

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

October 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023

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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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

October

Child Care centers face closings as federal relief funds run out

By Racquel Williams, KYW Newsradio

October 4, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Federal pandemic relief funds for child care have run out, which could leave families scrambling for child care with many centers forced to close their doors.

In 2021, \$24 billion was earmarked in the American Rescue Plan to help daycare centers stay afloat. Now, that funding is exhausted.

According to the Century Foundation, over 2,800 childcare programs are expected to close in Pennsylvania — and more than 150,000 children would lose care — without a much-needed cash infusion. Legislation introduced in Congress by Democrats would provide \$16 billion a year over the next five years to help child care programs across the country stay afloat. That bill currently has no Republican support.

“I feel like if these policymakers really understood the depth of what we, as early child care providers do on a daily basis to really support our families, they would see us in a different light, and there will be no question about our budgets being passed,” said Damaris Alvarado Rodriguez, who runs the Children's Playhouse Early Learning Center in Philadelphia. She is among the growing number of daycare owners frustrated with the uphill battle in Congress for another “bailout”-type infusion to save the industry.

Aliya Logan, owner of Smart Beginnings Early Learning Center and the Learning Institute of Philadelphia, is also frustrated. “You can't supply more jobs into the economy, unless you stabilize the childcare industry,” she said, adding she already knows of centers that were forced to shut their doors.

“The fear for me is closing my doors after 15 years, and for my students to not have a place in your community to serve them, to help advocate for them,” Logan shared.

Parents are already getting desperate, according to Latonta Godboldt, co-founder of Philadelphia's Family Child Care Coalition. "I've seen parents saying, if you do my kid's hair, I'll watch your kids, or they're taking them in cars all day, interacting with electronics only," she said.

Laverne Cheeseboro, another Coalition co-founder, says some have even gone as far as taking out ads on Craigslist. "They're just looking for whoever. Every time families do that, these children are endangered sometimes when they make these decisions," she said.

That parents are scrambling in desperation scares Diane Barber, executive director of the Pennsylvania Child Care Association. "A Craigslist ad that says, 'I have a three month old and I need childcare like Monday because I have a new job. And if I don't get childcare, I'll lose my job,'" she noted. "Our businesses here in Pennsylvania need employee employees that they can depend upon. It's so challenging if a makeshift childcare arrangement falls apart."

The situation for daycare centers was dire before the pandemic, with low employee retention and hiring issues. Average pay rates of just over \$12 an hour were a deal breaker for job seekers looking for a livable wage. Godboldt says it's still an issue.

"I am putting out ads [but] people are not coming to interviews. When they do come, they are asking for higher pay rates," she said. "I get it because the cost of living is so high. Add all of that together, and you're looking at a disaster."

Advocates claim nothing was learned from the pandemic, when childcare workers were deemed essential. Barber says although we're already seeing daycare facilities shut down, the fallout from lack of funding will continue.

"It won't happen overnight, but it will happen over a period of time, as providers say we can't do this anymore. We can't find staff," she said, calling what's happening a "child care cliff."

"You watch those emergency shows where a car goes off the cliff. And so it goes off the cliff, and then it hits another section of rock, and it hangs out there for a little while. And then it falls and hits another section and then another. That's what it is. It'll be a series of cliffs," Barber explained.

“That's what's unacceptable, because some of this could have been resolved years ago. If we had continued to invest in childcare, we wouldn't be where we are today. It wouldn't be such a critical mess that it is today.”

Delaware County hosts resource fair to support grandparents that raise grandchildren

By Justin Udo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 14, 2023

MEDIA, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — Officials in Delaware County extended a helping hand this week to grandparents helping raise their grandchildren, through a special resource fair.

The idea for the grandparents' fair on Thursday, stemmed from the opioid crisis, according to Sandra Garrison with Delaware County's Department of Human Services and Community Support.

“They take the child in because the child is at risk, but by the time they realize they need support, they'll go to our local child welfare agency and they don't qualify because the child is safe, so they really are struggling to help support these children,” she explained. “Unfortunately they fall between cracks, sometimes.”

County agencies and nonprofits gathered at the Media Borough Community Center to show grandparents the resources available to them.

The fair gave grandparents a chance to learn about resources they have at their fingertips from agencies and organizations including the County Office of Services for the Aging, Delaware County Veterans Affairs, and the Early Learning Resource Center.

Angie Carr, with the grassroots organization Gratitude for Grandparents, has had custody of her two grandchildren for the last five years. She came to the fair to both give and get support.

“We're looking for resources because we have a lot of problems, mostly financial problems,” she said, “because we can't get any help from anybody, even though we legally have the children.”

Grandparents who could not make it to the event are encouraged to check the county's website to find out more about the agencies that have resources available to them.

Philly Homeless Services chief Liz Hersh steps down after nearly 8 years

Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 18, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The director of Philadelphia's Office of Homeless Services, Liz Hersh, is stepping down after nearly eight years in the job. She is the most recent of the top city officials leaving government as Mayor Jim Kenney's administration winds down and one of the longest-serving.

"It's been quite a ride," she said, reflecting on the challenges and rewards of her tenure.

Hersh took the job as the opioid epidemic was driving homelessness upward, spawning encampments, which the city had not seen before. Hersh's leadership on resolving them slowly and carefully, giving notice and offering services to the residents, became a national model. But then came the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'll never forget that day when the stay at home order was issued," Hersh recalled. "We have almost 5,000 people in this city who have no home to stay in. 700 or 800 of them are literally on the street, the rest are in shelters and oh my gosh, what are we going to do?"

Shelters pushed the beds six feet apart, while the city took over a downtown hotel. Just one homeless person died of COVID during the pandemic. In the midst of the response, a protest encampment took over the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Hersh chose to see them as allies and the situation ended peacefully.

"Those challenges, for me, it's always been about responding with love," she said. "It's absorbing those challenges and then continuing to move forward, adding housing which is the solution to homelessness."

Kenney says Hersh was innovative in finding housing models that took people from streets to homes. "The fact that our city doesn't have as large a problem as cities like [Los Angeles] and San Francisco, and other places, is a direct result of her and her team," he said.

Sister Mary Scullion of the nonprofit Project HOME calls Hersh a “powerful advocate.”

“Liz moved the needle,” she said, “which was greatly appreciated and made an impact on thousands of people in our city.”

Hersh says the key to doing her job was approaching each task with kindness and compassion.

“It’s tempting to go down that hole of all the things we didn’t do and that list will always be longer,” she said, “but I think I can say with my head held high that we work really hard every minute of every day to try to alleviate the sufferings and give people a better shot at a better life.”

Next for Hersh is working for the national nonprofit Community Solutions. Her former chief of staff David Holloman will step into the director’s job, becoming the first African American man to lead the department.

Correction: A previous version of this article incorrectly stated the number of homeless on the street. The current version reflects that change.

Philadelphia asks court to find state in contempt as Juvenile Justice Services Center continues to be overcrowded

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 31, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A Commonwealth Court judge has scheduled a hearing on whether to hold the state in contempt for not moving faster to help solve overcrowding at Philadelphia’s Juvenile Justice Services Center.

The state and city have been locked in a battle for nearly two years since the justice center began to exceed its maximum population of 184. The city blames the overcrowding on the state for not taking youth who’ve been sentenced to state custody.

Judge Ellen Ceisler has twice ordered the state to take a specific number of youth — the most recent being in July — who were waiting in the Juvenile Justice Center to begin their sentence in state facilities.

The state has taken 59 youth since the order was issued, but the justice center remains overcrowded and the city charges that the state, under the judge's order, should be taking more.

Young offenders often wait months in the justice center because the state is understaffed. So, even though it has empty beds, the state says it is at full capacity.

Meanwhile, the justice center regularly has more than 200 in residence, causing problems ranging from violent fights to missed medical visits.

In its request for a contempt order, the city argues that the state is obligated to get the center's population down to 184 and that it should have to pay \$12,000 each day for every young offender who stays in the center for more than 30 days after being sentenced to the state.

The state calls the city's arguments "so meritless as to border on the farcical," and says it's making a huge effort to staff up, including increasing pay, and taking as many youth as possible.

The hearing is set for Nov. 16.

November

Health officials recommend COVID-19, flu vaccinations to reluctant population

By Hadas Kuznits, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 2, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The city's top health official is once again recommending that everyone over the age of 6 months should get vaccinated against the flu and COVID-19. And nationwide, health officials are facing an uphill battle getting Americans to protect themselves against sickness.

A month after the CDC recommended new versions of COVID-19 vaccines to the public, only 7% of U.S. adults and 2% of children have gotten a shot. New federal data also indicates nearly 40% of adults don't intend to do so. And a similar percentage of parents say they don't plan to vaccinate their children.

Health Commissioner Dr. Cheryl Bettigole says city health centers have plenty of vaccine doses — and they're available for free.

“The uptake for this fall's COVID vaccine nationally is still pretty low,” she said. “So we have a lot of work to do to reach people with that vaccine. And then flu is always lower than it should be.”

While rates of COVID infection are currently a fraction of what they were at the height of the pandemic, the virus is still circulating, Bettigole said.

“You know, people are continuing to get hospitalized. We have about, I believe, 86 people in the hospital right now with COVID. We still see deaths from COVID at higher rates than influenza. It's still the major respiratory virus in the city that is hospitalizing people and killing people. And immunity, we know at this point, wanes over time.”

Getting vaccinated isn't just about preventing illness and death; it's also about keeping access to hospitals clear and keeping kids in school.

“We had this huge respiratory wave last fall that really impacted our ERs. And what did that mean? Kids who were sick — even adults who were sick, but mostly kids — last year: The ER waits for 12 hours or more to even get seen.”

She says picking up preventable sickness can be particularly detrimental for children.

“Every year there are lots of kids who miss weeks of school they can't afford to miss. They need to be in school learning.”

Bettigole says it takes about two weeks after a vaccination for the body to be able to protect itself from the virus, which is why she says flu and COVID vaccines will work best now before people start gathering for Thanksgiving and other holidays.

“So we're trying to get people who didn't get their shots earlier in the fall to really step up and get those shots.”

And, she adds, it's safe to get the flu and COVID vaccines at the same time.

Newborn syphilis cases skyrocketed 10-fold in the last decade, CDC says

By Racquel Williams, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 8, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is updating its health recommendations in an effort to stop the growing number of newborn syphilis cases in the U.S.

Researchers call the skyrocketing number of congenital syphilis cases a crisis. New data shows more than 3,700 babies were born with syphilis in 2022 — more than 10 times the number in 2012.

Newborn syphilis occurs when mothers don't receive timely testing and treatment during pregnancy. According to the CDC's data in 2022, more than half of the cases were among people who tested positive during pregnancy but did not receive timely treatment. About 9 in 10 cases of newborn syphilis might have been prevented with timely treatment, the CDC said, and nearly 40% of cases were among mothers who were not in prenatal care.

Dr. Delana Wardlaw, a family physician with Temple Health, called the crisis heartbreaking, as syphilis is easily preventable, easily detected and easily treated.

“Due to the social determinants of health — the lack of access to care, lack of follow-up — people are not getting tested in a timely manner,” she said.

According to the CDC, individual-level barriers to care may include a lack of insurance or substance use disorders. System-level barriers may include systemic racism and limited health care access.

“We have to make sure, one, that people have access to care, which is a systemic issue; and two, make sure that we are doing the proper screenings because syphilis screening is a recommended screening for all pregnant women,” Wardlaw added.

Syphilis usually presents as a lesion on the genitals, but Wardlaw said it can also present as a rash in other areas, like the palms of one’s hands or the soles of one’s feet.

Syphilis during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death, and lifelong medical issues.

“They can have low birth weight, issues with their eyes, develop cataracts, they can develop seizures. And worst-case scenario is that they can die,” Wardlaw said.

Expectant mothers can be easily treated with little to no risk to the fetus. Physicians are being asked to be vigilant and work with local community health workers to overcome these barriers to care.

IBX Foundation launches new initiative to help Philly vets through nursing school

By Nigel Thompson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 11, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — More than 50 Philly-area veterans will receive support and scholarships as they pursue careers in nursing, thanks to the Independence Blue Cross Foundation’s Service Scholars Program.

The initiative launched on Wednesday, Nov. 8, with an announcement press conference in the lobby of the Independence Blue Cross building at 19th and Market streets.

In addition to providing \$350,000 of scholarship support to the veterans attending nursing schools in and around Philadelphia, they will also get mentorship opportunities.

For Heather Major, executive director of the IBX Foundation, targeting veterans with nursing education opportunities fell in line with their draw to continued service after being in the armed forces.

“Service to country doesn’t go away after service to country, and certainly a career in nursing could absolutely provide that value, live that value of service to community,” she said.

But the pathway for many veterans to find those educational opportunities can often be a rough journey. Major emphasized that it wasn’t a “one-size-fits-all” process.

“For so many people it’s a financial issue, whether that be on the academic tuition side or the other fees that are associated with going to school. Particularly in nursing, you have to pay for uniforms, and there’s a lot of testing fees,” she said.

Outside of the financial requirements to attend nursing school, Major also said traditional four-year universities don’t often accept credits earned by veterans in military school, let alone allow their military experiences to count as credits towards new degrees.

“Some of these folks that come in from the military and want to pursue a degree in nursing were finding themselves starting at day one when maybe they could’ve been starting in year two or year three,” she said.

The Service Scholars Program also arrives as the nation is expected to face a nursing shortage over the next decade, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

As more veterans make the transition into nursing through the program, it could soften the blow in Pennsylvania. With Major’s ambitions, it could also have a nationwide impact.

“We feel it’s replicable, and if it is replicated, imagine the impact that can have across the nation,” she said.

The first cohort of veteran participants will be announced at the beginning of next year. The program is set to begin in the fall of 2024.

Philly officials and advocates announce new tools, best practices for visitors to help city's homeless

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 29, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — As visitors descend on Center City for holiday events, Philadelphia officials and advocates offer advice on addressing the needs of homeless people they'll meet there.

Pennsylvania Convention Center President John McNichol interacts with unsheltered people regularly, but he sees visitors to the city respond to them with apprehension. "They step back, they don't want to be asked for money," he said.

However, he said not only is there nothing to fear, there are real solutions — supportive housing with wrap-around services — and those with the urge to help can do so.

"There's a place to give where you know money is going to go to true wellness programs," said McNichol at a Tuesday mini-conference on shared public spaces, where he emceed a panel of such program providers — including Project HOME, One Day at a Time, Valley Youth House and Women Against Abuse — to discuss how best to help as visitors pour in for the holidays.

At the conference, McNichol announced a new tool for people who want to help unsheltered Philadelphians — postcards stacked around Center City with a QR code that allows immediate donations, which will then be matched by PHL Cares, to provide housing and services.

"It is the holiday season," he said, "so we're hoping that we can raise a significant amount of money and fuel that provider network and help people get off the streets."

The panel agreed that the best action to take, for anyone who sees someone in need of shelter, is to call the outreach line at 215-232-1984, or the city's crisis line at 988, which connects to outreach.

"It takes all of us to end homelessness, so nobody should walk past anybody," said Mel Wells, president of One Day at a Time, which provides addiction recovery support and housing. "Even

if you're afraid to approach them, now you have a phone number, so we all are doing outreach together."

December

South Jersey prosecutors, hospital systems join forces to prevent opioid addiction

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 1, 2023

MULLICA HILL, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — A new partnership in three South Jersey counties lays out best practices for prescribing opioids for pain management in an effort to avoid addiction.

Cooper, Inspira and Jefferson health systems are now providing additional information and training for doctors in Cumberland, Salem and Gloucester counties about how to responsibly prescribe opioids and break the cycle of addiction.

Part of that plan is to create a new scholarship program to encourage more doctors, nurses, dentists and other prescribers to take part in Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey's "Do No Harm" medical education course.

Inspira CEO Amy Mansue says the expanded partnership will also include stronger collaboration between law enforcement and health care providers.

"Literally having our mental health providers riding with police officers to go to those scenes and then looping in recovery coaches. That's the key," Mansue said.

Cumberland County Prosecutor Jennifer Webb McCrae says they can't arrest their way out of this problem.

"As we break down these silos, as we build trusted relationships, we're in a better position to serve our community and actually address the root cause of addiction," she said. "We're able to touch people at different points in their journey and help them have successful outcomes."

The “Do No Harm” program is an accredited online course that prescribers must complete in order to renew their licenses.

Project guaranteeing legal support for Philadelphia tenants facing eviction expands to fifth ZIP code

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 3, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Evictions in Philadelphia have decreased by about ⅓, since before the COVID-19 pandemic, and officials give at least partial credit to the city’s Right to Counsel program, which guarantees tenants the right to a lawyer in eviction court. Now, more Philadelphians are eligible for legal help when facing eviction, under an expansion of the program.

Tenant advocates say landlords are represented in eviction court 92% of the time, which they say was one of the factors fueling Philadelphia’s high eviction rate before the pandemic. Advocates and city officials called it an “eviction crisis” and, in 2017, Philadelphia City Council began funding lawyers for tenants in eviction court to level the playing field with landlords.

That grew to a Right to Counsel pilot project, guaranteeing tenants in four ZIP codes with the highest rates of poverty and evictions — 19121, western North Philadelphia; 19134, Kensington and Port Richmond; 19139, West Philadelphia; and 19144, Germantown — would be represented in eviction proceedings. Last week, the city announced the addition of a fifth ZIP code, 19132, in North Philadelphia, where the eviction rate is 7.5% and the poverty rate is 33%.

Now tenants in those five ZIP codes, at least, never have to face eviction alone.

Mark Dodds, policy and planning program manager at the Division of Housing and Community Development, says the expansion reflects the pilot’s success: More than twice as many tenants in the program have successful outcomes, compared to those who don’t have a lawyer.

“Fifty-three percent of those who participate in the program reach a judgment by agreement, compared to 21.5% who are unrepresented. And judgments by agreements are associated with reduced payment amounts or more time to stay in the unit,” he said.

Dodds says that, combined with other measures in the eviction diversion program, resulted in a reduction in eviction filings, from 21,000 citywide before the pandemic to about 14,000.

The city has budgeted \$28 million for the program over the next five years, he said.

