 2025. Respondent

was given oral notice of the hearing but failed to appear. Goldie was present at the hearing. The State indicated they had been attempting to serve respondent, but she had evaded service for a period of time. The court ordered respondent to turn A.E. over to DCFS within 24 hours, which she did.

¶ 8 A. Adjudicatory Hearing

¶ 9 On March 26, 2026, the trial court conducted an adjudicatory hearing concerning both J.E. and A.E. While neither admitting nor denying the allegations, Goldie stipulated the State could prove the petition for adjudication of wardship by a preponderance of the evidence. The court accepted the stipulation as it related to both minors. However, because respondent objected to Goldie's stipulation in A.E.'s case, the State wanted to present evidence to support Goldie's stipulation. At the State's request and over respondent's objection, the court admitted medical records for J.E. from the Pediatric Resource Center and nurse practitioner Alyssa Wislander. The State and respondent also presented witness testimony.

¶ 10 1. *DCFS Investigator Amy Sherman*

¶ 11 DCFS investigator Amy Sherman testified she was a child protection specialist and became involved in this case on May 12, 2025. Sherman noted Goldie allegedly tortured J.E., causing cuts, bruises, welts, and abrasions. Sherman met with J.E. on May 12, 2025, at her school, along with Rock Island Sheriff's Deputy Tyler Reagan and a school staff member. J.E. said Goldie beat her butt and arm with a belt. Sherman photographed bruising on J.E.'s left buttock and left upper arm. J.E. also said Goldie used excessive exercise as a form of discipline. J.E. lived with Goldie, respondent, and A.E. J.E. said respondent never disciplined her but was sometimes present and allowed Goldie's discipline to occur. Additionally, according to J.E., when the alleged abuse occurred, A.E. was sometimes present, would get scared, and would hide.

¶ 12 After speaking with J.E., Sherman drove to J.E.'s home in Cordova, Illinois, along with Deputy Reagan. While there, she called 911 for assistance because she believed someone was inside the home but would not answer the door. Police officers arrived and surrounded the home, knocking on all the doors. In a call with Goldie on his cell phone, Goldie told Sherman he was on his way to the house and that respondent was inside the home. However, respondent never answered the door. When Goldie arrived at the residence, he had two small children with him. Sherman and Deputy Reagan talked with Goldie for approximately 40 minutes outside the home. Goldie said Sherman could go into the house, but she did not do so and did not speak with respondent that day.

¶ 13 Goldie admitted whipping J.E. on her arm and legs with a belt and using exercise to discipline her. At the time, respondent's involvement in this discipline was not discussed. Sherman told Goldie that if his treatment of J.E. continued, then she would most likely have to take protective custody of the minor. She also told Goldie he needed to take J.E. to her primary care provider as soon as possible to be examined. Goldie did take J.E. to her primary care provider, Wislander.

¶ 14 Sherman arranged for J.E. to be interviewed at the Rock Island County Children's Advocacy Center on May 22, 2025, took her to the appointment, and returned her home, but she had no contact with respondent. J.E.'s interview was consistent with her interview at the school. Sherman also took J.E. to an appointment at the Pediatric Resource Center in Peoria, Illinois, on May 27, 2025. When she picked up J.E. for that appointment, respondent told Sherman the appointment was unnecessary because the minor was fine. Respondent also indicated she would not be cooperating with Sherman's investigation and Sherman was not allowed inside her home. Before J.E. and Sherman entered Sherman's vehicle to leave, respondent yelled, " 'Go ahead and

keep her,' " referencing J.E.

¶ 15 Sherman and her supervisor both decided the minor's allegations would be indicated. At the time Sherman closed her investigation, the family was not involved in any services. Wislander told Sherman that Goldie and J.E. had a couple of counseling sessions together with her. At the time, DCFS did not pursue any additional follow-up because they deemed J.E. was safe.

