

# TOWN SQUARE LIVE

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June 20, 2024  
Vol. 5, Issue 25





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Fireworks and Fourth of July



Wilmington Force Finding on Fines and Fees



NBN Sports Academy Opens in Hockessin





# Community

TOWN SQUARE LIVE





# FIREWORKS AND SO FORTH TO CELEBRATE INDEPENDENCE DAY IN DE

BY KEN MAMMARELLA

Most Delaware places known for Fourth of July fireworks and other Independence Day activities have announced their plans. Organizers consistently ask for people to arrive early and leave late, and the Delaware Department of Transportation warns that many events close roads, too. In other words, traffic could be bad.

Organizers also often ask for contributions to support the celebrations. Go Fourth Lewes, for instance, says the fireworks cost \$85,000.

Dusk is about 9:05 p.m. on Thursday, the fourth, but fireworks could start as late as 9:30. Here's a lineup:

## FIREWORKS ON (OR NEAR) THE FOURTH

**Bethany Beach** calls its holiday celebration “our biggest party of the year.” The fun starts with a 5K run/walk on June 30. On the Fourth, there’s a parade at noon

featuring floats (the theme is “Celebrating 40 years”), bands, motor vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. Parade awards will be announced at the bandstand at 7:15 p.m., followed by a concert by The 1974 at 7:30 and the fireworks at dusk.

Dewey Beach gets fireworks on the Fourth, thanks to businessman Alex Pires.

The **Dover** Fourth of July Celebration starts at 10 a.m. with working tours of the First State Heritage park, with the declaration read at 2 p.m., near the spot where the document was first read in 1776. Artisans and food vendors will be operating by 4 p.m. A parade starts at 6 p.m. on Hazel Street, and it heads south on State Street and terminates at Water Street. It’s organized by American Legion Walter L. Fox Post No. 2. Fireworks are at 9:15 p.m.

The **Hockessin** Fourth of July Festival and Fireworks include neighborhood relays in the morning, a parade in the afternoon and the fireworks at dusk on July 4. The fireworks can be seen all over Hockessin, the website says, with the main viewing from Swift Park, Piedmont Baseball Fields, Hockessin Library and Artesian Soccer Fields.

**Laurel**’s 30th annual 4th of July Celebration is mostly at Janosik Park on Front Street. Events includes a car and truck show 4-8 p.m., a cornhole tournament at 5:30 p.m., live bands, a parade at 7 p.m (Evergreen Drive, Central Avenue, Market Street, Maryland Avenue) and fireworks at dusk.

**Lewes**’ Go Fourth fireworks starts at dusk on July 4. There are “events all day long, all run by different groups of volunteers,” Go Fourth Lewes says. Old-fashioned children’s games run 9 a.m. to noon on Second Street. The 28th annual July 4th Celebration and Car Show runs noon to 3 p.m. at Trinity Faith Christian Center, 15516 New Road. The decorated boat parade on the canal departs at 1:30 p.m. from the inlet and makes its way to the bridge. Winners will be announced at the Overfalls at 3:30. It’s organized by the Overfalls and the Lewes-Rehoboth Beach Rotary Club and sponsored by the Freedom Boat Club. The Doo-Dah Parade leaves from Manila Avenue “when organizers are ready to Doo-Dah...usually in the 4:30ish to 5 time frame.”

**Newark**’s Liberty Day and Fourth of July Fireworks runs 6-10 p.m. July 4 at the University of Delaware athletic complex on South College Avenue.

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# DELAWARE RANKED BEST IN NATION AT TIPPING

BY BETSY PRICE

Here’s another thing that Delaware is first at: Tipping at restaurants. That seems to surprise **Food & Wine** magazine, which noted in a recent article how small the state is and suggested the higher tipping likely is because Delaware has no state or local sales taxes.

Carl Georigi, CEO of Platinum Dining Group, wasn’t surprised, but only after he checked the validity of the source of the information, which is a survey by Toast, which offers point-of-sale technology.

Karen Stauffer, senior director communications and strategy for the Delaware Restaurant Association, also was unsurprised.

Delaware is a small enough state that people and restaurants have connections up and down the state, it’s an industry that includes one of every 10 state workers, and the COVID 19 pandemic raised the state’s appreciation for the role of restaurants in the community, they say.

Tips tend to be based both on service and on community, Georigi said. His Platinum Group includes Taverna, Eclipse Bistro, Redfire, Capers & Lemons, El Camino and The Market.

“There’s more of a personal connection on an ongoing basis, much more than you would see maybe in a resort town where people are in and out or big city where, you know, sometimes lunches and dinners are just a function of business and that type of thing,” he said. “I think here we experience a connection with our clientele and our regular customers that is really a direct result of the community being so small and close to them, even though it’s a state that operates like a large town sometimes because everybody knows everybody from north to south.”

“Delaware is a state of neighbors that celebrates restaurants and dining culture,” said Stauffer. “We may have a smaller state footprint, but there is no shortage of

diverse and exciting restaurants, not to mention an industry workforce that represents one in 10 Delawareans.”

With no sales tax, happy diners have more room to show their appreciation and support of great food and service, she said.

“It’s no surprise that visitors to our ‘Culinary Coast’ and locals enjoying business and dining options in the north, are leading the nation in tipping, in a state where restaurants and dining are at the very core of our neighborhoods, communities and hearts,” she said.

Delawareans had an average tipping percentage of 22.1% during the first three months of the year, according to a Toast survey cited by Food & Wine.

“It also has the highest tips for full-service restaurants, tipping an average of 22.5%, and quick-service restaurants, averaging 19.1%, according to Toast,” the magazine said.

California, the most populous state, tips the least of all states, especially for full-service restaurants, where the average tip was 17.9%, the magazine said. It reckons that may be because California mandates **higher hourly wages** for fast food and other workers, so consumers don’t feel the need to tip as much

The least generous tips at quick-service restaurants are in New Jersey, with an average tip percentage of 13.8% in the first quarter.

Georigi said tipping that rose dramatically during the pandemic has come back down, but is still higher than it was pre-pandemic. That’s partly because the tipping percentage baseline has risen. It used to be 15%, he said.

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# BREAST CANCER YOUNG SURVIVOR WANTS TO HELP OTHERS COPE

BY BETSY PRICE

Stephanie Cumella was only 32, with two young children, when she was diagnosed with a deadly form of breast cancer. The disease threw her world into chaos as she tried to cope with treatment, work, family life and more. It would also lead her into a career change, working with young breast cancer survivors who, like her, were diagnosed in their 20s or 30s.

“I can’t really speak for everybody but I know for me your kids are in sporting events or they’re in some sort of class play, or they have things that they have to go to,” she said. “It’s very hard to really take care of yourself and make that time because your life really kind of revolves around being a mom, being a wife and being a homemaker.”

Her first interaction with the **Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition** was at the time of her diagnosis, when the nurse navigator put her in touch with the Coalition’s Lois Wilkinson. Wilkinson talked about her story, which started with a diagnosis at age 47. She left Cumella with the feeling that the Coalition offered a place of community. Even so, it was a few years before she attended a DBCC event. That came at a Survivor’s Night at the **Blue Rocks**.

