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) 260794-U

NO. 4-26-0794

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF ILLINOIS

FOURTH DISTRICT

FILED
November 16, 2026
Carla Bender
4th District Appellate
Court, IL

In re A.A., a Minor	)	Appeal from the
	)	Circuit Court of
(The People of the State of Illinois,	)	McLean County
Petitioner-Appellee,	)	No. 26JA18
v.	)	
Janice A.,	)	Honorable
Respondent-Appellant).	)	John Brian Goldrick,
	)	Judge Presiding.

JUSTICE DeARMOND delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Grischow and Cavanagh concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held*: The appellate court affirmed, finding the trial court's dispositional determination was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 2 In April 2026, the State filed a supplemental petition for adjudication of wardship, alleging A.A. (born in February 2026), the minor child of respondent mother, Janice A., was neglected because his blood, urine, or meconium contained amphetamine and methamphetamine at the time of his birth (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(c) (West 2024)). In June 2026, the trial court entered a dispositional order making A.A. a ward of the court, placing his custody with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and finding Janice was unfit to care for, protect, train, educate, supervise, or discipline him. Janice appealed.

¶ 3 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4 On February 20, 2026, the State filed a petition for adjudication of wardship

regarding A.A., along with a supporting shelter care report. According to the report, Janice tested positive for methamphetamine, amphetamine, and tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in February 2026, before giving birth to A.A. on the same day. She had tested positive for amphetamines and THC on January 29, 2026. At the time, she denied using amphetamine or methamphetamine. An investigator spoke with Janice on February 19, 2026, and asked about her two recent drug tests. Janice "confirmed that the results were correct," and asserted that "she was using during the time she was pregnant" with A.A. A.A. was placed in the care of DCFS later that day. On February 20, 2026, the trial court entered an order placing A.A.'s temporary custody with DCFS.

¶ 5 A. Adjudicatory Hearing

¶ 6 On April 9, 2026, the State filed a supplemental petition for adjudication of wardship, alleging A.A. was neglected because he was a newborn infant whose blood, urine, or meconium contained amphetamine and methamphetamine (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(c) (West 2024)).

¶ 7 On April 30, 2026, the trial court conducted an adjudicatory hearing, during which Janice admitted to the supplemental petition's neglect allegation. The State provided the following factual basis:

> "[W]itnesses would testify that on February 17th of 2026, Janice A[.] gave birth to [A.A.]
>
> [Janice's] urine screen was collected prior to the birth, and it was positive for methamphetamine, amphetamine, and cannabis. [A.A.'s] umbilical cord blood was also tested, and it came back positive for the same substances; methamphetamine, amphetamine, and cannabis.
>
> [Janice] did admit to a DCFS investigator that she had used during the

> time she was pregnant with [A.A.], indicating that she had gotten involved with a friend and was using. The medical documentation shows that none of these substances were administered during the course of the mom or the child's medical treatment."

The court accepted Janice's admission as knowingly and voluntarily made and adjudicated A.A. a neglected minor.

¶ 8 B. Dispositional Report

¶ 9 On June 4, 2026, a dispositional report was filed. According to the report, Janice "disclosed a 2019 conviction for possession of methamphetamine." Janice told the caseworker that she first used methamphetamine in 2019, but DCFS records showed that she tested positive for methamphetamine in 2010. Janice claimed she abused alcohol during a prior relationship but stopped after the relationship ended. Records showed that she entered an inpatient program on March 31, 2011, left the program five days later against staff advice, and subsequently "admitted to drinking alcohol and using synthetic drugs during treatment." She also admitted that she "substituted her urine for clean urine when completing drug screenings, and falsified documents."

¶ 10 Janice reported that, after A.A.'s birth, she "ceased all substance use except daily marijuana use." Janice did not plan to stop consuming marijuana. From March 12, 2026, to April 2, 2026, Janice failed to appear at all five of her random drug screenings. From April 6, 2026, to May 26, 2026, she appeared at all nine of her random drug screenings and tested negative for all substances.

¶ 11 Janice had another child, H.C., from a previous relationship. H.C. came into the care of DCFS due to concerns with Janice's "continued marijuana abuse" and ongoing domestic

violence between Janice and her boyfriend at the time. Janice completed domestic violence treatment, but her relationship with her then-boyfriend "was marked by recurring violence and police involvement," as well as "mutual arrests, and a pattern of obtaining and subsequently vacating Orders of Protection against one another." Janice's parental rights to H.C. were terminated in November 2013.

