NOTICE
Decision filed 08/25/26. The text of this decision may be changed or corrected prior to the filing of a Petition for Rehearing or the disposition of the same.

2026 IL App (5th) 260285-U

NO. 5-26-0285

IN THE

APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS

FIFTH DISTRICT

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).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *In re* K.B., a Minor | ) | Appeal from the |
| | ) | Circuit Court of |
| (The People of the State of Illinois, | ) | Champaign County. |
| | ) | |
| Petitioner-Appellee, | ) | |
| | ) | |
| v. | ) | No. 24-JA-52 |
| | ) | |
| Artavian C., | ) | Honorable |
| | ) | Robert E. Jacobson, |
| Respondent-Appellant). | ) | Judge, presiding. |

PRESIDING JUSTICE CATES delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Boie and Vaughan concurred in the judgment.

**ORDER**

¶ 1 *Held*: The circuit court's orders terminating Father's parental rights were not against the manifest weight of the evidence where the State met its burden of proving that Father was unfit to parent and that termination was in the best interest of K.B. Therefore, the circuit court's orders making a finding of unfitness and terminating parental rights are affirmed.

¶ 2 The respondent, Artavian C. (Father), appeals the orders of the circuit court of Champaign County terminating his parental rights to K.B. He argues that the circuit court's orders finding him unfit and terminating his parental rights were against the manifest weight of the evidence. For the following reasons, we affirm.

¶ 3 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4 On May 22, 2024, the State filed a petition for adjudication of abuse, neglect, or dependency, alleging that the minor (K.B., born January 2022)[1] was neglected in that her environment was injurious to her welfare in that she resided with Kawanna B. (Mother), and that environment exposed K.B. to domestic violence. 705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2022). Father was included as the putative father and his address was listed as the Florida Department of Corrections. K.B. was placed in the temporary custody of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) the same day. The petition was later amended on April 1, 2025, to list Father as the legal father.

¶ 5 After an adjudicatory hearing, the circuit court entered an adjudicatory order on September 3, 2024, finding K.B. to be abused or neglected in that her environment was injurious to her welfare. 705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2022). The order noted that Mother and Kelvin K. engaged in numerous domestic violence incidents with K.B. and her half-sister, K.K., present. Father was not listed as a party in the order.

¶ 6 On September 25, 2024, the Center for Youth and Family Solutions (CYFS), the agency working on behalf of DCFS, filed a dispositional hearing report which included K.B. as well as K.K. Father's address was listed as "Polk Correctional Institution" in Polk City, Florida.

¶ 7 According to the report, after a domestic dispute between Mother and Kelvin, intact services began in early 2024 and continued through May 8, 2024, when K.K. was taken into protective custody. DCFS was contacted due to concerns over K.K.'s health; she was last seen at a doctor's office in November 2023, but then there were multiple no show appointments. Police

[1]In the petition and amended petition, K.B.'s birthdate is listed as October 2023. Her birthdate is actually January 2022, which is correctly included in the motion seeking finding of unfitness and termination of parental rights, several reports, and confirmed during the unfitness and termination hearings.

were called to do a welfare check and were unable to locate the child. A reporter called DCFS with concerns regarding Mother and Kelvin having domestic altercations while the children were present, occurring in April 2024 in Florida. DCFS received a police report from the St. Petersburg, Florida, police department confirming its response to a domestic violence disturbance involving Mother and Kelvin.

¶ 8 The report stated that Father was 23 years old and was incarcerated at Polk Correctional Institution in Polk City, Florida. Father's charges included "willful child abuse, concealed weapons charges, and grand theft of a motor vehicle." Father was sentenced to two and a half years, and his expected release date was April 21, 2025. Father responded to a letter from CYFS and indicated his desire to participate in the case and complete a paternity test for K.B. At the time of the report, K.B. resided with her maternal grandmother and was "adjusting well" and "meeting all milestones." K.B. did not have visitation with either parent at that time.

¶ 9 A dispositional hearing was held on October 1, 2024. Father appeared by telephone and requested court-appointed counsel. As Father had not yet been admonished, the circuit court made no findings as to whether Father was unfit, unable, or unwilling to parent K.B. During the hearing, the court made K.B. a ward of the court and placed her in the custody and guardianship of DCFS. Father was admonished on November 15, 2024, and the circuit court ordered genetic testing to establish his paternity. On February 3, 2025, Father waived his right to an adjudicatory hearing and stipulated to the September 2024 adjudicatory order and its factual basis.

