


Illinois Legislative News

Pritzker announces \$40 million grant program to promote development-ready ‘megasites’

Rebuild Illinois funds will be open to private, public, nonprofit entities

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Gov. J.B. Pritzker recently announced the creation of a \$40 million grant program to incentivize the creation of large development-ready areas known as “megasites” across the state.

Megasites are large swaths of land, developed to attract businesses such as manufacturing plants, warehouses and distribution centers. Pritzker said developing these sites will help make Illinois more competitive, especially as sectors including clean energy and manufacturing are rapidly expanding in the U.S.

The Megasites Development Program announced Monday uses Rebuild Illinois capital funds aimed at providing the necessary infrastructure improvements to develop these megasites. Other eligible costs include various land acquisition, clean-up and development expenses.

“Illinois is home to some of the largest such sites in the country, all ripe for fresh development,” Pritzker said at a Chicago news conference. “The new megasites investment program grants will help communities innovate their own business attraction efforts and will spur economic development in communities across our great state.”

The program is open to private entities, nonprofits and local governments, and the application portal is open through April 6. Those receiving the grant must match each dollar granted by the state with other private or local funding.

Grant allotments would range from \$250,000 up to \$5 million, depending on the acreage of the site. Eligible sites must have at least 200 contiguous acres and applicants must own or have an agreement in place to acquire the property when they apply.

Kristin Richards, acting director of the Department of Commerce

and Economic Opportunity, said the investment-ready sites may lure manufacturing and distribution hubs, or large scale one-stop shops that produce multi-part products within one location.

“I like to think of megasites as turn-key houses: move-in ready, with zero hassle, which is exactly what fast-growing businesses are looking for,” Richards said.

Intersect Illinois, an independent, not-for-profit economic development organization that often partners with state organizations including DCEO, announced their Vetted Sites Initiative alongside Pritzker at the Monday morning news conference.

The Vetted Sites Initiative, intended to aid businesses seeking out readily equipped property sites, would help businesses interested in moving to Illinois.

“The idea here is to identify large sites that can be brought up to speed quickly so that we can promote them across the country and even around the world,” Dan Seals, president of Intersect Illinois, said.

To help companies look for these “turn-key” locations in Illinois, Intersect Illinois has created a property finder that has more than 150 investment-ready sites in Illinois and a standalone guide with megasites over 1,000 acres.

Pritzker added that programs such as the Megasite Development Program are necessary to helping economic development as COVID-19 has eased up in recent years.

“As we’ve come out, I’ve been very aggressive. That’s not just in the last few months, that’s really over the last year and a half, two years, to make sure that we’ve got programs that are incentives for businesses, like Megasites,” Pritzker said. “Let’s prepare for them what they need.”

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Illinois bill signed into law removing barriers to access for legal gender change process

On Feb. 17, 2023, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed HB0009 into law, authorizing an easier process for individuals seeking to change the gender listed on their birth certificate. Previously, amending a birth certificate’s gender marker required certification from a healthcare professional that the individual had undergone gender reassignment surgery or other clinical treatment.

The updated law allows changes to the birth certificate providing the petitioner signs a statement affirming their gender identity or intersex condition, opening an easier path to legal recognition for transgender Illinoisans.

“Here in Illinois, we recognize that gender transition is a personal journey that doesn’t always follow a prescriptive medical path, but still deserves to be honored legally,” said Pritzker. “In a time of increasing violence and hateful rhetoric against the trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming community, it is more important than ever to reaffirm our state’s commitment to recognizing the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ Illinoisans.”

Previously, transgender Illinoisans were required to receive documentation from a licensed physician to begin the gender change process. However, many trans individuals do not opt for surgery to address gender dysphoria for personal or financial reasons but would still benefit from legally changing their gender as they transition socially or with the aid of hormone therapy. This bill makes gender-affirming documentation more accessible and recognizes the distinction between biological sex and gender for many transgender individuals.

The bill also provides fee waivers (between \$10-\$25) for the gender change process for those on release from parole, mandatory supervised release, or final discharge, or who have been pardoned by the Department of Corrections or Department of Juvenile Justice. Individuals placed on aftercare release under the Juvenile Court Act are also eligible. The waiver also applies to homeless individuals, youth in DCFS care, and those under 27 who were previously in care. Any domestic violence shelter listed as a residence will be given four waivers per year for use by residents seeking to change their birth certificates.