“We’ll continue to monitor and evaluate the progress and success of the program, and we hope to continue with expansion in the future.”

Renters at risk of eviction can get more information at phillytenant.org or by calling the hotline at 267-443-2500.

Philly Health Department warns of measles exposure inside Jefferson Health

By Rosie Leonard, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 24, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia Department of Public Health issued a measles advisory Saturday.

They say anyone inside Jefferson Health at 33 South 9th Street on Tuesday, Dec. 19, between 2 and 5:30 p.m. may have been exposed to the virus.

If you were not inside the building during those times, you are not at risk.

Measles can spread very easily from person to person, especially those not protected against the virus.

You can contract it through direct contact with respiratory droplets or droplets in the air from coughing and sneezing, the department said.

They advise looking out for the following symptoms:

- Fever

- Runny nose

- Cough

- Puffy eyes followed by a rash

They say for some, it can be a very serious infection that leads to pneumonia, brain infection and death. Those who have it can be contagious four days before to four days after a rash starts.

How to know if you're immune

The department says if you were born before 1957, have already had the measles, or received two doses of a measles-containing vaccine, usually given as measles, mumps, or rubella (MMR) vaccine, you are in the clear.

If you are not protected against this virus, they recommend reaching out to your health care provider for the MMR vaccine.

To prevent spread, the department recommends wearing a mask in indoor public spaces and around those who are unvaccinated through Jan. 9, 2024.

If you develop the above symptoms, contact your doctor and Philadelphia Department of Public Health at 215-685-6740 immediately.

Broad Street Ministry post office service helps thousands of individuals without addresses receive mail

By John McDevitt, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A bank of filing cabinets lines a portion of a room at Broad Street Ministry in Center City.

It's where mail and packages are kept for individuals with no addresses, including people who were formally incarcerated and those experiencing homelessness.

The initiative started more than a decade ago when someone who did not have an address asked Broad Street Ministry if they could get mail sent to the social service organization.

That one person's request many years ago has now helped 5,000 others with no addresses receive mail and packages.

Fred Wise of South Jersey has been helping out at the mail service for a few years. He says a lot of people depend on it to get their benefits each month.

"We get really busy and we try to prioritize when that mail comes in right away so they can get access to it," Wise said.

People also rely on the mailing service to establish residency, get identification, and search for employment.

"...If you think about putting a name and address on an application, whether it be for Social Security benefits or Medicare, things like that, if you don't have an address you can't fill out that application so it is really foundational support for individuals who wouldn't otherwise have access to some of those resources," said Larry Downey, corporate relations manager at Broad Street Ministry.

Broad Street Ministry says the number of people using the service has more than doubled since the pandemic and he thinks the main reason is because other organizations have done away with similar programs.

Volunteers assist those who are picking up mail Monday through Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. More information can be found [here](#).

ARTS AND CULTURE

October

Musicians' union rejects latest contract offer from Philadelphia Orchestra management

By Nina Baratti, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 2, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The union representing local musicians has rejected the latest contract proposal from the Philadelphia Orchestra and Kimmel Center, Inc. management.

Members of the American Federation of Musicians Local 77 have been negotiating since May. Their contract expired last month.

On Saturday, 91% of union members voted against the orchestra's second contract offer.

William Polk, a violinist on the negotiating committee, said they are asking for an increase in base salary, cleaned-up work rules, and better pay for substitute musicians. They are about 15 players short of the full complement.

Polk said orchestra and symphony groups in other cities make thousands of dollars more, and they want to continue to attract the best musicians.

“Of course we don't want to strike,” he said. “A strike is like a disaster. But we can't be just stonewalled either. We can't just be ignored and treated like little children — you pat them on the head, ‘There, there. I hear what you're saying, but we're not going to do anything you say.’”

In a statement, orchestra management said it was disappointed the union rejected the contract, as it offered an “additional investment of \$11.9 million in the musicians during the three-year agreement.”

Prior to turning down the deal, the union on Friday filed charges of unfair labor practices against Philadelphia Orchestra management, claiming it negotiated in bad faith.

The union has authorized a strike if and when it deems it necessary.

Avenue of the Arts celebrates 30 years of entertainment with jam-packed gala

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 5, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Thirty years ago, one of Philadelphia’s most successful rebranding campaigns began, transforming South Broad Street into the Avenue of the Arts. The prestigious milestone will be commemorated with a gala Friday night.

In 1993, then-mayor Ed Rendell imagined South Broad as a center for theater, music, dance, and culture — a magnet for people, an engine for economic development. It was an ambitious vision but City Representative Sheila Hess says he pulled it off.

“The street that 30 years ago was a canyon of office buildings that closed up at night at 5:00, well guess what. It is now bustling,” she said.

Hess presented a mayoral proclamation to the non-profit that runs the Avenue. Board chair Diane Semingson says she believes the Avenue has been a good investment.

“Today, we have 37,570 jobs and contribute \$4.1 billion to the economy of Greater Philadelphia,” she said.

Officials promised a sneak peek at future plans at Friday’s gala, including a greener, more pedestrian-friendly streetscape with more opportunities for outdoor performances. And for the gala — performances are lined up from the University of the Arts, BalletX, Opera Philadelphia, and the Clef Club — just some of the resident institutions that turned an office canyon into an arts district.

The Avenue’s executive director Laura Burkhardt says the transformation will continue with a more aesthetically pleasing streetscape in time for the semiquincentennial in 2026.

“It’s time that our grand boulevard is polished and ready to welcome new people,” she said.

Philly street artist helps Jewish students process trauma of war through art

By Hadas Kuznits, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 11, 2023

VOORHEES, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — A Jewish school in South Jersey is dealing with the trauma of the war in Israel through art.

Philadelphia street artist Amberella is known for her candy heart designs with words of inspiration. A project months in the making aimed to bring her signature wheat paste work to the walls of Kellman Brown Academy. But the week she came to the Jewish day school, students and staff alike mourned the loss of those killed in Israel at the hands of Hamas.

“Showing up at this time when this community is feeling so much pain,” said Amberella. “The hearts are a reminder of the love that’s shared in this community.”

Max, 9, says the artist’s words displayed around the school have brought hope during a dark time.

“They’re like kindness. Some say ‘I stand with Israel,’ ‘KBA (Kellman Brown Academy) awesome.’ They’re like words of joy,” he said.

“Especially for children who often lack the language to be able to express how they’re feeling, to be able to physically now draw these hearts, put in their sentiments, whether it’s about pride about being Jewish or supportive of Israel as a country,” said Laura Walters, a cooperating artist, “art has the power to just be transformative.”

Another 9-year-old student, Elka, says art is a good way to deal with complicated feelings. “Sometimes it makes you feel better [about] what it looks like, what it makes you feel. It just expresses your emotions a lot of the time,” she said.

Some of the affirmations were written in Hebrew. “They provided me with the Hebrew characters, then I was able to place them into the hearts and print them,” Amberella said.

She was also able to join in a school-wide prayer for peace in Israel. “It was really powerful to get to be in a circle with this beautiful community and I was just so honored to get to be in their prayer circle,” she said.

“There are teachers and there are students who have family and friends living in the land of Israel. We have a great number of teachers that are Israeli themselves,” said Walters. “So for them, I think, is literally like having the embrace around you.”

Amberella provided wheat paste works of art for the school as well as two mosaics. She also went into the classrooms, where she led inspiration-themed art classes for children of various grade levels.

Come on down! — You’re the next contestant on ‘Child Support’ at Camden Repertory Theater

By Sabrina Boyd-Surka, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 16, 2023

CAMDEN, NJ (KYW Newsradio) — A new play, which had its world premiere over the weekend at Camden Repertory Theater, examines the flaws of the child support system through the lens of a game show.

Camden Rep founder Desi P. Shelton wrote the play and stars as single mom Ajani.

“We ask ourselves through the game, ‘Is she going to win the ultimate prize?’” Shelton said. “And what is the ultimate prize? Is it the money? Or is it the relationship? ... And what are the rules? There always seem to be some ambiguous rules ... to the system.”

Shelton drew on her own experience as a single mom, as well as research into the financial impacts of single parenthood. “I started digging ... and information started coming up on economic mobility, and how marriage is one of the major parts that can contribute to economic mobility.”

The theater space is a former row house, which gives an immersive feeling to the play. The experience begins even before you enter the building, with the sidewalk set up like a Monopoly board.

As part of the immersive “game show” experience, the sidewalk leading up to the theater has been painted to look like a Monopoly board.

As part of the immersive “game show” experience, the sidewalk leading up to the theater has been painted to look like a Monopoly board. Photo credit Kamile Kuntz Photography

The cast also includes Chynah Michele as Ajani’s daughter, Muff. The play is directed by Barrymore Award-winner Ozzie Jones and features original music performed by a live band.

Shelton founded Camden Rep in 2005 to address a lack of artistic spaces in Camden and a lack of stories in theater centered on Black women.

She says she thought to herself, “The stories of Camden and communities that look like Camden, who are you expecting to tell them, Desi? Who are you expecting to document them so that they continue to live on in history? You have to do it.’

“The mission of Camden Rep is to tell this woman's story. ... She may not be the middle-class woman at all, but her story is still valid. ... It's easy to ignore someone if you don't have to hear their story.”

“Child Support” is on stage now through Oct. 28. Tickets and information are available on Camden Rep’s website.

November

Philadelphia Flower Show announces 2024 theme: ‘United By Flowers’

By John McDevitt, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 10, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — “United By Flowers” will be the theme of the 195th Philadelphia Flower Show in March 2024.

The weeklong event, which is the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s biggest annual fundraiser, will take place from March 2 to 10 in the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

PHS President Matt Rader said attendees will get to experience springtime a little early.

“By March, you’re going to be ready to enter the full glory of colorful floral displays, completely immersive sense and beauty; gardens by leading garden designers from this area and far beyond; more and more floral displays every year; and, the world’s largest houseplant and indoor plant completion,” he enthused.

Flowers and gardens are all about connection, Rader said, so this year’s theme is fitting.

“What it does to inspire and delight somebody else as well as you, it is incredible, and that force connects us. And the Flower Show is a place to celebrate that,” he said.

Even more importantly, he said, the Flower Show fosters a community of people from many walks of life who come together to put on the event, and that will be celebrated, too.

Information about specific exhibitions will be rolled out over the coming months.

Tickets are now on sale at phsonline.org.

'Our Land, Our Movement' public art project reaching teens, healing community through literal connection to the earth

By Shara Dae Howard and Justin Udo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 12, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Led by local artist and choreographer Marguerite Hemmings, Mural Arts Philadelphia's Porchlight Program tried a little something new this past year.

Our Land, Our Movement is an expansive public art project that reaches teens from West Philly, Olney and Chinatown with the goal of connecting them with their communities and the earth through workshops and performances.

“Our Land, Our Movement is an experiment,” Hemmings said. “Trying to heal our bodies in relationship to the land, in relationship to outside. We work with teenagers, but we are also looking to expand to people who just feel disconnected from place and from self. And we do that through movement and also through connecting literally to the earth with farming, herbal medicine.”

The project gave the teens a number of entry points — through farming, performance, community healing.

“We tried to have conversations around systemic issues that keep people from feeling safe in their neighborhoods and having connection to the land,” Hemmings said. “But we really just tried to do it through practice. We're like: Okay, let's get y'all out here growing food.”

It may not look like Mural Arts, she said, but there is art in that practice.

“A lot of people ask, ‘Where's the mural?’ And there was no mural. There was a series of performance rituals — like a live mural,” she said. “The teens got to show off some of their moves and just feel like they could be witnessed in their fullness, really.”

Philly tenor saxophonist Larry McKenna dies at 86

By Shara Dae Howard, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 21, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia-born tenor saxophonist Larry McKenna died Sunday at the age of 86 after a long battle with heart disease.

McKenna was a masterful saxophonist and a king of a human being, said musician Elliot Levin. Levin has played saxophone on the stage of nearly every jazz venue in the city and with almost every well-known musician, including McKenna.

McKenna performed with greats like Frank Sinatra, Woody Herman, Tony Bennett and Shirley Scott. He was respected in the community as a teacher and mentor.

Levin said McKenna will be remembered for both his kindness and his structured playing technique.

“He was really a master of the more traditional form of jazz,” he said, “coming from bebop, and he was really very knowledgeable in that world.

“I know quite a few saxophonists around the city who spent time with him and studied with him, and I’ve never heard anything but admiration and respect for him.”

Levin said McKenna believed supporting peers was paramount in the music business. One night while Levin was struggling at his own concert, McKenna came through with some brotherly love and support.

“I walked off stage and who was sitting right in front there but Larry McKenna,” he remembered. “He had this big smile on his face and said, ‘Man, Elliot, that was really beautiful.’ That really affected me so much and turned me around. And then when we came back to play the second set, I really felt better.”

Levin said it’s an accomplishment to be in the Philly jazz scene for as long as McKenna was — and to do so without a single enemy. “His reputation as just being a very nice person, a good person, was universal. I never heard anyone speak anything bad about Larry.”

McKenna lived in the Olney section of Philadelphia for most of his career. He leaves behind his son, Matthew McKenna, who said his father died after a long battle with heart disease.

3, 2, 1 blast off! Please Touch Museum's Rocket Room makes some out of this world improvements

By Nigel Thompson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 24, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A beloved exhibit at the Please Touch Museum just got a major upgrade.

Since Philadelphia's Please Touch Museum moved to Memorial Hall in 2008, the Rocket Room has been a place for young minds to hone their skills for a NASA internship.

And with some recent improvements, the launcher has expanded its capacity as an early teaching tool for kids to learn about math and science.

According to the museum's Chief Learning Officer Olivia Thomas, they now have a new and improved rocket launcher; a spacecraft you can go inside, explore and pretend to be an astronaut; communication to their Mission Control; and a place where kids can test what a Mars rover might look or work like.

"You can talk about trajectory and angles just through the movement and then how much air pressure you apply determines how far your rocket launches," Thomas said.

Kids can even try on costumes, astronaut helmets, different jackets, and pretend to be scientists.

"We're really excited to have it reopened and really kind of revived for the holiday season," Thomas added.

The museum offers discounted admission for \$2 per person the first Wednesday of each month.

December

It's Rocky Day in Philadelphia, where hundreds of fans, and the man himself, made it to those iconic steps to celebrate

By Justin Udo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 3, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — It's Rocky Day in Philadelphia. The city is celebrating in a special way as they honor the beloved fictional hero who brought Philly's grit to the big screen. The movie was released on Dec. 3, 47 years ago.

Hundreds of "Rocky" fans braved the rain on Sunday to pack an iconic city landmark — the Philadelphia Museum of Art's front steps, made famous in the movie.

That included Christopher Middleton, an amateur boxer and "Rocky" lover.

"It's raining so, you know, I'm dedicated to be out here in the rain. Looking forward to seeing Rock in person," he said. "It's a good day."

Afterward, Middleton said, he'd go score some cheesesteaks.

"It feels like being at Disneyland as a kid," said fan Nick Mancini. "I've been watching Rocky since I was 10 years old. I'm 27 now, so 17 years he's been in my life."

Philadelphia Visitor Center Corp. President and CEO Kathryn Ott Lovel said the day also marks the grand opening of Rocky Shop at the Parkway Visitor Center outpost in front of the museum.

"They can take a piece of that story and that spirit home with them — but they also can get information about the city of Philadelphia to enhance their experience here. You can get maps, you can get brochures," she said. "You can hop on the flash right outside and travel down to the historic district or to the waterfront or to West Fairmount Park."

And what official "Rocky" party would be complete without the man, himself? Sylvester Stallone was there, and he gave an impassioned dedication to the crowd: "To all of you, who are

real-life Rocky's, because you live your life on your own terms and you try to do the best you can, and you keep punching.”

City officials presented Stallone with a key to the city.

“I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart — and Rocky's too.”

Philadelphia choirs unite for 10th annual 'A Soulful Christmas' honoring Gospel musician and school teacher Carol Antrom

By Racquel Williams, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 7, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Choirs from churches all around Philadelphia will come together next week at the Kimmel Cultural Campus for the 10th year of A Soulful Christmas. Uniting gospel groups from area congregations under one roof, it's what the season is all about: Love. Hope. Inspiration. Praise.

“It truly is transformative,” said Leslie Patterson-Tyler.

“I just feel like the arts have the power to bring people together, to uplift a community, to do things and say things that words often cannot, and bring people together in a very special and unique way.”

Patterson-Tyler is vice president of program communications and partnerships for the Philadelphia Orchestra and Kimmel.

A Soulful Christmas is a vision of soul-stirring music, spoken words and movement, brought to life by creator and director Dr. Donald Dumpson, who is celebrating 50 years of music ministry in Philadelphia.

“He curates a number of choirs from the community. It's a lot of different choirs, different faiths, all celebrating Christmas. And it's just an incredible experience.”

Kicking off on Tuesday night, Dec. 12, Verizon Hall will transform into a sanctuary, where visitors will be spiritually lifted with songs of hope and praise. And it's not just song. The concert and celebration will also feature Citywide Praise Dancers and Universal African Dance and Drum Ensemble.

“So there's dance, there's drums, there's music, there's singing, and there's soul.”

Each year, an area musical legend is honored. This year, it's Philadelphia's Carol Antrom, a Gospel singer, songwriter, choir director, and elementary school teacher.

“She is a legend here in Philadelphia. And it's just the blessing that we'll be able to give her her flowers while she's still here with us,” Patterson-Tyler said.

Participating choirs include:

- 🎵 African Methodist Episcopal Church Mass Choir
- 🎵 Arch Street Presbyterian Church
- 🎵 Deliverance Evangelistic Church
- 🎵 Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church
- 🎵 Gospel Music Preservation Alliance
- 🎵 Mount Carmel Baptist Church
- 🎵 PA Commonwealth C.O.G.I.C. Mass Choir
- 🎵 Philadelphia Catholic Gospel Mass Choir
- 🎵 Philadelphia Heritage Chorale
- 🎵 A Soulful Christmas Youth Mass Choir

A pandemic-era tradition turns this Queen Village corner into a Dickensian dream each Christmas

By Jane Metzler, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 15, 2023

Update: Saturday, Dec. 16, at 1:04 P.M.

