

# TOWN SQUARE LIVE

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January 19, 2023  
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Bill to Stop School Boards Hiking Taxes is Tabled



9% Salary Raise for Teachers



Howard Wins Over Sanford



*Community*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**



# MEET THE LEARNING COLLAB'S THREE PARENT REPRESENTATIVES

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Wilmington Learning Collaborative’s three parent representatives share a passion and background for social work and educational advocacy. They have similar goals they want to address as members of the council that will guide the new organization. Those areas include mental health services, teacher support and transparency.

Appointed by their school district boards, Red Clay’s Jennie Yeow, Christina’s Shanette Graham and Brandywine’s Starr Wilson will help make decisions affecting nine city elementary schools across those three school districts. They will be three of the 12 board members.

The Collaborative, created last year by the state and three school districts, is designed to be a grass-roots organization focused on improving classroom outcomes and empowering families in the city of Wilmington.

Here’s more about the trio.

### Jennie Yeow

Yeow said her priority is to create a vehicle for educator leadership teams and school community councils to influence their schools. She also wants to make sure teachers and students get the proper support by identifying ways to create immediate relief for teachers to have more planning time to help students who are falling behind. Doing this will hopefully keep teachers in the city of Wilmington, she said.

Yeow hopes to connect students to services that will address reading challenges.

“I can see that students, teachers and families are really struggling,” she said. “It’s hard. It’s really hard to be a parent. It’s really hard to take care of a kid. It’s really

hard to be a teacher, and at the center of all that is a lot of students who are struggling.”

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a lot of the social discrepancies that families in the city already lived with everyday, she said. Those problems came on top of issues that were hurting students, she said.

Organizers have cited poverty, exposure to violence, frequent moves and unstable homes as problems that more city students deal with daily, compared to suburban ones. “We need to stabilize,” Yeow said. “Our council can make some bold changes and hopefully that’s what we see.”

Born and raised on the west side of Wilmington, Yeow attended school in the [Red Clay Consolidated School District](#). Her daughter is enrolled at [William C. Lewis Dual Language Elementary](#) there. Observing how private, charter and district schools rebounded from the pandemic encouraged her to apply for a seat on the Learning Collab’s council.

“The difference in how well some schools were able to bounce back while it’s been so difficult for others has been very striking to me,” she said.

Growing up in the city, she struggled academically and socially, she said, and has noticed little progress for Wilmington families since she graduated. Yeow said she’s known since high school she wanted to work in education and child advocacy. When she attended H.B. du Pont, she joined a program where she was a mentor to several students at Lewis Elementary. After that experience, she decided she wanted to be a teacher, so she became a public ally for [AmeriCorps](#).

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# NEW TWO-STORY NEWARK LIBRARY TO BE BUILT ON SAME SITE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

New Castle County has decided to update the Newark Free Library on the same [site](#). The new, two-story building will have 50% more interior space, and there will be 80% more parking, Diana Brown, manager of the county’s 10 libraries, said this week.

“Details of what will be inside will be developed with public hearings this year,” Brown said. Libraries will be still based on books but are growing in other directions. “They are ‘civic bridges and centers of community engagement,’ Brown told Out & About.

The current building is 26,500 square feet, and a 50% expansion would make it as big as the Brandywine and Route 9 libraries.

Replacing the 49-year-old building got a big boost a year ago when Gov. John Carney announced \$40 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding for libraries across

Delaware, Newark Life [reported](#), with \$4 million allocated for Newark. A lot more money will be needed. The county’s newest library, in Middletown, was budgeted at \$27 million.

### PROMINENT SITE FOR NEWARK LIBRARY

The current site has a high profile, being on the corner of busy Library Avenue and even busier Main Street, and across the street from a post office. It’s walkable from downtown, which is considered a big asset among urban planners these days. However, it’s not easy to get to by driving, since the only entrance to the site is on Main Street, which goes one way.

Newark’s library has relocated multiple times, according excerpts from Jane M. Tripp’s “History the Newark Library,” [posted](#) on the Friends of the Newark Free Library website.

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“The first written record of a library in Newark is from around 1860, with it moving among various businesses until 1920, when it settled in the Newark Academy Building on East Main Street,” Newark Life reported. In 1957, St. Thomas Episcopal Church on South Main Street and West Delaware Avenue was converted to a library, with a house next door later becoming a children’s library. The current library was dedicated in 1974 and expanded in 2003.



