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NO. 5-26-0440

APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS

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

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Honorable
Jonathan T. Braden,
Judge, presiding.

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I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4

A. Adjudication of Neglect and Initial Proceedings

¶ 5 On April 24, 2025, the State filed a petition for adjudication of wardship concerning the 14-day-old minor Wesson H., naming Father and Chelsie L. (Mother)¹ as the minor's parents. The State alleged that the minor was neglected pursuant to section 2-3(1)(c) of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Juvenile Court Act) (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(c) (West 2022)) because Mother's urine, the minor's urine, and umbilical cord fluid tested positive for amphetamines and methamphetamine at the time of the minor's birth. The State further alleged that the minor was neglected pursuant to section 2-3(1)(b) of the Juvenile Court Act (*id.* § 2-3(1)(b)) due to an environment injurious to his welfare, based on Mother's abuse of amphetamines and methamphetamine while pregnant with the minor, causing him to be taken for intensive care treatment to monitor for symptoms of withdrawal. Father submitted to drug testing the day after the minor's birth, and his results came back negative for all substances. Following a hearing, the circuit court entered a temporary custody order on April 24, 2025, placing the minor in shelter care.

¶ 6 The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) created an initial service plan for Father on June 4, 2025. Father's services were as follows: (1) obtain and maintain safe and stable housing, (2) complete a substance abuse assessment and follow any recommendations, (3) cooperate with random drug screens, and (4) complete a mental health assessment and follow any recommendations. Mother and Father were allowed twice-weekly supervised visitation with the minor.

¶ 7 The circuit court held an adjudicatory hearing on June 6, 2025, at which Mother admitted to the State's allegations pursuant to section 2-3(1)(c) of the Juvenile Court Act. The court set the

¹Mother filed her own separate appeal from the underlying matter.

matter for a dispositional hearing. In advance of the hearing, DCFS submitted a report to the court on June 17, 2025. It wrote that Father completed drug tests on June 3 and 16, and tested positive for THC, methamphetamine, and benzoxepines. He admitted to daily use of THC. Both Mother and Father were reported to act appropriately toward the minor during visitation. However, there were two instances when they were pulled over on their way to visitation for driving with a revoked license. This caused them to be late to one visit and to miss another. Their DCFS caseworker offered them transportation assistance, but both parents declined. DCFS recommended that the circuit court find Father unfit, unwilling, or unable to parent the minor.

¶ 8 On July 9, 2025, DCFS also filed with the circuit court the parents' integrated assessment. The assessment stated that Father "refused to participate after becoming agitated when questioned about his pending incarceration." He further "blamed the investigator for the family's circumstances, rather than engaging in a discussion of protective capacity or parenting strengths." His portion of the assessment was therefore completed using the limited case and investigative notes available.

¶ 9 Father reported that he was self-employed as a construction worker, but DCFS did not have verification of his wages or the duration of his employment. A LEADS background check revealed that Father had 18 criminal convictions. His latest arrest occurred in 2022, for driving on a suspended license and driving under the influence. Father was ordered to begin a four-year sentence in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) on June 30, 2025, which would "significantly limit[] his ability to provide direct care or engage in parenting services."² Father was known to use methamphetamine, and his criminal history included several drug-related

²Father failed to report for the commencement of his sentence on June 30, 2025. As noted in other DCFS records, Father evaded law enforcement until December of 2025.

charges and convictions, including methamphetamine possession, manufacturing, and delivery, as well as driving under the influence.

¶ 10 There were also concerns that Father had anger management issues, given his violent criminal history and his visible agitation during the assessment process. He was also heard expressing anger in the background during Mother’s assessment interview. He appeared “fixated on blaming the investigation and DCFS, rather than showing insight or accountability for the circumstances that led to their child’s removal.” Father remained defensive and in poor control of his emotions during a follow-up meeting. While DCFS chose to keep visitation supervised due to Father’s “aggressive nature and unwillingness to cooperate with investigations,” he was observed to hold the minor and feed him, and both he and Mother brought food, diapers, and other necessities to visits without prompting.

¶ 11 DCFS conducted a home inspection on Mother and Father’s residence on April 11, 2025, and found it clean, stocked with food, and with working utilities. There were no concerns with the home. Despite his behavior during visitation, DCFS rated Father’s prognosis as “poor” due to his refusal to participate in the assessment and services, his continued deflection of responsibility, and his impending incarceration. His ability to follow through on parenting responsibilities was “significantly hindered” by a lack of insight, poor emotional regulation, and the aforementioned four-year prison sentence.

