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CONTENTS

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Headlines	3
Culture	8
Business	10
Government.....	13
Education.....	20
Sports	25
Stay Connected	30



Delaware Artists State Fellowship Awards 2024



DSU President Condemns Elon Musk Tweet



Riders Edge Bucs in Showdown

photo link: White Clay Creek State Park



Headlines

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HOUSE, SENATE REPUBLICANS SHOWCASE BILLS THEY PLAN TO PUSH

BY BETSY PRICE

House and Senate Republicans on Wednesday showed a new spirit of cooperation—and a determination to get proposals they consider common sense out in front of the public—by holding a joint press conference.

The focus Wednesday was on GOP bills that would curb future governors' unrestricted use of emergency powers by requiring legislative review and give the legislature and therefore average citizens who elected representatives more say on regulations created by state agencies, specifically things like the electric vehicle ones.

But the real intent seems to be to raise their profile and public awareness of their efforts in a General Assembly heavily dominated by Democrats who can shove a huge amount of their agenda through the legislative body without a single vote from Republicans and while ignoring their bills.

The results often left Republicans positioned as the uncooperating, naysaying bad guys constantly opposing progress.

Democrats also control the committees and have the power to allow bills to come up for hearings, which are necessary before they go to the House and Senate floor.

In the last few years, there's been several examples of Republican bills that went nowhere, but in subsequent years flew through the assembly once they essentially came back under a Democratic sponsor.

The Republicans had another point they wanted to make, voiced in different ways by different representatives: They don't just represent Republicans.

"This is an effort by us to make sure that we are representing Delawareans and Delaware, not Republicans, not Democrats, not blue, not red," said House Minority Leader Mike Ramone, R-Newark.

REPUBLICAN LIMIT ON EMERGENCY POWERS

Rep. Rich Collins' House Bill 245, which would require the General Assembly to approve the extension of a state of emergency order after 180 days, is the second version of the bill to be introduced.

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STATE SHOULD CONSIDER DROPPING PLAN FOR TUNNEL, DESIGNERS SAY

BY BETSY PRICE

Designers involved in the construction of a \$22 million parking garage across from Legislative Hall have recommended the state cancel plans to build a private underground tunnel connecting the structures.

The tunnel originally was estimated to cost \$2 million, but will be closer to \$3.7 million, partly because its base would lay only 6 feet above sea level in an area that also is affected by the St. Jones River and has to routinely deal with rising water. The tunnel cost will be nearly double the original estimate and will require ongoing maintenance that will mount up over the years, said Philip Conte with [StudioJAED](#) during Friday's meeting of the [Legislative Building Committee](#).

The garage and tunnel are part of a larger plan that includes a 57,000-square-foot addition to Leg Hall.

They were expected to cost \$113 million, but now are projected at \$122 million, Comet said. The pedestrian tunnel is designed to only be used by legislators and staff, to allow them to safely walk to and from private restricted parking on the first floor of the planned three-story garage.

Research already has found three buried power lines, which may feed nearby streetlamps, that will have to be dealt with. The tunnel itself would require power for air circulation, pumps, lights and sprinklers, he said.

The amount of earth moved would need to be much larger than the tunnel itself to allow workers to maneuver, and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard would have to be closed or have reduced access during construction, which would include the January-June legislative session.

Comte suggested the committee consider whether the cost-benefit ratio is worth the price of construction and maintenance, especially compared to the amount of time it would be needed and used.

TUNNEL OR DEATH?

In addition, he pointed out, the narrow nature of the tunnel may bother some people. He showed a diagram depicting two people walking through the tunnel.

Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden, asked how the firm had handled tunnel projects for hospitals and schools. He was told that virtually all of the plans ended up being some kind of elevated walkway, but designers stayed away from that option for Dover because they don't want to interfere with the historic look of Legislative Hall, which was built in 1931.

"So you build tunnels or you build bridges," Yearick said.

Another committee member asked whether it was feasible to put the legislator-only parking on the third floor and build a walkway. She was told that it would interfere with the historic brick look and that Delaware Tech had concerns with the walkways on their Wilmington campus.

Comte told the committee that designer didn't need an immediate answer but would need to know as the design work continues.

"Anything is doable," he said, but he wanted the committee to be fully informed.

One committee member asked whether the company had contacted DelDOT to ask whether some kind of traffic-calming work could be done on MLK, which is where the street parkers will have to cross.

[READ MORE HERE](#)

WILMINGTON COUNCIL: MAKE PARENTS PAY FOR CHILD'S CAR CRIMES

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Wilmington City Council is considering making parents pay for damages caused by their minor children who break into or damage cars. Carjacking and thefts of personal belongings in cars has been a major problem in cities across the country and Wilmington is no exception.

Some of this was sparked by a [TikTok dare](#) in which people—typically teenagers—break into cars, often documenting the process of hardwiring the vehicle to steal it. Known as the “Kia Boyz TikTok Challenge,” as certain Kia and Hyundai models were particularly quick and easy to steal. The cars were targeted so much that the [Wilmington Police Department](#) gave away steering wheel locks to prevent thefts.

