

**KYW-AM/WIP-HD2 PHILADELPHIA, WPHI-FM JENKINTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA  
QUARTERLY SIGNIFICANT PROGRAMS REPORT**

January 1, 2024 – March 31, 2024

Station KYW (AM) provides an all-news radio service to Philadelphia and the surrounding metropolitan area at 1060kHz AM, with simulcasts on the FM dial on WPHI-FM at 103.9 MHz and WIP-FM-HD2 at 94.1 MHz HD2. By its very nature, this service deals with and is responsive to significant community issues on a regular basis. A variety of program elements ranging from reports of breaking news events to in-depth reports and public service announcements on matters of concern to the community are included.

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The report was prepared and reviewed by Newsroom Operations Manager, Dennis Edward.

**\*Bridging Philly is KYW Newsradio's half-hour public affairs show that airs Saturdays at 9:30p and Sundays at 8:30a\***

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## CHILDREN AND HUMAN SERVICES

### JANUARY

**With the holidays over, COVID-19, RSV and flu cases on the rise**

**January 2, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19, RSV, and the flu have been on the rise, and health officials expect them to shoot up even more now that holiday gatherings have wrapped up.

Most states have “moderate” to “very high” levels of respiratory illnesses, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. New Jersey is at the “very high” level, while Pennsylvania is “high.” Delaware is one of the handful of states that is “low.”

COVID-19 hospitalizations were up — close to 17% — and deaths were up 10% in the week ending on Dec. 23, according to the CDC.

Health experts are urging people to take precautions to protect themselves and those around them.

“If you can work from home if you’re feeling a little bit sick, that’s a great thing to do,” said Dr. John Russell, chair of the Department of Family Medicine at Jefferson Abington Hospital. “I think people should consider putting masks on again. Not forever and ever, but I think in a time when we’re having so much of this respiratory illness going around, especially if you are vulnerable, wearing a mask in public is not a bad thing.”

At least five states in other parts of the country currently have mask requirements at healthcare facilities. There are no such mandates in the greater Philadelphia area, but in western Pennsylvania, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center has one in effect, as of Dec. 20.

Health officials are also urging people to get vaccinated. The CDC released a health advisory in December saying not enough people were getting their shots.

“Low vaccination rates, coupled with ongoing increases in national and international respiratory disease activity caused by multiple pathogens, including influenza viruses, SARS-CoV-2 (the

virus that causes COVID-19), and RSV, could lead to more severe disease and increased healthcare capacity strain in the coming weeks,” the advisory says.

Less than 20% of Americans received the updated COVID-19 vaccine, according to the latest figures released by the CDC. That number is on par with the RSV vaccine, which the CDC recommends for adults 60 and older.

An estimated 42% of U.S. adults received the flu shot. Russell said there is still time to get one.

“The majority of flu activity over the last 35 years in the United States has been around February, so it’s not too late,” he assured. “So your doctor, I’m sure, still has the flu vaccine in the refrigerators.”

## **Record 410,000 Pa. residents have health coverage through Pennie — but some 700,000 don't, and time is running out**

**January 9, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — An estimated 700,000 Pennsylvanians currently have no health insurance, and there are just 10 days left to get affordable coverage through the state’s online health insurance marketplace, known as Pennie.

The Jan. 19 deadline for Pennie health plans is actually an extension. Normally, the final deadline is Jan. 15, but that’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day, so state officials added four extra days to give people until next week Friday.

Announcing the extension at Beckett Life Center, a North Philadelphia community center, Pennie Executive Director Devon Trolley pushed back on the three most common reasons people give for not signing up.

First, to those who think they don’t need insurance because they’re young and healthy: Accidents happen, she says. “Think about health insurance as protection against what you can’t control and can’t see coming.”

Second, for those who think they can't afford insurance: There are a variety of plans available, and the cost will never be more than 8.5% of your income. "What you pay for Pennie is based on your income — so, if you make less, you pay less."

She notes some plans cost \$0 a month.

Third, for those who are simply overwhelmed by the process and the options: Help is available, she says. "We have call center representatives that are both English- and Spanish-speaking, and we even have in-person help throughout the commonwealth."

Carol Zachary Smith, Beckett's executive director, says she used to pay \$1,100 per month for a family insurance plan. Now she enrolls through Pennie and gets the same coverage for free.

"It can be a little challenging, but they know a lot," she said. "So I implore you, once you give them the information that they need, they can help you through it."

On the upside, Trolley says, a record 410,000 Pennsylvanians have health coverage for 2024 through Pennie.

All plans cover essentials, including primary care visits, hospitalizations, immunizations, and mental health treatment.

## **Deptford Mall enforces policy requiring chaperone for teens on weekends**

**January 17, 2024**

DEPTFORD, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — Teens must now be accompanied by an adult chaperone on weekend evenings at the Deptford Mall.

A robust retail shopping scene is the lifeblood of Deptford's local economy, and Mayor Paul Medany said he wants to be proactive in preventing theft and any other kind of nuisance behavior.

"We know people are stealing, regretfully, but we want them to know: You come to Deptford, you're going to get caught and you're going to get punished," he said.

Anyone under 18 must be accompanied by an adult over the age of 25 on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights, starting at 5 p.m. The over-25 adult can supervise up to four minors.

There will also be more police on patrol at the mall.

Medany said there wasn't a specific incident that prompted the strict policy, but after a meeting with police and mall security, they all decided a curfew would be the best way to avoid potential problems moving forward.

"I want to be proactive," he said. "I don't want any issues or problems. I don't want to wait until something happens and then we react to it."

Medany noted there haven't been any arrests either. "We stemmed any issues. We go up to the kids and tell them 'Listen, you're misbehaving and you have to leave.'"

Other malls, including Cherry Hill Mall and the Fashion District in Philadelphia, have used similar policies off and on in the past.

The whole country is dealing with a rise in retail theft and social media meetups that sometimes get out of hand, Medany added, which he finds unacceptable. He said he wants the township and local businesses to know that they will "aggressively" work to curb retail theft.

"Don't come to the Deptford Mall and do something stupid," he warned.

## **New law requires NJ schools to issue reports on students' mental health**

**January 24, 2024**

TRENTON, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — Gov. Phil Murphy has signed a new bill into law that requires schools to report on child mental health, as the state is seeing an uptick in teen mental illness and suicide.

The law's sponsor, Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt, says it is essential to better understand what kids are going through and why there has been an increase in depression and other mental health disorders in young people.

The goal is to save lives by learning about the best ways of preventing suicide. She said it “focuses on trying to capture what each one of our school districts are actually doing in the schools as it pertains to suicide prevention.”

She says they want to identify some of the best practices being used by schools and find ways to share that with others to hopefully save lives.

“It really helps to formulate what can you do, what’s in our control to do. And these are the things that are definitely in our control, that we can act upon to minimize the negativity around mental health,” Lampitt said.

“We need to increase opportunities for people to find mental health providers.”

According to national statistics, the suicide rate among children ages 12 to 17 increased 16% between 2008 and 2020.

## **FEBRUARY**

### **New teen center in South Philly offers youth a safe space to gather**

**February 1, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A teen center is officially open in South Philadelphia, a place where organizers say kids can be engaged and safe.

Downstairs at the Caring People Alliance, located at 15th and West Porter streets, the South Philadelphia Boys and Girls Club space now has a fresh coat of paint and tables full of activities, ready to welcome local teenagers.

“It’s exciting,” said Jewel Felder-James, director of teen programming. “I just can’t wait to see it fully functioning, seeing kids having fun, and music playing and kids just doing what they want to do.”

She said when she was a teen, she got involved in activities of her own, and they stuck with her years later. “I started caring,” she recalled. “I started wanting to get up in the morning. I wanted to get up and go do those things.”

At Wednesday afternoon’s ribbon-cutting, speakers reminded the audience that the space needed a major clean-up. The 3,350-square-foot, multi-level teen center has new areas for them to hang out and activities ranging from art, technology, podcasting, and more.

“It is a needed place. It helps the kids grow,” said 19-year-old Shakeem Smith, who has participated in the program in North Philly since he was 14. He has since been hired as a mentor for kids coming into the program.

“It gives kids the opportunities to experience what they really want to be in life,” he said. “They can stay away from outside drama, the drugs, the shootings, and everything out there. And also to have a place to experience their talents and become a better person.”

Local parent Teresa Jack helped get support and backing for the space. She said there's a void citywide for teen programming, as well as space to accommodate youth in the city — especially as they age out of activities.

“Having a space where teenagers want to come and be here and be with their peers, be with trusted adults,” she said, “it’s critical, but as a parent, it’s really heartwarming.”

The free center will be open until 8 p.m. every school night.

The space is done, but officials need some help filling it. Caring People Alliance is fundraising to get more equipment and other supplies on its wish list.

### **Delco’s newest state-of-the-art support center caters to young victims of sexual assault February 7, 2024**

MEDIA, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — A new state-of-the-art support center in Delaware County is helping young sexual assault victims get the help they need, while also helping put sex offenders behind bars.

The Family Support Line provides a crucial resource for court cases involving children, especially those who are sexual abuse victims, according to their executive director Sarah Gibbons. She says their new 13,000-square-foot space in Chester Heights, equipped with bright lights, plush seats, and comforting toys, allows them to better serve some of the county’s most vulnerable residents.

“We provide 360 comprehensive child sexual abuse education, prevention education, therapy, and also advocacy,” she said.

Their new children’s advocacy center is critical for their forensic interviewers who are tasked with sitting with children and speaking with them about what trauma they might have experienced. Many of those interviews are used in court to help convict sex offenders.

Gibbons says having a safe, comfortable space is crucial to helping those young witnesses who otherwise might be too intimidated to talk.



“A child having to go to a courthouse or a law enforcement office to testify around what has happened to them is very trauma intensive,” she said.

According to Gibbons, in the last fiscal year, the support line provided more than 400 forensic interviews and saw over 700 kids in the county. So far this year, they’re on pace to see even more in their new space.

Gibbons says they’re using a \$100,000 grant to create a room that provides medical exams, so families don’t have to go to various places and relive their trauma.

### **Philly Dems raise awareness of new child care tax credit amid filing season**

**February 16, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Members of the Pennsylvania House Delegation visited the Early Learning Literacy Academy in Philadelphia Thursday to discuss the expansion of one of Pennsylvania’s tax credit programs.

Pennsylvania’s Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit was created to help ease the costs for working families. Eligible families can claim the credit when they file tax returns.

And now, since the state's credit is the same as the federal credit, Pennsylvania will provide a 100% match to the tax credit. It was previously 30%.

Households with two or more children will see a state credit of up to \$2,100 — and households with one child, up to \$1,050. According to the Department of Revenue, the credit cap phases down as income levels increase.

State Representative Morgan Cephias says childcare plays a pivotal role in the lives of working parents.

“For millions of families across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, particularly here in the City of Philadelphia when we are dealing with a startling 25% poverty rate, access to reliable and affordable childcare is not just a convenience, it's a lifeline,” Cephias said.

Latoya Monroe, owner and director of the Early Learning Literacy Academy, says working just to be able to afford childcare is no way to live.

“The tireless effort that the Pennsylvania House delegation put in to increase this child tax credit will undoubtedly improve the quality of life for many families.”

More than 27,000 working Philadelphians will see their tax credit triple for daycare costs when they file their taxes this year.

### **Philadelphia City Councilmember goes to battle for better health outcomes for Black women in pregnancy**

**February 29, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — City Council Majority Leader Katherine Gilmore Richardson has awarded a foundation of \$250,000 to address the crises of maternal mortality and homelessness among Black women in Philadelphia.

Richardson had her own scare in 2016 while giving birth to her son, she explains. She was in the worst pain of her life, knew something was wrong, and she demanded a caesarian section as she advocated for herself.

“Little did I know at that time, my uterus had ruptured while I was in labor, and if it had been any longer, things may not have ended well,” she said.

Hers is just one of many horror stories Black women experience when they face life-threatening problems during the birthing process.

The \$250,000 will go to the A Home From Shana Foundation, which honors the life and legacy of LaShana Gilmore, who died in 2019 at age 34, while giving birth to her second child.

“I never had the opportunity to know her,” Richardson said of Gilmore. “And I remember hearing about her story. And I said we cannot let her story go, because it happens to too many of us. And I said when I have the opportunity to do something about this issue, we are going to do just that.”

They will establish the first and only maternity safe haven in the United States, called LaborLiveLove, staffed with birth doulas.

“Being pregnant, and giving birth, while Black can possibly be one of the most traumatic experiences that one would ever endure,” said founder Cleopatra Robinson. “As of today, we are still being sent home with chest pain, high fever, excessive bleeding, incisions that show no sign of healing, bad headaches, trouble breathing.”

Robinson was Shana’s best friend and is now, herself, a doula. Statistics show Black women are about four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women.

“A lot of people are scared. A lot of people don't know resources, and a lot of people don't know where to begin to ask for help. Some people are scared to ask for help,” said Nina Winfield, a Philadelphia mother who was previously unhoused. “I wasn't and I hope that nobody else will be either.”

Winfield received help from A Home From Shana Foundation.

State Rep. Gina Curry, co-founder of the Black Maternal Health Caucus, says they plan to introduce the Pennsylvania Momnibus on March 18. The bill package covers maternal health community funds, commercial insurance coverage for blood pressure cuffs, and commercial insurance coverage for doula services, among other necessities.

## MARCH

### **Former director of the Office of Homeless Services welcomes investigations into overspending under her leadership**

**March 1, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Liz Hersh, the former director of Philadelphia’s Office of Homeless Services (OHS), said she welcomes an outside audit and an inspector general’s investigation of cost overruns while she was in charge.

Hersh ran OHS for nearly eight years, from 2016 to October 2023, and faced unprecedented challenges — the opioid crisis, the pandemic, the Parkway encampment — and she’s proud of her record.

“I make no apologies for prioritizing life-saving services throughout my administration and especially throughout the pandemic, the opioid crisis,” she told KYW Newsradio in an interview this week. “Unlike cities across the country, where they stopped providing those life-giving services [during the pandemic], we never closed our doors and we bucked national odds. In Philadelphia, homelessness went down by 22 % between 2018 and 2022.”

City officials say cost overruns began during the 2020 pandemic and accumulated until they totaled \$14 million over four years.

Hersh attributes them to new funding streams that confounded the city’s financial system: federal money the city had never received before, new state grants, all with different rules and timetables, she said.

Overruns are not uncommon. The Philadelphia Fire Department went over budget by \$14 million in one year, in 2023. Fleet services went \$17 million over and subsidies to the Community College of Philadelphia were \$16 million higher than budgeted that year alone.

OHS, though, also postponed payments to providers for months at a time. Hersh says she worked with the providers so they always had what they needed even as she grappled with accounting issues brought on by the pandemic.

“We would all get on the phone sometimes every day, every week, every month, whatever it took to resolve the issues,” Hersh said.

That's why she said she welcomes the scrutiny of her spending.

“I hope it will accelerate the city’s ability to respond to these emergencies when they arise so that the next time the people who are charged with saving lives have the tools that they need,” Hersh said.

City Council is conducting its own investigation. Council member Katherine Gilmore Richardson has even proposed a charter change to create an ombudsman just for OHS.

That is not on Hersh’s list of what the office needs.

“What the Office of Homeless Services needs is enough money to house every single person who is experiencing homelessness, and enough money to pay the providers so their employees aren’t making just \$15 an hour and they can recruit and retain qualified people,” she said. “What I think the Office of Homeless Services needs is a modern financial infrastructure and staffing that supports the kind of complex funding situation we have in getting grants from local, state, and federal dollars.

“And what I think the Office of Homeless Services needs is to be supported in investing in the men, women, and children who are experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia — 70% of whom, in 2022, had never been homeless before. Let’s keep our eye on the ball.”

## **Federal budget dispute over LIHEAP is putting low-income families in Pa. at risk of utility shutoff**

**March 15, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — With three weeks remaining for low-income families to get help with utility bills through a well-known utility assistance program, Pennsylvania is running out of money because Congress is withholding any remaining funds.

Some states contribute to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP which helps low-income households pay heating bills and restore service. Since hundreds of thousands of Pennsylvanians depend on it, the hold-up in releasing the funds would impact the most vulnerable residents.

But Pennsylvania runs its entire program on federal funds so the budget dispute in Washington means a \$2 million shortfall.