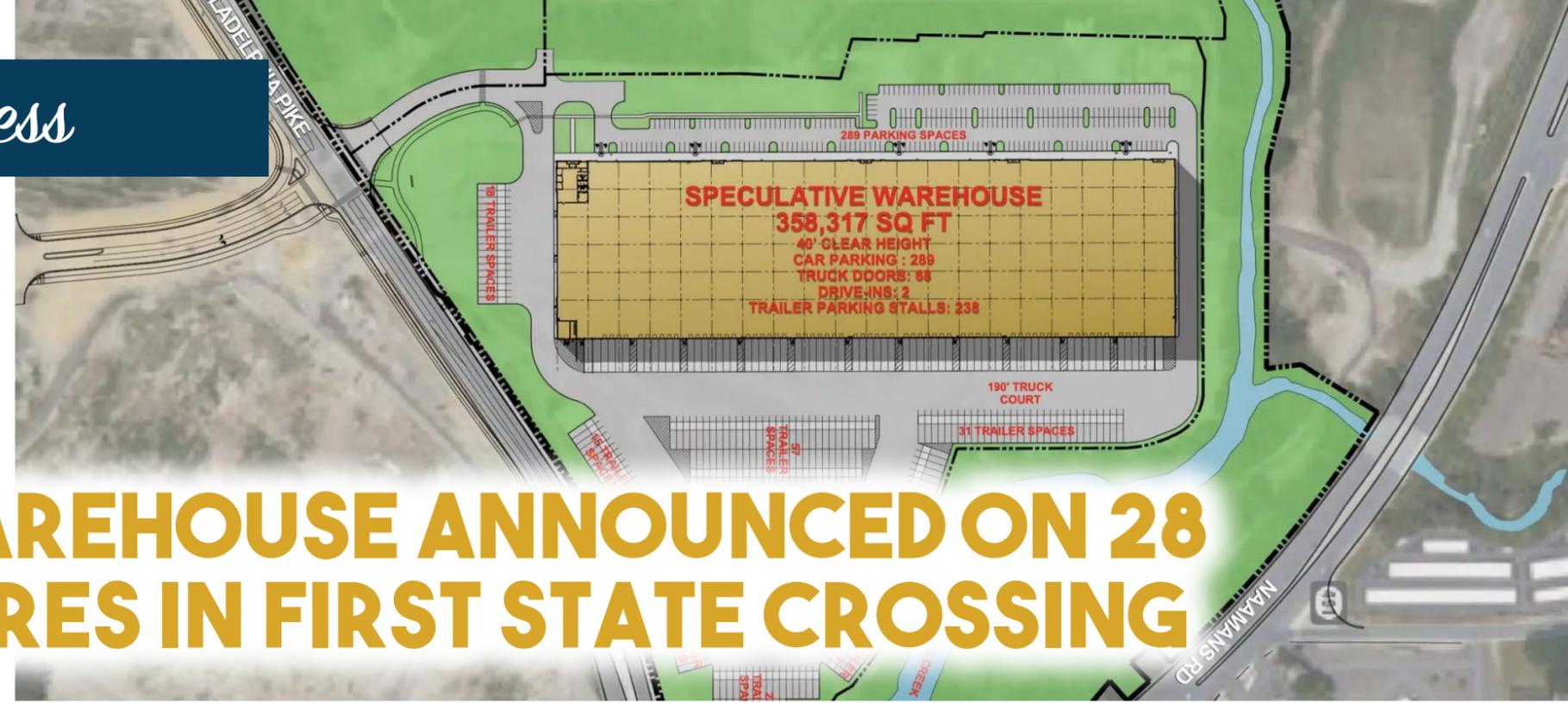
photo by fauxels on Pexel



*Business*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**

# WAREHOUSE ANNOUNCED ON 28 ACRES IN FIRST STATE CROSSING



BY KEN MAMMARELLA

A developer has sold 28 acres in **First State Crossing**, a multiuse Claymont site that once housed a steel plant, and the buyer will build a 358,000-square-foot warehouse there. **First Industrial Realty Trust** is planning a rear-load facility with 68 dock door positions, a 40-foot clear height and parking for 241 trailers and 289 cars. The land is on the west side of Philadelphia Pike, just south of Naamans Road.

“The building’s flexible design accommodates a single tenant or multiple users across a range of industries,” the announcement said.

A rendering accompanying the announcement calls the building “speculative,” meaning that no company has yet signed up for it.

“Our project offers efficient highway access to I-95 and I-495 and a strong local labor pool,” said John Hanlon, executive director for the Chicago-based First Industrial.

“We are excited to bring this state-of-the-art facility to serve businesses in this high-barrier market.”

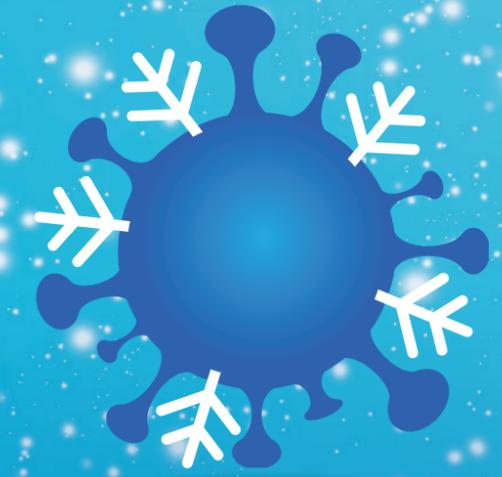
A high-barrier market is one where high costs, limited resources or other obstacles make it difficult to compete.

First State Crossing is is being developed by **Commercial Development Co.** of St. Louis

“We understand there is high-demand for ready-to-occupy logistics facilities, and we are pleased to work alongside First Industrial to bring this project to Claymont,” said Stephen Collins, executive vice president at the privately held CDC.

CDC in 2015 bought the 425-acre site which once housed Evraz Steel, for a mixed-use project. It sold the steel company’s 18,000-square-foot headquarters and five acres to Gaudenzia, which provides substance use disorder treatment services in Claymont, Ellendale and Wilmington.

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photo link: SoDel Concepts



# Food & Dining

TOWN SQUARE LIVE



## ESPRESSO YOURSELF: FOUR NEW COFFEE SHOPS OPEN IN DELAWARE

BY PAM GEORGE

In Delaware, the new year started with a jolt—and that’s a good thing. Three independently owned coffee shops opened last month, proving that you can never have too many lattes.

Like cleaners, banks and drug stores, every neighborhood seems to need a coffee shop—which is as it should be, according to Nicholas Qaabar, owner of Scout Café in Wilmington’s Triangle neighborhood. His new restaurant is also near the Ninth Ward and Baynard Village. “I want to create a community hub,” he said, a common refrain among coffee shop owners.

Here’s the skinny on Delaware’s new spots for your daily cup of Joe—or two.

***kaffé KARMA.***

***342 Barley Mill Plaza, Wilmington***

Owner Katie Kutler is particular about the spelling and look of her new business’s name. But if you talk to her for any length of time, you realize that she won’t compromise on her vision. KARMA, as she calls it for

short, hit the ground running last week, and the opening was so successful, the shop had to close for a few days to restock. It’s now open from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Coffee shops have often sported a rustic chic ambiance. Not KARMA. Kutler designed a clean white-and-black space with touches of marble and chrome. The shop could easily double as a zen-filled meditation and yoga studio—which is precisely the case. Sip coffee by day and slide into downward-facing dog in the evening.

“The intention behind KARMA is to become the area’s local community hub, focusing on mental health and wellness,” says Kutler, who will offer workshops. She also has a retail section with wellness products.

The menu reflects the mission. Mushroom coffee, turmeric latte and blue matcha tea share the menu board with espresso and cappuccino. (Coffee comes from Ceremony Coffee Roasters). There is a lengthy list of “toasts,” including the Namaste—cashew butter, banana slices, hemp and chia seeds and a honey drizzle.

KARMA bills itself as “your third place”—a social surrounding separate from home and work. The Cali vibe is new for Delaware, but judging by the response thus far, it is a refreshing change.

***Scout Cafe***

***2316 Baynard Blvd, Wilmington***

The one-story corner building on Baynard Boulevard was neglected when Qaabar fell in love with it. But you’d never know it now. Qaabar has totally renovated the Triangle landmark. Like Kutler, he has a penchant for white and black, but only for the exterior, and the café’s look is far more farmhouse than modern.

Inside, earth tones, mainly green and ochre, drive the décor. To Qaabar, scout refers to the outdoors and adventure—blazing new trails or trying new dishes.

Originally from the Middle East, Qaabar features a few items from his homeland, including falafels and hummus. But there are plenty of options, such as grilled cheese. The coffee comes from Brooklyn-based Partners Coffee Roasters, a Fair Trade company that supports sustainable growing practices and farmers.

