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Redding Votes to Remove Christina from Wilmington



Leaders Warn Hospital Board is a Bad Idea



Weidner Lifts William Penn Over Caravel



photo link: Milford Parks and Recreation Department



# Headlines

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# REDDING VOTES TO REMOVE CHRISTINA FROM WILMINGTON

BY JAREK RUTZ

The members of the [Redding Consortium for Educational Equity](#) voted Thursday night to remove the Christina School District from the city of Wilmington in a redistricting plan.

Those for the move said that removing Christina's three schools inside the city that don't connect to the rest of the district will allow the consortium to better focus its efforts on the needs of city students and families. Those opposing the move said the plan didn't have enough details to support the vote, that it would mean teachers and families had to deal with a long period of uncertainty about schools and that would not help with teacher shortages.

Even with the yes vote, there's a period of more than a year for the Redding Consortium to hold town halls,

engage with stakeholders and receive feedback that could spark changes. The group must present a final redistricting plan to the State Board of Education by October 2025. After that, it could take around three to five years to implement the plan, meaning the dust could be settled around the turn of the decade.

Wilmington now has schools in its city limits that are overseen by three different school districts and some children are bussed out of the system to Colonial District schools. The city's schools and students were split up as part of a desegregation plan in the late 1970s.

The final vote to dump Christina was 18 yes, two no and two abstentions. Christina's superintendent Dan Shelton abstained from the vote after giving the Redding members feedback from the district's board of

education. Danya Woods, education professional at Shortlidge Elementary School in Red Clay abstained, as did Red Clay Superintendent Dorrell Green.

Tika Hartsock, a parent in the [Brandywine School District](#), voted "no" along with Stephanie Ingram, president of the [Delaware State Education Association](#), the largest teacher's union in Delaware.

The three other district superintendents in the consortium—Brandywine's Lincoln Hohler, Colonial's Jeff Menzer and New Castle County Vo-tech's Joseph Jones—all voted "yes" to remove Christina from the city. The 15 other voting members joined them with their vote to make the removal—which has been discussed for months now without a vote—part of the official plan.

The Redding Consortium was created in 2019 to recommend policies and practices to the governor and legislators to improve education equity and outcomes in the city of Wilmington and northern New Castle County. The consortium defines educational equity as something that "requires safe, secure and student-focused learning environments where every student is intentionally provided access to the support, resources and opportunities they need to reach their full academic and social potential, in and out of the classroom."

## INTERIM PLAN

This interim redistricting plan was proposed by Redding members Rep. Nnamdi Chukwuocha, D-Wilmington and City Councilman Jea Street.

Shelton said he doesn't want to be misconstrued and said Christina is deeply invested in its city schools and city students and their outcomes.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



# WLC REPORT REACTION BRINGS PROMISE OF MORE INCLUSION

BY JAREK RUTZ

Nothing has come easy to the **Wilmington Learning Collaborative**, not its formation, not its hiring of an executive director and certainly not the release of its first report on city schools. That angered teachers and brought dozens of them to a Collaborative meeting to speak.

Laura Burgos, executive director, says she learned a big lesson there and will do things differently.

“One thing I would have done is bring our school communities, including families, closer to the methodology and forming of the opportunity scorecards,” Burgos said. “WLC school leaders, teachers, families and others connected to our school communities should have been afforded opportunities for initial grounding, prior to the public release.”

The Collaborative, created in late 2022 with about \$16 million in state funding, is comprised of nine city of Wilmington elementary schools across the **Brandy-**

**wine, Christina** and **Red Clay** school districts. It aims to reverse historical discrepancies in opportunity and achievement for students and families in the city. A key part of that is welcoming families’ and educators’ voices in policy-making and establishing programs designed to bolster student achievement academically and socially.

To build trust and to access the community hive brain, the collaborative wants to establish site-based community councils, family advisory councils and teacher advisory councils to give those groups more of a chance to offer suggestions. It also is planning a nine-school Education Leadership Team conference over the summer to bring school leaders from all WLCs together and to receive professional learning.

And a new behavioral health support system will be piloted in two WLC schools this fall. It’s being developed and modeled after “The Chill Project” in Pittsburgh (PA) schools. The Project “uses mindfulness-



“

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based exercises to equip students, teachers and parents with a common language and universal skills to identify, discuss and react positively to stress.”

Some of the key resources students will have access to are:

- One-to-one counseling.
- Support groups.
- Medication management.
- School-based outpatient services.
- School-wide preventive services.
- Professional development opportunities.
- A social-emotional curriculum and classroom consultations.

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## THE 5 CANDIDATES FOR GOVERNOR TALK EDUCATION IN DELAWARE

BY JAREK RUTZ

The five candidates vying to replace Gov. John Carney in November's gubernatorial election took the stage Wednesday night to give their thoughts on the state of education in Delaware. The three Democrats and two Republicans agreed that the need for reform in First State schools transcends politics.

The forum, hosted by [Polytech High School](#), was organized by the [Vision Coalition of Delaware](#), a public-private partnership of Delawareans working to improve public education. It includes education, community and legislative leaders, and it developed the [Vision 2015](#) plan in 2006. Ten years later, with Delaware adopting more than 75 percent of its recommendations, Vision Coalition helped create a new 10-year plan.

Bettina Tweardy Riveros, chair of the Vision Coalition's leadership team, asked the questions to the five

candidates: Republican Mike Ramone, state representative; Democrat Matt Meyer, executive of New Castle County; Democrat Bethany Hall-Long, lieutenant governor; Democrat Collin O'Mara, chief executive officer of the National Wildlife Federation; and Republican Jerry Price, former NYPD and Rehoboth Beach police officer.

The typical questions were thrown their way on topics like low student achievement, reform to the funding formula, mental health in schools, equity for minorities and disadvantaged students, and more questions, some from Riveros and a few from students.

Along with the theme of bipartisanship sprinkled throughout the speakers, all of them agreed that there is a real problem in Delaware schools.