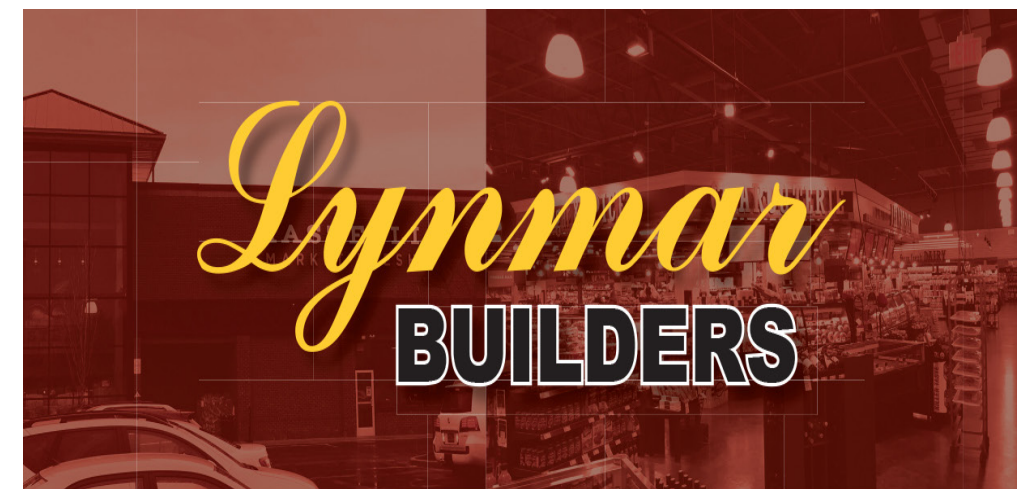
In Monday night’s Joint Finance & Economic Development and Public Safety Committee meeting, a resolution was introduced to address the problem. Sponsored by District 6 Councilwoman Yolanda

McCoy, chair of the Public Safety Committee, the resolution urges the Delaware General Assembly to enact legislation that would make parents liable for auto insurance deductibles in motor vehicle crimes.

“We’ve been having a surge of crime here within the city, which has been going on for some time,” McCoy said. “Now we realize that what’s happening is it’s minors who are taking part in most of these issues with vandalism to the cars, the stealing of the cars and things of that nature.”

The proposal would amend Delaware Code to mandate that when a minor has been found or pled guilty to criminal mischief, carjacking, theft or any crime that results in damage to or loss of a motor vehicle, the parents or guardian of that minor are liable to pay any deductible of the vehicle owner who submits an insurance claim for repair or replacement.

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STATE WORKER HEALTH INSURANCE TO RISE 22%, ADD \$50M COST

BY BETSY PRICE

The state of Delaware will need at least an additional \$50 million dollars in fiscal 2025 to pay for increases in the cost of employee health insurance, which is expected to see premium rises of up to 22%. Ruth Ann Miller, controller general, said the program will have a shortfall of \$15 million by April 1 and will need \$22 million by June 30, the end of Delaware's fiscal year 2024.

Miller on Thursday told the [Legislative Council](#)—a group comprised of the leadership of the House and Senate—that the insurance hike is just one example of an extra “door-opener” expenditure that will eat up the state's ability to raise its annual budget 5.9%. Other examples include \$80 million from the Medicaid program in the Department of Health and Social Services and \$40 million from the Department of Education.

“So very quickly all of those costs will eat up that allowable growth,” Miller said.

Her office is waiting on Gov. John Carney's proposed budget, which will be released Jan. 25, and then will send that to the Joint Finance Committee, a bipartisan committee of legislators who allot state money using the proposed budget as a base.

INSURANCE SPLIT

The state splits health insurance costs with its employees. An employee's personal cost for a premium could increase anywhere from \$91 to \$887 per year, while the state's split may be anywhere from \$2,171 to \$5,857 per employee.

The expected costs were calculated by the State Employee Benefits Committee, Miller said.

Miller said she and Cade Cerron, director of the state Office of Management and Budget, would be coming back to the Legislative Council with some suggestions

on how to solve the insurance problem in this fiscal year.

Delaware's annual budget limit is determined through a process called benchmarking, which allows Delaware to budget a specific amount to spend after first steering other monies into places such as the Rainy Day Fund.

Miller also said:

- Hearing notices for the agencies requesting money from the Joint Finance Committee have gone out. Those meetings start Jan. 30 and will be held every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for four weeks, starting at 10 a.m. The public is welcome to attend in person as well as to listen in or testify by Zoom.
- The state needs to do a mini bond bill this year. The bond bill committee will meet Thursday, Jan. 18, to discuss that.
- The Community Reinvestment Fund will open grant applications Feb. 15 and close May 15. Awards will be contingent on available funding.
- The Grant-in-Aid application period has ended, with the state receiving 356 applications. That's up from the usual 310-315.





photo link: Delaware Ballet

Culture

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20 DELAWARE ARTISTS GIVEN 2024 STATE FELLOWSHIP AWARDS

BY BETSY PRICE

A Wilmington composer was given the Delaware Division of the Arts' top fellowship award in its 2024 list of state artists. Mark Hagerty was named the 2024 Master Fellow, an honor that comes with a \$12,000 stipend for the artist. He was chosen from applications of those who previously had won an Established Professional Award and covered the fields of dance, jazz and music. He is one of 20 Delaware residents from up and down the state to be honored with the state-funded fellowships in three categories, chosen from a field of 149 applicants.

An award-winning, highly individualistic composer. Hagerty's work is inspired by theoretical physics and chaotic systems. He increasingly is dedicated to using music in the service of social change and has an ongoing collaboration with the urban spoken-word Twin Poets, Delaware's poets laureate.

Hagerty was classically trained as an instrumentalist and singer and studied composition at Oberlin in Brandeis before following his own path outside of any tradition or institution. Early in his career, he was awarded the prestigious Joseph H. Bearn's Prize from Columbia University for his "String Quartet: Formations." He previously received a state Individual Artist Fellowship for "The Realm of Possibility," a multi-movement piano work of flexible form, the recording of which received 5-star ratings in Fanfare for its "revelatory new sounds," "elements that are by turns dramatic, amusing, thrilling, and lovely," and its "plateaux of great beauty."