¶ 12 The circuit court entered a dispositional order on July 11, 2025, adjudicating the minor to be neglected. The minor was made a ward of the court, and custody was placed with DCFS. Mother and Father were ordered to complete their required services relating to substance abuse and housing, and to participate in parenting education and visitation.

¶ 13 On August 18, 2025, Father filed a motion entitled “Emergency motion to dismiss [for] lack of jurisdiction, In limine to exclude improper evidence, [and] for injunctive relief.” In this motion, he argued, *inter alia*, that the circuit court lacked subject-matter jurisdiction over the case.

¶ 14 DCFS filed a subsequent service plan dated September 8, 2025. In addition to his previous requirements, Father was to take a mental health assessment to evaluate his emotional functioning. However, DCFS wrote that Father had not engaged in any services or had any contact with DCFS since June of 2025. Because of this, he was rated unsatisfactory on all services. The circuit court entered a permanency order on October 17, 2025, finding that Father had not made reasonable efforts or reasonable and substantial progress toward returning the minor home.

¶ 15 On March 12, 2026, DCFS filed a report to the circuit court in advance of the next permanency hearing. DCFS wrote that Father was meant to start a prison sentence in June of 2025, but evaded law enforcement until he was arrested on December 1, 2025. He has remained incarcerated ever since his arrest. On January 12, 2026, Father was evicted from his home. His caseworker met with him in jail shortly after his arrest to review his service plan. Father insisted that he had completed the required services during prior prison sentences, despite his caseworker explaining that the current case was a separate matter.

¶ 16 DCFS learned from IDOC that Father would not be able to begin any of the courses offered at the prison to which he was transferred until March 20, 2026. Father had not engaged in services before his incarceration and was unable to begin mental health or parenting services while in prison. Regarding visitation, DCFS reported that Father had been regularly attending visits with the minor until he began evading law enforcement. Father’s last visit was on June 26, 2025. Between May 8, 2025, and August 1, 2025, Father attended 15 out of 20 visits. Of the 15 that he

attended, there were 3 for which he was so late that they would have been canceled, had Mother not been present.

¶ 17 Father requested visits with the minor while in prison, but arranging such visits was delayed because Father was transferred to different correctional facilities three times between December 2025 and February 2026. DCFS wrote that Father “has only shown interest in visiting with his son since his incarceration.” DCFS recommended that the circuit court find that Father had failed to make reasonable efforts or substantial progress toward the return home of the minor.

¶ 18 On March 23, 2026, the State filed a motion for termination of parental rights as to both parents. Regarding Father, the State alleged that he was an unfit parent on the following grounds: (1) failure to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the minor’s welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2024)); (2) failure to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal, between the nine-month period from June 6, 2025, to March 6, 2026 (*id.* § 1(D)(m)(i)); (3) failure to make reasonable progress toward the return of the minor, between the nine-month period from June 6, 2025, to March 6, 2026 (*id.* § 1(D)(m)(ii)); and (4) depravity, in that he had at least three felony convictions, at least one of which occurred within the past five years (*id.* § 1(D)(i)).

¶ 19 B. Fitness Hearing

¶ 20 The circuit court held a combined fitness and best interest hearing on May 15, 2026. At the start of the hearing, Father’s appointed counsel informed the court that Father wished to object to the proceedings based on a lack of subject-matter jurisdiction. Father had indicated to counsel that if he did not file a motion to this effect on Father’s behalf, Father would raise the issue on his own and proceed *pro se*.

¶ 21 The court explained to Father the role of appointed counsel, the professional experience his appointed counsel had in juvenile court matters, the benefits of having legal representation, and the risks of self-representation. The court further questioned Father on the argument he wished to make regarding subject-matter jurisdiction, and asked if he understood that if the court denied his motion, the hearing on the State's motion for termination would take place as scheduled. Lastly, the court asked Father to confirm, after having been informed of the above, that he would like to make his motion and proceed *pro se*. Father confirmed his understanding of all of the above, and told the circuit court that he did wish to represent himself and raise his motion. The court then vacated counsel's appointment.

¶ 22 The circuit court next addressed Father's motion. Father stated that he did not bring a new motion, but stood on the one he filed in August of 2025. After hearing Father's arguments, the circuit court denied his motion, and explained that an Illinois trial court has subject-matter jurisdiction over a petition alleging abuse or neglect in this state. The court then turned to the State's petition.