¶ 10 CYFS filed a dispositional hearing report on February 26, 2025. As to Father, he was incarcerated at the Santa Rosa Correctional Institution in Milton, Florida, with a scheduled release date of March 1, 2025. He would reside with his mother and younger siblings in Sun City, Florida, and planned to work in the construction industry when released. Father informed CYFS that he

was never in a caregiver role for K.B. and would like "an opportunity to take part in the upbringing of" K.B. Father would be recommended for services upon his release. CYFS noted that Father would be recommended to complete a parenting education class, and that visitation would likely begin with "short visual visits between the two with agency supervision" before allowing in person visits.

¶ 11 The circuit court held a dispositional hearing on March 3, 2025.[2] Father was released from incarceration on March 1, 2025, and had never been in a parenting role for K.B. The circuit court found that Father needed to "establish and maintain housing, obtain and maintain stable employment, engage in services, and develop a relationship with K.B. through visitation before K.B. could be placed in his care." The court found Father to be unfit and unable, for reasons other than financial circumstances alone, to care for, protect, train, or discipline K.B., and that the health, safety, and best interests of K.B. would be jeopardized if K.B. remained in the custody of Father. It was in the best interests of K.B. that custody and guardianship be removed from Father and placed with DCFS.

¶ 12 Father's paternity of K.B. was confirmed on April 1, 2025. The circuit court entered a permanency order the same day, finding that the permanency goal was return home within 12 months and that Father made reasonable efforts toward the goal, but not reasonable and substantial progress toward returning K.B. home.

¶ 13 On July 21, 2025, CYFS filed a permanency hearing report. The report stated that Father had not yet begun his parenting services due to a delay in receiving the necessary consent forms, communication issues, and scheduling. Father lived with his sister in Tampa, Florida, but his housing had not yet been observed due to the location. Father was employed, working 28 to 36

[2]A transcript of the hearing is not included in the record on appeal.

hours per week, and he verified his employment. K.B. was placed with her maternal grandmother, Alesha W., in Champaign, Illinois, and CYFS had some concerns about the safety of K.B.'s bedroom that was not fully addressed. Additionally, CYFS had ongoing concerns regarding K.B's placement with Alesha, who had been reported as verbally aggressive toward K.B. with inappropriate approaches to discipline. Alesha also allowed K.B. to be exposed to people not approved to be a babysitter through DCFS, and allowed Mother to visit K.B. outside the supervision of CYFS. Alesha was receptive to the agency's concerns and was working to correct them. CYFS stated that Father had appropriate interactions with K.B. during the visit. Father also had daily contact with K.B. through video calling. One in person visit occurred on June 27, 2025, and Alesha supervised the visit. The hotel where Father stayed reported noise complaints due to yelling and arguing with another individual in his room, who was later determined to be Mother. Father denied any physical altercation between him and Mother, despite reports of hearing noises indicative of such an altercation, although there were no witnesses.

¶ 14 On July 29, 2025, the circuit court held a permanency review hearing and entered an order, finding that the permanency goal was return home within 12 months and that Father made reasonable efforts toward the goal, but not reasonable and substantial progress toward returning K.B. home.

¶ 15 On August 6, 2025, the State filed a motion seeking a finding of unfitness and termination of the parental rights of Father and Mother. The motion alleged that Father and Mother (1) failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility for K.B.'s welfare (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2024)); (2) failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of K.B. during any nine-month period following the adjudication of neglect or abuse (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(i) (West 2024)); and (3) failed to make reasonable

progress toward the return of K.B. during any nine-month period following adjudication of neglect (750 ILCS 50/1(D)(m)(ii) (West 2024)). The petitions identified the nine-month period between November 1, 2024, and August 1, 2025, for purposes of the last two counts. Attached to the motion were the February 3, 2025, adjudicatory order and the March 3, 2025, dispositional order as to Father.