The state fellowships come with a stipend and requirement to create an opportunity for the public to experience their work. Established professionals are given \$8,000 and Emerging professionals are given \$5,000,

which can be used to further training, provide work material or otherwise advance their careers.

INDIVIDUAL ARTIST AWARDS

The Established Fellows include:

Maya Belardo, jazz: performance, Wilmington
 David Burslem, visual arts: sculpture, Arden
 Lori Crawford, visual arts: interdisciplinary, Dover
 Richard Hill Jr., jazz: composition, Wilmington
 Shakira Hunt, visual arts: photography, Wilmington
 Michael Kardos, literature: fiction, Rehoboth Beach
 Victor Letonoff, literature: creative nonfiction, Lewes
 Rebecca Raubacher, visual arts: painting, Rehoboth Beach
 L.J. Sysko, literature: poetry, Wilmington
 Trebs Thompson, visual arts: crafts, Newark

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photo link: [Bethany Beach Events & Entertainment](#)

Business

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BILL BANNING PAYING DISABLED LESS TAKES EFFECT THIS MONTH

BY PETER OSBORNE

Laura Randa started her search for a new headquarters with a list of 232 possible locations across the country before Delaware jumped to the top of the list.

“Our final decision to move Toivoa and Toivoa Coaching’s headquarters to Delaware was made when Delaware passed legislation to eliminate subminimum wage for people with disabilities,” Randa said.

“We hope to make Delaware the capital of the digital therapeutics industry,” she added. “That includes training and hiring 1,000 certified mental-health coaches over the next decade” to address the nationwide shortage of mental-health clinicians.

Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act authorizes employers, after receiving a certificate for the U.S. Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division, to pay wages less than the Federal minimum wage to workers who have disabilities for the work being performed. The General Assembly in late June 2021 passed legislation in a

near unanimous vote to phase out subminimum wages.

Final implementation will happen at the end of January. The bill was named the Jamie Wolfe Employment Act in honor of the tireless advocate of rights for Delaware’s disabled who passed away in 2018.

“We adopted a delayed approach to implementation to allow both workers with disabilities and employers a transitional period,” said House Sponsor Rep. Debra Heffernan (D-6), whose district covers much of northeast Wilmington. “This was to help facilitate a smooth transition, enabling individuals with disabilities and their families to find meaningful employment or training in a new setting.”

Heffernan said “jobs for people with disabilities has been a prime focus for me since first being elected. One of my first bills, in 2012, transformed Delaware into an Employment First state.”

Individuals with disabilities in Employment First

states receive state services, including members of the service-related industry. They are considered for placement in integrated employment making minimum wage or above before other placements (such as in sheltered workshops).

“Having a job is one of the most important steps to living a productive and independent life,” Heffernan said. “Paying a worker with disabilities less than minimum wage is pure and simple discrimination. Getting rid of the subminimum wage and sheltered workshops allows our state to acknowledge the value of every Delawarean with and without disabilities.”

“We have seen a few employers drop out of the program and a few more cutting back on how many they hire,” said Jim Greenwell, vice president of finance for Milford-based Kent-Sussex Industries.

It is a private nonprofit vocation rehabilitation organization that provides employment and training services to individuals with intellectual, mental, physical and emotional disabilities who live in Kent, Sussex, and lower New Castle County.

Greenwell said KSI has about 90 program participants at different stages of entering the workforce. About one-third are working in the community for 20-40 hours per week. KSI has been paying in-house program participants the minimum wage for the past eight years or so, he said.

The General Assembly passed a bill in June 2021 that would raise the minimum wage by at least \$1 per year until the state rate reached \$15 in January 2025. Since the start of 2021, Delaware’s minimum hourly rate has increased from \$10.50 to \$13.25 as of January 1, 2024.

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Government

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EDUCATOR PAY REPORT GETS MOSTLY WARM WELCOME FROM LEGISLATORS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Delaware state senators and representatives didn't revolt when they got their first bite at recommendations for higher educator pay that would cost the state hundreds of millions in coming years. But questions did arise in Thursday's joint House And Senate Education committees meeting that lasted about 1¼ hours.

They included concern about poorer districts' ability to pay their 30% share of salaries, whether incentives should be created for high-performing teachers, whether the state was chasing arbitrary salary numbers from other states, and whether the state also should look at other issues such as classroom discipline that affect teacher morale and retention.

The salary recommendation came from the final report of the 15-person Public Education Compensation Committee, which met all year. Secretary of Education Mark Holodick and Kim Klein, associate secretary of operations at the [Department of Education](#), presented

the final report of the Public Education Compensation Committee to the joint meeting.

"What I see here in terms of compensation looks good to me...with minimal study so far, but I like the concept of what you're doing," said Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro. There are other issues in education he worries about, including teacher attendance. Superintendents have told him many take off Fridays for a three-day weekend.

"We ought to consider some sort of incentive program through this," he said. He believes teachers don't want to be in the classroom because of the lack of discipline for misbehaving students.

"If we look at a comprehensive package to solve our fundamental problems, I would think this would be the ideal place to try and address it to some extent," Collins said. "In other words, give the teacher a better working environment combined with higher pay."

He also wants the state to keep taxpayers in mind, especially because of inflation and with property reassessments taking place in New Castle and Sussex counties.

