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*March 23, 2022*

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**VO-TECH STUDENTS HELP CITY OF WILMINGTON**



**SPELLING BEE KING IS BILLY SCIALLA**



**FAIRNESS IN WOMEN'S SPORTS ACT**

*Photo credit: Delaware Greenways*

*Community*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**





# VO-TECH STUDENTS TO BE PAID TO HELP REVITALIZE WILMINGTON

BY JAREK RUTZ

New Castle County Vo-Tech students will swap their pencils for screwdrivers as part of the effort to revitalize the city of Wilmington. The students will be involved in the city’s \$50 million residential redevelopment and stabilization plan funded through the American Rescue Plan Act.

The city has given a \$300,000 grant to New Castle County Vocational Technical School District to provide the students. The Vo-Techs—which include Delcastle, Hodgson, Howard, and St. Georges—are now recruiting 25 student workers, aged 16-24, to combine academics with a paid job.

As of now, the students must attend one of the schools. Starting in year two, the qualifications will expand to include any students living in Wilmington, said Colleen Conaty, the liaison between the schools and the city.

The selected students will be paid \$12 to \$15 an hour, she said.

The project students will work special schedules. Some will be on the job two weeks every month, with classes the other two weeks. The Vo-Techs call that a “2-week-about” schedule. To make it work, companies will hire two or more workers, so there will always be some students on the job and some in class. Other workers will have a day-parting schedule, being on the job in the morning and taking classes in the afternoon.

“Construction companies really want students full time and early in the morning,” said New Castle Vo-Techs Superintendent Joseph Jones, “so a 2-week-about schedule works out perfectly for students in the construction field.”

Conaty says the district plans to have the 25 students selected by the end of May and working by the start of

summer. Student workers will be paid based on factors such as certifications, credits earned and placement status in their apprenticeship.

The initial \$300,000 budget will pay Conaty’s salary as well as provide student resources such as certifications, including a GED, apprenticeship materials, and any training that’s needed. If the students need tutoring or a counselor, the grant money will cover it.

The budget also is expected to pay for uniforms, tools, boots, transportation costs to and from a project site and other necessities for the 25 students to work effectively on the revitalization project.

She expects additional funding as the program continues in years two and three. “I have been given every indication that the program will grow and expand in both funding and number of workers,” she said.

Students will not be required to take additional courses to train them for the revitalization work, Jones said. They will be expected to apply what they already learned in school and their hands-on training, a key part of most Vo-Tech classes.

In those schools, students select one of six “clusters” that dictate their career training and course selection. The clusters are also referred to as “career pathways”—business, communication and computers; construction technologies; health services; public and consumer services; science, energy and drafting technologies; and transportation.

Career pathways are a concept that many other schools in Delaware have recently adopted for topics such as teaching.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE](#)

# WILMINGTON PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT TO FOCUS ON REIMAGINED DOWNTOWN

BY BETSY PRICE

A sidewalk photography exhibit opening Friday by four Wilmington photographers offers a series of portraits capturing the creative and vibrant downtown culture. Showing work in “Downtown Reimagined” exhibit are Joe del Tufo, Andre Wright Jr., Sara A. Crawford and Shakira Hunt.

The artwork is installed at 417 N. Market St., and an opening for the sidewalk exhibit will take place Friday, March 25, at 4 p.m.

The sidewalk exhibit will be accompanied by a speaker series at MKT Place Gallery, during which the artists will share the inspiration behind their submissions. Dates and times for that will be announced later.

Following the unveiling, guests are invited to join the artists for a reception at **The Knight’s Bar** across the street at The Queen (500 N Market Street).

“Downtown Reimagined” is a part of The Buccini/Pollin Group’s ongoing efforts to support the downtown

arts community and provide exposure to local artists. This is the second sidewalk art exhibit organized by BPG Cares.

In 2020, BPG provided retail space for the **Storefront Mural Arts Project**, which connected local artists with businesses boarding up their windows after riots occurred in downtown Wilmington.

Instead of trashing the murals, BPG, **Flux Creative Consulting** and **Moonloop Photography**, created a sidewalk gallery to display all of them for public viewing at The Residences at Mid-town Park. They also recently went on display at the Longview Museum of Fine Arts in Longview, Texas as part of the “Addressing the Moment: The Artist’s Voice” **exhibit**.

MKT Place Gallery, at 200 W. 9th St., features monthly exhibits curated by Sara A. Crawford of **The Original Coloure Collective**.

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# MORE PROOF OF SPRING: BLUE POPPIES BLOOM AT LONGWOOD

BY BETSY PRICE

The blue poppies are blooming at Longwood Gardens, one of the many hallmarks of spring in the Mid-Atlantic.

The sky-blue flowers, which are native to the high elevations of the Himalayan Mountains, are forced into bloom by Longwood horticulturists for the annual display. The flowers are rarely cultivated outside their native habitat.

The cultivar, *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm,' produces large flowers that average four inches in diameter. They will begin to fade just as daffodils, tulips and flowering trees begin to color the outdoor landscape at Longwood, which is in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania.

The display is included in the gardens' ticket prices. For timed tickets and reservations, go to [www.longwoodgardens.org](http://www.longwoodgardens.org).