¶ 12 The report asserted that Luke M., A.A.'s putative father, had been incarcerated on charges for domestic violence and gun violence prior to meeting Janice. Janice claimed she met Luke in 2025, after he was released from prison, and that she was unaware of his criminal history. However, collateral sources reported that Janice had known Luke for several years, which "rais[ed] concerns that she may have had prior awareness of potential safety risks." When the report was filed, Janice had a court date scheduled to obtain an order of protection against Luke.

¶ 13 The report acknowledged Janice was engaged in services, but "concerns remain[ed] regarding her overall progress, accountability and honesty." Janice had provided "inconsistent information regarding her history," and she made "significant" omissions that impacted the accuracy of assessments and treatment recommendations. The report opined, "Meaningful progress will require not only participation in services but also a willingness to acknowledge past concerns, apply skills and demonstrate lasting behavioral change through consistent actions and insight." The report warned that Janice needed to "demonstrate increased honesty and accountability regarding her history." The report concluded that Janice had not eliminated safety threats, and A.A.'s recommended goal was changed to "Return Home in 12 Months."

¶ 14 C. Dispositional Hearing

¶ 15 On June 18, 2026, the trial court conducted a dispositional hearing. The State called Janice as a witness. She denied ever being arrested for possession of methamphetamine, insisting she had been "arrested for possession of paraphernalia." The State directed her attention to McLean County case Nos. 17-CF-97 and 19-CF-99. When asked whether she was charged with possession of methamphetamine in either case, Janice testified, "I've never been charged with possession of methamphetamine." The State asked if she pleaded guilty to the lesser offense of possession of drug paraphernalia in case No. 17-CF-97, and Janice answered, "I'm not sure. I just know I've never been charged with possession of methamphetamine." Janice denied using amphetamine and methamphetamine while pregnant with A.A. Janice acknowledged that A.A.'s umbilical cord blood tested positive for amphetamine, methamphetamine, and THC, but she testified "that [was] from a shot that they give you whenever you have high blood pressure."

¶ 16 During cross-examination by her counsel, Janice testified marijuana was the only substance with which she had an issue. She testified she last used marijuana on February 20, 2026. She denied ever having a problem with alcohol.

¶ 17 During cross-examination by the guardian *ad litem*, Janice once again testified that she had never been charged with possession of methamphetamine. She testified she only purchased marijuana from a licensed dispensary, so it was not possible that her positive drug screen results were caused by ingesting marijuana laced with a substance containing methamphetamine. She testified that she was given a shot for high blood pressure while giving birth to A.A.—"Lisinopril or something like that."

¶ 18 On redirect examination, the following colloquy occurred:

> "[THE STATE]: It's fair to say that we've looked at the documentation from Carle for [lisinopril] having been given to you, yes?

[JANICE]: Yes.

[THE STATE]: And it did not show up on the record, correct?

[JANICE]: Correct.

[THE STATE]: That we could tell?

[JANICE]: Yes.

[THE STATE]: But you continue to believe that you were given that shot?

[JANICE]: Yes."

¶ 19 Jamie C., A.A.'s foster mother, testified there were supervised visits between Janice and A.A. for two months. Janice visited A.A. twice per week. Janice was "always on time," and she met A.A.'s needs during visits, including providing formula, diapers, and clothing. Jamie did not have any concerns that Janice was under the influence during visits. Jamie testified that Janice "is a genuine mother that cares for her child and wants to be a parent. And *** she's capable of doing so." A.A. "smiles and lights up when he sees [Janice]" during visits. Jamie described Janice as "very consistent and reliable." Jamie had been in Janice's home, which had a room with a crib prepared for A.A.

¶ 20 A recess was taken at the conclusion of witness testimony, during which the trial court reviewed case Nos. 17-CF-97 and 19-CF-99. In case No. 17-CF-97, Janice was charged with possession of methamphetamine, and she pleaded guilty to possession of drug paraphernalia. In case No. 19-CF-99, she was charged with and pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine.

¶ 21 After considering the evidence and testimony presented during the hearing, the trial court determined "there is nothing that indicates that [lisinopril] would be something that would cause *** a false positive." The court expressed concern that Janice was trying to

"minimize" or "deny" her history with methamphetamine, emphasizing that she "testified that she did not used that substance, but yet it's in her son's system." The court asserted Janice "create[ed] issues and *** greater concern" by testifying falsely that she was never charged with possessing methamphetamine and that marijuana was the only substance with which she had an issue. The court told Janice, "I think reunification is possible with these services, but you just got to be honest." The court found Janice unfit, asserting, "[A]t this point in time there's still a little bit more work to do." The court wanted a more concrete treatment plan regarding Janice's individual counseling and whether domestic violence treatment would be necessary. The court also asserted, "[B]ecause of the information presented, the history, I need to see *** completed treatment and continued [drug] screening on a consistent basis *** before I'm willing to make a fitness finding." The court made A.A. a ward of the court and set A.A.'s goal at "return home within 12 months."