The Queen Village production of “A Christmas Carol” has been postponed from Sunday, Dec. 17, due to weather. A reschedule date has not yet been released.

The original story follows:

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — It’s described as a “holiday celebration of city life and Philly strengths at a time when both are being criticized.” So... what’s Charles Dickens got to do with it?

It all started during the COVID-19 pandemic. With neighbors cooped up inside their homes, writer and Temple University adjunct professor Terese Zeccardi got an idea: a safe, socially distanced way to celebrate the holiday season. Her inspiration: a Charles Dickens classic.

“Living where I do on a street that I always felt looked like something out of Dickens, I said, let’s try and do this outside on my block,” she said.

That block: South Hancock and Queen streets in Queen Village. Zeccardi’s neighbors were game, so 20 people, of all ages and backgrounds, came together to perform “A Christmas Carol.”

Some shouted lines from second-story windows, while others delivered theirs from doorways or in the narrow cobblestone street. Few had any acting experience.

Now for their third year, the neighborhood troupe is borrowing costumes from local theater companies as well as special lighting, props, fake snow and other special effects.

And, Zeccardi said other neighborhoods have been asking her to share her script so they can stage their own productions. She does, gladly.

“A Christmas Carol” is a “wonderful redemption story,” she said — “and right now, we could all use a happy ending.”

The Queen Village production is being staged on Sunday, Dec. 17 at 6 p.m. on South Hancock Street. Attendees are asked to bring their own chairs.

EDUCATION

October

Investigation finds no evidence of Philadelphia School Board discriminating against Black-led charters

By Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 6, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A long-awaited investigation finds no evidence that the Philadelphia School Board discriminates against Black-led charter schools.

The 191-page report from the law firm Ballard Spahr found there was no racial discrimination by the Philadelphia School Board in how it authorizes and renews Black-led charters.

"We are pleased to share that the investigation has not revealed any evidence of intentional overt racially discriminatory acts by the SRC, any board member, the district, the charter school office or anyone," School Board President Reginald Streater told KYW Newsradio in an interview Friday.

"We said, if there's any finding of discrimination, period, full stop, that's a red line for us. And we are again pleased that that red line apparently wasn't crossed."

Streater said many of the applications were denied on merit.

"In each of those instances, Ballard came to the conclusion that there was no finding of discrimination," Streater said.

Of the 13 charters the district voted not to renew or revoke between 2010 and 2021, eight were Black-led. The board commissioned the independent investigation in December 2021 after members of the African American Charter Schools Coalition (AACSC) alleged the district was biased against Black-founded charters. The coalition said Black-led charters represented 19% of the city's charter schools, but 87% of Philadelphia charter closures and non-renewals.

"I don't know that we can say that we're satisfied," said Dawn Chavous, a spokesperson for the AACSC. "The word 'intentional overt bias's is in there. But what is not in there is, what if it's not intentional? Does that mean the bias didn't exist?"

The report said while the district's Charter Schools Office was aware of racial disparities in authorizing charters, the district didn't act to address those concerns.

"We need a complete overhaul of the authorization process in Philadelphia," Chavous said.

While it didn't find evidence of bias, the report recommended the district should separate the jobs of supporting and evaluating charters, and lobby Harrisburg for a different authorizing model to "alleviate conflicts of interest."

"There are a few recommendations in there that the board is going to have to still digest, and we are not yet at a point where we can opine on what should go forward, [or] what should not go forward," Streater said.

Ballard Spahr provided the report pro bono, but the district is responsible for a \$55,000 third-party analysis of charter evaluation data by the Center for Urban and Racial Equity.

Mastery Charter School network's sports community supports thriving academics

By Shara Dae Howard, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 11, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The city's largest charter school network has turned what was once an almost nonexistent athletics program into a thriving sports community for students. And the man behind it is watching his dream come true.

Students call him Coach, but you can call him John Davidson. He's the assistant principal of school culture at Mastery Charter School Lenfest Campus in Center City.

"Our motto is 'I'm not here to teach you football. I'm here to teach you to be a better man or person,'" Davidson said.

Davidson is the pioneering force behind the charter network's successful sports model, which promises to build a lasting athletics community for students across the city.

“Sustainability is the key. Things shouldn't depend on a person but a system — and the system is sustainable over time, every step of the way. Despite COVID. We've stayed the course,” Davidson said.

Since 2011, his goal has been to provide students a focus point away from street violence while at the same time creating a path to graduation.

“‘The idle hand ...’ We all know the end of that statement,” he said, citing Proverbs 16:27. “But when you involve kids in extracurricular activities, they know better, they do better.”

Mastery Charter School Pickett Campus in Germantown, where Davidson is head coach, has broken ground on a new football facility. Construction is expected to be completed this year.

The Pickett Campus boasts a graduation rate near 100%, and Davidson says the fast-growing sports program is contributing to that success.

“We started off with one sport: basketball. And now we have bowling, golf, football, soccer, volleyball and wrestling.”

That's important to 17-year-old Zion Chamberlain, who plays football for Mastery.

“By playing football, it teaches discipline, I feel like — teaches me how to control my emotions,” Chamberlain said.

“It means a lot to me, being an athlete here. It's exciting, because the school brings the energy and makes you want to play sports.”

Takeaways from the 2023 mayoral debate between Cherelle Parker and David Oh

By Mike DeNardo, Pat Loeb, Racquel Williams, Tim Jimenez, Ian Bush, Rachel Kurland, and Nigel Thompson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 26, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Cherelle Parker and David Oh, who are running to be the next mayor of Philadelphia, faced off in a live debate at KYW Newsradio's studios Thursday morning. It was the only planned debate of the campaign season between Parker, the Democratic nominee, and Oh, the Republican.

The candidates faced off on a variety of topics, including public safety, education, poverty and the opioid epidemic.

A major concern in the city, of course, is gun violence and how the next mayor will approach making Philadelphia a safer place to live. Both candidates support more rigorous enforcement of lower-level crimes, such as retail thefts and firearms violations, and they support hiring more police.

But they also talked about prosecution. Surprisingly, Oh said he would deputize attorneys to act as prosecutors if he felt District Attorney Larry Krasner was not prosecuting rigorously enough. That would be possible under state law, though obviously an extreme step.

Parker took a more collaborative tone when asked about working with the D.A. She said she would present to the public the cases that police send to the D.A.

OTHER KEY TAKEAWAYS

There were few fireworks. Oh, a distinct underdog in a heavily Democratic city, advocated his viewpoints emphatically but didn't directly challenge Parker, even when they disagreed. In fact, when moderator Ian Bush gave him the opportunity, he was complimentary.

"The last Republican to come close to toppling a Democrat in the mayor's race is Sam Katz. He told the Inquirer that to win in Philadelphia, a Republican needs an unpalatable Democratic candidate. Is Cherelle Parker an unpalatable candidate?" Bush asked.

"No, no. She's a good candidate," said Oh.

Parker, however, was a bit tougher on Oh. When she asked him a direct question toward the end, it hinted he had little to show for his years on council: "What programs are standing here in the city of Philadelphia that you have scaled citywide that are changing the lives of people?"

Oh pointed to legislation he introduced incentivizing employers to hire veterans and his work with the local music industry.

One of the more heated discussions was over the 76ers' arena proposal in Chinatown. Oh has been vocal against it. When asked if he would approve if the Sixers built a stadium elsewhere, like Camden, he said that's up to the Sixers organization. While she hasn't definitively said she's for the proposal, Parker said the Sixers belong in Philadelphia.

Crime and gun violence

PROSECUTING VIOLENT CRIME

Critics of Philadelphia's crime-fighting efforts say a reluctance to prosecute crimes — such as retail theft and gun violations — works against best practices for addressing violent crime. Both candidates support a more rigorous enforcement of lower-level offenses. Parker said the city must have a comprehensive approach to addressing public safety, and that, she said, starts with appointing a new police commissioner.

That commissioner "will ensure that while we have zero tolerance for any misuse and/or abuse of authority," she said. "Our law enforcement officers, our police officers, they will be supported by the mayor in enforcing the law. With that being said, we need accountability. If the voters of Philadelphia elect me, we are going to implement a process called CompStat360. It is something that the police department does to ensure that its captain-level leadership responds on its plans to reduce crime."

Oh believes not prosecuting what are considered low-level crimes has been a poor move by the Kenney administration.

"When it comes to the lawlessness, such as the ATVs and dirt bikes, that's not low level, and many of them are brandishing weapons," he said. "It creates an atmosphere of fear and fear of

violence. They have to be dealt with. And so under the broken window theory, if we could deal with these problems at the beginning, show people that this is not something we'll tolerate in our city, we will not have the influx of violations and violators that we are now dealing with."

WORKING WITH THE POLICE COMMISSIONER AND THE DA

As for District Attorney Krasner, who is independently elected, Parker said there is power in transparency. She wants to make cases that police send to the D.A. open to the public.

"We have to have a comprehensive approach that doesn't include finger-pointing," she added.

As for Oh, he said he would have a frank conversation with Krasner — "I write his budget. His budget will be tight," he said.

"The mayor is overall responsible for public safety in this city," Oh continued. "The district attorney, who's an independently elected official, he's responsible for prosecution. But as mayor, I will lead the police department in ensuring that all laws are enforced — criminal laws, public safety laws, quality of life laws, and traffic laws. Police shall enforce all laws throughout our city."

STOP-AND-FRISK

Parker prefers to call the stop-and-frisk policy "Terry stops," as stop-and-frisk has a negative undertone. Oh is not in support of Terry stops and doesn't believe they can be done constitutionally.

"The reason Terry stops, or stop-and-frisk, does not produce results is because it's used to harass and bully people," he said.

Parker believes stop-and-frisk is something that should be done, and she doesn't want to take any tools away from the Police Department. However, in the event that an officer abuses this power, particularly among young men of color, Parker said that officer or officers would be fired, as she has a zero-tolerance policy for such abuses.

Education

Parker and Oh both fundamentally back improving Philadelphia's public school system, first and foremost, but are also not opposed to including private, charter, parochial and other types of schools in the overall solution.

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL CHOICE

Oh: "I'm primarily concerned about quality education. I'm less concerned about whether it's public, private, charter — whatever it is. I want to ensure that every child in our city has access to a good, quality school, and that if they have a choice, that they can use that choice. However, fundamentally, I want to have good public schools. I believe that a public education system is the best type of system for everyone."

Parker: "Putting people on a path to self-sufficiency is the foundation of my candidacy. You can't do that without access to quality public education. ... That's why this concept of traditional public versus charters, it's not a narrative that I will allow in a Parker administration and not one I've employed during this campaign. As a matter of fact, for the first time in the history of our city, if the people of this city decided that I will be their mayor, we will bring together traditional public schools, traditional public charters, parochial schools, and even private schools, leadership to sit at the table [and] figure out if there's any way for us to have synergy and learn from each other."

AGING SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Parker was vague on the city's aging school buildings, citing state Sen. Vincent Hughes' estimation of \$5 billion-plus to fix Philly school infrastructure, but she didn't know what form that funding would take if realized. Oh was also vague, saying he wanted to create a "master plan" that would be acted upon, unlike ones in the past he said were not acted upon.

Both Parker and Oh agreed with potentially needing to close down more schools, if necessary.

Parker: "That is the rebuilding of new [schools], the environmental remediation of others. And we have to be able to drive those dollars through an efficient system in order to get them on the street, get those schools rebuilt, have our students trained by the building trades to do that

building. Will it be in the form of a school board authority that's an additional system or structure created? I'm not sure about that yet. We have to do more study."

On closing down schools, she added, "It's essential for right-sizing our district and it is true that environmental remediation is not enough. Some buildings need to be totally demolished and schools rebuilt — 21st-century modern buildings."

Oh: "We need a master plan. We've had master plans in the past, but we haven't taken action on them. I want a master plan. Some buildings are going to get demolished, some, they're gonna get rehabbed. We need to ensure that every one of our children has an equal level of facilities, curriculum and resources to get a good quality education."

YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL

During her campaign, Parker has proposed year-round school. That doesn't mean 365 days a year — a week on, a couple weeks off. She said it wouldn't be mandatory, but as mayor, she would propose that pilot program, which the school district is currently working on.

She said it would provide "access to year-round education for the children who are not all growing up, quite frankly, in perfect familiar environments."

Oh, on the other hand, said that he does not think that year-round schools are a good idea. He supports the current calendar as it is, saying students need a break and time off to be with their families.

"They need time to grow their minds, their bodies. To have different experiences," he added.

Proposed Sixers arena in Chinatown

Parker wasn't ready to rule one way or the other on the Sixers arena proposed for Chinatown. She wants more collaboration from not just the Chinatown community but also communities across the city about the potential economic impact. She was adamant about the Sixers needing to be in Philadelphia, though.

Oh said putting the arena in Chinatown was a bad idea because it would displace Chinatown, and he urged the Sixers to be more transparent about their plans for building a stadium. He did not express the same concern as Parker about the Sixers building the arena outside the city.

Parker: “I will continue to affirm that I will use a data-driven and research-based approach that will include both quantitative and qualitative data. ... I will want to see diversity and inclusion from top to the bottom. ... I want to hear a community approach, but the people in every neighborhood in the city will also have an opportunity to have their voices heard. An economic development project of this magnitude has to be vetted.”

Oh: “It’s just a bad idea in that location [Chinatown]. It’s inconsistent with what that location is. ... It’s going to impact that entire area, including what can happen there, what won’t happen there, the property values, whether people can afford to live there or not, who’s going to invest and open up in that area. So it’s really incumbent upon the Sixers to give us a detailed plan.”

Oh faces an uphill climb due to the overwhelming voter registration advantage Democrats have in Philadelphia over Republicans — 776,863 to 116,027, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State. The last Republican mayor of Philadelphia was Bernard Samuel, who served from 1941 to 1952.

Oh has support in varying parts of the city. He was a three-term City Council member-at-large before he resigned to run for mayor. Parker, who was a Pennsylvania state representative from 2005 to 2015, served two terms as City Council member for the 9th District. She came out on top in the Democratic primary in May by 10 percentage points.

“Both up to this point have demonstrated an ability to win citywide. I think that’s important,” said Mustafa Rashed, president and CEO of Bellevue Strategies. “Both of them have their bases that they believe will continue to support them and turn up and show out for them.”

If elected, both candidates would hold firsts: Parker would be the first woman elected Philadelphia’s mayor, and Oh would be the city’s first Asian American mayor.

Arcadia University must revise Title IX policies after US Dept. of Ed. finds they failed to investigate harassment complaints

By Justin Udo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 31, 2023

GLENSIDE, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — Arcadia University, at the heart of a sexual harassment investigation, has reached an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which determined that the Montgomery County university violated Title IX mandates.

They say that happened when the university failed to investigate three years' worth of complaints from students and faculty of sexual harassment by a professor, after getting a number of from both students and faculty, from 2018 to 2021.

The Department of Education says sexually harassing conduct was reported to the university's then-chief of human resources and a dean, and that students had reported the professor's alleged misconduct in course evaluations from 2019 onward.

Further, they say, when Arcadia brass finally did initiate an investigation, they stopped it when the professor resigned, a move that violated the university's Title IX obligations to determine whether sex discrimination occurred and to redress any hostile environment students may have suffered.

Under the terms of the agreement, Arcadia must revise their Title IX policies and procedures and train faculty and staff accordingly. The university must assign a third party to complete an investigation — and conduct a review of all Title IX complaints from student- and staff-involved sexual harassment for a three-year period.

Arcadia has not yet responded to KYW's request for comment.

November

Philly Superintendent Tony Watlington says a few schools are interested in testing year-round classes

By Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 5, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia schools Superintendent Tony Watlington says "a few" schools have expressed interest in his pilot for year-round classes, and more details should be released next month.

Watlington's five-year plan includes a pilot of up to ten year-round schools starting next school year. He says the district doesn't want to rush the process. "We want to spend a lot of time in communities talking directly with parents and families because they'll ultimately have to opt-in," Watlington told KYW Newsradio Tuesday.

"We're moving along the way we expected to. And so we think we're on course," Watlington said. "We won't have an update on a more substantive timeline until mid-December."

Watlington says classes at participating schools would be year-round with breaks every few weeks, and the plan is not to have business as usual. "We don't see a year-round calendar as just the same thing you do all year long," he said. "Whether it's chess or STEM clubs or other exciting opportunities it won't just be students sitting behind a desk 12 months a year."

Any year-round school plan would require changes to the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers contract.

The idea of year-round school has been promoted by Democratic mayoral candidate Cherelle Parker. "We've paid close attention to what we're read in the press about the mayoral nominee's thinking about year-round schools, year-round calendars and we agree," Watlington said.

"We're early in the process but we're committed to doing it," Watlington said.

UPenn tutoring program with Philly elementary school showing early dividends

By Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 13, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Administrators at Henry C. Lea Elementary School in Walnut Hill say a partnership with the University of Pennsylvania is showing early dividends.

On the first floor of the elementary school located at 47th and Locust streets, there are desks in the corridor where first, second, and third graders get individual tutoring in reading and math. It's where the University of Pennsylvania's five-year, \$4 million commitment to the school is making a difference, said Lea elementary Principal Aaron Gerwer.

About 50 Penn graduate and undergraduate students work with Lea elementary students in 20-minute sessions.

"We established the tutoring program last year seeing the gaps caused by COVID," Gerwer said, "and we targeted a specific grade of students and our very youngest learners."

"Penn provides us financial support, they provide staff members who do a lot of the work in the building, and they also open their doors to collaboration and brainstorming with us different ideas for programs with the students."

Gerwer said in standardized tests last year, 40% of students scored proficient in English Language Arts, which is up 4%. Math scores grew 7%, to about 22% proficient.

"We had the highest data in every category on record. So I think it's a good indicator, but I think we're still turning the corner as to where we can get to."

The district showed off the tutoring program Monday as part of a media tour marking American Education Week.

Superintendent Tony Watlington has "high dosage" tutoring on his list of strategies to improve achievement in Philly schools over the next five years.

School district looking into staggering dismissal times to ease after school crowds

By Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 17, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Could staggering dismissal times ease the crush of students converging at Broad and Spring Garden streets every afternoon?