"I would think it would be reasonable to at least look at any other area we could to see where we might be able to find cuts, to try and keep the burden on the taxpayers to something that they can afford," Collins said.

PAY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The pay committee evaluated the five education groups in Delaware Code, as well as two employee groups that are not listed: teachers, custodians, nurses, bus drivers, administrators, secretaries, information technology workers, paraprofessionals and food service workers.

The committee was formed to make Delaware regionally competitive with salaries to strengthen its educator pipeline and ensure the recruitment and retention of school employees. Notable pressure came from neighboring Maryland, which passed a law that would increase the starting salaries of teachers to \$60,000 by 2026.

"You're setting up districts to be challenged to keep good teachers because they're going to be competing against other districts that can afford it," said Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, a former teacher and coach.

He wanted to see data on how other states are raising revenue as well as cost of living.

"I need to really know what the apples to apples are, because if you don't, you start chasing other people's budgets and that gets dangerous," Buckson said. It's an opinion he's expressed before.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



PASSIONATE HOUSE DEBATES FOCUS ON ISRAEL, GAZA CONFLICT

BY BETSY PRICE

Dueling resolutions about the Hamas attacks in Israel and that nation's invasion of Gaza drew intense—but civil—reactions on the first day of the 2024 session of the Delaware House of Representatives Tuesday.

First up was [House Concurrent Resolution No. 80](#), which noted that the attacks and invasion “resulted in catastrophic and heartbreaking losses of human life.” Delaware’s hearts go out to all who are suffering in Delaware and across the world, HR80 said.

The resolution called on the General Assembly to recognize that Delaware is “a state of neighbors bound together by empathy, compassion and a sense that we’re all stronger together. Majority Leader Melissa Minor-Brown, D-New Castle, said her resolutions “affirms that there is no place for hate in our state.”

Rep. Madinah Wilson-Anton, D-Newark, who gained national attention for heckling Vice President Kamala Harris during a speech at a holiday party and demanding a ceasefire, argued that the bill used sanitizing lan-

guage. “We’re whitewashing what’s actually happening,” she said, starting nearly an hour of debates.

More than 1,200 Israelis were killed on Oct. 7, she said. Since then, more than 23,000 Palestinians have been and probably more, hidden by the rubble of bombing by the “apartheid state of Israel.” Palestinians were not even mentioned in the resolution, she pointed out.

“This is not a religious conflict. It’s a situation of settler colonialism,” she said. “Palestinians come from all walks of life, including they’re also Jewish Palestinians. So to simplify this situation to one in which it’s a Muslim-Jewish thing is disingenuous. It’s misleading. And it leads to a conversation where we don’t talk about human rights. We talk about interfaith, or we talk about all of us just getting to know each other and understand each other. It’s not about a religious conflict at all.”

She noted that Minor-Brown did not have a Muslim leader appear before the House, as she did Jewish and other interfaith leaders.

“I don’t know if it was that they were not invited or if it was that they were invited and they were not interested in a charade like this,” Wilson-Anton said. “The word Palestinian is not even mentioned in this resolution,” she said. “The word genocide is not mentioned.”

Even so, she said, she planned to vote for the resolution. “It doesn’t say anything. It doesn’t call us to anything other than to continue to do our jobs, which is to recognize all Delawareans,” she said. “You don’t need a resolution to continue to do that.”

State Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, R-Clayton, who is Jewish, took the floor. However, the House has new wireless microphones and Spiegelman didn’t turn his on—that time—so online listeners have no idea what he said.

The resolution passed unanimously, with one member absent, and Wilson-Anton rose to introduce her [House Resolution 26](#), co-sponsored by Rep. Eric Morrison, D-Glasgow. It recognized the genocide and humanitarian crisis in Gaza and called on the Biden administration and federal delegation from Delaware to support a permanent and lasting ceasefire.

“I think I can say that all of us were horrified by the attacks on Oct. 7,” Wilson-Anton said. “It’s unfortunate that in the aftermath of the terrible attacks, the way that the Israeli government has responded has included indiscriminate bombing of innocent civilians.”

Many are displaced, living without shelter, food, water and electricity, she said. Her social media feeds are filled with photos of injured children, including some said to have undergone amputations without anesthetics.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



ANOTHER ALCOHOL BILL KICKS OFF THIS YEAR'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BY JAREK RUTZ

It's 8 o'clock somewhere!

That's what state senator Laura Sturgeon, D-Hockessin, said with exuberance after a law expanding the hours of alcohol sales in Delaware garnered approval from her fellow legislators.

House Bill 235, sponsored by Rep. Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, allows any individual or business with an alcoholic liquor license to sell at 8 a.m., an hour earlier than the current law of 9 a.m.

HB 235 is one of six alcohol-related bills in Delaware's 152nd General Assembly. The bill is now headed to the governor's desk for signature after unanimous support on the Senate floor Tuesday.

Alcohol licensees cannot sell for on-premises consumption after 1 a.m. They're also allowed to close before 1 a.m. by ordinance of the municipal corporation.

Alcoholic sales are allowed on every day of the year, but licensees are not required to be open to sell alcohol on Sundays, Thanksgiving, Easter or Christmas.