It’s open Thursday, Friday and Monday from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

***Zava Cafe***

***102 Federal St., Milton***

In Milton, Danio Somoza and partner Thaina Bittencourt introduced a second location of Zava Café in space formerly occupied by the Fox Hole. They opened the first Zava in downtown Rehoboth, and Somoza also co-owns Harvest Tide in Lewes and Bethany and Zoca Modern Mexican Cuisine in Bethany.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)



*Government*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**

# BILL TO ADD RETIREES TO HEALTH PANELS PASSES SENATE

BY BETSY PRICE

Despite vehement opposition from a state retirees' group, a bill that would add retirees to committees that help determine health care options overwhelmingly passed the Senate Wednesday, just moments after it had cleared a committee hearing. Voting against it were three Republican senators.

Senate Bill 29, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Bryan Townsend, D-Newark, would give retirees a voice by putting one retiree with full voting rights on the State Employee Benefits Committee that oversees retiree healthcare plans. It also would create the Healthcare Benefits Advisory Subcommittee of the State Employee Benefits Committee, with three state retirees and four members of the General Assembly and give that committee the power to hold public meetings and make recommendations about retiree health plans, with a goal of doing that by May 1.

Townsend said in both the hearing and the Senate that he didn't think the May 1 deadline was feasible, but it was a goal. An amendment added to the bill would require members of the state committee to attend its meetings themselves, instead of sending a representative, but would allow members to continue sending representatives to subcommittee hearings.

The state's move last year to switch all 30,000 retirees to a Medicare Advantage plan instead of continuing their current specially tailored plan galvanized retiree opposition. The retirees accused the state of failing to live up to guarantees of health care and of hiding the fact that the plan was being changed.

The state argued that it had not been done secretly, but in open meetings that various officials attended, and that it was necessary to stabilize health care expenses in order to be able to continue to provide high quality care

for future retirees. After, a group of retirees led by retired state Rep. John Kowalko formed **RiseDelaware** and sued the state.

Superior Court Judge Calvin Scott sided with them, saying that the state had promised that health benefits would not change, but the Medicare Advantage plan included requirements for preauthorization and demanded retirees use in-network doctors, big changes. He ordered the state to stop their plans. The state later allowed retirees to stay on their current plan.

Townsend said there is no process in place to confirm what happens next, and his bill would help solve that problem.

## RETIREES OPPOSE BILL

No, it won't, Kowalko testified in the Senate Executive Committee hearing. Kowalko said RiseDelaware is worried that the bill is being fast-tracked and that it was only designed to make the General Assembly feel like it was doing something.

"Retirees represented by RiseDelaware have concluded that this piece of legislation appears to be an attempt by the General Assembly leadership and this administration to avoid or ignore their responsibility and obligation to retirees," Kowalko said.

Linda Hastings of the Delaware Department of Human Resources said that her office does support HR29, but it will come with costs, even though the bill says there will be none.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)



# BILL TO STOP SCHOOL BOARDS HIKING PROPERTY TAX IS TABLED

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that would ban a local school tax increase after the statewide property reassessment is completed was tabled Wednesday in the House Education Committee after a lengthy discussion. **House Bill 42**, sponsored by Rep. Mike Smith, R-Pike Creek, would remove the up-to-10% increase in school property taxes that current law would allow school boards to levy.

Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, said a tax increase would create political pressure for school board members, who would ultimately set the number and vote on whether to raise taxes in their districts.

“We have had thousands of retirees move into Sussex County and they’re building very expensive homes,” he said, “and for the most part, they don’t have children in the schools.”

He asked around the House chamber as to who would

actually want to pay more in school taxes, which could be raised by hundreds or thousands of dollars. Several representatives shook their heads “no,” but the newly-elected Rep. Deshanna Neal, D-Elsmere, said yes, in a heartbeat, if it meant giving more money to schools, many of which are severely underfunded.

“I could be as broke as I don’t know what and I will take a raise on anything to make sure these schools are safe, healthy environments for our kids,” Neal said.

Neal said that even if a family no longer has children in public school, their neighbors, friends and coworkers have children in schools, and it’s every resident’s duty to support the future.

## PROPERTY REASSESSMENT EXPLAINED

Property values will be assessed by **Tyler Technologies**, a public service and software company. The reassessments for New Castle, Kent and Sussex counties are expected to be completed by 2025, the first reassessment done in Delaware since the 1980s. They were prompted by the settlement of the far-reaching **ACLU lawsuit** that also required the state to add millions in opportunity funding for underserved children.

Rep. Sean Lynn, D-Dover, pointed out that not every school board will vote to raise property taxes by 10%.

“This fear is not warranted,” he said. “It’s a disgrace that these reassessments haven’t occurred within the entirety of my lifetime, to the detriment of our schools and our children.”

John Marinucci, executive director of the **Delaware School Boards Association**, said it’s wrong to assume that every district will raise the tax by 10% and said this bill would limit a school board’s ability to properly fund their district.

“We vehemently support local control and local authority over the school districts,” he said, after telling the committee that he and DSBA oppose the bill.

Also in the meeting, a bill that would allow parents to opt out of developmental screenings for their child was voted out of committee and will move to the House Floor. The child must be receiving early intervention services or special education and related services for a parent to decline a screening.

A screening looks at five major developmental domains, according to Cindy Brown, a representative from the Department of Education. Those are how students are learning, their motor skills, language development, social emotional wellbeing and adaptive skills.

The majority of Delaware parents who send their children to childcare services are very cooperative and open to the screening process, she said.



## BILL TO GIVE POLICE \$20 MILLION HEADS TO HOUSE FLOOR

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill authorizing a one-time \$20 million fund for Delaware police agencies to use for recruiting passed unanimously through the House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee Wednesday.

In the same meeting, a bill that would create a separate offense for the theft of mail, including packages, from a residence was heard, but the vote outcome was not clear.

**House Bill 39**, sponsored by Rep. Mike Smith, R-Pike Creek, would create the Expanded Protection for Our Communities and Homes Grant Program through the one-time appropriation. The money will likely be used to recruit and retain police officers because law enforcement agencies are receiving less applicants in recent years.

“A few short years ago, we had 400 to 500 applicants competing for two to three positions,” testified Thomas Johnson, **Dover**’s chief of police. “That has completely

inverted itself to 30 applicants competing for six, and at the end of that process, I only arrived at three quality, character-based candidates that I could even consider handing them a firearm and the authority to use it.”

Each Delaware police agency that applied for grant money would be given \$50,000 as a base. Additional money would be determined by the number of officers that department has, but the amount is not detailed in the bill.