Cumella chose that event because it was a family event and because other events had been during the work day or at times that were hard for her to fit into the demands of her paralegal work, treatment regimen and family schedule. Seven years later, she’s a Coalition Survivor-

ship Specialist and program manager of its **Young Survivors in Action** program.

Her work with DBCC started when the company she worked for encouraged their workers to get back to a local charity. She chose to volunteer at the Monster Mile walk in Dover, a breast cancer fundraiser. That led to more volunteering and, finally, an invitation to join the team as a survivorship specialist.

Cumella says her goal is to help young women and men find lasting friendship and bonds that helps them cope with the traumatic experience of cancer.

“You know, a lot of times you feel like you’re alone in it, even if you’ve had a partner that walked right next to you,” she said. “It’s definitely different having been in those shoes.”

She found simply talking with women who had the same experience to be emotional, supportive and ultimately healing. “It’s just taking that initial step and trusting that we’re very welcoming and making sure that everybody has a good time,” she said.

## DIAGNOSES RISING

Women being diagnosed with breast cancer at a younger age is a rising national trend. It’s still considered unusual, affecting only about 5% of women under age 40, but the rate of those diagnoses have been rising at 2% a year, according to Breastcancer.org. The median age at diagnosis is 62, meaning that half of the women are diagnosed before age 62 and half are diagnosed afterward, the website said.

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# BLACK BEAR SEEN IN NEWARK KILLED BY VEHICLE ON ROUTE 1

BY BETSY PRICE

The black bear seen around Newark was struck and killed by a vehicle on Route 1 Tuesday night. The accident happened about 11 p.m. on Rt. 1 near School Bell Road in New Castle, according to the Delaware Natural Resources Police. Delaware State Police and the Delaware Department of Transportation removed the bear.

Wildlife biologists with the **Department of Natural Resources and Economic Control** will conduct an examination of the bear to try and determine where it originated, its age, sex and other information that might be helpful in tracking other transient black bears that venture into Delaware from surrounding states that have resident black bear populations.

“We understand the community’s interest in the bear,” said Joe Rogerson, a DNREC wildlife biologist. “It’s always unfortunate when wildlife is lost in such a manner. Our team will be examining the bear to gather information.”

Over the past several days, DNREC wildlife biologists and DNRP officers had been actively coordinating reports of black bear sightings with local authorities in the Newark area. Affectionately known as “Delabear” on social media and among local watchers, bears in Delaware have garnered significant attention and concern from the community.

The expansion of black bear populations in neighboring states such as Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania has led to occasional sightings in Delaware.

### DON'T FEED, SHOOT AT BEAR

The DNRP has trained officers to handle situations involving transient black bears from surrounding states. For public safety, the DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife advises residents to follow these precautions if a bear is reported in the area:

- Do not approach, touch, feed or shoot at the bear. Back away slowly to give the bear space. Go inside and wait for the bear to leave. Once inside, contact the DNRP at 800-523-3336 to report the sighting.
- Eliminate potential food sources by cleaning or removing anything outdoors that may smell like food.
- Keep pet food indoors, especially for dogs and cats.



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*Business*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**





# STATE MOVES TO BOLSTER SPORTS TOURISM WITH \$11.3 MILLION IN GRANTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

An indoor track, a Frederica sports site, a pickleball complex and a tournament site have been awarded \$11.3 million from a state fund devoted to boosting sports tourism. Established last year, the **Sports Tourism Capital Investment Fund**'s allocations are announced by the **Delaware Tourism Office**, providing grants in support of sports facilities like arenas, courts, fields, aquatics facilities, track and field and more.

The winners were:

- **Indoor Track Delaware:** \$6 million to construct a new indoor track facility, adjacent to the Chase Fieldhouse in Wilmington, that will serve as a multi-sport complex and host a variety of events and competitions.
- **DE Turf:** \$3 million to make improvements to the

complex in Frederica in order to host larger regional and national tournaments. This will include tripling current stadium seating from 1,000 to 3,000 seats, constructing a new tournament facility, adding additional amenities and more.

- **Midway Motion & Fitness:** \$2 million to construct a pickleball complex in Rehoboth Beach with 12 indoor courts and 4 outdoor courts, meeting the requirements for sanctioning of tournaments by the American Pickleball Association.
- **STATS Tournaments:** \$300,000 to install stadium lights at two of its fields and build one additional baseball and softball field at their facility in Bear to accommodate the increasing team and tournament demands.

The **Sports Planning Guide**, an organization that documents the best destinations for sporting events, states that “the First State has witnessed an explosion in sports tourism, as visitors from across the country are flocking to this small coastal state to enjoy its diverse range of sports and outdoor activities. In essence, Delaware, the oldest state in the country and a state renowned for its rich history and stunning beaches, is also a sports tourism hotbed.”

According to Delaware’s 2021 travel numbers, tourism that year had a \$4 billion impact on the state, and attracted 28.3 million visitors with 83 percent of those being repeat visitors. For the economic boost, the goal of the fund is to drive regional and national events to Delaware.

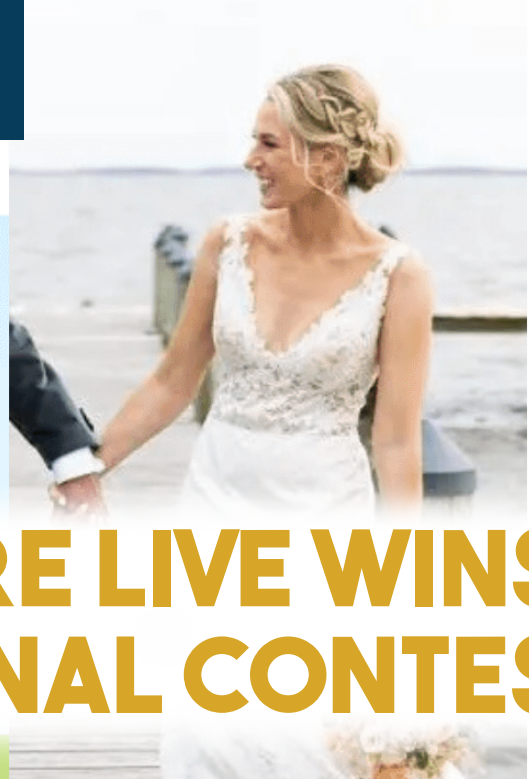
“Sports tourism is a significant economic driver in our state, attracting thousands of visitors to Delaware each year and generating millions of dollars in revenue,” said Jessica Welch, director of the Delaware Tourism Office. “This funding will go a long way in ensuring that our state can offer top-notch facilities to teams and event operators for years to come.”

The tourism office received 18 applications requesting more than \$54 million. Eligibility and award criteria can be found **HERE**, but one example is applicants are judged on potential economic impact on the state and local economy if the facility is provided funding.

Another is they have to be a facility within the state, specifically a high school, collegiate or recreational venue that generates positive incremental state tax benefits to Delaware, is used for public purposes and regularly hosts sports tourism events.

[CLICK TO READ MORE](#)





# DELAWARE LIVE WINS FOUR AWARDS IN NATIONAL CONTEST

## STAFF WRITER

Delaware LIVE reporters won four awards, including a first place, in the 2024 National Federation of Press Women Professional **Communications Contest**. The national contest pits first-place state winners against each other, in this case winners of the the 2024 Delaware Press Association 2024 Professional Communications Contest.