¶ 16 When cross-examined by respondent's attorney, Sherman testified J.E. said Goldie kept her home from school for a week after an incident. (We note Sherman's testimony was not clear about what incident preceded J.E. being kept home from school for a week. However, J.E.'s school counselor, Casey Stichter, did provide some information about what happened in May 2025, which we summarize below.)

¶ 17 According to J.E., Goldie forced her to do excessive exercise during that week. J.E. also explained respondent was sometimes present and sometimes tried to protect her when Goldie disciplined her. However, when respondent tried to intervene, Goldie told her to stay out of the situation because J.E. was his daughter, not respondent's. According to J.E., respondent never disciplined J.E., and J.E. was not afraid of her. J.E. also told Sherman that A.E. was the favored child in the house and did not get disciplined by anyone. Sherman also testified Goldie told her he was the primary caregiver for both J.E. and A.E. because he was unemployed and respondent worked.

¶ 18 2. *J.E.*

¶ 19 During an *in camera* interview, J.E. told the trial court Goldie would get angry at her and had hit her with his belt, a back scratcher, an orange plastic toy bat, and his hands. The abuse started when she was nine years old. When asked about missing a week of school, J.E. said

she was not sick, but Goldie instructed her to tell a police officer that came to her house that she was ill. She did not remember if she had any bruises or marks on her body when the police officer came to check on her. However, Goldie made her take down her pants and struck her with a belt that week. J.E. said Goldie occasionally punched her in the stomach and once hit her with a back scratcher, but he mainly hit her with a belt. Although J.E. said respondent was sometimes at work or sleeping when Goldie hit her, she was pretty sure respondent had been present when Goldie hit her. J.E. also indicated A.E. was in the house when Goldie hit her, knew what was happening, was scared, and would go to another room and shut the door.

¶ 20 J.E. told the trial court Goldie had made her lift weights, use the treadmill and exercise bike, and perform push-ups and squats as punishment. J.E. said Goldie would stand and watch her, tell her to keep doing the exercises, and get mad if she took a break. In addition, J.E. claimed Goldie hit A.E. and her little brothers with the orange plastic bat. According to J.E., respondent had smacked her face and yelled at her, but she had not seen respondent discipline A.E. J.E. also said Goldie had punched her in the nose and warned her not to tell anyone or he would beat her more. In addition, J.E. told the court she did not feel safe in her home and asked for help at school. When examined by respondent's attorney, J.E. said she felt well taken care of by respondent, and respondent tried to intervene on her behalf and protect her from Goldie's discipline. She also said respondent always protected A.E.

¶ 21 3. *Stichter*

¶ 22 Stichter, a school counselor, testified J.E. told him in May 2025 and November 2025 about Goldie's abuse. Stichter testified he spoke with J.E. on May 5, 2025, after she had a disciplinary issue on the school bus. He said J.E. was upset that she would have to tell her parents what happened on the bus. Stichter testified he next spoke with J.E. on May 12, 2025, and provided

the following testimony about that conversation: "[J.E.] reported that the week before, when she had been absent from school, that she had received a beating with a belt and that she had been made to do squats and exercises while she was at home that week." Stichter informed the school principal. Then, in the presence of a female teacher, Stichter asked to see the bruising that J.E. reported. J.E. showed Stichter bruising on her left hip and buttock area and on her back. DCFS then became involved in the matter.

¶ 23 On November 5, 2025, J.E. approached Stichter again. J.E. said she was late coming home from the library on Monday, November 3, 2025, and Goldie punched her in the face. In addition, J.E. said Goldie punched her again on Tuesday, November 4, 2025. Stichter testified people at school had noticed J.E. had been wearing the same outfit to school every day since approximately October 27, 2025, which was not normal for J.E. J.E. told him she was being forced to wear the same clothes every day as punishment for not remembering Goldie's telephone number and coming home from the library late. In addition, J.E. said her hair braids were also cut off as a punishment. Once again, DCFS became involved after J.E.'s statements on November 5.