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# BISHOP KOENIG TO JOIN POPE FRANCIS IN PRAYER FOR UKRAINE, RUSSIA

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

In response to an invitation from Pope Francis, William Koenig, Bishop of the Diocese of Wilmington, will join in a prayer of peace for the consecration and entrustment of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Koenig, along with bishops from around the world, will join Pope Francis in the special prayer at 12 p.m. on Friday, March 25, followed by the 12:10 mass at the Cathedral of St. Peter in Wilmington.

According to [The Pillar](#), a Catholic media project, consecration means setting something apart, dedicating it to a sacred purpose.

“The word is used often in Catholicism: churches are consecrated, sacred vessels are consecrated...men and women’s religious orders are called ‘consecrated life,’ and ‘consecration’ is used to describe the sacramental confection of the Eucharist.”

There is also a Catholic devotional custom of private consecration to Christ through Mary, The Pillar explains, by a set of devotional prayers.

On Sunday, March 20, Pope Francis denounced Russia’s “violent aggression against Ukraine” as a “senseless massacre where every day is repeated atrocities” for which “there is no justification.” He said “all the international actors” have a duty to “truly commit themselves to bring an end to this repugnant war.”

“Sadly the violent aggression against Ukraine does not slow down,” Pope Francis said.

It’s not clear whether the Pope will appear via live stream on March 25 and the text of his prayer has not been released as of Monday.

The prayer service and mass at the Cathedral, located at Sixth and N. West Streets in the historic Quaker Hill section of Wilmington, are open to the public and will be live streamed on the Diocese of Wilmington’s [YouTube channel](#).

The Catholic Diocese of Wilmington was established in 1868 and comprises 56 parishes, 18 missions and 27 schools serving the State of Delaware and the nine counties of Maryland’s Eastern Shore. More information about the diocese is available [HERE](#).



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*Photo by Jonathan Borba for Pexels*



*Food & Dining*

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# WINE-BY-MAIL COULD SOON BE LEGAL

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Delawareans could soon have wine shipped directly to their homes under a bill released from the House Economic Development Committee Tuesday.

**House Bill 210**, sponsored by Rep. Mike Smith, R-Pike Creek, would permit wineries in the United States to obtain a license to ship wine directly to consumers so long as it is done through a common carrier like FedEx or UPS.

The bill would limit the amount of wine a producer could sell to a single household to three nine-liter cases per year. Direct shippers of wine would be restricted from shipping more than 1,800 nine-liter cases of wine to Delaware consumers annually. The proposal would require a person 21 years of age to sign for a wine delivery.

Current law requires wine shipments to be delivered to a wholesaler, who is then able to deliver the wine to a consumer by a retail license. This is known as the “three-tier system.”

Opponents to House Bill 210 say the three-tier system works—it gives Delawareans access to the wine they desire while benefitting local alcohol distributors who are required to complete the transactions.

Supporters argue that the proposal would have little impact on those businesses’ bottom lines. Forty-six states allow for direct-to-consumer wine shipments and local distributors and wholesalers in those states have not reported significant losses as a result of the practice. While the laws vary in those 46 states, only Delaware, Mississippi, Rhode Island and Utah outright prohibit direct shipment.

Delaware wine stores do not have to compete with gas stations or grocery stores, either—unlike in nearby Pennsylvania and Virginia.

There are also those who do not support the bill because they don’t think it goes far enough.

“While the National Association of Wine Retailers believes the intent to bring Delaware’s wine laws into the 21st century and give the state’s residents more wine choices is laudable, it laments that the proposed wine shipping law falls well short of giving Delaware wine lovers the access to wines they desire,” the national advocacy group said shortly after the bill’s introduction.

The bill would still prohibit direct wine shipments from out-of-state wine stores, specialty wine retailers, wine-of-the-month clubs, or wine auction houses, while only giving Delaware residents access to domestically made wines shipped by wineries.”

According to the association, the federal government must approve all wines sold in the United States, both domestically-made and imported. Over the past three years, 336,000 wines were approved for sale. 213,000 of those wines were imported. Under House Bill 210, imported wines could not be shipped directly to consumers.

Smith said during the committee meeting that the bill was the result of discussions and negotiations with stakeholders. Efforts to reach him for comment Monday were unsuccessful. The bill will now advance to the House floor for consideration.





# 302 BEER DRINKERS' CHOICE AWARDS TO CROWN 'DELAWARE'S BEST BEER' ON APRIL 3

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

The 302 Beer Drinkers' Choice Awards will return to Crooked Hammock's flagship brewpub in Lewes on Sunday, April 3. Every brewery in the state is invited to compete in the event, which organizers said is "known for its sudsy silliness and refined debauchery."

"Delaware's brewery scene has exploded by leaps and bounds in recent years and we wanted to create a one-of-a-kind festival that promotes our shared commitment to the 302," said Crooked Hammock owner Rich Garrahan.

"Every single brewery in the state is welcome back and we challenge those who haven't reached out to get off

the sidelines," he said. "Don't be scared. It's more about connecting with each other than winning or losing."

But it does have a great deal to do with winning, too. Both brewers and attendees will vie for a number of awards, including "Fan Favorite Beer, Most Unique Beer, Best Brewery Costume, Best Drinkers Costume and Best Edible Necklace"—whatever that means.

Guests will have the chance to vote online and democratically pick winners; of the people, by the people, for the people in the never-ending quest to crown Delaware's "Best Beer."