Department of Human Services Secretary Val Arkoosh has announced the state is pausing cash grants till the situation is resolved but will not shorten the season and will continue to issue crisis payments for those in imminent danger of a heat shut-off.

Lydia Gottesfeld, Managing Attorney of Community Legal Services Health and Independence Unit, says although she's pleased the state is continuing applications and crisis grants, the situation shows the need for the state to put money into the program.

“We’ve pushed Pennsylvania to expand our LIHEAP programs so we cover not only heating season but cooling season and to put state funds in the program,” she said. “Having state funds in the program would mitigate this crisis that we’re dealing with right now.”

Gottesfeld expects the budget dispute to be resolved before LIHEAP closes on April 5th.

## **As child care waitlists balloon, some parents turn to au pairs**

**March 18, 2024**

LAWNDALE (KYW Newsradio) — In 2023, it was reported that more than 35,000 children in Pennsylvania are on waiting lists for day care centers. It's the product of COVID-19 staffing shortages that are still impacting child care services across the country, and it's forced some parents to find other options.

Caroline Bright is one of those parents. She lives in the Lawndale section of Philadelphia, is a flight attendant and is also pursuing her master's degree in Divinity. Her husband is a JAG officer in the Army National Guard and also works for the City of Philadelphia.

They're two parents with very hectic schedules, and when their first child was 18 months old, her husband suggested an au pair.

Bright wasn't buying her husband's proposal at first.

“And I said, No, no, there's no way we can afford that. It's way too expensive. That is not something that we have no way like our house is too small,” she said.

The notion that au pairs are only for wealthy families is a common misconception. Au pairs are young people between the ages of 18 and 26 from foreign countries that arrive in the U.S. on J-1 visas to stay with American families and care for their children.

The State Department oversees the program that welcomes au pairs to the U.S. It began as a cultural exchange visa program in 1986. Regulations require au pairs to receive a weekly stipend, room and board, and three meals a day. For Bright, that's a weekly cost of just over \$400.

After some persuading, Bright caved, and now she and her husband are on their second au pair, Issy from the U.K., who they welcomed in October 2022.

“I am not exaggerating when I say that Issy is truly the little sister I never had,” said Bright. “And in fact my daughter is very possessive of Issy, and it's really special but we've had so many adventures with Issy.”

She said Issy also allows her to have the flexibility that daycare wouldn't allow her. Bright's sentiment was echoed by Natalie Jordan, senior vice president of Cultural Care Au Pair, a designated sponsor of the federal au pair program.

"The au pair program offers an alternative option where families can have accessible care that they can have flexibility to be able to create a schedule that works well for them and for the au pair," she said.

But Jordan did warn that parents must be willing to share space, culture, and traditions with the au pair for it to be successful. Parents that only want someone to take care of their kids should stay away.

"If you're willing to fully embrace a young person coming into your home, and learning some things that might really be brand new to them," said Jordan, citing the metric system or driving on the other side of the road as examples. "These are small things that we might take for granted, but are differences that need patience and time to work through."

According to the State Department, there are approximately 29,000 au pairs currently working in the U.S.

### **Child advocates already seeking changes to mayor's budget, including more money for schools and pre-K**

**March 25, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker's budget was not even a week old when advocates began lobbying City Council for changes to her \$6.3 billion spending plan.

The child advocacy organization Children First went office to office last week asking council members to back four changes in the budget: more money for schools, pre-schools, out-of-school time, and diversion programs to keep kids out of the criminal justice system.

Parker did propose an increase in the percentage of city taxes that go to schools, from 55% to 56%, but parent Jazmin Banks said it should be 58%.



“We cannot afford any cuts to the school district budget so that the gains the district has made these last few years are not lost, because the district is facing a fiscal cliff,” she said.

Parker’s budget holds the number of free pre-K seats steady, but parent Savon Almodovar said that number should grow.

“We want 250 more PHL pre-K seats. My child is in one of them, and I thank God for it,” Almodovar said. “Our district is facing a fiscal cliff and our kids cannot afford to move backward.”

Council members say they are open to the advocates’ requests and will keep them in mind as they rework the budget over the next few months. Councilmembers Jaime Gauthier and Rue Landau welcomed the proposals.

“These are things that I support and I’m just looking into the budget to see how the proposal relates to these requests,” Gauthier said.

“Anything we can do to support young people in schools, after-school programs, and in any way in our city, I’m all for it,” Landau added.

## ARTS AND CULTURE

### JANUARY

**Philly Loves Bowie Week is back — alongside a new exhibit on music’s ability to bring change  
January 6, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Nobody gets David Bowie like Philly, especially in early January. It’s the time of year when the city comes together for a week of Bowie-inspired celebrations.

Philly Loves Bowie Week is an annual festival honoring the rock icon, who died of liver cancer on Jan. 10, 2016, just two days after his 69th birthday. There are tribute performances, dance parties, gallery exhibitions, and even a Bowie-focused karaoke night.

Everyone has a story of how they found Bowie, but few have a story like Patti Brett.

“I discovered him when I was 17 years old,” I saw him live in December of ‘72, and seeing that show changed my life.”

Later, Brett was one of the “Sigma Kids” standing outside Sigma Sound Studios as Bowie recorded his legendary album “Young Americans” in Philadelphia. He invited them in to hear the unedited tracks, inspired heavily by the Philly soul sound he’d fallen in love with during his “Diamond Dogs” tour.

Bowie’s bond with the city would grow deeper over the years, not only through regular touring appearances but also a pair of live albums — “David Live,” recorded at the Tower Theater and “Stage,” recorded in part at the Spectrum. Notably, Bowie also narrated a 1978 recording of “Peter and the Wolf,” performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra.

In 2017, Brett, a bartender at Doobies in South Philly, found other Bowie lovers to inaugurate a week of Bowie celebrations in the city. This year, the annual Philly Loves Bowie Week runs now through Jan. 13.

On Friday night, The National Liberty Museum kicked off the festivities with its fourth annual Bowie Bash.

“Oh, who isn’t a Bowie fan?” asked museum CEO Alaine Arnott. The event this year comes alongside the opening of the museum’s “Amplified” exhibit, which showcases the power of art and music to spur social change.

“A lot of people come and they expect it to be about protest music or big events and what we really found is that it’s really most important to talk about the personal connections,” said Aaron Billheimer, the museum’s director of exhibitions.

“The nostalgia the people have, the way they’re moved by the music, that’s what actually empowers them to cause the social movements.”

For Billheimer, the late singer-songwriter evokes both nostalgia — but also empowerment, through his ever-shifting styles and personas. “He was a person who was fluid and kind of traveled through different social norms and sort of represents all of us,” he said, alluding to how the singer elided the boundaries of gender during the 1970s.

Brett, for her part, couldn’t be happier to pair the Bowie Week kickoff with the “Amplified” exhibit, which runs through April 8. “I think it’s a perfect match ... I think he would be blown away by it,” she said.

“He’s been so influential to so many people with, you know, being who you are, don’t care about what people think, do what you want to do.”

Or as Bowie himself — as Ziggy Stardust — summed it up, “Let all the children boogie.”

## **Rowan University to build healing arts center thanks to \$1M donation**

**January 6, 2024**

GLASSBORO, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — Rowan University will be the site of a new healing arts center, thanks to a donor who says painting helped change his outlook on life after he was paralyzed.

A \$1 million gift from Dr. James George will fund the creation of the healing arts center in his name. George worked for decades as an emergency medicine physician, until a fall paralyzed him. He says painting became a passion during his recovery at Magee Rehabilitation Center in Philadelphia.

“When I was in Magee rehab hospital, just barely beginning to recover some movement on my left side, I could just put marks on paper. And then after a couple of weeks of that, I discovered color, and I ended up painting every day when I was at Magee,” he said.

“That, for me, has been a miraculous gift of art in my life after my accident.”

George says he’s right-handed but gained function in his left side first, and he found joy and inspiration in learning something new. He says this turned into the passion that helped push his limits of mental and physical recovery.

He now hopes to share this experience with others through the creation of the new center, “which would collaborate with a wider and wider network of healthcare institutions, community groups, Rowan students, and other folks,” he explained.

“It gave and gives me great personal satisfaction and it keeps me active,” George said, “so all of those things are reasons why I decided to do this.”

Rowan’s Creative Arts and Communications Dean Sanford Tweedie says the Dr. James George & Family Healing Arts Center will be available to patients, their families, students, and just about anyone else they can help.

“He hasn’t used this phrase yet but he’s said it before: he sees this opportunity for the healing arts as a weapon of mass improvement,” Tweedie shared.

Rowan President Dr. Ali Houshmand says George is a longtime member of the Rowan community who leads by example — and helping to unlock the healing power of creativity may be the greatest gift of all.

### **Philly Art Commission gives final, unanimous approval to Harriet Tubman statue project January 11, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia’s new Harriet Tubman statue is one step closer to taking its place outside of City Hall, as officials gave final approval to the project.

The Philadelphia Art Commission unanimously approved the commission at a regularly scheduled meeting on Wednesday, allowing the city to begin the contracting process with artist Alvin Pettit. The Jersey City-based Pettit was chosen last October to create the statue after an open call to artists was narrowed down to five finalists.

All five finalists were presented to the public in an online survey that received nearly 3,000 responses. Pettit’s design scored the highest in every category, including likeness, essence, and emotional and educational qualities.

The statue will be titled “A Higher Power: The Call of a Freedom Fighter,” and will stand on the northeast apron of City Hall upon its completion. According to the city’s Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, it is inspired by Tubman’s Civil War heroism, including an 1863 battle where she led 150 Black Union soldiers and rescued more than 700 enslaved people. Tubman was the first woman to lead an armed military operation in the U.S.

“As the first ever woman mayor of Philadelphia, I am thrilled that the first piece of public art to be approved under this administration will be this statue of a Black woman who fought for freedom here in Philadelphia,” said Mayor Chelle Parker.

OCT. 30, 2023

Pettit says the statue, which depicts Tubman with a rifle across her arm and her hands clasped in prayer, is also inspired by a 1975 painting of George Washington at Valley Forge. “Since [George Washington] is considered by most to be the primary founding father of our nation, I

feel it is only fitting to reimagine this famous image with Harriet as the founding mother of freedom,” said the artist.

A permanent Tubman statue has been in the works since 2022 after a traveling statue of the abolitionist received positive feedback from Philadelphians. The Kenney administration commissioned that statue’s creator, Wesley Wofford, to create the permanent work.

However, the choice of Wofford, a white sculptor from North Carolina, received pushback from many Black artists from the area, who were upset that the city automatically chose to move forward with Wofford rather than offer local artists, including those of color, the opportunity to submit their own designs.

## **Curtain up! Ensemble Arts Philly takes center stage as presenting brand for former Kimmel Cultural Campus**

**January 14, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — What’s in a name? Ask the Kimmel Cultural Campus, which has changed its name to Ensemble Arts Philly.

The Kimmel Cultural Campus may have been known as the centerpiece of performance on the Avenue of the Arts, but the name was difficult to distinguish from the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, which is a single venue within the campus.

“What we were finding was that people were showing up with a ticket to the Academy of Music at the beautiful Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts,” said President and CEO Matías Tarnopolsky.

The organization is hoping to clear that up by making Ensemble Arts Philly the presenting brand for shows at the Kimmel Center, Miller Theater, Academy of Music, and Forrest Theater. The newly named Ensemble Arts Philly will present just about every performance that would play before on the Kimmel Cultural Campus.

The musical “Ain’t Too Proud” currently running at the Academy of Music, “Girl From the North Country” coming to the Forrest Theatre, and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra coming to Verizon Hall inside the Kimmel Center, are all Ensemble Arts Philly shows.

Ensemble Arts Philly will also present “Hamilton” in 2024 and “MJ the Musical” in 2025.

The Philadelphia Orchestra, which performs at the Kimmel Center, will maintain its own brand and website, but tickets will also be available on the Ensemble Arts Philly website.

“For the first time ever, you could buy a ticket for a Broadway show and a Philadelphia Orchestra performance in the same shopping cart,” Tarnopolsky said.

Tarnopolsky says the new name is all about bringing people together.

“Ensemble is a warm embrace. It's a unifying concept. Ensemble Arts Philly is about bringing the audiences, the communities, of Philadelphia together with the great artists and performances of our day in our beautiful venues.”

## **FEBRUARY**

### **Black cinema classics take center stage this weekend at Philadelphia Film Center**

**February 3, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Classics of Black cinema, as well as movies that flew under the radar are on display this weekend at the Philadelphia Film Center in Center City.

The five-night Black Cinema Weekend series kicked off Black History Month on Thursday with a screening of Zeinabu Irene Davis’ 1991 romantic drama “A Powerful Thang.” The Philadelphia Film Society, which operates the Film Center, followed that on Friday with that same year’s seminal coming-of-age story “Boyz N the Hood.”

The Film Center also has a series of events scheduled over the weekend before the films, including everything from a celebration of Black women filmmakers to a family-fun trivia night. Black Cinema Weekend runs through Sunday.

“What I love about film in particular is that it has a power to spark conversation, show you something, and have you grapple with it as a community,” said Joshua Campbell, director of education for PFS. He worked alongside education and programming coordinator Yace Sula to assemble the lineup.

“What I love about this program specifically, it’s a plethora of varying narratives of Blackness that aren’t necessarily explicitly about Blackness,” shared Sula. “It’s just about being a person in this world and navigating the things you navigate in life, but you can’t separate Blackness from that.”

The selected films also honor the achievements of their creators, like “Boyz N the Hood” director John Singleton. Singleton made the movie right out of film school and received Oscar nominations for Best Original Screenplay and Best Director — becoming not only the youngest, but also the first Black director to be nominated.

“The best way to honor the likes of a John Singleton is to continue that work, and to continue uplifting Black filmmakers and filmmakers of color, and giving them the opportunity to continue the work that he did,” said Sula.

The movie’s themes of gun violence, police brutality, and family are just a few that some of the other films this weekend will grapple with while showcasing the complexity of Blackness. “It’s asking us, in this moment, ‘Have we really grown, have we really learned, have we really evolved if this thing is still happening?’” said Campbell.

Several dozen Black creatives gathered Friday evening for a cocktail hour before entering the theater to see the Singleton classic. Jae Rich was the mind behind the cocktails, and she has a whole slate of them to go with every movie being shown across Black Cinema Weekend.

“We called it Sweet Cinematics, and that was infusing flavor with film, and I decided to theme all of the drinks around the movies,” said Rich, who called Friday’s drink “Concrete Jungle.”

“We came up with these amazing ideas,” she added. “How can we help people experience all of the amazing things that the Philadelphia Film Society has? Just movies, but they also have an amazing bar experience here.”

Six other movies will be showcased this weekend, including “Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song,” credited with kicking off the Blaxplotation wave of the ‘70s, and 1982’s “Losing Ground,” the first movie directed by a Black woman since the 1920s.



Also on the schedule are the supernatural drama “Eve’s Bayou,” starring Samuel L. Jackson, and the boxing biopic “Big George Foreman.”

## **Camden County College unveils exhibition highlighting legacy of Black baseball figures February 5, 2024**

CHERRY HILL, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — A new exhibition now open at Camden County College showcases the impact Black athletes had on baseball.

The exhibition, “A League Apart,” focuses on the importance of breaking barriers with a series of historic photos and stories about Philadelphia Negro League baseball, as well as five Black individuals whose impact on the game is immeasurable.

Camden County Commissioner Jon Young says this is a great way to teach Black kids about the Black heroes of baseball.

“I think these stories and these types of exhibits really highlight baseball at a time where baseball is kind of teetering a little bit and trying to find some new identity,” Young said.

Visitors will find Octavius Catto in the exhibit. “He founded the second Black baseball team in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Pythons,” Young said.

South Philadelphia Little League phenom Mo’ne Davis is also there. “Everyone knows that great story and how she broke some boundaries,” Young said.

Also on the roster are Ed Bolden, Pop Lloyd, and Phillies legend Dick Allen.

“Dick Allen belongs in the Hall of Fame. We all know that. The guy was a hell of a slugger,” Young said.

Admission to the exhibit is free at Camden County College’s Cherry Hill campus, and it will be open until May 20.

## **Banned books by Black authors get new life in Little Free(dom) Libraries**

**February 6, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Visit Philadelphia has launched a new initiative for Black History Month to make hundreds of banned books by Black authors available to readers.

