

CHICAGOLAND

Alderman seeking crackdown on pedicabs

Cites ‘illegal street curb parties’ and ‘chaos and mayhem’

By Bill Ruthhart
Chicago Tribune

Downtown Ald. Brendan Reilly is seeking a crackdown on Chicago pedicab drivers, who he says have created a public safety hazard by clogging streets outside River North bars and participating in illegal street parties across the city.

Reilly introduced an ordinance at Wednesday’s City Council meeting that would ban the bicycle-pedal-powered passenger vehicles from a portion of River North at night. A separate measure seeks to reduce rickshaw ruckus across the city by outlawing the use of loud speakers, a popular feature of some pedicabs.

“The police commander of the 18th District came to me and said the density of these pedicabs, especially on the weekend nights, has gotten out of control,” said Reilly, 42nd. “They can’t get ambulance, fire service or police cars through Hubbard Street or Kinzie Street or Illinois Street, and that’s a safety concern.”

If approved, the ordinance would ban pedicabs after 6 p.m. in the popular nightlife district bound by Ohio Street to the north, Michigan Avenue to the east, the Chicago River to the south and Wells Street to the west.

Pedicabs already are prohibited at all times on Michigan Avenue and State Street downtown, two thoroughfares heavily frequented by tourists and shoppers.

Reilly’s other ordinance would ban all pedicabs citywide from having amplified music.

“We’re having these illegal street curb parties hiring the pedicab driver to be their DJ for the evening,” Reilly said. “So they sit there and crank their music while these guys are sitting there drinking and smoking dope on the curb in front of bars and restaurants, creating chaos and mayhem.”

“We’ve had these large groups hanging out, drinking, doing drugs, listening to the pedicab music and then they see rivals doing the same thing across the street and they get into fights. That also has become an issue for cops.”

Reilly said the city has a “pretty strict noise ordinance on the books that should apply to pedicabs too.”

The veteran alderman stressed the pedicabs would be allowed to operate in that section of River North before 6 p.m. and in all other areas of the city at all times, with the exception of the existing bans on Michigan and State streets.

Asked if the pedicab popularity and street congestion has been driven at all by the fewer number of cabs and ride-shares available post-pandemic to take revelers home, Reilly scoffed and called the pedicabs a “rolling violation,” with passengers often illegally smoking marijuana on the public right of way.

“These are not being used as commuter options,” Reilly said. “These are being used by drunk people who want to frequent the bars, play loud music and have their Instagram moment.”

“This is not about getting people from point A to point B. This is about partying.”

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Millions in Head Start funds now going straight to neighborhoods

Here’s what it means for local families

By Karen Ann Cullotta
Chicago Tribune

When Shontae Johnson’s 5-year-old daughter, Serenity, steps into a kindergarten classroom at Chicago Public Schools this fall, the Humboldt Park mother said five years’ worth of experiences in a neighborhood Head Start program has ensured her child will be prepared.

The extended hours and support services offered at the Nia Family Center Head Start program on the city’s West Side have also allowed Johnson to return to college, where she is slated to complete a dental hygienist program by early next year. “My daughter is very observant, she’s a fast learner, and she wants to be the teacher’s helper all of the time,” said Johnson, 26.

The Nia Family Center is run by Chicago Commons, one of five neighborhood nonprofits that for the first time will receive money directly from the federal government to support Head Start programs for local families.

While the city’s Department of Family and Support Services had previously received the entire \$145 million in federal Head Start funding as a “supergrantee,” this month Chicago became the latest large U.S. city to decentralize the financing of an early childhood initiative that for more than five decades has served children from low-income families.

While the city of Chicago will still receive nearly \$52 million of the \$145 million award, the remaining roughly \$95 million will be granted directly to five community-based organizations that will operate Chicago Head Start and Early Head Start services that previously needed to request funding from the city.

The new awards represent a combined 7,852 slots for Head Start and Early Head Start with an increased investment in the youngest learners, up to age 3, officials said.

“For years, our Department of Family and Support Services has been a key player in strengthening our children’s academic foundation,” Mayor Lori Lightfoot said in a news release earlier this month.

“These new grants will allow DFSS and the five community-based organiza-

tions to double down on this important work and further our ongoing, citywide investment in the short- and long-term success of our youngest learners and their families,” Lightfoot said.

Among the five local recipients of the new funding stream is the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, which provides early education for children starting at birth on Chicago’s West Side. The group was awarded a five-year, \$103 million grant — about \$20 million a year — from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Head Start, the nonprofit’s CEO, Bela Moté, said.

The center also recently received a five-year, \$20 million grant from Early Head Start, and combined, the grants will serve more than 1,500 children and youth up to age 17 in 27 communities, Moté said.

