



SOUTHERN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY TODAY

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

• Volume 55 Number 49

• 6 Pages

SERVING ALL OF SOUTHERN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

South County SPOTLIGHT

St. Patrick Catholic Charities - Tolono IL Free Food Pantry
Every Monday from 5-6:30 & Friday 9-10:30
Located at the Parish - providing Fresh produce, meat and pantry items. Serving all of Champaign County.

The Giving Place is open every Wednesday from 4pm-6pm in Tolono to help families in need of food items

3rd Thursday of every month Tolono Fun Day Committee Meeting 6:30 @Police Station

2/2 Village of Sidney Board of Trustees Meeting at 7pm

2/7 Catholic Charities of Champaign and Piatt Counties is hosting a Bingo Night at the Elks Lodge in Savoy, doors open at 5pm

2/28 Unity PTO Glow Bingo doors open at 5:30

If you have an upcoming event that you would like to see featured in Spotlight email: jamie@thecounty-chronicle.com

Unity West PTO Meet to Discuss 2026 Plans

Unity West Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meets the second Tuesday of the month at 6:30pm in the school's media center (library).

Members discussed the big fundraiser "Glow Bingo" (Brighter Together: Let's GLOW) happening February 28th at the R.E.Franks Center (Philo Gym) at 127 Washington St. in Philo, with the food trucks (Smith Burger and Come & Get This) serving at 5pm, doors opening at 5:30pm and the 10 games will begin at 7pm.

Reservations for the Tables of 8 (\$300) or single tickets (\$30) started online January 17th. Extra tickets are sold for drinks and other games and activities with lots of prizes including a Skylight Calendar, Polar Express Tickets and a fire pit (Solo Stove).

Other events the committees are working on include Unit

7's "Sweet Senior Citizens" that M can be nominated by calling Unity High School's office at (217)485-6230 by Friday January 30th at 3pm for deliveries February 6th-8th. A cheer camp will take place at the Unity High School Gym February 10th and 11th for k-3rd grades from 6-7pm and 4th-8th grades from 7-8pm with the performance to take place in the Rocket Center during halftime of the February 13th basketball game. When the meeting opened up, a Tolono Fun Day festival board member described to all present, about the June 26th and 27th weekend needing volunteers to assist and help appeal to the younger attendees and suggested they go to a meeting the third Thursday of the month at 6:30pm in the downtown police station and for details to visit TolonoFunDays.org



Unity West Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) met on January 13, 2026. Photo provided by Diane Ducey

St Thomas Annual Pancake and Sausage Breakfast

St Thomas School in Philo hosted their 59th Pancake and Sausage breakfast on Sunday, January 18, from 7am-1pm. Despite the chilly weather, organizers were happy with

the turnout and support of the Tiger Raffle with tickets still available for the chance to win \$4000, \$2500, \$1000 and \$500 (purchase at the link: school.stThomasPhilo.org) Special

events are planned for the last week of January with Catholic Schools week and Trivia Night is happening Saturday, March 7th (2026stsTrivia.givesmart.com)



Weekly Weather Forecast		
Wed Jan 14		40 / 16 °F
Thu Jan 15		24 / 12 °F
Fri Jan 16		36 / 20 °F
Sat Jan 17		29 / 10 °F
Sun Jan 18		17 / 4 °F
Mon Jan 19		30 / 10 °F
Tue Jan 20		33 / 20 °F
Wed Jan 21		36 / 25 °F

Illinois 'Clean Slate' Law allows automatic Sealing of Nonviolent Criminal Records; Recent Postal Service Changes Could Disrupt mail-in voting, County Clerks Warn

Over 1.7 million Illinois adults will be eligible to have their nonviolent criminal records automatically sealed after Gov. JB Pritzker on Friday signed the long-debated 'Clean Slate' Act. House Bill 1836 will require law enforcement agencies and circuit clerks to begin systematically sealing eligible criminal records by 2029. Existing law already allows people to apply for qualifying records to be sealed for certain crimes. The new law doesn't add to the list of eligible offenses, but rather streamlines and automates the process, removing legwork for those with records.

Of the 2.2 million Illinois adults with a past arrest or conviction, advocates estimate that 1.74 million, or 79%, could have their records partially or fully sealed because of the legislation.