The Little Free(dom) Library project is aimed at encouraging Philadelphians to explore Black history. Together with the Free Library of Philadelphia and Little Free Library, Visit Philadelphia placed boxes in 13 visitor hubs across the city. More than 1,500 books by Black authors are distributed through those boxes.

According to free speech nonprofit PEN America, more than 30 states have banned certain books by Black authors. As Visit Philadelphia's CEO Angela Val says, the Little Free(dom) Library initiative demonstrates Philadelphia's commitment to making these stories accessible to both visitors and residents.

“We understand that our history in America can be complex but we celebrate it here in Philadelphia,” said Val, “and we do that by also telling Black stories — which are also American history stories.”

Loraine Carter and her two daughters spent the weekend visiting Philly museums, historic houses, and the Little Free(dom) Libraries. She calls the project outstanding but warns the books are going fast.

“We took books and when we came back ... many were already taken. They were gone,” she said.

The Little Free(dom) Libraries can be found throughout the city at the following locations:

1. Betsy Ross House, 239 Arch Street
2. Columbia North YMCA, 1400 N. Broad Street
3. Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, 2027 Fairmount Avenue
4. Faheem's Hands of Precision, 2100 S. 20th Street
5. Frankford Community Development Corporation, 4667 Paul Street
6. Franklin Square, 200 N. 6th Street

7. Historic Germantown, 5501 Germantown Avenue
8. Johnson House Historic Site, 6306 Germantown Avenue
9. Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, 419 S. 6th Street
10. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2600 Benjamin Franklin Parkway
11. The Independence Visitor Center, 599 Market Street
12. The Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, 300 S. Broad Street
13. South Street Off Center, 407 South Street

**Marian Anderson Museum and historic church to present one-day pop-up exhibit, 'Faith, Music and Community'**

**February 11, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The Marian Anderson Museum is partnering with the historic Tindley Temple United Methodist Church on Broad Street for a Black History Month event honoring two very special people in the singer’s life.

Jillian Patricia Pirtle, a National Marian Anderson Scholar artist with the museum, says faith, music, and community are at the heart of the pop-up exhibit experience: “Faith Music & Community.”

“They are important because they foster the story of the Black community in Philadelphia,” said Pirtle.

The exhibit examines the lives of Rev. Charles A. Tindley and opera singer Marian Anderson — both connected to Tindley Temple United Methodist Church in Center City.

“The reason why this is so significant is because Marian Anderson’s mother was a lifetime member of the church. And because of that, Marian Anderson had several meaningful concerts there during her lifetime and career in honor of her mother.”

Tindley headed the church during the civil rights movement of the 20th century. Both Anderson and Tindley were integral in the church's involvement in civil rights and in lifting up the Black community.

“It’s a brand-new experience. Philadelphia has never seen it before. An exhibition that features Rev. Charles Tindley and everything he did to build a bridge of faith for the Black community in the 1800s into the 20th century — and Marion Anderson’s significant role with that and her family.”

Pirtle says the one-day event — Sunday, Feb. 25, at 1 p.m. — will include recordings and live performances.

On display, visitors will find photos, artifacts, and sheet music from Marian Anderson and the church’s historic collections, showcasing the essential roles faith, music, and community played in American history.

“These things are a rich part of the story of what makes Black Philadelphia the experience it has been since 1663.”

## **MARCH**

**After decades in the dark, historic Lansdowne Theater set to reopen as a concert venue this fall**

**March 14, 2024**

LANSDOWNE, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — The last time the Lansdowne Theater hosted guests was Independence Day 1987 for a showing of “Beverly Hills Cop II.” An electrical fire damaged the theater and the owner walked away, leaving it untouched for more than 35 years.

Now, tickets are available at the historic Delaware County theater, but not for movies on the silver screen. It is being converted into a live music venue.

Construction started in August 2023 and is expected to be completed by the fall of this year. The Historic Lansdowne Theater Corporation used grant money and donations from the community to transform the former movie theater into a state-of-the-art concert hall.

“The borough forgave some of the building permits, so that saved us money. The county has made a significant financial investment in the building, as has the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the federal government,” said Matt Schultz, executive director of the Historic Lansdowne Theater Corporation.

The building, which opened in 1927, has old but strong bones, Schultz said. He is in charge of preserving its character, and he's doing so by keeping some pieces intact, like the projection booth equipment.

"This is how they controlled all the lights in the theater, through this board," he described. "It's disconnected. We're just going to keep it as a relic of the days that movies were shown here."

Concertgoers can expect new seating that resembles the theater's original chairs, a cash bar, and a stage that can support bands and their equipment.

"We're going to extend the stage overtop of what was the orchestra pit," he said. "When movies would be delivered to the theaters, sheet music would be delivered [too], so the organ would play along. We're not sure how frequently they did it, but there would be a pit orchestra here of maybe four or five people playing along with the organ."

The theater tested out the stage with a performance by a capella group Straight No Chaser. Schultz said the size of the venue made it an intimate show.

"I got to introduce them," he said, "and when I stepped out on the stage and looked at this big auditorium, I felt like I was standing in my living room. Because when you have that many people, it just makes it tiny, which makes it a great place to see a show."

The theater's first official acts will be Hot Tuna, Don McLean, Will Downing, and Southside Johnny in December.

Concertgoers can see the venue's progress for themselves on April 13 at an open house from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at the theater's old ticket booth for \$20.

## **Ensemble Arts promises big hits and even bigger names in 2024-25 Broadway season** **March 18, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Ensemble Arts, the new presenting brand of The Philadelphia Orchestra and The Kimmel Cultural Campus, announced its 2024-25 Broadway season full of current and past hits that have captivated audiences.

As Francis Egler with Ensemble Arts highlighted, among heavy hitters like “Les Miserables” (which kicks off the season on Aug. 27) and “Hamilton” (beginning on Oct. 29) is a Philly classic.

“We’re really excited to showcase the amazing new revival of ‘The Wiz’ and [it] has everything from home and [a] brand new day, so many songs that we haven’t had a chance to present on stage in Philly,” she said.

“The Wiz” began its pre-Broadway tour in Philly at the Forrest Theatre in 1974. It would hit Broadway in 1975.

On the whole, the season will feature 12 shows and run between Aug. 27, 2024 and July 27, 2025. The caper in July of next year is “Life of Pi.” During the holiday season there’s also a variety of exclusive touring productions and children’s favorites like “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.”

## **Philly’s Jewish history museum could become part of the Smithsonian** **March 21, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Bipartisan-backed legislation was introduced in Congress to try to make Philadelphia’s Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History a part of the Smithsonian Institution.

Lawmakers want to establish a commission of nine people to “study the feasibility of transferring” the Weitzman to the Smithsonian, a press release from the Jewish museum says.

If integrated, the Weitzman would become the 22nd museum under the Smithsonian but would remain in Philadelphia.

“Our museum’s location here on Independence Mall, here in Philadelphia is very intentional,” said Chief Public Engagement Officer Emily August. “A lot of people have asked us over the years, ‘Why aren’t you in D.C.? Why aren’t you in New York?’ And the answer seems so clear to us.

“When you come to a museum and explore American Jewish stories in that location and look out the windows across at the Liberty Bell and Independence Mall and Independence Hall, it’s a really powerful feeling.”

After the commission process, another round of legislation would be needed to officially make the transfer. August said it would be an exponential opportunity for the Weitzman to tell American Jewish stories on the Smithsonian’s level.

The legislation was introduced in the House by U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz and backed by several other lawmakers, including Pennsylvania Rep. Brendan Boyle and Sens. Bob Casey and John Fetterman.

**‘We are all Jonathan Larson’ — In ‘Rent’ composer’s ‘other show,’ a tribute to Philly’s creative community**

**March 25, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Theatre Horizon’s production of the rock concert-style musical “Tick, Tick... Boom!” in April is an exercise in autobiography on a couple of levels.

The musical, written by the late Jonathan Larson — who later won a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award for “Rent” — is about a composer who’s about to turn 30 and struggling to get a show produced.

Robi Hager, who directs and stars in Theatre Horizon’s production, is a lyricist and composer himself. He has performed on Broadway, but he always returns home to Philadelphia, where he says he has found a strong theater community.

“I think there’s a sense of community here, that everybody is in on the same plane, that we all collaborate together to make art. And that’s been really, really exciting,” Hager said. And he says his aim with this production is to use Larson’s story to pay homage to the people of that community.

“And as many, many, many composers — even here in Philadelphia, that I know, that are friends of mine — that part of what I want to do with this show in this version is to represent them as well — as what it takes for young composers to step away from being a ‘young promising composer’ [to become] a composer that is making a living off of it.”

Hager says the echoes of Philadelphia’s creative community show up in more concrete ways on the stage, as well.

“We decided to add a little bit of that touch in our set — of other composers that have inspired me, and composers who are still on the rise who are friends of mine. We have some of their sheet music put in decoupage, on the wall in the back to be like: We all are, in some way, a version of Jonathan Larson.”

In “Tick, Tick... Boom!” the main character, Jon, sees his friend succeeding at a corporate job and has to decide if he wants to keep struggling and pursuing his art, or turn to something more lucrative but less fulfilling.

“I’m excited to do the show, because I’m kind of hitting that wall a little bit. You know, the arts is the first thing to go when it comes to funding. So that’s the thing — like, I love doing this so much. I love performing. I love writing,” Hager says.

“But how much longer do I have it in me when I see other people stepping away from that art form and getting that house, getting that car, getting all these things? Not that it’s a material thing that I’m looking for, but it’s stability.”

Hager wrote a musical in 2021 called “Little Duende,” which had a reading in New York City but was not picked up by any producers. He’s now working on another musical, “Siluetas,” that will be produced in Philadelphia by Power Street Theatre.

“Tick, Tick... Boom!” is co-directed by Steve Pacek and also stars Angel Sigala and Montgomery County native Elena Camp. It opens April 4 and runs through April 14. Tickets are available on Theatre Horizon’s website.



## **EDUCATION**

### **JANUARY**

#### **Education advocates say boosting Pa. school funding by billions would meet the Commonwealth Court mandate**

**January 5, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — As Gov. Josh Shapiro prepares his budget proposal, education advocates are recommending how Pennsylvania should fund K-12 schools in a way that would meet last year’s court mandate.

Last year, the Commonwealth Court ruled that Pennsylvania’s system of funding education was unconstitutionally inadequate and inequitable. A coalition of groups called PA Schools Work has released a recommendation on how to satisfy the court.

Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg, senior attorney with the Public Interest Law Center, said adding \$6.2 billion to the state’s education budget over the next five years — with a \$2 billion increase in the first year — would meet the court’s directive.

“They have to fill this \$6.2 billion adequacy gap within five years. It’s a big number,” he said. “We don’t pretend that it’s not a big number, but it’s also an urgent problem.”

Donna Cooper, executive director of the nonprofit Children First, said Shapiro should step up when he delivers his budget address next month.

“We know and hope that he agrees with us that this is the right time, this year, to right the unconstitutional wrong,” she said.

A bipartisan panel called the Basic Education Funding Commission is expected to present its school funding recommendations to the governor and state Legislature next week.

## **New PA legislation to require mandatory financial literacy course for high school graduation**

**January 15, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Pennsylvania high school students will soon be required to take a personal finance course in order to graduate.

“While it’s important to understand biology and history, they’re not going to be using them in their day-to-day living,” said Cindy Axelrod, a finance professor at Temple University’s Fox School of Business.

She says teaching financial literacy at a young age will set students up for success.

“When you graduate high school you’re 18 years old and you’re suddenly thrust out into the world and you don’t have the financial tool to be able to succeed financially. Suddenly, you have bills to pay, you have independence.”

The new graduation requirement will be implemented in the 2026-2027 school year.

According to the General Assembly of the Commonwealth, a school entity or nonpublic school must provide a mandatory course in personal financial literacy worth at least half of a credit.

Students will have to complete the course once during their high school career. Ed Nelling, head of the finance department at Drexel University’s LeBow College of Business, says it’s been considered taboo to talk about money in the past, but sharing financial successes and failures with your children can help them in the future.

Pennsylvania is one of 25 states to pass legislation requiring financial literacy courses for high schoolers.

## **Murphy calls for Camden School Board president to resign amid sexual assault allegations**

### **January 19, 2024**

NEW JERSEY (KYW Newsradio) — Camden’s School Board president has taken a leave of absence amid allegations of sexual assault of a student in the 1990s. New Jersey’s governor is asking for him to resign immediately.

Wasim Muhammad was a social studies teacher at Cooper B. Hatch Middle School in Camden when the victim, in eighth grade at the time, says he began calling her beautiful and grooming her for a sexual relationship.

Her attorney, Jeff Fritz, says Muhammad had sexual encounters with her for years — in classrooms, at motels, and at his home, which is near the school. Fritz says he claimed her as one of his multiple wives when she turned 18 in 1997.

“Mr. Muhammad is claiming that she was a wife of his, a spiritual wife, through the Islamic faith. She denies that,” Fritz said.

Camden School District is also named as a defendant in the civil suit. Fritz says there’s reason to believe administrators knew about this relationship.

“She was unable to come forward for years, in fact, decades, due to embarrassment, humiliation, and a fear that she wouldn’t be believed.”

A spokesperson for the district says their top priority continues to be the safety and well-being of students.

Gov. Phil Murphy says the allegations are heinous and believes Muhammad should resign.

Muhammad’s attorney has not responded to a request for comment.

## **Expected \$400M budget shortfall has Philly district delaying year-round schools pilot**

### **January 31, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — With a big budget deficit looming, the School District of Philadelphia is taking a more cautious approach to its pilot program for year-round schools.

Superintendent Tony Watlington has made a pilot of up to 10 year-round schools part of his five-year “Accelerate Philly” plan, with a projected cost of about \$25 million. However, with a projected budget shortfall of \$400 million next year, Watlington tells KYW Newsradio that the district is backing off of the accelerator.

“We want to make sure that we have the resources not just to do this, but to do this well,” Watlington said, “so we’ve delayed a communication about next steps until we see what the budget looks like.”

Mayor Chelle Parker — who talked about her desire for year-round schools during her campaign — clarified her position on Tuesday, at Watlington’s “State of the Schools” address.

“Some people refer to it as out of school time. I called it year-round school during the campaign,” she said. “You can call it whatever you want to call it, but I want our young people to have access to those opportunities year-round.”

Watlington says he’ll have a more complete picture of any year-round school pilot later this semester.

## **FEBRUARY**

### **Philadelphia School District hires administrator to help reduce dropout rate**

**February 1, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Thousands of Philadelphia public school students drop off the rolls each year, with no explanation. A new administrator is joining the Philadelphia School District with the sole focus of preventing dropouts.

At the end of last school year, 3,600 students had disappeared from the district's attendance rolls, with no information about why they weren't in school anymore.

As of December 2023, the district listed more than 1,900 dropouts for the current school year. That's about 900 fewer than December 2022, but Superintendent Tony Watlington said it's still too many.

So, he's hiring someone to tackle the issue.

“We're going to bring aboard a new assistant superintendent who will focus exclusively on coordinating our dropout efforts across the school district,” Watlington said.

Dr. Melvin Marshall, a former high school principal in Guilford County, North Carolina, will become the district's latest assistant superintendent. Marshall was an assistant principal at Dudley High School in Greensboro — the same school where Watlington served as principal two decades ago.

“It's a school where we had a significant improvement in student achievement and significant decreases in the dropout rate,” Watlington said. “He has experience significantly improving student outcomes, including for children of color, and for significantly reducing the dropout numbers and increasing the four-year graduation rates.”

Watlington said Marshall will work with the city, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, and other agencies to keep students in school.

“We have a very tightly coordinated intergovernmental strategy, and we won't stop until we get the dropout numbers down to zero,” he pledged.

Watlington pointed to a study that determined every dropout costs the city \$405,000. Because students who drop out generally don't have good life outcomes, he said keeping students in school is a moral issue for the district.

Marshall comes to Philadelphia from North Carolina, but Watlington noted that he has promoted several assistant superintendents from within the Philadelphia School District in recent months.

### **Community College of Philadelphia scholarship offers financial boost to LGBTQ, under-represented minority students**

**February 4, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A historic nonprofit and the Community College of Philadelphia are working together to give LGBTQ students a financial boost for higher education.

“We love our community and we want to make sure that all of our community get the opportunities that everyone else has,” says Christopher Cirillo, with the nonprofit Philly AIDS Thrift at Giovanni's Room.