¶ 23 The State entered certified copies of Father's 2007, 2012, 2014, and 2022 criminal convictions into evidence. The State then called Kara Chamoun, who testified that she was a child welfare specialist with DCFS. She was assigned to the minor's case on October 15, 2025, and had reviewed the case file. Regarding Father, Chamoun testified that his original service plan included substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and stable housing. Parenting services were also added after the integrated assessment.

¶ 24 Chamoun stated that Father attended visitation early on in the case, but then stopped communicating with DCFS. When Chamoun took over the case in October of 2025, she was unable to contact him. She believed that he last visited with the minor on June 26, 2025. From June 2025

to December 2025, Father's whereabouts were unknown, he was not visiting the minor, he did not attend drug testing, and he never made contact with DCFS.

¶ 25 The first contact Chamoun had with Father was on December 5, 2025, at the Coles County jail. At that time, she reviewed his service plan with him. To Chamoun's knowledge, Father had not completed mental health or substance abuse assessments, and had not maintained safe and stable housing due to his incarceration. He did attend random drug screens for a period of time until the end of June 2025. Chamoun further testified that she was eventually able to arrange visitation for Father while he was incarcerated.

¶ 26 The State next called Kristin Williams, a family support specialist employed by Addus. Her role was to supervise visits for DCFS and to work with parents on one-on-one parenting. She stated that she was unable to provide Father with visitation while he was a fugitive. Her remaining testimony pertained to Mother.

¶ 27 Amber Huston also testified for the State. She was a public service administrator at DCFS, and served "on and off" as the supervisor for the minor's case. To her knowledge, Father had not made any substantial progress on his services.

¶ 28 Following the State's witnesses, Mother testified on her own behalf. Her testimony did not pertain to Father.

¶ 29 Following Mother's testimony, the circuit court announced a five-minute recess to give Father time to prepare his testimony. After the recess, the court explained to him the four bases upon which the State alleged that he was an unfit parent. Father then stated that during his time in prison, he completed "multiple self-help courses" on topics including parenting, substance abuse, and coping skills. He further stated that he had reported this to Chamoun, but that she was having

issues confirming this with IDOC. He concluded by stating that he was trying to do the best he could with the programs available to him in prison.

¶ 30 On cross-examination, he was asked where he was between June and November of 2025. He stated that he was at his house, and confirmed that he had known of the warrant out for his arrest. During that time, Father did not see the minor, but he said that he remained in contact with Mother, who informed him of how visits were going. He was also asked whether he was now aware that, had he turned himself in in June of 2025, he could have been having visitation with the minor during the time that he was evading law enforcement. Father answered in the affirmative.

¶ 31 Father spoke again during arguments. He contended that during the time the State alleged he was not in compliance with his service plan, he was doing the courses he had mentioned in his testimony—which he said primarily occurred in November and December of 2025—and was trying to make reasonable efforts to work on his service plan. He said that there were no programs he could take at the IDOC facility where he was currently being held, but that he was trying to get transferred. He stated that he was responsible for the fact that he and Mother lost their home in January of 2026 in a mortgage foreclosure. Lastly, Father asked the circuit court to allow him the opportunity to correct the conditions preventing the return of the minor.

¶ 32 The circuit court then announced its findings and decisions. The court first determined that the State had proven by clear and convincing evidence that Mother was unfit on the bases of lack of reasonable efforts or progress. The court then turned to the State’s allegations regarding Father.

¶ 33 The court found that, over the life of the case, Father had spent very little time in contact with the minor, and failed to comply with the terms of his service plan. While the court acknowledged the efforts he had recently made while incarcerated, the court noted that, by Father’s own admission, there were limited services for him to engage in while in IDOC custody.

Furthermore, Father was in prison because of his own actions, so he was responsible for his inability to access services. Moreover, he had not engaged in services during the period when he was not incarcerated. The circuit court thus found that the State had proven unfitness on the basis of Father's failure to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the minor's welfare.

¶ 34 Next, the court explained that the measure of reasonable efforts was limited to the reason why the minor was brought into care, which was both parents' substance abuse issues. During the relevant nine-month period, Father had not complied with any of the terms of his service plan, including substance abuse. Again noting Father's testimony about the courses he took while incarcerated, which Father said included substance abuse, the court stated that he did not use the service providers that were approved by DCFS to address the specific issue that brought the minor into care. Thus, the circuit court found that Father had failed to make reasonable efforts during the nine-month period from June 6, 2025, to March 6, 2026. Again because of his failure to engage in any services—and losing the stable housing he previously held—the circuit court found that he was also unfit due to a failure to make reasonable progress during the aforementioned nine-month period.