Approximately 2,500 students go to five high schools near Broad and Spring Garden, and they all get out around 3 p.m. De’Naiza Watson, a junior at Science Leadership Academy who serves as a student representative on the Philadelphia School Board, says it can be difficult just getting to the Broad Street Line.

"It's just, there's kids, and a lot of them like to linger," Watson explained. "I mean, we're teenagers. We're going to linger. We're going to hang out with our friends. So a lot of the time there's just a lot of traffic. There's a lot of, like, pushing and shoving just to get down to the subway alone."

Watson says the traffic doesn't end there, noting that once they get to the subway, it's "crowded" and "crazy."

The district standardized high school schedules two years ago to align with bus transportation.

District Safety Chief Kevin Bethel told the school board Thursday that it's worth examining again.

Watson says she believes safety in the area has improved, but she and the other kids who simply want to get home would like to see a more orderly dismissal.

Survey shows Philly teachers are overworked and underpaid. Still, they're passionate about what they do

By Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 30, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia teachers say they're overworked and underpaid but they're still passionate about the work they do.

That's one of the takeaways from a survey released Thursday by the nonprofit Elevate 215, formerly the nonprofit known as the Philadelphia School Partnership.

About 734 teachers participated in the online survey conducted by Philadelphia Citywide Talent Coalition, a group that comes up with strategies to build a more diverse and effective teaching force.

Most teachers responded that their schools are on the right track, but they believe, overall, Philadelphia schools are not.

Forty-eight percent of teachers responded they were "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with their salaries, said Scott Gaiber, Elevate 215's deputy chief of investments.

"Teachers definitely do not feel like they're compensated adequately for the work that they do," Gaiber said. "They also feel like their workloads are, frankly, overwhelming."

The survey showed that 82% of the respondents were district teachers and 18% were from charters.

"Overall, charter teachers did view a number of different conditions more favorably," Gaiber said. "What's interesting about that is that, in terms of actual turnover, we know that charter teachers turn over more than district teachers."

While most teachers said they believe they have the respect of parents and their peers, 80% of them have considered leaving the profession.

Gaiber says survey results will be used to recommend ways to build a more diverse and effective teaching force.

The survey was commissioned by Elevate 215.

December

New Central Bucks school board sworn in, immediately suspends previous board policies

By Nina Baratti and Conner Barkon, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 5, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — New members of the Central Bucks Board of School Directors were sworn in on Monday night, officially flipping to a Democratic majority. And they did it in front of a packed audience. Parents and voters squeezed into the meeting.

Most of the audience was in support of the new board although during public comment, some speakers called to see respect in the room, as well as transparency from the board.

“Just getting it back to where we were. That’s pretty much what we’ve all wanted. We’re a better community than what’s been going on, we deserve better, we elected better,” said parent Barbara Kielbana.

Shenoa Incorvati, a parent from Doylestown, said, with the recently elected board, she hopes to see more engagement between members and the community.

“Before, it’s always been ... they just sit there and stare with blank faces during the community part of this. And I want them to acknowledge what the people are saying,” Incorvati said.

The new board wasted no time in its first meeting, passing a measure on Monday night's meeting that suspends several hot-button policies enacted by the previous board — limiting transgender athletes, allowing library books to be challenged and banned, barring political symbols, including LGBTQ pride flags, from classrooms.

"Those policies are now suspended. The transgender athlete policy that was passed two weeks ago — that's now suspended," Karen Smith, the new board president, said.

This is Smith's first time as president and her ninth year on the school board. Smith was sworn in on a stack of books that had been challenged by the previous board.

"We were talking about what to get sworn in on — you don't have to use the Bible. And somebody suggested banned books, and I thought, "Yea, I'm gonna do that."

The board also voted to investigate the legality of the severance package given to the district's outgoing superintendent.

The previous Republican-controlled board agreed to pay him \$700,000 in their lame duck session after their election loss in November.

Philly School District designates 24 schools as 'swing spaces'

By Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 8, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The School District of Philadelphia has released a list of two dozen school buildings to be used as "swing spaces," where students can attend classes if asbestos or another issue forces them out of their school. But it's making some students feel slighted.

"We want to be able to move students quickly back into schools when schools are closed due to an environmental issue," Superintendent Tony Watlington told the Board of Education Thursday night. "We will build this plan out over time. When it's completed, we will have some 22,500 swing space seats available."

Watlington said it's a "good plan, not a perfect plan," that remains a work in progress.

"Some of the spaces are not ready and will require some significant work," he said. "We are prepared to talk about the cost for this plan and how we intend to pay for it over time."

Watlington added that swing spaces could be used for future school improvement projects.

"Over the long term, we will have some 22,000 seats shovel-ready when we get to the point where the board decides to repurpose, build new schools, things of that nature," he said.

De'Nazia Watson, a student member on the school board, said students at one of the swing buildings – South Philadelphia High School — felt the relocation classrooms got attention from the district while their own classrooms were too hot or too cold.

"They felt like the swing spaces, the places that were being converted into swing spaces, were a lot more put together and a lot more up to date than their own schools," Watson said. "The district immediately fixed all of the problems that were wrong, while the students that were still learning in spaces that were not swing spaces are still in the same conditions."

"I just wanted to make sure that if you guys are having these swing spaces, that you also make sure to address the other issues that are going on with the other students instead of just having the other kids coming in and kind of being subjected to better learning conditions," Watson added.

District Chief Operating Officer Oz Hill responded that he'd met with student government leaders at South Philly High Thursday, and planned to follow up to address their concerns.

Camden high school students gain hands-on experience in EMT training program

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 12, 2023

BERLIN, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — A partnership between Virtua Health and Camden City Schools is helping train the next generation of emergency medical technicians. Camden high school students are getting hands-on training on the other side of the county to become emergency medical technicians.

The program is made possible through a partnership with Virtua Health. Camden City Schools Superintendent Katrina McCombs says the goal is to show kids there are many paths to success.

"They're mentoring our students also through the process and any challenges that they may have but also celebrating the successes."

On days when the class meets, students are bused from Camden to Berlin so they can get training from Virtua staffers. On Tuesday, a group of students gathered around a hospital bed to learn from an experienced EMT how to connect medical devices to patients.

Marlyn Valentin, 17, says this is a great way to learn the physical and mental skills needed to pursue a medical career.

“Throughout this program, they have a section on how to handle yourself in mental situations, how to take care of yourself, first, and then the situation.”

She says she hopes to become a doctor — “and, hopefully, open up my own practice. I would like to be either a cardiovascular surgeon or anesthesiologist. And this program has really grown my love for medicine and honestly just helping in general.”

McCombs says she’s happy to see students take control of their futures.

“Another opportunity to learn and to grow, but also to have a marketable certificate to benefit their own lives as they move forward,” McCombs said.

Students will be offered a job when they complete the program.

District debuts new T.M. Peirce Elementary School building 4 years after asbestos demolition

By Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 21, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The School District of Philadelphia cut the ribbon on the new T.M. Peirce Elementary School building in North Philadelphia on Wednesday, replacing an antiquated, asbestos-contaminated facility.

The school made headlines in 2019 when damaged asbestos and lead paint were found throughout the more than 100-year-old building at 23rd and Cambria streets. Students were moved to an alternate site and the building was demolished — and then COVID-19 hit.

Two years ago, crews broke ground on the three-story, \$44 million facility. Now, it’s ready to open.

“We lived through the construction,” said principal Anthony Gordon. “We lived through COVID. We lived through the lead stabilization and asbestos, to now, moving back home after the winter break.”

T.M. Peirce Elementary School

Photo credit School District of Philadelphia

T.M. Peirce Elementary School

Photo credit School District of Philadelphia

T.M. Peirce Elementary School

Photo credit School District of Philadelphia

The new LEED-certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building has amenities that didn't exist in the old building — a library, a digital lab, art and music rooms, new lighting, playground equipment, and an actual cafeteria.

“Food preparation and serving was outside in the hallway between two bathrooms,” Gordon said of the old Peirce building. “That’s where we were. So now that students are coming back to a brand-new building that has a real cafeteria, it’s a big uplift.”

District Chief Operating Officer Oz Hill said the building will be open to the neighborhood as well.

“That’s going to be nestled right in the middle of that community that’s been underserved for decades,” he added.

The district said it is the first new school building to open in that neighborhood in more than seven decades.

About 200 K-5 students have been attending classes at the former Pratt Elementary School seven blocks away while their new school was being built. Students will report to Peirce after the winter break, on Jan. 3.

ELECTIONS & POLITICS

Pa. Senate passes bill to impose 10-year prison sentence for selling a deadly dose of fentanyl

By Jim Melwert, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 2, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — The Pennsylvania Senate passed a bill that would stiffen penalties for selling a lethal dose of fentanyl.

Republican State Senator Doug Mastriano, who is behind the legislation, says there were more than 5,000 fentanyl overdoses in Pennsylvania last year, averaging between 13 and 15 a day.

“According to the latest numbers from the Pennsylvania commission on sentencing, the average offender convicted under the statute received a sentence of less than five years,” he said. “A significant number of these offenders got off with no jail time at all.”

Mastriano’s bill would require a 10-year minimum sentence for anyone who profits off the sale of a deadly dose of fentanyl. He says it’s written to focus on dealers and carves out protections for someone who is sharing the drug and not trying to make money off of it.

But Philadelphia Democrat Sharif Street says mandatory minimums are not the answer to the fentanyl crisis.

“What it will do is increase the jail stays for the least serious crimes,” Street said. “We’ve gone down the road of mandatory minimums in the past, it did not work.”

Street says there are recently adopted enhancements for the sale of fentanyl, which allows judge’s discretion in sentencing.

The bill passed the Senate with bipartisan support 35-14 and is heading to the State House.

Bickering in Harrisburg locks legislation to move up next year's presidential primary in a hyper-partisan quagmire

By Jim Melwert, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 5, 2023

HARRISBURG, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — Pennsylvania's House of Representatives on Thursday approved a bill to move up the state's 2024 presidential primary election by three weeks, but disagreements have arisen with Republican senators who wanted an even earlier date.

The effort to move up the primary date from April 23 — the date set in law — is driven primarily to avoid a conflict with the Jewish holiday of Passover. The idea has bi-partisan support, but lawmakers can't seem to agree on a final version.

Critics say moving up the primary date will create chaos for county election administrators and that Jewish voters who observe Passover can vote early by mail.

Philadelphia Democrat Malcolm Kenyatta's bill, which would move Pennsylvania's primary to the first Tuesday in April in presidential election years, narrowly passed the House, 102-100, with every Democrat voting "yes" and every Republican voting "no."

Its future is uncertain in the state Senate, which was scheduled to reconvene Oct. 16.

Senate Republicans have pushed a second bill to move up the primary election date to the third Tuesday of March, saying that would give voters in the battleground state more of a say in deciding presidential nominees.

However, critics also say moving up the primary by five weeks would help protect incumbent lawmakers by giving primary challengers less time to prepare.

That bill passed the Senate two weeks ago, but it failed in the House — 26 in favor, 177 against — after more than an hour-and-a-half of debate punctuated by frequent procedural challenges.

Republican leader Bryan Cutler called it a failure of Democratic leadership.

“I think when you look at what they did, it's really — it's legislative games for the sake of politics. It's all about who gets credit and who gets blamed,” Cutler said.

Earlier in the week, the Senate version of the bill was amended on the floor — by Republicans — to include voter ID requirements, which Democrats largely oppose. Then, in a late-night Appropriations Committee hearing on the eve of final passage, Democrats rammed through an amendment addressing mail-in ballots.

“The horrendous amendment added at the 11th hour in the Appropriations Committee last night is a poison pill to this bill. And we all know it,” said House Republican whip Tim O’Neal.

House Democratic leader Matt Bradford pointed the finger back at Republicans, saying they’re the ones who stirred up election conspiracies, making it hard to pass meaningful election reform.

“And then you sit there in the most sanctimonious way and say, ‘I don't understand why people are worked up.’ That's what happens when you engage in election lies,” Bradford bellowed.

“No matter what side you come down on, understand about how we wound up here. Be honest about how amendments got into this bill and didn't get into this bill and recognize the difficult work ahead to put faith back in our elections.”

Bradford has filed a motion to reconsider the Senate version.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

A new indictment charges Sen. Menendez with being an unregistered agent of the Egyptian government

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio and The Associated Press

KYW Newsradio

October 12, 2023

NEW YORK (AP) — Federal prosecutors have rewritten their indictment against U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey and his wife to charge them with conspiring to have him act as an agent of Egypt and Egyptian officials.

The superseding indictment, filed in Manhattan federal court on Thursday, accuses Menendez of violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which requires people to register with the U.S. government if they are acting as “an agent of a foreign principal.” As a member of Congress, Menendez was prohibited from being an agent of a foreign government, even if he did register as one.

Messages left with Menendez’s Senate staff and attorney on Thursday were not immediately answered.

The indictment says the conspiracy occurred from January 2018 to June 2022. It alleges that in May 2019, Menendez, his wife and a business associate, Wael Hana, met with an Egyptian intelligence official in Menendez’s Senate office in Washington. During the meeting, they discussed an American citizen who was seriously injured in a 2015 airstrike by the Egyptian military using a U.S.-made Apache helicopter, the indictment says.

Some members of Congress objected to awarding certain military aid to Egypt over that episode and the perception by certain lawmakers that the Egyptian government was not willing to fairly compensate the injured American citizen, according to the indictment.

Shortly after the meeting in Washington, the Egyptian official texted Hana that if Menendez helped resolve the matter, “he will sit very comfortably.” Hana replied: “Orders, consider it done,” the indictment says.

The new charge comes just weeks after the Democrat and his wife were accused of accepting bribes of cash, gold bars and a luxury car from three New Jersey businessmen who wanted the senator to help and influence over foreign affairs. The couple have pleaded not guilty.

Hana, the business associate, pleaded not guilty last month to charges including conspiracy to commit bribery.

In both the old and new indictments, prosecutor said Menendez, after meeting with an Egyptian official, lobbied then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to increase American engagement in stalled negotiations involving Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to build a dam over the Nile River, a key foreign policy issue for Egypt.

The indictments said that while Menendez was chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he took several steps to secretly aid Egyptian officials. That included ghostwriting a letter to fellow senators encouraging them to lift a hold on \$300 million in aid to Egypt.

He was also accused of passing along information about employees at the U.S. Embassy in Egypt and transmitting nonpublic information to Egyptian officials about military aid.

Menendez, 69, has insisted that he did nothing unusual to assist Egypt and that prosecutors had misunderstood the work of a senator involved in foreign affairs. Authorities who searched Menendez's home last year said they found more than \$100,000 worth of gold bars and over \$480,000 in cash — much of it hidden in closets, clothing and a safe.

The new charge against Menendez comes as more than 30 Senate Democrats — including his home state colleague, Democratic Sen. Cory Booker — have called on him to resign. Menendez has remained defiant, telling his colleagues in a closed-door luncheon two weeks ago that he will not leave the Senate.

Menendez has not said whether he will run for reelection next year. At least one Democrat, New Jersey Rep. Andy Kim, has already jumped into the primary, and the head of Senate Democrats' campaign arm, Michigan Sen. Gary Peters, has called on Menendez to resign, signaling that he may not receive campaign assistance traditionally available to incumbents.

Bill that would allow unaffiliated voters to take part in primary elections advances in Pa. House

By Jim Melwert, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 17, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Legislation to allow independent voters to take part in Pennsylvania primaries cleared a state House committee Tuesday morning, but a similar bill in the state Senate faces an uphill battle.

Pennsylvania is one of a handful of states with closed primaries, meaning only voters registered with the two major parties — Democratic and Republican — can vote in their respective primaries.

But the House State Government Committee advanced a pair of bills that would change that. The bills are slightly different but generally would allow independents and unaffiliated voters to take part.

About 1.2 million voters in Pennsylvania are registered as unaffiliated or with a third party.

“We have the opportunity today to bring over 1.2 million voters into the democratic process in Pennsylvania, to allow them a stake in our democratic process,” said Democratic state Rep. Jared Solomon, of Philadelphia.

Committee majority chairman Scott Conklin, a Democrat of Centre County, said a growing number of voters don’t want to be affiliated with either party, but they do want a say in elections.

“That new group that doesn’t want to be the Democrat and doesn’t want to be the Republican, they just want to be an American,” he said. “They just want to be a concerned citizen without the labels.”

Republican Brad Raoe, who represents northwestern Pennsylvania, still believes members of political parties should be the only ones who have a say.

“It just seems that letting somebody that is not a member of a party vote in a primary for that party just doesn’t make a lot of sense,” he argued. “When you think about how things work, usually members of an organization are the ones that make decisions for that organization, and a political party is an organization.”

The bill passed committee and will head to the House floor.

A similar bill in the Senate is stuck in the State Government Committee. The chair of that committee, Republican Cris Dush, of northern Pennsylvania, opposes open primaries and says there are no plans to bring up the bill.

Takeaways from the 2023 mayoral debate between Cherelle Parker and David Oh

By Mike DeNardo, Pat Loeb, Racquel Williams, Tim Jimenez, Ian Bush, Rachel Kurland, and Nigel Thompson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 26, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Cherelle Parker and David Oh, who are running to be the next mayor of Philadelphia, faced off in a live debate at KYW Newsradio’s studios Thursday morning. It was the only planned debate of the campaign season between Parker, the Democratic nominee, and Oh, the Republican.

The candidates faced off on a variety of topics, including public safety, education, poverty and the opioid epidemic.

A major concern in the city, of course, is gun violence and how the next mayor will approach making Philadelphia a safer place to live. Both candidates support more rigorous enforcement of lower-level crimes, such as retail thefts and firearms violations, and they support hiring more police.

But they also talked about prosecution. Surprisingly, Oh said he would deputize attorneys to act as prosecutors if he felt District Attorney Larry Krasner was not prosecuting rigorously enough. That would be possible under state law, though obviously an extreme step.

Parker took a more collaborative tone when asked about working with the D.A. She said she would present to the public the cases that police send to the D.A.

OTHER KEY TAKEAWAYS

There were few fireworks. Oh, a distinct underdog in a heavily Democratic city, advocated his viewpoints emphatically but didn't directly challenge Parker, even when they disagreed. In fact, when moderator Ian Bush gave him the opportunity, he was complimentary.

