2017 IL App (4th) 170487-U

NOS. 4-17-0487, 4-17-0488 cons.

FILED
November 9, 2017
Carla Bender
4th District Appellate
Court, IL

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF ILLINOIS

FOURTH DISTRICT

In re A.L., a Minor (The People of the State of Illinois, Petitioner-Appellee, v. (No. 4-17-0487) Louis Lay, Respondent-Appellant).	)	Appeal from Circuit Court of Sangamon County No. 14JA166
In re A.G.L., a Minor (The People of the State of Illinois, Petitioner-Appellee, v. (No. 4-17-0488) Louis Lay, Respondent-Appellant).	)	No. 14JA167 Honorable Karen S. Tharp, Judge Presiding.

JUSTICE HOLDER WHITE delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Harris and Knecht concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held*: The appellate court affirmed, concluding the trial court's fitness and best-interest findings were not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 2 In October 2016, the State filed a motion to terminate the parental rights of respondent, Louis Lay, as to his children: A.L. (born November 26, 2010) and A.G.L. (born December 7, 2012). In March 2017, the State filed a supplemental motion to terminate respondent's parental rights. Following a fitness hearing, the trial court found respondent unfit. In June 2017, the court found it was in the children's best interest to terminate respondent's parental rights.

¶ 3 Respondent appeals, asserting the trial court's fitness and best-interest findings were against the manifest weight of the evidence. We affirm.

¶ 4 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 5 In November 2014, the State filed a petition for adjudication of wardship, asserting the children were neglected or abused in that they were subjected to an injurious environment pursuant to section 2-3(1)(b) of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 (Act) (705 ILCS 405/2-3(1)(b) (West 2014)), where they were exposed to domestic violence between the parents. Additionally, as to A.G.L., the petition alleged he was subjected to an injurious environment where he was not receiving the proper care and supervision—specifically, medical care—necessary for his well-being. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) received a hotline call after A.G.L. was hospitalized with a life-threatening liver injury that required surgery, but his parents failed to keep medical appointments or obtain the bloodwork necessary for the surgery. While in the process of investigating A.G.L.'s medical neglect, DCFS learned the children's mother had an active order of protection against respondent with A.L. and A.G.L. listed as protected members, yet respondent lived with the family. The order of protection was based on allegations that respondent had committed acts of domestic violence against the children's mother. As a result, respondent was arrested for violating the order of protection and the children were removed from the home.

¶ 6 In September 2015, following a stipulation by respondent, the trial court found the children were in an environment injurious to their welfare due to domestic violence in the home. The following month, the court entered a dispositional order finding the parents unfit, making the children wards of the court, and granting custody and guardianship to DCFS.

¶ 7 In October 2016, the State filed a motion for the termination of parental rights.

The motion alleged respondent was unfit because he (1) failed to maintain a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility as to the minors; (2) failed to make reasonable efforts to correct the conditions which were the basis for the removal of the minors from him; and (3) failed to make reasonable progress toward the return home of the minors within nine months of the adjudication of neglect, specifically September 9, 2015, to June 9, 2016. In March 2017, the State filed a supplemental motion for the termination of parental rights, alleging that respondent is unfit because he is depraved.

¶ 8 A. Fitness Hearing

¶ 9 The fitness hearing commenced in March 2017, at which time the trial court considered the following evidence.

¶ 10 1. *Patricia Kaidell*

¶ 11 Patricia Kaidell, the program director for foster care at the Family Service Center, testified she was involved with this case since it opened in November 2014 until the July 2016 transfer to Rutledge Youth Foundation (Rutledge) and caseworker Margaret Perry. Kaidell regularly observed visits between respondent and the children until December 2015. However, due to an indicated finding that respondent was behaving inappropriately around the children, respondent's visits were suspended from December 2015 until March 2016, at which time the indicated finding was overturned through the DCFS appeal process. By April 2016, just after respondent resumed his visits, he was arrested for manufacturing or delivering a controlled substance. He remained incarcerated throughout the remainder of the case.

¶ 12 During visits, Kaidell recalled respondent was very concerned about his children's hygiene and, during visits, he often spent significant time grooming the children. He did not think the children were clean enough, nor did he want them touching him after breakfast

until he washed them. This grooming often upset A.L. Respondent also made inappropriate remarks to A.L., such as calling a song she was singing "stupid."