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# GOP'S SHORT: BUDGET NEEDS OVERSIGHT, TOO, IF HOSPITALS MUST HAVE IT

BY BETSY PRICE

A Sussex County state representative plans to introduce a bill that will hold lawmakers to the same rules its Democrat members want to set for hospitals: Holding budgets to benchmark.

State Rep. Danny Short, R-Seaford, and other Republicans have repeatedly said during House and Senate hearings and debates that the state wants to hold hospitals to a rule it won't meet itself. Two years ago, the legislature approved a state operating budget exceeding the state spending growth benchmark by 53%, Short said in a press release. Last year, spending was 62% higher than the setpoint. Lawmakers are on track for the upcoming FY 2025 to be at least 42% over the budget growth target, he pointed out.

"The arc of our state spending growth is unsustainable," Short said, "and the state has been unsuccessful

in adhering to advisory spending growth limitations."

**House Bill 350**, now awaiting a slot on the Senate floor agenda, would create a board that could review and demand changes in hospital budgets to make them meet a benchmark set by the state, usually somewhere around 3%.

Dems and teachers say hospitals account for 42% of state spending on healthcare and Delaware hospitals charge the most in the region. Republicans, hospitals, nonprofit and business leaders say the state has no right to insert itself into a private business.

A benchmark in this case is a specific percentage that a budget is allowed to grow. In Delaware, that number is based on the state's gross domestic product—the annual value of goods and services produced in a year and other financial data.

Since 2018, Delaware's benchmark has ranged from 3% to 3.8%. It's set by a subcommittee of the Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council, called DEFAC. HB 350 supporters maintain hospitals have only met that benchmark in 2020, the first year of the pandemic. But under a deal cut in 2018, hospitals agreed to keep it in mind, but they were not required by law to meet it.

Short is a member of DEFAC, a nonpartisan group that tracks the state's expected revenues and expenditures to advise the governor and General Assembly. By law, the state is limited to spending no more than a percentage of its anticipated revenues under Gov. John Carney via Executive Order 21. Carney issued the order after a Republican move in 2018 to set a spending limit that Democrats refused to support.

"The current limitation on state budget growth has two critical problems," Short said in a press release. "First, it isn't binding. It's a guideline that has been repeatedly ignored. Second, because it was established by executive order, it will cease to exist after the Carney administration comes to an end in January."

**Senate Bill 270**, sponsored by Sen. Trey Paradee, D-Dover, would codify part of Carney's executive order, which requires money to be put into a budget stabilization fund that proved useful in 2020 when state revenues crashed. A chunk of it was needed to keep the fiscal 2021 budget whole.

Paradee is chair of the Joint Finance Committee, which writes the state budget based on the governor's suggestions. His bill would not make the benchmark binding.

[READ MORE HERE](#)





photo link: The Delaware Contemporary

Culture

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# LONGWOOD'S NEW CONSERVATORY OVERLOOK OPEN FOR SUMMER

BY BETSY PRICE

A big chunk of Longwood Gardens' renovation is open now at the Kennett Square botanical gardens. The conservatory overlook and the lower conservatory plaza, both between the conservatory and the fountain complex, will allow patrons a broader view of fountain shows, which have begun. The work includes a new allée of yellowwood trees and new stone steps.

## CONSERVATORY SITES

The illuminated fountain shows—dancing fountains set to music and a blaze of color—will run through October on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. They are included with admission and seats are not assigned. You can find a schedule of the performances and the music they will include [HERE](#). Seats are assigned for the Fireworks and Fountain shows, which require addi-

tional tickets. Many already are sold out. See that schedule [HERE](#).

The full [Longwood Reimagined: A New Garden Experience](#) is expected to open Nov. 22, in time for A Longwood Christmas. It's been underway since 2021. The work is designed to enhance visitor experience and create a 32,000-square-foot-conservatory designed by WEISS/MANFREDI as a living and breathing glass house, with walls and roofs that open and close in response to the weather. It will feature gardens, pools and fountains designed by Reed Hilderbrand.

Word to the wise: If you don't already have tickets for Mother's Day, which is Sunday, it's too late. Longwood is sold out already.





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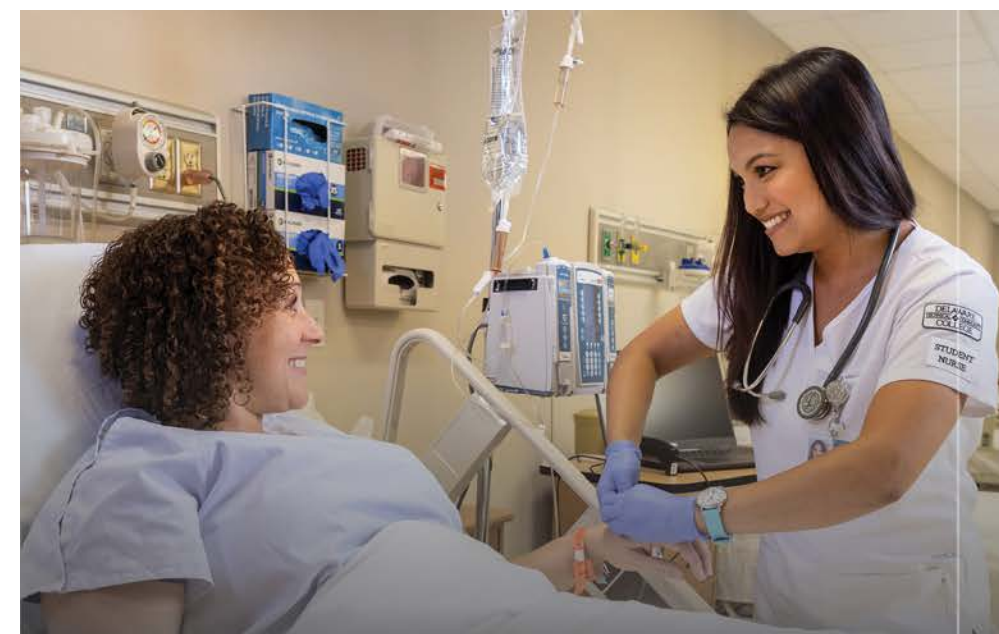
# FAITHFUL FRIENDS WELCOMES 36 DOGS FROM NEW MEXICO

BY BETSY PRICE

**Faithful Friends Animal Society** on Tuesday welcomed 36 dogs from overcrowded rescues in New Mexico. Chapo, Rocko, Lilo, Mammias, Bandit, Bo Peep, Pluto, Cindy, Percy, Lil Bear, Rico, Ghost, Nymeria, Lady, Shaggydog, Greywind and Summer are among the fuzzy transplants who are expected to be put up for adoption soon.

