

# Fact Sheet

## Supporting the Kankakee Institutional History and Burial Access Act

### Local Relevance

- The burial grounds of **Kankakee State Hospital** lie within city boundaries and represent a significant chapter in both the city Kankakee, and the State of Illinois public health and civic history.
- Thousands of individuals, many with mental illness or developmental disabilities, were buried in institutional cemeteries, often without names on headstones or family notification.
- These cemeteries are located on **public and private land**, maintained by **state agencies**, yet remain **inaccessible** to families, researchers, and advocates.

### Purpose of the Act

- Restore **public access** to institutional cemeteries tied to Kankakee State Hospital and its successor, Shapiro Developmental Center.
- Require state agencies to **release burial records** and maintain searchable databases.
- Affirm the **continuity of institutional responsibility**, regardless of name changes or administrative shifts.

### Why It Matters to Families

- Burial records contain vital **medical history**, including hereditary conditions, psychiatric diagnoses, and causes of death.
- Families deserve access to this information for **health decisions, genealogical research, and emotional closure**.
- Many descendants are actively searching for loved ones and have no other path to answers.

### Why It Matters to Kankakee

- The City of Kankakee has a unique opportunity to lead in **historical justice, public transparency, and community healing**.
- Supporting this Act affirms the city's commitment to honoring those who died in state care and restoring dignity to forgotten lives.
- A council resolution would signal strong local leadership and encourage state lawmakers to act.

### Legislative Impact

- Sets a precedent for statewide access to private and institutional cemeteries.
- Aligns with national efforts to restore visibility to marginalized histories.
- Encourages responsible stewardship of public records and land.

### Supporters

- Families of former patients
- Genealogists and historians
- Mental health and disability rights advocates
- Transparency and public records coalitions