¶ 13 Respondent's service goal from November 2014 through July 2016 was for the children to return home. However, respondent's refusal to take responsibility for any of his actions that caused the children to be taken into care was a hindrance. Rather, respondent focused on the process being unfair.

¶ 14 At a January 2016 administrative case review, Kaidell testified respondent's progress was rated unsatisfactory. He was uncooperative because he did not understand why he needed the recommended services. He was unemployed, but he would not explain how he managed to pay for rent, utilities, and bills. He denied having any issues with domestic violence and was rated unsatisfactory for failing to engage in domestic-violence classes. He was also rated unsatisfactory for visitation. Respondent was rated satisfactory for attending counseling, where he worked on his anger-management skills.

¶ 15 In July 2016, Kaidell was present at an administrative case review, at which time the case was transferred to Rutledge. By that time, respondent had been successfully discharged from counseling; however, Kaidell noted he never made progress toward accepting responsibility for the children being taken from the home and repeatedly expressed frustration that he was required to complete services. He did, however, complete parenting classes. Throughout the process, respondent remained communicative with his caseworkers and attended every visit.

¶ 16 Although a substance-abuse assessment was recommended, the facility did not complete an assessment because respondent had no drug cases pending. Notably, this referral predated respondent's April 2016 arrest for a drug-related offense. Despite his progress with some of the services, due to his incarceration, respondent was rated unsatisfactory in his overall

progress. He also continued to lack accountability or an appreciation of the medical injuries A.G.L. suffered. Respondent refused to attend domestic-violence classes. Moreover, the children would not be able to return to respondent's care because his stepson was a registered sex offender, and Kaidell was unsure where the son was living.

¶ 17 2. *Margaret Perry*

¶ 18 Perry testified she had been the family's caseworker since July 2016, when the case transferred to Rutledge. In September 2016, Perry changed the service plan goal to substitute care pending the termination of parental rights. According to Perry, as part of his services, respondent was required to (1) obtain substance-abuse treatment, (2) complete individual counseling, (3) engage in domestic-violence classes, (4) obtain legal employment and appropriate housing, and (5) obtain a mental-health assessment and comply with recommended treatment. Respondent was not receiving visitation due to his incarceration and the stress such visits would cause for the young children.

¶ 19 At a January 2017 administrative case review, respondent was deemed unsatisfactory because he still needed to complete domestic-violence classes, engage in substance-abuse treatment due to his recent drug conviction, and obtain stable income and housing. Also, due to respondent's incarceration, he would likely need to complete more parenting classes and individual counseling. In the last couple of months, respondent had enrolled in classes in prison, including (1) pre-general-equivalency-degree classes, (2) a lifestyle-redirection class, (3) anger-management classes, and (4) a drug-awareness class. He had also obtained a mental-health evaluation. Despite his enrollment in classes, Perry testified respondent would not be in a position to immediately take custody of the children upon release because he had never progressed beyond supervised visitation with the children.

¶ 20 3. *Tiffany Hampton*

¶ 21 In June 2015, respondent completed a 16-week parenting class for fathers through The Parent Place. As part of the program, respondent was observed for eight hours during various visits. Tiffany Hampton, a parent educator with The Parent Place, observed respondent during several of those visits.

¶ 22 During an April 21, 2015, visit, Hampton recalled respondent became upset when A.G.L. could not locate a pair of Michael Jordan tennis shoes respondent had previously given to him. Respondent claimed he was about to "snap" and went into the restroom, but he was calm and quiet when he returned. This drastic change in temperament led Hampton to suspect respondent might have been under the influence. Hampton reminded respondent that the children were not responsible for their clothing and advised him to take up those concerns with a caseworker.

¶ 23 When respondent's wife (who is not the children's mother) attended visits, respondent was standoffish or on his phone while his wife cared for the children. Respondent always had to be prompted to change diapers. When encouraged to change a diaper, respondent frequently indicated the children's mother could do it, as her visit immediately followed his. He never brought diapers or wipes to the visits despite being instructed to do so. When the case aide insisted respondent change A.G.L.'s diaper, respondent gave A.G.L. a marker to keep him still, which resulted in A.G.L. drawing all over himself. He also made no attempts toward encouraging A.G.L. toward toilet training.