The goal is to help bridge a gap in resources for LGBTQ students.

“They're discriminated against — not always just by their peers but also their families — so they don't always have the opportunities that a lot of other people have,” Cirillo said.

The Ed Hermance Scholarship was established to create opportunities for LGBTQ and under-represented minority students pursuing higher education at the Community College of Philadelphia.

“Last year was our 50th anniversary, and we decided one of the best ways to celebrate was to honor one of the longest-standing managers of Giovanni's Room itself — that's Ed Hermance. So they decided to start a scholarship in his name.”

Annually the scholarship fund will offer \$1,000 to 50 incoming and current full- and part-time students in good standing at the Community College of Philadelphia, Cirillo said. Applications for the scholarship are being accepted now. The deadline is June 30.

Philly AIDS Thrift at Giovanni's Room supports organizations fighting against HIV and AIDS. Giovanni's Room is the oldest LGBTQ and feminist bookstore in the country.

### **Study: Philly schools outpacing other urban districts in pandemic recovery**

**February 9, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A recent study shows Philadelphia schools are outpacing other urban districts in recovering from the pandemic.

The report by Harvard University's Center for Education Policy Research and the Educational Opportunity Project said, compared to other large and poor urban districts, Philadelphia's math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tests have recovered from the pandemic the fastest, and its reading scores showed more post-COVID growth than only Chicago.

Schools Superintendent Tony Watlington touted the Harvard study at the school board's Goals and Guardrails meeting Thursday night.

"Anytime the School District of Philadelphia can get in first place in terms of rebound and improvement, we should celebrate and applaud our students and staff," he said.

Overall, of the urban districts that took the tests, Philadelphia ranked near the bottom. Watlington, though, told the board that it's important to recognize growth.

"It validates that we're on the right track. We're making some significant progress, and yet, we have a long way to go and a lot of work to do," he said.

"We should not immediately say, 'Well, the test scores are too low anyway.'"

He says they need to let teachers and students know that success begets more success.

“We've got to start looking at the glass as half full and not just always half empty.”

**One way to address the teacher shortage: Pay student-teachers for their time, lawmaker suggests**

**February 27, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Pennsylvania State Sen. Vincent Hughes, union leaders and administrators gathered at Science Leadership Academy at Beeber Monday to discuss ways to ease the state’s teacher shortage.

The Philadelphia School District started the current year short of more than 200 teachers. Superintendent Tony Watlington says it’s a reflection of the fact that between 2011 and 2022, there’s been a huge drop — about 71% — in people seeking teaching careers.

Recognizing the decline, Science Leadership Academy started a course for students seeking teaching careers.

“The pipeline program is doing what it has set out to do: To spark that interest,” said Instructor Njemele Anderson.

But beyond interest there are financial obstacles, said Melody Dorsainvil, a Temple University senior majoring in early childhood education.

“From tuition to books to transportation, there were very few days where I wasn’t anxious about how I’d be able to keep going,” she said. “During a majority of my college career, I’ve had to work two or three jobs to try and stay afloat.”

One strategy promoted by Hughes is to pay student-teachers for their time. Pennsylvania State Education Association President Aaron Chapin endorsed the idea.

“Paying our student-teachers a modest stipend will remove a significant barrier in becoming an educator and help ease the staff shortages in the years ahead,” he said.

Last year, lawmakers approved \$10 million to pay student-teachers up to \$10,000 each. Gov. Josh Shapiro is looking to expand the program in his current budget proposal.



## MARCH

### **Philadelphia School Board VP resigns ahead of new board nominations**

**March 5, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — As Mayor Cherelle Parker prepares to pick a new Philadelphia School Board, one influential member is taking her name out of the running.

School Board Vice President Mallory Fix-Lopez had applied to be considered by Parker for reappointment, but she has since withdrawn her name and announced her resignation, effective April 18.

Her decision to step down isn't political, she said. It's personal. With two young children in school and a medical procedure coming up, she said she couldn't commit to a new four-year term.

“When I started this, I had one child that was 3 years old. Now I have two that are 8 and 4. Both of them will be in school this fall and I really want to be deeply committed to their school and engaged,” she said. “When I really thought about that much more deeply, over the past couple of weeks in particular, I had to be honest with myself that I don't have four more full years.”

Fix-Lopez, who teaches at the Community College of Philadelphia, has been a member of the school board since 2018 when the district returned to local control.

“We had to build this board from scratch. I think just helping it have a structure, have governance policies is huge,” she said.

Among her accomplishments, Fix-Lopez lists the expansion of multilingual services, a renewed board focus on academic achievement, and a policy supporting trans and nonbinary students. The latter led to mandatory training across the district and the creation of gender-neutral bathrooms in schools — something “the policy called for, but never existed,” she said.

“I feel like I really helped set things in motion for the next board to carry through and to bring their own ideas and new lenses to it,” Fix-Lopez added. “But it's my time to go to focus on my family.”

Board President Reginald Streater has said he would like to continue on the board. The Educational Nominating Panel on March 12 is expected to give the mayor 27 names, from whom she can pick nine to serve on the new school board.

## **Gov. Shapiro discusses his higher education ‘blueprint’ at West Chester University**

**March 7, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Gov. Josh Shapiro on Thursday shared his vision for the future of higher education in the commonwealth. Speaking at West Chester University, he proposed significant tuition drops for lots of students.

According to Shapiro, Pennsylvania ranks 49th in the U.S. in state investment in higher education, and 48th for affordability. He said he wants to change those numbers.

With a placard on the podium in front of him reading “Freedom to chart your own choice,” the governor delivered his new “blueprint for higher education,” focusing on competition and workforce development, as well as access and affordability.

“My plan builds a strong pipeline between our community colleges and our [Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education] universities and invests in the future of our students and our colleges,” Shapiro said.

The governor unveiled his plan in January, ahead of last month’s budget address. Under the initiative, state system universities and community colleges will unite under a new governance system, and Pennsylvanians making up to the median income will pay no more than \$1,000 in tuition and fees per semester at those schools.

“We need to make sure that they have a low-cost, high-quality higher education at any one of our Pennsylvania colleges or universities,” he said.

Shapiro told lawmakers that his plan, if passed, would take Pennsylvania from 49th in the nation in higher education investment to 22nd place.

He also encouraged lawmakers from both sides of the aisle to give their input on his blueprint. “We put forth a thoughtful plan that we are now giving to lawmakers and others,” said Shapiro, “to allow them to help inform that plan so that we can get it done together.”

Republican lawmakers were cool to his plan, however. Pa. Rep. Seth Grove, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said the plan lacked key details, particularly on financing. He also claimed it would open families and businesses to significant future tax hikes, and that it funds institutions over students.

## **Bipartisan legislators call for overhaul of New Jersey’s school funding formula**

**March 19, 2024**

SOUTH JERSEY (KYW Newsradio) — Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are calling for an overhaul of New Jersey’s school funding formula, as they say it is too unpredictable year to year and leaves many school districts caught off guard.

School funding will increase by \$900 million, totaling \$11.7 billion for the next budget year. Despite this massive increase, more than 130 districts are seeing reductions in state aid.

Democratic state Sen. Vin Gopal, chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, said one of the schools in his district lost \$10 million from last year’s aid total.

“We need to make sure there is at least three- to five-year budgeting so a district is not on the hook all of a sudden, like Long Branch, where they’re down \$10 million and they got three weeks to figure out how to cut \$10 million from their budget,” he said. “That’s layoffs. That’s real people.”

Year to year, districts often don’t know what to expect from the state, with millions of dollars in fluctuations. Over the last several years, Gopal said increased transportation and special education costs have put districts in a tough spot.

This is the last year for the current funding formula. Republican state Sen. Owen Henry agrees with the need for multi-year budgeting.

“And now we have the opportunity to fix this,” he said. “Some districts need relief now. We need to do some short-term solutions, but at the end of the day, long-term solutions. These districts need to be stabilized.”

Both senators also believe that the state isn’t doing enough to support students with special needs. Currently, the state funds about 70% of special education, but there is no headcount of the total special needs students in each district. Instead, funding is estimated by a census formula based on population.

“It has to be tiered,” Henry suggested. “What are the needs for every individual special needs [student]? Is it a tier one? Is it a tier five, where that student needs to be placed out of district?”

Special education advocate John Mulholland said magnet schools do the best job with special education under the current system, adding to a district’s costs.

“If you create fair funding that actually supports students where they are, it doesn’t disincentivize districts from trying to do the right thing,” he added.

## **Principal at Edison High uses award money to open e-sports room for students**

**March 19, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Students at Philadelphia’s Edison High School who behave well and get good grades can earn time in the school’s new e-gaming room.

Principal Lillian Izzard used the \$20,000 she received last year as a Lindback award winner to outfit a little-used school room with flat screens, arcade games, furniture, and a colorful mural with a comic book vibe. She made the decision after speaking to her students.

“When I was awarded the \$20,000, this would have been the best thing for them – to have a place for them to be able to gather,” Izzard told KYW Newsradio.

There’s only room for 15 students or so, in a school of nearly 1,000 students. So they earn game time by having good attendance, performing well academically and staying out of trouble. Senior Kevon Cottle says he spends about a half hour each week in the room. “Since I’m a senior, it’s like really stressful now. And the fact that I get to play some games inside school makes it fun.”

Students are rewarded with time in the game room by scoring points through the school's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support system. "I do my classwork, homework. Sometimes I just help other teachers just so they would give me points," Cottle said.

Senior Damyan Santiago interrupted his Spider-Man game to say the game room provided a welcome break to bond with friends. "I'm often, like, trudging away on my senior project," he said. "Coming into a nice place to release some steam is really great."

The eSports room is purely for fun now, but Izzard hopes to eventually incorporate computer science education into the new game room.

## **ELECTIONS & POLITICS**

### **JANUARY**

**The new year brings a flurry of new laws to Philly region, including wage bumps in NJ and Del. — but not Pa.**

**January 1, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — As the calendar flipped from '23 to '24, new laws took effect in nearly every state. A higher minimum wage in Delaware and New Jersey and criminal justice reform in Pennsylvania are among the new laws now taking effect.

Nearly 10 million American minimum wage workers stand to benefit in 22 states that are adopting laws to pump up paychecks. Raises range from a 35-cents-an-hour hop in some states to big leaps of more than a 1 dollar for workers in Maryland, Hawaii, and Nebraska.

The minimum wage in New Jersey increased by \$1 when the clock struck midnight, taking it to \$15.13 per hour. Delaware raised its minimum wage to \$13.25, with another planned increase that will put it at \$15 per hour next year.

Pennsylvania's minimum wage remains at \$7.25. That's the federal minimum wage — which hasn't budged since 2009, despite a 40% jump in inflation since then. In all, 20 states remain at that baseline minimum wage.

The Keystone State did, however, pass a flurry of new laws aimed at criminal justice reform before the legislative session ended, last month.

Incarcerated people in Pennsylvania will now have an easier road to returning home. Under two new laws taking effect, criminal records for non-violent drug convictions can now be sealed, so people leaving jail can return to the community more easily, and offenders will stay on probation for shorter periods of time.

Incarcerated women in Pennsylvania now have more protections. Male guards can no longer do full body searches on them and pregnant inmates can't be put in solitary confinement.

The state is also cracking down on people who steal packages left outside homes. A third offense will now be a felony.

The Pennsylvania attorney general's power to prosecute local offenses has expanded, especially in Philadelphia, where a new law puts the AG in charge in the case of crimes on or near SEPTA property. District Attorney Larry Krasner has denounced the new law as taking away his prosecutorial discretion.

And Pennsylvania dog owners, be aware: All dogs must now be licensed by the time they're 3 months old.

Pennsylvania and Delaware now join New Jersey in allowing automatic voter registration when drivers receive or renew their licenses.

In Delaware, guns are banned at polling places, schools and recreation zones. And the First State gave tenants the right to legal representation during eviction proceedings and legalized marijuana, allowing heavily regulated sales of the drug.

New Jersey eased access to birth control (women can now get self-administered birth control without a doctor's prescription), mandated menstrual products in schools and expanded protection-from-abuse orders to include victims who have no dating or familial relationship with an abuser.

And telemarketers calling New Jerseyans now have 30 seconds to identify themselves and the reason for their call.

## **New federal guidelines will end highway signs deemed 'too edgy' and distracting for drivers**

### **January 17, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has updated its manual of regulations governing street and highway signs, and those made with pop culture references or intended humor are no longer allowed.

It means classic quips made on New Jersey signs — “Nice car. Did it come with turn signals?” — and PennDOT holiday warnings — “Only Rudolph should drive lit.” — are banned from use beginning in 2026.

New Jersey Transportation Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti told KYW in November that the FHWA believed the signs could be misunderstood by drivers.

"FHWA a year ago was concerned that the signs may have been too edgy or too distracting," she said.

But Gutierrez-Scaccetti shot back that the humorous approach can make the message more memorable.

"I think when people see something that catches their eye, that they chuckle over — or they go home and tell their kids — yeah, you remember it," she said. “ Does it make them slow down? I hope in the moment it does."

Under the new guidelines, only “simple, direct, brief, legible and clear” messages are permitted.

In a statement to KYW, the FHWA emphasized that “the safety of all road users is the priority,” and said it supported the use of “changeable message signs” operated by state transportation departments.

“States are expected to exercise good judgment in how and when they use changeable message signs for traffic safety messages, and in their specific wording of the messages,” it continued.

The FHWA then pointed to its manual when considering the nature of those messages.



## **Moratorium on New Jersey brewery restrictions extended by 2 weeks**

**January 2, 2024**

TRENTON, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — Brewery owners in New Jersey have temporary relief from some restrictions on events and menu offerings, and they hope a permanent solution is close.

A bill to remove the restriction on the number of events a brewery can host was passed by the state legislature, then conditionally vetoed by Gov. Phil Murphy. A six-month moratorium on enforcement expired at the start of the new year, but Alcoholic Beverage Control extended the moratorium by two weeks.

While Murphy hoped for a larger overhaul of New Jersey's liquor laws, that hasn't happened yet and brewery owners are stuck in the middle.

“Those restrictions though are set to go back into place on Jan. 16,” said Eric Orlando, executive director of the Brewers Guild of New Jersey. He said the group is hopeful a new bill will be on the agenda in Trenton in the next few days.

“Based on the conversations that we have had with both the legislature and the governor's office, I think there is a commitment to try to get rid of these restrictions within the next few weeks,” said Orlando.

“I'm hoping that possibly this Thursday there will be action on that legislation with the hopes of getting it on the governor's desk by next week.”

Orlando said the constant fits and starts with the bill have been difficult to digest, but he's happy to see removing regulations that are harmful to breweries seems to be a priority in Trenton. However, as this is a lame duck session, Orlando acknowledges that brings some uncertainty to the table for an issue he wishes was already settled.

## **What to know about abortion rulings, bills and campaigns as the US marks Roe anniversary**

**January 22, 2024**

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* ruling on Jan. 22, 1973, the time around the anniversary has always been marked by rallies, protests and political pledges.

This time, after the 2022 ruling that overturned the nationwide right to abortion that *Roe* provided, there's a flurry of activity as state policy gets decided by courts, lawmakers and voters.

It's also giving Democrats, including President Joe Biden's reelection campaign, a chance to rally voters around abortion access.

Abortion opponents also rallied last week in Washington with a context that's different from past editions of the annual March for Life. There's no longer a nationwide right to abortion and 14 states have bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy. But the political fallout has boosted their opponents more than them.

There were still some traditional anti-abortion rallies, including one in St. Paul, Minnesota, where an estimated 2,000 people attended, with many placing what organizers described as life-size models of fetuses on the steps of the state Capitol in protest of policies that protect abortion access.

Here's what to know about several developments.

### **Ballot drive launches in Colorado, campaign in Maryland**

At least a hundred people gathered on the steps of the Colorado Capitol on Monday to launch a signature campaign for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state's constitution. A cardboard sign read, "Someone you love has had an abortion," as state lawmakers and the Colorado attorney general bunched around a microphone and the crowd cheered.

Colorado's legislature passed abortion protections last year, but "if we don't enshrine it in the constitution, we will be at the whim of lawmakers," said Nicole Hensel, executive director of New Era Colorado, one of the coalition of groups behind the Coloradans for Protecting Reproductive Freedom campaign.

Colorado has become an island of abortion protections as surrounding states installed restrictions after Roe was overturned. The Cobalt Abortion Fund based in Colorado spent six times the amount helping people get abortions in 2023 as they did in 2021.

