

Gov. Pritzker Announces Deputy Governor, IDHS Transitions

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CHICAGO - Today, Governor JB Pritzker announced the upcoming departure of Deputy Governor Sol Flores, who has served as Deputy Governor for Health and Human Services since the beginning of the Governor's first term in January of 2019. The Deputy Governor position will be filled by Grace Hou, current Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). Prior to serving as Deputy Governor, Flores was the founding Executive Director of La Casa Norte, a non-profit organization established in 2002 serving youth and families confronting homelessness.

"Sol Flores has dedicated countless hours of work and a lifetime of expertise to my administration over the last four and a half years; she has led with a focused tenacity, passion and energy, and I am incredibly grateful for her years of service," said Governor

JB Pritzker. “Although she will be missed at IDHS, Secretary Hou has been a partner in some of our largest and most impactful initiatives, and I’m looking forward to accomplishing even more together.”

Throughout the last five years, Flores championed the expansion of healthcare access and the restoration of the human services safety network, bringing an equity lens and focus on Illinois’ most vulnerable individuals. Sol led COVID-19 response efforts from testing and vaccines to one of the most successful rental assistance programs nationally to keep people housed. From the Governor’s Office she spearheaded a strategic plan with the HHS state agencies to break down silos and develop comprehensive interagency strategies and collaboration including Census 2020, the Home Illinois Plan, healthcare expansion and managed the state’s response to the influx of migrants from the Southern border.

Sol Flores was the founding Executive Director and built La Casa Norte from two employees to a multi-million-dollar organization that delivers inspiration, hope and critical services to the lives of families, and youth experiencing homelessness. Flores was raised by a single mother who came to Chicago from Puerto Rico and has been recognized as a national Champion of Change for her work by the Obama White House. Beginning in November, Flores will head a Chicago based family foundation.

Grace Hou has served as IDHS Secretary since March of 2019. Prior to that appointment, she was the President of Woods Fund Chicago. Secretary Hou led IDHS through the COVID-19 emergency into a period of critical human services recovery, expanding the agency’s impact and scope of responsibilities through an equity and racial justice lens. Under her leadership, IDHS expanded to the largest headcount and budget in its history – and established a standalone Early Childhood Division. Her work alongside Deputy Governor Flores also launched an unprecedented investment in public safety in state history through the Reimagine Public Safety Act. The daughter of immigrants, Hou is a lifelong Illinoisan who also served as the Assistant Secretary at IDHS from 2003 to 2012.

“Looking back at the last four and a half years, I see a state that had suffered years of disinvestment and mismanagement that now leads the nation in providing progressive and efficient health and human services care,” said Deputy Governor Sol Flores. “It’s been my honor to serve the Governor in making our shared dream of a better Illinois a reality—and I know I leave my office in the strongest possible hands as Secretary Hou continues her exemplary record of service.”

“My heart will always be with the IDHS clients, staff, providers, families and all individuals touched by human and social services in Illinois,” said IDHS Secretary Grace Hou. “In recent years, IDHS has met the challenges of the pandemic and its

lasting impact while also eliminating the Medicaid backlog, anchoring the Smart Start plan, implementing the Reimagine Public Safety Act, and much more. The lessons and inspiration from my time at IDHS will propel me in this new role, and I am so grateful.”

Deputy Governor Flores’s final day will be October 13th. Grace Hou will begin as the new Deputy Governor for Health and Human Services on October 9. On the same day, Dulce M. Quintero will become Acting Secretary of IDHS.

“It is an honor to lead the largest state agency and to continue building on this administration’s ongoing legacy of inclusion and equity for all,” said IDHS Assistant Secretary Dulce Quintero. “At IDHS, our message is clear: ‘Help is here.’ It’s a simple mission, but one that comes with complexity and enormous responsibility. The work continues to make our services streamlined, accessible and relevant when it comes to what vulnerable Illinoisans need today not only to survive, but to be empowered to thrive.”

Quintero has served as Assistant Secretary of Operations at IDHS since 2019. Quintero’s strategic vision helped lead the department’s COVID response with a focus on equity. Quintero is a longtime and prominent community builder and innovator in the fields of health care and human services, with a particular focus on LGBTQ+ services and advocacy. Before joining IDHS, Quintero served as Director of Operations for the Erie Humboldt Park Health Center and founded the Casa Corazon Youth Drop-in Program at La Casa Norte, one of Chicago’s few safe spaces serving LGBTQ+ youth on the West Side. Quintero was born in Mexico to migrant farm workers and moved to Chicago at the age of nine.