Editor Betsy Price won first place in specialty articles/hobby for **“They spend weeks lighting houses for Christmas. Here’s why.”** She also won an honorable mention in feature writing for **“Delaware Wedding: Matt Meyer, Lauren Cooksey marry in Rehoboth”**.

Education writer Jarek Rutz won third place in education writing for **“Wilmington Friends School to mark 275th anniversary”**.

Freelance writer Peter Osborne won first place in business reporting for **“Wilmington’s office-to-housing conversions add energy to city”**.

The awards were announced Saturday night in St. Louis, MO.

## DELAWARE LIVE

Delaware LIVE CEO Bryan Shupe said he was proud to see the reporters honored nationally, particularly in the same month that Delaware LIVE is celebrating its fourth anniversary.

“The national awards are further proof of the impact that hyperlocal news has in a community,” Shupe said.

Delaware LIVE was founded as a locally owned, state-wide media company that promises to never have a paywall. Rooted in traditional journalism, its mission is to bring back daily, local media to The First State by focusing on its people, organizations and businesses, not national news and headlines.

The company has four websites: **Delaware LIVE; Town Square Delaware LIVE; Milford LIVE** and **Chadds Ford LIVE**.




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# *Food & Dining*

TOWN SQUARE LIVE







# STATE MAY GET OFFICIAL COCKTAIL: THE ORANGE CRUSH

The Orange Crush cocktail is claimed to have been created by bartenders in Ocean City, MD in 1955. The drink long has been a staple of the Starboard restaurant in Dewey Beach.

HB 444 says the Orange Crush “has been made famous and become synonymous with Dewey Beach and the Starboard perfected the Orange Crush and serves the most Orange Crush cocktails of any bar in Delaware every beach season.”

It’s a refreshing summer drink, traditionally made with an orange-flavored vodka, triple sec and orange juice, preferably freshly-squeezed. Orange Crush is often served in pint glasses or a mason jar over ice and topped with lemon-lime soda.

The bill now moves to the Senate, where it will need to be heard in a committee and pass the full Senate before the session ends June 30.

The drink already is associated with the state on many culinary sites. On [thedailymeal.com](http://thedailymeal.com), a list of state drinks includes this disclaimer about the Orange Crush: “Many locals believe it’s not a true orange crush if it’s made with bottled orange juice—fresh is always the way to go.”



## BY BETSY PRICE

Delaware residents soon will be able to say “cheers” or “bottoms up” with the First State’s official cocktail. **House Bill 444**, sponsored by Rep. Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, designates the Orange Crush as the state cocktail, passed the state House June 20. The point of declaring a state cocktail is to increase tourism, Schwartzkopf said before asking for a vote.

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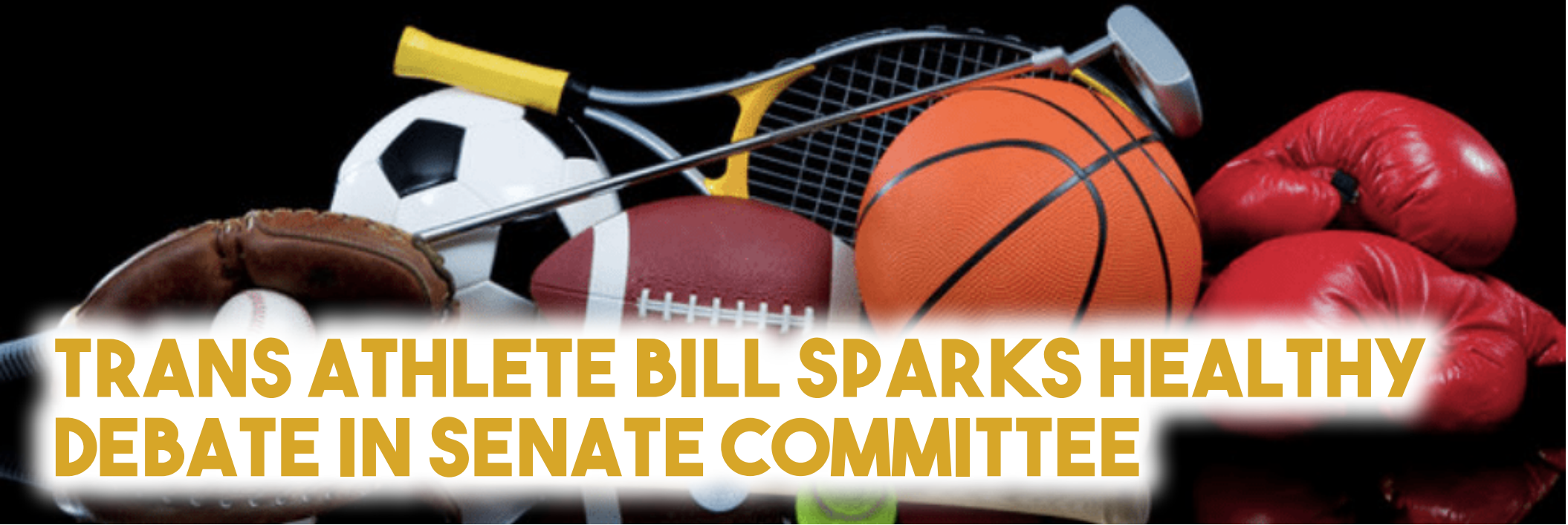
photo link: Town of Newark, Delaware



*Government*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**





# TRANS ATHLETE BILL SPARKS HEALTHY DEBATE IN SENATE COMMITTEE

BY JAREK RUTZ

A bill forcing transgender student athletes to compete only with others who share their biological gender drew some healthy discussion in the Senate Education Committee Wednesday.

“While the public could be broadly accepting of the idea that adults who want to identify as a different gender and undergo hormone treatment to live out their lives should be given space to do so, transgender activists are pushing for changes that have direct ramifications for others—here girls high school sports,” said Tom Neuberger, an attorney at the [The Neuberger Firm](#) who was called to testify in support the bill.

Dubbed the “Fairness in Girls’ Sports Act,” [Senate Bill 191](#), sponsored by Sen. Bryant Richardson R-Seaford, defines biological gender as being determined by birth and based on the student’s birth certificate or other government record if a birth certificate is unobtainable.

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover and a longtime athletic coach, pointed out that there’s scientific evidence of biological males having an athletic advantage over biological females.

“All that means is bigger, faster, stronger, something that I painted on the walls in the weight room when I ran those weight rooms for 30 years, telling the athletes that bigger, faster, stronger was how you won the moment,” he said.

He pointed out that in his time as a legislator he took heat from his own side of the political aisle for supporting the Pride Month legislation, but said logic would tell people that biological males should not compete with biological females. Buckson then brought up Anna Hall, who he said is referred to as the greatest American female athlete right now.

He said Bruce Jenner, gold medal Olympian in the 1970s who transitioned to a female, Caitlyn Jenner, would dominate in women’s sports.

“He was a gold medalist in the decathlon...and his times, her times now, but then his, would have dominated this year’s heptathlon,” Buckson said. “Even though he was an athlete in 1976, despite all the advances in training capability, he would have blown them [females] out of the water in his 100 yard dash time. He would have been out the door before Anna [Hall] gets here.”

