

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

House panel told Gaetz paid for sex

Attorney: Client said she saw lawmaker in tryst with 17-year-old

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two women told House Ethics Committee investigators that former Rep. Matt Gaetz, who has been nominated to be attorney general in the next Trump administration, paid them for sex, and one of the women testified she saw him having sex with a 17-year-old, according to an attorney for the women.

Joel Leppard, who represents the two women, described the testimony his clients gave the House ethics panel, which has been investigating the Florida Republican over allegations of sex trafficking involving a 17-year-old girl. The Justice Department separately ended its own sex trafficking investigation into Gaetz without criminal charges.

The House committee's inves-

tigation effectively ended last week when Gaetz resigned from Congress after Trump nominated him to lead the Justice Department.

Gaetz has denied ever having a relationship with a 17-year-old, and any other wrongdoing. A lawyer who has represented Gaetz said he would not answer any questions when reached Tuesday for comment.

A Trump transition spokesperson said Tuesday that they are "baseless allegations intended to derail the second Trump administration," adding that the Justice Department "investigated Gaetz for years and cleared him of wrongdoing."

Gaetz is facing mounting scrutiny over the allegations, which threaten to complicate his path to confirmation as the nation's top federal law enforcement offi-



Gaetz

cer. Several Republicans in the Senate have expressed concern about his nomination or declined to say publicly whether they will support him.

Leppard told ABC News, CNN and other news outlets that one of his clients saw Gaetz having sex with her then-17-year-old friend at a party in 2017 in Florida, while Gaetz was serving in Congress. The attorney told NBC

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A SAFE HAVEN

Chicago seen as a refuge for homeless youth in uncertain climate

By Caroline Kubzansky | Chicago Tribune

Bri Johnson's ambition is hard to miss. The 20-year-old is studying to be a medical assistant and will soon start applying for externships at several local hospitals. Her next big goal is buying a car — "a nice car that's going to get me from point A to point B."

But the thing that topped Johnson's list of priorities on a fall afternoon, days before she moved into an apartment in Little Village, was getting a white desk and decorating her place, where she was set to live with a roommate. After years of temporary living situations, she was "happy and excited and ready to be on my own."

Johnson, who until late October had been one of estimated thousands of homeless young

Above: Bri Johnson, 20, stands in a bedroom while moving belongings into an apartment in the Little Village neighborhood after moving out of a youth homeless shelter in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood earlier the same day on Sept. 15. **TESS CROWLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

people in Chicago, spent years in foster care and later on staying with relatives in Illinois and Mississippi. She was matter-of-fact about where that left her: "Long story short, I didn't have nowhere to go."

Homeless youth like Johnson tend to be less visible than other segments of the city's homeless population, typically sheltering with friends or family in temporary living situations as opposed to the tent cities that have drawn significant attention from media and residents. Experts say this group, whose ages range from 18 to 24 and tend to be disproportionately Black, have needs distinct from their school-age counterparts and older people without homes.

That has begun to be recognized. Last month, Chicago and Cook County officials, advocates and social service providers initiated a 2½-year

Turn to Homeless, Page 4

Proposed property tax hike cut in half

Johnson says new plan, with \$150M increase, 'is not the final budget'

By Jake Sheridan
Chicago Tribune

Mayor Brandon Johnson is now proposing hiking Chicago property taxes by \$150 million, down from his original \$300 million recommendation for 2025 that was unanimously struck down by the City Council last week.

But he stopped short Tuesday of saying he has the votes in the council to pass even the smaller increase.

Johnson's new budget plan closes the remaining \$150 million hole in next year's budget by instead raising taxes on streaming subscriptions and the digital lease of "cloud" computing space. As negotiations over the \$17.3 billion package continue, the proposal is just that — a proposal — the mayor insisted Tuesday.

"This is not the final budget," Johnson said at a City Hall news conference. "My responsibility is to present a budget that's balanced. Working with the City Council to actually pass that budget requires me to remain as collaborator-in-chief."

Johnson last week described the \$300 million property tax he broke a campaign promise to initially propose as a ploy to "get people's attention" once it became clear the City Council would reject the measure. Aldermen united for a rare 50-0 vote to defeat the tax at a special meeting Thursday.

It's a common tactic for the mayor and aldermen to present a large property tax hike proposal, then reduce it so they can make the case to homeowners that they spared them an even bigger financial hit. Asked Tuesday if the property tax could come down even further, Johnson emphasized

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INSIDE



RAY GORA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE 1973

'One of the original Bulls greats'

Bob Love, a three-time All-Star who played nine seasons in Chicago, died Monday at 81 after a long battle with cancer. He was known for his on-court tenacity and off-court kindness. Plus, Paul Sullivan writes how Love overcame all obstacles to help make Chicago a pro basketball town. **Chicago Sports**

Lake Michigan water levels drop to lowest in years

Experts cite warmer temperatures, low precipitation as causes

By Vivian La

Lake Michigan's water levels have dropped below long-term averages for the first time in 10 years. Experts said factors like this fall's warmer temperatures and low precipitation have affected lake levels — the same factors that make it tricky to predict this winter's lake outlook.

In addition ation will depend on how the cooling pattern from an emerging La Nina will play out in the Midwest.

"It's a complicated picture," said Lauren Fry, a scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Great to seasonal variables, lake levels and ice formLakes Environmental

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Lake levels are low near Diversey Harbor in Chicago on Tuesday. **TESS CROWLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

TODAY'S WEATHER



High 48 Low 31

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 14

\$4.00 city and suburbs and elsewhere
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