¶ 35 Lastly, regarding the allegation of depravity, the circuit court referenced the State's production of certified copies of Father's criminal convictions, including for aggravated DUI, possession of methamphetamine precursor without a prescription, possession of methamphetamine manufacturing materials, and unlawful use of weapons—the last of which was the basis for his current incarceration. By contrast, the court found that there was “simply insubstantial evidence” of Father's efforts to rehabilitate himself. Thus, the court also found Father to be unfit on the basis of depravity.

¶ 37 The court then proceeded to the best interest hearing. The State again called Chamoun, who explained that in April of 2025, the minor was taken into protective custody and placed in a foster home after leaving the hospital. While Chamoun was not assigned to the minor's case at that time, she was supervising another minor in the same foster home, and thus she was able to observe the minor during her monthly visits to check on the other minor. She described him as doing "very well" in his foster placement, and stated that the foster parents were willing and financially able to provide him with permanency through adoption.

¶ 38 Chamoun further testified that the one-year-old minor was attached to his caregivers, and generally got along well with his two-year-old foster brother. He was also integrated into the foster parents' nearby extended family. The foster parents got him the medical care he needed, including vaccinations and treatment for injuries he sustained at birth. The minor attended church functions with his foster family and appeared to be adapting well to life with the family. Chamoun opined that it was in the minor's best interest that he be adopted by his foster parents.

¶ 39 Following Chamoun's testimony, the circuit court asked Father if he would like to speak. Father stated that he was not prepared, to which the court reminded him that he had been told that the hearing would proceed even if he dismissed his appointed counsel. Father declined to testify or speak during argument.

¶ 40 The circuit court began by listing the statutory best interest factors it must review pursuant to the Juvenile Court Act (705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2024)). The court then stated that the minor was placed with his foster family directly after his release from the hospital where he was born, and thus this was the only family he had ever known. The court found that remaining with the foster family would be the least disruptive placement for him, and that this placement met his

need for permanence. Therefore, the court ruled that it was in the minor’s best interest that the State’s petition be granted and both parents’ parental rights be terminated. Mother and Father filed separate appeals of the court’s decision.

¶ 41

II. ANALYSIS

¶ 42 On appeal, Father argues that the circuit court’s findings that he was an unfit parent and that termination of his parental rights was in the minor’s best interests were against the manifest weight of the evidence. Father does not challenge the circuit court’s denial of his objection to subject-matter jurisdiction, or the court’s vacatur of his counsel’s appointment.

¶ 43

A. The Circuit Court’s Finding of Unfitness

¶ 44 A parent’s right to raise his or her child is a fundamental right, which a court may not terminate without the parent’s consent except as authorized by statute. *In re Gwynne P.*, 215 Ill. 2d 340, 354 (2005). A court’s statutory authority to involuntarily terminate parental rights is governed by the Juvenile Court Act and the Adoption Act. *Id.* Pursuant to the Juvenile Court Act, the involuntary termination of parental rights requires a two-step process. *In re Donald A.G.*, 221 Ill. 2d 234, 244 (2006). First, the court must determine, by clear and convincing evidence, that the parent is an “unfit person” as defined by section 1(D) of the Adoption Act. *Id.*; 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2) (West 2024); 750 ILCS 50/1(D) (West 2024). If the court makes a finding of unfitness, it next considers whether termination of the parent’s rights is in the best interests of the child. *In re Donald A.G.*, 221 Ill. 2d at 244; 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2) (West 2024).

¶ 45 Here, the circuit court based its fitness ruling on (1) lack of reasonable interest, concern, or responsibility (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2024)); (2) failure to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal, between the nine-month period from June 6, 2025, to March 6, 2026 (*id.* § 1(D)(m)(i)); (3) failure to make reasonable progress toward the

return of the minor, between the same nine-month period (*id.* § 1(D)(m)(ii)); and (4) depravity, in that Father had at least three felony convictions, at least one of which occurred within the past five years (*id.* § 1(D)(i)). Section 1(D) of the Adoption Act sets forth numerous grounds under which a parent may be deemed unfit. However, only one properly proven ground is sufficient to enter a finding of unfitness. See *id.* § 1(D) (stating that the grounds of unfitness “are any one or more” of an enumerated list); see also *In re C.W.*, 199 Ill. 2d 198, 210 (2002).