An exception is outlined in the bill to allow female athletes to compete in male sports if a corresponding female sport is not available. Under the bill, a school district, charter school or [Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association](#) (DIAA) member school must designate an athletic team or sport based on the biological sex of students. Civil actions can be brought forward against any school or individual who violates this bill, with a statute of limitations of two years.

Kirsten Olson, chief executive officer of [Children and Families First](#), said the bill “could do substantial harm to the mental health well being and lives of trans youth.”

She cited statistics that transgender individuals are much more likely than their cisgender counterparts to have mental health struggles and much higher rates of suicide.

Sarah Stone, a representative for [ChristianaCare](#) said her organization opposes the bill.

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# CARNEY VETOES BILL TO REWORK EMPLOYEE BENEFITS COMMITTEE

BY BETSY PRICE

Gov. John Carney on Tuesday vetoed a bill to restructure the state committee that tried to move state retirees from a rich health plan to a Medicare Advantage one to save money.

**House Bill 282**, sponsored by Rep. Paul Baumbach, D-Newark, is one of several that grew out of a year's worth of committee hearings. It promised to revise the membership, structure and procedures of the State Employee Benefits Committee to increase transparency and accountability.

"I am disappointed that the governor has vetoed House Bill 282, a bill of such importance to our retirees and current employees and a bill that unanimously passed in both chambers," Baumbach said in a statement he issued Tuesday evening. "I will be in communication with House leadership to determine next steps in the best interest of our state," he said.

## BENEFITS & RETIREES

The Benefits Committee moved in 2022 to switch retirees to Medicare Advantage to help stem the rising costs of healthcare. That set off a huge revolt by retirees that led to the committee hearings who accused the state of making the move in secret, even though it did not and was known across state government.

One of the big concerns was that committee members didn't always attend the meetings, but instead sent someone in their place so the information wasn't getting to the right people.

Ultimately a court ruling said the state couldn't push retirees into Medicare Advantage because it violated what the retirees had been promised. HB 282 sought to thwart any future attempts to change retiree healthcare by requiring the Speaker of the House and the Senate Pro Tempore to appoint retirees to the committee.



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"It's important to understand that this veto will leave our state employees and retirees haunted by the fear of the next surprise cut to their retiree benefits," Baumbach said.

The changes would address longstanding concerns, both from retirees and current employees, about the visibility and makeup of the committee, said Baumbach, who is not running for re-election.

"With several bills this year and last year, the legislature has collaborated with the governor to fully address the issues he raised in his opposition to the bill," he said. "However, we must acknowledge that there is an underlying operational problem within the SEBC."







# FIVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS WILL SHARE \$160 MILLION FOR PROJECTS

BY BETSY PRICE

The state will invest \$160 million for school projects in six districts and \$100 million in deferred maintenance and capital improvements in state buildings, according to the \$1.1 billion capital budget introduced Monday.

The \$160 million for school construction projects is the largest amount of money designated and will go to Smyrna, Red Clay, Colonial, New Castle County Vo-Tech, Polytech and Christina school districts. It represents the state’s share of construction after all six districts applied for the construction money, were approved and then had to get residents to vote for tax increases to pay the district share.

The capital budget includes investments in roadway enhancements, school construction, state building renovations, economic development initiatives and various projects to protect Delaware’s natural resources.

**House Bill 475**, known as the Fiscal Year 2025 Bond Bill, is created by the Joint Capital Improvement Committee, a 12-member panel of legislators who draft the state’s capital spending plan.

HB 475 was on the **agenda** for Tuesday’s State House of Representatives session, but was not called up. If approved it will go to the Senate.

“The capital budget is prudently financed with a combination of cash reserves and bond sales that limits and manages state debt,” said Joseph Fulgham, director of Policy & Communications for the House Republican Caucus. “While there will always be disagreements about the individual items included in any omnibus bill of this size, the Bond Bill delivers value in long-lasting tangible assets that will serve our residents for years to come.”

The 2025 budget will be \$300 million less than 2024’s \$1.4 billion and ends a three-year run of rising bond bills, which were based on huge revenue surpluses. Delaware is not expected to have that kind of surplus in 2025 for a variety of reasons.

The 2024 Bond Bill is \$1.409 billion, the second-largest in state history behind 2023’s record \$1.458 billion capital spending plan. The 2022 bond was \$1.350 billion and 2021 was \$707.9 million.

The Bond Bill is one of four budgets the General Assembly must pass, including the general budget, one-time supplemental and grants-in-aid. But it doesn’t have to be passed by June 30 like the state budget does.

“These investments have a real, tangible impact on people’s lives, whether it’s students attending new and upgraded schools, roads that are easier to travel, or clean

water projects moving forward,” said Rep. Debra Heffernan, D-Bellefonte, chair of the Joint Capital Committee, commonly referred to as the Bond Committee.

The projects financed by the budget include school, road and environmental efforts and serve as a catalyst for job creation and economic growth, Heffernan said. “For several years now we’ve been fortunate to make significant investments in the infrastructure improvements that Delawareans want and need to strengthen our state.”

The Bond Bill includes \$40 million for the Community Reinvestment Fund, which will provide funding for capital projects for Delaware community nonprofit and municipal organizations.

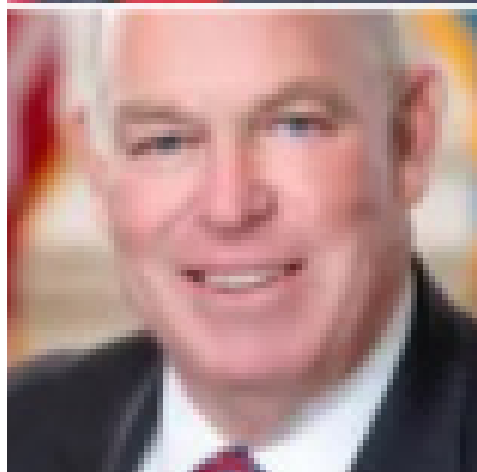
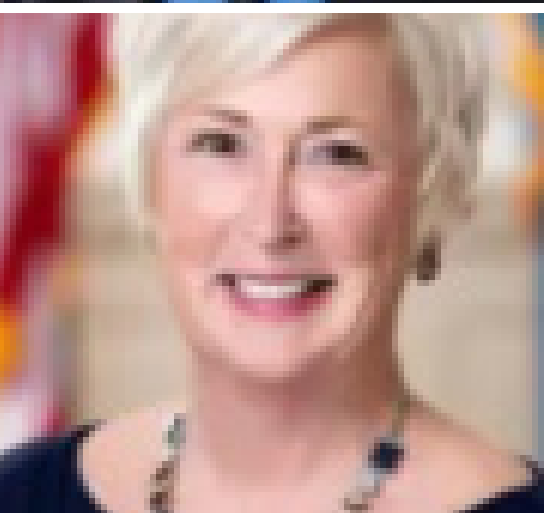
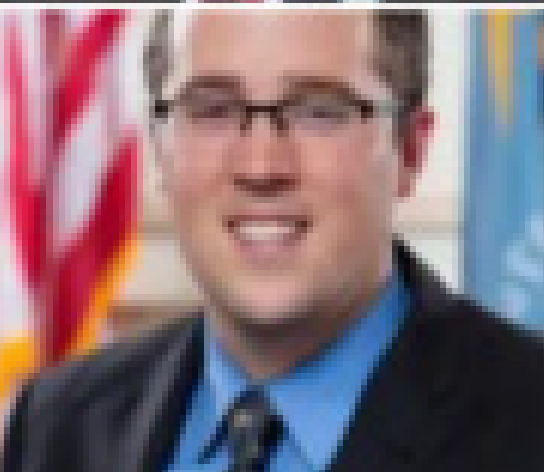
“My Republican and Democratic colleagues on the Bond Committee deserve a lot of credit for putting together a strong job creation bill that continues our record of strong, sound investments in the infrastructure that keeps our communities running,” said committee co-chair Sen. Jack Walsh, D-Wilmington.