In what was the Senate's first meeting of this year's legislative session, two other bills, both relating to education, were unanimously voted for by all 21 senators and are now on their way to the House for consideration. They are:

- **Senate Bill 187**, sponsored by Sen. Sturgeon, D-Hockessin and chair of the Senate Education Committee, would ensure that educators who earned graduate degrees prior to becoming educators receive credit on the salary schedule for those degrees regardless of the specific subject area of those degrees. Once an individual is employed as an educator, in order to receive credit for any graduate degrees earned after that time, such degree must be in the subject area in which the educator is employed.
- **Senate Bill 188**, also sponsored by Sturgeon, would enact the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact. This would make it easier for teachers to transition to a new state, as their certifications and credentials would

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transfer to other states in the compact. Licenses would require a bachelor's degree and completion of a state-approved program for teacher licensure like a teacher preparation program at a college or university. There was also a notable resolution voted for Tuesday that expresses the General Assembly's concern for the loss of life in the Israel-Hamas war and calls on the legislature and the citizens of Delaware to recognize its common humanity and the shared strength of the state's diversity.

Two Muslim and one Jewish faith leaders shared testimony, involving prayer, poetry and words of unification.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



BY JAREK RUTZ

The Wilmington City Council discussed a proposal Monday night to contract with **St. Francis Hospital** to subsidize emergency ambulance service through 2024. The service mostly is used by the most vulnerable residents of the city, according to St. Francis. It had about 20,000 EMS runs in Wilmington in 2023.

In the council's Joint Finance & Economic Development and Public Safety Committee meeting Monday night, the details of the contract were explained.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Under the deal, Wilmington would pay St. Francis, which is part of the **Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic** network, up to \$3.5 million this year to subsidize the hospital's costs for emergency transports. This comes after Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki announced the city is faced with a potential crisis about emergency

WILMINGTON CONSIDERING \$3.5 MILLION SUBSIDY PLAN FOR EMS SERVICES

ambulance service, which had always been provided to the city without cost by St. Francis Hospital.

Faced with severe financial difficulties, St. Francis told the city in late 2023 that it would not be able to provide ambulance services in 2024. The St. Francis EMS program was available without cost to the city because people who were transported to the hospital were billed by St. Francis for employee and equipment costs through the health insurance program. St. Francis said the billing process was no longer covering the true cost of the service.

In recent weeks, the city administration and St. Francis explored alternative funding options to keep the ambulances running for at least another year. Purzycki said the city also considered having the Wilmington Fire Department add an EMS unit, which is still a possibility. The city also issued a request for proposals to see if another ambulance service could take over from St. Francis, but the only bidder was St. Francis for \$3.5 million.

The most feasible solution, Purzycki has said, is to enable the city to spend up the \$3.5 million.

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SHOULD THOSE 65+ GET MARIJUANA CARD WITHOUT DOC CONSENT?

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that would allow Delawareans 65 or older to obtain a medical marijuana card without their doctor's approval got some pushback Wednesday in a legislative hearing.

House Bill 285, sponsored by Rep. Ed Osienski, D-Newark would allow the state's elders to self-certify for the card without a certification from a health-care provider, circumventing the doctor-patient relationship.

Oseinski said those 65 and older are usually automatically approved for a card by their doctor if they believe they will benefit from it, so the bill would save them a trip to the doctor and the costs that come with that. He also said doctors typically recommend their patients to start small and slow with dosage and then work their way up to make sure their body reacts to it positively.

His move comes 12 to 24 months before the Delaware marijuana industry is expected to be selling legal marijuana.

"Once the recreational market is up and running, basically anybody, if they're 21 years and older, will be able to basically self-certify because it's a recreational market," he said.

The bill would also:

- Remove the requirement that a patient must have a debilitating medical condition to qualify for a registry identification card. Instead, health-care providers would determine whether a patient has a diagnosed medical condition that would benefit therapeutically or palliatively from the use of medical marijuana.
- Modify the issuance process of medical marijuana registry identification cards, which facilitate the acquisition, delivery, possession or transfer of medical marijuana.
- Allow for flexible expiration dates on registry identification cards, enabling 1-, 2- or 3-year expiration dates.

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But a Long Neck representative, who is also an optometrist, had questions in Wednesday's **House Health & Human Development Committee** meeting.

"We know that if you compare a 65-year-old to a 35-year-old, 65-year-olds have reduced reaction time, decreased vision, decreased hearing, decreased taste sensation, decreased smell," said Rep. Jeff Hilovsky, R-Long Neck, "and so to have 65-year-olds...have carte blanche to just get as much as they want and have to get no sense of approval, no medical discussion with their physician. I can't understand that."

[READ MORE HERE](#)



SMYRNA DEFICIT SMALLER THAN PREDICTED, TAX INCREASE STILL LIKELY

BY JAREK RUTZ

The town of Smyrna has a multimillion dollar budget deficit that it will try to combat by raising the taxes of local residents. Sheldon Hudson, town manager, said the **Smyrna Town Council** originally thought the deficit would be \$8 million, but the Budget Committee has since clarified that it has shrunk to the tune of about \$6 million, \$2 million less than the initial estimate.

Smyrna is in a unique position in that its fiscal year aligns with the calendar year, so it is currently operating in a deficit for the 2024 year. The state government, and most towns, have a fiscal year that runs from July 1 to June 30 of the next year. So the state, for example, starts fiscal year 2025 July 1 of this year, with it ending June 30 of 2025.

One reason for the deficit is the town's population has increased 21% since 2019, yet the tax revenue has remained the same. Smyrna has a population of roughly 14,250 as opposed to about 11,800 in 2019.

Additionally, Hudson pointed out the booming inflation that has seemingly affected every industry and individual in the country. This creates less purchasing power, he said, adding that \$100 in 2019 is worth \$80 today.

"It's probably unavoidable not to have some sort of meaningful tax and utility rate increases to account for that, but we're also trying to look at what we can do in terms of cuts," Hudson said. "We're trying to take a balanced approach."

