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Contact:

Rachel.Otwell@illinois.gov

Daisy.Contreras@illinois.gov

State Launches Work on Two New Shelter Sites for Asylum Seekers

*New brick and mortar and soft-shelter sites to provide
2,200 beds for families and those with disabilities*

Advancing a data-driven plan to improve the asylum seeker response and provide safe shelter through the winter, Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) announced construction will launch this week on two new shelter sites. The sites, a base camp in Brighton Park and a brick-and-mortar site in Little Village, will house up to 2,200 asylum seekers in total. The locations of the shelters were identified by the City of Chicago and both shelters will operate as part of the existing City of Chicago shelter system. Work to construct and operate the shelters is being funded by the State through Governor Pritzker's recently announced \$160 million investment to improve the asylum seeker pipeline as well as the \$478 million in State funding that has been provided or committed to the asylum seeker response over state fiscal year 2023 and 2024.

In partnership with the City of Chicago, available beds will be prioritized for families and individuals with disabilities who are currently sleeping outdoors, at police stations and at O'Hare airport. While construction on both locations will begin this week, asylum seekers will not move into the Brighton Park location until all environmental concerns have been addressed. Pending this work, the shelter sites are expected to open and begin housing asylum seekers as early as mid-December.

"Asylum seekers have travelled thousands of miles and entered this country legally in search of a better life, and we cannot allow them to be met with sub-freezing temperatures and inadequate shelter," said Governor JB Pritzker. "These two new shelter sites will provide transitional housing for more than 2,000 new arrivals as they apply for work permits and strive for independence."

Both sites will offer warm sleeping spaces as well as meals, hygiene facilities, and wraparound services to allow asylum seekers, particularly those eligible for temporary protected status, to gain work permits and achieve self-sufficiency, thereby alleviating the strain on State and City resources. Construction, shelter operations and wraparound services will be funded by the State.

The two sites will operate as a part of the existing City of Chicago shelter system with New Life Centers of Chicagoland contracted by the State to provide on the ground support, including quality assurance and community-care services, like conflict

resolution, onsite communications, community engagement, and connection with local resources.

“Since asylum seekers arrived in Chicago over a year ago, IDHS has met the call for needed wraparound support. IDHS is heartened to see and be a part of the City of Chicago and State’s ongoing work in partnership to meet new arrivals with dignity as we continue to clear obstacles on their pathway to employment and independence,” **said Dulce Quintero, Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services.**

“New Life looks forward to being a continued partner with the City and State in welcoming new arrivals,” **said Matt DeMateo, Executive Director, New Life Centers.** “The two locations will provide warm shelter and support for our new neighbors as they begin their lives in this country.”

In addition to a \$65 million investment in these new shelter sites, the State is also making targeted, data-driven investments on the front and back end of the asylum seeker pipeline, to alleviate bottlenecks. Those investments are as follows:

1. **WELCOME:** \$30 million to stand up a large intake center and deploy a welcome team to better support those coming to Chicago who are seeking another final destination, or who have sponsors in Illinois and don’t require shelter. With this approach, data indicates the number of new arrivals requiring shelter can be reduced by 10%.
2. **INDEPENDENCE:** \$65 million in increased funding to expand the wraparound services the State currently provides at City shelters which enable new arrivals to live independently as they await asylum hearings, including case management, housing assistance, legal services, work permit processing, and workforce development support. The State will continue to provide the rental assistance that allows asylum seekers to transition from shelters to independent living.

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