¶ 24 During a June 23, 2015, visit, respondent wanted to take the children outside. Hampton told him to seek permission from the staff at the Family Service Center, where visits were held. Respondent returned with the director, and he was yelling at her in the hallway while

the children were inside the visit room. He also refused Hampton's suggestion to let A.G.L. feed himself, stating he was too young. On that day, respondent did not practice any parenting skills with the children, but left them to play together.

¶ 25 Hampton testified that respondent needed to interact more with the children on their developmental level, and he constantly needed to be reminded about changing diapers. He also had to be reminded not to leave visits or use his phone.

¶ 26 4. *Keisha Robison*

¶ 27 Keisha Robinson, a case aide at the Family Service Center, testified she would transport the children to visits and observe the visits. The visits started at one hour per week but later increased to two hours per week. During a typical visit, respondent would bring breakfast for the children and sometimes toys or clothes. Respondent would then groom the children—wash hands, clip fingernails, and wipe noses. Both children would resist the grooming, but would typically acquiesce. Excessive grooming was an ongoing concern.

¶ 28 During visits, respondent rarely changed A.G.L.'s diaper. This caused Robinson concern, as respondent was also not encouraging A.G.L. with toilet training. Even if A.G.L. asked to use the bathroom, respondent would refuse to take him, which resulted in A.G.L. filling his diaper.

¶ 29 According to Robinson, respondent would ask A.L. about school and ask about items she wanted or that he had purchased for her. Respondent would play with A.G.L. sometimes, but A.G.L. was often distracted and would play on his own. Robinson observed respondent had difficulty focusing on both children, and the majority of his attention was on A.L. Robinson was concerned that respondent did not pay enough attention to A.G.L., who, as a toddler, could quickly get himself into trouble. Robinson described occasions where she stopped

A.G.L. from engaging in dangerous activities, such as climbing a windowsill. Robinson recalled the visits where Hampton was also present, and she corroborated Hampton's observations.

¶ 30 5. *Carly Mason*

¶ 31 Carly Mason testified she worked for the Sangamon County Child Advocacy Center. She was also a court-appointed special advocate (CASA), and she began working with respondent and the family in August 2015.

¶ 32 According to Mason, respondent attended all of his visits. He frequently brought toys or clothing with him. He also brought breakfast, as his visits were usually in the morning. Although respondent was tasked with bringing diapers for A.G.L., he did not bring them consistently.

¶ 33 During visits, A.G.L. would usually play alone, but A.L. was always trying to get respondent's attention by showing him art or asking him to play with her. Respondent directed the majority of his attention to A.L., and very little toward A.G.L. Mason found respondent would often get impatient with A.G.L. and did not know how to handle him. According to Mason, when respondent was incarcerated in April 2016, A.L. expressed concern over respondent's absence.

¶ 34 6. *Leaha Jones*

¶ 35 Leaha Jones testified she was the clinical supervisor at the Family Service Center. Respondent opened his counseling case in June 2015 and the case closed in April 2016. The counseling at the Family Service Center was client-driven, which allowed clients to choose their own goals. Respondent's first goal was to increase his level of patience and communication with professionals involved with his case. His second goal was to implement anger-management skills in his daily living. According to Jones, respondent completed his self-identified goals, but

he did not complete the alternative goal recommended by his caseworker: recognizing his role in why the children came into care. During sessions, respondent would largely vent his frustration with DCFS; however, he also learned some anger-management skills and learned better communication skills.

¶ 36 According to Jones, respondent underwent a mental-health assessment in June 2015, where he was diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, which prevented him from accepting responsibility for his role in the children being taken into care. His prognosis for developing a healthy relationship with his children and others was poor due to his inability to empathize. Respondent was discharged from counseling when his team determined he would never accept responsibility for his role in the children being taken into care. Respondent also failed to empathize with a life-threatening liver injury A.G.L. sustained while in respondent's custody. Upon discharge, respondent was invited to return for further counseling if he so desired.