## NOTABLE BOND BILL PROJECTS

- \$352.7 million to complete road projects statewide, including additional funds to address the roads in the poorest condition.
- \$160 million for school construction projects in the Smyrna, Red Clay, Colonial, New Castle County Vo-Tech, Polytech and Christina school districts.

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# DELAWARE HOUSE TO SALUTE SIX DEPARTING MEMBERS

BY BETSY PRICE

Among the last week’s work in the 2024 session will be **Delaware House of Representatives** saluting six legislators who are leaving or have left the Delaware House.

They include Rep. Sherry Dorsey Walker, D-Wilmington; Rep. Sean Matthews, D-Middletown; Rep. Paul Baumbach, D-Newark; Rep. Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach; Rep. Michael Ramone, R-Newark/Pike Creek; and former Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown.

On Tuesday, June 25, the House celebrated Matthews and Briggs King. She resigned last fall after moving into a house a mile outside of her district. She’s now running for lieutenant governor on the Republican ticket.

On Wednesday, the House recognized Baumbach and Schwartzkopf. Both have already been the subject of much appreciation, Baumbach when he announced he was not running for re-election a few weeks ago and Schwartzkopf when he stepped down last year as Speaker of the House.

On Thursday, the House will recognize Dorsey Walker and Ramone. She is running for lieutenant governor on the Democratic ticket against two other women. He is running for governor on the Republican ticket.



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# WILMINGTON TASK FORCE FINDS FINES, FEES ARE 'HIGH PAIN, LOW GAIN'

BY JAREK RUTZ

Water fees have risen the most of any city of Wilmington fees and the city is increasing its use of the water/sewer fund to pay for general city expenses, according to a [city task force report](#). The report said, among other findings, that using fines and fees is a low-reward system.

The 16-page report, conducted by Wilmington’s Fines and Fees Task Force, is about a year-and-a-half in the making. The group was created in October 2022 to review fees, fines and administrative sanctions administered by the city, make findings and potentially make recommendations to the city council for changes.

The Wilmington City Council voted last Thursday to approve the final report, which says the fines have “high pain and low gain.” That’s because over the last two decades, the city has increasingly used fines and fees to generate revenue, shifting more of the burden of paying for city services to people with the least ability to pay.

“As the costs of fines and fees rise, more people have had difficulty paying, causing financial hardship, especially among lower-income residents,” the report states.

Plus, late payments or failure to pay and increased costs of collection have impacted Wilmington’s bottom line.

The task force believes fair and equitable budgeting is a solution. That means revising the city’s budget to better align revenue with sources that have the ability to pay. It also means Wilmington must address the needs of low-income groups to ensure universal access to city services.

Here are the 13 key findings outlined in the report:

- Water bill fees have grown more than any other source of revenue.
- New Castle County’s payment for sewage services has been growing much slower than direct user fees paid by water customers.
- Water customers have made up the difference.

- The city uses the water/sewer fund to pay for both water/sewer expenses and general city expenses.
- The city is increasing its use of the water/sewer fund to pay for general city expenses.
- A growing portion of the water/sewer fund is paying for general city expenses.
- Wilmington’s population hasn’t grown at all, and resident incomes aren’t growing as fast as fees are going up.
- Wilmington’s higher water bills have outpaced many residents’ ability to pay.
- The city uses its most harmful collection tactics to collect overdue bills from residential accounts.
- Fines contribute a small but growing portion of city revenue.
- Generating revenue from fees and fines is time-consuming and expensive.
- A very large portion of fine revenue goes to pay outside contractors.
- Booting and towing for overdue parking tickets generates little revenue and harms Wilmington’s low-income residents the most.

The 13th finding was actually the focus of a legislative bill brought before the General Assembly in April that is currently stuck in committee. [House Bill 351](#), sponsored by Rep. Ed Osienski, D-Newark, would create a slew of requirements for the towing and storage of vehicles without the consent of the owner or operator.

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# ASSISTED SUICIDE BILL DIES IN SENATE

BY JAREK RUTZ

A controversial bill that would give terminally ill people the right to end their lives failed to pass the Delaware Senate June 20. **House Bill 140**, sponsored by Rep. Paul Baumbach, D-Newark, would have permitted a terminally ill adult resident of Delaware to request and self-administer medication to end the individual’s life in a humane and dignified manner. The medication is typically a solution that a patient takes orally.

Under HB 140, both the individual’s attending physician or advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) and a consulting physician or nurse would have to agree on an individual’s diagnosis and prognosis and believe the individual has decision-making capacity, is making an informed decision, and is acting voluntarily.

This method is often referred to as “assisted suicide”

or “assisted dying.” The topic has been rejected multiple times in recent years by the General Assembly.

The bill’s defeat came as something of a shock, because it was sponsored by a Democrat and most of those bills fly through the Senate because of the Democrat super majority.

Opponents of the bill have cited mostly religious reasons for their opposition. Some have said they feared unscrupulous family members or guardians would coerce sick or disabled relatives into committing suicide.

The vote was nine ‘yes’ and nine ‘no,’ with the nay votes coming from five Republicans and four Democrats. Those who voted no are Sen. Darius Brown, D-Wilmington; Sen. Spiros Mantzavinos D-Newport; Sen. Jack Walsh, D-Wilmington; Sen. Nicole Poore,

