As we enter a new month, we continue to face unprecedented times in our State and throughout the nation. Many of us have been heavily affected by repeated incidents of brutality against Black people and the countless lives lost to the pandemics of both, racism and COVID-19 in America. We are mourning the unjust killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery and countless others while continuing to disproportionately lose family members and loved ones to COVID-19.

As Governor Pritzker stated, “These are enormous weights, that nobody should have to carry.”

I hear you and I understand. It’s okay, if you’re not okay.

Regardless of your own race or ethnic identity, we all work with people, and support communities and constituents of various races, ethnicities, religious affiliations and backgrounds. This is what we do in service of the public.

In keeping with CMS’ mission to promote and instill a culture of equity, continuous improvement and respect for all people, CMS is working to develop more learning opportunities about anti-racism efforts and how you can be an ally to people from other communities. We are all in this together and dismantling racist systems is all of our cross to bear. Let’s continue to stand in support of one another during times like these.

We are also quickly developing plans to begin safely reopening the state and returning to work as Illinois has moved into Phase 3 of the Restore Illinois plan. The data shows that Illinois is successfully flattening the curve but at this time our directive remains to stay at home.

The COVID-19 battle is not over, and it is imperative that we continue to practice social distancing, wear face coverings and wash our hands to protect our families, friends and frontline workers.

During the weeks ahead, CMS employees and all State workers will be receiving detailed information and guidelines on reopening their worksites including guidance on strict social distancing processes. We will all not return at one time and we are moving toward a calculated reopening in steps that will be sustainable, yet flexible as conditions may change.

Please continue to do your part to take care of yourselves and each other during these truly unprecedented times.

Thank you CMS for your ongoing commitment and your hard work. We are negotiating this crisis together, and we are making progress toward a brighter future.

For you:
- Bearing Witness: The Death of George Floyd (Facing History)
- A Guide to How You Can Support Marginalized Communities
- Don’t Say Nothing (Teaching Tolerance)

For parents and children:
- Why All Parents Should Talk With Their Kids About Social Identity (NPR)
- Teaching 6-Year-Olds About Power and Privilege (KQED)
EOTM Award for June – Bureau of Property Management

A CMS team from the Bureau of Property Management (BoPM) has been named the CMS Employee Team of the Month Award for June 2020, for work done to halt and correct an erosion problem threatening a longtime cemetery site near the vacant Lincoln Developmental Center near Lincoln.

The BoPM facilities team project, with crucial assistance of materials and equipment from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and several local suppliers, managed to save the State of Illinois an estimated $90,000 by brainstorming the problem in-house and implementing a corrective action plan that stopped the erosion and stabilized the cemetery. The old cemetery contains nearly 150 burial sites, with some dating to the early 20th century.

“It was a group of nine guys that we brought together because of specific skills they bring that would be required of this job,” said CMS Facility Manager Vince Veseling, who coordinated the team’s work. Most of the team members came from a facility Veseling was acquainted with, but no longer manages, housed in IDOT’s Springfield headquarters. “We are most appreciative to Ray Coleman, who is the CMS Facility Manager at the Hanley Building,” Veseling said. “We knew the skills we had available there, and Ray and his entire team were ready to help when we asked.”

Veseling and Coleman assembled the team and “basically, those guys took a look at the problem and worked together to figure out how to correct things,” Veseling said. Problems at the cemetery site included a gully that formed near a corner of the cemetery where drainage issues related to a broken underground drain tile caused worsening erosion and threatened nearby burial plots.

While the site was no longer an active burial site, “many people still visit this cemetery, and have people buried here, so we all feel an obligation to get this sort of problem taken care of so people can visit here and not be concerned about their loved ones interred here,” Veseling said.