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*Photo from Getty Images*



*Government*

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# CHIEFS OPPOSE NEW VERSION OF POLICE BILL OF RIGHTS

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Police officers are not on board with a revised bill to amend Delaware’s Law Enforcement Officer Bill of Rights. The **bill** would open police misconduct records for the public to view and create two tiers of community review boards, each with the power to examine law enforcement agencies’ handling of officer misconduct cases and make recommendations for improvements.

Police misconduct records would also be able to be used in court proceedings and police agencies would be barred from destroying or discarding those records.

In a statement after the substitute bill was filed, Sen. Tizzy Lockman, D-Wilmington, said a “culture of secrecy and ambiguity...has allowed hatred and fear of law enforcement to grow in our state” and argued that the legislation will put “oversight into those agencies in the hands of the people, where it belongs.”

Patrick Ogden, president of the Delaware Association of Chiefs of Police, said in an op-ed published Tuesday that his biggest concern is that law enforcement would be excluded from being voting members on civilian review boards. “Every single professional board in the state of Delaware includes practitioners from the industry,” the chief said. “To exclude members of the law enforcement community flies in the face of working together to garner trust, transparency and accountability.”

Ogden also cited concerns relating to the lack of clarity around civilian review boards and questioned: “how they will work from a sensible and realistic perspective.”

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# Cancer isn't waiting for COVID-19 to be over.

One in three Delawareans will get cancer. Unfortunately, many have put off their cancer screenings in the past year. Screenings detect cancer early, when it's most treatable. If you've skipped or canceled a screening due to the pandemic — for breast, cervical, colon, lung, or prostate cancer — don't wait one more day. **Call your health care provider to schedule your cancer screenings today.**

If you don't have a provider, we can help. If you are uninsured or underinsured, you may be eligible for free screenings. To learn more about eligibility requirements and recommended cancer screenings, and other information, please visit [HealthyDelaware.org/Cancer](https://HealthyDelaware.org/Cancer).

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- Beebe Healthcare: 302-291-4380

DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES  
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# BILL TO REMOVE DOUBLE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENT PASSES SENATE

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

A bill to require Delaware cities and towns to use the state’s voter registration system for local elections passed in the state Senate Tuesday. Under [Senate Bill 233](#), voters who live within town limits would be able to vote in municipal elections without having to register separately with both the state and the town.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Tizzy Lockman, D-Wilmington, passed along party lines. Fourteen Democrats voted for the bill and seven Republicans voted against it.

Proponents say the bill will increase voter turnout and eliminate a problem wherein voters arrive to vote in municipal elections only to be turned away because they did not know they had to register with the town.

Claire Snyder-Hall, executive director of Common Cause Delaware, said the bill will eliminate the unnecessary and redundant requirements that keep citizens from voting. “Unless a person has been explicitly informed about the double registration requirement, any reasonable person would expect that being regis-

tered to vote with the state of Delaware would qualify them to vote in their own town’s election,” Snyder-Hall said. “That person would likely be shocked to discover the opposite when arriving to vote in a municipal election. And by then it would be too late to register.”

“It’s long past time to fix this and ensure that all Delaware voters are able to have their voices heard in municipal elections, regardless of the zip code.”

Only one Republican cited his justification for opposing the bill: Sen. Gerald Hocker, R-Ocean View. “I have nine incorporated towns in the 20th Senate District,” Hocker said. “I did contact them and I didn’t have any of the nine towns in favor, so I will be voting ‘no’ on the bill.” Hocker did not detail the concerns he heard from the towns in his district.

If passed by the House of Representatives and signed by the governor, the law will take effect in July 2024.



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# TENANT RIGHT TO COUNSEL BILL RELEASED FROM HOUSE COMMITTEE

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

A bill to guarantee tenants the right to legal counsel in eviction proceedings was released from the House Housing and Community Affairs Committee Wednesday. [Senate Substitute 1 for Senate Bill 101](#) will now advance to the House of Representatives for consideration. Among other things, the bill:

- Creates a right to legal representation for renters facing eviction whose household income is lower than 200% of federal poverty guidelines;
- Places coordination of the program within the Delaware Attorney General's Office, who will contract with appropriate legal service organizations to provide representation in proceedings covered by the bill;
- Requires landlords to provide notice of the right to representation at certain designated intervals of a tenancy and in eviction proceedings; and,
- Creates an Eviction Diversion Program designed to help resolve payment or other issues once a landlord files for eviction.

Proponents say the bill would create parity with landlords who are currently able to be represented in eviction proceedings by non-lawyer advocates, or Form 50 agents. Under the bill, legal aid groups would be given funding to provide tenants with qualified tenant advocates. Those advocates would not be lawyers, but would be well versed in eviction law and would be able to guide evictees through the process.

The bill would create a system wherein the state's three legal aid groups could provide qualified tenant advocates to evictees free of charge, so long as the tenant falls within 200% of the poverty line.

Landlords and landlord interest groups on Wednesday pleaded with committee members not to release the bill. They don't want to evict their tenants, many of them said, and only evict tenants when they have no other choice. Eviction is a lengthy and expensive process, they said, and landlords incur additional expenses finding new tenants and rehabilitating properties in between tenants, not to mention the lost income that occurs after tenants are evicted.

"We're in the business of housing," said Debra Burgos, president of the Delaware Apartment Association. "We know that it's a very important business. I think people often forget that we're all on the same side—we want tenants in safe and affordable houses. That's what we're in the business to do."