Advocates in Maryland also used Monday's Roe v. Wade anniversary to begin their campaign to support the ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution that's already on the ballot there for November.

The only other state where a statewide vote on abortion rights in 2024 is sure to happen is New York, where the proposed amendment includes protecting reproductive freedom.

But similar votes are under consideration in more than a dozen states.

Since 2022, abortion rights supporters have prevailed on all seven statewide ballot measures.

Lawmakers in Wisconsin, and Maine consider ballot measures

Lawmakers in two states scheduled hearings for Monday as first steps to ask voters to change abortion policy. Both face uphill battles.

In Maine, Democrats are pushing for a measure that would protect reproductive autonomy in the state constitution.

Democrats control both chambers of the Legislature and the governor's office and, under state law, abortion is allowed at any point throughout pregnancy, if it's deemed necessary by a doctor.

But advancing a measure to voters would require the approval of two-thirds of both legislative chambers. To reach that, several Republicans would have to vote in favor of asking the public to vote.

In Wisconsin, a GOP proposal would ban abortion after 14 weeks of pregnancy.

Republicans control the legislature there, but Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, would likely veto the measure if it passed.

Currently, abortion is available in Wisconsin until fetal viability, but there's litigation over whether an 1849 law that conservatives interpreted as banning abortion should apply.

Missouri activists choose an amendment to support

A coalition of abortion rights supporters in Missouri decided last week which of 11 amendment proposals to support.

They went with one that would allow lawmakers to restrict abortion access only after viability — generally considered to be around 23 or 24 weeks gestation age — when a fetus might survive outside the uterus.

The decision from groups including the state ACLU chapter and Planned Parenthood chapters is one solution to a debate advocates have been having on whether to support measures that allow some abortion restrictions.

The Missouri measure would allow abortion later in pregnancy to protect the life and physical and mental health of the woman.

Some moderate Republicans are pushing a competing amendment, which would allow abortion up to 12 weeks in most cases, and between then and viability only in pregnancies resulting from rape or incest or in medical emergencies.

Under Missouri law, abortion is banned at all stages of pregnancy, with an exception to protect the life of the woman — but not in cases of rape or incest.

Biden Administration sides with Oklahoma hospital

In a decision made in October but not revealed publicly until last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that an Oklahoma hospital did not violate federal law when doctors told a woman with a nonviable pregnancy to wait in a parking lot until her condition declined enough for her to qualify for an abortion under the state's strict ban.

The ruling was the latest in what's emerged as a major legal question as most Republican-controlled states have imposed abortion bans: When do exceptions apply?

In other situations, the same federal agency has maintained that hospitals would violate federal law by turning away women seeking an abortion amid medical emergencies.

Pending lawsuits from women who assert they were wrongly denied an abortion address the issue.

Even as the Biden administration ruled in favor of the hospital in the Oklahoma case, it's planning to help people file complaints under the law that's intended to ensure emergency health care access.

## **FEBRUARY**

### **Former Atlantic City politician charged with ballot fraud in 2022 general election**

**February 1, 2024**

CAMDEN, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — South Jersey political operative Craig Callaway has been charged with submitting fraudulent mail-in ballots in the 2022 general election.

Federal authorities allege Callaway, a former City Council president in Atlantic City, gathered vote-by-mail ballots and cast them in the 2022 election, in the names of people who said they never voted.

U.S. Attorney Philip Sellinger said Callaway, about a month before the election, paid messengers between \$30 and \$50 each to gather applications from people who supposedly wanted to vote by mail. But according to Sellinger, after the applications were processed, the messengers took the mail-in ballots from the Atlantic County clerk and gave them to Callaway.

Under the law, messengers are required to deliver mail-in ballots directly to the people who requested them. Callaway, 64, is charged with one count of fraudulently procuring and casting ballots.

“Holding free and fair elections is a bedrock principle of our democracy,” Sellinger said in a statement. “As alleged in the complaint, the defendant attempted to deprive New Jersey residents

of a fair election by fraudulently procuring and casting ballots. Today's charges reflect our office's commitment to hold to account those who try to undermine the electoral process.”

Callaway previously served 3 1/2 years in federal prison after pleading guilty to bribery in 2006.

## **City Councilmember introduces affordable housing legislation, but one measure could hurt public schools**

**February 1, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia City Councilmember Jamie Gauthier plans to introduce a package of bills at Thursday's meeting aimed at increasing access to affordable housing.

Gauthier is proposing several measures. One would beef up the language in the Fair Practices Ordinance to specify that landlords cannot discriminate against renters using housing vouchers.

It already prohibits “source of income” discrimination, but she said that hasn't stopped landlords from refusing to accept vouchers. Her bill would not only clarify that vouchers are included but would make it easier for renters to seek a legal remedy if they're denied.

Another bill involves the money paid by developers so they can build more densely than zoning allows. Gauthier proposes that it get redistributed to parts of the city seeing the biggest increases in development, to provide funds for affordable housing.

A third proposal would freeze property tax increases for people making under \$33,000 a year. That, though, would hurt the School District of Philadelphia, since it receives most of the property tax revenue and is already facing a \$400 million deficit next year.

## **NJ bill would prohibit cable service termination fees for customers moving to long-term care facilities**

**February 6, 2024**

NEW JERSEY (KYW Newsradio) — Early termination fees are built into many contracts for cable, phone and internet service. A new bill advancing in the New Jersey Senate would prohibit service providers from imposing those fees on certain people suffering hardships.

The financial distress experienced by people who need extended medical treatment at long-term care facilities shouldn't be made worse by burdensome utility fees, according to bill sponsor, Sen. Robert Singer.

“This will affect thousands of people because, unfortunately, we have an aging population in New Jersey,” Singer said.

The senator says some people are paying \$250 a month for cable, phone and internet bundles and there should be no red tape preventing them from canceling the service if they are moving into a nursing home.

“The fact of it is, if you terminate your gas or your electric, it ends that month. Cable should be the same thing.”

He says this would apply to anyone who will be out of their home for at least 90 days for medical reasons.

The bill has received committee approval, and Singer hopes it'll be up for a full vote next month.

## **City Council committee votes to advance bill that would outlaw casino-style gaming machines in Philly stores**

**February 25, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — City Council is back to in-person hearings for the first time in nearly four years, and the very first one — last week — showed how different it can be from a Zoom hearing.

After a long and sometimes heated hearing, the Public Safety Committee voted to advance a bill that would prohibit so-called skill game machines in corner stores and other spots where they may create a nuisance. The machines operate like arcade video games but can pay out like casino games. They are totally unregulated and untaxed.

Sponsor Curtis Jones said the machines create a dangerous environment, drawing would-be thieves lying in wait for someone to win.

“It’s a preponderance of things: When you sell loose cigarettes; when you sell liquor by the drink and when you have these kinds of gambling machines, it almost creates a watering hole for prey.”

The bill has already passed City Council once, but Mayor Jim Kenney pocket-vetoed it by not signing it before leaving office, so this is the second hearing on the matter. The first one, last year, on Zoom, was quick with no opposition. This one took 3 ½ hours and was dominated by opponents like store owner Akash Patel, who said his store would suffer without the income from the machines.

“Why are you punishing honest, hard-working, tax-paying constituents?” he said in testimony.

Ari Marshand, who owns Xtreme Skill Games, Inc., said regulation is needed but not a ban.

“Right now, Philadelphia is known around the country as the Wild West of skills games. It’s an absolute atrocity what is happening in Philadelphia,” said Marshand, who has proposed turning the machines into revenue generators for the city by requiring permits that would also allow the city to track numbers and locations of the machines.



Supporters of the bill, such as Andy Toy of the Community Development Corporations Association, testified they create an unsavory atmosphere.

“Because of the amounts of cash at these locations and people hanging out for hours, they can become hostile and potentially unsafe places for others in the community,” Toy said.

Patel got into sometimes heated exchanges with councilman Jeff Young, attending his first hearing as a Council member.

“Should we as a city allow people to shoot dice outside your business establishment?” Young asked.

“Absolutely not. That would be very dangerous,” said Patel.

“My point is about the loitering that happens in these communities where these machines are,” said Young.

While City Council grapples with the issue, Gov. Josh Shapiro has recently proposed imposing state taxes on the machines.

In the end, the committee voted unanimously to advance the bill. It now goes to the full Council for a vote.

## MARCH

### **New Jersey businessman pleads guilty and agrees to cooperate in Sen. Bob Menendez's corruption case**

**March 1, 2024**

NEW YORK (AP) — A New Jersey businessman pleaded guilty Friday to trying to bribe U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, admitting that he gave the senator's wife a car to influence him and agreeing to a deal with prosecutors that calls for him to testify in the corruption case against the powerful Democrat.

Jose Uribe, of Clifton, New Jersey, entered the plea in Manhattan federal court to seven charges, including conspiracy to commit bribery from 2018 to 2023, honest services wire fraud, obstruction of justice and tax evasion.

As he described his crimes in court, Uribe told Judge Sidney H. Stein that he conspired with several people, including Nadine Menendez, to provide her with a Mercedes-Benz in return for her husband “using his power and influence as a United States senator to get a favorable outcome and to stop all investigations related to one of my associates.”

He said he also hoped the gift would, if necessary, stop a “possible investigation into another person who I considered to be a member of my family,” according to a transcript of the proceeding, which the media was not told about before it happened.

Uribe said he made certain payments on the Mercedes “in a manner to conceal my involvement because I knew it was wrong. I knew that giving a car in return for influencing a United States senator to stop a criminal investigation was wrong, and I deeply regret my actions.”

According to a plea agreement, Uribe could face up to 95 years in prison, though he could win leniency by cooperating and testifying against the other defendants, which he's agreed to do. He also agreed to forfeit \$246,000, representing proceeds traceable to his crimes.

Uribe was among three businessmen charged in the corruption case against Menendez and his wife, which was revealed last fall. Authorities say the couple accepted bribes of cash, gold bars and the luxury car in exchange for his help and influence over foreign affairs.

The defendants have pleaded not guilty.

Uribe remains free on a \$1 million bond, which was set when he was arrested. His plea deal, dated Thursday, was signed by him on Friday.

Uribe's attorney, Daniel Fetterman, declined to comment. David Schertler, a lawyer for Nadine Menendez, declined to comment. Lawyers for the senator did not immediately comment.

Menendez, his wife and the two other New Jersey businessmen are scheduled to go on trial in May.

Federal prosecutors allege that Menendez, the former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, used his position to take actions that benefited foreign governments in exchange for bribes paid by associates in New Jersey.

An indictment contends that Menendez and his wife took gold bars and cash from a real estate developer, and that the senator used his clout to get that businessman a multimillion-dollar deal with a Qatari investment fund.

Menendez is also accused of helping another New Jersey business associate get a lucrative deal with the government of Egypt. Prosecutors allege that in exchange for bribes, Menendez did things that benefited Egypt, including ghostwriting a letter to fellow senators encouraging them to lift a hold on \$300 million in aid.

Menendez also has been charged with using his international clout to help a friend get a multimillion-dollar deal with a Qatari investment fund, including by taking actions favorable to Qatar's government.

Uribe was accused of buying a luxury car for Nadine Menendez after her previous car was destroyed when she struck and killed a man crossing the street. She did not face criminal charges in connection with that crash.

The indictment has said the senator helped Uribe by trying to persuade prosecutors to go easy on one of his business associates who was the subject of a criminal investigation.

Uribe provided more information about his involvement in obstruction of justice crimes from June 2022 to 2023 during his plea hearing Friday, saying that after investigators sent him a subpoena related to the probe of the senator, Nadine Menendez contacted him through another individual.

He said he met with her later that afternoon at a Marriott hotel, where she asked him what he was going to say if somebody asked him about the car payments.

“I told her that I would say a good friend of mine was in a financial situation and I was helping that friend to make the payments on the car, and when she was financially stable, she will pay me back. Nadine says something like: ‘That sounds good,’” Uribe told the judge.

He said he later told his attorneys the same version of what happened and they transmitted that “false story” to prosecutors with his approval.

“Late in 2022, I received a check from Nadine paying me back for the car payments. I then deposited the check,” he said.

### **Rare public spat among City Council members breaks out in Thursday meeting**

**March 21, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia City Council members got into a rare public tiff at Thursday’s meeting when the Council president refused to allow a woman to speak about the war in Gaza during the public comment period.

The rules of Council say the public can only comment on legislation that’s up for a vote. The war in Gaza was not on the agenda, so when Kate Perez began speaking about Gaza, Council President Kenyatta Johnson interrupted her.

“I think I should be allowed my full two minutes to talk about Palestine,” Perez protested.

“Ms. Perez, could we just speak what’s on the actual bill?” asked Johnson, before ultimately cutting off her microphone and calling for the next speaker.

That prompted a rare public rebuke from Councilman Curtis Jones.

“When there is something egregious that is happening, we don’t want to fight the Middle East war here in City Council but doggone it, we have to be fair,” he said. “This is Ramadan. (I could) introduce a bill to allow her to speak. We can do it privately or we can do it real public.”

Jones went back and forth with Johnson until Council’s majority leader, Katherine Gilmore Richardson called for “orders of the day,” which means debate must stop. After the session, Jones and Johnson both said there were no hard feelings.

“There’s no bad blood,” Jones said, with Johnson adding, “For the record, this is us just having a spirited conversation.”

Council passed three significant bills at the meeting. One prohibits corner store gambling machines, which Council members say have become a nuisance and even a potential danger in vulnerable neighborhoods. Another bill outlaws devices that flip license plates, allowing drivers to evade police. The third imposes a curfew on businesses in Kensington that sponsor Quetcy Lozada says are problematic.

“This is just another tool we’re going to be able to use to respond to some of the illegal and disruptive activity that occurs after 11 p.m.,” said Lozada.

All three bills create new enforcement challenges for police and the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

## **New Parker administration policy requires city spokespeople get permission from mayor's press office before speaking to media**

**March 26, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker's administration has imposed strict controls on her staff's interaction with reporters, which can hinder coverage of city government.

In January, KYW Newsradio contacted the fire department to confirm the address of a fire, in order to tell listeners to avoid the area. The spokesperson said she could not provide the information without first getting permission from the managing director's office and the mayor's press office.

This policy had been laid out in an email from Managing Director Adam Thiel saying — in capital letters — “NO MEDIA INTERVIEWS, SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, OR STATEMENTS OF ANY KIND UNTIL/UNLESS APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS.” It immediately ran into trouble from librarians who alerted patrons they might not be able to post information about events or changes to hours.

At the time, the mayor's spokesman Joe Grace said the email had been misinterpreted. A short time later, police, fire, and the Office of Emergency Management were permitted to speak without advance permission.

However, the gag stayed on others, even cabinet-level commissioners, stifling the flow of information that reporters depend on to give the public an accurate picture of how the government performs.

The control of the message extends beyond limiting who can say what. Last month, after the press office sent out an email saying the mayor had no public events, it invited two — and only two — media outlets to a public event, effectively excluding all other coverage.

Grace says he is done talking about the policy because it is, in his words, “inside baseball,” meaning it isn't of interest to anyone except reporters. But privately, communications staff in other departments complain it adds time and extra steps to their job of keeping the public aware of what their government is doing.

## **Supreme Court seems likely to preserve access to the abortion medication mifepristone**

### **March 26, 2024**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Tuesday seemed likely to preserve access to a medication that was used in nearly two-thirds of all abortions in the U.S. last year, in the court's first abortion case since conservative justices overturned *Roe v. Wade* two years ago.

In nearly 90 minutes of arguments, a consensus appeared to emerge that the abortion opponents who challenged the Food and Drug Administration's approval of the medication, mifepristone, and subsequent actions to ease access to it lack the legal right, or standing, to sue.

Such a decision would leave the current rules in place that allow patients to receive the drug through the mail, without any need for an in-person visit with a doctor, and to take the medication to induce an abortion through 10 weeks of pregnancy.

Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar, the Biden administration's top Supreme Court lawyer, said the court should make clear that the anti-abortion doctors and organizations that challenged the FDA's relaxation of restrictions on mifepristone don't "come within 100 miles" of having the legal right, or standing, to sue.

Even three justices who were in the majority to overturn *Roe* posed skeptical questions about standing to the lawyer for the abortion opponents. Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Neil Gorsuch, and Brett Kavanaugh are former President Donald Trump's three Supreme Court appointees.