The drive took two days in total from Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley. They were on their way to Connecticut to drop off a few more dogs at another shelter.

See all the dogs on the Faithful Friends website.



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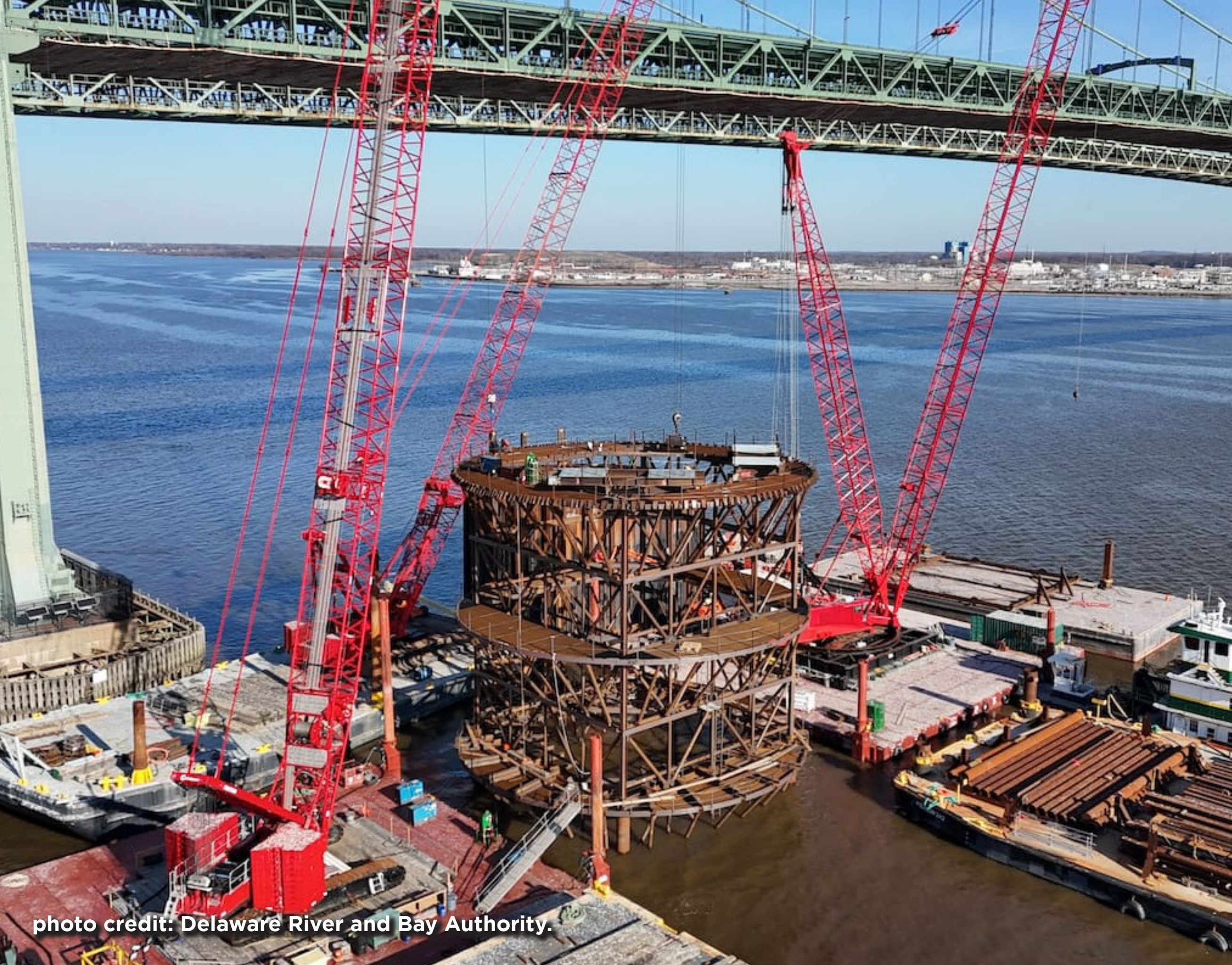


photo credit: Delaware River and Bay Authority.

# Business

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BY KEN MAMMARELLA

The state of Delaware and Enstructure, the current private operator of the Port of Wilmington, will build a \$635 million new terminal in Edgemoor that will quadruple its capacity for container cargo ships and serve larger ships.

The Edgemoor industrial site was purchased in 2017 by the taxpayer-owned Diamond State Port Corp., which subsequently secured the necessary permits to construct a new port terminal. The addition will be the largest shipping terminal in Delaware since the current Port of Wilmington opened in 1923 and will create a north and south campus.

Press materials dubbed the expanded site the “Port of Delaware.” A state-of-the-art “green port,” construction of the Edgemoor terminal will start with site work expected to take about three years. A state press release said the terminal is expected to create nearly 6,000 new

# STATE, PORT OPERATOR TO BUILD NEW \$635M PORT TERMINAL IN EDGEMOOR

jobs, including more than 3,100 direct jobs. Building the new facility will create more than 3,900 construction jobs and generate \$42.3 million in tax revenues.