Burgos said that bills like Senate Bill 101 force landlords to spend more money on lawyers and that cost ultimately gets passed down to tenants in the form of rent increases.

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# STATE REVENUES STABLE FOR 2022, BUT WORRIES FOR 2023, 2024

BY BETSY PRICE

Buoyed by personal and corporate income taxes, as well as real estate transfer taxes, predicts of Delaware's 2022 revenues, and therefore its state budget, remain stable. But state fiscal experts expect the financial good times to slow as the state enters its fiscal year 2023 on July 1.

With three months left in the 2022 budget, the Delaware Economic and Financial Advisory Council voted Monday to continue to approve the spending of the \$5,050 billion budget. It also said an additional \$206 million in revenue had come into state coffers since its December meeting. The state surplus remains at more than \$823 million, thanks to taxes and COVID-19 relief cash.

DEFAC also said that as of now, the amount of state money available to budget for fiscal year 2023 would be \$5,683 billion. Finance experts expect the high growth in taxes to slow into 2023 and 2024. Among the interesting bits of information:

- Many state construction projects, grants and contracts are having trouble finding workers as well as materials, thanks to inflation and supply chain issues. That's slowing down the state spending of funds allotted to those projects, contracts and grants.
- As of February, Medicaid now has 291,423 people eligible for benefits, thanks to expansions during the COVID-19 pandemic. That is nearly one-third of the state's population and 26,982 more than it was a year ago. Thousands of those are expected to come off the rolls as programs expire and more people go back to work.
- The Ukraine-Russian war is expected to lower national gross domestic product growth, but at this point not significantly.
- Personal income tax continues to show "pretty health growth," with expected income raised by \$20 million for 2022. Delaware's tax season opened Jan. 31.
- Real Estate transfer taxes continue strong, but that market can be volatile, and there have been years when the transfer tax was negative. The state has seen an increase in people who have sold homes paying estimated taxes because their houses sold for so more more than it was worth. In 2017, there were 1,000 people who sold property

and paid estimated taxes; in 2021, there were 3,500. In 2013, there were seven homes sold for more than \$1 million each. In 2021, there were 193 that sold for more than \$1 million.

- Boomers may have a role in the continued rise of taxes. The leading edge of boomers, many of whom have huge savings in 401Ks or IRAs, must start taking required minimum distributions from those accounts by age 72. The first Boomers are 74 this year. The federal program makes retirees do that to start returning some of the deferred taxes to the government, and Delaware could reap benefits from that, but it's hard to track or predict because the state does not know who has how much money in tax-deferred 401Ks or IRAs.
- Delaware continues to dominant the market in registering new companies, with 93% of initial public offerings registered in Delaware, which means that's where they pay corporate taxes. Many companies who went public in the last few years did it was COVID-19 monies. The number of LLCs is growing dramatically. That kind of filing could be a bubble, said Secretary of State Jeff Bullock, but it also shows the growth of Delaware's brand. Too much of a good thing also can be a bad thing, he said, because a rapid raise in corporate franchises also puts more pressure on that state office and on courts. The number of companies registered with Delaware had doubled in 12 years, he said. He also wouldn't be surprised to see it double again in eight years.
- As the Federal Reserve Bank raises rates, revenue from bank franchises is expected to drop, as much as 9.6% in 2023.
- Revenues from Unclaimed Property are up \$50 million over two years as the state continues its MoneyMatch programs, sends reciprocal claims to other states and continues improved processes.
- Taxes from the sales of new and used cars remain steady.
- The tobacco tax estimate was reduced by 4.7% down to \$111 million.



# LAWMAKER PROPOSES SPECIFIC CRIMES FOR VIOLENT RIOTS, LOOTING, DESTROYING MONUMENTS

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Four bills aimed at increasing penalties for destructive and dangerous conduct during times of civil disorder were heard by a Senate committee Wednesday.

The first of the four bills—all sponsored by Sen. Dave Lawson, R-Harrington—would make it illegal to manufacture, transfer, possess or use Molotov cocktails or other incendiary or explosive devices during a riot.

The second would create the crime of looting, which would be classified as a class C felony.

The third would create the crime of riotous burning, which would be a class B felony unless another individual is injured as a result of the crime, in which case it would be a class A felony.

The fourth bill would make it a crime to destroy a public monument during the course of a riot.

“Delaware has, for the most part, escaped the extreme actions of mobs experienced elsewhere, and enjoyed the benefits of mostly peaceful exercise of First Amendment rights by people seriously expressing a perceived need for change,” the bill’s synopsis says.

“Other jurisdictions have been faced with situations where a lack of sufficient legal tools have impeded the ability of authorities to adequately protect both public and private property as well as the lives of the innocent.”

While Senate Bills [219](#), [220](#), [221](#) and [223](#) address actions that are already illegal in their own right, the

bills would assign specific crimes to those actions depending on whether they took place during a riot. That, according to Lawson, would provide additional tools for courts, law enforcement and prosecutors to protect Delawareans and their property.