"The last Republican to come close to toppling a Democrat in the mayor's race is Sam Katz. He told the Inquirer that to win in Philadelphia, a Republican needs an unpalatable Democratic candidate. Is Cherelle Parker an unpalatable candidate?" Bush asked.

"No, no. She's a good candidate," said Oh.

Parker, however, was a bit tougher on Oh. When she asked him a direct question toward the end, it hinted he had little to show for his years on council: "What programs are standing here in the city of Philadelphia that you have scaled citywide that are changing the lives of people?"

Oh pointed to legislation he introduced incentivizing employers to hire veterans and his work with the local music industry.

One of the more heated discussions was over the 76ers' arena proposal in Chinatown. Oh has been vocal against it. When asked if he would approve if the Sixers built a stadium elsewhere, like Camden, he said that's up to the Sixers organization. While she hasn't definitively said she's for the proposal, Parker said the Sixers belong in Philadelphia.

Crime and gun violence

PROSECUTING VIOLENT CRIME

Critics of Philadelphia's crime-fighting efforts say a reluctance to prosecute crimes — such as retail theft and gun violations — works against best practices for addressing violent crime. Both candidates support a more rigorous enforcement of lower-level offenses. Parker said the city must have a comprehensive approach to addressing public safety, and that, she said, starts with appointing a new police commissioner.

That commissioner “will ensure that while we have zero tolerance for any misuse and/or abuse of authority,” she said. “Our law enforcement officers, our police officers, they will be supported by the mayor in enforcing the law. With that being said, we need accountability. If the voters of Philadelphia elect me, we are going to implement a process called CompStat360. It is something that the police department does to ensure that its captain-level leadership responds on its plans to reduce crime.”

Oh believes not prosecuting what are considered low-level crimes has been a poor move by the Kenney administration.

“When it comes to the lawlessness, such as the ATVs and dirt bikes, that's not low level, and many of them are brandishing weapons,” he said. “It creates an atmosphere of fear and fear of violence. They have to be dealt with. And so under the broken window theory, if we could deal with these problems at the beginning, show people that this is not something we'll tolerate in our city, we will not have the influx of violations and violators that we are now dealing with.”

WORKING WITH THE POLICE COMMISSIONER AND THE DA

As for District Attorney Krasner, who is independently elected, Parker said there is power in transparency. She wants to make cases that police send to the D.A. open to the public.

“We have to have a comprehensive approach that doesn’t include finger-pointing,” she added.

As for Oh, he said he would have a frank conversation with Krasner — “I write his budget. His budget will be tight,” he said.

“The mayor is overall responsible for public safety in this city,” Oh continued. “The district attorney, who’s an independently elected official, he’s responsible for prosecution. But as mayor, I will lead the police department in ensuring that all laws are enforced — criminal laws, public safety laws, quality of life laws, and traffic laws. Police shall enforce all laws throughout our city.”

STOP-AND-FRISK

Parker prefers to call the stop-and-frisk policy "Terry stops," as stop-and-frisk has a negative undertone. Oh is not in support of Terry stops and doesn’t believe they can be done constitutionally.

“The reason Terry stops, or stop-and-frisk, does not produce results is because it’s used to harass and bully people,” he said.

Parker believes stop-and-frisk is something that should be done, and she doesn’t want to take any tools away from the Police Department. However, in the event that an officer abuses this power,

particularly among young men of color, Parker said that officer or officers would be fired, as she has a zero-tolerance policy for such abuses.

Education

Parker and Oh both fundamentally back improving Philadelphia's public school system, first and foremost, but are also not opposed to including private, charter, parochial and other types of schools in the overall solution.

CHARTER SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL CHOICE

Oh: "I'm primarily concerned about quality education. I'm less concerned about whether it's public, private, charter — whatever it is. I want to ensure that every child in our city has access to a good, quality school, and that if they have a choice, that they can use that choice. However, fundamentally, I want to have good public schools. I believe that a public education system is the best type of system for everyone."

Parker: "Putting people on a path to self-sufficiency is the foundation of my candidacy. You can't do that without access to quality public education. ... That's why this concept of traditional public versus charters, it's not a narrative that I will allow in a Parker administration and not one I've employed during this campaign. As a matter of fact, for the first time in the history of our city, if the people of this city decided that I will be their mayor, we will bring together traditional public schools, traditional public charters, parochial schools, and even private schools, leadership to sit at the table [and] figure out if there's any way for us to have synergy and learn from each other."

AGING SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Parker was vague on the city's aging school buildings, citing state Sen. Vincent Hughes' estimation of \$5 billion-plus to fix Philly school infrastructure, but she didn't know what form that funding would take if realized. Oh was also vague, saying he wanted to create a "master plan" that would be acted upon, unlike ones in the past he said were not acted upon.

Both Parker and Oh agreed with potentially needing to close down more schools, if necessary.

Parker: "That is the rebuilding of new [schools], the environmental remediation of others. And we have to be able to drive those dollars through an efficient system in order to get them on the street, get those schools rebuilt, have our students trained by the building trades to do that building. Will it be in the form of a school board authority that's an additional system or structure created? I'm not sure about that yet. We have to do more study."

On closing down schools, she added, "It's essential for right-sizing our district and it is true that environmental remediation is not enough. Some buildings need to be totally demolished and schools rebuilt — 21st-century modern buildings."

Oh: "We need a master plan. We've had master plans in the past, but we haven't taken action on them. I want a master plan. Some buildings are going to get demolished, some, they're gonna get rehabbed. We need to ensure that every one of our children has an equal level of facilities, curriculum and resources to get a good quality education."

YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL

During her campaign, Parker has proposed year-round school. That doesn't mean 365 days a year — a week on, a couple weeks off. She said it wouldn't be mandatory, but as mayor, she would propose that pilot program, which the school district is currently working on.

She said it would provide “access to year-round education for the children who are not all growing up, quite frankly, in perfect familiar environments.”

Oh, on the other hand, said that he does not think that year-round schools are a good idea. He supports the current calendar as it is, saying students need a break and time off to be with their families.

“They need time to grow their minds, their bodies. To have different experiences,” he added.

Proposed Sixers arena in Chinatown

Parker wasn't ready to rule one way or the other on the Sixers arena proposed for Chinatown. She wants more collaboration from not just the Chinatown community but also communities across the city about the potential economic impact. She was adamant about the Sixers needing to be in Philadelphia, though.

Oh said putting the arena in Chinatown was a bad idea because it would displace Chinatown, and he urged the Sixers to be more transparent about their plans for building a stadium. He did not express the same concern as Parker about the Sixers building the arena outside the city.

Parker: “I will continue to affirm that I will use a data-driven and research-based approach that will include both quantitative and qualitative data. ... I will want to see diversity and inclusion from top to the bottom. ... I want to hear a community approach, but the people in every neighborhood in the city will also have an opportunity to have their voices heard. An economic development project of this magnitude has to be vetted.”

Oh: “It’s just a bad idea in that location [Chinatown]. It’s inconsistent with what that location is. ... It’s going to impact that entire area, including what can happen there, what won’t happen there, the property values, whether people can afford to live there or not, who’s going to invest and open up in that area. So it’s really incumbent upon the Sixers to give us a detailed plan.”

Oh faces an uphill climb due to the overwhelming voter registration advantage Democrats have in Philadelphia over Republicans — 776,863 to 116,027, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State. The last Republican mayor of Philadelphia was Bernard Samuel, who served from 1941 to 1952.

Oh has support in varying parts of the city. He was a three-term City Council member-at-large before he resigned to run for mayor. Parker, who was a Pennsylvania state representative from 2005 to 2015, served two terms as City Council member for the 9th District. She came out on top in the Democratic primary in May by 10 percentage points.

“Both up to this point have demonstrated an ability to win citywide. I think that’s important,” said Mustafa Rashed, president and CEO of Bellevue Strategies. “Both of them have their bases that they believe will continue to support them and turn up and show out for them.”

If elected, both candidates would hold firsts: Parker would be the first woman elected Philadelphia’s mayor, and Oh would be the city’s first Asian American mayor.

Who are the 4 candidates running for the 3-seat Montgomery County Board of Commissioners?

By Jim Melwert, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 1, 2023

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — This year's election will bring changes to Montgomery County. The three county commissioners who won the election four years ago are not on the ballot. One is not seeking re-election, another lost in the primary, and the third stepped down earlier this year.

Four candidates are vying for those three seats. It's the first time any of them has run. Of the four, the top three vote-getters will win.

The Montgomery County Board of Commissioners has been under Democratic control since 2012.

Republicans Liz Ferry and Tom DiBello hope to change that, both pointing to their work to balance budgets and lower taxes, Ferry as Upper Dublin Township commissioner, DiBello on the Spring-Ford School Board.

Ferry was with the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and has been the lone Republican on Upper Dublin's seven-person board of commissioners.

"And I've been able to get things done. I've been able to pass budgets with no tax increases, and I've been able to provide innovative ways of providing services," Ferry said.

DiBello, an entrepreneur, points to his time as president of the Spring-Ford School District's board of directors.

"We eliminated a \$15 million spending deficit, reduced the district debt by over \$200 million. I reduced the annual average tax increase from five and a half percent on one and 1.8%, including a 0% tax increase in 2017."

Democrats Neil Makhija and Jamila Winder stress a message of inclusivity. Makhija worked in the U.S. Senate and the Obama White House and led a national South Asian civic organization.

“I've seen the promise of what happens when we commit to the American ideals of multiracial, inclusive democracy,” Makhija said.

He points to his work on the successful opioid lawsuit against pharmaceutical companies:

“Now billions of dollars of those funds are coming back to counties like Montgomery County. So one of the challenges that we're going to face is how do we administer those programs?”

Winder was appointed to the board earlier this year to replace Val Arkoosh, who stepped down to join Gov. Josh Shapiro’s administration.

“I've been hard at work to make our community one where everyone from our determined seniors, to our innovative small business owners is celebrated and uplifted,” Winder said.

“What you'll get in me is truly a commissioner that will fight for all residents of Montgomery County.”

Philly releases lists of voters who made mail-in ballot mistakes and need to resubmit ballots

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 4, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — As Philadelphia’s Board of Elections begins to receive mail-in ballots ahead of Election Day on Tuesday, it has published lists of voters who left out a date or signature, so they can request a replacement or vote in person.

State law requires that voters sign and date their ballots and the state Supreme Court has ruled the date must fall within the range in which mail-in ballots are being accepted.

The city's Board of Elections urges voters who failed to meet the requirements to go in person to Room 140 at City Hall to get a new ballot. As a backup, the voters can request a provisional

ballot at their polling place on Tuesday, but the board recommends fixing the problem before then. The board office is also open over the weekend for voters to pick up replacement ballots.

The lists of voters with faulty ballots are available on the City Commissioners' website. For those who can't physically get to City Hall, there is also a designated agent form online

Judges affect every aspect of our lives. Here's what voters should consider when deciding who should sit on the bench

By Kristen Johanson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 7, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — In every Pennsylvania county this election, judges are on the ballot — but, how do you decide who sits on the bench?

“Judges affect every aspect of our lives,” said Philadelphia Bar Association Chancellor Marc Zucker, “whether you are in front of the judge in a case or just affected by everything from abortion rights to voting rights to taxes that are being challenged based on violations of the law.

“You come before a judge with a traffic ticket. You come before a judge because you have been arrested and accused of a crime. You come before a judge because someone is suing you, or you are suing someone else.”

Some of the ballots may ask voters to select a certain number of judges, while some judicial candidates are up for retention.

“It is critical that all judges act in a non-partisan fashion, and that is one of the issues we consider in evaluating whether a judge who is up for retention should be retained,” said Zucker, “whether an attorney has been so much of an advocate for a political position that they may have difficulty switching roles once they come on the bench.”

When voting for the right candidate, he said it should come down to who is the most qualified.

“A sitting judge is not supposed to be partisan in any way, and that is something to consider,” he said. “That's why often in these campaigns we don't hear how a judge would rule in a particular

matter because that judge cannot take a position in advance and that judge cannot take a partisan position.”

Several county bar associations have shared a list of judges that they would or would not recommend, based on certain criteria like experience, character and a full investigation into each of their backgrounds. View their recommendations below:

Montgomery County Bar Association

Chester County Bar Association

Delaware County Bar Association

Pennsylvania Bar Association’s recommendations for state appellate courts

Philadelphia Bar Association

December

Late financial disclosure filings expose loophole in NJ election transparency law, political analyst says

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 4, 2023

SOUTH JERSEY (KYW Newsradio) — New election transparency laws in New Jersey were used to hide the source of some campaign finances until after the election this year.

It didn't affect the results, but Sen. Vince Polistina (R-Atlantic County), who voted in favor of the election law changes, is asking for an investigation into dark money groups.

Financial disclosures show South Jersey Democrats were behind a political action committee called Jersey Freedom, which spent money on advertisements in Legislative District 2 (Polistina's district) and Legislative District 4 (including parts of Camden, Gloucester and Atlantic counties), boosting independent conservative candidates they hoped would siphon votes from Republicans.

"So there is no mystery. We know exactly what happened," said Micah Rasmussen from Rider University's Rebovich Institute.

He says, while all of the new rules were followed, the rules themselves are a problem for transparency.

"And it turns out that one of the loopholes that this new law created, it let these independent expenditure groups off the hook from disclosing who they are supporting in a timely way."

Rasmussen says if groups do a little planning, they can keep the source of funding secret for campaigns until after the election, which is what Jersey Freedom did.

"You know, this group knew that they were going to have to disclose eventually," Rasmussen added.

Jersey Freedom put out a statement, without a person's name attached, saying it followed every letter of the law.

Polistina won in Legislative District 2, despite the efforts of Jersey Freedom. In Legislative District 4, Democrat Paul Moriarty proved he didn't need any extra help, also winning by a substantial margin.

Private schools, child care legislation pass in Pennsylvania as lawmakers move past budget feud

By The Associated Press

KYW Newsradio

December 14, 2023

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Lawmakers moved past a month's long budget feud in Pennsylvania's Capitol on Wednesday, advancing legislation to tie up loose ends and send millions more to subsidize private school tuition and child care tax credits for parents.

After days of negotiations that typically play out before June 30's end of the fiscal year, the House and Senate traded a flurry of just-unveiled legislation, each agreeing to concessions in bills that Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro said late Wednesday night he would sign.

Shapiro suggested that the dragged-out process of passing budget legislation carried a silver lining, in that leaders of the politically divided Legislature overcame partisanship to finish important pieces of legislation long in the making.

"I think it's important to note that we learned how to work together, and that is critically important," Shapiro said.

In addition to subsidies for private schools and parents who send kids to child care, lawmakers agreed to raise the monthly fee on telephone bills by 30 cents, from \$1.65 to \$1.95, to help raise another \$60 million for county 911 emergency response services. Raising the fee to \$2.30 a month has been a top priority of counties that say they are forced to raise property taxes because they are paying a growing share of the cost of the service.

More tax credit for private school donations

Education funding had become a key sticking point in finalizing the spending plan, with the Republican-controlled Senate aiming to expand private school subsidies and the Democratic-controlled House pressing for more aid for the poorest public schools.

In the end, Democrats dropped a demand that Republicans had opposed to send another \$100 million to the poorest public schools.

In exchange, Republicans agreed to transparency measures sought by Democrats in a program that allows businesses to receive tax breaks for donating money to defray the cost of tuition at private and religious schools.

“Thirty-five thousand more kids could take advantage of it, so it’s very significant,” said Steven Bloom, senior vice president at Commonwealth Foundation, which lobbies in Harrisburg for school choice.

Under the bill, the state will expand that private school tax credit program by \$130 million — from \$340 million to \$470 million. Republicans also agreed to scale back the amount of money that middleman administrators could keep — from 20% down to 10% — and to require the disclosure of more demographic information about the students who benefit.

The bill also boosts the amount of tax credits — from \$12 million to \$60 million — for donations that go to private schools that serve a larger proportion of students from lower-income families.

“Expanding school choice is critical because it’s a life and death situation for these kids It gives them a pathway toward getting a good education ... they can then use that as a platform for success for the rest of their lives,” Bloom said.

Public school advocates have criticized the program as discriminatory, saying many of the eligible schools cherry-pick the students they want to teach and have policies that discriminate on the basis of religion, LGBTQ+ status, disability or another reason.

They also say it siphons money away from public schools at a time when a landmark court decision found that the state’s system of school funding is violating the constitutional rights of students in the state’s poorest districts.

Expanded child care tax credit

Another key concession won by Democrats is the expansion of a year-old state child care and dependent tax credit.

The bill raises the current child care tax credit from 30% to 100% of the federal child care and dependent tax credit, at an annual cost of hundreds of millions of dollars to the state.

The size of the child care tax credit is based on income, but the biggest tax credit would be \$2,100 — instead of \$630, under current state law — for families making below \$43,000 and spending \$6,000 or more on child care for two children.

“Anything that we can do at the federal or the state level that offsets some of the costs of child care ... is a good thing for kids, and it’s a good thing for parents,” said Donna Cooper, executive director of Children First.

“For young families, child care is their second biggest expense after housing Many families have to choose between going to work or paying for child care.”

That bills also carry another win for Democrats: \$175 million in one-time aid to fix up schools, including cleaning up lead, asbestos, mold and other environmental health hazards in school buildings — still a drop in the bucket compared to the billions the School District of Philadelphia says it needs for deferred maintenance.

“It’s small potatoes compared to the need, but I really commend people for recognizing we’ve got to start somewhere,” Cooper said.

Uncertainty ends for community college funding

Meanwhile, the bills headed to Shapiro’s desk allow hundreds of millions of dollars to flow after spending months snarled in the Legislature.

That includes more than \$300 million for libraries and community colleges, and \$100 million in federal aid for school mental health services.

Montgomery County Community College had to spend tens of thousands on borrowing costs to mitigate the impact on students.

"We've pulled out of our investment portfolio. We've taken out a line of credit and, of course, that equals out to additional borrowing costs and lost revenue that we might have if we invested those funds," said Michael Bettinger, director of government and external relations.

Bettinger says budget impasses are common, but these negotiations stood out.