¶ 24 4. *Child Protection Specialist Nicole Cook*

¶ 25 DCFS child protection specialist Nicole Cook testified she was assigned to J.E.'s and A.E.'s cases on November 5, 2025. J.E told Cook that Goldie had hit her several times in the face, punched her in the stomach, forced her to cut her braids and forced her to wear the same clothes to school every day as a form of punishment. When Cook met with Goldie at the family's home, A.E. and J.E. were present. However, Cook said she was only allowed to come into the home's entryway. Cook testified Goldie was verbally aggressive with her, denying the existence of any issues. Because of Goldie's intimidating verbal escalation, Cook had concerns for her own safety. At one point, Goldie put his hand on Cook's shoulder and made threatening comments.

Because of Goldie's behavior, Cook asked a case aide to come to the house. Goldie said respondent was on vacation in Las Vegas, Nevada, during that home visit.

¶ 26 Cook initiated a safety plan that had the children remain in the care of their maternal grandfather, John D. Goldie was not to have unsupervised contact with the minors until DCFS could make a safety determination. After John arrived at the home, the safety plan was explained to him. However, on November 6, 2025, Cook received information suggesting the safety plan had been violated. She then took protective custody of J.E. During a forensic interview, J.E. provided information consistent with her statement from the day before.

¶ 27 On November 6, 2025, Cook spoke with respondent and reported DCFS's concerns about Goldie's treatment of J.E. and the safety of both children while in his care. In response, respondent was verbally combative and aggressive. Respondent stated she would not cooperate with Cook, claimed J.E. was a liar and manipulative, said DCFS could keep J.E., and told Cook that DCFS would have to "shoot her" before she would let DCFS take custody of A.E. Cook told respondent that DCFS believed it was necessary to take custody of A.E. because of concerns regarding her home environment, informed respondent of the date and time of a temporary custody hearing, and told respondent that she needed to bring A.E. to court for that hearing. Respondent stated she had to work and would not be present. Neither respondent nor A.E. appeared at the temporary custody hearing on November 10, 2025. Goldie denied having contact with respondent or A.E. since the prior Thursday. The trial court ordered both children to be taken into protective custody. Cook attempted to make contact with respondent after the November 10 hearing, but respondent failed to respond.

¶ 28 On December 18, 2025, Cook spoke with respondent after the Cordova police received a tip she had moved to Iowa City, Iowa. Respondent said A.E. was in the care of her

mother, Wendy M. Cook informed respondent that the trial court had given DCFS temporary custody of A.E. However, respondent did not make arrangements to turn A.E. over to DCFS or allow Cook or law enforcement personnel to look for A.E. in respondent's residence.

¶ 29 In November, Goldie had twice denied knowing where respondent and A.E. were living. Cook also contacted A.E.'s healthcare provider, Wislander, to try to locate A.E. but was unsuccessful. At the next court date, respondent indicated she had blocked Cook's phone number from being able to contact her. Cook said two of her supervisors at DCFS also were unsuccessful in trying to make contact with respondent. Cook stated, other than this case, she had never had a parent fail to produce a child when ordered. Cook also testified she had not been able to check A.E.'s body for bruising on November 5, 2025, because Goldie would not allow it.

¶ 30 5. *Respondent*

¶ 31 Respondent testified that she was A.E.'s mother and J.E.'s stepmother, had worked as a traveling nurse for several years, and usually had two residences, spending a week in Cordova and then a week in Davenport, Iowa. She had been working at the University of Iowa since April 2025. Starting in early November 2025, respondent accepted a staff assignment and began working weekends in Iowa City and was off during the week. She also asserted she was living full-time in Iowa City.