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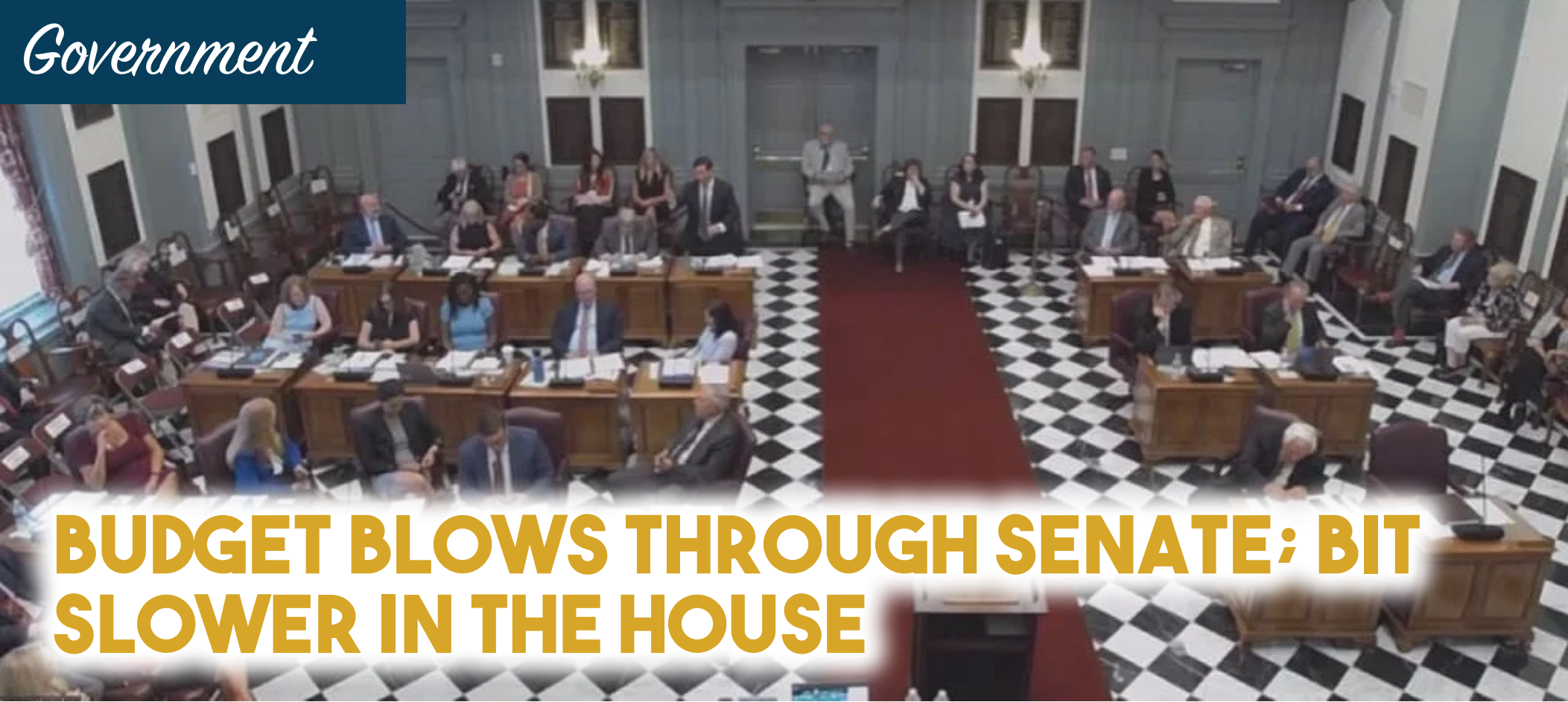
D-Delaware City; Sen. Bryant Richardson R-Seaford; Sen. Bryan Townsend, D-Newark; Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, Sen. Dave Lawson, R-Marydel; and Sen. Dave Wilson, R-Lincoln.

“I do not take my no vote lightly,” said Wilson. “I do believe the efforts of those who support this legislation are being done in good faith. I could not, however, bring myself to support HB 140 due to the easing of safeguards seen in other states across our nation.”

Townsend changed his vote from ‘yes’ to ‘no,’ which allows him to bring the bill back to the floor for consideration within three legislative days, meaning by or on next Thursday, June 27.







# BUDGET BLOWS THROUGH SENATE; BIT SLOWER IN THE HOUSE

BY BETSY PRICE

The 2025 Delaware state budget quickly passed the Senate June 20 and the House in the evening. The \$6.1 billion budget, outlined in [Senate Bill 325](#), goes into effect July 1 and likely will be signed into law this week by Gov. John Carney before the session ends.

Quick budget approval hasn't always been the case in the General Assembly. Battles over the budget and other bills often lasted well into the night on June 30, the final day of the session. In recent years, though, it's arrived and been passed with little dissent during the penultimate week.

In the Senate, the only whiff of concern came when Sen. Dave Lawson, R- Marydel, asked if the budget was exactly as it had been passed by the Joint Finance Committee. That bipartisan group starts with the governor's

suggested budget to create the final version. Sen. Trey Paradee, D-Dover, the chairman of the Joint Finance Committee and sponsor of SB 35, assured him it was.

"Once markup is done and we've all agreed, you know there's no making changes at that point, unless of course, we were to call the Joint Finance Committee back in," he said.

In the House, Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Camden, thanked Rep. Kim Williams, D-Marshallton, for co-chairing the Joint Finance Committee.

"It's a competition for resources and competition that is very challenging at times," he said. But, he pointed out, the 2025 budget is 9.3% higher than 2024's. In two years, he said, the state's operating budget spending has increased by more than \$1 billion, a 20% increase, while

the state's gross domestic product is growing at about 1%.

"The budget broke the \$5 billion mark for the first time in fiscal year 2023, and the new one smashes through the \$6 billion ceiling," he said.

SB 325 includes a lot of good things, he said.

"I'm challenged to see how we're going to be able to keep that pace of spending up with an economy that struggling to grow," he said. "Revenues have now started to slow down from an all-time high, but they continue to grow 20% in two years. I find it very challenging that we're gonna be able to keep that pace without some very serious discussions in regard to how we're going to acquire additional revenue because we've never really found any way to quench our insatiable appetite to spend."

The budget passed the bill 38-3 with Yearick, Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, and Rep. Bryan Shupe, R-Milford voting no.

## BUDGET DETAILS

Medicaid and employee expenses drove the budget, he said. Paradee pointed out that this bill is the third in a row to make "significant investments" with another \$95 million for pay increases for the state workforce.

"That is mission No. 1 here," he said. "You know our job as a government is to make sure that we have a functioning government. You have to have all the employees. You have to have all the employees. You have to attract and retain quality people to run our government and provide essential services that our citizens depend on."

Merit employees will be receiving a 2% increase. Edu-

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# AFFORDABLE HOUSING GROUP SEEKS SCHOOL TAX EXEMPTIONS

BY JAREK RUTZ

The Delaware legislature pushed through a bill that would exempt an affordable housing organization from paying certain taxes.

**Senate Bill 78**, sponsored by Senate Majority Whip Elizabeth “Tizzy” Lockman, D-Wilmington, exempts people from paying school property taxes on real estate owned by **Todmorden Foundation** and used for the purposes of affordable housing. That organization is a non-profit that provides affordable rental housing and improves the quality of life in Wilmington.

The bill’s fiscal note shows \$178,267.32 a year lost for three school districts in Delaware. That’s a result of \$159,085.95 revenue lost for the **Red Clay Consolidated School District**, \$6,765.50 for the **Christina School District** and \$12,415.87 for the **New Castle County Vo-**

## Tech School District.

Legislators asked how that revenue would be made up, which wasn’t answered, but districts said they are “neutral” on the bill. Rich Przywara, president and chief executive officer of the Todmorden Foundation, said in the June 20th House Education Committee that the school districts “very graciously said they won’t oppose it,” which drew a few crackles from the legislators.

“They understand that affordable housing is very important to their ability to have the students attend school regularly, and that housing stability is very important for them,” Przywara said.

He said the foundation has a program with the districts where it helps their own staff find housing. “We have one or two units a month that come online and we’re

sending those advertisements to their HR departments so that they can get their own employees to be in affordable housing, because this is such a critical problem,” he said. “The organization’s and our housing focuses on people in the 80% or below of AMI (area median income).”