For Moté, a top priority is supporting and recruiting Head Start teachers at the center by offering equitable wages and benefits, as well as going “deeper and broader” with wraparound services offered to Head Start students’ families.

“I like to think about this change from an equity perspective, as it’s giving us the ability to make decisions that make sense, and better meet the needs of the good working families and their children in the community,” Moté said.

At Start Early, a Chicago nonprofit helmed by Diana Rauner, the wife of former Gov. Bruce Rauner, officials said they plan to use the \$20 million award to bring early learning and care opportunities to 19 under-resourced communities in Chicago — doubling the number of young children and families it currently serves, said Diana McClarien, vice president of the Early/Head Start Network at Start Early.

Officials at the nonprofit also plan to improve salaries for their early childhood workforce, and create career advancement and professional development opportunities to tackle what they described as “long-standing workforce issues” that were magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like all schools and early childhood programs in Illinois, the organization’s Head Start centers closed during the state’s shutdown in the wake of the pandemic, but the centers reopened



Summer Anderson, from left, Miya Candelaria and Serenity Peters search for insects with their teacher at the Nia Family Center on Tuesday in Chicago. **STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

in June 2020, and are up and running this summer, McClarien said.

“We have a lot of families who have lost their employment during the pandemic, and some have seen deaths in their families too,” McClarien said. “But in the past four months, families are slowly coming back in.”

After receiving a \$23 million, five-year Head Start grant, Chicago Commons President and CEO Edgar Ramirez said the direct injection of federal funding will allow the organization to provide services for 1,270 children in 13 underserved neighborhoods across Chicago, including at the Nia Family Center.

“In a sense, creating micro-systems is adding a lot of value, and I hope all six grantees can work together, and collaborate on best practices with the goal of creating the best Head Start services for the city of Chicago,” Ramirez said.

Back at the Nia Family Center, Johnson said these final days of her daughter Serenity’s time at their neighborhood Head Start are proving to be bitter-sweet.

“I really appreciate everything her Head Start teachers have done to make sure she’s on track, and ready for kindergarten,” Johnson said, adding: “I think we’re both going to be sad when she has to leave, but she’s a big girl now.”

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Pritzker launches first TV spots, campaign theme

By Rick Pearson
Chicago Tribune

Just days after making his reelection bid official, Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker is launching the first TV ads of the 2022 race for governor with three spots looking at Illinoisans’ response to the pandemic that unveil his campaign’s theme: “Strong leadership in tough times.”

The 30-second spots, scheduled to break Saturday, feature Pritzker telling the stories of a nurse who volunteered as part of the state’s COVID-19 response, a National Guard member involved in testing and vaccinations and the owners of a small distillery who shifted their business from bourbon to hand sanitizer.

The people and businesses featured in the ads are from Downstate — Springfield, Belleville and Rochelle — a region where Pritzker is weakest amid opposition to the phased mitigation restrictions he imposed to deal with the pandemic.

“It’s the people of Illinois all across the state who

came together during tough times to lead the effort to save lives and protect livelihoods during the state’s response to the COVID pandemic,” Pritzker said in a statement that went out with the new ads.

“It’s the people of Illinois who motivate me every day and I’m excited to be running for reelection to continue to lift up working families and move Illinois in the right direction,” he said.

Pritzker has contended opposition to his efforts to deal with the pandemic has been led by a “loud” minority of citizens.

But Republicans have sought to play off the criticism and the three announced GOP challengers, Bull Valley businessman Gary Rabine, state Sen. Darren Bailey of Xenia and former state Sen. Paul Schimpf of Waterloo, have been ardent opponents of Pritzker’s restrictions.

The campaign did not release details of the extent of the ad buy, which comes 11 months before the June 28 primary, where Pritzker faces no serious opposition.

On the way to defeating one-term Republican

Gov. Bruce Rauner, Pritzker began his TV campaign in February 2017 — more than a year before the 2018 primary. Unlike this time around, Pritzker was in a crowded field of Democrats seeking the primary nomination, and the wealthy heir to the Hyatt Hotel fortune needed to introduce himself to Illinois voters.

Pritzker on Friday also announced veteran Democratic campaign operative Mike Ollen will be his 2022 campaign manager. Ollen most recently was involved in Sarah Gideon’s unsuccessful challenge to Republican U.S. Sen. Susan Collins in Maine.

Quentin Fulks, who had been in charge of Pritzker’s political operation, including the unsuccessful push to change the state from a flat-rate income tax to a graduated-rate system, has been named campaign manager for Georgia U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock.

Warnock took office in January, helping give Democrats control of the Senate, and is seeking a full six-year term next year.

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