State and local taxes generated from Edgemoor are estimated at \$39.4 million annually. Once completed and fully operational, the port’s existing and new terminal will generate a total of about 11,480 jobs and \$76.2 million in tax revenues for the state, making it one of Delaware’s largest employment centers.

The Port of Wilmington now is a significant source of high-paying jobs to support Delaware families. Many longshoremen earn annual incomes of more than \$100,000, with a recent national report estimating the average annual salary of a maritime worker at \$98,000.

The announcement comes a week after Gov. John Carney announced he will run for mayor of Wilmington, an unusual move for a man who’s also been a U.S. congressman and lieutenant governor.

This [document](#) details the project.

## TERMINAL CONSTRUCTION

Construction of the new terminal is expected to take place in three phases, the first to be completed over 32 months. Much of the early work in the first phase will be focused on waterside construction and will include building a seawall, high deck and associated dredging. Landside construction of the terminal will come later with proactive public participation and community engagement.

Phases two and three of the project will be built by Enstructure when business justifies the additional capacity. The state will pay for about 31% of the cost of building the facility, or \$195 million. Those funds will come from excess abandoned property revenues made available in previous state bond bills for specific one-time uses, including maritime terminal development.

Enstructure will pay most of the construction and equipment costs, beginning with \$170 million to support Phase 1 of the project and an additional \$165 million to complete phases 2 and 3, which equals 53 percent of the entire project. Remaining costs will come from federal sources and the Diamond State Port Corp.

Carney in the past has said he felt like the powers that be at the Philadelphia port have limited the opportunities for Delaware. In Wednesday’s press release, he said, “For decades, jobs at the Port of Wilmington have been a gateway into the middle class for thousands of workers and their families—the kind of jobs our state and country were built on.

“This investment to expand the Port will position Delaware to compete for container cargo and larger ships. It will bring new, good-paying union jobs to Wilmington. I am pleased to see strong bipartisan support for this important and necessary next step in making the planned Edgemoor expansion a reality.”

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# Food & Dining

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## DAN BUTLER'S BLUEBIRD BRINGS BREAKFAST, LUNCH HAPPINESS

BY PAM GEORGE

Dan Butler is unafraid to take risks. In 1991, the Culinary Institute of America graduate opened Griglia Toscana in Trolley Square. At the time, most Italian restaurants served red “gravy” and meatballs. However, Butler offered artisanal pizza from a wood-burning oven, grilled veal and hard-to-find risotto. He wasn’t afraid to mess with success; he’s tweaked Toscana several times. It’s now [Piccolina Toscana](#).

In 1998, Butler opened Deep Blue Bar & Grill in a struggling downtown dining district. It is now [Tonic Seafood & Steak](#). His newest venture, [The BlueBird](#), opened April 30 in the WSFS Bank Center at 500 Delaware Ave.

That’s right—it’s named for the bluebird, which is a symbol of happiness, harmony and renewal. Butler and managing partner Brian Walsh hope their guests find all three in the contemporary café, which currently serves breakfast and lunch. And if dinner creeps into the offerings in the future, that’s a joyful sign as well.

### BLUEBIRD FILLS A GAP

The Bluebird is in space formerly occupied by a Pure-Bread Deli location and owned by Buccini-Pollin Group. (Butler has had a longtime friendship with developers Chris and Rob Buccini.)

Initially, Butler wanted to open a bakery that Toscana’s pastry chef would manage. But when his pals

heard he was looking for sites, they asked him to tour 500 Delaware Ave. The Buccinis wanted a unique eatery in the vacant space, especially since they plan to redo the plaza out front. With 60 seats inside and another 60 possible in the plaza, the location has the numbers to interest Butler and Walsh.

While construction was underway on The BlueBird, Butler had to make a decision: He already had a pizza and sandwich stall in The Chancery Market & Bar at 1313 Market St, and he didn’t want two operations close together. He opted to leave The Chancery and move the staff to the café.

### MENU MAINSTAYS

Like most breakfast spots, The BlueBird starts with coffee, and in the new café’s case, it’s Lavazza, an Italian brand. Other beverages include chai or matcha lattes and teas. Assorted baked goods include bagels, croissants and some unexpected selections: maple-pecan-butter Danish, leek-parmesan pastry, Margherita pastry and spinach-and-feta pastry. Recently, the online ordering form indicated that the blueberry, chocolate and corn muffins were hot commodities; they were sold out.

Other morning options include quiche, breakfast sandwiches and the intriguing duck hash, made with butternut squash, mushrooms, baby kale and sundried peppers, sauteed with dush confit and topped with two poached eggs.

For lunch, guests can choose from sandwiches, bowls, salads and tartines, as well as an open-faced sourdough base with toppings.

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# ROBBIE JESTER AIMS TO INFUSE NEW LIFE INTO KITTY KNIGHT

BY PAM GEORGE

Robbie Jester has come home. Sort of. Raised in Galena, MD, the chef is partnering with **Jamestown Hospitality Group**, owner of **Deep Blue at Kitty Knight**, an inn and restaurant in Galena, to infuse new life into the old establishment.

“Ironically, my dad owned Kitty Knight in the 1980s, and I was conceived there,” said Jester, a Culinary Institute of America graduate.

If Jester’s name sounds familiar, it’s because the skilled chef won the grand prize on Netflix’s “Pressure Cooker” series. He also successfully competed on “Guy’s Grocery Games” and “Beat Bobby Flay.” On May 28, he will join the “Chopped Battle Italiano” contestants.

Even if you haven’t watched the shows, you’ve likely tasted his food when he worked at **Piccolina Toscana**, the Stone Balloon Ale House or **Limestone BBQ &**

**Bourbon**. He is also the owner of **Pizzeria Mariana** in Newark.

## KITTY KNIGHT: AN ICON

Jester and Paul Bouchard, Jamestown’s chief operating officer, met while working at Toscana.

“We’ve always kept in touch,” said Bouchard, who oversees Jamestown’s impressive portfolio, including **Tonic Seafood & Steak** in downtown Wilmington, **Park Café** in Wawaset Park, and **Giordano’s** in Kennett Square.

