

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 of 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 land owned, operated, or controlled by public or private entities, including state agencies and local public bodies, yet remain inaccessible to families, researchers, and advocates.

Purpose of the Act

- Restore reasonable 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

- Establishes a statewide framework for access to cemeteries located on land owned, operated, or controlled by public or private entities, including institutional burial grounds.
- 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
- Advocates for mental health, disability rights, and historical transparency
- Organizations concerned with public records access and preservation