¶ 32 According to respondent, she was on vacation in Las Vegas from November 2 through November 6, 2025, and had no personal knowledge of what happened while she was gone. When she got back to Illinois from Las Vegas, respondent said Cook told her she was coming to take A.E. into custody, which made respondent angry, hostile, frustrated, and protective of A.E. Respondent claimed she followed an attorney's advice to make DCFS get a warrant before she produced A.E. After being served with "paperwork," respondent appeared in court and produced

A.E. When asked about J.E.'s statement that Goldie hit A.E. with a plastic baseball bat, respondent testified, "I think it's absolutely ridiculous to even think it occurred." According to respondent, she had never witnessed Goldie being abusive to either A.E. or J.E. Further, respondent testified J.E. had an ongoing problem "with lying and sneaking."

¶ 33 According to respondent, she was not aware Goldie sent J.E. to the basement as punishment and only recently learned of J.E.'s bruises. When J.E. came to live with her and Goldie in August 2022, they were told J.E. would need a lot of emotional support and guidance because of her history of neglect and abuse. Respondent said J.E. also had a history of making false allegations. When respondent was asked about the incident in May 2025 and whether it surprised her that J.E. reported the incident to the school but not her, respondent said no because J.E. "has a very manipulative personality." When they caught J.E. doing something wrong, J.E. would start crying and continue lying instead of admitting the truth. Respondent claimed Goldie had never abused J.E. or A.E., A.E. and Goldie had a great relationship, and A.E. was never afraid of Goldie.

¶ 34 Respondent testified she took A.E. to see her primary care provider after she spoke with Cook on November 6, 2025, and the primary care provider never raised any concerns about A.E. Respondent claimed A.E. would be safe in her care and asked for A.E.'s immediate return and the dismissal of this case. She also denied ever slapping J.E.

¶ 35 On cross-examination, respondent said she did not remember DCFS ever coming to her house in May 2025, except for Sherman coming to pick up J.E. to take her to an appointment. While she said Goldie had told her that J.E. told people at school that he had "whooped her," respondent said she made no inquiry into J.E.'s allegations. Respondent testified she was not concerned about a DCFS investigator coming to her house to take J.E. to see a doctor. Further, respondent claimed she did not ask anyone about the results of J.E.'s examination, other than

Goldie. When asked whether she refused to let Sherman into her home and said DCFS could keep J.E., respondent said she did not recall but admitted she would not be surprised if she said DCFS could keep J.E. because of her ridiculous allegations.

¶ 36 6. *Wislander's Testimony*

¶ 37 Wislander testified she had been seeing A.E. since her birth and had seen her on December 23, 2025. She did a full physical exam on A.E. and was able to check her full body for marks on her skin. Wislander did not have any concerns with A.E. at that appointment or at any other appointment. In addition, Wislander testified she had also seen J.E. as a patient after she moved to Illinois from Texas. According to Wislander, J.E. had never expressed any issues or concerns about respondent. However, on May 13, 2025, J.E. expressed concerns about Goldie, telling Wislander that she had been spanked and swatted on the arm for lying. Wislander observed a bruise on J.E.'s left upper arm but no bruising on her buttocks. According to Wislander, J.E. had not made any other complaints before or after the visit on May 13, 2025.

¶ 38 On cross-examination by the State, Wislander testified J.E. said she had received a "whooping," not a spanking. Wislander's assessment of J.E. indicated the minor had presented with signs of emotional distress due to her home environment, which included being afraid of physical discipline and anxiety about her familial relationships. Wislander noted J.E.'s history of bruises and Goldie's disciplinary methods raised concerns about potential child abuse. According to Wislander, if DCFS had not already been involved in this case, she would have made a report for child abuse based on what she observed. Wislander informed respondent of the bruising on J.E. and explained she examined J.E. at the direction of DCFS. In response to Wislander's concerns, respondent said she felt J.E. was safe and not undergoing any potential abuse, and nothing needed to be done. According to Wislander, A.E. was with J.E. at the May 13, 2025, appointment. She did

not examine A.E. but visually observed and assessed her and did not have any concerns about A.E.