¶ 46 We begin by noting that on appeal, Father does not address the circuit court’s finding that he failed to make reasonable efforts. As we may affirm the circuit court’s fitness determination based on any single statutory ground, we could end our review here. However, as the circuit court’s findings pertaining to reasonable efforts overlap with those pertaining to reasonable progress, and Father does address the latter on appeal, we will review his arguments on this point.

¶ 47 As applicable to the underlying case, the Adoption Act defines an “unfit person” as:

“D. ‘Unfit person’ means any person whom the court shall find to be unfit to have a child, without regard to the likelihood that the child will be placed for adoption. The grounds of unfitness are any one or more of the following ***:

* * *

(m) Failure by a parent (i) to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of the child from the parent during any 9-month period following the adjudication of neglected or abused minor ***, or (ii) to make reasonable progress toward the return of the child to the parent during any 9-month period following the adjudication of neglected or abused minor ***.” 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i), (ii) (West 2024).

¶ 48 Under the Adoption Act, “reasonable effort” is “a subjective standard and refers to the amount of effort reasonable for the particular parent.” *In re P.S.*, 2021 IL App (5th) 210027, ¶ 34. The court must determine “whether the parent has made earnest and conscientious strides toward correcting the conditions that led to the removal of the minor from the home.” *Id.*

¶ 49 By contrast, “reasonable progress” is determined by an objective standard, which is based upon the amount of progress measured from the conditions existing at the time custody was

revoked. *In re Za. G.*, 2023 IL App (5th) 220793, ¶ 47. The Adoption Act provides guidance for measuring reasonable progress as follows:

“If a service plan has been established *** to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of the child from the parent and if those services were available, then, for purposes of this Act, ‘failure to make reasonable progress toward the return of the child to the parent’ includes the parent’s failure to substantially fulfill his or her obligations under the service plan ***.” 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2024).

The benchmark for measuring reasonable progress “encompasses the parent’s compliance with the service plans and court’s directives in light of the condition that gave rise to the removal of the child and other conditions which later become known that would prevent the court from returning custody of the child to the parent.” *In re D.T.*, 2017 IL App (3d) 170120, ¶ 17 (citing *In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d 181, 208 (2001)).

¶ 50 In reviewing a court’s findings that a parent is unfit and that terminating parental rights is in the best interest of the child, we do not retry the case; rather, we must determine if the findings are against the manifest weight of the evidence. *In re Za. G.*, 2023 IL App (5th) 220793, ¶ 31. The lower court’s finding of unfitness is afforded great deference because that court was best positioned to view and evaluate the parties and their testimony. *Id.* Accordingly, on appeal, we will not reweigh the evidence or reassess the credibility of the witnesses. *Id.* A decision is contrary to the manifest weight of the evidence “if the opposite conclusion is apparent or when findings appear to be unreasonable, arbitrary, or not based on the evidence presented.” *Id.*

¶ 51 On appeal, Father argues that the evidence presented at the fitness hearing did not clearly and convincingly establish that he failed to make reasonable progress toward correcting the conditions that led to the minor’s removal during the relevant nine-month period. He contends that, although hindered by his incarceration, he made meaningful progress both before and during incarceration. In support, he states that “[p]rior to the relevant nine-month period,” he consistently

attended twice-weekly visitation, and, along with Mother, voluntarily provided the minor with food, diapers, and other necessities. He also appropriately held, fed, and bonded with the minor.

¶ 52 Father further notes that his home passed a safety inspection prior to the nine-month period, and he maintained suitable housing for some time before he was incarcerated. Lastly, he argues that he testified to his rehabilitative efforts while incarcerated, taking courses on parenting, substance abuse education, coping skills, and other topics. He adds that his opportunities to take these courses were limited by the fact that he was not eligible for them while in the orientation phase of IDOC custody.

