

# Illinois shut down his group home network over risk to residents. Now he's been convicted of health care for unneeded medical tests.

*Christy Gutowski*

The head of a shuttered Chicago-area network of group homes for adults with disabilities has been convicted of accepting kickbacks in a scheme to steer biological samples to a St. Louis laboratory for publicly funded testing.

A federal jury found Reuben F. Goodwin Sr., 53, guilty of 11 counts of health care fraud and a conspiracy-related charge earlier this month in Missouri. A sentencing hearing is set for July 12.

The state-funded group homes run by Goodwin were among those spotlighted in a [November 2016 Tribune investigation](#) that detailed deaths, injuries and mistreatment inside various facilities and day programs across Illinois. The Illinois Department of Human Services [revoked Goodwin's license](#) to operate his facilities after state inspectors visited the properties and determined that all 45 residents faced an "imminent risk" of harm.

In a federal indictment the following year, prosecutors said Goodwin and an employee, Phillip L. Jones, were part of a kickback plot with the St. Louis medical lab to split profits from [Medicare](#) and Medicaid reimbursements for medically unauthorized tests. Goodwin and Jones acted as marketers for the owners of the lab, collecting blood, saliva and urine specimens in 2014 and 2015 from large public fairs and churches in Indiana and Illinois, according to the indictment.

Authorities said the men also targeted residents with "severe" mental health issues who lived in a Goodwin facility and could not travel to a doctor's office on their own. Many of the tests performed by the lab were never approved by a doctor, despite documentation submitted by the defendants indicating that a treating physician had ordered the tests.

"We have no reason to believe that those patients understood the nature of the testing that was being ordered or performed," the U.S. attorney's office for the Eastern District of Missouri said in a statement to the Tribune.

Jones, 58, of Markham, was convicted at trial with Goodwin of similar fraud and conspiracy charges and awaits sentencing as well. He declined to comment Monday.

Attempts to reach Goodwin, of Richton Park, were unsuccessful. His attorney in the federal case, citing the upcoming sentencing hearing, declined to comment.

After the Tribune questioned state officials in late 2016 about serious problems at state-funded homes run by Goodwin's Disability Services of Illinois, officials cited the nonprofit business for "willfully violating the rights of individuals with disabilities" and repeated failures to correct problems. His network previously was known as Southwest Disabilities Services & Supports, which is the name used in the federal indictment.

Goodwin's network included eight homes on Chicago's South Side and in the south suburbs. He fought in court to keep his license, but state officials confirmed Monday he remains unlicensed and is unable to operate a group home in Illinois. The criminal conviction also makes him ineligible to bill Medicare for a time period to be determined by federal officials.

The Tribune's "Suffering in Secret" investigative series showed how Illinois had steered thousands of the state's poorest and most vulnerable residents with disabilities into a network of state-funded group homes, then routinely obscured evidence of harm from the public.

Reporters found the public often was unaware of deaths and mistreatment because of secrecy and inaccurate reporting. In response, state officials retracted erroneous reports and made reforms.

In court proceedings as well as earlier Tribune interviews, Goodwin has defended his group homes and staff training.

But his businesses, which operated under various names, had a long history of health and safety violations.

Equip for Equality, Illinois' federally empowered disability-rights watchdog, alleged his operation in the early 2000s had hazardous conditions and financial mismanagement. At the time, it was called These are God's People Too.

The state then tried three times to cancel contracts with those businesses. Goodwin challenged Equip for Equality's findings and said he fixed problems in his homes. He and his supporters alleged racial discrimination. Officials from then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich's office intervened to keep Goodwin's group home network open.

Southwest Disabilities continued operating state-funded group homes, but problems persisted.

In more recent years, four arms of state government documented serious concerns about conditions faced by people living in Southwest Disabilities homes. Human Services twice barred Goodwin's group homes from accepting new residents, then lifted those bans after the problems were fixed, records show.

Deborah Kennedy, vice president of Equip for Equality's abuse investigation unit, said the federal case should put an end to the long saga. She and Zena Naiditch, the group's president, said the state's oversight of the system and response to violations have improved in recent years, and such problematic providers as Goodwin have become more rare.

“The department jumps in quicker, puts in monitors and pulls together various divisions to try to come up with solutions,” Kennedy said. “(Goodwin) and whatever name he was using was a very, very problematic provider, and problems at that level are not something we’re seeing now throughout the system.”

Federal prosecutors said Goodwin faces a possible penalty of five years in prison for conspiring to solicit and receive illegal kickbacks and conspiring to commit health care fraud, and 10 years for each of the 11 health care fraud counts, as well as a \$250,000 fine on each count.

The sentencing guidelines are advisory, though, and the judge may instead grant probation. Goodwin did not have a prior criminal history.

The lab’s managing partner, Anthony B. Camillo, 62, of Collinsville, Ill., pleaded guilty in March 2018 to his role in the scheme and is awaiting sentencing.

It is unclear how much Goodwin profited, but the federal indictment included a June 2015 email in which Camillo told Goodwin the lab had paid his business “around \$105,000” in 2014.

In an August 2014 email, Goodwin told Camillo he and Jones expected about 200 participants at an upcoming fair and added, “If you need us to slow down please let me know because we have rather large fairs in Indiana booked for the next 3 months and (Jones) and I need to be able to manage the expenses,” according to the indictment.

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