Przywara said the districts did not directly share their plans to make up lost revenue with him, but he said they understand that this is relatively modest and they think this will not present a problem because of the growth in Delaware and the number of market rate housing that is being built.

“I don’t think we should be picking and choosing either/or,” said Rep. Sherae’a Moore, D-Middletown. “I believe there is a way to get both, but the amount of revenue loss...this is a huge revenue loss, but I do understand the cost.”

Legislators asked how this would affect people downstate, to which Przywara said it wouldn’t since the foundation only operates in Wilmington.

Rep. Eric Morrison, D-Glasgow, wanted to know what percentage of the districts’ budget would be lost. Mark Holodick, Delaware Secretary of Education, said off the top of his head he knows Red Clay’s annual budget is north of \$100 million.

Rep. Rich Collins, R-Millsboro, asked if there’s any other groups like the Todmorden Foundation.

Przywara said there’s many who are also exempt from this tax, including the Ministry of Caring, Salvation Army, West End Neighborhood House and more.

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photo credit: Appoquinimink School District



*Education*

TOWN SQUARE LIVE





# SENATE MOVES TO ADDRESS SCHOOL FUNDING STUDY WITH COMMISSION

BY JAREK RUTZ

After a couple of briefings on the landmark December 2023 report on school funding that says Delaware should invest up to \$1 billion more into it, the state legislature is moving to take action. Tuesday, the Senate passed **Senate Concurrent Resolution 201**, sponsored by Sen. Laura Sturgeon, D-Hockessin and chair of the Senate Education Committee, which establishes the Public Education Funding Commission.

That group will be tasked to continue the comprehensive review of public education funding, develop a roadmap of recommendations to implement improvements to the education funding system and serve as an ongoing body to review the funding annually and recommend updates and changes.

It's a response to the **American Institutes for Research's** (AIR) 200-page **report** that suggests an investment of \$500 million to \$1 billion more in public educa-

tion, which already accounts for about a third of the state's annual budget. Notably, the report points out that the funding formula for Delaware—which is more than 70 years old—is outdated, doesn't follow the resources and needs of students and doesn't sufficiently provide enough for certain demographics like minorities, low-income and students with disabilities and special needs.

“In my 25 years as a public school teacher, I saw firsthand how the incredibly complex and inequitable system that Delaware uses to fund public education is failing to meet the needs of students and contributing to widespread burnout among educators,” Sturgeon said Tuesday.

Some of the inequities in funding led to a Delaware NAACP lawsuit which was settled in 2020.

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# LEGISLATOR: MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS HURT DELAWARE CLASSROOMS

BY JAREK RUTZ

A member of the state task force that’s trying to improve student behavior and school environments in schools said that tiered mental health programs are killing Delaware classroom productivity.

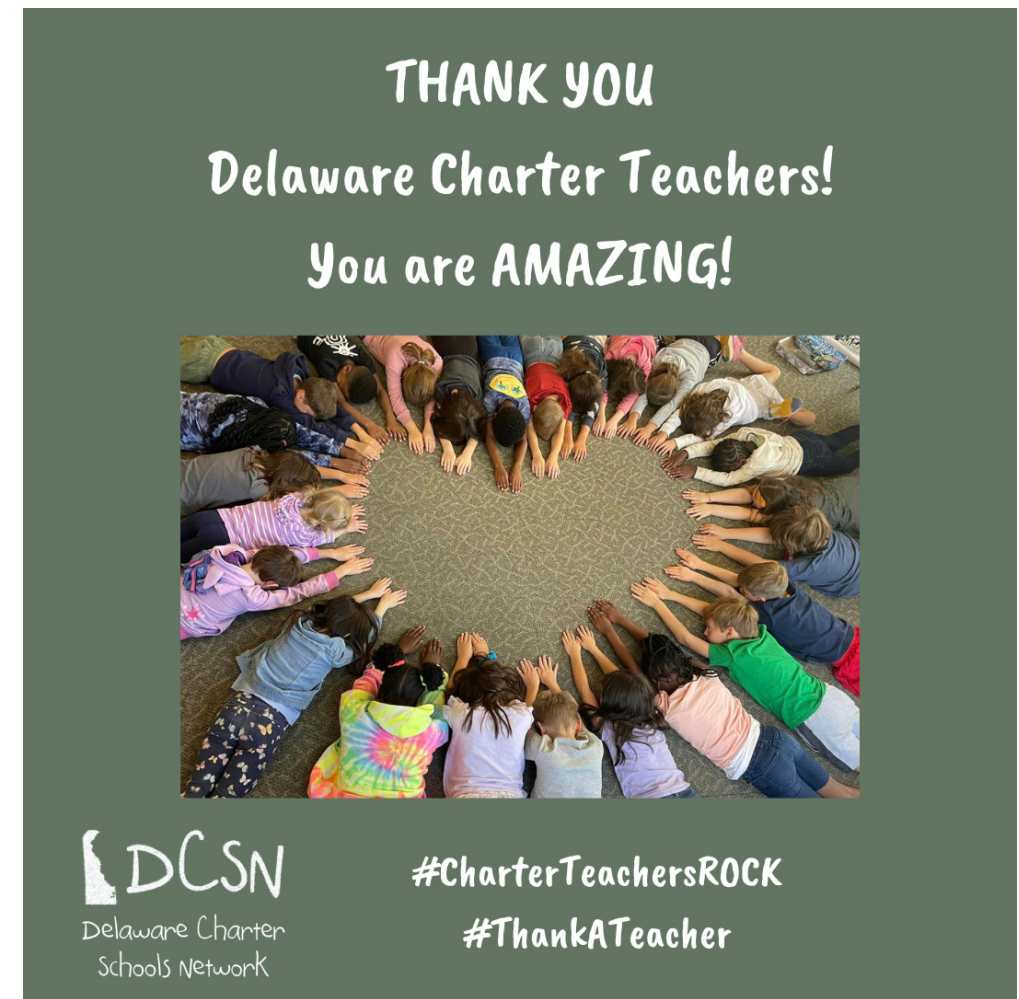
“They don’t need all the fancy stuff,” said Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, said. “They don’t need the interventions. They don’t need the couches, they don’t need the specialists. They just need to realize, okay, there’s accountability back in the system and I need to handle my business.”

He made the comment in the Student Behavior and School Climate Task Force’s fourth meeting Monday

night. The focus of the meeting was the multi-tiered system of supports, referred to as MTSS, in First State schools.

“Mental illness is real, mental fitness is real,” Buckson said. “Mental health is a good thing that we all have, but we’re labeling it as some stranglehold on education and the weight of it is collapsing the system.”

The 24-member task force, made of government and educational officials as well as school behavioral specialists and resource officers, was created to study the needs and options of students and educators to improve student behavior and school climate policies.



Studies have shown that the support systems help improve student behavior, academic outcomes, on-time graduation rates, said Kathy Kelly, director of curriculum, instruction and professional development at the [Delaware Department of Education](#).

They also lead to better system-level outcomes, she said, including more instructional and planning time for educators, efficient use of resources and staff, a decreased inappropriate special education referrals and placement rate, a reduction in student time in special education services and grade retention, Kelly said.