¶ 39 Wislander testified Goldie admitted to spanking J.E. According to Wislander, she told Goldie that she was concerned his physical discipline, which had left bruises on J.E., was not appropriate parenting and should not be done. Wislander spoke with respondent on November 13, 2025, about her preexisting concerns of potential abuse in the home. She said respondent was aware of Goldie spanking J.E. but was not aware of the bruising. Wislander noted she was not just concerned about J.E. but also A.E. because she was in an environment where another child was abused.

¶ 40 7. *Trial Court's Adjudicatory Findings*

¶ 41 At the end of the adjudicatory hearing, the trial court found J.E. was both abused and neglected and A.E. was neglected because she was in an environment that was injurious to her welfare. The court noted its findings were based on Goldie's stipulation to the petition, witness testimony, and a review of the evidence and exhibits admitted by the court. The court ordered the children to remain outside Goldie's and respondent's home or homes because remaining in the home or homes would be contrary to the minors' health, welfare, and safety. The court found J.E. provided "credible *** testimony" that she was hit by Goldie and subjected to an injurious environment. The court did not find respondent's testimony that she did not know about the abuse of J.E. that was occurring in the home credible. While the court found Goldie inflicted the physical abuse on J.E., the court also found both Goldie and respondent created an injurious environment for A.E.

¶ 42 B. Dispositional Hearing

¶ 43 1. *Arguments Presented*

¶ 44 On April 30, 2026, the trial court held a dispositional hearing in A.E.'s case. At the

State's request and without objection by the other parties, the court took judicial notice of the integrated assessment prepared by Tara L. Gilbert and Kayla M. James and the dispositional report prepared by James that were filed on April 20, 2026. The State noted James, the assigned caseworker, was present and available for cross-examination. Otherwise, the State noted it would simply rest on the reports for purposes of the dispositional hearing.

¶ 45 The guardian *ad litem* (GAL) also indicated she did not have any additional evidence to present, did not have questions for the caseworker, and would rest at that point. Goldie's attorney stated they had received the report and gone over the recommendations. According to the attorney, Goldie had completed a majority of the recommendations, "they are finishing up the *** parenting class, and then he'll have the coaching to do." Goldie's attorney indicated the recommendation for family counseling would only be applicable to J.E.'s case, not A.E.'s case.

¶ 46 Respondent's attorney indicated she did not have any evidence to present on behalf of her client. The attorney also noted respondent had completed "five sessions of parenting" and had five more sessions left, and she had completed a mental health assessment through Transitions Mental Health Services (Transitions), which did not recommend any additional services for her. According to respondent's attorney, other than some parenting classes, respondent had completed everything she had been asked to do, and counsel requested A.E.'s return to her while recognizing her Iowa residence made that difficult. Respondent's counsel asserted respondent was willing to live separately from Goldie if the trial court believed that was necessary for A.E.'s return. Respondent also requested more visits with A.E.

¶ 47 The State responded it did not have any objection to the family therapy recommendation not being included in A.E.'s case. However, the State said a discrepancy existed

between the contents of the integrated assessment and the dispositional report. According to the State:

> "[T]he recommendation in the integrated assessment is actually for individual psychotherapy. It's not for a mental health assessment. It's for therapy. I understand that DCFS referred [respondent] for a mental health assessment, but the actual recommendation is for therapy. So the State would be asking that that recommendation be included in an order for services rather than a mental health assessment."

As for the requested additional visits, the State noted DCFS would need to check with A.E.'s caretaker to see if she would be agreeable to respondent's request. The State then asked the trial court to make A.E. a ward of the court, with DCFS having guardianship and additional recommended services being put into place.

¶ 48 The GAL then stated she agreed with the State's assessment of the integrated assessment compared to the recommendations in the dispositional report. According to the GAL:

> "[A] big part of the adjudicatory hearing was [respondent]'s failure to protect the minors. And to not have a therapy recommendation—she's still in a relationship with [Goldie], and they are representing that they are living together in Iowa City at this time. So I don't think we're close to return home of [A.E.] with that *** situation still in place. So I don't know what service to recommend for that other than the psychotherapy that is referenced in the integrated assessment."