"This was a little bit different, being that the budget was approved but not released," he said. "The political realities in Harrisburg sometimes causes these things. We're just grateful that they came to a bipartisan agreement."

State Rep. Mary Isaacson of Philadelphia County said, "Our community colleges have become hostages."

Dr. Guy General, president of Community College of Philadelphia, said, "The pressure that the colleges — and ultimately the students — would feel were as a result of this negotiation. I don't know the issues that were related but we definitely were the victims."

Community colleges will receive \$262 million now that the school code provision is approved.

To encourage more college students to become teachers, one of the bills creates a program to give a stipend of up to \$15,000 to student teachers. With numerous schools having difficulty hiring or retaining teachers, the stipends are aimed at easing a hardship for college students finishing up a teaching degree who each must student-teach in schools for 12 weeks without pay.

KYW Newsradio's Conner Barkon and Nigel Thompson contributed to this report.

NJ officials looking to crack down on unpaid tolls from out-of-state drivers with new bill

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 15, 2023

NEW JERSEY (KYW Newsradio) — A bill moving through Trenton would give New Jersey transportation officials the tools to collect unpaid tolls from drivers in other states.

The total of unpaid tolls from out-of-state drivers in 2022 was more than \$115 million, and other states say they have similar problems. Assemblyman Bill Moen says collaboration is the solution.

“If we’re asking our own Garden State residents to pay their fair share, then out-of-state residents should be doing the same,” Moen said.

Moen says the framework for enforcement is still being worked out, but it could involve license suspension for people who accumulate large bills.

He says this will be even more important as toll plazas are removed and replaced with cashless options, like along the Atlantic City Expressway.

“We are encouraging tolling agencies to embrace technology and become more innovative,” Moen said. “There needs to be a sober approach to the idea that that will not be a catch-all for everyone.”

A similar bill introduced in 2021 never made it to the governor’s desk to be signed into law. There’s no date set yet for a full vote on Moen’s bill, but he’s hopeful that will happen soon.

Pa. passes laws to overhaul probation system, allow courts to seal more criminal records

By AP News

KYW Newsradio

December 14, 2023

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — More criminal records in Pennsylvania can be sealed from public view and fewer people might be kept on probation or in county jails, under legislation signed by Gov. Josh Shapiro on Thursday.

Both bills passed the House and Senate with large majorities Wednesday amid a flurry of end-of-year action.

The new probation law aims to limit the length of probation and prevent people from being sent back to jail for minor violations in a state with one of the highest rates of residents who are incarcerated or under supervision.

However, it drew criticism from the American Civil Liberties Union, which says the law doesn't fix the problems that plague Pennsylvania's probation system and will do little to reduce the number of people under supervision.

The other bill allows courts to seal records of non-violent drug felonies with a minimum sentence of under 2 1/2 years in prison and or a maximum sentence of under five years.

Under the state's existing Clean Slate law, it also allows the sealing of certain nonviolent felonies for those who are conviction-free for 10 years and reduces the waiting period for automated sealing of misdemeanors to seven years, rather than 10 years.

Both bills emerged as part of a nationwide reconsideration of the criminal justice system, to help people leaving incarceration resume their lives and find jobs more easily.

The case of rapper Meek Mill helped shine a light on Pennsylvania's probation system after he spent most of his adult life on probation — including stints in jail for technical violations — before a court overturned his conviction in a drug and gun case in Philadelphia.

The bill will limit the circumstances under which a non-violent offender on probation can be sent to jail. It does not, however, put a cap on the length of a probation sentence.

Judges can continue to “stack” probation sentences and impose probation after incarceration, the ACLU said. The bill also fails to provide an automatic or efficient way to end probation early, it said.

Under it, a judge can order an end to probation, regardless of any agreement on a sentence between a prosecutor and the defendant. But judges no longer have wide latitude to extend probation.

Probation is required to end unless the defendant commits a crime that demonstrates that they are a threat to public safety, has not completed certain treatment or has not paid restitution under some circumstances.

The bill also prohibits courts from extending someone’s probation for not paying fines or court costs if they are found to be unable to afford it.

GUN CRIMES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

October

Police kill suspect wanted in quadruple shooting that left 3 dead inside Lawncrest home

By Tim Jimenez and Nina Baratti, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A suspect in connection with a triple homicide in Lawncrest, which left three family members dead and one injured, was shot and killed by police after a brief chase and shootout in East Mount Airy.

Around 5 a.m. Monday, police responded to a report of someone with a weapon. When officers arrived at the twin home on the corner of Shelbourne and Lardner streets, Chief Inspector Michael McCarrick said a woman met them outside. She had been shot in the eye.

“She indicated that there were multiple individuals upstairs who also had sustained gunshot injuries. Subsequently, we have three deceased adults upstairs,” he said.

Homicide investigators have taped off the area, which is near Lawncrest Park.

Police have identified the deceased victims as 63-year-old Denise Snead-Doram, 61-year-old Gregory Doram, and 42-year-old Nina O’Brien. The suspect was identified as Jahad Snead, 41.

Police say the shooting was a result of some sort of family dispute.

One very distraught family member told KYW Newsradio that his aunt and uncle were two of the victims. He was shocked, saying he had no indication that something like this could happen. His relatives were enjoying the Eagles game together just the day before.

The injured woman was taken to the hospital and is expected to survive.

Police started looking for Jahad who got away in a Honda Pilot. Around 8 a.m., they found him and chased him about 6 miles to Phil Ellena and Ross streets in East Mount Airy, where a shootout between the him and police ensued.

Someone else was driving him, according to the preliminary police account. Jihad fired at least one shot at officers and missed. An officer returned fire, striking the individual.

He was taken to the hospital in critical condition but died shortly thereafter.

The officer who shot the suspect sustained minor hand injuries from broken glass.

Investigators are interviewing the person who was driving Jihad.

Police have not provided a motive for the quadruple shooting, only that everyone involved is related.

The number of photo-enforced traffic lights in Philly could grow if bills clear City Council

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 5, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — City Council will consider putting red light enforcement cameras at three more intersections. Bills introduced in session on Thursday would expand the program from 35 intersections to 38 intersections.

The Philadelphia Parking Authority, the agency that oversees the red light cameras, has a list of 30 to 40 intersections that have been flagged for safety, but Executive Director Rich Lazer says each one is studied carefully before it makes it into a City Council bill.

They put up a temporary camera at a candidate location to see how many people run red lights there. Then they study the results with PennDOT, community groups, City Council members and the city's Office of Transportation, Infrastructure and Sustainability.

The latest intersections to show enough safety issues to warrant cameras are at Belmont and Overbrook avenues, 17th Street and Washington Avenue, and Kelly Drive at the Falls Bridge. He says the three new intersections were studied for almost a year before they were approved for the program.

“They’re high networks of a lot of travel and a lot of different means of travel,” said Lazer.

The location at 17th Street is along a stretch of Washington Avenue that was not included when recent safety enhancements were made to the road, and it is just a few blocks from where a pedestrian was critically injured in a hit-and-run crash this week.

Though some drivers complain that the cameras seem to be made just to generate fines, Lazer says the only goal is safety.

He says data shows the red light enforcement cameras currently in use have cut red light running by over 40% at those intersections.

“It’s our responsibility to make sure [people] can travel safely through our streets, and this system works. It curbs behavior, the violations drop, and it leaves people safer.”

There will be hearings before the bills move forward and, if Council approves them, a grace period before fines are imposed on people caught by the devices.

Atlantic City Beach Patrol utilizing drones to prevent drowning

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 12, 2023

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ (KYW Newsradio) — There’s a new eye in the Atlantic City sky, as their beach patrol unveiled drones this week that will be used to help prevent drowning deaths.

When a call comes in for a swimmer in distress, Atlantic City’s Beach Patrol can dispatch a drone to the location and drop a self-inflating flotation device for someone to grab until lifeguards arrive.

Emergency Management Coordinator Scott Evans says using the drones is a force multiplier that will allow first responders to be more efficient.

“This is something that’s going to be able to give us quicker intelligence, something that will give us real-time situational awareness,” he said.

The drones are equipped with thermal imaging technology to help spot swimmers in the water. They also have two-way speakers for communication.

Evans says the drones will help them monitor the beach after hours and when lifeguards aren’t on duty. He notes that letting people know and understand to stay out of the water during those times is sometimes a challenge.

He says the city has nine drones for now and may add to the fleet before summer when they will start being used regularly.

SEPTA driver shot and killed in Germantown on Route 23 bus; woman charged with murder

By Tim Jimenez, Nigel Thompson, and Mike DeNardo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 26, 2023

Updated: Oct. 27, 10:55 a.m.

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Police say a SEPTA driver was shot and killed in Germantown Thursday morning.

It happened just before 10:30 a.m. at Abbotsford and Germantown avenues. According to police, the 48-year-old driver, Bernard Gribbin, was shot six times in the chest while operating a Route 23 bus. He was taken to a hospital where he died less than 10 minutes later.

Gribbin was a 12-year veteran of SEPTA, according to the transit agency.

"At some point in time, a female in her early 20s exited the bus ... on the 4600 block," explained First Deputy Police Commissioner Frank Vanore. "She then fires a shot toward the bus driver, re-enters the bus and fires again, and from what we see on video — and it's very preliminary — it appears she gets on and off several times."

SEPTA Transit Police Chief Charles Lawson says there didn't appear to be any kind of struggle or dispute before the driver was shot. "The only indication that we have right now is that there was no significant interaction between this individual and the operator," he said.

Vanore says the woman got off the bus one last time and walked a couple blocks down the street. She was ultimately apprehended by SEPTA police at a Sunoco station, according to Lawson.

"We had individuals tracking the movement of the suspect that we believe, by private video, commercial video sources throughout the neighborhood," Lawson said.

On Friday, police identified the woman as 21-year-old Zhontay Capers and charged her with murder and gun offenses.

Police have not yet determined a motive for the shooting. No other passengers were struck by the gunfire.

Authorities say the investigation is still in progress and urge anyone with information to call police.

SEPTA's board opened its monthly meeting Thursday afternoon but immediately recessed until Friday, out of respect for Gribbin. According to board chair Pat Deon, general manager Leslie Richards was at the Midvale depot, supporting Gribbin's colleagues.

Meanwhile, Lawson says the entire transit agency has been in mourning. "As you could imagine, this is a very traumatic incident for the entire SEPTA family. Quite frankly, we're shell-shocked right now," he shared.

November

Newly released video of 2 inmates escaping from Philadelphia prison in May reveals multiple security failures

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 1, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — District Attorney Larry Krasner unveiled dramatic video Wednesday that shows how two inmates escaped from the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center in May. It also details the security lapses that allowed the men to get away without being noticed, even though three head counts.

It took about 90 seconds for Nasir Grant and Ameen Hurst to break out of the prison on the evening of May 7. It wasn't until more than 18 hours and three headcounts later that Philadelphia Department of Prisons Commissioner Blanche Carney said she was notified of their escape. It took authorities 10 days to track them down.

The newly released video shows Grant and Hurst opening the doors of their cells and simply walking out, strolling through a hallway. Then, with one inmate acting as a lookout through an unguarded space, they crawl out a door and into the prison yard, where they slip through a hole

in the fence that had been cut seven weeks earlier — which, Krasner said, prison guards knew about.

“There’s video of them pointing at it, staring at it, indicating an awareness of what had happened with this piece of fence,” he said.

That was just one of the ways that Krasner said prison employees showed “malfeasance.” He also said a guard walked off his post halfway through an overtime shift, leaving the pathway to the prison yard unguarded for four hours. The next guard, who was supposed to do a head count, went to sleep.

“That correctional officer seems to have interrupted her sleep only long enough to go over and punch in the prior count number,” Krasner said. “A count is supposed to be a count. A count is not supposed to be a nap.”

Krasner said Hurst and Grant did get stuck for a half-hour between two fences, where there were sensors that were supposed to alert guards when someone was in the area.

“For anyone who’s been up there, you’ll know there are a lot of Canada geese. Well about a decade ago, Canada geese were setting off the sensors. Eventually, someone decided to turn [the sensors] off. They have been turned off for more than a decade,” Krasner said.

Hurst and Grant climbed the sensor poles to get over the fence.

Krasner presented these findings to a City Council committee Wednesday.

Carney also testified that she has begun making improvements, including new locks, lights and cameras as well as more employees, but understaffing remains a big problem.

“We have been obliterated by the pandemic and we are challenged with maintaining a population that is static — 4,700-plus — with a limited workforce,” she said.

Carney said the prison currently has 867 vacancies.

Problems with Philly 911 dispatch system are the focus of City Council hearing

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 14, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia police have adopted new standards for answering 911 calls, after an address mistake last July caused police to miss an early warning that might have prevented a mass shooting in Kingsessing.

Police officials testified at a City Council hearing Tuesday on the dispatch system along with residents and dispatchers, themselves.

On Oct. 2, as groups of looters robbed Center City stores En Masse, Walt Weber told council he watched a similar situation in his West Philadelphia neighborhood — car loads of people shattering windows and walking out with merchandise.

“People were loading their cars like they were checking out from a regular store. No one was in a hurry. Clearly, no one felt that they were in any chance of getting in any trouble,” he recalled.

Weber understood because he’d been calling 911 for two hours with no police response and mounting irritation from dispatchers.

“One dispatcher said, ‘This is a very dangerous situation. What do you want police to do about it?’” he testified.

Resident Theresa Armstrong said she’d called 911 on multiple occasions when there was no response.

“I know they have their hands full but I have a sense that I’m not safe. It feels like there’s no care for the citizens,” she told Council.

Dispatcher Tomasz Rog shared the other side of the story — the view from within the 911 call center where dispatchers struggle under a nearly unbearable workload.

“Some of the numbers, in 2019, we had 346 homicides; 2020, the first year of COVID, that jumped by 40% to 500. After that, we have not been below 520. Homicides do not include shootings. That’s 2,200 to 2,500 a year. That’s not including aggravated assaults including firearms. That’s 4,000 a year,” he detailed.

“That doesn’t include rapes, robberies. Kias and Hyundais, the last two years — hopefully the city is aware of this and maybe files a civil suit against the carmakers. I dispatch, in the mornings, multiple officers to homes for reports of people breaking into Kias and Hyundais, stolen car reports in reference to Kias and Hyundais, investigate autos for abandoned Kias and Hyundais on the highway. So I understand the frustration about response time but the response time can only be controlled so much by dispatchers.”

Even the Kingsessing mass shooting, he said, was one of 20 this year.

At the same time, Rog testified, veteran dispatchers left in droves during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We’re at a point where 70% of this room has less than three years on, so they can’t even begin to understand certain instances because they haven’t processed them yet,” he said.

Police officials agreed that the department needs urgently to recruit more dispatchers and do a better job of retaining them. They recommended a higher pay scale for dispatchers and agreed with Rog that the department should find ways to promote dispatchers to higher level jobs.

Staff Inspector Joseph McBride said the department is also working to address the trauma of the job itself.

“You can tell them over and over again what a mother sounds like when their child’s been shot and that scream, that blood-curdling scream, but until you hear it live,” said McBride, “it’s very, very different.”

In the meantime, Police Commissioner John Stanford says the department has adopted new measures specifically in response to the Kingsessing shooting, in which officers were sent to North 56th Street instead of South 56th Street to investigate a report of a shooting and missed the first victim of alleged shooter Kimbrady Carriker, who is charged with returning to the neighborhood the next day and shooting four more people.

He said the greeting to 911 calls has changed from “What is your emergency?” to “What is the location of your emergency?” with a follow up question about whether the address includes a direction indicator such as North, South, East or West.

Stanford said the department is working on more changes, including pre-formatted questions, which it hopes to have up and running in Jan. 2025.

After years of restricting access, the Chester Police Department reopens its doors to residents

By Justin Udo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 15, 2023

CHESTER, Pa. (KYW Newsradio) — Police in the city of Chester have made a big change to the way the department interacts with the public since a September KYW Newsradio report revealed residents’ concerns about the police station’s doors being locked.

Chester Mayor Thaddeus Kirkland said protocols originating with the COVID-19 pandemic combined with a staff shortage led the department to keep their doors locked and to require residents to speak to officers remotely through an intercom before they could gain entry or be seen.

Chester resident and businessman David Nelson, who spoke to KYW in September, said he hasn’t had to use it, but he saw firsthand the problem it created.

“Someone was being threatened. And they needed direct access. And that was a safe haven they were looking to get into, and they couldn’t get in,” Nelson said.

Kirkland says that policy has changed, and the police commissioner has freed up some personnel — “now we have to take some of our folks out of some of the office areas and also take some people off the streets” — to keep an officer in the lobby and keep their doors open.

“It’s a good feeling, knowing that people can have an easier access to our law enforcement and be able to share some concerns or seek help,” the mayor said.

This is a move Nelson says is a step in the right direction.

“Having the access, having the police station being open for public access, for the officers being able to come down and people take the reports — it makes people feel like there’s an attentiveness to their needs, and it’s not just a pass-by — that we’ll take your report or whatever.”

Chester resident Clinton Johnson said it’s good news, knowing that he or others will no longer need to speak through an intercom, while standing in the rain or waiting in a dangerous situation, just to see an officer.

“It’s more convenient because you won’t be wasting your time going down there. Now you can get in. You ain’t got to bam on the door, push the button or none of that. The door is open. I’m telling everyone today. Come on down.

Nelson and Johnson both say they believe opening the doors to the police station goes a long way toward boosting residents' attitudes and mending relations with the police.

Atlantic City to hire 30 more full-time police officers with federal grant

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 26, 2023

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — A federal grant of \$3.75 million will allow Atlantic City to add 30 full-time officers to its police department. The city’s police chief says they will be working as school resource and traffic safety officers.

The money comes from a Community Oriented Policing Services grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Atlantic City Police Chief James Sarkos says they will be adding some school resource officers. The school resource officers, Sarkos says, are going to help build a strong relationship with students and protect them from violence as much as possible.

They are also adding traffic officers on motorcycles to patrol, with a focus on Atlantic and Pacific avenues, two of the most dangerous roads in South Jersey.

“We envision them being back on the Harley Davidson motorcycles doing traffic enforcement in Atlantic City, especially on Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Avenue, where we’ve had some issues in the past with those roadways being very dangerous,” Sarkos said.