¶ 37 7. *Michele Herron*

¶ 38 Michele Herron testified she was the clinical director at the Family Service Center. She was the supervisor of the clinical team that meets to discuss the termination of clients from their clinical sessions, and she was therefore part of the team that discharged respondent. According to Herron, respondent met the treatment goals he set for himself—learning anger-management skills. However, he could not successfully complete the alternative treatment goal—taking responsibility for his role in the children being taken into care—because his antisocial personality disorder prevented it. Respondent's failure to successfully complete his alternative treatment goal was an ongoing concern, particularly where he had a history of criminal behavior and domestic violence. Thus, respondent was discharged successfully, but

with a poor prognosis.

¶ 39 8. *Respondent*

¶ 40 Respondent testified he completed all of the recommended services. He denied that he was ever asked to complete domestic-violence classes or he would have completed them. He also admitted, when he was being assessed for substance-abuse treatment, he failed to disclose his prior drug-related offenses because no one asked him about them.

¶ 41 Respondent testified he attended all of his visits and never said anything derogatory toward the children, though he admitted, regretfully, he once told A.L. that she sounded like "a white girl." He always brought breakfast to the visits but also brought toys and clothing.

¶ 42 According to respondent, visits went well until December 2015, when his visits were temporarily suspended. In spring 2016, visits resumed with A.G.L., but he never fully reinitiated visits with A.L. Shortly after resuming visits with A.G.L., and after one visit with A.L., respondent was arrested for manufacturing or delivering a controlled substance.

¶ 43 While incarcerated, respondent confirmed he was enrolled in the classes as outlined by Perry. Respondent promised, upon his release in November 2017, he would stay out of trouble. His life was now about education and employment so he could provide for his children. Respondent promised to complete any and all recommended services. Respondent said he was very concerned about his children, and he denied he was more concerned with A.L. than A.G.L.

¶ 44 9. *Prior Convictions*

¶ 45 The trial court admitted defendant's following certified convictions: (1) a 1995 conviction for possession of a narcotic (Cook County case No. 94-CR-2970101), (2) a 1996

bribery conviction (Cook County case No. 96-CR-1243701), (3) a 1997 conviction for possession of a stolen vehicle (Cook County case No. 97-CR-2544802), (4) a 2005 conviction for possession of a controlled substance (Sangamon County case No. 05-CF-158), (5) a 2008 conviction for manufacturing or delivering a controlled substance (Sangamon County case No. 08-CF-350), and (6) his recent 2016 conviction for manufacturing or delivering a controlled substance (Sangamon County case No. 16-CF-507).

¶ 46 10. *The Trial Court's Fitness Finding*

¶ 47 Following the presentation of evidence, the trial court found the State met its burden on all counts. First, the court found respondent was depraved. The court noted respondent had six felony convictions spanning from 1994 through respondent's recent conviction in 2016. Thus, the State met its burden of demonstrating a rebuttable presumption of depravity. The court found respondent failed to rebut the presumption of depravity because he had shown an unwillingness to abide by and conform to the laws of society, and he placed his own interests above those of his children. Second, because respondent continued to engage in criminal activity when he was otherwise making progress in the case, he failed to show a reasonable degree of interest, concern, or responsibility for the children. Third, respondent failed to make reasonable efforts toward the return home of the children where he failed to (1) engage in domestic-violence classes, despite that being the central reason for the children coming into care; and (2) disclose his history of substance abuse when he obtained his substance-abuse assessment. Finally, the court found respondent failed to make reasonable progress toward having the children returned home because by June 2016 he was incarcerated and unable to progress in his services.

¶ 48 B. Best-Interest Hearing

¶ 49 In June 2017, the trial court held a best-interest hearing where it considered the following evidence.

¶ 50 1. *Perry*

¶ 51 Perry testified A.G.L., now four years old, had been in his traditional foster care placement since May 2015. A.G.L. was doing well in school, toilet trained, and learning to regulate his emotions. His foster parents also have a 10-year-old daughter, who resides in the three-bedroom home with them. The foster parents are attentive to A.G.L.'s medical, religious, and social needs. A.G.L. had bonded with his foster parents and they were seeking adoption. A.G.L. called his foster parents "mom" and "dad" and told them he loves them.

¶ 52 A.L. had been in a traditional foster care placement since October 2015. Perry described A.L. as comfortable in her home, making progress in school, and learning to regulate her emotions. The current placement met A.L.'s educational, medical, religious, and social needs. A.L. had her own room in a three-bedroom house she shared with her foster parents and another foster child. The foster family was bonded, and the foster parents expressed a desire to adopt.