Johnson said that police officers now leave the profession as soon as possible, whether that be finding a job outside of law enforcement or retiring after 20 years of service when pension benefits kick in.

“I just lost two sergeants last month who both stepped off at the earliest possible moment,” Johnson said, “one of them at 19 and a half years so he could use his remaining terminal leave to get him to 20 years because

he’s not interested anymore.”

The funding would not be limited to recruitment. Police agencies could promote or encourage careers in law enforcement, pay the salaries of newly hired officers, pay for overtime to facilitate additional work to address issues of local concern, and implement programs designed to improve public safety in the area of the agency’s jurisdiction.

New Castle County Police Chief Richard McCabe, Dover Mayor Robin Christiansen and Milford Mayor Archie Campbell all said they’ve experienced colossal changes in the number of applicants because of poor working conditions.

“I often tell people that my officers work for DNREC, because it’s catch and release,” Christiansen said. “While that’s kind of humorous, it’s not damn funny.” He was alluding to the fact that those arrested often are sent back into the community without punishment.

“What incentive is there for a police officer to do his job and his duty, to take people in and have them released back out on the street before the police officers can complete their paperwork,” he said. “The perps know it, the police officers know it, and there is frustration.”

Johnson said he had an officer last year disarm an individual in a confrontation.

“And on his way back to writing his report, he almost collapsed into his chair because he confiscated that very same gun less than a year before, and that case was thrown out and the property was returned,” he said. “His life might have been cut short by a weapon that he actually got off the streets within 14 months of the new event.”

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## BILL TO ALLOW TENANTS TO STOP PAYING RENT STUCK IN COMMITTEE

BY BETSY PRICE

A proposed bill that would allow tenants to stop paying rent when life- or safety-threatening issues had not been repaired, failed to pass out of committee Tuesday.

**House Bill 37**, sponsored by Rep. Sherry Dorsey Walker, D-Wilmington, drew praise from both sides of the aisle as well as from apartment associations and others who deal with renters for wanting to help. However, many also worried that parts of the bill were covered by or conflicted with existing state law, could be misused by tenants or would severely impact landlords who only dealt with a small number of apartments.

After an hour and one-half hearing that included extensive questioning by Housing committee members and public comment, neither proponents nor opponents could muster the seven votes needed to table the bill or to release the bill to the House floor. Three of its members were absent.

It was not immediately clear what will happen to the bill, although many speakers offered to work with Walker to strengthen the bill.

Walker and others repeatedly cited the horror last year of 27 families whose Wilmington apartments on Adams Street were summarily condemned and locked after years of complaints about the safety of the buildings. They had no way to get into the building to get their belongings and, with no warnings, they had no place to go. If those tenants had been able to legally stop paying rent, it would have forced the landlord's hand, Walker and others said.

HB37 would have given tenants the right to stop paying rent, citing the failure to fix life- or health-threatening conditions. It also allowed renters the choice of paying into a court-controlled escrow fund each month instead of paying the landlord. If the landlord didn't fix the problems within 90 days, the rent reverted back to the renter instead of going to the landlord.

Under HB 37 the tenant could not simply stop paying. The tenant would be required to notify the landlord in one of three ways before taking that action. The bill also would create choices for a court to choose from when

considering the case. "What we have found in the state of Delaware is people only respond when their pockets have been affected," Walker said.

She said the bill is meant to impose meaningful sanctions on those who allow dangerous conditions and defects to exist in rental property. Cosmetic or aesthetic conditions are specifically barred for action under the bill.

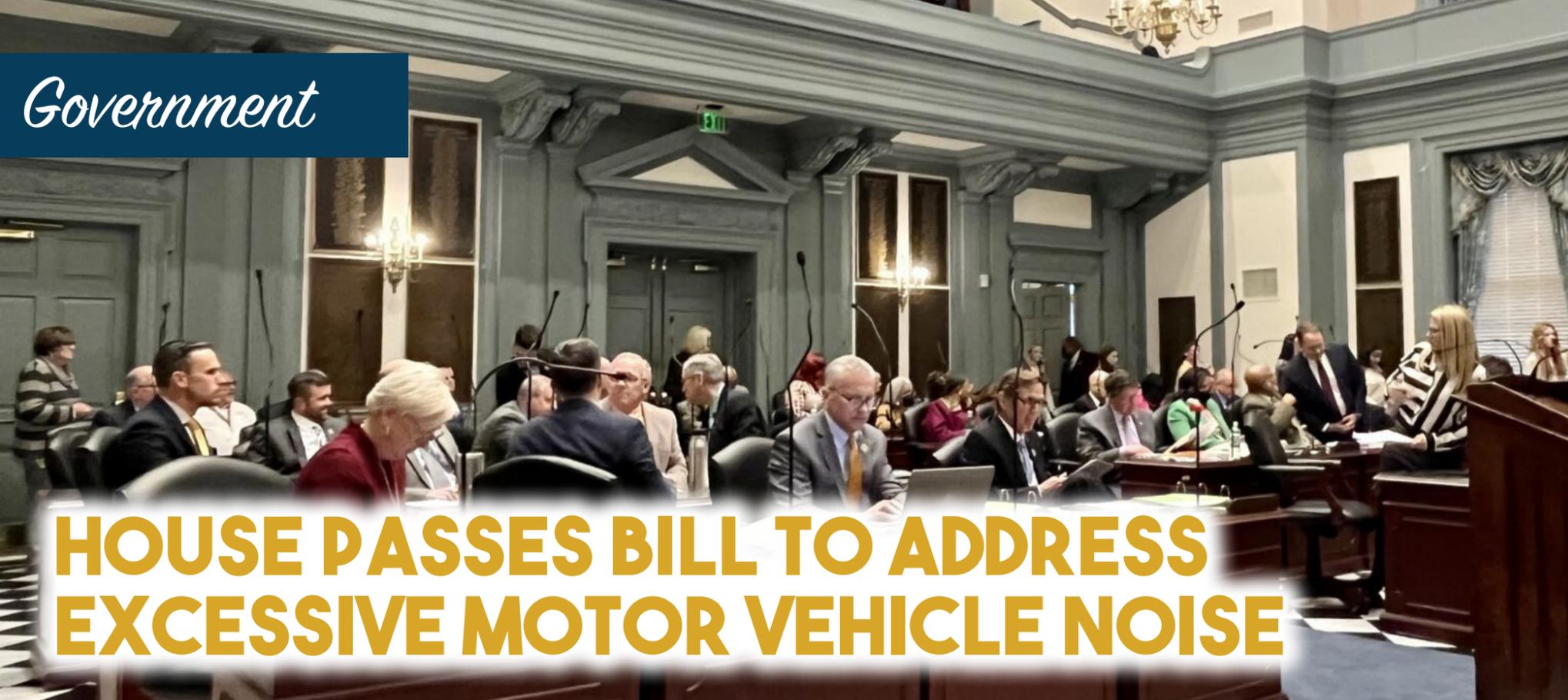
Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, R-Clayton, said that if the bill worked as described it would be a good and useful bill. But, he said, he was concerned that someone who couldn't pay their rent might deliberately damage something like a furnace and then claim they didn't have to pay because of that. Walker asked him whether removing the clause that allows renters to just stop paying would make Spiegelman more comfortable and more likely to vote for the bill. He said he'd have to look at the rest of the bill.