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# NEW HOLY CROSS TO BECOME ONLY CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL IN KENT COUNTY

BY JAREK RUTZ

Kent County is getting a Catholic high school. Holy Cross High will open in fall 2025. It is the only Catholic secondary education institution since Dover’s St. Thomas More Academy closed in 2020 because of the pandemic and low enrollment.

Supporters include many involved in the old Holy Cross High School that closed down in the ‘80s, including alumni and people who had kids there, as well as some involved in St. Thomas More, said Tom Fertal.

Fertal left Wilmington’s **Saint Mark’s High School** to head the new Kent school. He said Holy Cross meets the demand for a Catholic high school downstate.

Right now, the school is raising funds to establish a strong endowment for tuition assistance and operating costs before Holy Cross opens. Fertal said organizers hope to start with a \$6 million endowment and have raised about 35% of that so far. The school also needs to

find a building to call home, but eventually wants to be able to offer a full high school campus.

Tuition has not been set yet, but is anticipated to be less than the Catholic high schools in New Castle County, based on the population of Dover and a survey asking what people would be willing to pay. For example, tuition for the 2024–25 school year is \$28,180 for Wilmington’s Ursuline Academy, \$20,250 for the Salesianum School and \$16,740 for Padua Academy.

Applicants to the school do not have to be Catholic, and Fertal said he hopes there’s interest from all types of families in Delaware.

“We will welcome all, and people understand that we have a worldview and a theological position that we teach from,” he said. “If they’re okay with that, come on in and welcome home.”

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*Sports*

**TOWN SQUARE LIVE**





# NBN SPORTS ACADEMY OPENS NEW FACILITY IN HOCKESSIN

BY NICK HALLIDAY

NBN Sports Academy has opened its new facility in Hockessin. NBN purchased the old Hockessin Indoor Tennis Facility and turned it into a basketball and volleyball training facility with three high school courts with shot clocks. The basketball courts can then be converted into five volleyball courts. The facility also includes a cafe, classrooms, and training and physical therapy area.

NBN Sports Academy is an independent sports academy that was established in 2017 by Lonnie Wright. NBN has four coed divisions based on age for youths between the ages of four and 17. Each team consists of eight to 10 children, a coach and an assistant coach. Wright and his group also run an AAU group out of NBN called Delaware Ignite which is a nationally ranked program that competes in grades six-12.

But just like the motto says, NBN is “More than Sports”. Their program also provides educational and life skills training. They offer a curriculum that supports the needs of youths and helps them advance to the next level. Their educational and life skills training programs include:

- Conflict resolution
- Interviewing skills
- Self-esteem
- Money management
- Critical thinking
- Credit building
- Resume/job search

Wright told us his reason behind starting NBN was “I had four boys who were basketball players and they were not being taught the game the right way. They were

playing in programs that just had them come in and run up and down the floor. But more importantly, I wanted my boys to be more well-rounded. Sports have a way of bringing all types of groups together black, white, green, yellow, rich and poor.”

Since NBN’s inception in 2017, they have nearly quadrupled their size with their purchase of the new facility. The new facility also brings more opportunities and NBN hopes to hold some major tournaments here in our state to showcase the talent our state has to offer.

Wright told us when asked why the bigger facility was so important. “We see all the professional Delaware athletes that don’t come back. Then we see all of the high school kids leaving the state because they think they offer a better opportunity. Now there’s an opportunity for them all they have to do is walk through the door.”

NBN also offers adult leagues and tournaments as well as other sports like volleyball and cheerleading. They are also going to offer an NBN podcast, as well multimedia training for those kids who want to be an analyst or a broadcaster. Looks like we may have some future NBN staff members joining us one day. NBN expects the new sports facility to offer many more opportunities in which they see their new facility and growth to continue upward.







# BLUE TEAM BREAKS RECORDS IN 68TH DFRC ALL STAR GAME

BY NICK HALLIDAY

The 68th DFRC Blue-Gold All Star football game took place Friday night, June 21, at the University of Delaware. The game showcases Hand-in-Hand Buddies, children and young adults with intellectual disabilities, and Delaware’s finest high school student leaders who participate as football players, cheerleaders, band members and school ambassadors.

Forty-eight schools across the state were represented. The main event of the night is the all star football game, with top seniors from around the state split between two teams—the Blue and Gold teams.

The Blue team opened the game with a trick play that went 92 yards for a touchdown and set a new Blue-Gold record that had stood since 1982. On a double reverse, Rahshan LaMons pitched the ball back to quarterback Rashaan Matthews Jr. who found Vandrick Hamlin at midfield wide open as he caught the ball and ran in for the touchdown.

Late in the second quarter, Matthews found Hamlin again for a pass down the sideline, 46 yards down to the 10-yard line. LaMons finished off the drive with a five-yard run to make it a 14-0 lead. Cole Fenice then picked off a Jacob Tiberi pass on the ensuing drive and returned it to the 13-yard line. Fenice was then able to kick a successful 36-yard field goal to take a 17-0 lead into the half.

On the opening play of the second half, the Blue team went for another big play as Matthews found Hamlin again for a 78-yard touchdown. On that play Hamlin broke another Blue-Gold record as he totaled 216 receiving yards after that play. The previous record was held by Gary Hammond of Newark who had 202 yards in 1969. Blue took a 23-0 lead.

The Blue team added six more points when Markevis Rogers picked off a pass and walked it in for a 23-yard pick six. The Blue team led 29-0 heading into the fourth and final quarter of the game.

The Gold team finally broke the shutout after they were stopped short of the goal line on fourth down. The Blue team had a miscommunication on the snap which made Matthews get rid of the ball quickly, but he was unable to get it out of the end zone which resulted in a safety, giving the Gold team two points.

In the 32-2 victory the Blue team broke three different Blue-Gold game records. The duo of Matthews and Hamlin set new records in longest play from scrimmage (92), most receiving yards (Hamlin 213) and most passing yards in a game (Matthews 254). All of these stats are unofficial until the final stats are available, but we are certain all of these records were broken in Friday’s game.





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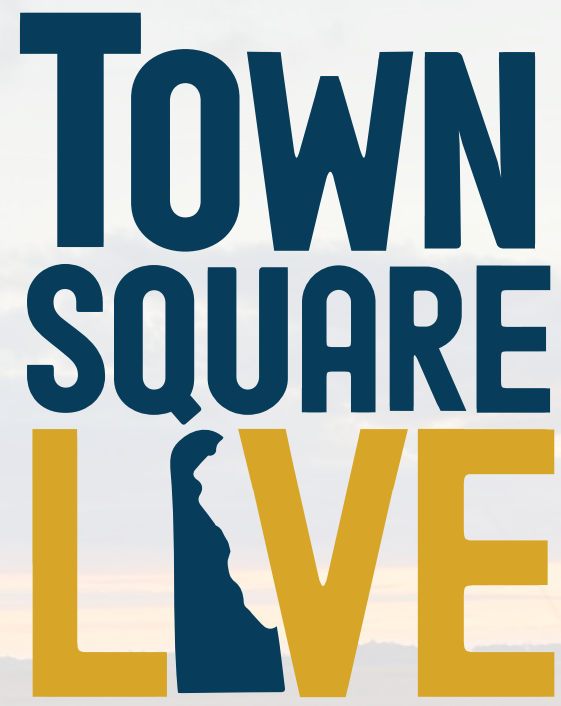


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