¶ 53 Although adoptive placements were available, Rutledge was also exploring another adoptive resource for the children—respondent's cousin. Perry was going to initiate visits with this relative to see if placement was appropriate. At one point, respondent requested the children be placed with his wife; however, she had not visited with the children since October or November 2016 despite Perry offering visitation.

¶ 54 Perry testified the children would not be harmed by terminating respondent's parental rights because they had spent so much time away from respondent and had since developed relationships with their current placements. According to Perry, respondent was

unable to provide for his children, and this would continue into the foreseeable future due to his incarceration. As a result of his incarceration, the children had not been able to maintain a relationship with their father.

¶ 55 2. *Respondent*

¶ 56 Respondent testified that A.L. resided with him from September 2011 until November 2014. Respondent described his relationship with A.L. as strong, explaining how he would play with her, bathe her, and teach her how to read and spell. He said visitation always went well and he was excited to see her upon his release. He also described himself as having a good relationship with A.G.L. He said it would be devastating to him if his parental rights were terminated because he loved his children and wanted to see them grow. Respondent explained he grew up without a father and did not want that for his children.

¶ 57 Respondent remained incarcerated, with an expected release date in November 2017. Upon release, respondent testified he would return to the home he has shared with his wife. Respondent thought he would be able to provide for the educational, medical, social, and religious needs of his children.

¶ 58 3. *The Trial Court's Best-Interest Finding*

¶ 59 Following the presentation of evidence, the trial court determined it was in the best interest of the children to terminate respondent's parental rights. The court emphasized the case had been in the system since November 2014, and the children still remained in foster care. The court said the children should not have to wait any longer for respondent to provide permanency. Respondent also had a history of incarcerations, demonstrating he would not abide by the law in the future.

¶ 60 This appeal followed.

¶ 61 II. ANALYSIS

¶ 62 On appeal, respondent asserts the trial court's fitness and best-interest findings were against the manifest weight of the evidence. We address these arguments in turn.

¶ 63 A. Fitness Finding

¶ 64 Respondent first asserts the trial court's fitness finding was against the manifest weight of the evidence. The State has the burden of proving parental unfitness by clear and convincing evidence. *In re Jordan V.*, 347 Ill. App. 3d 1057, 1067, 808 N.E.2d 596, 604 (2004). A reviewing court will not overturn the trial court's finding of unfitness unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Id.* "A decision is against the manifest weight of the evidence only if the facts clearly demonstrate that the court should have reached the opposite result." *In re Jay. H.*, 395 Ill. App. 3d 1063, 1071, 918 N.E.2d 284, 291 (2009). The court's decision is given great deference due to "its superior opportunity to observe the witnesses and evaluate their credibility." *Jordan V.*, 347 Ill. App. 3d at 1067, 808 N.E.2d at 604. "When multiple grounds of unfitness have been alleged, a finding that any one allegation has been proved is sufficient to sustain a parental unfitness finding." *In re D.H.*, 323 Ill. App. 3d 1, 9, 751 N.E.2d 54, 61 (2001).

¶ 65 When the State alleges depravity as grounds for terminating parental rights, it is incumbent upon the trier of fact to closely scrutinize the parent's character and credibility. *In re J'America B.*, 346 Ill. App. 3d 1034, 1046, 806 N.E.2d 292, 303-04 (2004). "Depravity of a parent may be shown by a course of conduct that indicates a moral deficiency and an inability to conform to accepted moral standards." *Id.* at 1047, 806 N.E.2d at 304. With regard to depravity, section 1(D)(i) of the Adoption Act provides:

> "There is a rebuttable presumption that a parent is depraved
>
> if the parent has been criminally convicted of at least 3 felonies

> under the laws of this State or any other state, or under federal law, or the criminal laws of any United States territory; and at least one of these convictions took place within 5 years of the filing of the petition or motion seeking termination of parental rights." 750 ILCS 50/1(D)(i) (West 2016).

A parent may overcome the rebuttable presumption of depravity by presenting evidence that, despite his criminal convictions, he is not depraved. *In re Shanna W.*, 343 Ill. App. 3d 1155, 1166, 799 N.E.2d 843, 851 (2003).