Barrett, for example, seemed to doubt that the doctors identified by lawyer Erin Hawley could show that they were actually harmed by the FDA's actions, one of the requirements for showing standing.

"The difficulty, to me, is that the affidavits do read more like conscience objections," Barrett said.

Abortion opponents are asking the justices to ratify a ruling from a conservative federal appeals court that would limit access to mifepristone, one of two drugs used in medication abortions.

The FDA approved mifepristone in 2000. Over the last quarter-century, the agency has made accessing the drug easier, most recently in 2021, when they allowed providers to send the pill through the mail amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The high court's return to the abortion thicket is taking place in a political and regulatory landscape that was reshaped by the abortion decision in 2022 that led many Republican-led states to ban or severely restrict abortion.

That ruling had immediate political consequences, and the outcome in the new case, expected by early summer, could affect races for Congress and the White House.

The scene outside the Supreme Court was lively Tuesday morning, with demonstrators occupying the streets surrounding the court and groups on both sides of the issue marching and chanting. The police blocked traffic surrounding the court as well.

The practical consequences of a ruling for abortion opponents would be dramatic, possibly halting the delivery of mifepristone through the mail and at large pharmacy chains, reducing the period in pregnancy when it can be used from 10 to seven weeks and ending increasingly popular telehealth visits at which the drug can be prescribed.

Rachel Rebouché, dean of Temple University Law School, says government agencies have typically been trusted to regulate as they see fit. She, along with President Joe Biden's administration and drug manufacturers, warn that such an outcome also could undermine the FDA's drug approval process more widely by inviting judges to second-guess the agency's judgments.

“If the Supreme Court decides the FDA erred, it will shake a tenet of administrative law that we defer to expert agencies and their reliance on evidence, science and research,” said Rebouché.

Anti-abortion doctors and medical organizations argue that the FDA's decisions in 2016 and 2021 to relax restrictions on getting the drug were unreasonable and “jeopardize women's health across the nation.” The Democratic administration and New York-based Danco Laboratories, which makes mifepristone, respond that the drug is among the safest the FDA has ever approved.



“This would be different if it was just a question in the abstract — ‘Is medication abortion safe?’ We know it is,” said Rebouché, “and there’s a disturbing pattern here of ‘The sky isn’t blue and water isn’t wet.’”

In one possible resolution, the justices could avoid touching on the more politically sensitive aspects of the case while preserving access to mifepristone. The administration and Danco argue that the challengers, represented by the conservative Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine, lack the legal right, or standing, to sue. If the high court agrees, it would essentially dismiss the case and erase the appellate ruling.

Another abortion case already is on the docket. Next month, the justices will hear arguments over whether a federal law on emergency treatment at hospitals must include abortions, even in states that have otherwise banned them.

The mifepristone case began five months after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Abortion opponents initially won a sweeping ruling nearly a year ago from U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Trump nominee in Texas, which would have revoked the drug’s approval entirely. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals left intact the FDA’s initial approval of mifepristone. But it would reverse changes regulators made in 2016 and 2021 that eased some conditions for administering the drug.

The Supreme Court put the appeals court’s modified ruling on hold, then agreed to hear the case, though Justices Samuel Alito, the author of the decision overturning *Roe*, and Clarence Thomas would have allowed some restrictions to take effect while the case proceeded.

Mifepristone is one of two drugs, along with misoprostol, used in medication abortions. Their numbers have been rising for years. More than 6 million people have used mifepristone since 2000. Mifepristone is taken first to dilate the cervix and block the hormone progesterone, which is needed to sustain a pregnancy. Misoprostol is taken 24 to 48 hours later, causing the uterus to contract and expel pregnancy tissue.

Researchers at the Guttmacher Institute estimate that there were more than 1 million abortions in the U.S. last year and that nearly two-thirds of them were from medication. Both those numbers are up since the high court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Health care providers have said that if mifepristone is no longer available or is too hard to obtain, they would switch to using only misoprostol, which is somewhat less effective in ending pregnancies.

KYW Newsradio's Vik Raghupathi contributed to this story.

## GUN CRIMES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### JANUARY

#### **More than 1,600 gun victims in Philadelphia in 2023 — down by about 600, police say January 1, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Though gun violence continues to plague the city, the numbers have declined a bit from the prior year. More than 1,600 people were shot in the city in 2023 — about 375 of them fatally. Violent crime across Philadelphia is down about 7%, and police say they took about 6,000 guns off the street.

“I think it is a good indication that we are moving in a positive direction. I don’t think it is the norm to see any city drop 100 homicides in one year,” said interim Police Commissioner John Stanford.

He says they are trying to chip away at the city’s gun violence.

“Shooting victims are down 27%,” he said. That’s almost 600 fewer people shot in the city over the past year.

Stanford says the clearance — or solve — rate for homicides jumped a bit to about 60%, but for victims who were shot and injured: only about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of cases were solved.

“Our shooting clearance rate is 28%,” he said. “Still working to increase both of those numbers but have to tip our hat off to the investigators that have been working diligently on bringing in the people responsible for homicides and those who are responsible for shootings.”

He says communication between investigators working the cases and boots on the ground has been key — “both in solving some of these cases and clearing some of these cases but also in helping to prevent future incidents by trying to get in front of any type of retaliatory incidents we could possibly see.”

Stanford says the number of officers in the department is at a deficit, there are about 800 open spots.

“To see that we are making significant progress considering that we are down in staffing, it just is a testament to the dedication of everyone involved, and everyone committed to reducing gun violence in this city.”

There were about 30% fewer carjackings than in 2022, but car thefts were up more than 70%. About 23,000 cars were stolen in Philadelphia in 2023.

“We recovered 20,000 vehicles. Our folks are recovering vehicles just about the same rate that they are being stolen,” Stanford said.

He said most of the cars were found fairly quickly, and thieves mostly took the stolen cars on joyrides — “and then you have some folks that are stealing vehicles to commit other crimes.”

Retail theft was up about 27% from this time a year ago, he said.

Stanford credits community groups with helping to intervene in some of the issues on the streets. He will continue his career with the department, after Kevin Bethel is sworn in as the city’s new commissioner on Tuesday.

## **16-year-old shot in head on Center City subway platform**

**January 12, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A 16-year-old boy is in critical condition at the hospital after he was shot in the head on a SEPTA subway platform in Center City Thursday night.

It happened at the 15th Street Station along the Market-Frankford Line around 9:30 p.m.

Investigators are still combing through surveillance video. They say it shows the shooter and victim had some sort of interaction at the City Hall Station on the Broad Street Line. They then walked over to the 15th Street Station, and that's where the shooting happened.

SEPTA Police Chief Charles Lawson says there didn't appear to be any apparent dispute between the two.

"They didn't enter together and we haven't found an interaction between the two yet, prior to the shots ringing out."

What Lawson does know is that the presence of police did not stop the shooting.

He says there were three transit police officers on the platform when the shooting occurred.

An 18-year-old and a 16-year-old have been arrested, according to Philadelphia police. Lawson says both of them have criminal histories. One was arrested on weapons charges two years ago and then again for using a stolen car last year.

## **SEPTA plans to beef up security gates in South Broad concourse**

**January 23, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — SEPTA plans to erect more substantial fencing in the concourse under City Hall, by replacing chain link fencing in the South Broad concourse between 13th and 15th streets with steel panels and gates.

SEPTA has had chain link fencing up in the South Broad concourse since the pandemic. Spokesman Andrew Busch says the transit agency determined the subway concourse near City Hall, and one at 8th and Market streets, required a more secure structure.

“We did a full evaluation of the concourse and identified these locations where we thought it was appropriate to add gating,” said Busch. “It’s not limiting service or taking away any part of the concourse that is not currently closed off. We’re just trying to make it more secure.”

He says SEPTA maintains the South Broad concourse under an agreement with the city and that more secure gates would allow maintenance crews to do overnight work without disruption. The gates would close overnight when the Market-Frankford Line isn’t running, to discourage people experiencing homelessness from disrupting cleaning operations.

“It gives them security that there’s not going to be anybody coming into the concourse when they’re down there cleaning,” he said. “It’s not safe for anyone if the concourse area or our stations are being used as a shelter.”

The SEPTA board will vote Thursday on a \$795,000 contract to acquire the gates, which would be delivered by September.

## **Police searching for 17-year-old who escaped from custody at Children's Hospital**

### **January 24, 2024**

Last updated on Jan. 25, 7:45 a.m.

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Police are looking for a juvenile detainee who escaped from custody while at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Wednesday afternoon. The U.S. Marshals Service said he may be driving a stolen blue Ford F-150 with a Pennsylvania license plate ZTS-0503.

“He was wearing a dark-colored blue sweatsuit at the time of his escape,” said Deputy Police Commissioner Frank Vanore. “He's about 180 pounds, 5-foot-7. He has braids in his hair that are pulled over on both sides.”

He was last seen wearing slides or flip-flops when he escaped.

According to authorities, juvenile justice officers brought 17-year-old Shane Pryor to the hospital for a hand injury just before noon on Wednesday.

Surveillance video shows his escape.

"When staff pulled up into the driveway of Children's Hospital, we know now, through video evidence, as the male was exiting that car, he was able to escape from staff and run from this area on foot," said Vanore.

Officials said he was not handcuffed.

After fleeing officers at CHOP, police say Pryor headed toward the area of University Avenue and Civic Center Boulevard. "He left from this driveway," Vanore told reporters, "and crossed the boulevard and ran [from] building to building, pretty much."

Vanore said police searched parking garages, buildings and surrounding areas.

Pryor has been detained at the Juvenile Justice Services Center since he was 14 years old. "It's a murder charge," Vanore said. "He's been in custody from that point, still awaiting trial."

Pryor's attorney Paul DiMaio said his client and another teen were charged in a homicide case, in which a woman was killed in October 2020.

"He's always maintained his innocence. I think he's scared. He doesn't know what's going to happen," DiMaio said. "Getting to know Shane in the past year, he's actually kind of a mild-mannered kid. I don't know why he escaped. I don't know why he walked off."

Although he was not armed at the time of his escape, police say Pryor is nonetheless considered dangerous. Anyone who sees him is cautioned not to approach him but to call 911 or 215-686-TIPS.

The U.S. Marshals Service is also taking tips at 877-WANTED-2.

"If he's out there and listening, he needs to turn himself in," DiMaio said. "We can fight this case. I know he's scared, but the best thing he can do ... if I was to talk to him, I would tell him, 'You need to turn yourself in.'"

A judge recently denied Pryor's request to be tried as a juvenile. DiMaio thinks that may be why he fled. Investigators have not determined a reason for his escape.

Stay with KYW Newsradio for more as this story develops.



## FEBRUARY

### **City Council push against 'stop-and-go' corner stores renewed after police-involved shooting**

**February 5, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The recent shooting in which a Philadelphia police officer was wounded and the suspect killed has renewed city council's push to regulate stop-and-go liquor stores and gambling machines.

Philadelphia police released a video of the Jan. 26 shooting that showed the location, called Jennifer Tavern, didn't look like a tavern at all.

“You know, when I look at the video of what happened last Friday night, it just all came back because here was an establishment that's supposed to be a tavern, it's supposed to have seating for patrons, it's supposed to be an asset to the neighborhood, where people can purchase a meal and come in and eat — and it was none of these things.”

Jennifer Tavern is a type of liquor store known as a “stop-and-go,” which sells shots and other alcohol “to go,” even though its license requires food service and dine-in space. Councilmember Cindy Bass targeted the stores as neighborhood nuisances in 2017, but she says seeing video of the incident made her realize that they are still operating with impunity.

“I'm calling out the departments to do the enforcement that we called upon many, many years ago. In seven years you can't get it done? This is absolutely ridiculous that we allow these folks to operate in ways that are detrimental. They are a blight on our community.”

Bass proposed, and Council approved, hearings on the matter. The incident also touched a nerve with Councilmember Curtis Jones, who has been trying to regulate gambling machines in corner stores. There are three evident in the video of the shooting.

“They are in every neighborhood in the city of Philadelphia. We don't know how many there are. We don't know how much money they make. Nobody regulates them, nobody taxes them, so they are totally disrespecting the city of Philadelphia.

Jones has reintroduced a bill to outlaw the machines, which passed last session but was pocket-vetoed by Mayor Jim Kenney on his way out of office.

## **Temple police looking for suspect who fired gunshots into the air during huge teen gathering near Broad Street**

**February 12, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Temple University Police are trying to identify the person who they said fired two gunshots into the air during a gathering of hundreds of young people on Broad Street Saturday night.

Temple police released images of the suspect from the weekend gathering. Hundreds of young people met up in the area of Broad Street and Cecil B. Moore Avenue, close to Temple's campus — a gathering that was organized on social media, police said.

Temple police were aware of the meetup ahead of time and alerted Philadelphia police, according to Jennifer Griffin, Temple's vice president and chief for public safety.

Initially, there were no issues. But around 5:30 p.m., several fights broke out. A TU alert was issued to students, telling them to avoid the area.

Then just before 6 p.m., police heard a gunshot as they were trying to disperse the crowd. Minutes later, there was a second shot, according to police.

Investigators believe the shooter fired the shots into the air and no one was hit. Within an hour, the crowd was gone.

"I saw the moment when a gunshot went off and they all scattered. It was crazy," Gage Bernstein, a Temple junior, told NBC10. "I haven't seen anything like that before."

Seven teens, ranging in age between 13 and 16, were taken into custody in connection with the incident. They were cited for disorderly conduct, police said.

As police search for the alleged shooter, they are also looking at surveillance and cellphone footage to see if anyone else caused trouble during the gathering.

New Philly top cop Kevin Bethel talks reducing gun violence, helping the city's youth, stop-and-frisk, and more with KYW

## **Philadelphia Police Commissioner Kevin Bethel being interviewed by KYW Crime and Justice**

**February 16, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW NEWSRADIO) — Philadelphia Police Commissioner Kevin Bethel has been on the job a little over a month and has inherited a number of ongoing problems in the city, such as gun violence, retail theft, low recruitment, and a rising youth violent crime rate, to name a few.

But with a new administration at his back, Bethel projected confidence on a recent visit to KYW to talk through his plans.

On gun violence — the issue that remains at the top of his list — Bethel said he would continue to focus efforts on the districts where the most gun violence occurs.

“We have about 10 districts that represent about 80% of the violence in our city,” Bethel said.

Youth charged with violent crimes have also increased over the last few years, and Bethel's past experience working as Chief of School Safety at the Philadelphia School District could make him more apt than others to stem the trend.

For him, it starts with parents.

“Being in their lives is the first part,” said Bethel. “Having a positive adult in a child's life we know works, so don't cast that away.”

When it comes to the police department's often fraught relationship with District Attorney Larry Krasner, Bethel struck a conciliatory tone and acknowledged that he and Krasner may not always agree, but could hit a “reset” on the relationship.

## **Community members push to keep Jenkintown PD independent as its future remains uncertain**

**February 26, 2024**

JENKINTOWN, PA (KYW Newsradio) — The future of Jenkintown’s Police Department is at the center of an ongoing conversation between taxpayers and officials. The borough says the rising costs of running it are outpacing population growth.

“I want you all to show me by hands how many of you know our police officers? All 10? How about five police officers?” said Jenkintown Police Chief Thomas Scott.

Jenkintown Police Department is under the borough's general fund, currently taking up about 51% of the budget, according to officials.

During a presentation at a community meeting inside a crowded Jenkintown High School auditorium Monday, town leaders mentioned the financial strains of running the borough, noting several instances of mismanagement with a previous administration and the stress of catching up on tax revenue from the impact of the pandemic.

“How are we going to provide the best service while also being financially responsible?” Scott asked.

He says no decision has been made, but they are exploring other options, like contracting with officers from other towns.

“Our goal is to provide the best public safety to our citizens. If it’s sustaining the police department the way it is, then we’ll work through that. If it’s looking at other options, we’ll look at that.”

Community members expressed their fears of losing officers they are familiar with if a contractor does take over. They say they want the police department to remain independent

“They are here, they are constantly patrolling,” a community member said. “That would not happen with Abington. I’m not discouraging Abington or Cheltenham, but we should not lose such a valuable asset.”

## MARCH

### **New Jersey recognized by national study for its efforts to curb firearm deaths**

**March 2, 2024**

SOUTH JERSEY (KYW Newsradio) — A new study gave New Jersey top marks for efforts to curb gun violence, one of only four states to earn this status.