“What we’ve seen is, it seems like, ever since COVID, individuals have been a little careless with their driving habits. We’ve seen individuals running red lights, stop signs, speeding. And that’s what those officers will be out there to enforce. Strict enforcement of traffic laws.”

The majority of the 30 positions will be filled by current class-two officers, who will be promoted to full time. But the department is looking to hire more people, and anyone interested can find more information on the Atlantic City Police Department website.

December

Philadelphia authorities identify Macy's fatal double-stabbing suspect, who faces murder and related charges

By Kristen Johanson and John McDevitt, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 4, 2023

Updated: 6 p.m., Dec. 5, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A Macy’s security guard is dead, and another is in critical condition at the hospital after police say someone suspected of stealing attacked the pair late Monday morning while the store was packed with holiday shoppers.

Acting Police Commissioner John Stanford said Monday the incident started just inside the Market Street entrance around 10:45 a.m. when members of the store’s loss prevention team stopped a man trying to steal hats and kicked him out of the store.

That man, later identified as Tyrone Tunnell, returned minutes later with a switchblade knife — looking for the two guards who confronted him.

"This man leaves the store for 13 minutes, and he returns again, specifically looking for those two security guards who escorted him out, taking a knife and plunging it into a vital part of the victim's body," Assistant District Attorney Joanne Pescatore said Tuesday.

One of the guards, Eric Harrison, 27, was stabbed in the neck and died at the hospital, police say. The other guard, a 23-year-old man, was stabbed in the face and arm.

"The second security guard that was stabbed, ... who tackled the defendant after he stabbed Mr. Harrison who brought him down — he was stabbed in the process," Pescatore said. "He is currently in critical but stable condition. He had to have surgery because of his wounds."

Police say Tunnell fled on SEPTA's Market Frankford Line, entering via the 13th Street station. SEPTA General Manager Leslie Richards said transit police were able to track Tunnell in real time, using the network of 30,000 cameras throughout the transit system.

Authorities say they were able to see him throw away the knife — which they later retrieved — and get on the subway. SEPTA transit officers were able to stop him and arrest him in Kensington.

Tunnell is charged with murder, attempted murder, assault, theft and several other related offenses. Officials say Tunnell has an extensive record of retail-related arrests and convictions, not only in Philadelphia, but also in Montgomery, Bucks and Delaware counties, as well as drug-related charges.

'You have to have a heart'

The store was packed with shoppers on Monday who said they had no idea what was going on, even after they heard an announcement over the loudspeaker.

Denisha, visiting from Dallas, wanted to catch the Macy's holiday light show and do a little shopping for her grandchild.

"And then, all of a sudden, a guy came on and he was saying, 'Macy's is currently closed. Please get to the nearest exit.'"

After the announcement, she said things got chaotic. Sales associates pulled people out of dressing rooms, the registers were shut down, and customers were told to evacuate — but no one knew exactly why.

Cheerful holiday music was playing inside and outside the department store as customers exited the building En Masse. On the sidewalk, just steps outside the Market Street entrance, between 13th and Broad streets, was a puddle of blood and a set of bloody footprints.

Flashing lights from police cars shone in the display windows mixed morbidly with the holiday decor. A reflection of the times? Tammy from West Philadelphia, who works nearby, thinks so.

“I don’t shop in Center City anymore,” she said. “Oh, at one time I did, but now — in fear of people robbing you, you know, killing you over senseless stuff.”

But Gwen from South Philadelphia thinks differently. She was on her way to Macy’s when the stabbings happened. But she said she is not going to rethink where she goes as a Center City shopper.

“No, I am not — because you can’t live your life being afraid. Oh, no. You ask God to cover you. You go on. You cannot be afraid,” she said, her eyes welling with tears.

“Because you have to have a heart. You have to feel for people. Nothing was worth losing their life over. They came to work just like you came to work today.”

Stanford echoed her sentiment.

“Just a tragic situation, right here, a few weeks before the holiday. These security guards are just doing their job. They are here to make sure that people can come to this location and shop in a safe manner,” he said.

“And the fact that you have an incident like this occur, on a Monday morning, at a major retail in Center City is troubling. At the end of the day, it is a bit concerning for our city. We have to continue to push and continue to work together.”

With the entrance to the store cordoned off with caution tape, Macy's was closed for the rest of the day. A spokesperson released a statement for the store. It reads, in part:

“We are heartbroken about the incident that took place today at Macy's Center City. The store will temporarily remain closed as we work with law enforcement on this investigation and defer any further comments about the case to them. Ensuring the safety and well-being of our customers and colleagues is always our top priority.”

2 Philadelphia police officers in recovery after being shot in Holmesburg

By Nigel Thompson and Kristen Johanson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 10, 2023

Updated on Dec. 11, 5:10 p.m.

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Two Philadelphia police officers are now recovering at their homes after being shot in Holmesburg Sunday. The suspect was also shot and is in critical condition.

Authorities say it was during a traffic stop at Welsh Road and Frankford Avenue around 2 a.m. on Sunday when a driver got out a truck and began firing on the two officers.

Police say they initially responded to a report of shots fired near Cottman Avenue and Roosevelt Boulevard. Police were informed that the suspected gunman was driving a grey pick-up truck.

According to police, a sergeant responding to the scene saw a grey Dodge Ram pick-up truck occupied by a man who matched the suspect's description. The sergeant requested additional units to conduct a traffic stop, and he turned on his lights and siren. The Dodge Ram pulled over to the right side of the road and stopped.

As the sergeant approached, the driver of the pick-up drove off, northbound, in the outer lanes of Roosevelt Boulevard.

A short time later two officers from the Highway Patrol Unit tried to conduct a vehicle investigation. Their patrol car was in front of the pick-up truck. The driver of the pick-up crashed into the back end of their patrol car, causing major damage, according to police.

As the officers got out of the car, police say, the driver of the pick-up fired on them. One officer, 31 years old and a six-year veteran of the department, was hit once in his ankle, and he sustained a graze wound to his head. The other officer, 32 years old and a nine-year veteran, was grazed across the bridge of his nose. The rear passenger window of the patrol car was shattered by bullets.

Both officers, and two other officers who pulled up behind the pick-up truck, returned fire, critically wounding the man, according to police.

The two injured officers were transported to Jefferson Torresdale Hospital, where they were placed in stable condition. Medics took the suspect to the hospital, as well. His name has not been publicly released. He is in critical condition, but further details are not known.

Police recovered the offender's gun inside the pick-up truck.

This incident was not the first time one of the officers has been shot on the job.

"Being involved in something like this one time, you know, plays on you mentally. But having to be involved in something like this again after returning from the first ordeal ... you shouldn't have to deal with this," acting Police Commissioner John Stanford told KYW media partner NBC10.

Stanford said there are two paths to recovery: physical and mental.

"When I said they would physically recover, it still is a very heavy thing mentally ... to know that you've been shot in the head, to know that you've been shot in the face," Stanford said. "And so, they'll be on a little road to recovery mentally."

Every officer who fired his service weapon has been placed on administrative duty pending the outcome of an officer-involved shooting investigation and an Internal Affairs investigation.

District Attorney Larry Krasner says his office is doing a separate investigation into the matter.

"It is totally unacceptable to the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, and we will be doing everything we can to make sure that this investigation is solid, and to make sure that all of the facts are found so that we can do what we do need to do in relation to this case," he said.

City Council rolls out Blueprint for Safer Philadelphia

By Pat Loeb, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 24, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Philadelphia City Councilman Curtis Jones rolled out his Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia last week.

The slick-looking, 160-page report has 140 recommendations that came out of a gun violence summit in the fall, ranging from combatting drill music, a very violent form of hip hop, to building a new crime lab.

Jones noted the reduction in homicides this year, which are down by about 100, and said he was optimistic the report's proposals could help further bring down the crime rate.

"... I truly believe that the ingredients to keep this city moving in the right direction are within the city's grasp ahead," he said.

Mayor-elect Cherelle Parker promised to use the report as a guide, and her incoming Police Commissioner Kevin Bethel praised the approach.

"It's aspirational but it's what we should be as an organization, what we should be as an entity — working together to make the city a safe city."

ECONOMY

October

Amtrak offering more affordable and flexible train tickets

By John McDevitt, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

October 30, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Amtrak is rolling out a streamlined fare system with more flexible and affordable rides this week.

The new Flex tickets are fully refundable if canceled and can be changed without fees. Value tickets, though not changeable, are even cheaper.

“For example, for a trip from Washington to Philadelphia, or vice versa, before this change we had one flexible ticket price — it was \$127. Now with the change, the flexible ticket starts much cheaper at \$20,” explained Amtrak spokesperson Kyle Anderson.

The new fare structure was introduced in an effort to meet the needs of customers and get more people on board.

“We’ve got plans to double ridership by 2040,” Anderson added, “and I’m excited to say that ridership on the Northeast Corridor over the past year has finally started to exceed pre-pandemic levels.”

More than 23 million customers have traveled by Amtrak so far this year.

As a train books up on the new fare structure, though, ticket prices will obviously increase, Anderson said.

“But if you are planning ahead, you are going to be able to get much cheaper, flexible tickets that are only a few dollars more than our value tickets, which are affordable and have a little less flexibility,” he said.

Amtrak also has night owl fares. On select trains from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., tickets are even cheaper than the new fares. A trip from Philly to Washington, D.C. starts as low as \$9.

November

'Laying the foundation' — Camden officials encouraged by downtown's rebound but say work far from finished

By Mike Dougherty, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 13, 2023

All this week, KYW Newsradio has stories of post-pandemic recovery with a series called "The State of Downtown." Listen on Nov. 16 at 7 p.m. for "Audacy Conversations: The State of Downtown."

CAMDEN, N.J. (KYW Newsradio) — Downtowns all over the Philadelphia region are still working to get back on their feet after the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts long underway to revitalize Camden's downtown and promote economic activity are moving in the right direction, but nobody is declaring "Mission accomplished" just yet.

Mayor Vic Carstarphen has a bit of a "Field of Dreams," if-you-build-it-they-will-come mentality about it. He says city leaders are trying to approach economic growth from all angles: reduce crime, clean up the streets, work with businesses large and small.

"You can feel, see and touch what's happening," he said.

The mayor says the city draws a lot of people to the waterfront attractions, including the Adventure Aquarium, the Freedom Mortgage Pavilion, and the Battleship New Jersey Museum and Memorial, though visitors often don't do much exploring outside of that neighborhood.

"I want them to be able to stay. I want people to be able to live, work, and play here," said Carstarphen.

Rosemarie Hicks, who owns Nuance Cafe on Market Street, said the city has been working hard, but more communication and coordination is needed.

"For example, when there's a concert or events in the city, let the folks know and do advertisement support and marketing as it relates to businesses that are downtown," Hicks said.

Attorney Alex Varghese visits the city often for work and says he enjoys grabbing lunch from new places.

“It feels safe, it feels clean and I like it,” he said.

Part of the reason why it’s clean is the city ambassadors known as the Yellow Jackets. Nate Echeverria, who runs the downtown business improvement district, says it’s a daily grind, always with the big picture in mind.

“There seems to be a new business opening every month, so I think we’re kind of seeing some of this play out,” said Echeverria.

The data backs up the positive trend. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the poverty rate is the lowest it’s been in more than a decade. And the percentage of people in the labor force is the highest it’s been in the same time.

Outside City Hall, Alina Alivez says, there have been more free, family-friendly activities that she can bring her kids to, and she appreciates how the city remains committed to safety and cleanliness.

“I see the trash men — as we speak, they’re out here with brooms cleaning up — so, I feel like there has been a great impact,” Alivez said.

There are still many vacant storefronts, and the mayor says they will keep pushing for more development and more investment from their corporate partners, and they will keep plugging away each day to help push Camden toward its full potential.

Federal government says inflation is cooling off, but shoppers say they're seeing no signs of that

By Conner Barkon, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 14, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — A key economic report has found inflation in the United States is at its slowest pace in two years. The Labor Department's data shows a broad-based easing of inflation across most goods and services. It’s an indicator the Federal Reserve may be done raising interest rates, but people say they’re still spending far too much on everyday items.

The consumer price index, which measures commonly used goods and services, was flat in October from the previous month and increased 3.2% from a year ago. The core index, which

excludes often-fluctuating food and gas, was just 0.2% last month, slightly below the pace of the previous two months.

Economists closely track core prices, which are thought to provide a good sign of inflation's likely future path. Measured year over year, core prices rose 4% in October, down from 4.1% in September, the smallest rise in two years.

"We also saw prices decline for new and used vehicles, for airfares, for lodging away from home," said Mark Zandi, chief economist with Moody's Analytics.

Zandi says there's a lot of good news in the report, but inflation is still hitting families hard.

"Things are moving in the right direction, but it's going to take a while before people really feel it and believe it," he said.

"For the typical American household, they need to spend \$680 more a month to buy the same goods and services as they did two years ago, because of the high inflation."

Cynthia Fogle from South Philadelphia says she's not only spending more when she goes shopping — she's walking away with less.

"You could used to go to the store and you could spend \$50, and you could come out with a good little bit of stuff. Now you go to the store, now you spend \$50, you're gonna have maybe two items. That don't make no sense," Fogle said.

"I don't know what their standard is for inflation but, in my book, ain't much changed."

Darnell Williams says gas and food prices still seem to be out of control.

"It's not reflected in my account, you know. When I swipe, it's the same number it was last week."

Williams says he finds it difficult to believe things are improving.

"I would love for it — hoping for it — love for it to happen, but realistically I don't have much faith," Williams said.

Indeed, economists say, even if overall price increases slow down, that doesn't mean inflation is reversing or that prices will falling back to pre-pandemic levels.

A deeper dive

What's driving inflation lower, and will it continue?

A major factor has been a big improvement in the supply of many things — workers, housing and components for manufactured goods.

Millions of Americans have come off the sidelines in the past year and flooded back into the workforce, seeking and (mostly) finding jobs. Immigration has increased, too, and with it more people looking for work. With more hires available, businesses haven't had to raise wages as much to fill jobs, thereby easing the pressure on those businesses to raise their prices.

At the same time, the largest number of new apartment buildings nationwide in decades are being completed, a trend that is helping slow rent increases. Rental costs, after a spike in September, rose at a much more gradual pace last month.

Rents and other housing costs are likely to keep coming down, economists say, as the cost of new leases continues to fall, according to real-time data providers such as Zillow. Those lower prices show up in the government's data with a lag.

And the supply chains that were badly snarled during the pandemic have pretty much unwound. An ample availability of products, parts and components help keep a lid on their prices. Automakers, for example, are having a much easier time finding semiconductors.

Partly as a result, new car prices declined last month, defying fears that the now-settled autoworkers' strike would reduce dealers' inventories and send prices higher. Used car prices, too, are down. They fell for a fifth straight month in October and have tumbled 7% from a year ago.

"We're finally undoing that and getting the benefits," Austan Goolsbee, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, said Tuesday in remarks at the Detroit Economic Club.

Separately, consumers are widely expected to pull back on spending after a blowout summer, with credit card debts — and delinquencies — rising and average savings falling. Cooler demand should force businesses to compete more on price.

Gas costs have kept falling this month, with the national average price at the pump averaging \$3.35 Tuesday, down 42 cents from a year earlier. Those price declines could push overall inflation, measured year-over-year, below 3% by December.

But aren't things still pretty expensive?

Yes, inflation is still painfully apparent in many areas. They include auto and health insurance and some groceries, like beef and bread.

The average cost of auto insurance, which jumped 1.9% just from September to October, has soared nearly 20% from a year earlier. As new and used vehicles have grown more expensive, so has the cost of insuring them. And health insurance prices rose 1.1% last month, though that was largely due to a change in the government's methodology.

But even as overall price increases slow, it doesn't mean inflation is reversing or that most prices are falling back to pre-pandemic levels. The consumer price index, the most widely followed measure of inflation, remains about 20% higher than it was before the pandemic.

Milk prices, which have ticked down compared with the past year, are still 23% higher than they were pre-pandemic. Ground beef prices are 31% higher. Gas prices, despite a steep decline from a year ago, are still 46% higher than before the pandemic.

Many economists say a key reason why so many Americans hold a gloomy view of the economy despite very low unemployment and steady hiring is that these prices — on items that they buy regularly — remain much higher than they were three years ago.

Are paychecks keeping up?

Barring a deep and painful recession, prices aren't going to fall to their pre-pandemic levels. Instead, economists say, Americans' wages need to rise to help pay for the higher costs.

Wages and salaries trailed inflation in 2021 and 2022, exacerbating the pain of higher prices. Yet this year, as inflation has cooled, average pay has pulled ahead of inflation. By most measures, average paychecks, adjusted for inflation, are back to where they were before the pandemic.

Yet that essentially means that Americans, on average, have had scant real pay increases compared with three years ago. And while average pay may be back to pre-pandemic levels, many people have received below-average pay raises and are still behind inflation.

How might the Fed respond?

The Fed will likely welcome Tuesday's report as evidence of further progress toward getting inflation back to its target of 2%. Fed officials, led by Chair Jerome Powell, are considering

whether their benchmark rate is high enough to quell inflation or if they need to impose another increase in coming months.

Powell had said last week that Fed officials were “not confident” that rates were sufficiently high to tame inflation. The Fed has raised its benchmark interest rate 11 times in the past year and a half, to about 5.4%, the highest level in 22 years.

But the central bank has raised its key rate just once since May. Since its last meeting on Nov. 1, a government report showed that hiring cooled in October compared with September, and wage growth slowed, thereby easing pressure on companies to raise prices in the coming months.

Adams, the Comerica economist, said he thinks the Fed’s most likely next move will be to cut rates, likely by mid-2024.

The prospect that the Fed may end its rate hike campaign and eventually cut rates ignited a stock market rally Tuesday. The Dow Jones industrial average soared nearly 1.4% in mid-afternoon trading. The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note fell to 4.46%, down from nearly 4.6%, reflecting investors’ expectations that borrowing rates will decline.

The Fed’s rate hikes have increased the costs of mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and many forms of business borrowing, part of a concerted drive to slow growth and cool inflation pressures. The central bank is trying to achieve a “soft landing” — raising borrowing costs just enough to curb inflation without tipping the economy into a deep recession.