¶ 49 Respondent's attorney again argued respondent mother went to Transitions, which is recognized by DCFS, and they did not recommend any services for respondent. Counsel argued DCFS was recommending services that were not recommended by an expert. As a result, counsel

asked the trial court not to adopt DCFS's specific psychotherapy recommendation.

¶ 50 However, the State responded that DCFS's recommendation was in the integrated assessment and came from Gilbert, who was a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor. The State further argued, "[T]he purpose of these proceedings [is] to correct the conditions that require the child's removal from care." The integrated assessment recommended a screening to address the concerns surrounding respondent's failure to protect A.E. The caseworker then noted the evaluation from Transitions did not specifically state respondent did not need counseling. It only said it could not provide counseling without a diagnosis for respondent.

¶ 51 2. *Integrated Assessment*

¶ 52 The integrated assessment, of which the trial court took judicial notice, indicated the prognosis for reunification for both parents within a reasonable time frame was poor. The assessment indicated concurrent planning was warranted for each parent and should continue. The primary concern with regard to Goldie was his pattern of perpetrating abuse on J.E., which had continued in a potentially elevated and more aggressive manner when she was left in his care. The assessment also stated Goldie had been accused of hitting A.E. with a plastic bat and belt. Further, Goldie had refused to provide A.E.'s location to DCFS and provided DCFS with information that was inconsistent with information provided by collateral sources regarding his abusive behavior.

¶ 53 The assessment's primary concern with respondent was her failure to protect J.E. from Goldie's repeated abuse and torture. The assessment stated that all the evidence suggested respondent was aware of Goldie's abuse but made no reasonable efforts to protect J.E. and continued to place A.E. at a great risk of harm, as respondent and Goldie remained in a relationship. According to the assessment, respondent's lack of action or efforts to protect J.E. and A.E.

suggested possible underlying mental health symptoms and/or conditions impacting her overall judgment and reasoning and her empathy for J.E. Further, the assessment noted respondent had been uncooperative with DCFS in the past, identified no services that could benefit her, and provided information for the assessment that was contradicted by other sources, raising questions "about her willingness/desire to change and/or benefit from recommended services." That being said, the assessment indicated respondent's circumstances and ability to provide for A.E.'s safety, permanency, and well-being might improve through engagement with the programs and services outlined by DCFS.

¶ 54 Finally, according to the assessment, respondent and Goldie's continued relationship would impact the prognosis for reunification because of their respective desires regarding reunification. Unlike Goldie, respondent expressed no desire for reunification with J.E.

¶ 55 3. *Dispositional Ruling*

¶ 56 After reviewing the integrated assessment and the dispositional hearing report, considering the positions of the parties, and commending the parents for the services done up to that point, the trial court determined it was in A.E.'s best interests to be made a ward of the court. According to the court's written order, reasonable efforts and appropriate services aimed at family reunification had been made to keep A.E. in respondent and Goldie's home, but those efforts and services had not eliminated the necessity for A.E. to be removed from their residence because leaving A.E. there would be contrary to her health, welfare, and safety. According to the court, respondent and Goldie needed to complete reunification services, cooperate with visits, and correct the conditions that required A.E. to come into care. The court also found respondent to be unable, for other than financial reasons alone, to care for, protect, train, or discipline A.E., in that she needed to complete recommended reunification services to correct the conditions that required

A.E. to come into care. The court also found Goldie to be unable. Further, the court found the services that had been delivered, the services that were to be delivered, and the permanency goal of return home within 12 months to be appropriate. The court ordered respondent to attend and successfully complete parenting classes and parenting coaching, obtain and maintain appropriate housing and income, and "complete an assessment to determine whether individual therapy is needed by a proper provider who can provide the service if it is deemed clinically necessary. Finally, the court ordered A.E. to be placed in relative foster care with a maternal uncle and placed A.E.'s guardianship with the guardianship administrator of DCFS.