Spiegelman later said that he thought the bill should include a clause requiring the tenant to document the damage with photos, if possible. Dorsey Walker said she was open to that.

Scott Kinder, who said he was speaking on behalf of the Apartment Association, testified in public comment that the bill was not going to do what Dorsey Walker wanted it to do. It conflicts with the current landlord tenant code, he said.

Kinder also said that Wilmington courts already work with escrow accounts, so there's no reason to create a mechanism that allows more.

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# HOUSE PASSES BILL TO ADDRESS EXCESSIVE MOTOR VEHICLE NOISE

BY RACHEL SWICK MAVITY

A bill that would crack down on excessive motor vehicle noise passed the House Tuesday. Just one legislator, Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, voted no, but gave no comment.

**House Bill 35** would require the Department of Safety & Homeland Security to present a report and plan to the General Assembly for a comprehensive motor vehicle noise and abatement program. The department would work with the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, and the Department of Transportation to curate the report.

Rep. Kim Williams, D-Marshallton, bill sponsor, said the legislation specifically addresses the Kirkwood Cruise Night, which annually takes place on the second Saturday of August. Hundreds of cars clog the road as

they drive up and down Kirkwood Highway, which creates a lot of unwanted noise for nearby residents.

“The event in 2021 had some bad actors who showed out making the event unsafe, causing many accidents and several people were injured,” Williams said. “The incident caused attention to larger issues surrounding drag-racing and noise issues.”

The bill would help ease the concerns and countless complaints of constituents throughout the state, she said. Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown, pointed out that there’s residents downstate who also have raised concerns to her about the noise levels of cars. She said traffic to Ocean City, MD, often causes excessive amounts of noise for those living in Sussex County.

The bill now heads to a Senate committee for consideration.

**“**  
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**”**  
 - URSULINE ACADEMY

Also Tuesday, Rep. Shannon Morris, R-Felton, had his first bill pass the house since he was elected in 2018. While legislators poked fun at him, they also gave Morris a standing ovation after the bill received a unanimous vote. His **House Bill 28** creates a special license plate for **Whitetails Unlimited**, a national conservation nonprofit that raises funds in support of educational programs, wildlife habitat enhancement and acquisition, and preservation of the hunting tradition and shooting sports for future generations.

The bill moves over to the Senate for a committee hearing.





# LIFELONG NEWARK RESIDENT TO BE ITS NEXT POLICE CHIEF

my, first serving the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control before joining the city police force in 1995.

He has served in the patrol division, plus the traffic, special operations and street crimes units. He has also been a member of the SWAT team, and he has served as the public information officer and professional standards officer. He was promoted to deputy chief in 2015 and served as commander of both the administration and investigations bureau and the field operations bureau.

## SERVING NEWARK OUTSIDE THE DEPARTMENT

From 2018-2020, he served as acting deputy city manager and chief human resources officer. He is also a graduate of FBI National Academy and the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police Command and Leadership Academy.

His award including the Delaware State Police Academy Outstanding Recruit Award, Knights of Columbus Officer of the Quarter Award, Chief’s Citation Award, Citation of Merit Award, Mothers Against Drunk Driving Award and several letters of commendation.

Farrall’s promotion is the second high-profile change this month in police leadership in New Castle County. Wilfredo Campos, a 28-year-veteran of the Wilmington Police Department, is now its chief. He replaces Robert Tracy, who moved over to lead the police department in St. Louis, MO.

“Farrall is an experienced and respected leader with a track record of effectively managing those in his chain of command,” City Manager Tom Coleman said in announcing his promotion.

“The Newark community is in good hands” with Farrall, Mayor Stu Markham said. “He is well-respected among his peers in law enforcement, and I look forward to working alongside him to maintain Newark’s reputation for being an attractive and safe place.”



BY KEN MAMMARELLA

A lifelong Newark resident who has served on the Newark Police Department for 28 years will be its next leader. Mark Farrall, now the acting chief, will become chief of police on Feb. 1. He replaces Paul Tiernan, retiring after 15 years.

“I am humbled by the opportunity,” Farrall said in a statement. “I am extremely proud of the men and women of the Newark Police Department and look forward to leading them as they continue to serve our community with excellence and professionalism.”

Farrall is a graduate of Newark High School and University of Delaware. He became a police officer in 1993 after completing the Delaware State Police Acade-

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LEGISLATIVE HALL

## BILL TO RAISE UNEMPLOYMENT PAYMENTS BLOWS THROUGH COMMITTEE

BY BETSY PRICE

A bill to permanently raise unemployment payments by \$50 a week, but use state money for one year only to make sure employers don't get hit by the rise, sailed through the House Labor Committee Tuesday.

House Bill 49, sponsored by Rep. Ed Osienski, D-Newark, received yes votes from all nine attending committee members and had little comment from members or the public. It now goes to the full House.

Osienski introduced the bill Friday heading into the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend and immediately scheduled it in the Labor Committee, which he chairs. He seemed at the start of the meeting to expect it to sail through, instructing committee members about how to sign on as co-sponsors when they were signing the bill backer before making other comments.

"This bill is time sensitive," he said. "We want to get this done and through both chambers and on to the governor's desk by the end of January."

The General Assembly goes on break in February for budget hearings by the Joint Finance Committee.

The bill would raise maximum payments from \$400 a week to \$450. Osienski said all surrounding states already pay more than that. The increase would be permanent.

### USING UNEMPLOYMENT TRUST FUND

But the break for employers would only be for one year. The bill would authorize the state **Department of Labor** to use money from the Unemployment Trust Fund, which is normally funded from a portion of employer-paid taxes. That fund was depleted during the pandemic, but Gov. John Carney used \$400 million of federal COVID-19 relief money to replenish it, Osienski said.

"We want to make sure the employers are getting the tax assessment decrease retroactive by Jan. 1, 2023," Osienski said.

Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, wanted to know why the state would pay more money to keep people off a job.