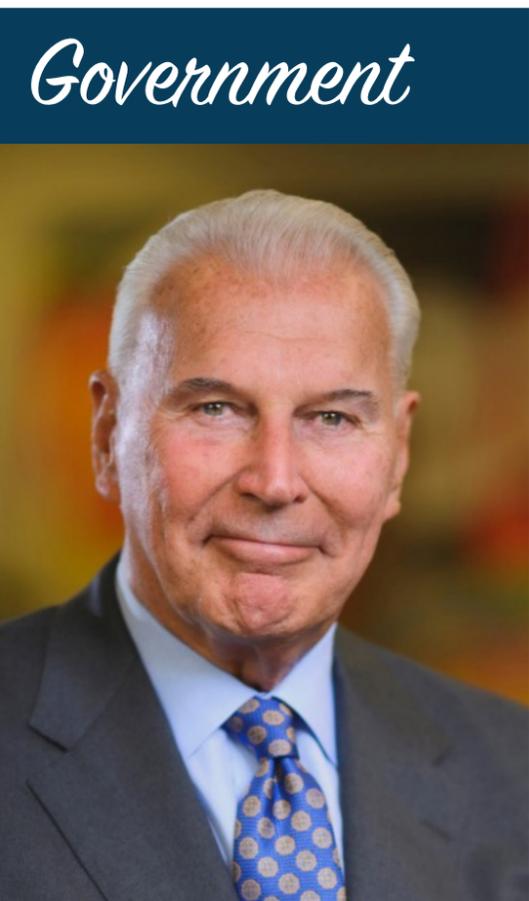
“What prompted me to introduce them was concerns from the community, and even law enforcement, that the penalty for those things, if existing at all, are not a deterrent for this kind of behavior,” Lawson said in an interview with Town Square Live News. “The idea is that if we make it strict enough, it may well be a deterrent, as opposed to a punishment,” he said.

Lawson said that when people engage in the type of behavior described in his bills, the public and perpetrators must know that Delawareans and their property will be protected, that justice will be served, and that there will be stiff penalties for those rioters.

That’s not what he saw during the May and June 2020 protests in the wake of the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis, he said. In many large cities throughout the country, wide-scale reports of shootings, looting and vandalism went on for weeks.

“We have not had that in Delaware to the same extent,” Lawson said. “Hopefully we’ll never have that, but I think we have to have the laws in place to deter and prosecute if need be.” He argued that individuals arrested during the summer 2020 protests were not prosecuted by Attorney General Kathy Jennings.

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE](#)



# WILM. MAYOR'S BUDGET: TAX INCREASES, PAY RAISES, JOB CUTS

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Included in Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki's proposed \$176.9 million city budget are a 7.5% property tax increase, a 5% increase in water and sewer fees, and the elimination of 14 positions in city government.

Purzycki presented the fiscal year 2023 budget proposal before City Council Thursday along with an \$82.1 million water, sewer and stormwater budget. Fiscal year 2023 begins on July 1.

While the proposed budget is balanced by an infusion of \$12 million in federal relief funds, Purzycki said tax and fee increases are necessary to address lost revenues incurred during the pandemic and prevent future deficits.

"While city finances have generally stabilized, there is an unsettling threat of a continued loss of revenues from a number of sources," he said. "A sensible look down the road reveals an untenable deficit in years to come if we are not prudent today."

According to the mayor, because many employees are working from home, wage tax revenues are down \$1.5

million while tax refunds for those workers have increased by \$2.4 million. Red light camera fines are down \$1.6 million and real estate tax appeals have resulted in an annual loss for the city of \$800,000. The city's interest revenue has fallen by \$1.5 million since 2019. In total, the city's projected revenues are \$7.8 million under pre-pandemic levels.

Those revenue streams have been falling throughout the pandemic, Purzycki explained, but in fiscal years 2021 and 2022, the city relied on CARES Act and rate stabilization funds to help offset losses.

They've done that because raising taxes and fees would have been "untenable," but moving forward the city "must be more disciplined about our finances," he said.

"I am proposing a 7.5% tax increase in this year's operating budget that will give us a small surplus in this year, but one that can be used in the near future to help balance future budgets," the mayor said. "Council must realize that in order not to leave our successors with catastrophic deficits, we have to raise additional sources of revenue."

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# GRANTS ALLOCATED TO BRING HIGH-SPEED INTERNET TO EVERY DELAWARE HOME

BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

Every Delaware home will have access to high-speed wired broadband internet thanks to \$56 million in federal infrastructure grants. Grants were awarded to Comcast, Verizon and Mediacom—Delaware’s three largest service providers. Comcast will receive \$33.1 million, Verizon will receive \$11.8 million and Mediacom will receive \$11.1 million.

With those funds, the three companies will extend their existing coverage areas to serve more than 11,600 Delaware homes and businesses that do not have access to high-speed broadband service. Construction is expected to begin in the next few weeks.

“Stable, high-speed internet connection is important for all Delaware families, students, and businesses,” Gov. John Carney said in a press release. “Now, with the availability of federal funds, we are on our way to giving Delawareans across the state access to connect to school, work, health care, and more.”

Over the next 36 months, Comcast, Verizon and Mediacom will build out and extend current infrastructure to deliver fixed, wireline internet access with transmission speeds that, at a minimum, provide 100 megabits per second download speed and 20 megabits per second upload speed.

Delawareans can find out if their area has internet access and report addresses that don’t have internet access to Delaware’s **Broadband Hub**. The Delaware Department of Technology and Information plans to update the interactive map with expansion project updates and real-time data. Addresses reported as lacking service during the construction phase will be included within the current project.