The hospitality group purchased Kitty Knight in 2021 and changed the name to Deep Blue after Tonic’s predecessor. Bouchard had always loved the name, which suited the Sassafras River location.

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photo link: Governor John Carney

# Government

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# SOUTHBRIDGE RESIDENTS AWAIT REMEDIATION OF CONTAMINATED PARK

BY JOSE IGNACIO CASTANEDA PEREZ

*This story was originally published on Spotlight Delaware.*

Regular visitors of Barbara Hicks Park in Wilmington's Southbridge neighborhood face potential health risks stemming from contaminants in the soil that were discovered nearly two years ago. Despite the discovery, city officials have not yet made a decision on remedial action or established a timeline to clean up the park.

Frequent park visitors face risk of cancer-causing agents if they're directly exposed to certain quantities of soil for extended periods of time, according to a Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) investigation report.

The park's soil contains elevated concentrations of **polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)** that generally have carcinogenic, or cancer-causing, effects. As one of the few green spaces that's accessible to Southbridge residents, however, the park remains popular with locals.

The low-lying neighborhood has long been plagued by perennial flooding and incessant mosquitos. It's also one of seven New Castle County communities at greater risk for cancer and respiratory illness.

"Everybody that grew up with it is contaminated with whatever that is—all my kids," said Rick King, a born-and-raised Southbridge resident, about the park contamination. "Dig it up and get it out of here and then let us move on." King recalled growing up in the neighborhood when the park used to just be a dirt mound with a basketball court and a couple swings.

Today, neighborhood residents often use the grassy park to play basketball, romp on the playground or swing on the pair of swing sets available. Community barbecues have also taken place at the space, which spans more than an acre.

Visitors enjoying outdoor activities at the park, who

are directly exposed to shallow or deep soil, for 75 days a year may be exposed to contaminants of potential concern (COPCs), including chemicals, metals and glass, the report estimated. Direct exposure includes inhalation, ingestion and touching.

"We were very concerned about the contamination, very concerned about residents having access to the park," said Russell Zerbo, an advocate for the Clean Air Council, a Philadelphia-based environmental nonprofit.

Simply being at the park for 75 days a year, however, doesn't "necessarily" mean a person would be at risk based on the exposure values calculated during the DNREC risk assessment report, according to Michael Globetti, DNREC media relations manager.


The estimation was in addition to children being exposed to 200 milligrams of soil per day and adults being exposed to 100 milligrams per day through inhalation, ingestion or touching. Only the ingestion pathway was found to pose "significant carcinogenic and non-carcinogenic" risk for the park visitor exposure scenario in the report.

## SOUTHBRIDGE PARK SOIL CONTENT

The discovery of the contaminants was expected, as the metals and PAHs are typically found in urban environments that have had fill material or industrial uses, according to Globetti. The soil contamination dates back to filling at the site that occurred between 1940 and 1965, according to Timothy Ratsep, director of DNREC's Division of Waste and Hazardous Substances. The filling process is typical of low-lying properties in Wilmington, Ratsep added.

[READ MORE HERE](#)





# BILL TO AMEND HOSPITAL BOARD BILL POPS UP FOR VOTE UNANNOUNCED

BY BETSY PRICE

A bill to alter the controversial hospital board bill, which is still moving through the Senate, was filed in the Delaware House at 2:55 p.m. Tuesday and showed up unannounced in the House Administration Committee at noon Wednesday. Despite protests from House Minority Leader Mike Ramone, R-Newark/Pike Creek, and Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden, about the speed and non-transparency of the move, the Dem-heavy committee voted it right through.

At least the conversations were civil, compared to the verbal brawl in the House two weeks ago when Republicans tried to filibuster the bill and Democrats voted to essentially silence the Republicans to pass Speaker of the House Valerie Longhurst's [House Bill 350](#).

The rapid move is another example of how determined and how desperate the Democrats in the House and Senate are to get the bill, which would create a board

to review and even change hospital budgets, through the legislature in this session while the current power structure is in place.

At issue is a part of the House Bill 350 described as a “cost containment measure.” It would go in place as soon as the bill is signed into law and is expected to be in effect at least two years until the Diamond State Hospital Cost Review Board could get up and running in 2026. The move would have required hospitals to charge less than 250% of what Medicare will pay for procedures.

Hospitals revolted, saying that would cost them hundreds of millions and they then would not be able to pay a revenue tax they agreed to under [Senate Bill 13](#). That tax would have unlocked another \$100 million in federal funds for Delaware's Medicaid program.

[House Bill 395](#), sponsored by Rep. Kerri Evelyn Harris, D-Dover, will instead switch the formula and use the core regional Consumer Price Index, plus one point, as the measure against which hospitals may create their charges. The region includes Wilmington, Philadelphia and Camden, NJ. Using the CPI would allow hospitals to grow their budgets, Harris said.

“This growth will be at a rate of the greater of 2% of the previous year's rate or CPI plus 1%,” Harris said.

## HOSPITALS AGREED

Hospitals had agreed to the change, said Brian Frazee, executive director of the Delaware Healthcare Association, a trade group for hospitals.

Democrats have repeatedly tried to portray hospitals as the largest problem in the rising cost of healthcare for the state and its residents and complained repeatedly that they were not reliable partners in negotiations.

Harris said in the committee Wednesday that she had been made aware that the move to restrict hospital charges using Medicare as the stick would have severely affected Kent and Sussex hospitals.

“I don't want to cut services for hospitals,” she said. Hospital growth also would match health insurance plan rates for 2022, 2023 and 2025, she said.

Yearick wanted to know what the sense of urgency was and why he and Ramone would not given the courtesy of the usual 48-hours between a bill being filed and it showing up in committee. Harris said hospitals had agreed to things during negotiations and then changed their mind later.