¶ 66 In this case, the State presented evidence of respondent's six criminal convictions: (1) possession of a narcotic in 1995, (2) bribery in 1996, (3) possession of a stolen vehicle in 1997, (4) possession of a controlled substance in 2005, and (5) manufacturing or delivering a controlled substance in both 2008 and 2016. The most recent of these convictions came in 2016—within five years of the filing of the motion seeking to terminate respondent's parental rights. Thus, the State met the statutory requirements to establish a rebuttable presumption of depravity.

¶ 67 It was then incumbent upon respondent to rebut the presumption of depravity. See *id*. Respondent focused on the fact that he had completed most of the recommended services and attended all of the scheduled visits. However, respondent's April 2016 incarceration, which arose during the pendency of the case, supports the trial court's finding that respondent lacks the ability to conform his behavior to accepted moral standards. The court found respondent's testimony that he was turning his life around in prison and would not commit further crimes upon his release lacked credibility. In support, the court highlighted respondent's criminal history dating back more than 20 years, which demonstrates respondent's acts of depravity "of

sufficient duration and of sufficient repetition to establish a 'deficiency' in moral sense and either an inability or an unwillingness to conform to accepted morality." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *In re J.A.*, 316 Ill. App. 3d 553, 561, 736 N.E.2d 678, 685 (2000). Because respondent's repeated criminal behavior—including accruing his most recent conviction during the pendency of this case—demonstrates his inability to conform to accepted standards of morality, we conclude the trial court's fitness finding was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 68 B. Best-Interest Finding

¶ 69 Respondent next asserts the trial court's best-interest finding was against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 70 Once the trial court determines a parent to be unfit, the next stage is to determine whether it is in the best interest of the minor to terminate parental rights. *In re Jaron Z.*, 348 Ill. App. 3d 239, 261, 810 N.E.2d 108, 126 (2004). The petitioner must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that termination is in the best interest of the minor. *Id.* The court's finding will not be overturned unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Id.* at 261-62, 810 N.E.2d at 126-27.

¶ 71 The focus of the best-interest hearing is determining the best interest of the child, not the parent. 705 ILCS 405/1-3(4.05) (West 2016). The trial court must consider the following factors, in the context of the child's age and developmental needs, in determining whether to terminate parental rights:

> "(a) the physical safety and welfare of the child, including food, shelter, health, and clothing;
>
> (b) the development of the child's identity;

(c) the child's background and ties, including familial, cultural, and religious;

(d) the child's sense of attachments ***[;]

* * *

(e) the child's wishes and long-term goals;

(f) the child's community ties, including church, school, and friends;

(g) the child's need for permanence which includes the child's need for stability and continuity of relationships with parent figures and with siblings and other relatives;

(h) the uniqueness of every family and child;

(i) the risks attendant to entering and being in substitute care; and

(j) the preferences of the persons available to care for the child." *Id.*

¶ 72 In this case, the children have been in their current foster care placement since 2015, where they bonded with their foster families. The children's needs were being met, and A.G.L. even referred to his foster parents as "mom" and "dad." Both foster families expressed an interest in adoption subject to Rutledge exploring placement with respondent's cousin. These placements provided the children with permanency and security.

¶ 73 Conversely, there is no indication respondent will be in a position to provide permanency for the children in the near future. Respondent had not completed all of his recommended services and, as a result of his incarceration, he would need to repeat some of

those services, such as parenting classes, counseling, and substance-abuse treatment. Even if respondent is released from prison in November 2017, Perry testified he would need to reengage in services and reinitiate visits. He would need to reestablish his relationship with the children, as he had not seen them since April 2016 as a result of his decision to engage in illegal conduct. Since November 2014, respondent never progressed to the point of unsupervised or overnight visitation, so even if he reinitiated visits upon his release, the children could not be returned to his care in the foreseeable future. This approach would not provide permanency or stability for the children, particularly where respondent has demonstrated a proclivity for committing illegal acts.

¶ 74 No one disputes respondent loves his children and had, at least at one time, a strong bond with A.L. However, respondent's promises to stay out of trouble upon his release failed to persuade the trial court of his ability to reform or provide permanency. We therefore conclude the trial court's best-interest finding was not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 75 III. CONCLUSION

¶ 76 Based on the foregoing, we affirm the trial court's judgment.

¶ 77 Affirmed.