There's been a persistent lagging of keeping up with inflation over the past couple of decades, he said, which has compounded to the point of this year's budget deficit. The town's operating budget is about \$40 million. And while there might have been some small deficits over the years, Hudson said to his knowledge there hasn't been a deficit of this magnitude "in quite some time."

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BY JAREK RUTZ

Just days before Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the president of a top-ranked Historically Black College and University condemned remarks from one of the richest men in the world, Elon Musk. **Delaware State University** President Tony Allen Thursday stated that the tweets from Musk—the owner of X, formerly known as Twitter—were “unoriginal in their amplification of antiquated racial tropes, signify little of objective consequence and strike any learned ear as attention-seeking noise.”

Many online are claiming a tweet from Musk put into question the IQ and intelligence of students who attend HBCUs. Musk replied to a tweet that stated that the graduates of the HBCU partners of United Airlines have a lower IQ than the average IQ of United States Air Force pilots. Allen took particular exception to this, especially since DSU’s aviation program has been significantly growing in recent years.

DSU PRESIDENT ISSUES STATEMENT CONDEMNING ELON MUSK TWEET

“You can only imagine the kind of concern and outrage that I personally had when I saw the attack not only on the university, but on those fine students in that program,” Allen said Friday.

“It’s an outstanding program,” Allen said Friday. “I’ve said many times, we produce more pilots with color than any other place in the country and we are the high-quality, low-cost provider for all aviation schools east of the Mississippi.”

The DSU Aviation Program currently has 110 Professional Pilot students and 47 Aviation Management majors. Established at the institution in 1987, the Aviation Program owns a fleet of 26 airplanes. They are maintained at Delaware Airpark in Cheswold, the program’s base of flight training operations.

Allen said Friday that the partnership with United Airlines has been fantastic.

“Their Aviate Program is world class,” he said Friday. “We’re proud to be a significant partner in that regard and understand them and our other airline partners as uniquely committed not only to preparing the aviation industry for what is the significant shortage in pilots,...

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WILMU: \$1M LONGWOOD GRANT TO FUND TWO BRANDYWINE BUILDINGS

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Brandywine campus of **Wilmington University** will soon expand by 200%. Thanks to a \$1 million grant by the **Longwood Foundation**, WilmU’s Brandywine Campus—located at 10 Beaver Valley Road in Wilmington—will go from one building to three. The grant will help pay for the construction of a law school building and a convocation center.

According to WilmU, Longwood cites that the awarded grant links the limited diversity within Delaware’s legal profession and Wilmington University’s long tradition as an open-access, accredited and inclusive institution. The full cost of the building was not disclosed, but Longwood generally requires matching funds, often ponying up the last of the money, not the first.

The Delaware Business Times **reported** in May 2023 that WilmU will also use \$45 million in bonds to fund the two buildings.

The private, nonprofit university serves traditional students starting their college careers, non-traditional students and working adults seeking advancement through higher education.

“We have fostered a caring environment and offered convenience, flexibility and affordable tuition to students from all walks of life since we were established 56 years ago,” said President LaVerne Harmon, president of WilmU.

The convocation center will be an 85,000-square-foot building and will feature a 2,000-seat auditorium, a sizable stage for graduation ceremonies and events and a new home for the **Wilmington University Criminal Justice Institute**. The law school building will be three stories and will span 52,000-square-feet. It will showcase an expansive atrium, classrooms, library, private study rooms and office space.

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BY JAREK RUTZ

A **Colonial School District** forum Tuesday about a vote to raise school tax revenue by \$61 million also served to ease fears about the effects of property reassessments.

“Everyone thinks that ‘Oh my God, my house is gone from this and it’s quadrupled, my taxes are going to skyrocket’, and that would be true except we have to reset the rate backwards,” said Emily Falcon, Colonial’s chief financial officer.

That means that if the property values quadruples, the school tax rate would be cut by a fourth, since the district must remain revenue neutral.

“We can’t get any more money after reassessment than we’re getting right now,” Falcon said, “Unless the school board chooses to take that little bit extra that they’re allowed to under Delaware law.”

That “little bit extra” is up to a 10% increase in the district’s local revenue. So if the revenue is \$50 million, the maximum revenue increase would be an extra \$5 million, which would be reflected in the tax rate and spread out among district residents. The district’s school

FORUM DETAILS PROPOSED TAX HIKE, REASSESSMENT EFFECT

board would have to vote on whether or not to raise the local revenue, but it is not obligated to do that or to raise it 10%. It can choose a smaller amount.

Falcon said she has no clue whether the board would vote on an increase. The board is more than a year away from needing to make that decision, as both New Castle and Sussex counties are expected to have its reassessments completed by July 2025, so the new tax rate would go into effect in fiscal year 2026, which starts in July 2025.

Delaware’s three counties have not been reassessed in decades. New Castle properties have not been reassessed since 1983, Falcon said.

“Properties built after 1983 are still assessed based on what their home would have been worth in 1983,” she said. “So a home built in 2023 gets backwards math to determine what it would have cost if it was on the books in 1983.”

Kent County’s reassessment is done and residents have already received letters detailing their new property values.

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NO ARRESTS YET IN NEWARK HIGH 'SWATTING' THREAT INCIDENT

BY JAREK RUTZ

There have been no arrests made yet in connection to last week's incident at Newark High School involving an anonymous caller making threats.

At approximately 1:10 p.m. on Jan. 4, the **Newark Police Department** Communications Center received a phone call from a subject claiming that they were outside of Newark High School, in **Christina School District** and were planning to enter the school and shoot students and staff members.