The broadband infrastructure grants are part of the \$110 million commitment to broadband infrastructure Carney announced in Aug. 2021.

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*Education*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**





# V-I-C-T-O-R-Y FOR SPELLING BEE KING BILLY SCIALLA OF CAMDEN

BY JAREK RUTZ

Billy Scialla can thank The Hulk for his 2022 Delaware spelling bee title. Out of the 12 words he spelled correctly to win, only one gave him pause.

“Punily.”

But then his love for films came to the rescue.

“I remembered that one Avengers movie when Hulk calls Loki a ‘puny god,’” he said. “I heard it over and over again in my head—puny god, puny god, punily, and then I had it.”

Surrogate is the word that clinched eighth grader Scialla’s victory and a shot at the national competition and its \$50,000 grand prize. He defeated 44 other First State spellers. The 2022 spelling king, a student at Fifer Middle School in Camden, punched his ticket to the big show March 5 in the state competition at St. Mark’s High School.

Besides being hit with punily, his 11 rounds were smooth sailing, said Billy. Billy’s mom, Michele, did not have the same confidence as her son. She said she was way more nervous than Billy, shaking in her seat at every word as the 12 rounds progressed. “Well, of course I expected him to do well, but I did not expect him to win,” she said. “There’s been a surprising amount of attention on him now, which is really awesome.”

His friends all cheered him after his victory, in the way eighth grade boys know best.

“They’re telling me I’m going to get all the girls,” Billy said. “And I just keep telling them, ‘It’s not like I’m a football player. Let’s not get too crazy.’”

One of his prizes from his March 5 victory was a 2022 United States Mint Proof Set. The collection doesn’t arrive until June, but Billy knows who’s getting the first look at it. “My grandfather is really big into coins, so he’s gonna be very proud of me and impressed,” said Billy.

Scialla is a big fan of fantasy science fiction movies. He said his spelling success can be attributed to this passion, because he watches movies with closed captions on and will identify all the “fancy words” and write them down on paper. An aspiring writer, he’s been sure about his career goals since his younger years.

He’s also a huge gamer, reader and fan of Comic-Con. “I really believe that I was put on this earth to write and have some fun with you know, gaming and Comic-Con as a writer,” he said. “It’s always fun covering those things.”

Billy hopes to one day attend Princeton University. He said Harvard is definitely an option, but it’s a bit too far away from home for his liking. “I’m sure Princeton will be happy to know that you’re willing to settle on them,” his mom said jokingly.

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# BILL ORDERING K-12 MENTAL HEALTH CURRICULUM ON WAY TO SENATE

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that will require the state to provide mental health education in every grade level passed the House and is headed to the Senate Education Committee.

House Bill 301 would require the Delaware Department of Education to establish a statewide curriculum for kindergarten through grade 12 for use in each school district and charter school. The information in the classes would be tailored to the developmental levels of students at each grade level.

“We need to break the stigma of mental health, and one of the most important ways we can do that is by educating young people about mental health so they recognize warning signs and can get help,” said House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear, the sponsor of the bill, during Tuesday’s hearing.

Rep. Richard Collins, R-Millsboro, voted for HB 301, but said he “has serious doubts that it will lead to changes.” There are definitely children who need support, Collins said Wednesday morning, but he thinks some of the state’s actions—including supporting the legalization of marijuana—have added to the problem.

“This confuses our young people,” he said. “Why is the state saying it’s OK to use this mind-altering drug?”

According to a 2017 [survey](#), 7.2% of Delaware’s high school students reported in 2016 that they had attempted suicide, according to testimony in the hearing. In addition, 27.6% said they stopped some of their usual activities because they felt sad and/or hopeless almost every day for two weeks in a row.

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# DELAWARE SCHOOLS TO TURN TO SCIENCE OF READING TO IMPROVE LITERACY RATES

BY JAREK RUTZ

Delaware's once highly-ranked reading scores are worse than those in Mississippi. Much worse.

In 2002, Delaware fourth graders outperformed Mississippi's by 21 points on national scores, with the First State well above the national average. Today, after a decade of emphasizing training teachers in the science, Mississippi students handily outperform Delaware's, which has dropped below the national average.

Less than half of Delaware's students can read at their grade level, including about one-quarter of White students and half of Black and Brown students, attendees at the Delaware Reading Summit heard Thursday. That struggle follows them into their adult years, speakers said. Eight University of Delaware football stadiums could be packed with the 160,000 Delaware adults who can't read.

Legislators and education nonprofits want to change that by integrating the **science of reading** into public schools. The science of reading is defined as cognitive brain research that shows how students learn to read, said Monica Gant, chief academic officer for the Delaware Department of Education.

Senate Bill 133, signed into law in June 2021, was the first of several pieces of planned legislation that focused on the science of reading, Gant said. Sponsored by Sen. Laura V. Sturgeon., D-Hockessin, SB 133 created a literacy plan that would train teachers to be able to engage students in the essential components of evidenced-based reading

instruction. Many current teachers were trained under out-of-date materials, or programs that since have been proven not to work and may even be counterproductive, said several speakers at the summit.

SB 133 requires elementary school, early childhood education or special education teachers or reading specialists to provide instruction aligned with the science of reading by July 1, 2023.