Darryl Scott of the Department of Labor said that most workers on unemployment are only paid 56% of the salary they had been earning. Other states pay up to 66%, he said. Therefore, Scott said, there's no incentive for a worker to stay on unemployment when the worker is only making about half of what he or she had been making before.

"I will tell you that it's not something that individuals choose to do," Scott said.

The state pays unemployment for 26 weeks. In December, it was paying 4,000 people.

Collins also wanted to know the impact using state funds would have. Scott said the trust fund is considered solvent when it has at least \$270 million. At \$400 million, it easily could be used to pay the employer portion of any additional tax. That would save employers in Delaware \$50 million in 2023, the bill said.

Scott estimated that doing so would only cost the fund \$1.9 million in 2023. In 2024 and 2025, it would be about \$2.2 million, Scott said.

Last year the state collected more than \$100 million in unemployment taxes, he said. With the break outlined in the bill, he said the state expected to drop from \$75 million to \$80 million in unemployment taxes to \$20 million to \$25 million, Scott said. The amount an employer pays varies according to the salary.

Delaware now has 79 rows in its current unemployment tax rate, he said. The bill includes a chart reduced to fit on the page, he said.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)



# Government

## HOUSE MOVES TO BLOCK FEDERAL TAXES ON \$300 REBATE CHECKS

BY BETSY PRICE

If a bill approved Jan. 12 by the Delaware House of Representatives succeeds, residents won't have to pay state or federal taxes on the \$300 rebates issued last year. **House Bill 25** would designate that money as qualified disaster payments and therefore untaxable.

The 2022 Delaware Relief Rebate Program was a one-time direct payment of \$300 per Delaware resident taxpayer who filed personal income tax returns for tax year 2020 and adult residents who did not file a 2020 tax return. It was not subject to Delaware income taxes. However, the payment still could be federally taxed under the original version of the law.

The payments came after Republicans started hammering about the need to return money to tax payers after the state had two banner years for budget surpluses. It was especially important, Republicans said, in 2022 as inflation battered residents last year and gas prices

kept rising. The bill that finally authorized the payments came through the Democrats.

“The rebates were already excluded from state income tax and this bill, once enacted, will ensure that Delawareans will not owe any federal tax on the payments either,” said House Minority Leader Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden, Wyoming, in a press release.

### TAX REBATE PROTECTION

He said he hoped the General Assembly “can retain the bipartisan cooperation demonstrated on this measure as we look to further help working Delawareans struggling with higher inflationary costs.”

“We are going a step further to protect them from having to pay federal taxes on those payments,” said bill sponsor Valerie Longhurst, D-Bear. “It’s another move we can make to help Delawareans, and it’s the first action of what I hope are many to provide a hand up to residents in need.”

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The state has sent 782,000 checks to Delawareans, with more payments being made this month. Because the money will be deigned a disaster relief payment, it legally can be excluded from a person’s gross income, saving residents from paying taxes on the \$300. The program was estimated to cost more than \$180 million, which was funded through a budget surplus.

“The past couple of years have been hard on Delaware families,” said Senate Minority Leader Gerald Hocker, R-Ocean View. “I am proud of the work the General Assembly did in coming together and passing much needed relief to help combat rising fuel costs, inflation and the overall tough economic circumstances Delawareans found themselves in.”

HB 25 now heads to the Senate for consideration.



# DISABLED VETERAN TAX BILL PASSED TO HOUSE AMID CONCERNS

Rep. Sean Lynn, D-Dover, initially asked if there would be any income limitations on the tax break.

“Receiving VA disability doesn’t preclude veterans from working, so is this designed for veterans whose only source of income are their VA benefits?” Lynn asked Rep. Bill Bush, D-Dover, the bill’s sponsor.

That answer is no, which led to several committee members requesting some sort of means test to see if a disabled veteran actually needs the tax break.

“There’s no limitation,” said Rick Geisenberger, the state’s Finance Secretary. “You can be a 100% disabled veteran and you can have millions of dollars of income.” Although he didn’t have a vote, Geisenberger said the Department of Finance was against the bill.

## HOW MANY VETERANS GET A TAX BREAK?

He said the current tax break, which requires a three-year residency, is used by 710 disabled veterans. A simple means test, he said, would be to look at the property values of applicants’ homes, rather than looking at someone’s income, which typically changes much more often than property values.

“The current disabled veterans tax credit program is in its infancy,” Geisenberger said. “With only one year of actual data to analyze, we believe it’s advisable to have more experience in history prior to making additional modifications.”

There’s still four months left to apply to this year’s tax credit, and Geisenberger. The Finance Department

expects a 30% increase in applications over that span for a total of 923 disabled veterans who will receive this year’s tax credit. He pointed out that expanding the number of people who get the tax breaks would lose the state a lot of money.

Expanding the tax credit would cost the state between \$248,887 and \$518,514 in Fiscal Year 2024, according to the bill’s fiscal note. The tax credit average is \$1,500, with a range from \$633 to \$4,632.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill that would remove the three-year residency requirement to qualify for the Disabled Veteran Tax credit drew concerns in the House Education Committee Wednesday. Some members wanted an income limit or means test included in the bill. After a motion to table the bill failed, House Bill 30 was eventually released to the House floor.

If passed, First State veterans who are 100% disabled would not have to pay their school property tax. The bill defines disabled veterans as a person who receives 100% disability compensation from the **United States Department of Veterans Affairs** or its successor agency, due to a service-connected, permanent and total disability based on unemployability, or a 100% **disability rating**.



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TOWN SQUARE LIVE

# CARNEY TO RAISE TEACHER SALARIES 9% STARTING IN 2023-24

BY JAREK RUTZ

Classroom teachers in Delaware’s public schools will receive a 9% increase in their salary next school year. Others who work in education will receive a 3% raise.

Those announcements came Tuesday from Education Secretary Mark Holodick during an event in which Gov. John Carney detailed the money he was investing in public education in next year’s budget, which starts July 1.

“We can’t afford to wait until November,” Holodick said. That’s when salary recommendations are due from the Public Education Compensation Committee, a group created to review and develops suggestions about enhancing Delaware’s educator compensation structure.

Its goal is to attract teachers to work in Delaware—and to keep them in the state—by paying them salaries that are competitive to neighboring states. Most notably, Maryland passed a law that would give teachers a starting salary of \$60,000, which is nearly \$20,000 more

than the base pay for Delaware teachers.

“If we want to recruit and retain quality educators, we need to provide them with a respectable salary at the beginning of their career,” said Rep. Kim Williams, D-Marshallton, chair of the House Education Committee. “Educating our children is one of the most important jobs one could ever hold, and we should pay the educators a salary showing that we believe that it’s the most important job,” she said.