¶ 16 CYFS filed a status report on August 29, 2025. The report noted that Father started his parenting class on August 4, 2025. He did not attend any additional sessions, missing three scheduled meetings. One of the missed sessions was due to illness, which also resulted in him missing an in person visit with K.B. scheduled for August 15 to 17, 2025. A visit was planned for September with the dates to be scheduled.

¶ 17 The hearings for the motion seeking a finding of unfitness occurred on December 16, 2025, January 20, 2026, and February 9, 2026. As testimony presented at the hearing was applicable to Mother, Father, K.K., and K.B., we will limit our facts to those concerning Father and K.B. At the outset of the hearing, the circuit court took judicial notice of the adjudication order dated September 3, 2024, and the dispositional order dated October 1, 2024.

¶ 18 The State called Lisa Payne, who testified that she was a caseworker for CYFS. She was assigned to K.B.'s case when it began and was presently her caseworker as well. Father's services in this case involved cooperation with CYFS and a parenting class. Father was incarcerated in Florida at the beginning of the case; Payne was able to make contact with him through letters, including scheduling the DNA testing. After he was released, Father communicated mostly through phone calls. Payne put a referral for Father to participate in an online parenting class in June 2025. The delay for the parenting class was due to Father's incarceration and confirmation of

the DNA test, as well as communication issues to receive the necessary consent forms. Father did not complete the parenting class.

¶ 19 Payne testified that Father was cooperative with the agency. Father did virtual visitation with K.B., as well as two in person visits, with one in June 2025. Father missed one visit due to illness and Payne was unsure why he missed a second in person visit. Father's visits were supervised by Alesha and did not progress to unsupervised visits. Payne testified that Father told her that Mother visited him at his hotel room during his June visit. Father was permitted to have virtual visitation whenever he desired, as he would call Alesha to have a visit. The virtual visits were "sporadic," depending on Father's availability and Alesha's schedule. They did occur at least once a week.

¶ 20 Payne was not aware if Father sent any gifts, cards, or letters to K.B. during his incarceration. Father did have "some involvement" with K.B. before his incarceration. Payne testified that CYFS was not close to returning K.B. to Father's care in August 2025 because he had not completed services.

¶ 21 Father testified on his own behalf. Father stated that he met K.B. soon after she was born and had a relationship with her before his incarceration, as K.B. was roughly a year old at the time. Father lived with Mother and K.B. until he was incarcerated. Father previously completed a DNA test and knew that K.B. was his child. Father's mother and Mother provided updates on K.B. to Father while he was incarcerated. Father's mother was the one who informed Father that K.B. was taken into the care of DCFS.

¶ 22 Father's virtual visits occurred through video visits on a cell phone, happening every week for 5 to 15 minutes, depending on the foster parent's schedule. Father and K.B. talked about what she did each day. If she became upset or had a "temper tantrum" while on the video call, Father

would attempt to talk her through it. Father had two in person visits with K.B. The first visit lasted four days, and the second visit lasted three days. Father visited K.B. at Alesha's house, as well as going to eat, to an arcade playground, and Father purchased K.B. some clothing and other small items. Father stated that he felt bonded with K.B. Father denied any sort of visit or argument with Mother during his June visit with K.B.

¶ 23 Father lived in Florida his entire life, and after completing his sentence, he was not on any sort of release program or parole. Father's sentence was for driving without a license and a firearm charge, but one of the charges on which he was in custody was willful child abuse.

¶ 24 After arguments from the parties, the circuit court stated that before this case started, Father did have a relationship with K.B. but then he was incarcerated "due to his own past behaviors." The court stated that Father only had one service to complete, the parenting class, which he did not do "even though he had the opportunity to, even though that could have been done virtually." Father had "some virtual visits" with K.B. and only two in person visits. The circuit court found that Father did not make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of K.B., did not make reasonable progress because he did not complete the parenting class, and he failed to maintain a reasonable degree of responsibility as to K.B. The circuit court found Father to be unfit.

¶ 25 CYFS filed a best interest report on March 16, 2026. K.B. was placed with her maternal grandmother, Alesha W., with her half-sister, K.K., with whom she shared a bedroom. K.B. appeared comfortable in the home, which was clean and safe, and Alesha was willing to adopt K.B. CYFS did have previous concerns with Alesha permitting unapproved individuals into the home and not addressing K.B.'s emotional needs. CYFS conducted an investigation, which was determined to be unfounded, and they retracted their notice of removal of K.B. from Alesha.

