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Staff cut at troubled Choate facility

State plans to lay off 250 workers at downstate mental health center mired in abuse allegations

By Olivia Olander
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Gov. JB Pritzker's administration is significantly reducing staffing at a long-troubled downstate center for people with mental health issues and developmental disabilities, state and union officials said Thursday.

A statement from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31, which represents employees at the Choate Mental Health and Developmental Center in Anna, said the state plans to let go "some 250 employees" and end most operations at the facility.

A spokesperson for the Illinois Department of Human Services did not confirm the number of employees who will be laid off but said operations at Choate "will be reduced."

The Choate facility is about 20 miles south of Carbondale. As of July 1, the facility had about 523 staff, according to the state, 468 of whom were represented by AFSCME.

The moves follow Pritzker in

2023 announcing he planned to repurpose Choate while expanding opportunities for residents to move into smaller group homes in the wake of repeated reports that many Choate residents were abused, neglected and otherwise mistreated. The alleged maltreatment was documented in stories by the Chicago Tribune and ProPublica, Lee Enterprises and Capitol News Illinois.

The announcements Thurs-

day appeared to be a culmination of the administration's plans, though advocates for workers still expressed disappointment and surprise that layoffs would come shortly after the state enacted what was billed as largely a maintenance budget.

"This decision aligns with the state's commitment to reducing institutionalization across Illinois,

See **CHOATE** on Page A2

'We want justice for these babies'

Arrest in infant's '05 death puts new focus on Safe Haven law

By Joseph States
PIONEER PRESS

It's a quiet, overcast day in Highland Memorial Park cemetery as Susan Schulenberg stands over a small, dark stone embedded in the grass.

She places a few bright flowers beside the grave, which has the words "With our Heavenly Father loved and remembered" inscribed on the face, and the names David and Rosa. More than 20 years ago, on Nov. 18, 2005, she had stood in much the same place for the burial of the two babies.

Schulenberg has no personal connection to the two children buried there — both had died after being abandoned by their biological parents — but Rest in His Arms, a nonprofit she founded in 2005, has organized the burials of more than 50 abandoned infants in the last 21 years, including David and Rosa.

Earlier this month, Schulenberg was shocked to learn that, according to authorities, David's biological mother had been identified with new DNA technology and charged with involuntary manslaughter, potentially bringing a 25-year-old cold case to a close.

Standing above the infants' grave, Schulenberg reflected on the heartbreaking situation, made all the more tragic by Illinois' Safe Haven law — passed just days before his 2001 death — that might have saved the two babies.

COLD CASE

On Aug. 26, 2001, Round Lake Beach police officers

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JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

'HOME COURT' ADVANTAGE

Former President Barack Obama greets WNBA players and coaches before an All-Star Game practice at Home Court on the Obama Presidential Center campus in Chicago on Friday. "All of you are extraordinary, and I could not be a bigger fan," he told the players ahead of a practice marking the first full-scale basketball event at the Obama Center courts. **Sports, Page B1**

ALL-STAR WEEK DRAMA: WNBA players want teams to nip in the bud hateful online rhetoric — much of it dripping with racist and homophobic subtext — and fans to focus on the basketball. **Sports, Page B3**

Measles outbreak outpaces all of '25

Cases surpass tally for whole year with months of '26 to go

By Devi Shastri
ASSOCIATED PRESS

The number of measles cases in the U.S. has surpassed the record-breaking tally for all of 2025, with five more months of 2026 still to come.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention logged 2,318 cases of measles as of Thursday, according to an agency update Friday.

The nation had 2,289 cases in 2025, the worst year for measles in more than three decades. Now, 2026 has easily become the nation's worst year for measles since 1991, as major outbreaks in South Carolina, Utah and Arizona have sickened hundreds and smaller clusters of cases sparked in other states.

In November, international health officials will meet to determine if the U.S. and Mexico have lost their measles-free status. The U.S. eliminated local measles spread in 2000 by maintaining high vaccination rates, which have fallen in recent years to below the 95% coverage needed to prevent outbreaks.

While measles cases in the U.S. are climbing, it may be impossible to say exactly how far-reaching the spread is. Public health departments and disease researchers have long acknowledged that official counts are incomplete because some people get sick and don't seek out treatment — something not unique to measles.

Furthermore, experts say the spread might be greater than what's known because the virus is one of the most contagious

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Hilario Dominguez, right, joins Chicago Teachers Union members and their allies in a protest outside Chicago Public Schools headquarters on Monday before a school board meeting. **TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/TRIBUNE**

ELECTION 2026 SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT

CTU foe says candidate broke rules

Union-backed Dominguez reported no spending in quarter; filing claims that 'cannot be accurate'

By Kate Armanini
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A formal complaint from a rival campaign accused school board president candidate Hilario Dominguez of violating campaign finance laws.

Dominguez's candidate committee reported no contributions or spending in its first quarterly report, which "cannot be accurate," according to the complaint,

filed with the Illinois State Board of Elections last week on behalf of challenger Sendhil Revuluri. The complaint was first reported by Chalkbeat.

The filing accuses Dominguez — the political director of the Chicago Teachers Union — of failing to report the costs of gathering petitions, printing campaign materials and setting up a website. He also held a fundraiser, the complaint alleges, but did not disclose any

donations.

The treasurer of Dominguez's candidate committee, Kat Zamarrón, said in a statement that "the campaign is in compliance and more activity will be in the next report."

A spokesperson for his campaign said donations from his June 27 fundraiser hadn't appeared by the end of the filing period on June 30 due to processing delays. Dominguez said in a statement that the race "is about parents, students and communities."

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