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# HOSPITAL BOARD BILL ON TO FULL SENATE; DEAL SAVES MEDICAID TAX

BY BETSY PRICE

A controversial bill that will establish a board to review and change hospital budgets is headed to the Senate floor after a lively committee hearing. There were some surprises and revelation of a compromise in the Senate Executive Committee Tuesday evening.

Surprise one: Dr. Kara Odom Walker, who was secretary of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services when it established the state healthcare benchmark, told the Senate Executive Committee that **House Bill 350** was a bad bill as written and would hurt hospitals. The bill will require hospitals to create budgets that rise no more than the state healthcare benchmark, which is tied to the rise in Delaware's gross domestic product and has ranged from 3% to 3.8%,

Walker, who now works for Nemours Children's Health, said she was a board member.

Surprise two: Sen. Bryan Townsend, D-Newark, the Senate sponsor of HB 350, said a bill is being worked on

that will look at pharmaceutical costs, but it is unlikely to be ready before the end of the session, which is June 30. He said that the bill sponsors were aware that other medical groups needed to be involved in any focus on the costs of healthcare.

The compromise: The bill had demanded hospitals immediately lower their charges to no more than 250% of what Medicare pays for the same services as soon as the bill is passed—and hold that for as long as two years until the Diamond State Hospital Cost Review Board is expected to be up and running.

Hospitals said the amount of money that would cut from their revenues would mean that they could no longer participate in a plan to be taxed at 3.58% so the state could qualify for an additional \$100 million in Medicaid under Senate Bill 13, sponsored by Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington.

Instead, hospitals are now expected to be held to

charging no more than the core regional Consumer Price Index, plus one point. The region includes Wilmington, Philadelphia and Camden, NJ.

Brian Frazee, executive director of the Delaware Healthcare Association, a hospital and healthcare trade group, said that while that will solve the dilemma and keep the Medicaid assessment alive, hospitals still have problems with other parts of the bill.

Sen. Brian Pettyjohn, R-Georgetown, said he wanted to know why the change wasn't acknowledged with an amendment or change in the bill, and was told it would be changed.

In the meantime, House Majority Whip Kerri Evelyn Harris was filing a new bill, House Bill 395 which will make that change.

JOHN MOLLURA

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# BUSINESS, NONPROFIT LEADERS WARN HOSPITAL BOARD IS BAD IDEA

BY BETSY PRICE

Business and nonprofit leaders have joined hospital and health groups in an effort to stop the state from creating a board that would control hospital budgets, but it might be too little too late. The issue will come up again Friday at 4 p.m. in the Senate Executive Committee, which has a hearing on [House Bill 350](#). It's the last stop before the bill heads to the Senate floor, where it is all but guaranteed to pass because of the Democratic supermajority. That supermajority means the Senate has enough Democrats that they can pass anything without needing a vote from a Republican.

One side of the fight is Speaker of the House Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear, Gov. John Carney's office and the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, who believe the board is needed to control the state's soaring healthcare costs. They point to healthcare costs taking up one-third of the state's \$6 billion

budget, and the recent news that employee health premiums will rise 27% next year.

## HOSPITAL ALLIES

On the other side are hospital, business and nonprofit leaders as well as Republicans who are horrified that Democrats want to take the financial reins of private businesses, superseding local control. As hospitals have tried to rally opposition in the last week, their employees and business leaders such as the Delaware Business Roundtable and chambers of commerce have joined the cause, with letters, videos and social media posts.

In a letter to legislators, the Roundtable said, "Enacting a bill with that oversight has the potential to irrevocably tarnish Delaware's reputation among the national and international business community as a place where businesses are welcome and where innovation thrives."

It also said that the business leaders were well aware of

the impact of high healthcare costs, but said HB 350 is not the solution. "Rather it has the potential to stifle innovation and growth in the healthcare space in Delaware," the letter said.

The move implies the state knows how to run a business better than the business does, the letter said. "It is unlikely that any CEO, board of directors or shareholder would want to move to (or maybe even remain in) a state where that is a possibility," the letter said.

The Delaware Healthcare Association, a trade association of hospitals and other health providers, sent out a statement from healthcare, nonprofit and business leaders warning that HB 350 is dangerous in its current form.

"This bill will have disastrous ramifications on not just the hospital systems but on the business and nonprofit communities," it said. "It is our hope that we can bring all parties together inclusive of the business community, nonprofit leaders, healthcare systems, providers, payors, pharmaceutical companies, pharmacy benefit managers, state unions, community advocates and patients to determine a strong path forward for our state.

"That is the Delaware way."

House Bill 350, now known as [HS 2 for HB 350 w/HA 1](#), will require six statewide hospital systems to submit their budgets in 2025 to the Diamond State Hospital Review Board for review. But in 2026, that board will be able to require hospitals to submit a performance improvement plan before its budget is approved.

[READ MORE HERE](#)





# GOP CHAIR MURRAY DECIDES AGAINST BID FOR GOVERNOR

BY JAREK RUTZ

The leader of Delaware's Republican Party has decided against a run for governor.

Julianne Murray, chair of the Delaware GOP announced Monday that she will forego the gubernatorial race to help strengthen

her party.

"I cannot sit idly by as our party faces the prospect of division and distraction," Murray said in a statement. "Now, more than ever, unity is our greatest asset in championing conservative values and reclaiming Delaware from the grip of RADICAL DEMOCRAT governance. We must break the stranglehold of one-party rule."

Just a few days ago, House Minority Leader Rep. Mike Ramone, R-Dover—announced his campaign for governor, citing that the state has had 32 years of one-party rule and an increase in taxes, goods and services.

Ramone faces off against three Democrats: Lt. Gov. Bethany Hall-Long, New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer and National Wildlife Federation Chief Executive Officer Collin O'Mara.

In Monday's statement, Murray said it's imperative to maintain focus on party unity and organizational strength, and to take the fight to the party in power.