Sgt. Jay Conover, part of the crime analysis/criminal intelligence units and the leader of the Crisis Negotiations Team at the department, said Monday that there is still an active investigation into the situation. The department confirmed that there was not believed to be a threat to the public and the incident was of the "swatting" type.

"Swatting is currently defined as the practice of making a fraudulent or false call to emergency services reporting serious criminal threats or violent situations in an attempt to bring about the dispatch of a large number of first responders, often law enforcement, to a particular location," Conover said. "It is extremely dangerous for all parties involved from the first responders to the occupants in and around the location where they are responding to."

There is no additional information on the person who called in, other than the fact that they said they were planning to enter the school and shoot students and staff members.

Newark Police school resource officers along with Christina School District constables, who were already at the school, immediately responded to the threatening

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phone call. Additional Newark Police patrol officers also responded to the scene, and officers quickly determined that no shooting or acts of violence were taking place in or around the school.

Christina School District stated it is unable to comment on an active investigation, but will continue to work closely with local law enforcement agencies.

The "swatting" type of incident has been a growing problem.

"We can not speak for the entire state of Delaware," Conover said, "but swatting in general has become more common in the past several years, so much so that the FBI has created a database to help track and prevent future incidents."





photo credit: Eric Donato

Sports

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RIDERS EDGE BUCS IN HENLOPEN MAT SHOWDOWN

BY BENNY MITCHELL

The Milford and Caesar Rodney wrestlers went back and forth trading pins and slugging it out like a heavyweight title fight. Both teams had six pins, but the match came down to a major decision and a buzzer-beating takedown to give the Riders a 43-36 victory in a Henlopen Conference Northern Division match.

“We faced adversity tonight and we had guys that found ways to get it done,” Caesar Rodney head coach Trey Mitchell said.

The Riders’ Ben Donato got the match started at 106 pounds with a pin in 1:10. Autumn Littleton tied it up for the Bucs with a pin in 4:26 at 113 pounds. The back and forth continued over the next six bouts.

Cole Moffett pinned Kaiden Swain at 120 in 3:41, Trevor Copes pinned Davonne Dallas in 2:56 at 132 and Jamisen Dean received a forfeit at 144 pounds for Cae-

sar Rodney.

Dan McElwee pinned Alex Batton in 2:57 at 126 pounds, Da’Zhon Frazier pinned Braedon Bole in 1:08 at 138 pounds and Hunter Durham pinned Craig Dixon at 150 pounds in 2:48 for Milford tying up the match at 24-24 after the first eight bouts of the night.

The Riders then ran off three straight wins to build up a 40-24 lead heading into the last three bouts that Milford was favored in.

Jami White had Kenneth King on his back as the buzzer sounded at the end of the first period. King then put White in a cradle early in the second period and secured a pin in 2:23 at 157 pounds.

At 165 pounds, Logan Heffington pinned Riley Carmean in 2:17 and Owen Dixon scored a late takedown to earn a 13-5 major decision at 175 pounds.



“

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“Kenneth King and Logan Heffington came up huge tonight. As first year varsity wrestlers I asked them to go out there be dominant, they did and stepped up for the team with big pins,” Mitchell said.

The 190-pound match between Milford’s Jordan Curry and the Riders’ Owyn Meister battled to a 9-9 tie at the end of the six-minute regulation match. Curry threw Meister in a flurry in overtime to get the pin in 6:32.

At 215 pounds, the Riders’ Walter Toomer, who is not a regular starter, needed only to keep the match close, win or lose. Toomer scored a takedown at the buzzer to win a 6-5 decision over Dauriel Jones to seal the victory as Caesar Rodney took a 43-30 lead with just one bout left.

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SECOND QUARTER RUN PROPELS SMYRNA OVER CAPE

BY GLENN FRAZER

The Smyrna Eagles used a 12-0 second quarter run to break open a close game en route to an easy 52-25 boys hoops win Wednesday night over Cape Henlopen.

The Eagles led 10-3 after the opening quarter, but Cape fought back thanks to baskets by Jacob Schell and Jameson Tingle, plus Tingle's three-point shot to pull within 12-10 midway through the second. That's when Smyrna dialed up good defensive pressure, and forced turnovers that led to a 12-0 run to go up 24-10 with two minutes left in the quarter. Freshman Aaron Johnson, Maurice Kilgoe and Chase Sullivan paced the Eagles in the decisive run that basically put the game away. Smyrna took a 28-13 advantage into the locker room and increased its lead to as many as 24 points in the final quarter.

Cape Henlopen coach Steve Re has a very young team that struggled to knock down some open looks at the basket. His Vikings defeated Smyrna 61-44 on their home floor in December, but this time Smyrna turned the tables with a decisive 52-25 final score.

Nine different players scored in the game for Smyrna as head coach Andrew Mears' squad displayed a balanced offensive effort. O-B Coleman and Chase Sullivan both scored 10 points, Johnson added seven (all in the second quarter), while Kilgoe and Ryan Jones each had six points. The Eagles improved to 6-2 (4-1 in the Henlopen North). Smyrna has already surpassed last season's win total by three games.

Cape Henlopen dropped its fifth straight game, after winning the first three games in December. The Vikings are 3-5 overall, 2-3 in the Henlopen North. Geordan Downing, Jacob Schell and Jameson Tingle led the Vikings with six points apiece.





COURTSIDE VIEW – WEEK 4 GIRLS' BASKETBALL TOP 10 RANKINGS

BY JASON WINCHELL

The girls basketball season saw some great games last week with conference games providing some upsets as the season ramps back up after the holiday break.