“This problem had been going on for a while, but the contract estimate we put together a couple of years ago totaled nearly $100,000, and we just didn’t have money in the budget,” Veseling said. “The team we put together figured out who on our staff could do which jobs, and then contacted suppliers and got materials put together at really good prices.” The final cost totaled about $5,000 for materials such as fill dirt, rock, field tile, and rented equipment including a skid steer and excavator, along with about 20 hours of staff overtime – far less than the estimated $100,000 cost of an outside contract, and the time it would have taken to put the contract in place. IDOT’s Bureau of Operations loaned the team three tandem dump trucks for hauling. “That alone saved us a lot. IDOT has always been right there, willing to help when needed,” Veseling added.

Weather issues through the winter and early spring delayed the project, “but we finally got a window of good weather and got it done in less than a week,” Veseling said. The nine members of the CMS work crew included Brian Mulcahy, project excavator and skid steer operator; Todd Knoles, who installed tiling, assisted with tree cleanup, and directed crew efforts; Jeff Parks, who drove a truck and skid steer, and coordinated equipment and personnel; Tad Rice and Gary Perkins, who both drove trucks; Tom Daniels, who installed tiling and operated equipment; Josh Gorsage, who handled the chain saw operation; and Justin Buchanan and James McKinney, who did tree cleanup.

Two of the work crew members were members of another CMS Employee Team of the Month, highlighted in November 2019, for a cost-saving project that refurbished and stabilized a deteriorating IDOT fuel station in Springfield. That project, also coordinated by Veseling, reflects an ongoing strategy outlined by the CMS Statewide Facilities Manager James Fox, who joined CMS less than a year ago. “I am so proud of our facilities teams – all of them,” Fox said. “I believe our teams are more engaged than they have ever been, and a lot of it is the leadership philosophy of the current administration. We try to build trust and show respect to all our staff members. We ask for their input on projects like this because they have a lot of knowledge and experience among them. And, as we have done that, we have seen an increase in staff engagement.”

Fox says he is encouraged most by what he sees as a new sense of need or purpose embraced and demonstrated by CMS staff members in general. “We have definitely seen the work culture changing to a much more positive one just in the past year or so,” Fox said, “and much of that relates to the entire CMS leadership team. Director (Janel) Forde, has done a very good job in driving this. Change starts at the top if it is to be impactful, and we are seeing that engagement is infectious, largely because of that leadership. Everybody wants to be part of a team where their voices are heard, and their ideas and efforts are respected. We all do, and we all feel fortunate to be here to provide an environment that the people we serve expect to see.”
In March, the State of Illinois transitioned many of its employees to remote work to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible. CMS is now working with State agencies to build a comprehensive Return to Work plan to prepare State employees for a gradual return to the workplace during and post COVID-19.

CMS leadership is working to develop a phased plan for our agency based on the unique needs of each operation and following the State’s Restore Illinois plan. The site-specific plan will be discussed with each employee before returning to work and include standing operating procedures with detailed guidance for social distancing in shared spaces, workspace cleanliness and personal protective equipment requirements for each worksite.

Employees who are currently reporting to their worksite will notice new signage in elevators, restrooms and communal spaces to help maintain mindfulness about proper COVID-19 safety precautions. Some structural changes will also be made at worksites to help enforce occupancy limits. Full details are under development, but the basic guidance below will be in place for approved activities until further notice. As the State moves through the phases of the reopening plan, it is important to follow these basic tenets:

- **Safety First**: Follow the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH); use social distancing, hand washing and face covering guidance to ensure compliance and mitigate risk.
- **Telework First**: CMS recommends that employees who can productively telework should continue to do so at this time to maintain safe social distancing. However operational demands may require some or all of these employees to return to the workplace.
- **Personal Responsibility**: We are all in this together. Everyone plays a role by following the CDC and IDPH guidelines for handwashing, social distancing, wearing masks, and staying home if you are sick.

**Benefit Corner**

The CMS Bureau of Benefits held seven virtual Benefit Choice webinars for State employees to discuss the new plan rates, voluntary benefits and plan offerings. Benefit Choice has ended but employees can visit MyBenefits.Illinois.gov for information on their health plan. There is also new IRS Guidance for Medical Care Assistance Plan (MCAP) and Dependent Care Assistance Plan (DCAP) accounts that can be accessed here.