Among other things, the science of reading says that nearly all children learn to read in the same way no matter their ethnicity or background; that one in five kids is dyslexic; and that fundamentals such as focusing on phonics, are key to success and later performance.

SB133 specifies the number of hours of professional development that teachers must complete to be considered proficient in teaching using the science of reading. Since SB 133 became law, more than 700 teachers and educators have taken part in that training, Gant said.

"We know reading is a complex process, more than just saying words out loud," said Mark Holodick, Delaware secretary of education, who supports both the shift in reading instruction and making it universal. "We need evidence-based research on how to promote language development."

Sturgeon announced during Thursday's Delaware Reading Summit that she will introduce an additional three pieces of legislation to address Delaware's literacy rate.

A former teacher and chairman of the Senate Education Committee, Sturgeon says she plans to introduce one resolution and two bills.

The resolution would strengthen the certification requirements of teachers applying to Delaware schools. Educators would be required to be well versed in the science of reading and able to construct lessons that closely align.

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## FREIRE WITHDRAWS REQUEST TO OPEN CHARTER SCHOOL IN NEWARK

BY JAREK RUTZ

Freire Schools has withdrawn its request to expand and put a charter school in Newark.

Nate Durant, co-head of school at Freire Charter School-Wilmington, said in a note to state education officials that the move didn't seem smart at the moment, when schools were grappling with many issues.

"Positive impact can only happen when we are all working together," the letter said. "But we are not together right now, and any division hurts our kids."

Freire, which also has three schools in Philadelphia, released a copy of the letter in an email.

Officials there declined to comment further.

The letter was addressed to Department of Education Secretary Mark Holodick, the Delaware State Board of Education, Charter School Accountability Committee, and the Charter Schools Office.

"The department, through the Charter School Accountability Committee, worked closely with Freire Charter School regarding its application for a new charter school in the Newark area," said Alison May, spokeswoman for the Department of Education.

"We respect the school's decision to withdraw its application at this time and will continue to provide the necessary supports to Freire and all of our charter

schools as they focus on providing strong educational services to Delaware students."

Durant said that the intention behind bringing a second Freire school to Delaware was to create a positive impact on Delaware students and families that were looking to find the best option for their education.

He said that a sense of togetherness is vital during this "trying time" for educators, schools, communities, and the state of Delaware.

The note comes after the Christina School Board voted to ask the state to put a moratorium on new or expanding charter schools as it grapples with getting the Wilmington Learning Collaborative up and running, as well as other issues.

The move has drawn fire from parents and others who favor parents having the choice of a charter school for their children.

"We ask that you join us in realigning so that the "us" versus 'them' feeling dissolves," the letter said, "and we can work together to provide the strongest education possible for every Delaware student."

Durant said in the letter that Freire-Wilmington is still committed and determined to the families and students of the school and their educational excellence.

Freire-Wilmington opened its doors in 2015 with support from the Longwood Foundation, the Welfare Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education. It has 2,000 students in its four schools.

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## BILLS TO ADD MENTAL HEALTH HELP IN SCHOOLS SENT TO HOUSE FLOOR

BY JAREK RUTZ

The House Education Committee on March 16 unanimously voted to release two bills focused on putting additional mental health resources into Delaware schools. House Bills 300 and 301 serve as an extension of [House Bill 100](#), legislation passed in 2021 that included an \$8 million investment to provide mental health services in the state's elementary schools.

HB 300 calls for more mental health care professionals in middle schools to decrease the ratio of students to school therapists, psychologists and counselors. HB 301 calls for a statewide implementation of educational mental health programs in each grade level, kindergarten through 12th grade. The bills will now move to the house floor.

Sponsor Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear, said Delaware's youth is plagued by a high percentage of suicide attempts and documented cases of depression. Among other things, she said, is that suicide is the second-leading cause of death of people between 10-24 years of age, 50% of mental health illness begins before age 14, and one in five kids suffer from depression.

Anne Slease, director of advocacy and education at National Alliance on Mental Illness in Delaware, said 53% of Delaware's youth received no treatment for their depression in the past year. "When children's warning signs of mental illness are identified and addressed at a young age, recovery is not only possible, but it's likely," she said.

Rep. Michael Ramone, R-Pike Creek South, expressed concerns about being able to get enough professionals to take the jobs, which would offer salaries of \$77,000. With HB 100, which took effect in January, there already has been trouble filling the available slots in elementary schools and he wondered if the state would be able to fill even more. Longhurst said that fear shouldn't stop legislators from passing the bill.

"We shouldn't hold back just because we don't have enough professionals," she said. "We should be moving forward in order to create that pipeline."

"If we build it, they will come," is a common belief in regard to the professional pipeline that Department of Education Secretary Mark Holodick, Rep. Kimberly Williams, D-Marshallton, and parents giving public comments all shared.

Rep. Richard Collins, R-Millsboro, noted that COVID-19 has resulted in a surge of mental health illness and questioned how the committee will know if the monetary investment is worthwhile.

Longhurst said mental health issues have been a serious problem for years. "This is not a political issue—our kids killed themselves because of unaddressed mental health issues, not COVID," said Longhurst. A school environment encourages students to speak up on mental health challenges, she said.

Chris Locke, whose son Sean committed suicide in 2018 just before his 24th birthday, said he believes schools need to teach the "power of vulnerability" to allow students to feel comfortable and safe talking about mental health struggles.

