

Meridian Health Plan of Illinois and Centene Foundation Award \$2.2 Million Grant to Safer Foundation for Purchase and Renovation of Affordable Housing Building in Chicago - Jan 29, 2026

*Safer Foundation to Offer 23 Affordable Rental Units for Underserved Individuals in the Austin Neighborhood*

CHICAGO, Jan. 29, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- [Meridian Health Plan of Illinois](#), Inc. (Meridian) and the [Centene Foundation](#) today announced a \$2.2 million grant to [Safer Foundation](#) (Safer), one of the nation's largest nonprofits providing reentry assistance for more than 50 years, for the purchase and renovation of an apartment building in Chicago's South Austin neighborhood. The grant supported Safer's purchase of the building at 146-150 N. Central Avenue and renovations of its affordable units that will be available in 2026.

Meridian, a leading managed care organization in Illinois and a company of [Centene Corporation](#) (NYSE: CNC), along with the Centene Foundation—the philanthropic arm of Centene Corporation—jointly awarded the grant to Safer Foundation. The purchase of the 23-unit building adds to Safer's affordable housing portfolio that provides stable housing to individuals returning to community living and those transitioning from institutional or supportive care settings.

Initial renovations at Safer Foundation's new building have been completed, including cleaning the exterior grounds and repairing security gates for the parking area. Renovations will include security upgrades, structural repairs, new roofing, electrical and HVAC systems, lead remediation, updated kitchens and bathrooms, fresh paint, new flooring, and modern appliances. The building will provide a variety of housing options for individuals and families seeking assistance, including 15 one-bedroom units, four two-bedroom units, and four three-bedroom units. Safer Foundation expects renovations to be completed for occupancy in 2026.

Safer Foundation will maintain the affordable housing for the community and designate some of the 23 units for justice-involved individuals. Four units may house Colbert & Williams program graduates, including those reintegrating from institutional or supportive care environments. These units aim to provide stability as residents transition toward self-sufficiency.

According to the City of Chicago's annual [Point-in-Time \(PIT\)](#) count, 18,836 individuals were experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2024 — a sharp increase from the 6,139 counted in 2023. The 2025 PIT count identified 7,452 individuals experiencing homelessness, which represents a 21.4% increase over the 2023 total. The assessment also found that 35% of people experiencing homelessness have a history of incarceration.

"There is a clear and growing shortage of affordable, accessible housing—especially in Cook County," said Cristal Gary, Meridian Plan President and CEO. "By partnering with Safer Foundation, we're not just expanding housing—we're delivering a comprehensive, strength-based model that meets people where they are and helps them build toward long-term stability. At Meridian, we're committed to closing economic and social gaps, and that includes investing in the critical infrastructure—like housing—that empowers individuals, families, and entire communities to thrive."

"Safer Foundation, with the vital financial support of Meridian and Centene Foundation, is proud to announce this important addition in our rapidly expanding affordable housing portfolio. This funding allows us to further our mission of providing affordable housing opportunities for the local community, including hard-working returning residents and their families," said Victor Dickson, Safer Foundation President and CEO. "Stable housing is one of our most fundamental needs, and without it, individuals and families, whether they have records or not, face immense challenges in leading productive lives. This partnership is instrumental in our holistic approach to creating lasting social impact in the communities we serve."

Prospective residents for Safer Foundation's affordable housing are referred by its program navigators or can apply directly by calling (844) 442-2227 for housing support, and all applicants must undergo a formal application process.

For more information on Meridian's community impact and its support of local organizations working to close care gaps and address health-related social needs, visit [ILMeridian.com/IL-first](https://www.ilmeridian.com/IL-first).

### **About Meridian Health Plan of Illinois**

Meridian Health Plan of Illinois, Inc. and its family of health plans provide government-sponsored managed care to families, children, seniors, and individuals with complex medical needs. This includes Meridian's Medicaid Plan, YouthCare HealthChoice Illinois, Wellcare (Medicare Advantage plans), Wellcare By Meridian (Medicare-Medicaid plans), and Ambetter Marketplace plans. Meridian connects members to care and offers comprehensive services to support lifelong health and wellness. Meridian is a company of Centene Corporation, a leading healthcare enterprise committed to helping people live healthier lives. Learn more at [ILmeridian.com](https://www.ilmeridian.com).

### **About Centene Corporation**

Centene Corporation, a Fortune 500 company, is a leading healthcare enterprise that is committed to helping people live healthier lives. The Company takes a local approach - with local brands and local teams - to provide fully integrated, high-quality, and cost-effective services to government-sponsored and commercial healthcare programs, focusing on under insured and uninsured individuals. Centene offers affordable and high-quality products to nearly 1 in 15 individuals across the nation,

including Medicaid and Medicare members (including Medicare Prescription Drugs Plans) as well as individuals and families served by the Health Insurance Marketplace and the TRICARE program. The Company also contracts with other healthcare and commercial organizations to provide a variety of specialty services focused on treating the whole person. Centene focuses on long-term growth and value creation as well as the development of its people, systems, and capabilities so that it can better serve its members, providers, local communities, and government partners.

Centene uses its investor relations website to publish important information about the Company, including information that may be deemed material to investors. Financial and other information about Centene is routinely posted and is accessible on Centene's investor relations website, <https://investors.centene.com/>.

### **About Safer Foundation**

Safer Foundation (Safer) is an Illinois-based nonprofit organization dedicated to delivering stabilizing reentry supports and opportunities for people with arrest and conviction records, improving the socio-economic well-being of the individual, their families, and their communities.

Since its founding in 1972, Safer has empowered tens of thousands of individuals to rebuild their lives and realize their true potential through providing housing and other holistic supports including job placement, education, health services, and advocacy. With its headquarters in Chicago and locations throughout the Midwest, today the organization serves more than 4,200 people annually.

For more information about Safer Foundation's programs, please visit [www.saferfoundation.org](http://www.saferfoundation.org) or follow Safer on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

SOURCE Meridian of Illinois

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[\(2\)](#)

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