Alesha cooperated with CYFS and responded to their concerns, agreeing to enroll K.B. in therapy to meet her emotional needs. Alesha provided a safe and stable living environment for K.B. and met her physical, medical, and emotional needs. K.B. had a strong bond with Alesha and maintained bonds with her biological family members through a relative placement. Alesha provided K.B. with permanence and was committed to continually providing a stable and comfortable home.

¶ 26 The report stated that Father lived in Tampa, Florida, with his sister, and CYFS had not observed the home because it was outside of Illinois. Father was employed and verified his employment through paystubs. Father did not fully engage in or complete his parenting class, and he did not re-enroll when it was offered to him. Father had virtual visits with K.B. and two in person visits in June and October 2025. Father cancelled two visits in August and November 2025, and CYFS stated it would no longer provide financial support for visits at that point. CYFS provided Father's transportation expenses including airfare and hotel fee when he visited and the expenses were non-refundable when he cancelled or did not attend the visit. When visits did occur, they went well, and Father was attentive to K.B., and used as much time as possible to see her while in Illinois. CYFS recommended that Father's parental rights be terminated, as it was in K.B.'s best interest.

¶ 27 The court appointed special advocate (CASA) also filed a best interest report on March 17, 2026. The report included that K.B. was comfortable and content in Alesha's home, and she had developed a sense of identity in the home. The report noted concerns with Alesha's ability to respond to K.B.'s emotional needs and regulation, as K.B. could have a complete meltdown, with crying and other inappropriate behavior, brought on by the smallest aggravation. K.B. was recommended for play therapy to address these issues. The CASA recommended that Father's

parental rights be terminated and that Alesha complete a parenting capacity assessment to best address K.B.'s needs.

¶ 28 The matter proceeded to a best interest hearing on March 23, 2026. The circuit court stated that it considered the reports filed by CYFS and CASA. The State argued that Father's parental rights should be terminated because it was in K.B.'s best interest. The State addressed the statutory factors which favored placement with Alesha, including K.B.'s physical safety and welfare, her development of identity, background and ties, minor's sense of attachment, need for permanency, the uniqueness of every child, and the risks attendant to being in substitute care.

¶ 29 Father stated that he did not wish to have his rights terminated. Due to his incarceration and the timing of the case, he was disadvantaged. Despite this, he did obtain stable housing and employment. He would complete any services required of him moving forward.

¶ 30 The circuit court stated that it considered the reports filed by CYFS and CASA, the evidence from all prior hearings, and the arguments from the parties. The court addressed the concerns with Alesha's placement throughout the case, including her ability to meet K.B.'s needs and interactions with Mother throughout the case. The court stated that it factored in those concerns within K.B.'s best interests.

¶ 31 As to Father, the circuit court stated that Father did not complete his parenting class despite "multiple attempts and multiple opportunities to do so." Father did not have a strong bond with K.B. due to the limited time they spent together and Father "could have and should have" done more to be involved in the case, but the court did credit him for the steps he did take. The circuit court then addressed the statutory factors for K.B.'s best interest. Alesha provided the residential stability, food, shelter, and care necessary; K.B. felt valued and loved in her home with her sister; and K.B.'s need for permanence favored Alesha, as Father was not in the position to provide

permanence in the foreseeable future, and Alesha was willing to adopt K.B. The circuit court found that it was in her best interest to terminate Father's parental rights. A written order was entered the same day, terminating Father's rights and changing the permanency goal to adoption. Father timely appealed.

¶ 32 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 33 On appeal, Father argues that the circuit court's finding of parental unfitness was against the manifest weight of the evidence as to each ground, being, (1) failure to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to K.B.'s welfare; (2) failure to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions that were the basis for the removal of K.B. during the time period of November 1, 2024, to August 1, 2025; and (3) failure to make reasonable progress toward the return of K.B. to him during the time period of November 1, 2024, to August 1, 2025. 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b), (m)(i), (m)(ii) (West 2024). Further, he argues that the circuit court's best interest finding was against the manifest weight of the evidence. For the following reasons, we affirm.