“Transgender and nonbinary people are being targeted at alarming rates around the country for simply existing,”

said State Senator Laura Fine (D-Glenview). “This legislation will now make it easier for trans and nonbinary people to live as their authentic selves and ensure consistency on legal documents.”

“Since the start of 2023, state legislators in at least 27 states across the country have introduced hateful and discriminatory anti-trans legislation. But Illinois continues to move forward because of Governor Pritzker’s approval of HB 9 today,” said Mike Ziri, Director of Public Policy at Equality Illinois. “The old state law, which required verification from a healthcare provider in order for trans and gender-diverse people born in Illinois to obtain a birth certificate that reflected their authentic selves, represented a barrier to lived equality. We are excited because HB 9 affirms trans and gender-diverse people born in Illinois as their authentic selves.”

“We are grateful to see HB 9 passed and move Illinois forward toward gender self-determination,” said Carolyn Wahlskog of Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois. “Reducing barriers and gatekeeping when seeking affirming identity documents supports our trans and non-binary siblings throughout Illinois. This bill creates accessibility for correcting one’s gender marker on their birth certificate by removing correction fees for individuals experiencing homelessness, exiting incarceration and fleeing domestic violence. TJLP thanks our partners and legislators for their efforts throughout the pandemic to ensure this bill became a reality.”

“Lambda Legal applauds the signing of HB9 into law, an essential and long-awaited bill. Illinois has taken a significant step forward in enacting legislation in support of our transgender community, especially in contrast to the barrage of legislative attacks

being launched by other states,” said Kara Ingelhart, senior attorney at Lambda Legal. “This tremendous victory allows self-attestation of gender markers on birth certificates and eliminates barriers that undermine the health and safety of people whose gender identity conflicts with the gender marker on these essential documents. We are grateful for the sustained advocacy of Illinoisans, elected officials and LGBTQ+ defenders.”

“HB 9 will save lives - by allowing Illinois residents to change their legal documents to affirm themselves, transgender Illinoisans will no longer be barred by medical gatekeeping,” said Benito Goff, Youth Programming Coordinator at the Rainbow Café LGBTQ Center. “In rural areas like Southern Illinois, finding a mental health or healthcare provider competent in LGBTQIA+ issues is challenging, in addition to other compounding factors such as poverty.”

‘Equitable restrooms’ bill advances in House

Bill calls for setting standards for multi-occupant, all-gender facilities

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A bill that would allow restaurants, hotels and other public places to designate “all-gender multiple-occupancy” restrooms passed out of a House committee Wednesday, sending it to the full House for consideration.

House Bill 1286, sponsored by Rep. Katie Stuart, D-Edwardsville, is similar to one that passed through the House in 2021 but died in the Senate.

“So it just creates the opportunity for places, businesses, universities, you name it, to create a multi-stall gender-neutral restroom, if they so choose,” Stuart said during the hearing. “And it lays out requirements for what is in that facility.”

In 2019, the General Assembly passed the Equitable Restrooms Act, which identified all single-occupancy restrooms in public places as gender-neutral and designated them for use by no more than one person at a time, or for family or assisted use. But there is currently no law in Il-

linois authorizing multi-occupancy restrooms to be gender-neutral.

The text of the bill states its purpose is “to promote the privacy, safety, and gender inclusivity of all Illinois residents and visitors,” and that the measure should be “liberally construed” to carry out its purpose.

It would require that such restrooms be clearly marked at their entrance with “inclusive signage” that does not indicate any specific gender. It would also require that each toilet stall be separated by dividers and a functioning lock mechanism on the door.

Urinals, if present, also would have to be separated by partitions.

The bill also provides that any multi-occupancy restroom could be converted to an all-gender restroom. But if another multi-occupancy restroom that is designated for a specific gender is located adjacent to or near the all-gender restroom, both would have to be designated as all-gender facilities.

Additionally, the bill would set out more specific standards for multi-occupant all-gender facilities that are part of a

newly constructed building or one resulting from major renovations of a building.

The bill would require the Illinois Department of Public Health to adopt administrative rules to implement the new standards.

Rep. Charlie Meier, R-Okawville, said the bill’s requirements could impose significant costs on the owners of large arenas where plumbing fixtures are already in place.

But Stuart said those facilities would be under no obligation to convert their existing restrooms to all-gender facilities. She said the bill would only allow them to do so if they choose.

The bill passed out of the House Human Services Committee on a party-line vote of 6-3. It now goes back to the full House where it could come up at any time for final vote.

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