The national report from the nonprofit Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence found that in 2023, no firearms dealers in New Jersey were cited by the federal government for selling a high volume of guns that were later used in crimes. It's the second year in a row the state received this recognition.

“New Jersey is a leader on gun safety policies, with some of the strongest gun laws in the country — and the third-lowest rate of firearm deaths,” read the report.

“Last year we had the lowest number of shootings in New Jersey since we've been tracking them,” said Attorney General Matt Platkin. For him, the report proves all of his office's hard work is paying off.

“We have the strongest gun laws in the country, and I'm proud of that. We have successfully defended them against every single challenge that has come our way, and we will continue to do so,” he said.

Platkin says his office has approached gun violence from every angle they can think of, including strong laws, enforcement, policing, community engagement, and holding manufacturers accountable.

“Then we use those laws,” he said. “We use them to hold accountable violent, serially violent people who are causing havoc in our communities.”

Platkin said he's also encouraged by a recent study that proves the viability of microstamping technology, which gives law enforcement additional tools to match guns with shell casings found at the scene of a crime. He urged gun manufacturers to adopt the technology and make it widely available.

## **More than a dozen shots fired near The Met, injuring 2 men**

**March 6, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Two men were shot near The Met Philadelphia on North Broad Street early Wednesday morning.

It happened around 1 a.m. near Broad and Poplar Streets. Police said the shooting stemmed from a party up the block.

Someone fired at least 18 shots, striking two men, ages 41 and 42. One was shot in the leg, and the other was shot in the eye. Their conditions are unknown.

Several cars parked on the street were also hit by gunfire. Two of the bullets hit The Met building.

## **Police have not made any arrests. Police search for suspect in string of Camden robberies**

**March 7, 2024**

CAMDEN, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — Police in Camden say the same man is responsible for eight robberies since the start of the year and they need help tracking him down.

Investigators believe 53-year-old Mark Long has stolen thousands of dollars from local businesses and caused thousands more in damage from breaking in.

“This individual was gaining access using prying tools and then using the prying tools to open up the register,” said Deputy Police Chief Janel Simpson.

They say Mark Long is believed to be homeless, but is known to frequent the Fairview neighborhood and Mount Ephraim Corridor.

Police want to hear from anyone with information on his whereabouts.

## **SEPTA ends pilot program that used artificial intelligence to detect guns on the system**

**March 22, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Amid a rash of gun crimes, SEPTA has ended a pilot program that used artificial intelligence to detect guns on the system.

Without fanfare, the 10-month pilot program with the Conshohocken-based firm ZeroEyes ended in December. ZeroEyes used artificial intelligence to scan real-time security camera feeds to alert police about people with guns.

SEPTA spokesperson Andrew Busch said only a few guns were spotted during the pilot, which monitored 300 analog and digital cameras on the Broad Street and Market-Frankford lines.

“What we decided was that it wasn’t the right fit for SEPTA police at this time,” Busch said. “There were only a few instances that we saw where the system alerted police to someone with a firearm.”

Sam Alaimo, ZeroEyes co-founder and chief revenue officer, said SEPTA’s mostly analog cameras were largely incompatible with the AI software.

“They’re very old. They’re ineffective. They’re grainy,” Alaimo said. “We built a cutting-edge AI technology to leverage digital cameras, which most institutions have nowadays.”

Alaimo said ZeroEyes’ software is being used at schools, colleges, and federal and commercial facilities in 40 states.

“Our new technology simply does not work well on old security cameras,” he added, “so neither SEPTA nor us [sic] were satisfied with our performance.”

Busch said SEPTA did a blind test with plainclothes officers carrying guns. The transit agency tested 20 digital cameras and 20 analog cameras that were part of the program, but the cameras didn’t detect the armed officers.

Alaimo said SEPTA asked ZeroEyes to figure out a way to use the AI software on the transit agency’s existing cameras. “SEPTA was adamant that they wanted us to function on the analog

cameras,” he said. “While we became slightly better, it was still a degraded performance that we were not comfortable deploying on, and SEPTA was not comfortable deploying on.”

From SEPTA’s standpoint, Busch said it’s not a matter of analog versus digital. “Because we do have a mix” of cameras, he said. “We’ve been bringing cameras online for well over a decade.”

SEPTA received a \$5 million state grant to be used for the ZeroEyes program. The firm approached SEPTA about using some of that money to replace more of its analog cameras with digital ones, but “that was not an acceptable solution,” Alaimo said.

Instead, SEPTA is asking the state to reallocate \$2 million of the grant for camera upgrades and another \$2 million for police overtime related to a separate technology that SEPTA may pursue, Busch said.

SEPTA’s Virtual Patrol Unit, which uses retired police officers to monitor live video feeds from its 31,000 cameras, has helped make arrests in several recent high-profile crimes, Busch noted, including the stabbing death of a Center City Macy’s guard in December 2023.



## ECONOMY

### JANUARY

#### **Home mortgage rates expected to fall in 2024, but not until the second half of the year, says economist**

**January 2, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — It could cost less to borrow money in 2024 after years of interest rate hikes, but that doesn't mean it's going to be less expensive to buy a home. Economists believe the Federal Reserve won't cut interest rates until summer.

The Fed has hiked interest rates 11 times since March of 2022, and the national average for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage hit 8% last year.

“Interest rates took the elevator going up the past couple of years, but they're going to take the stairs coming down,” said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst with Bankrate.

The national average is now hovering around 7%, and McBride expects the Fed to cut rates no earlier than June.

“Most of that is going to come in the back half of the year, and that's contingent on inflation,” he said. “From an interest rate perspective, later in the year will be better than earlier in the year. But the offset to that is if mortgage rates come down sharply, home prices are likely to go up in response.”

McBride says inflation needs to continue to come down in order for the Fed to feel comfortable to start to trim interest rates.

“If inflation is stubbornly high, that's going to limit how much the Fed can cut interest rates this year. That's why I only expect to be able to cut rates twice.”

McBride says more sellers may list their homes this year as rates come down, but buyers will still have a tough time.

“It’s not really going to do much to ease the affordability pressures because, with the limited inventory and high home prices, those are really going to persist. We might see some modest improvement on the inventory front but affordability is still going to be an issue.”

Buyers may feel pressure to overpay for a home or waive inspection, but McBride says if the competition is that heated, just walk away.

“Making the biggest financial decision of your life under duress is rarely a recipe for success.”

Mortgage rates aren’t all that is expected to drop. Savings rates are also due, he said.

“So if you’ve had your eye on a CD, now is the time to lock in. I wouldn’t expect those to improve as the year progresses.”

### **Broad Street reopens through Navy Yard after 18-month, \$22M reconstruction project January 9, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — It’s a straight drive through the Philadelphia Navy Yard again, as Broad Street has reopened after 18 months of construction.

Four lanes of Broad Street between Crescent Drive and Intrepid Avenue reopened Monday after a \$22 million reconstruction project. Broad Street had been built on top of a wooden bridge constructed in the 1800s that connected League Island to the mainland. By 2006, that timber bridge had weakened to the point that two lanes of Broad Street and the sidewalks near the reserve basin were closed for safety concerns.

“Just in the natural course of things, it had deteriorated over time and that resulted in subsidence and cracking in the sidewalk and the travel lanes,” said Kate McNamara, senior vice president for the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) at the Navy Yard.

“Everybody understood that Broad Street needed to be reconstructed — that it was a super-important safety issue and convenience issue and we had to make sure that it was done right.”

With Broad Street reopened, the Navy Yard will need to tweak the software for the driverless employee shuttle it’s preparing to introduce. “What threw us for a loop is the reopening of Broad Street, which we were able to get done. And that just meant that we had to program the shuttle for that piece of the route,” McNamara said. “We couldn’t do it until the road was actually open, so it added a little bit of extra time to the programming for the shuttle.”

The autonomous shuttle should launch in late January or early February, according to McNamara. In addition to the newly-opened travel lanes, a bicycle lane and pedestrian walkway were also built.

Construction also continues on a mixed-use development project that includes 614 apartments. It would mark the first residential development at the Navy Yard since the base closed in 1996.

### **Philly Water Department receives \$25M grant for improvement projects January 24, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — City and state officials on Wednesday celebrated \$25 million in grants to the Philadelphia Water Department for projects to improve drinking water, reduce flooding and make the Delaware River cleaner.

The award was announced by state legislators at the Northeast Water Pollution Control Plant in Port Richmond. The money comes from \$200 million in federal funds that were awarded to the state for distribution. State Rep. Jordan Harris says Philadelphia is getting more than 10% of the total.

“Philadelphia is one of the oldest cities in the country and because of that, we have an old and aging infrastructure and that infrastructure must be addressed,” Harris said.

Some of the grant money will go to expanding the capacity of the Germantown pumping station to reduce sewer overflow and flooding. Another chunk will go to a long-term plan to improve drinking water quality at the Queen Lane plant in East Falls. The largest share will go to the Port Richmond plant.

Water Commissioner Randy Hayman says the grants will have a big impact. “These are improvements that will touch the lives of Philadelphians. Each of these projects will make our city cleaner, greener and safer and show people how support from the state and federal government can improve the lives of our residents,” he said.

Harris promised more help would be coming from Harrisburg, which delighted Mayor Chelle Parker.

“Thank you for not bringing home slogans,” she said. “Slogans won’t help us fix our aging infrastructure.”

## **Elevated Darby Creek Trail project receives \$226K in state funding to finish design phase January 25, 2024**

DELAWARE COUNTY, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — A new trail that will let hikers walk among the treetops in Delaware County is one step closer to becoming a reality.

A \$226,900 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development is pushing the Darby Creek Trail project into its phase 2 final design, “which means engineering an elevated trail,” said Gina Burritt, the county’s director of planning.

“It’s not your typical trail, but this will really be a neat design feature and a unique section of trail that will be up in the trees.”

Burritt says the trail will span about a half-mile, from Upper Darby through Lansdowne and into Clifton Heights. The project also takes into consideration how the weather affects the creek.

“Because of the land uses and the creek being right there, obviously that is also a feature but it can lead to some flooding concerns,” she said, “so having an elevated trail that will not be as prone to flooding is a big deal.”

Part of the grant will go into figuring out just how this trail will look. “It will give people just a different viewpoint, a different perspective than what they typically see on your standard trail,” Burritt said.

The final design phase has an estimated price tag of \$850,000. According to Burritt, the county hopes to have it wrapped up in the next three years. Construction of the elevated trail, however, won’t come cheap.

“Because of this feature, it will be expensive. We’re at this point thinking somewhere in the \$5 million range,” said Burritt. Right now, there is no timetable on when the project as a whole will be finished.

## FEBRUARY

### **\$1.47M federal grant a boost to Philadelphia’s growing electric vehicle workforce February 13, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia received a \$1.47 million federal grant to develop a workforce program that will train a new generation of workers in the electric vehicle industry.

Through the Plug In Philly initiative, workers will complete a pre-apprenticeship program, which will help launch them into full-time or union jobs in the field. They will learn to build, install, and maintain charging stations for electric cars.

“This grant is going to be used to create 45 job placements,” Mayor Chelle Parker said, “and at the same time, it’s going to expand the use of electric vehicles in our great city of Philadelphia.”

The long-term goal is to create a more diverse electrician workforce, said Lily Reynolds, director of federal infrastructure strategy for the Philadelphia Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, and Sustainability.

“Today, women and people of color are underrepresented in the trades and in all types of infrastructure careers,” she said. “Meanwhile, new federal investments in infrastructure mean an increase of job opportunities with family-sustaining wages.”

The announcement was made Monday at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 98 training facility at the Navy Yard.

“What we believe now is that if we care about our children, we invest in their future. We don’t just give them jobs — we give them careers,” said union business manager Mark Lynch Jr.

Philadelphia Managing Director Adam Thiel said the city is committed to a safe, clean and green infrastructure installation.

“We need more folks to represent our community who are trained and certified to do the work, and this program will help do that,” he added.

The program aims to enroll the first group of participants in late summer or early fall.

## **Federal transit officials announce \$317M for new rail cars on SEPTA's Market-Frankford Line**

**Updated on February 21, 2024**

UPDATED: 4:25 p.m.

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — SEPTA has received a big boost from the federal government to pay for hundreds of new rail cars on the Market-Frankford Line.

Nuria Fernandez, head of the Federal Transit Administration, issued SEPTA a check for \$317 million at a press conference Wednesday, at 69th Street Transportation Center in Upper Darby. “It is the largest single grant that SEPTA has ever received,” said SEPTA General Manager and CEO Leslie Richards.

“About 175,000 riders a day are now going to get better and more reliable service,” said Fernandez.

The grant will fund 200 new cars for the El. The cities of Baltimore and Chicago also received funding.

SEPTA has been looking to modernize the Market-Frankford Line, which the agency calls the “workhorse” of its system. The M-4 cars that are running now have been around for at least 25 years, which Fernandez acknowledged brings them to the end of their useful lives. “It has become challenging to keep those rail cars in service,” said the FTA administrator.

“Constant maintenance and downtime are limiting the number of trains that we can put out on the line every day. It’s preventing SEPTA from providing the frequency and reliability to support the needs of our customers and this region,” explained Richards.

“Replacing these rail cars is our highest priority and this grant could not have come at a more critical time for SEPTA.”

Richards said the transit agency plans to award the contract for a company to build the new M-5 rail cars this summer, and hopes to start using them within the next few years.

This round of federal money comes from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Rail Vehicle Replacement Program, which stems from the bipartisan infrastructure bill that was signed in 2021.

Any bit of money helps, and SEPTA has a huge backlog of projects. Issues have been popping up — last week, a wheel on a work train came off the tracks near Huntingdon Station. That led to a service disruption, and shuttle buses were needed.

Financially, SEPTA faces a fiscal cliff when pandemic relief cash runs out later this year. SEPTA and transit advocates are pushing for Gov. Josh Shapiro's budget proposal, which would increase state public transportation funding. The agency is warning, though, that there could be service cuts and fare hikes if the budget hole is not filled.

## **Philadelphia tourism made some progress in 2023, but economic impact is still not what it was before pandemic**

**February 22, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Tourists still are not flocking to the Philadelphia region like they did before the pandemic lockdowns, but the city's tourism sector last year did manage to make some improvements over the year before.

In 2023, Philadelphia and its five surrounding counties welcomed just under 43 million visitors, and tourists spent just over \$7.5 billion, leading to an estimated economic impact of \$12.4 billion. That's according to a new outlook for 2024 put out by Visit Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Here in Philadelphia, we should be proud of the city that we have," said Angela Val, president and CEO of Visit Philadelphia.

The numbers are slight increases in tourism for the region compared to 2022, but still not at their pre-pandemic levels, which were at a record high for visitors in the region.

"We have definitely made year-to-year progress, so everything is headed in the right direction, although there is definitely room to grow," Val said.

The depletion of some of the savings people were able to grow during the pandemic when travel was restricted is one headwind facing further tourism growth in the city, she added. "So, although demand for travel is still really great, we do expect it to slow down a bit, but not decrease."

The hotel sector, especially, in 2023, still lagged behind pre-pandemic figures in occupancy rate, demand for rooms, and revenue.

“I think one of the things that is impacting the slow recovery in occupancy is that we grew the number of rooms here in Philadelphia County, specifically in the downtown area, about 2,000 additional rooms out of the pandemic.”

Leaders still have an optimistic outlook for 2024, however, two years before the 2026 FIFA World Cup shines an international spotlight on the city and draws throngs of soccer fans from around the world.

“We have a lot of work to get prepared for 2026, but I anticipate that we would’ve reached our 2019 benchmarks by the first quarter of ’25 and definitely 2026,” Val said.

**Center City Philadelphia continues to attract new residents, which is helping overall recovery downtown  
February 26, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The number of people moving into Philadelphia’s core continues to grow, according to a Center City District report released Monday.

Foot traffic in the district is still slightly less than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the report shows the number of full-time residents has grown by 6% in the last three years. Unlike many parts of Philadelphia, more people are moving into Center City than are moving out.

Residential growth has been a crucial part of ongoing economic recovery from the pandemic in every sector, says Prema Gupta, who recently took over as CCD president.

“More residents means steady foot traffic, which attracts restaurants and retailers, increases economic activity, and contributes to safety and security,” Gupta says.