¶ 34 Termination of parental rights proceedings are governed by the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (705 ILCS 405/1-1 *et seq.* (West 2024)) and the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1 *et seq.* (West 2024)). *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d 347, 352 (2004). A petition to terminate parental rights is filed under section 2-29 of the Juvenile Court Act, which delineates a two-step process to terminate parental rights involuntarily. 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2) (West 2024).

¶ 35 The State must first establish, by clear and convincing evidence, that the parent is an unfit person under one or more of the grounds enumerated in section 1(D) of the Adoption Act (750 ILCS 50/1(D) (West 2024)). 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2), (4) (West 2024); *In re J.L.*, 236 Ill. 2d 329, 337 (2010). If the court finds that the parent is unfit, the matter proceeds to a second hearing, at

which the State must prove that termination of parental rights is in the best interests of the child. 705 ILCS 405/2-29(2) (West 2024); *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 352.

¶ 36 A. Unfitness

¶ 37 Our courts have recognized that parental rights and responsibilities are of deep importance and should not be terminated lightly. *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 364. Thus, parental rights may be terminated only after a finding of unfitness that is supported by clear and convincing evidence. *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 364. A finding of parental unfitness will not be disturbed on appeal unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d 181, 208 (2001). A finding is against the manifest weight of the evidence only if the opposite conclusion is clearly apparent. *In re C.N.*, 196 Ill. 2d at 208. The circuit court's finding of unfitness is given great deference because it has the best opportunity to view and evaluate the parties and their testimony. *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d 1052, 1064 (2006). This court, therefore, does not reweigh the evidence or reassess the credibility of the witnesses. *In re M.A.*, 325 Ill. App. 3d 387, 391 (2001). Each case concerning parental fitness is unique and must be decided on the particular facts and circumstances presented. *In re Gwynne P.*, 215 Ill. 2d 340, 354 (2005). In addition, because each of the statutory grounds of unfitness is independent, the circuit court's finding may be affirmed where the evidence supports a finding of unfitness as to any one of the alleged grounds. *In re C.W.*, 199 Ill. 2d 198, 218 (2002).

¶ 38 Section 1(D)(b) of the Adoption Act provides that a parent may be found unfit for "[f]ailure to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern or responsibility as to the child's welfare." 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(b) (West 2024). Since the language of the statute is in the disjunctive, any one of the three individual elements, *i.e.*, interest *or* concern *or* responsibility, may be considered by itself as a basis for unfitness. *In re B'yata I.*, 2014 IL App (2d) 130558-B, ¶ 31; 750 ILCS

50/1(D)(b) (West 2024). In determining whether a parent has shown a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility for a minor's welfare, a court considers the parent's efforts to visit and maintain contact with the child as well as other indicia, such as inquiries into the child's welfare. *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d at 1064. Completion of service plans may also be considered evidence of a parent's interest, concern, or responsibility. *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d at 1065. The court must focus on the parent's efforts, not his or her success. *In re Adoption of Syck*, 138 Ill. 2d 255, 279 (1990). In this regard, the court examines the parent's conduct concerning the child in the context of the circumstances in which that conduct occurred. *In re Adoption of Syck*, 138 Ill. 2d at 278. We are mindful, however, that a parent is not fit merely because he or she has demonstrated some interest or affection toward the child. *In re Jaron Z.*, 348 Ill. App. 3d 239, 259 (2004). Rather, the interest, concern, or responsibility must be objectively reasonable. *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d at 1064.

¶ 39 The record reflects that Father had a relationship with K.B. prior to his incarceration and received updated information about her from family members. We appreciate that Father's incarceration limited his ability to communicate with K.B.; however, his interest, concern, or responsibility had to be reasonable under his circumstances. "If personal visits were somehow impractical, courts consider whether a reasonable degree of concern was demonstrated through letters, telephone calls, and gifts to the child, taking into account the frequency and nature of those contacts." *In re Daphnie E.*, 368 Ill. App. 3d at 1064-65 (citing *In re Adoption of Syck*, 138 Ill. 2d at 279). Here, Father did not write any letters or cards to K.B. or send her any gifts during his incarceration. Father may not have been able to call K.B. directly due to her young age, but he could have sent her letters and cards during this time rather than only receiving information through family members.