Stephanie Ingram, president of the [Delaware State Education Association](#), the state teachers union, was happy with the investment. The union supports all public school employees, whose salary is what the Public Education Compensation Committee is reviewing. It previously asked the committee to take immediate action on increasing teacher salaries since the shortage of teachers is the most pressing matter.

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Ingram and the DSEA have also asked the committee to increase teachers’ starting salaries to \$60,000 to compete with Maryland, since teachers could simply cross a border and snake significantly more.

Sen. Laura Sturgeon, D-Hockessin, a former educator and chair of the Senate Education Committee, said that people become teachers to make a difference, not for the pay.

“But your ability to make that difference in the lives of your students is seriously impaired when your school is short-staffed, which creates ballooning class sizes and impossible caseloads, and diminished wraparound supports,” she said. “Today we began to right this ship.”

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# URSULINE CELEBRATES ACHIEVEMENTS OF 38 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Dozens of prospective **Ursuline Academy** students gathered with their families Sunday for a recognition ceremony celebrating their scholarships to the private all-girls Catholic school. Nearly all of the private schools hold similar ceremonies, both to honor students who earned the scholarships but also to convince those who may have several offers to pick their school.

“This ceremony allows us to celebrate them and their hard work,” said Lisa Clody, director of enrollment management at Ursuline. “The group that is here may not actually be Ursuline students next year, but we encourage them to come because we’re recognizing and rewarding them for their accomplishments and we want them to come and be a part of our community.”

Scholarships are awarded to students who will be in ninth-grade for the 2023-24 academic year. The amount

at Ursuline is based on their score on the school entrance exam, which is taken in November.

The incoming freshman class is typically about 60 girls, said Clody, director of enrollment management at Ursuline. Most receive some sort of scholarship. Clody said Ursuline typically gives out about 40 scholarships per year to students entering its Upper School. Ursuline awarded 38 Sunday.

Scholarships range from \$3,000 to \$18,000, but Clody said the average scholarship is about \$9,000. The tuition discount renews every year. Tuition is \$26,865 per year for Upper School students.

The most prestigious award is the Lister Family Scholarship. A student that earns this will have a year of free tuition, a free laptop and uniform, and then an all-expense paid global trip that they can use at any time in their four years.

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# LEARNING COLLAB COUNCIL GRAPPLES WITH LEADER, MEETINGS

BY JAREK RUTZ

In Friday’s first public meeting of the Wilmington Learning Collaborative’s board, members focused on ironing out the specifics on how the organization will move forward. Among the issues they tackled were selecting a temporary secretary to handle organization issues; setting meeting times; and forming committees to tackle the three main goals of the board.

The collaborative is designed to improve student achievement and outcomes in Wilmington’s elementary schools—which are split among several school districts—while tackling societal discrepancies that negatively impact many families in the city.

Here are highlights from Friday’s meeting:

### *Selecting a secretary*

Jenny Yeow, Red Clay’s parent representative, volunteered to serve as the 12-member council’s secretary until an executive director is picked. Once that happens, the executive director will assume the secretary’s respon-

sibilities. In the role, Yeow will organize meeting times and locations, and post public notices, minutes and agendas, while making sure the collab follows Delaware’s public meeting laws.

### *More meetings*

It’s no secret that some of the initial steps for the collab to get the ball rolling have been delayed, whether that was signing the memorandum of understanding to create it in the first place, or hiring an executive director to lead its board.

“Meeting once a month is not acceptable or appropriate,” said council member Adriana Bohm, who’s Red Clay’s Wilmington board member. “Meeting twice a month is definitely better. However, that still allows a week here and then a week there to go by.”

After discussing which days work best for the 12-person council, a motion to meet at 6 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesday was approved.

Several of the council members also are members of the [Redding Consortium for Educational Equality](#), which has similar goals to the Learning Collab—to improve the education of disadvantaged children. The WLC meeting on the second and fourth Tuesday will ensure no meetings overlap.

### *Project Manager*

Council member Alethea Smith-Tucker, who is Christina School District’s Wilmington board member, suggested that [Delaware State University](#)’s Shelley Rouser be named temporary project manager. Rouser is the chair of DSU’s Education Department. She previously had spoken at school district board meetings, offering DSU’s help with the collaborative. Rouser did not attend the meeting.

Under Smith-Tucker’s plan, Rouser’s appointment would be for four months. She would be responsible for team-building exercises, supporting and developing a communication plan, and helping to hire the council’s permanent executive director.

After Smith-Tucker made a motion to appoint Rouser, Don Patton, who is the appointed city representative and Christina school board member, said he didn’t know enough about Rouser and her qualifications to agree to the appointment. He suggested reaching out to Empower Schools, a national education association that’s been working with the board, for advice about appointing someone. Several board members are flying to Florida next week to attend an Empower Schools seminar.

Smith-Tucker said that the duties of the project manager aren’t necessarily specific to the collaborative, but rather any governing board.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)

# THREE SUSSEX CHARTERS ASK FOR MORE LEGISLATIVE HELP

BY JAREK RUTZ

Officials from three Sussex County charter schools told state representatives Thursday they need more legislative support to best help their students and communities.

“We don’t have the available resources for a wellness center,” said Eric Anderson, head of **Sussex Academy**. “Our kids are like any other, and they need these supports.”

His school hosted a joint breakfast that included **Sussex Montessori**, the **Bryan Allen Stevenson School of Excellence**, local education groups and a few state legislators. Anderson pointed out that charters rarely receive capital funding from the state, unlike district schools.

“We have to raise money ourselves for most projects,” he said, “and that’s money that’s being taken out of the classroom.”

Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, who sits on the House Education Committee, said some Delaware legislators feel unfavorably to charters. “That’s why it’s crucial you

have lobbyists,” Collins said. Anderson said charters do, and pointed to Kendall Massett, executive director of the **Delaware Charter Schools Network**.

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Magnolia, said it’s important for legislators to come to events such as the joint breakfast.

“We need to find a way to get legislators in the room and listen to schools,” he said. “Education is rooted in everything and it’s where the fight is, because children are our leaders of tomorrow.”

The breakfast also allowed the Sussex charters to showcase themselves, listing enrollment, core values and classroom philosophies.

Chantelle Ashford, head of Bryan Allen Stevenson School of Excellence, a charter that will open this fall, said equity is one of her school’s core values.

To truly achieve that, she said there needs to be universal access to local resources, which again starts with the legislature.