“Things are proceeding in a way that is very consistent with what (the Fed) would want to see,” said Eric Winograd, chief economist at AB Global, an asset management firm. “They look like they are on course to generate a soft landing. There’s no guarantee that they will actually manage to accomplish it. But right now, that’s the story that the data are telling.”

Despite inflation, Philly-area shoppers expect to spend more on the holidays this year than last, survey finds

By Nina Baratti and Vik Raghupathi, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 24, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Ready or not, the holiday shopping season is upon us.

The impacts of inflation had many retailers worried about whether consumers would be spending much, even with significant deals in place. Despite inflation hardships, a recent survey says shoppers are still planning to spend a pretty penny.

According to a Deloitte survey, shoppers in the Northeast region of the U.S. are expected to spend, on average, \$1,792 for the holidays. Philadelphia-area holiday spending is projected much higher, at \$1,842 — up about 20% from last year.

Even while keeping the spirit of giving alive, shoppers are tightening their budgets by hunting for deals. Deloitte found that 70% of Philadelphia-area shoppers expect to spend more this year but plan to budget about the same amount as last year.

“People are watching their pennies and they’re trying to get the most bang for their buck this holiday season,” said Sheri Lambert, associate professor of marketing at Temple University.

There’s a nostalgia factor in the gift-giving season too. People buy toys, electronics or other items they wanted when they were younger. “Mattel is getting a lot of halo effects from the ‘Barbie’ movie in July,” she noted.

Some shopping deals actually started in October. Others began as early as Labor Day. Consumers took advantage of both.

“Truly, people have started spending earlier this year,” said Lambert. “And I think it is this whole idea of spreading it out — it doesn’t seem so painful.”

Jenna Pogorzelski, audit managing director at Deloitte in Philadelphia, said Black Friday and Cyber Monday are making a big comeback.

“Seventy-six percent of shoppers plan to shop Thanksgiving week as a whole,” she said, “and that’s compared to 52% last year, which really shows that folks are actively looking for deals to make sure they’re making spirits brighter without making their wallets much lighter.”

Philly shop owners gearing up for Small Business Saturday

By Nigel Thompson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

November 24, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — It’s one of the busiest shopping weekends of the year, and while big chains are offering some major deals, small businesses are about to take center stage.

When Ibn Craddock thinks of P's & Q's, the family-owned clothing store and brand he helps manage on South Street, he sees a home for many of its clientele.

“We are kinda like a living room for South Street. People just come by and relax,” Craddock said.

He says it's for reasons like that that supporting small businesses on days like Black Friday and Small Business Saturday is so important.

“I think with a small business, they have their consumer more in mind than with a bigger business. Obviously, it's a lot more personable,” Craddock said.

“I just am happy that people are thinking about it. The more that it becomes part of the cultural zeitgeist to support a small business, I'm here for it.”

Jess, manager of DreamEerie, a store down the street from P's and Q's that sells vintage home decor with a gothic flair, echoed Craddock's sentiment saying it's the small businesses that keep the big chains honest with what they charge.

“The big businesses, they'll offer you deals right now, but as soon as they've shut out all of the competition, they're gonna raise the prices.”

Owners encourage shoppers to also look for retailers that are volunteer-run, nonprofit, or women-owned.

For more ways to support small businesses this holiday season, [click here](#).

December

Delco property owners could see a property tax increase next year

By Justin Udo, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 6, 2023

DELAWARE COUNTY, PA (KYW Newsradio) — Delaware County property owners could see a tax increase next year, as officials are proposing a 5% increase as part of next year's budget.

Delaware County's proposed 2024 budget is a little more than \$353 million, according to Chief Administrative Officer Marc Woolley.

Woolley says it has five main objectives:

- Support Delaware County's five-year Capital Improvement Program to sustain and improve infrastructure and physical assets.
- Continue to make improvements and document processes for internal support functions
- Increase accuracy and precision and budget forecasting and management
- Support critical core services

- Recruit, retain, and invest in staff

Woolley told council Tuesday this budget is a realization they must reduce their reliance on COVID-19 relief funds.

"These one-time revenue infusions, while critical in years past in shoring up our bottom line and lost revenues, have sunsetted," Woolley said.

He says that's why he's advocating for a property tax increase that would go towards things like deferred building maintenance, which officials say totals about \$300 million.

Woolley says some properties have gone decades without proper upgrades.

A budget approval meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 13.

Beware of card draining this holiday season

By Kristen Johanson, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 11, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — Pennsylvania Attorney General Michelle Henry says a new scam is targeting holiday shoppers buying gift cards.

According to Henry, scammers pull information like PINs from un-purchased gift cards hanging on store shelves. Then, once a store-goer buys it and it's activated, the scammer uses the information they jotted down to almost immediately purchase things on it, leaving the gift-card buyer with nothing.

Henry says this scam has been reported more than 100 times at a grocery store in eastern Pennsylvania and is now happening in other parts of the state and country.

Henry advises that those buying gift cards inspect them for tampering, make sure the scratch coding is untouched, and only purchase them if the card is sealed in some way.

She also recommends keeping the receipt.

If you feel you've been a target of card draining, report it to the company you purchased from, as well as the Attorney General's office.

Just how much did prices increase this year?

By Conner Barkon, KYW Newsradio

KYW Newsradio

December 18, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (KYW Newsradio) — It's costing us less to stock up on some holiday essentials compared to last year, but prices in several categories have increased.

Overall, 65% of items increased in price — an improvement from 2022 when 88% got more expensive, according to financial company Bankrate.

Bankrate Analyst Sarah Foster says many consumers become frustrated when they hear inflation is slowing while they are still paying more than what they're used to for basic items.

“I mean, it's very salient to them how much it used to cost to fill up their gas tank, or how much a carton of eggs used to cost before the pandemic, and I think a lot of Americans do kind of remember that most, whereas economists are looking at annual inflation rates because they want to know if inflation is slowing.”

Alcohol, flour, and tickets to concerts and sporting events are just some of the things we are paying more for this year.

The cost of flour is up 3% according to Bankrate. Alcohol people buy for their homes is up 1.5% from a year ago, and if you catch yourself out at a restaurant, the cost is about 5.2% more.

Movie and concert tickets are about 4.5% more expensive than last year, and admission to sporting events is up 16.5%.

Last year's highest-inflated item was eggs — this year, it's the least.

“If you were gonna zoom out to pre-pandemic levels, they're still up about 25% since then,” Foster said. “So it's one of those instances of how egg prices are not rising as quickly as they once were, but they're still more expensive than they were before the pandemic.”

Foster says the economic outlook is strong.

“Slowing inflation is expected to happen throughout the rest of next year, too,” she said, “and so hopefully Americans can continue to at least catch up from a wage standpoint where I think that really is kind of the point when they'll start to feel better.”

Here's what happens to the billions of gift cards that go unspent each year

By The Associated Press

KYW Newsradio

December 25, 2023

Americans are expected to spend nearly \$30 billion on gift cards this holiday season, according to the National Retail Federation. Most gift cards will be redeemed. But many — tens of billions of dollars' worth — wind up forgotten or unused.

That's when the life of a gift card gets more complicated, with expiration dates or inactivity fees that can vary by state.

Here's what to know about the gift cards you're giving — or getting:

ADVERTISING

LOVED, BUT LOST

After clothing, gift cards will be the most popular present this holiday season. Nearly half of Americans plan to give them, according to the National Retail Federation.

But many will remain unspent.

Gift cards get lost or forgotten, or recipients hang on to them for a special occasion. In a July survey, the consumer finance company Bankrate found that 47% of U.S. adults had at least one unspent gift card or voucher with an average value of \$187. That's a total of \$23 billion.

ADVERTISING

THE GIFT OF TIME

Under a federal law that went into effect in 2010, a gift card can't expire for five years from the time it was purchased or from the last time someone added money to it. Some state laws require an even longer period. In New York, for instance, any gift card purchased after Dec. 10, 2022, can't expire for nine years.

Differing state laws are one reason many stores have stopped using expiration dates altogether, says Ted Rossman, a senior industry analyst at Bankrate.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

While it may take gift cards years to expire, experts say it's still wise to spend them quickly. Some cards — especially generic cash cards from Visa or MasterCard — will start accruing inactivity fees if they're not used for a year, which eats away at their value. Inflation also makes cards less valuable over time. And if a retail store closes or goes bankrupt, a gift card could be worthless.

Perhaps consider clearing out your stash on National Use Your Gift Card Day, a five-year-old holiday created by a public relations executive and now backed by multiple retailers. The next one is Jan. 20, 2024.

OR SELL IT

If you have a gift card you don't want, one option is to sell it on a site like CardCash or Raise. Rossman says resale sites won't give you face value for your cards, but they will typically give 70 to 80 cents per dollar.

THE MONEY TRAIL

What happens to the money when a gift card goes unused? It depends on the state where the retailer is incorporated.

When you buy a gift card, a retailer can use that money right away. But it also becomes a liability; the retailer has to plan for the possibility that the gift card will be redeemed.

Every year, big companies calculate “breakage,” which is the amount of gift card liability they believe won’t be redeemed based on historical averages. For some companies, like Seattle-based Starbucks, breakage is a huge profit-driver. Starbucks reported \$212 million in revenue from breakage in 2022.

But in at least 19 states — including Delaware, where many big companies are incorporated — retailers must work with state unclaimed property programs to return money from unspent gift cards to consumers. Money that isn’t recovered by individual consumers is spent on public service initiatives; in the states’ view, it shouldn’t go to companies because they haven’t provided a service to earn it.

CLAIM IT

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have unclaimed property programs. Combined, they return around \$3 billion to consumers annually, says Misha Werschkul, the executive director of the Washington State Budget and Policy Center.

Werschkul says it can be tricky to find the holders of unspent gift cards, but the growing number of digital cards that name the recipient helps. State unclaimed property offices jointly run the website [MissingMoney.com](https://www.missingmoney.com), where consumers can search by name for any unclaimed property they’re owed, including cash from gift cards.

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Bridging Philly Q4 October, November & December 2023

October 08, 2023

Breast Cancer Survivors' Stories of Hope

[Rebroadcast from 8.05.2023]

Host Racquel Williams and four breast cancer survivors share their unique journeys from the terrifying first time they were told of their diagnosis, through the exhausting treatments, to mentoring new patients. A doctor, also a survivor, explains different types of cancers, dispels treatment myths, and urges securing the right medical team. The group describes their struggles juggling family and work commitments, fears of recurrence, and triumphs by helping others.

October 14, 2023

The Power of Philly Sports Fans

We celebrate the power of Philadelphia sports fans united by their shared love for their teams despite varying views of politics, religion, and race. KYW Newsradio sports reporter Dave Uram dispels the negative reputation of Eagles fans, and shares superfan anecdotes and common Game Day superstitions. Then, "The Power of Fun" with the original Phillie Phanatic Dave Raymond, who shares the mascot's origin story, and how he fights hopelessness by focusing on the positive things in his life.

October 21, 2023

Mayoral candidates David Oh and Cherelle Parker

Mayoral candidates Democrat Cherelle Parker and Republican David Oh share their visions to improve public safety and raise Philadelphians' quality of life. They both share stories of humble beginnings that inform their future policy decisions. Election Day to choose the city's 100th mayor is November 7th

October 28, 2023

Live to See the Day | What Philly Wants in their 100th Mayor

Author and sociologist Nikhil Goyal followed three students from El Centro de Estudiantes, an alternative, last-chance public high school in North Philly. The stories of their struggles with the juvenile justice system, poverty, and housing insecurity – and finally earning their high school diplomas in the face of great odds - are featured in the new book, "Live to See the Day: Coming of Age in American Poverty." Then, what do voters from different neighborhoods want from their 100th mayor?

November 4, 2023

STEM Games for Kids | Olympic Gold Medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey

Meet Steve the Legacy: a Philly-based inventor who develops STEM-inspired games to help kids develop their coordination and strategy skills that he creates in his living room factory. He shares how other amateur inventors can take an 'ah ha' moment to the next level by believing in themselves. Then, Olympic gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey came through Philadelphia recently to inspire over 200 elementary students at Drexel University's Vidas Field Day and give away copies of her children's book, "Running for the Gold: Connecting Kids to Dreams."

November 11, 2023

John Legend | PA Cannabis | Murals & Movement

The new HBO documentary Stand Up & Shout: Songs From a Philly High School explores the transformative power of music and how an arts education can be a source of hope and healing. Executive producer, Grammy award-winning musician John Legend - with executive producer Mike Jackson, and director Amy Schatz - worked with teenagers from Philly's Hill-Freedman World Academy to learn how to write, compose, produce, and perform original songs.

Then, why is it taking so much time for Pennsylvania to legalize adult-use marijuana? And will there be business opportunities for everyone? We talk to Cherron Perry-Thomas, co-founder of Diasporic Alliance of Cannabis Opportunities, about how the commonwealth is behind many states in Canna business development.

Finally, choreographer Marguerite Hemmings' Mural Arts public art initiative - Our Land Our Movement - helps kids connect their bodies to the outside through gardening and dancing.

November 18, 2023

Focus on Fathers | Wicked turns 20

The Focus on Fathers parenting education program shows new fathers how to have positive relationships with their kids. The "fathers to the fathers" try to fill in the gaps of men raised without a strong male father figure with child development education, job readiness, and mental health awareness with remote and in-person classes. Then, the Broadway show Wicked is celebrating its 20th year with a national tour stop at the Kimmel Cultural Center. The musical is about The Wizard of Oz's witches' relationship before and after Dorothy drops down in the Land of Oz. PA & NJ-raised actors Celia Hottenstein and Olivia Valli share how playing the characters has helped them to be humble and more comfortable being themselves.

November 25, 2023

Grief, gratitude & the holidays | A WWII veteran looks back on his service

The holidays bring families together but often remind us of those missing at the table. How can we prepare for these difficult times? Naila Francis, a death doula and grief guide, recommends the bereaved give themselves a break, and Ravina Daphtary describes an art installation in Philly's Rail Park where visitors can "call" a lost loved one on a disconnected rotary phone. Then, 100-year-old Willow Grove-born Benjamin Berry remembers

being stationed in England in the U.S. Army at 19 - to prepare and be a part of the Battle of the Bulge.

December 2, 2023

Holiday Manners & Etiquette | The Colored Girls Museum

Are your table manners ready for holiday parties in friends' homes or out in restaurants? From knowing who and what to tip to bringing a gift to a host, Founder and Director of the Delaware Valley School of Etiquette, Dorlisa Goodrich Young, and longtime hospitality worker and artist, Jere Edmonds, guide us through the skills to avoid social embarrassment - so you'll be invited back next year. Then, an update on the future of Germantown's The Colored Girls Museum with Founder and Executive Director Vashti DuBois, who is waiting on a zoning variance to continue her work in the community.

December 9, 2023

Aging Together - The Arden's The BFG

The Golden Years are not as bright as promised. Many seniors have reduced income, and health issues, are often full-time caretakers for their grandchildren, and increasingly experience social isolation and loneliness. For 40 years, the Philadelphia non-profit SOWN has helped older adults age together with peer support so that no one has to be alone. Then, The Arden Theater Company stages a family-friendly adventure through Roald Dahl's BFG (Big Friendly Giant), in which an eight-year-old girl learns about dreams and friendship.

December 16, 2023

Food As Medicine | Philly's Hip Hop Pioneers

How do the chronically ill access the proper nutrition to get better? The Philadelphia non-profit Manna prepares and delivers medically tailored meal plans to patients with everyday conditions like cancer, heart disease, and more. CEO and dietician Sue Daugherty, Thomas Jefferson University's Dr. Kristin Rising, and a client who has thrived with their services describe the transformative health benefits of knowing how to eat for a particular ailment. Then, Philadelphia Inquirer fashion columnist Elizabeth Wellington reminds us of how Philly hip-hop pioneers shaped 50 years of the evolving culture.

December 23, 2023

Philly Holiday Food Traditions | Black & Brown-owned small biz shopping

Have you eaten catfish and waffles? Turtle soup? As we now enjoy an enormous variety of food, these dishes are part of Philly's culinary history. Origins of the city's food traditions are rooted in the cultural melting pot that includes the African diaspora and the Pennsylvania Dutch. Chef and Culinary Educator Joy Parham and Elwood Restaurant Chef and Owner Adam Diltz share traditional New Year's traditions and explain why the cultural foods we eat connect us to the regions in which we live. Then, we take a holiday shopping tour of some of West Philly and Germantown's Black-and Brown-owned businesses.

December 30, 2023

A look back on 2023

Bridging Philly Host and Executive Producer Racquel Williams, “Shara in the City” Reporter Shara Dae Howard and Producer Patty McMahon look back at their favorite guests and topics from 2023. Some segments include Cambodian refugee-turned-Secret-Service officer Leth Oun, The West Philly Dig, and their trip to Ocean City, NJ to meet the families behind the book *The West Side: Ocean City in True Color*.

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I’m Listening - Q4 October, November & December 2023

I’m Listening / October / Children's Mental Health

October 22, 2023

Guest: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Contact: David O'Leary, Host

Category: Children's Mental Health

Audacy host **David O'Leary** is shining a light on youth suicide and mental health during October’s Children's Mental Health Month along with representatives from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention **Dr. Christine Moutier** and **Victor Armstrong**.

During David’s conversation with Christine, the doctor really stressed that children’s mental health, according to the surgeon general is in a “state of emergency.” Calling it a “crisis” from a public health standpoint that can show up “in some different ways.” Pointing out that it gives us “as a society” a lot of “room for putting into action what we’re talking about more and more.”

“We understand that mental health is real, it’s as important as physical health. But what does that look like when a child begins to kind of fall off their developmental trajectory in terms of their physical and mental health growth,” Dr. Moutier asked. “So that’s how I like to look at it with kids, they’re on a trajectory of growth and change and that’s what partly makes it a little more challenging for us as parents and teachers and coaches.”

Audacy's *I'm Listening* initiative aims to encourage those who are dealing with mental health issues to understand they are not alone. If you or anyone you know is struggling with depression

or anxiety, know that someone is always there. Additionally, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 988. Find a full list of additional resources [here](#).

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