“Where we see it very directly is with new retailers in Center City. We’ve heard national experts call Walnut Street one of the preeminent locations for digital-native brands which, frankly, cater to a younger, Millennial, Gen Z crowd.”

Gupta says it also helps with the return to work since CCD has found that employees are far more likely to go into an office if it’s within two miles of their home, and Center City remains the largest job center.

“This report is really optimistic,” says Gupta. “We feel really good that this relationship between new inventory and population follow each other really closely.”



CCD's economic development manager, Lauren Smith, says most of the new residents are coming from other parts of Pennsylvania, but 15% have come from New York City. The majority of Center City residents are 22 to 34 years old, and 80% have college degrees.

"We're looking at affluent young professionals, many of them coming from universities nearby," she said.

Philadelphia leads the nation in converting office space to residential, thanks in part to the 10-year tax abatement — though, Smith adds, candidates for the conversion are dwindling.

"There are very specific things that are needed for a residential building — like windows and elevator access — so identifying those buildings will be important for the future," Smith said.

Center City added nearly 3,000 residential units last year, the highest number in the last five years, according to the report. Smith says there are 7,000 more in the pipeline, and she expects demand to keep up with the new supply.

## **MARCH**

**Are you eligible for Pa.'s Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program? Find out at an info session this month.**

**March 11, 2024**

MEDIA, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — With the expansion this year of Pennsylvania's Property Tax/Rent Rebate Program, many thousands of seniors and adults with disabilities are newly eligible for relief up to \$1,000. To help Delaware County residents access the program and find out if they are eligible, several senior centers this month are hosting a series of in-person information sessions.

Starting in 2024, for tax year 2023, the household income limit for both property tax rebates and rent rebates increased to \$45,000, and the maximum standard rebate increased from \$650 to \$1,000. Those changes opened the program up to thousands and as much as doubled the rebate for many who were already eligible.

Applications for 2023 Property Tax/Rent Rebates are due by June 30, 2024.

The Department of Revenue has more information online, as well as this tutorial video:

Delaware County Council Chair Dr. Monica Taylor says she wants residents to know about the expanded program so they don't miss out. The one-on-one sessions are meant to get residents access to the information they need, determine their eligibility, and fill out the application.

“It’s just very important, when you look at the strains that are on our residents — especially our individuals who are older adults, and those with disabilities,” said Taylor.

“You can just come to that senior center to get support.”

The relief comes at a good time, too, she says, as property taxes rise and household budgets continue to adjust to the realities of inflation.

“Being able to take at least a little bit of the burden off and being able to provide some relief in terms of property tax and rent rebate — it’s really going to have an impact for our community,” Taylor said.

Residents are advised to call ahead of time to confirm availability for any of the following upcoming sessions and to schedule an appointment:

March 12 from 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Wayne Senior Center  
108 Station Rd., Wayne, PA 19087  
610-688-6246

March 13, 20 and 27, and April 3 and 10 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Good Neighbor Senior Center  
1085 Hook Rd., Sharon Hill, PA 19079  
610-586-8170

March 19 from 9 a.m. – noon  
Friendship Circle Senior Center  
1515 Lansdowne Ave., Darby, PA 19023  
610-237-6222

March 21 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Schoolhouse Senior Center  
600 Swarthmore Ave., Folsom, PA 19033  
610-237-8100

## **'Chinatown Stitch' now fully funded with federal grant to heal community divided for decades**

**March 11, 2024**

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia has received full funding to put a cap over the Vine Street Expressway. The project is known as the Chinatown Stitch because its purpose is to reconnect the two sides of the neighborhood that were divided when the section of I-676 was built about 30 years ago.

The project will build a park over a two-and-a-half block stretch of the expressway between 10th and 13th streets. Construction is expected to take three or four years.

“This is truly a transformative day in the history of Philadelphia,” said Congressman Brendan Boyle Monday.

He and members of the city’s congressional delegation had gathered to announce that nearly \$160 million from the Infrastructure Bill has been designated for the Chinatown Stitch.

“We will finally be repairing a historic wrong, an injustice that was done to a community.”

When the Vine Street Expressway was built in the late 1980s and early '90s, state and city officials considered dividing Chinatown an acceptable cost. Decades did not heal the community’s scar, but John Chin of the Chinatown Development Corporation says this project will.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you, from the bottom of my heart,” said Chin.

He says he was moved to tears when members of the city’s congressional delegation announced the full \$160 million cost would be covered.

Chin has helped the community work with PennDOT for nearly two years on a design for the cap.

“Chinatown’s relationship with PennDOT has come full circle from 60 years ago when it was in charge of constructing that highway and dividing our community,” he said.

“The Chinatown Stitch is transformative. You will no longer see the highway. And it will provide green space and amenities that our community never had.”

Mayor Cherrille Parker applauded the project, which was begun during the Jim Kenney administration — but fitting in with her vision of unity.

“We are going to ensure that we really are one city, because we are bringing together a community that people across our city take great pride in,” the mayor said.

Construction is scheduled to begin in 2028.

It has taken more than 30 years to repair the damage done to Chinatown by the expressway. The community is now concerned that a proposed arena on its south side poses another threat.

**Delco borough awarded \$425K for much-needed sewer restoration project  
March 13, 2024**

DELAWARE COUNTY, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — A small borough in Delaware County is getting \$425,000 towards a sanitation project aimed at fixing a flooding problem plaguing the area for years.

Colwyn is less than a mile wide but unlike other areas in the region, the town owns its sewer system. But Borough Manager Richard Knox says after many decades, it’s now under pressure and out of date.

“Piping and things change over time,” he said. “We actually have a company going around now replacing the sewer system so we won’t get rainwater into the system which causes overflow and causes us to pay fines if we don’t maintain.”

Flooding from Darby Creek which happens multiple times a year, heavily impacts their neighborhood and sanitary pipes.

“When these outlets get clogged up and we don’t have the proper things in place to receive the amount of water we get from floods it causes that damage to the system,” Knox said.

Knox says he believes the money will go a long way and provide immediate help for residents when the creek inevitably floods.

“Having that updated piping so we don’t get the breaks, we don’t get the collapses in the streets, all the different things that can happen when those pipes are compromised,” he said.

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## **Bridging Philly: Q1 January, February & March 2024**

Prepared by Patty McMahon

### **Benefits of Dry January | The Philly Goat Project January 06, 2024**

Dry January has become an annual international event inspiring all kinds of drinkers to leave the bottles on the shelf for 31 days. The market for mocktails, non-alcohol spirits, wines, and beer is growing, and there are "safe spaces" for those who choose not to drink, but still want to be social. We learn about the benefits of temporary abstaining and the resources people can use to help them overcome their habit. Guests are Erin Goodhart, Executive Director of Core Programming, Pennsylvania at Caron Drug and Alcohol Treatment Centers; Fergie Carey, proprietor of several bars and restaurants in Philadelphia; and Drew Davis, co-founder of Pitman New Jersey's no-alcohol bottle shop and pop-up bar, Gem Life + Bar.

Then, an introduction to the only city-based multi-service goat program: Germantown's Philly Goat Project, which has programs including education, community wellness, animal-assisted therapy, and teen job training with the help of trained goats. Shara in the City talks to Karen Krivit, Director, and Kelly Corrigan, Therapy and Wellness Director of The Philly Goat Project.

### **Urban Navigation | MLK's legacy of social justice January 13, 2024**

Co-founders Don Jackson and Hameen Diggins describe their community organization Urban Navigation as a GPS for urban youth that points the next generation of non-shooters towards gun education and technician training in the inner city and Philadelphia suburbs. Then, this year is the 60th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, and Global Citizen's Founder and President Todd Bernstein describes the many opportunities in which to embrace MLK's legacy of social justice at the 29th Annual Great Philadelphia Martin Luther King Day of Service at Girard College.

### **Pa. House Speaker Joanna McClinton | Youth America Grand Prix January 20, 2024**

Pa. Speaker of the House Joanna McClinton looks back on the successes and challenges of her first year as the first woman and the first person of color to hold the gavel. With a razor-thin majority, Speaker McClinton negotiated tax credits for working families' daycare expenses, violence reduction programs, and a public defender fund. Then, Philly hosts the Youth America Grand Prix, an international student ballet competition that draws about 20,000 dancers whose finalists are selected to win cash prizes and scholarships at top schools and companies.

**NJ's doula access law | The Lullaby Project**  
**January 27, 2024**

Tammy Murphy, First Lady of New and U.S. Senate candidate, describes the new state law that protects a mother's right to a doula throughout pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. Then, creating a deeper bond between parents and young children through music with the Philadelphia Lullaby Project.

**Cecil B. Moore Freedom Fighters | The Colored Girl Museum lives on**  
**February 03, 2024**

Philadelphia's civil rights movement included the Cecil B. Moore Freedom Fighters, the "young militants" who protested and helped desegregate Girard College, which was a school intended for "poor, white male orphans." We hear stories of police harassment and songs of freedom from the former teenagers who followed their leader and Philadelphia NAACP branch's president's words: "If you stand together, you can make a difference." Then, Vashti DuBois shares good news about the future of The Colored Girl Museum, which has received a zoning variance to continue living in the Germantown house that is her home and museum.

**Are you ready for love? | Little Free(dom) Library**  
**February 10, 2024**

Is everyone ready for love? A relationship coach and a social worker discuss the humility, inspiration, and personal growth it takes to make heterosexual, same-sex, and non-traditional couples last. Then, taking and leaving banned books by Black authors at Visit Philly's 13 Little Free(dom) Libraries.

**Art for all**  
**February 17, 2024**

Fine art should be experienced by all people, according to philanthropic Philadelphia art collector Albert C. Barnes. The Barnes Foundation's Martha Lucy leads a tour of modern art and African masks, demonstrating the founder's legacy of accessible and diverse arts education. Lucy has edited a new book, "The Barnes Then and Now: Dialogues on Education, Installation and Social Justice."

**Young Chances Foundation | Preserving Mother Bethel AME Church**  
**February 24, 2024**

South Philly's Tyrique Glasgow shares his story about owning his South Philly neighborhood drug corner at 12 to founding the Young Chances Foundation, which provides a clothing bank, educational and feeding programs, and school supplies.

Then, Rev. Mark Kelly Tyler describes how a \$90,000 National Trust for Historic Preservation grant to help preserve Richard Allen's Mother Bethel AME Church, a beacon of hope and inspiration for those resisting white supremacy. The church is still growing in 39 countries and five continents.

**PA Youth Vote | Legacy Reclaimed: A 7th Ward Tribute**  
**March 02, 2024**

PA Youth Votes' Angelique Hinton, Kamryn Davis, and a high school senior explain how they engage future leaders with education and events programming to connect the dots between the issues they care about, voting, and holding elected officials accountable. Then, artists and curators lead a tour of the collective public art initiative, "Legacy Reclaimed: A 7th Ward Tribute," encompassing the blocks between 6th and 23rd Streets and Spruce and South Streets, whose residents once included Richard Allen, Octavius Catto, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

**Marian Anderson Hall | Restoring Marian Anderson's home**  
**March 09, 2024**

Marian Anderson Hall will soon be the home of the Philadelphia Orchestra. President and CEO of the Philadelphia Orchestra and Kimmel Center, Matias Tarnopolsky, explains how updating the Kimmel Center's Verizon Hall should reflect the diversity and demographics of Philadelphia. Then, a tour of the repair and restoration of the Marian Anderson Museum and Historical Society with its CEO, Jillian Patricia Pirtle. She has been working to put the museum back together after a flood to keep Marian Anderson's music and contributions to the Civil Rights Movement alive.

**Evoluer House | Girls Auto Clinic**  
**March 16, 2024**

Former fashion editor Cheryl Ann Wadlington has been mentoring urban girls to rise above their circumstances to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty for 20 years at Evoluer House with workforce, professional, and personal development programs. Then, engineer Patrice Banks leads a tour of her Girls Auto Clinic in Upper Darby – an auto repair service - that caters to women where she can get a manicure and car maintenance tips while waiting for her car.

## **PA School funding | Uncle Bobbie's Coffee & Books**

**March 23, 2024**

How can Pennsylvania public school students who live in a lower-income school district receive an equitable and adequate education like their affluent counterparts? Pennsylvania State Senator Vincent Hughes and education advocate Priyanka Reyes-Kaura discuss how state legislators must work with Governor Shapiro and his budget proposal to invest in our communities. Then, we hear why regulars and new guests at Germantown's home-grown, black-owned Uncle Bobbie's Coffee and Books come for the vibe, books, coffee, and stay for music and community.

**March 30, 2024**

As childcare wait lists grow many busy families are opening their homes to a young person from another country as an affordable care alternative. Cultural Care Au Pair's Natalie Jordan describes their multi-step screening process and cultural exchange benefits. Then, as roller skating returns across the nation, Great On Skates' co-founder India Bernadino creates accessible and affordable "Dope Skate Classes In Philadelphia" at three locations for all skill levels.

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## **I'm Listening - Q1 January, February, March 2024**

### **I'm Listening / January / Mental Health Seg 1**

Guest: Dr. Christine Moutier, AFSP and Paul Augustyniak, AFSP

Contact: David O'Leary, Host

Airdate: January 28, 2024 at 5:30am

Category: Mental Health

Description: Talk Away the Dark: How to Have Open and Honest Conversations with Loved Ones. We speak with Dr. Christine Moutier, Chief Medical Officer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Paul Augustyniak about how to have open and honest conversations with loved ones about suicide, suicidal ideation. Through a series of open and honest conversations we demonstrate the importance of talking to people directly about suicide and show what those conversations help to prevent suicide and give people hope.



## **I'm Listening / January / Mental Health Seg 2**

Guest: Dr. Christine Moutier, AFSP and Paul Augustyniak, AFSP

Contact: David O'Leary, Host

Airdate: January 28, 2024 at 5:30am

Category: Mental Health

Description: Talk Away the Dark: How to Have Open and Honest Conversations with Loved Ones. We speak with Dr. Christine Moutier, Chief Medical Officer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Paul Augustyniak about how to have open and honest conversations with loved ones about suicide, suicidal ideation. Through a series of open and honest conversations we demonstrate the importance of talking to people directly about suicide and show what those conversations help to prevent suicide and give people hope.

## **Audacy Conversations-State of the Entertainment Industry / February / Seg 1**

Guest: Ron Perlman, Cynthia Littleton-Variety, Karina Manashil-Mad Solar Productions, Patrick Gomez-Entertainment Weekly, Duncan Crabtree Ireland-SAG/AFTRA

Contact: KNX Charles Feldman and Mike Simpson-Hosts

Airdate: February 15, 2024 at 7pm

Category: Media/Entertainment

Description: Hollywood has always reflected the changing world around it. But we are at a reflection point, coming off a 6 month strike. Streaming services are on the rise and older business models are falling. We discuss what the future of what the entertainment industry looks like and what it means for what we will see and consume.

## **Audacy Conversations-State of the Entertainment Industry / February / Seg 2**

Guest: Ron Perlman, Cynthia Littleton-Variety, Karina Manashil-Mad Solar Productions, Patrick Gomez-Entertainment Weekly, Duncan Crabtree Ireland-SAG/AFTRA

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### **I'm Listening / March / Mental Health Seg 1**

Guest: Victor Armstrong-AFSP, Steve Siple-AFSP Contributor

Contact: David Glover, Host

Airdate: March 17, 2024 at 5:30am

Category: Mental Health

Description: Talk Away the Dark: How to Have Open and Honest Conversations with Men. Men are less likely to talk about their mental health struggles than women, which is why it's so important to break down stigma and open the door for these conversations. Community and friendships are huge protective factors against suicide. We seek to emphasize the critical role that asking someone directly about suicide plays in suicide prevention and demonstrate how to have supportive conversations with loved ones about mental health and suicide prevention.

### **I'm Listening / March / Mental Health Seg 2**

Guest: Alex Silva-AFSP, Dan Miller-Wounded Warrior Project and Dr. Erin Fletcher-Wounded Warrior Project

Contact: David Glover, Host

Airdate: March 17, 2024 at 5:30am

Category: Mental Health

Description: Talk Away the Dark: How to Have Open and Honest Conversations with Military and Veterans. Veteran populations face difficulties transitioning from military life and have higher rates of suicide compared to the civilian population. We seek to Understand how Veteran and military culture contributes to existing stigmas is essential to being open about mental health challenges and encouraging those who need it to seek help. Support and resources are available for Veterans that can make a major difference to save lives.

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