¶ 57 On May 5, 2026, respondent filed her notice of appeal.

¶ 58 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 59 On appeal, respondent claims the trial court erred by finding A.E. to be a neglected minor and by entering a dispositional order making A.E. a ward of the court and removing her from respondent's care. According to respondent, A.E. "was in perfect health and was not subjected to any abuse in the home."

¶ 60 A. General Principals of Law

¶ 61 "A proceeding for adjudication of wardship 'represents a significant intrusion into the sanctity of the family which should not be undertaken lightly.' " *In re Arthur H.*, 212 Ill. 2d 441, 463 (2004) (quoting *In re Harpman*, 134 Ill. App. 3d 393, 396-97 (1985)). The Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Act) (705 ILCS 405/1-1 *et seq.* (West 2024)) sets forth the procedure the trial court must follow in determining "whether a minor should be removed from his or her parents' custody and made a ward of the court." *In re A.P.*, 2012 IL 113875, ¶ 18.

¶ 62 "After the State files a petition for adjudication of wardship, the trial court must hold an adjudicatory hearing, where the State presents evidence in support of its petition." *In re*

A.R., 2025 IL App (4th) 250668, ¶ 59. The burden is on the State to prove the allegations in its petition by a preponderance of the evidence. *A.P.*, 2012 IL 113875, ¶ 17. "In other words, the State must establish that the allegations of neglect are more probably true than not." *Id.* If the trial court determines the State has proven by a preponderance of the evidence the minor is abused or neglected, the case proceeds to a dispositional hearing. *Id.* ¶ 21.

¶ 63 At the dispositional hearing, the trial court has two questions it must answer. *A.R.*, 2025 IL App (4th) 250668, ¶ 60. According to this court, those questions are as follows:

> "First, '[is it] in the best interest of the minor and the public that [the minor] be made a ward of the court?' [Citation.] Second, if the minor is made a ward of the court, what is the proper disposition for the minor, considering 'the health, safety and interests of the minor and the public?' [Citation.] When answering the second question, the court must determine whether 'the parents are unfit or unable *** "to care for, protect, train[,] or discipline the minor or are unwilling to do so, and that the health, safety, and best interest of the minor will be jeopardized if the minor remains in the custody of *** her parents." ' [Citation.] If the court determines the parents are unfit, unwilling, or unable and the best interest of the minor would be jeopardized if the minor remains in the parents' custody, it may grant custody and guardianship of the minor to DCFS." *Id.*

¶ 64 B. Neglect Adjudication

¶ 65 Respondent argues the trial court erred by finding A.E. to be neglected. She makes no argument regarding the adjudication of her stepdaughter, J.E. This court will not reverse a trial court's finding of abuse or neglect unless the finding is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *A.P.*, 2012 IL 113875, ¶ 17. "A finding is against the manifest weight of the evidence only if the

opposite conclusion is clearly evident." *Id.*

¶ 66 According to respondent, A.E. was not subjected to abuse at home and was in perfect health. While Goldie stipulated the State could establish A.E. was neglected, respondent chose not to join in the stipulation, and the State then presented evidence to prove A.E. should be adjudicated a neglected minor.

¶ 67 Citing *S.R.* and *Arthur H.*, respondent argues this court and the Illinois Supreme Court have rejected the presumption that a child is neglected when another sibling in the house was abused or neglected. Citing this court's decision in *S.R.*, our supreme court did state "there is no *per se* rule that the neglect of one child conclusively establishes the neglect of another child in the same household." *Arthur H.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 468 (citing *S.R.*, 349 Ill. App. 3d at 1021). According to our supreme court:

> "Rather, 'such neglect should be measured not only by the circumstances surrounding the sibling, but also by the care and condition of the child in question.' [Citations.] Although section 2-18(3) of the Act [citation] provides that proof of neglect of one minor 'shall be admissible evidence' on the issue of the neglect of any other minor for whom the parent is responsible [citation], we emphasize that the mere admissibility of evidence does not constitute conclusive proof of the neglect of another minor. Each case concerning the adjudication of minors, including those cases pursued under a theory of anticipatory neglect based upon the neglect of a child's sibling, must be reviewed according to its own facts." *Arthur H.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 468-69.