"With an unwavering commitment to party welfare and the electorate, Murray reaffirms her dedication to leadership responsibilities and the collective advancement of conservative principles," the statement reads. "Expressing gratitude to supporters who endorsed the prospect of her candidacy, Murray pledges to steer the Delaware GOP towards victory in the forthcoming elections."



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# 87 PLEDGE TO TEACH DURING EDUCATORS RISING SIGNING DAY

“I have been super excited for this moment,” she said. “I have wanted to be an educator since I was in second grade, so being here and being able to sign that I’m going to college for education is probably my biggest event that’s going to happen, because I have been waiting for this day and becoming an educator for such a long time now.”

Ever since she was little, she said, she went through a lot of challenges and trauma at home. “And there was always a teacher that cared enough,” she said, “and I want to be that teacher for somebody else.”

Carrera was joined by 87 students from 12 high schools throughout the state on signing day, which is similar to National Signing Day for college athletics, but is for seniors enrolled in the state’s Teacher Academy Programs of Study. Other schools represented include:

- Smyrna High School
- Delmar High School
- Polytech High School
- Appoquinimink High School
- Middletown High School
- Caesar Rodney High School
- Milford High School
- Thomas McKean High School
- Alexis I duPont High School
- Cape Henlopen High School
- Laurel High School

[READ MORE HERE](#)

BY JAREK RUTZ

The impact and caring role of teachers during a troubling childhood has sparked a career path for high schooler Leilani Carrera, who solidified that path Tuesday during the **Educators Rising** National Day of Signing. The senior at **Sussex Central High School** in the Indian River School District signed her letter of intent at the Old State House in Dover to continue her education at the **University of Delaware** to pursue a degree in elementary education.

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# NCCVT CAREER SIGNING DAY: 300 HOP INTO WORKFORCE

BY JAREK RUTZ

The First State workforce just broadened Monday as nearly 300 high school seniors from the **New Castle County Vocational Technical School District** put pen to paper as they inked their names for career signing day. The teenagers will begin work and earn income right after graduating high school with an arsenal of trades and skills, something that Superintendent Joseph Jones said is really what a vo-tech education is all about.

He said the day “represents opportunity and hard work,” and added that the graduates are expected to make about \$12 million combined in their first year of work.

As the students hopped onto the stage with family members or teachers to sign their papers, their employers were announced to the audience, each met with applause and a sense of pride and hope that all of the young adults will help bolster the local and state economy. Just a handful of the various industries and jobs the students

will enter include: Cosmetology, Medical assisting, Dental assisting, Technical drafting, Automotive technology, Auto body, Plumbing, Electrical trades, HVAC, Welding, Carpentry, Culinary arts, Graphic arts, Computer networking and programming, Early childhood education and Masonry.

Margaret LaFashia, director of workforce partnership development at **Nemours Children’s Health**, acknowledged that partnerships like the newly-developed one between Nemours and the district can help combat shortages in high-needs industries, such as nurses and other healthcare workers. There were about 10 on stage Monday that signed with Nemours.

LaFashia, who didn’t grow up in Delaware, reflected on how she would have loved a vo-tech education and how it’s a win-win for employers and young students who are eager to join the workforce.

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photo credit: William Penn Highschool Facebook Page





# NEW BILL LAYS OUT RULES TO HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFER PORTAL

BY JAREK RUTZ

The emergence of the transfer portal has drastically changed the landscape of college sports in the past few years, notably making it difficult for coaches to recruit and maintain players. Now, the same idea of athletes transferring schools has made its way into the high school level, and a new bill by the Delaware General Assembly aims to smooth the process.

**Senate Bill 281**, sponsored by Sen. Nicole Poore, D-Delaware City, makes changes based on the findings of the **Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association** (DIAA) Task Force. The task force, over the last eight months, studied and made recommendations to best address the needs of student athletes and ensure DIAA's effective and efficient functioning.

SB 281, which was discussed in a Senate Education Committee hearing Wednesday, addresses one of the identified issues: the waiver process when a student transfers from one school to another and wishes to play interscholastic athletics.

## OLD RULE

Under current regulations, a student who transfers schools and wishes to participate in sports must complete a period of ineligibility unless the student meets certain conditions or qualifies for an exception. In order to meet the conditions or exception or otherwise request a waiver of ineligibility, the student must go through a waiver process, in which the student applies for a waiver, DIAA's executive director makes an interim decision on the waiver, and the DIAA Board of Directors ratifies or rejects the executive director's interim decision.

If the board has any questions about any part of the waiver application or interim decision, they reject the interim decision and schedule a hearing for the student to testify to answer the additional questions.

By the time the board issues a final decision on the waiver, the student has lost time to play sports and the board has spent a great deal of its meeting time on the hearing, including going into executive session to

maintain a student's privacy, Poore said.

## NEW RULE

Under the bill, the executive director would make the final decision on a waiver, subject to an appeal of a three-member panel of board members. The executive director must issue their decision within 15 days of receiving a waiver and a student may appeal the decision to the appeals panel within 15 days of receiving the decision.

The appeals panel must issue its decision within 30 days of receiving an appeal, and it can't hold a hearing on an appeal or otherwise ask questions of a student who seeks an appeal. Rather, the panel must make its decision based on the documentation that the executive director used to make their decision.

"The athletes might want to transfer to be able to have that opportunity, whether they're a good player or not a good player, and everybody fits somewhere," Poore said. "Sometimes it is the location of the school, it could also be that someone has not been successful in the school that they're in, or for health reasons they need to make that change."

But, Poore added, the bill contains guardrails to make sure students aren't just jumping schools and having the ability to immediately pick up where they left off.

In NCAA college football, legendary head coach Nick Saban, who won a record seven national championships as a head coach—six at Alabama and one at LSU—noted the challenges of the transfer portal as a reason he suddenly retired in January.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



# WEIDNER LIFTS WILLIAM PENN OVER CARAVEL IN EXTRA INNINGS

BY NICK HALLIDAY



William Penn's Justin Weidner got the game winning hit and the win on the mound as the No. 8 Colonials needed extra innings to defeat the No. 10 Caravel Buccaneers on their home field Wednesday.