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*Sports*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**



# NO. 2 HOWARD LEADS WIRE TO WIRE IN WIN OVER NO. 4 SANFORD

BY NICK ALESSANDRINI

It was a packed gym at Howard School of Technology Tuesday for an evening tip between two teams ranked in the top five. RJ Matthews and No. 2 Howard welcomed in Dayon Polk and No. 4 Sanford for a highly anticipated battle between the Warriors and Wildcats.

Howard used hot shooting and smothering defense to build an early lead on Sanford. The Wildcats would hit four first-quarter triples to outscore the Warriors 20-4 in the opening period. Sanford would battle back but trail 29-17 at the half. They would cut further into the deficit in the third, cutting the Howard lead to 33-27 with two minutes to play in the quarter. But that's as close as the Warriors would get. Howard would then go

on a 19-1 run and regain complete control of the game.

The Wildcats would go on to earn a 61-42 victory over Sanford and improve to 7-1 on the season. Howard was led by Matthews, who finished with a game-high 20 points. Nine Wildcats got on the score sheet, including Ayden Richards Powell who finished with eight points. Sanford was without Sam Stanford in the contest and was led by Tommy Vaughn Jr. who had a team-high 14 points in the loss. Next up for Howard is a trip to Miami Beach, FL, for the Northeast vs South Showcase. Sanford will head back on the road Friday to take on Wilmington Christian.



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## WILLIAM PENN GRAPPLERS UPSET FIFTH-RANKED SMYRNA

BY NICK HALLIDAY

The William Penn wrestlers knew the history heading into their Monday night showdown with number five-ranked Smyrna. The Colonials' last win over the Eagles was 17 years ago in 2006. Monday night's win was the biggest win for the program over the last 20 years, as William Penn defeated Smyrna 39-32 in front of a loud home crowd.

With the match starting at 157 pounds, the Colonials jumped out to a 21-0 lead behind pins from Michael Lane (157) and Frankie Norris (165). Ziyad Badreldein won a 6-3 decision over the Eagles Teagan Gratowski at 175 pounds and Vincent Che received a forfeit at 190 pounds. Smyrna climbed back into the match winning five of the next six bouts.

Kael Howell (215), Chi Chi Eule (285), Warren Coates (113) and Wyatt Miller (120) all had pins while Qwantez Watkins (126) added a technical fall for the Eagles as they took their only lead of the night 29-27 going into the 132 pound match.

Nick Hendricks and Kyle Davis put on the most competitive match of the night, as Davis took down Hendricks to his back in the first period as the Smyrna wrestler took a 5-2 lead at the end of the first period.

Hendricks chipped away at the lead with an escape and a takedown in the second period followed by two near fall points late in the third period to get the 7-5 decision and put the Colonials back in the lead 30-29.

"When I got caught on my back I thought, I'm not going to let this happen, my team needs me," Hendricks said. Hendricks gave William Penn a lead it would not relinquish much to the pleasure of head coach Joe Archangelo.

"He (Hendricks) banged his shoulder up and we really weren't sure if he was going to be able to go, but here he is, he got the job done and we couldn't be more proud of this guy," Archangelo said.

Jamir Ross received a forfeit at 138 pounds followed by an 11-4 decision by Daniel Sinclair over Tyree Heath at 144 pounds putting the match out of reach 40-29.

Jesse Dixon won a 12-6 decision over Austin Smith at 150 pounds to end the night. Jayden Ellis added a pin for William Penn at 106 pounds.

William Penn improves to 3-1 while Smyrna falls to 5-6 on the season.

### CAESAR RODNEY DEFEATS ST. GEORGES

Caesar Rodney used pins by Cody Waski (157), Logan Heffington (165), Owen Dixon (175), Walter Toomer (285), Cole Moffett (113) and Nick Moore (120) to defeat St. Georges 51-18.

The Riders got a technical fall by Trevor Copes (126) and a major decision by Graig Dixon (144).

Gavin Sheehan (138), T.J. Arrowood (190) and Odai Morgan (215) all had pins for the Hawks.

The Riders improved to 5-1 while the Hawks fell to 3-2.





# NO. 1 TOWER HILL COMPLETES COMEBACK ON THE ROAD

BY NICK ALESSANDRINI

Two top five teams in the state of Delaware met up Jan. 12 in Bear in what would be a four-quarter battle. Both teams came into the contest at 5-2 but only one would leave with their sixth win. Tower Hill looking to rebound from a recent loss to Sanford, and Caravel still hadn't dropped a game to an in-state opponent.

Caravel got off to the early lead, but a Dylan Shepherd triple at the end of the quarter gave Tower Hill a one-point lead after one quarter of play. The second quarter belonged to Caravel and Dominique Wyatt. Wyatt had 10 points in the first half and the Bucs were able to get behind their transition game on their way to outscoring Tower Hill 17-10 in the quarter, and ending the half with a six-point lead.

Caravel would extend its lead in the third, and lead 45-36 going into the fourth quarter. But you can never

count out the state champs, especially when they have the Shepherd brothers. Tower Hill would use its defense, as well as some unforced Caravel errors, to quickly erase the deficit. Dean Shepherd would complete some easy transition layups off of unforced turnovers and his brother Dylan, with a huge three, as the Hillers climbed all the way back to take the lead with three minutes to play 48-45.

Caravel lead 43-28 in the third, but a 20-2 Tower Hill run did the Bucs in. The Shepherd brothers could not have been bigger in the win as they combined for 49 of the 58 Tower Hill points and every field goal but one in the second half. Caravel was led by Wyatt, who finished with 19 points.



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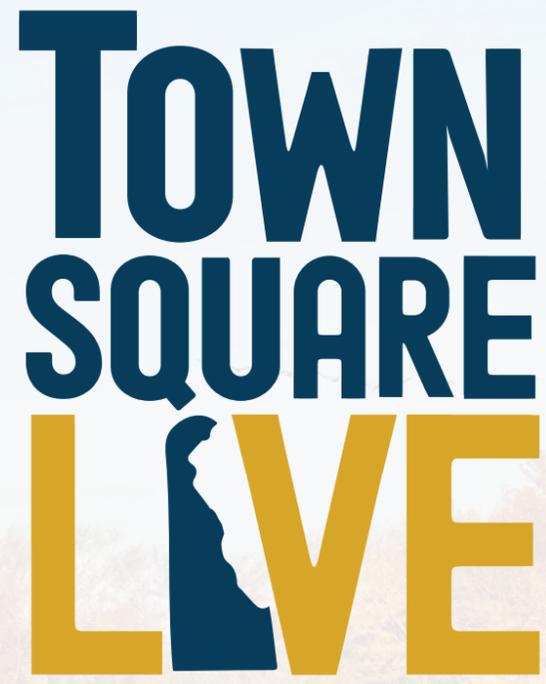
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