Wilmington Friends won the Quaker Classic last weekend. They defeated Seaford 57-49 behind 19 points from Izzy Winchell. She made five triples and led a balanced Quakers team to the tournament title.

The Padua Pandas picked up their sixth win of the season over the weekend in their first eight games. They were 7-13 last season, just missing the state tournament. They will have some tough games coming up in the next couple of weeks, but should match their win total from last year soon.

There are no undefeated teams left in the state, but there are nine teams heading into this week with just one loss. Saint Mark's is one of them, but they have a gauntlet of tough games coming up against ranked teams including Padua, St Elizabeth, Wilmington Friends and Ursuline.

Here are the new top 10 for this week voted by our Delaware Live Crew.

No. 1 Ursuline (8-1) (LW No. 1) The Raiders defeated Archbishop John Carroll (Pa.), 61-57. They are off this week but host A.I. Dupont on Monday, Jan. 15.

No. 2 Caravel (7-1) (LW No. 2) The Bucs picked up a win over Tatnall last week. They had three road games

this week including a showdown with St. Elizabeth on Tuesday which was postponed due to inclement weather.

No. 3 Sanford (4-4) (LW No. 3) The Warriors picked up a huge win over No. 5 Dover on Saturday. They traveled to Tower Hill on Tuesday.

No. 4 St. Elizabeth (5-1) (LW No. 4) The Vikings defeated First Stat Military last week. They hosted Caravel on Tuesday and traveled to Conrad on Thursday.

No. 5 A.I. DuPont (8-2) (LW No. 6) The Tigers beat Hodgson last week. They hosted Dickinson on Wednesday and traveled to Concord on Friday.

No. 6 Dover (7-1) (LW No. 5) The Senators lost at No. 3 Sanford last week. They hosted Sussex Central on Tuesday and Sussex Tech on Thursday.

No. 7 Saint Mark's (7-1) (LW No. 7) The Spartans beat Tower Hill last week. They traveled to No. 8 Padua on Tuesday and Red Lion on Thursday.

No. 8 Padua (6-2) (LW No. 8) The Pandas defeated Tatnall last week. They hosted No. 7 Saint Mark's on Tuesday.

No. 9 Cape Henlopen (3-4) (LW No. 9) The Vikings defeated Caesar Rodney last week. They hosted Smyrna on Tuesday and traveled to Milford on Thursday.

No. 10 DMA (5-3) (LW 10) The Seahawks won a conference game against Wilmington Charter. They traveled to Newark Charter on Thursday.





COURTSIDE VIEW – WEEK 4 BOYS' BASKETBALL TOP 10 RANKINGS

BY JASON WINCHELL

It was a great week of basketball on the boys side last week, filled with a pair of top five games plus a lot of upsets.

The Smyrna Eagles are off to a great start this year including a pair of Henlopen North wins. They are 5-2 overall after having a 3-17 record last year. They have three straight at home including Cape Henlopen on Tuesday. That game was livestreamed on Delaware Live and the Vikings won their first meeting 61-44 on Dec. 12.

Wilmington Friends won the Quaker Classic over the weekend by defeating Glasgow 43-36. Joey Winchell led the Quakers with 15 points and Ryan Tattersall added 14 points. They improved to 4-2 on the season and have two road conference games coming up this week.

There are four undefeated teams left in the state and two of them reside in the Henlopen South. Seaford and Lake Forest are both 7-0 and will meet in Seaford on Jan 16. St. Elizabeth and Odessa are the other two teams.

Here are the new top 10 for this week voted by our Delaware Live Crew.

No. 1 St. Elizabeth (7-0) (LW No. 2) The Vikings beat FSMA and then No. 1 Sallies 84-77 last week. The Vikings hosted Conrad on Thursday night.

No. 2 Sallies (4-5) (LW No. 1) The Sals went 1-1 last week winning at Malvern Prep (PA) before losing to St. Elizabeth. The Sals were finally home for the first time in over four weeks when they played No. 5 William Penn on Tuesday.

No. 3 Dover (6-1) (LW No. 3) The Senators went 2-0 with wins over Polytech and Sanford They have a pair of road games this week as they faced Sussex Central on Tuesday and Sussex Tech on Thursday.

No. 4 Middletown (3-3) (LW No. 4) The Cavs defeated St. Georges Tech last week. They hosted Howard on Tuesday and Newark on Thursday

No. 5 William Penn (4-2) (LW No. 7) They won a pair of games last week over Appoquinimink and Tower Hill. They were at No. 2 Sallies on Tuesday and hosted Delcastle on Thursday.

No. 6 Sanford (4-3) (LW No. 6) The Warriors lost a tough one to No. 3 Dover 61-59 last week. They hosted Tower Hill on Tuesday and traveled to St. Andrew's on Friday.

No. 7 Odessa (8-0) (LW No. 9) The Ducks defeated Newark in its first Blue Hen Flight A game. They were at Red Lion on Tuesday and hosted Christiana on Thursday.

No. 8 Lake Forest (7-0) (LW Unranked) The Spartans beat Sussex Academy last week. They hosted a pair of games this week as they faced Delmar on Tuesday and Early College High School on Thursday.

No. 9 Mount Pleasant (8-2) (LW Unranked) The Green Knights defeated Caravel last week. They hosted St. Georges Tech on Thursday.

No. 10 Saint Mark's (9-1) (LW No. 10) The Spartans defeated Laurel last week. They hosted Christiana on Tuesday.



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