Convictions for more serious offenses like sexual violence against minors, DUIs, reckless driving, cruelty to animals and serious violent crimes, including any that qualify for sex offender registration remain ineligible for sealing.

Law enforcement, courts and other relevant agencies will still have access to sealed records,

but the public and private background check entities will not. Automatic sealing will apply to convictions as well as dismissed or reversed charges and arrests.

Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth, D-Peoria, chief sponsor of the bill in the House, said the project was a personal one for her. Gordon-Booth recounted how an infraction from her youth was weaponized against her in her first run for office.

"I was given the chance to move beyond my mistake and to manifest my potential in service of my community, and I want the millions of other people in this state to have the same exact opportunity," Gordon-Booth said. "This law is not about charity. It's not about forgiveness. This is about justice. This is about redemption."

The legislation passed 39-17 in the Senate and 80-26 in the House during the fall veto session.

New postal service changes to postmarking and transportation rules could disrupt mail-in voting in the 2026 election, Illinois county clerks warn.

Ahead of the March primary election, county clerks are telling voters not to rely on past pro-

cesses and to mail their ballots as early as possible, no later than one week before Election Day.

Clerks from around the state discussed how to educate voters at the annual Illinois Association of County Clerks and Records Conference on Thursday in East Peoria.

One new rule, which took effect Dec. 24, states that the date a postmark is applied to a piece of mail may not reflect the day it was received by the Postal Service.

Currently, 14 states, including Illinois, will accept mail-in ballots if they are received within a certain period after Election Day if they are postmarked on or before Election Day.

Clerks warned that uncertainty about when ballots will now be postmarked necessitates voters to act earlier. The way postmarks are applied is not changing, the USPS says. Mail is only postmarked at distribution centers, and that will remain the same.

But in an effort to improve mail delivery efficiency, some localities' mail may be sent to a different distribution center than in the past, which can increase the amount of time it takes for the USPS to receive and then

postmark mail at these centers.

"It's a question mark of when will it actually get through a distribution center. So I'm advising my voters to make sure that they get their vote-by-mail ballot in the mail no less than a week before Election Day," John Ackerman, the Tazewell County clerk, said.

In the city of Peoria, for example, the distribution center is in Peoria. Tazewell County's center, Ackerman said, is in Champaign, although Peoria is geographically closer.

To educate voters about the change, he said, his office will include yellow index cards with the recommendation in the vote-by-mail packets sent to voters.

Voters can also request a manual postmark from their local post office or drop off their ballot at the election official's office.

But if election officials can't rely on postmarks to reflect accurate dates, a number of mail-in ballots that were mailed prior to Election Day may not be counted at all clerks said.

Ballots also will no longer be automatically considered priority mail, increasing the amount of time it will take to deliver the mail.

"We've utilized that successfully over the years to make sure that all those ballots not only are delivered, but they are received in time. Changing that status dramatically changes how that will impact us as well," Ackerman said.

These changes will be most felt during the recount process, when candidates are "scrambling," Ackerman said.

The clerks generally agreed this could change the outcome of a race.

Anthony Vega, Lake County Clerk, speaks to reporters at a news conference in East Peoria. Vega, among other Illinois clerks, warned of disruptions to vote-by-mail processes due to new USPS changes. (Capitol News Illinois photo by Jenna Schweikert)

Clerks also said they are concerned about changes impacting voter trust in elections, especially because voter guidance is now going to be different depending on the county's location and distribution center.

"We've told all of our voters, get your vote-by-mail ballot in your box by Election Day to be postmarked for Election Day, we will process it now. We're rip-

ping the rug out from underneath that," Ackerman said. "That leads to distrust. When you can't give a solid date, you can't give a solid answer, when you can't reply back to them with facts, when it's left for interpretation. That erodes the trust that we've been trying to rebuild."

In the past, when this potential change was proposed, the clerks said they were able to speak to federal lawmakers to advocate for its reversal.

In late September 2025, a delegation of clerks traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with lawmakers and staff about changes to federal funding for election infrastructure and learned lawmakers didn't know about the potential changes, Ackerman said.

"They were all unaware that this change was going to take effect. They were unaware, in my opinion, of the impacts it would have on vote by mail," he said.

This time, however, clerks didn't know the changes were proposed until days before they were imple-