¶ 22 This appeal followed.

¶ 23 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 24 On appeal, Janice argues the trial court's unfitness finding was against the manifest weight of the evidence. We disagree.

¶ 25 A. Standard of Review

¶ 26 The Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Act) (705 ILCS 405/1-1 *et seq.* (West 2024)) provides the two-step process that trial courts follow when determining whether to make a minor a ward of the court. See *In re A.P.*, 2012 IL 113875, ¶ 18; 705 ILCS 405/2-18(1), 2-22(1) (West 2024). During the first step, the court conducts an adjudicatory hearing to identify whether the minor is abused, neglected, or dependent. See 705 ILCS 405/2-18(1) (West 2024). If so, the court must then conduct a dispositional hearing to decide whether it is in the best interests of the

minor to be made a ward of the court. See 705 ILCS 405/2-22(1) (West 2024). When making its determination, the court will consider "whether the parents *** are unfit or are unable, for some reason other than financial circumstances alone, to care for, protect, train or discipline the minor or are unwilling to do so," as well as whether "the health, safety, and best interest of the minor will be jeopardized if the minor remains in the custody of the minor's parents." 705 ILCS 405/2-27(1) (West 2024).

¶ 27 "The paramount consideration in proceedings under the Act is the best interests of the child." *In re J.T.*, 2024 IL App (1st) 232041, ¶ 67. The trial court is best positioned to determine a child's best interests, and we afford such decisions "broad discretion and great deference." *In re E.S.*, 324 Ill. App. 3d 661, 667 (2001). "[A] dispositional order entered in a proceeding under the [Act] is a matter committed to the sound discretion of the court." *In re Beatriz S.*, 267 Ill. App. 3d 496, 500 (1994). We will not reverse a trial court's wardship determination unless "the factual findings are against the manifest weight of the evidence." *In re Kamesha J.*, 364 Ill. App. 3d 785, 795 (2006). "A decision is against the manifest weight of the evidence when the opposite conclusion is clearly apparent." *In re Ta. T.*, 2021 IL App (4th) 200658, ¶ 48.

¶ 28 B. Unfitness Determination

¶ 29 The trial court did not err in making A.A. a ward of the court and finding Janice unfit. "[T]he wardship determination is based on the best interest to the child when considering the totality of the circumstances surrounding the child's life." *In re D.S.*, 2018 IL App (3d) 170319, ¶ 15; see 705 ILCS 405/2-22(1) (West 2024). The evidence shows that Janice was charged with possession of methamphetamine in two separate cases. In one case, she pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine, and in the other case, she pleaded guilty to possession

of drug paraphernalia. However, Janice repeatedly testified that she had never even been charged with possession of methamphetamine. Janice's urine tested positive for methamphetamine, amphetamine, and THC on the same day she gave birth to A.A., and his umbilical cord blood tested positive for the same three substances. Janice insisted that her test results were false positives caused by a purported lisinopril shot. But according to Janice's hospital records, she was not given a lisinopril shot, and she admitted as much during her testimony. Furthermore, nothing in the record indicates a lisinopril shot would result in a false positive for any of the substances in question.

¶ 30 The dispositional report warned that Janice was not completely honest about her history, and she made significant omissions that impacted subsequent assessments and treatment recommendations. The report advised that Janice needed to show "increased honesty and accountability regarding her history" in order to make meaningful progress. By lying on the witness stand, Janice put her alarming difficulties with honesty and accountability on full display.

¶ 31 Janice argues that her "participation in treatment, repeated negative drug screens, stable home and employment, appropriate parenting during visitation, and the foster mother's support for reunification" indicate the trial court erred in finding her unfit. These are certainly positive signs that suggest reunification is attainable. The court made a point of saying so. However, according to the dispositional report, Janice admitted to consuming alcohol and synthetic drugs while in an inpatient treatment program, and she hid this behavior by falsifying documents and substituting clean urine for her own. As a result, it is difficult to accept her negative drug tests at face value. Additionally, her false testimony regarding her criminal history involving methamphetamine possession casts serious doubt over her ability to take responsibility

for the issues that brought A.A. into the care of DCFS.

¶ 32 The trial court determined there was "more work to do" for Janice to achieve reunification with A.A., asserting it wanted Janice to complete her recommended treatments and continue to test negative for all substances. We wholeheartedly agree. The court's findings were not manifestly erroneous, as the opposite conclusions were not clearly apparent. See *Ta. T.*, 2021 IL App (4th) 200658, ¶ 48. Accordingly, we affirm the court's judgment.

¶ 33 III. CONCLUSION

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

¶ 35 Affirmed.