However, respondent fails to show the trial court determined A.E. was neglected based only on its determination J.E. was abused and neglected.

¶ 68 Here, the State presented sufficient evidence to meet its burden of proving A.E. was neglected by a preponderance of the evidence. Our supreme court has stated, "the term 'injurious environment' cannot be 'defined with particularity,' but it includes the breach of a parent's duty to ensure a safe and nurturing shelter for his or her children." *In re Z.L.*, 2021 IL 126931, ¶ 89 (quoting *Arthur H.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 463). J.E. testified Goldie abused her at home while A.E. was also present in the home. She also testified she believed the abuse made A.E. upset and scared, noting A.E. would go into another room and hide while the abuse was happening. Further, J.E. testified Goldie had hit A.E. with an orange plastic bat, but she did not think this left any marks on A.E. Finally, J.E. testified respondent smacked her in the face, yelled at her, and knew Goldie was abusing her, and she still left her alone in the home with Goldie and A.E. for extended periods of time.

¶ 69 The trial court in this case found J.E. to be a credible witness and did not believe respondent when she claimed she did not know about Goldie's abuse of J.E. Based on the evidence presented in this case and the court's credibility determinations, the court's determination A.E. was neglected because she was in an environment injurious to her welfare was not against the manifest weight of the evidence presented.

¶ 70 C. Dispositional Order

¶ 71 Respondent next asserts the trial court erred in entering a dispositional order making A.E. a ward of the court and removing her from respondent's care. According to respondent, the evidence showed A.E. was "perfectly healthy" while in her care. Respondent also notes she told the court through her attorney that she would live apart from Goldie if necessary to have A.E. in her custody.

¶ 72 This court has stated a trial court's dispositional decision "will be reversed only if

the findings of fact are against the manifest weight of the evidence or the court committed an abuse of discretion by selecting an inappropriate dispositional order." *In re J.W.*, 386 Ill. App. 3d 847, 856 (2008).

¶ 73 Based on our review of the record and the standard of review in this case, the trial court did not err in determining it was in A.E.'s best interests to be made a ward of the court and removed from respondent's care. As stated above, the court found J.E. to be a credible witness and did not believe respondent's testimony that she did not know about Goldie's abuse of J.E. Moreover, even when confronted with concerns about Goldie's abuse of J.E., respondent concluded J.E. was fine. Despite the fact respondent was a mandated reporter, she made little to no effort to protect J.E. from Goldie and left A.E. alone with Goldie and J.E. As a result, A.E. was exposed to Goldie's abuse of J.E. without any supervision or protection. Further, the record shows respondent went to great lengths to avoid cooperating with DCFS in this case until A.E. was removed from her custody.

¶ 74 While respondent asserts she would be willing to live apart from Goldie if A.E. was returned to her, we agree with the State that given her actions throughout this case, her assertion should be given little, if any, weight. Throughout the proceedings, respondent has persisted in asserting A.E. could not have been impacted by the abuse occurring in the home because A.E. was "in perfect health." Considering both respondent's belief A.E. was not impacted by the abuse in the home and respondent's prior conduct, it seems unlikely she would have followed through on living apart from Goldie, cooperated with DCFS, or obtained the services she needed if A.E. had been returned to her custody after the dispositional hearing.

¶ 75 III. CONCLUSION

¶ 76 For the reasons stated, we affirm the trial court's judgment.

¶ 77 Affirmed.