Weidner was clutch all game, but he couldn't have been any more clutch than in the top of the ninth inning. Mikey Baker led off the inning as he reached safety on an error followed by Colby Gilbert who was hit by a pitch.

With Gilbert on first and Baker on third, Caravel attempted a pickoff play that had Gilbert off the bag, but Caravel's Garrett Bohn was unable to hold on to the throw. Baker scored while Gilbert moved up to third base on the error. Weidner at the plate knocked a line drive to left field that knocked in Gilbert to take a 5-3 lead.

Weidner, now on the mound, was able to get the last three outs of the inning to close out the game in the bottom of the ninth. He pitched the last three innings of the game, coming in relief of starting pitcher John Grybowski who went six strong innings before reaching his pitch count. Weidner allowed one run, two hits and struck out two batters in relief and got the win for Penn.

Caravel's starting pitcher Tim Tyler went seven strong innings allowing two runs on two hits while striking out eight batters. Truman Auwerda and Gavin Evans each had two hits to lead the Buccaneers offensively.



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# STATE CHAMPION ALUMNI RETURN FOR THIRD YOUTH FOOTBALL CLINIC

BY PATRICK GARYANTES

It was a star-studded afternoon at the St. E Center for St. Elizabeth High School's third annual youth football clinic. Over 40 campers, current members of the high school coaching staff and players, and an impressive list of alumni players from three generations of Viking football as special coaches were in attendance for the event.

Campers were handed bags that included a tee shirt, water bottle, an autographed photo from alum Andre Patton and a report card that campers could use for progress. The report cards were used to gather campers' heights, weights and times for typical testing measurables. The tests included pushups, vertical jumps, broad jumps and three three-cone agility drills.

After the testing portion of the day, campers were split into position groups of quarterbacks/wide receivers,

lineman/tight ends, and running backs. The guest coaches worked campers through some basic positional fundamentals.

Finally, despite the rain, campers made their way down to Canby park for some 7v7 work on the practice fields to conclude the day. The alumni coaches were both team coaches and referees for the finale.

"Today marked the third year of our youth football clinics and each year you have to continue to make adjustments so that the kids have fun," head varsity coach Mike Lemon explained. "I do think they enjoyed themselves today throughout the entire clinic. No coach should overlook the enjoyment of any sport, it's such a crucial part."

The alumni guest coaches included members from the 1994, 1996 and 2010 state championship teams, as well as players from other successful areas of Viking football as laid out below.

## 1990S

Steve Azzanesi '95: 1994 State Championship quarterback. Wesley College quarterback 1996-2000. Wesley assistant football coach, 2000-2001, 2002-2017, 2018-2019. Delaware State University Offensive Coordinator 2020-2021. Current Alvernia Head Coach since 2022.

Rich Conway '95: 1x All-State. Member of 1994 State Championship team. 1994 Gatorade Football Player of the Year.

## 2000S

Joe Durney '01: All-Conference quarterback. 2x State runner-up. Former Wesley quarterback. St. Elizabeth 7th & 8th grade offensive coach 2006-2013.

Jeff Fletcher '01: All-State running back. 2x State runner-up. La Salle running-back 2001-2004. St. Elizabeth 7th & 8th grade offensive coach 2006-2013.

## 2010S

Dom Bright '12: All-Conference lineman. 2010 State Champion.

Jerome Padilla '11: All-Conference lineman. 2010 State Champion.

Justin Mcvey '12: All-State lineman. 2010 State Champion. 2013 Stevenson University.

James Rendle '13: All-State TE, DL. 2010 State Champion. Widener University defensive lineman 2013-2016.

Collin Russell '11: All-State TE, DE, Punter. 2010 State Champion.

[READ MORE HERE](#)



# MIDDLETOWN GIRLS' SOCCER REMAINS UNDEFEATED

BY JOE SINGLES

On a rainy Friday evening, the 11-1 St. Mark's girls' soccer team visited Cavalier Stadium and the 12-0 Middletown squad in what many considered a potential state final matchup of days gone by before most Delaware sports switched over to a multi-division format. Back and forth they went early, as both teams seemed content to kick and chase despite having talent up and down the field. St. Mark's Lily Phillips found Emma Manley multiple times early, but was unable to secure any quality scoring opportunities while the Cavaliers found their own offense rhythm 15 minutes into the first half that culminated with a goal in the 18th minute as Gabby Riley found the back of the net off a Cavalier corner kick. The goal seemed to energize the Cavaliers. Riley and company pushed forward with run after run, putting pressure on the Spartan defense who found themselves on their heels until the seven minute mark when Lily Holcroft found the ball at her feet from about eight yards out. Holcroft turned and fired a left-footed shot back across the goal mouth into the far side netting to put Middletown up 2-0 with time left to spare in the half. For the first time this season, the visiting Spartans found themselves with little to no answers for the opposing team's offensive attack.

The Cavalier offensive pressure continued into the second half, as the Middletown passing continued to keep the Spartans off balance despite the wet conditions. Then just four minutes into the half, the home team secured a free kick from 25 yards out. Riley sent a low shot skipping off the wet turf past a diving Marissa Cirillo to give the Cavaliers a 3-0 lead. St. Mark's did not go away quietly however. In the 50th minute, St. Mark's Ava Frohnafel, who coincidentally gave up the foul that lead to Middletown's third goal, redirected a St. Mark's corner into the back of the net for their first goal of the match. With 16:06 to go in the game, the Spartans struck again. Manley drove a shot past a diving keeper as her momentum drove her out of bounds and to the ground, but not before making the score 3-2. St. Mark's continued to put its own pressure on the Cavalier defense, but was unable to pull even on the scoreboard as the Cavaliers held on for their 13th win of the season. A win that should surely give the Middletown squad a boost of confidence as it heads into state tournament play coming up in less than two weeks.

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