¶ 53 As Father himself admits, the housing inspection and his satisfactory performance at visitation occurred prior to June 6, 2025, the start of the relevant nine-month period. He and Mother lost their home in January 2026, at which point Father was already in prison. Thus, while he may have maintained safe and suitable housing for a portion of the nine-month period, he unquestionably moved backwards in terms of housing progress. Regarding visitation, Father again points to his efforts and progress made before the relevant period. Soon after the start of the nine months, Father stopped attending visitation altogether, as he was a fugitive. He was only able to restart visits after he was arrested and entered IDOC custody. Father admitted in his testimony that he was aware that he could have been having visits with the minor in prison, had he commenced his sentence on the court-ordered date. Therefore, his own actions prevented him from making reasonable efforts or progress in that area.

¶ 54 As the circuit court stated, Father also bears responsibility for his obstacles to engaging in substance abuse, mental health, and parenting services. His actions led to his imprisonment, and he chose to evade law enforcement for several months. Had he instead begun his sentence in a

timely manner, he could have completed orientation much sooner, and thus begin taking whatever courses were available to him in prison.

¶ 55 The circuit court found that Father failed to meaningfully engage with his required services—before or after his incarceration—during the relevant time period, had very little contact with the minor, and was responsible for the circumstances that made it difficult for him to complete his service plan. Based on the record on appeal, none of these findings were against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 56 Furthermore, as the parents’ substance abuse was the reason for the minor’s removal, it is particularly significant for reviewing reasonable effort that Father did not complete a substance abuse assessment, and did not complete all required random drug screens. While he began substance abuse education in prison, it was not through an accepted provider.

¶ 57 Regarding reasonable progress, we note that any obstacles Father faced in trying to work through his service plan are irrelevant under an objective standard. Thus, even if we consider his argument that he was limited in what he could accomplish while incarcerated, this does not weigh against a finding of failure to make reasonable progress. In conclusion, the circuit court did not err in finding Father unfit on at least two separate statutory bases, which is more than sufficient for us to end our review and affirm its fitness determination.

¶ 58 B. The Circuit Court’s Best Interest Finding

¶ 59 Once the court makes a finding of unfitness, “[t]he issue is no longer whether parental rights *can* be terminated; the issue is whether, in light of the child’s needs, parental rights *should* be terminated.” (Emphases in original.) *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d 347, 364 (2004). The parent’s interest in maintaining the parent-child relationship “must yield to the child’s interest in a stable, loving home life.” *Id.* At this stage of the termination hearing, the State bears the burden of proving

by a preponderance of the evidence that termination of parental rights is in the child's best interest.

In re J.B., 2019 IL App (4th) 190537, ¶ 31.

¶ 60 In making a best interest determination, the court must consider several factors, within the context of the child's age and developmental needs. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2024). The factors are as follows:

“(1) the child's physical safety and welfare; (2) the development of the child's identity; (3) the child's familial, cultural[,] and religious background and ties; (4) the child's sense of attachments, including love, security, familiarity, continuity of affection, and the least disruptive placement alternative; (5) the child's wishes and long-term goals; (6) the child's community ties; (7) the child's need for permanence, including the need for stability and continuity of relationships with parent figures and siblings; (8) the uniqueness of every family and child; (9) the risks related to substitute care; and (10) the preferences of the person available to care for the child.” *In re J.B.*, 2019 IL App (4th) 190537, ¶ 32 (quoting *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d 1052, 1072 (2006)).

¶ 61 As with the circuit court's findings at the unfitness stage, we afford the court great deference, as it is in a superior position to view the witnesses, assess their credibility, and weigh conflicting evidence. *Id.* ¶ 33. We will not reverse the circuit court's best interest determination unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Id.*

¶ 62 On appeal, Father argues that throughout the case, caseworkers noted Father's strong desire to reunify with the minor. He further contends that this strong desire was seen in his preparation for and positive interactions with the minor during visitation, as well as his request to arrange visits while he was in prison.

¶ 63 We do not doubt Father's love for his son. However, a parent's desire to continue his parental role in the child's life is not a relevant factor at this stage. See *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 364. The appropriate measure of a minor's best interests is the list of statutory factors found in section 1-3(4.05) of the Juvenile Court Act. Father does not challenge any of the circuit court's findings regarding any specific factor. Nor does he argue that a majority of the factors weighs in

his favor. Indeed, he does not address the statutory factors, apart from recognizing that the circuit court must consider them in its review. We find that there was substantial uncontroverted evidence presented at the best interest hearing that supported the circuit court's decision, and thus its decision was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 64

III. CONCLUSION

¶ 65 For the reasons stated, the circuit court did not err in terminating the respondent's parental rights. The judgment of the circuit court is affirmed.

¶ 66 Affirmed.