¶ 40 When released from his incarceration, Father was first permitted to have virtual visits with K.B. via video calling with Alesha. These visits were described as "sporadic" depending on the parties' schedules and lasted between 5 and 15 minutes. Caseworker Payne informed Alesha that the visits needed to occur at least once a week. Although visits did occur weekly, Father spent at most 15 minutes a week visiting with K.B.

¶ 41 When the case progressed to in person visits in June 2025, Father attended only two in person visits which were supervised by Alesha and funded by CYFS. Father missed one visit due to illness, but provided no reason as to why he missed the second scheduled visit. Due to his failure to attend visits, CYFS stopped providing the financial support for the visits. Father did not schedule any additional visits on his own and did not see K.B. in person after that time.

¶ 42 Father received one service class requirement, which was parenting. Father did not enroll in the classes until July 2025, roughly five months after his release. This was in part due to communication issues with Father's email and sending illegible pictures of the necessary consent forms for a referral. When the referral was finally made, Father only attended one parenting class before he was removed for lack of participation. One missed class was due to illness, but there was no other reason provided for the other two missed classes. The parenting class provider offered Father a chance to re-enroll in the course in October and December. Father never re-engaged with this service, despite it being offered to him multiple times and despite the fact that it was the only class he was required to take.

¶ 43 Father displayed minimal participation in his services, including both visitation and parenting. In light of the evidence presented and considered, the circuit court did not err in finding that Father failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the child's welfare. Evidence of a single statutory ground is sufficient to uphold a finding of parental

unfitness. *In re T.Y.*, 334 Ill. App. 3d 894, 905 (2002). Thus, the circuit court's finding that Father failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, and responsibility is sufficient to support the finding that he was an unfit parent.

¶ 44 B. Best Interests

¶ 45 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 at 364. The parent's interest in maintaining the parent-child relationship "must yield to the child's interest in a stable, loving home life." *In re D.T.*, 212 Ill. 2d at 364. At this stage of the termination proceedings, 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.

¶ 46 In making a best interest determination, the court must consider, within the context of the child's age and developmental needs, the following factors:

> " '(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 at 1072).

See 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2024).

¶ 47 As with the circuit court's findings at the unfitness stage, we afford the circuit court great deference, as it is in a superior position to view the witnesses, assess their credibility, and weigh conflicting evidence. *In re J.B.*, 2019 IL App (4th) 190537, ¶ 33. We will not reverse the circuit

court's best interest determination unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *In re J.B.*, 2019 IL App (4th) 190537, ¶ 33.

¶ 48 Father argues that the evidence showed his "love for, and growing bond with, [K.B.] and his eagerness to be involved in her life." Further, the evidence did not show anything "of his circumstances, so that the court had no way to know if, in the long run, [K.B.'s] best interest would be served by terminating his parental rights."

¶ 49 The circuit court's best interest determination was supported by the record and was not against the manifest weight of the evidence. K.B. was placed with her maternal grandmother, Alesha, and had been for the entirety of the case. She lived there with her half-sister as well. CYFS said the home was safe and clean, and Alesha was able to meet her physical, medical, and emotional needs. CYFS also observed a strong bond between K.B. and Alesha, who was committed to providing permanency for K.B. through adoption, as well as for K.B.'s sister. Both CYFS and CASA recommended termination. The circuit court, in its determination, addressed CYFS's concerns about Alesha's decisions throughout the case. Ultimately, K.B. remained with Alesha, and she remained committed to working with the agency to best meet K.B.'s needs, including enrolling her in play therapy and responding to suggestions from CYFS. The circuit court relied upon the evidence presented by the State to address the best interest factors applicable in Alesha's favor, including K.B.'s physical safety and welfare, K.B.'s identity, background and ties, K.B.'s sense of attachment, community ties, need for permanence, the uniqueness of every family and child, and the risks related to substitute care.

¶ 50 We find that the State proved by a preponderance of the evidence that termination of Father's parental rights was in K.B.'s best interests. The opposite conclusion is not clearly evident.

As such, the circuit court's termination of Father's rights was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 51 III. CONCLUSION

¶ 52 For the foregoing reasons, the circuit court's orders of unfitness and termination of Father's parental rights are affirmed.

¶ 53 Affirmed.