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*Photo by Nick Halliday*



*Sports*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**

# A bill to ban transgender girls from participating in girls' sports in Delaware was heard in Senate Committee Wednesday.

DEVELOPING STORY

## SENATE COMMITTEE HEARS FAIRNESS IN WOMEN'S SPORTS ACT

“The inclusion of male-bodied athletes in women’s sports inevitably means that more females lose out,” Richardson, R-Seaford, said. “We have an obligation to defend everyone’s rights. What is wrong is when the rights of some put at risk the rights of others.”

The chair of the Senate Health & Social Services Committee, Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington North, identifies as transgender. McBride is the first openly transgender state senator in the country and the highest-ranking transgender elected official in United States history. She took Richardson’s bill as a personal affront to her identity and said it puts transgender children at risk.

“I didn’t run for this office to talk about transgender identities,” McBride told the committee. “But when legislation comes before me that goes after young people—that goes a step too far.”

McBride argued that there are many competitive advantages and disadvantages in high school sports—among them, wealth and access to private coaching, and biological differences between cisgender athletes such as height and weight and athletic capacity. She asked Richardson if his bill sought to level the playing field by addressing any of those perceived disparities.

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BY CHARLIE MEGGINSON

A bill to require Delaware student-athletes to compete on athletic teams or in sports associated with their biological sex was the subject of a raucous Senate committee hearing Wednesday. [Senate Bill 227](#) specifically aims to prohibit transgender girls—or girls who were born as boys—from playing on girls’ sports teams.

Under the bill, cisgender female athletes, or girls who were born as girls, would be allowed to compete on boys’ sports teams if the sport in question is not available for girls, like wrestling, for example.

“You can be anything you want to be in this great country; the purpose of this bill is not to undermine that privilege,” said Sen. Bryant Richardson, the bill’s sponsor. “The purpose of the bill is to protect the gains in women’s sports that came about almost 50 years ago under Title IX.”

Richardson referred to transgender girls as “male-bodied,” and said that when male-bodied athletes are allowed to compete on girls’ teams, biological girls are at higher risk of injury, because male-bodied athletes are, on average, bigger and stronger.



# FOX LEADS SANFORD IN BIG WIN OVER RED LION

pitches. Freshman Dominic Liguori then hit a double of his own scoring Burroughs making the score 2-1.

The Warriors then scored four runs in the top of the second inning on a couple hits coupled with some errors from the Lions. They then followed up with two more runs in the third to inning pushing their lead to 8-1.

Red Lion did bring the score to 8-4 after getting two runs of its own in the bottom of the fourth inning on a hit by Mason Nester and an RBI by Brayden Redmond on a fielder's choice.

Sanford then broke the game open in the top of the fifth inning. They scored nine runs with Fox highlighting the inning by hitting a grand slam over the right field fence, driving in four runs (see video). Ryan Timmons, John Malloy, Brian Keiser, and Colton Ferguson also added RBIs in the inning.

Dominic Liguori, JR Montgomery, Riley Burroughs, Mason Nester, William Koble, and Zachary Villamor each collected one hit for the Lions.

Sanford's next game is at home as it hosts First State Military on Thursday at 3:45. Red Lion will travel to Newark National Field Thursday to face last year's state champs Delaware Military Academy at 4 p.m.



## BY NICK HALLIDAY

The Sanford Warriors defeated Red Lion 17- 6 behind the bat and arm of Brady Fox. He went 2-4 scoring three runs and six RBI at the plate while pitching three innings, allowing two runs on three hits and striking out six collecting the win on the mound

Warrior bats got started early as they scored two runs. After a single by Colton Furgeson, Fox crushed a double scoring Furgeson. Fox was able to move over to third base on a passed ball, then was knocked in by Luke Filliben as he singled.

Red Lion would answer in the bottom of the first inning when Riley Burroughs drew a walk on four

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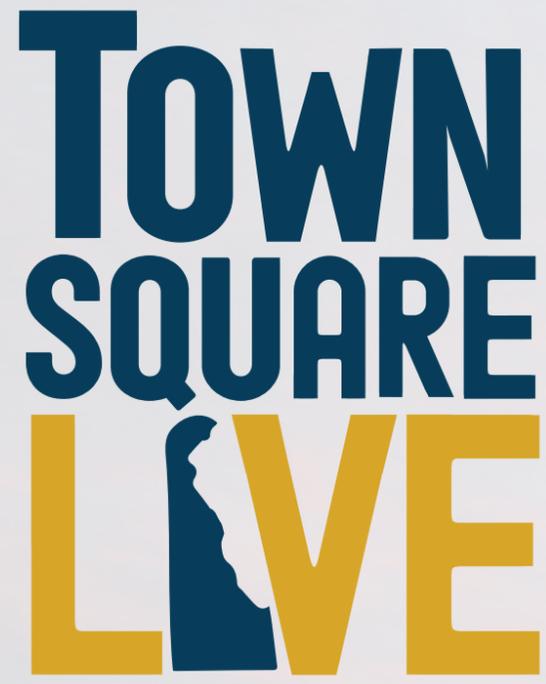


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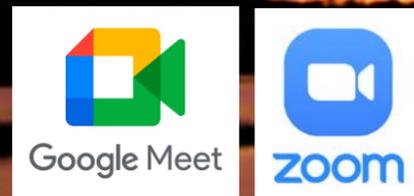
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