To support the emotional health and well-being of our employees during this stressful time, CMS benefits partners offer the following free and confidential services.

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**
The State of Illinois offers the EAP through Magellan Health for all non-AFSCME31 employees. Learn more about the services and resources available at https://magellanascend.com/. The State of Illinois and Magellan are also extending telephonic EAP support to employees that are not benefit eligible, such as part-time and contract employees. Employees can contact Magellan Healthcare 24/7 at (866) 659-3848 for a free, confidential consultation with a Magellan EAP clinician.

**Personal Support Program (PSP) for AFSCME31 Employees**
The PSP is a unique, union-based employee assistance program designed specifically for AFSCME31 employees and their families. The PSP offers services statewide through a network of licensed professionals who are specially trained to provide confidential assistance on a wide variety of concerns and problems. To receive help, AFSCME31 employees can visit www.afscme31.org or call (800) 647-8776 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. The following support resources are available free of charge, regardless of what plan you are enrolled in:

- **Optum’s Emotional Support Help Line** is available to support anyone who may be experiencing anxiety or stress following the recent developments around COVID-19. The free service can be reached at (866) 342-6892, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is open to all.

- **Aetna Resources for Living** mental wellbeing services has set up crisis support lines anyone can access.
  - Aetna medicare members, call (866) 370-4842 (TTY:711)
  - Non-Aetna Medicare members, call (833) 327-2386 (TTY:711)
Illinois has entered Phase 3 of the State’s Restore Illinois plan and the stay at home order has been lifted. Phase 3 focuses on community recovery and reflects Illinois’ new, more open reality while continuing critical public health measures to keep everyone safe.

In the Phase 3, gatherings are still limited to 10 or fewer people for all groups and social distancing and face coverings in public are required safety precautions. Many businesses have now reopened and outdoor activities like youth sports and boating and fishing have resumed with strict safety and occupancy guidelines. Full details about business reopening guidelines can be found at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity website.

Restore Illinois is guided by public health metrics and the decision to move into Phase 3 was made after the State hit required benchmarks for each of the four regions. In fact, at this time, we are one of the only states in the US that meet federal guidelines for reopening.

- Illinois averages nearly 250 fewer COVID-19 patients in intensive care than we were four weeks ago – a 20% decrease.
- We also average nearly 40 fewer COVID-related deaths per day than we were just two weeks ago – a 32% decrease.

This is an important step forward, and our number one priority must continue to be the health and safety of front line workers and our families and neighbors.

What’s Open

Travel: Travel should follow IDPH and CDC approved guidance

Health Care: All health care providers are open with DPH approved safety guidance

Education and child care: Remote learning in P-12 schools and higher education; Limited child care and summer programs open with IDPH approved safety guidance

Outdoor recreation: State parks open; Activities permitted in groups of 10 or fewer with social distancing

Businesses:
- Manufacturing: Non-essential manufacturing that can safely operate with social distancing can reopen with IDPH approved safety guidance
- "Non-essential" businesses: Employees of "non-essential" businesses are allowed to return to work with IDPH approved safety guidance depending upon risk level, tele-work strongly encouraged wherever possible; Employers are encouraged to provide accommodations for COVID-19-vulnerable employees
- Bars and restaurants: Open for delivery, pickup, and drive thru. Some bars and restaurants will open patio and outdoor spaces with occupancy and social distancing requirements.
- Personal care services and health clubs: Barbershops and salons open with IDPH approved safety guidance; Health and fitness clubs can provide outdoor classes and one-on-one personal training with IDPH approved safety guidance
- Retail: Open with capacity limits and IDPH approved safety guidance, including face coverings

Please visit the State’s Coronavirus website for the latest information about the response and Restore Illinois.