

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

IG says state employees defrauded aid program

Some made up businesses, lied about their incomes to receive pandemic funding

By Olivia Olander
Chicago Tribune

Illinois state employees fabricated hair salons, paid others to inaccurately fill out forms and drastically inflated income numbers for their side businesses in an effort to fraudulently receive pandemic-era Paycheck Protection Program loans, according to recently released reports from the Office of Executive Inspector General.

One Department of Human Services employee said on a PPP application that his car-washing business made \$110,000 in a year but later acknowledged the venture had no customers or income, according to one report. Asked why he listed that amount, the report says he told investigators: "I just randomly put it in to see what I could get; I wanted to try my business again and wanted to go mobile with it."

Another DHS employee who claimed to have six-figure income from a beauty salon business later told investigators she had only ever made \$20 to \$40 per month doing hair for friends and family and did not consider it a business.

The woman told investigators she "did what everyone else was doing at the time in order to get money," the IG reports said. "She said that she did not use loan proceeds for any kind of business expenses because she does not have any business expenses."

Those cases are two of the 275 instances in which the inspector general found PPP wrongdoing, the alleged thefts totaling more than \$7 million in public funds, according to the IG's April newsletter. Department of Human Services employees accounted for 175 of those cases. The Department of Corrections was the next highest, with 31 cases.

While the state IG provided updates on PPP investigations last year, the specifics of the alleged fraud weren't made public until the state's Executive Ethics Commission in recent weeks published about a dozen reports — all except one regarding Department of Human Services' workers — detailing how they say state employees

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INSIDE Leaders skip meeting on racial disparities in CFD

Chicago aldermen and residents criticized Fire Department brass and officials from Mayor Brandon Johnson's administration for not attending a Thursday meeting on a lack of diversity in the ranks of the department. **Chicagoland**

■ Thornton's Morez Johnson Jr. and Lincoln's Kloe Froebe took far different paths to get to be this year's Mr. and Ms. Basketball in Illinois. **Chicago Sports**

Despite warm weather, Illinois cicadas remain a few weeks away from a historic emergence set to excite experts and bug enthusiasts alike



Horticulturist Rachelle Frosch demonstrates how to gently place fine-mesh netting around young or vulnerable trees to protect them from the state's emerging cicadas at the Morton Arboretum in Lisle on Tuesday. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Loud, but harmless

By Adriana Pérez | Chicago Tribune

In a restored savanna habitat behind the Lake Forest College science center, professor Sean Menke crouched down next to a small circular hole and stuck a thermometer into the ground.

After a short wait, he took the device out to look at the temperature. "That was 52 (degrees), so that's great."

The hole was, presumably, a periodical cicada's tunnel dug ahead of this summer's emergence of billions of others that will come out simultaneously across the United States. They belong to Brood XIX, four species that appear every 13 years

in the Southeast, and Brood XIII, three species that appear every 17 years in northern Illinois.

Since earlier in the week, Menke has been monitoring soil temperatures which, once reaching 64 degrees at 8 inches, should signal the cicadas that they can come out to mate.

"With the weather we've been having, there's some concern that they're going to be emerging earlier," Menke said. "And we're hearing reports from people that they're finding the

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Biden grasps for center on protests over Israeli military

In lawsuit, activists say city unprepared for DNC rallies

By Nell Salzman
Chicago Tribune

As protests surge across America just months before the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, activists representing LGBTQ+ and women's reproductive rights say Mayor Brandon Johnson's administration is violating their First Amendment rights and is unprepared for the onslaught of dissidents headed to the city this August.

The claims were made as Bodies Outside of Unjust Laws filed a federal lawsuit Thursday alleging the city wrongfully denied permits for the group to protest by the Water Tower on Michigan Avenue, an area where many Democratic delegates will be staying during the Aug. 19-22 convention.

Joined by the ACLU of Illinois, activists with the LGBTQ+ and women's

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Police clad in riot gear confront students protesting Israel's attacks on Gaza on Thursday at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. **JOHN RUDOFF/GETTY-AFP**

President addresses unrest after silence draws critics

By Chris Megerian
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Thursday rejected calls from student protesters to change his approach to the war in Gaza while insisting that "order must prevail" as college campuses across the country face a wave of violence, outrage and fear.

"Dissent is essential for democracy," Biden said at the White House. "But dissent must never lead to disorder."

The Democratic president broke days of silence on the protests with his remarks, which followed mounting criticism from Republicans who have tried to turn scenes of unrest into a campaign cudgel. By focusing on a law-and-order message while defending the right to free speech, Biden is grasping for a middle ground on an intensely divisive

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