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Gregg County expands its ICE agreement

Sheriff's office joins agency's task force model

BY JORDAN GREEN

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Gregg County commissioners on Tuesday approved an ICE task force model agreement between the sheriff's office and the Department of Homeland Security.

The agreement will not significantly change existing procedures in the sheriff's office,

Sheriff Maxey Cerliano said.

Commissioners Ronnie McKinney, Ray Bostick, Floyd Wingo and Gregg County Judge Bill Stoudt voted for the proposal. Pct. 4 Commissioner Danny Craig II abstained, saying he was opposed to some of the wording in the agreement.

About 20 East Texas law enforcement agencies have signed

agreements in the past year with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement – or ICE – as part of the Trump administration's nationwide crackdown on illegal immigration. A state law that took effect Jan. 1, Texas Senate Bill 8, requires county sheriffs that operate jails to partner with ICE.

Immigration-related agreements between local law enforce-

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Gregg County Sheriff Maxey Cerliano speaks Tuesday to commissioners during their meeting at the courthouse. (Jordan Green/Longview News-Journal Photo)

PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

East Texas children's advocates recognize April as abuse awareness month



Members of East Texas CASA pose for a portrait Tuesday with Judge Tim Womack on the steps of the Gregg County Courthouse. (Jordan Green/Longview News-Journal Photo)

BY JORDAN GREEN

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Gregg County professionals and volunteers who help abused and neglected children gathered Tuesday at the Gregg County Courthouse to recognize April as National Child Abuse Awareness Month.

Judge Tim Womack in the 307th Family District Court read a proclamation on the courthouse steps, surrounded by people who work with East Texas children in need.

Domestic violence, alcoholism, drug abuse and more are the major causes of child abuse and neglect, Womack said. He thanked members of various organizations – CASA of East Texas, Buckner International, the Martin House Children's Advocacy Center and the Women's Center of East Texas – for their roles in helping children and families recover from violence and abuse.

Womack said children are the nation's most valuable resources and



Sharon Boles with East Texas CASA listens to Judge Tim Womack speak Tuesday on the steps of the Gregg County Courthouse. (Jordan Green/Longview News-Journal Photo)

the most vulnerable members of society, and child abuse affects every facet of the community.

In 2025, Texas law enforcement officials conducted more than 136,000 child abuse investigations. In Gregg County, law enforcement officials conducted 782 investigations last year, confirming that 318 children were

victims of abuse. Of those children, 71 were removed from their homes.

"Childhood trauma can have long-term psychological, emotional and physical effects," Womack said. "Children who live in families with access to concrete economic and social support are less likely to experience abuse and neglect."

Abuse prevention is possible "because of partnerships between families, child welfare professionals, health professionals, community- and faith-based organizations, businesses and law enforcement agencies," Womack said.

Jackie Eylar, program director for East Texas CASA, said people should

always report possible or suspected child abuse. People can call the Texas Abuse Hotline at (800) 252-5400 or visit txabusehotline.org/ to report abuse. In an emergency, people should always call 911.

Volunteers with CASA – which stands for Court-Appointed Special Advocates – are trained to help children whose families are in crisis. Those volunteer advocates accompany children to court hearings and communicate with judges, making unbiased recommendations about whether children should be reunited with their families or moved into the foster care system.

Advocates also supervise visitations between parents and their children as ordered by a court. East Texas CASA serves Gregg, Upshur and Rusk counties.

The organization is seeking volunteers. Those who wish to volunteer or learn more about the organization can visit easttexascasa.org/.

Seven books removed from library at WOISD this year

BY JORDAN GREEN

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White Oak ISD faculty members and parents have voted to remove seven books from the school library since January as a result of challenges.

However, the books ultimately will remain available to the public because the school library also serves as a public library. Books removed from the school library will be reclassified as books in the public library, meaning students cannot check those books out during the school day, but can check them out after school if they have a library card and parental permission.

During three meetings – Jan. 6, March 2 and March 16 – White Oak ISD Library Materials Challenge Committee members voted 4-1 to remove books from the school library. The books discuss sexual topics, LGBTQ themes, mental health issues and other matters that parents and educators decided were not appropriate or helpful for students.

Lori Davis, the school librarian, was the only member of the book challenge committees who voted to retain challenged books in the school library.

Library book challenges and book bans have become more common across the country in recent years, with books discussing LGBTQ topics among the most frequently challenged and banned, according to the American Library Association.

At White Oak, parents can challenge books in the school library if they believe a book is obscene, harmful or educationally unsuitable, and those challenges must be considered by a committee within 90 days, according to district policy. Parents also can choose to restrict what kind of books their children can read at the library.

Book challenge committees are comprised of parents, faculty and staff. Challenge committees are convened as needed and have different members each time, except Davis, who is a member of all committees as the school librarian. Challenge committee members read a challenged book and then meet to discuss whether they believe it should be retained or restricted.

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Today's weather

Breezy with a shower and t-storm. High of 79.
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