

The Prince George's Post



A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY SINCE 1932

Vol. 91, No. 49 December 7 — December 13, 2023 Prince George's County, Maryland Newspaper of Record Phone: 301-627-0900 25 cents

Prince George's County, Maryland, Celebrates Decade of Economic Growth With 55,000 New Jobs Added

The county added more jobs than any other county in the state between 2011–2021

By PRESS OFFICER
PGCEDC

LARGO, Md. (Nov. 29, 2023)—Prince George's County proudly announces a significant economic growth and development milestone. Over the past ten years, from 2011 to 2021, the County has successfully added 55,000 new jobs, marking a considerable achievement in its commitment to economic prosperity and community development according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) data.

This remarkable job growth is a testament to the County's robust economic policies, strategic initiatives, and a conducive business environment that have collectively fostered job creation and attracted diverse industries to the region.

"This achievement reflects our dedicated efforts to create a thriving economy in Prince George's County," said David Iannucci, President & CEO of Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation. "We have worked tirelessly to attract businesses, support local entrepreneurship, and create a skilled workforce that meets the evolving demands of the job market."

This period of growth has seen a diverse range of industries flourish in the County, including technology, healthcare, education, and service sectors, contributing to a dynamic and resilient local economy.

That vertical economic trajectory will only expand with the recent announcement of the Federal Bureau of Investigations headquarters coming to Greenbelt, MD.



This decision will bring generational transformation and investment for Prince George's County and the State of Maryland because large federal job centers have driven job and income growth in the region. When the Federal Government decided in 1941 to locate the Pentagon on the west bank of the Po-

tomac, that decision created decades of additional investment in Virginia.

As we look to the future, Prince George's County remains committed to continuing this trajectory of growth and prosperity, ensuring a sustainable and inclusive economy for all its residents.

New MCAP Results Show Signs of Recovery From Pandemic Learning Loss in English and Math While Science Declines

By AYA HUSSEIN
Capital News Service

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (Nov. 28, 2023)—The results for the 2023 Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) tests for grades 3 to 8 show that student proficiency in English Language Arts has surpassed the level it was at before the pandemic. Math scores have improved, but have yet to fully rebound from the pandemic, while science scores have declined, according to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

MCAP tests are administered annually in public schools to assist educators in understanding student progression so that they can better tailor their methods of instruction, according to MSDE.

Students in grades 3 to 8 take tests in English and math, while students in grades 5 and 8 are given an additional science test.

English proficiency surpasses 2019

According to data from MSDE, average English proficiency dropped from 44% in 2019 to 31% in 2021.

Proficiency increased significantly in 2022 and by a smaller

degree in 2023, with results showing an average passing rate of 47%, according to MSDE.

Improvements can be seen across Maryland, as every county except Somerset had an increase in English proficiency between 2022 and 2023. Somerset County had a slight 0.3% decrease in scores. Baltimore City had the most improvement with 22%.

Math proficiency still below pre-pandemic levels

The 24% average passing rate for math in 2023 is still lower than the 31% in 2019, indicating that math scores have still not fully recovered from pandemic learning loss.

Despite average passing rates in math still not being as high as in 2019, they have gone up since dropping to 15% in 2021. Proficiency increased by 6 percentage points from 2021 to 2022 and 3 percentage points from 2022 to 2023.

Not every county had an improvement, as there are four counties that saw a decline in average math proficiency from 2022 to 2023: Baltimore, Kent, Somerset and Talbot. Baltimore County had a significant 15% drop in math proficiency from 2022.

Baltimore County Public Schools Board of Education Member at Large Tiara Booker-Dwyer said that an explanation for the slower improvement in math scores is that the format of math questions in these tests have become more layered, which makes it difficult for parents, teachers and administrators trained in the traditional format to help students get accustomed.

"Not only do you have to have that English language proficiency to understand 'what is this question asking,' then you also have to have that mathematical skill set to do the problem," Booker-Dwyer said. "That's going to take a little bit longer for students to truly master, it's going to take a little bit longer for teachers to truly master how to facilitate instruction on it."

Historically underserved students lag behind

Despite making improvements over the last two years, average scores for historically underserved students in English and math still lag behind. The most recent scores of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino and American Indian/Alaska Native students are

still below those of white and Asian students.

Booker-Dwyer said that it is important to build the cultural competency of educators so that they can connect better with students.

"When you look at the curriculum that was developed, it speaks to a certain demographic. There are certain people who just 'I'm not going to connect with this,' so it's going to go in one ear and out the other. Or when they try to connect to it, people recognize that it's inauthentic," Booker-Dwyer said.

Booker-Dwyer states that another solution is encouraging more historically underserved students to take honors and AP classes, as well as providing resources to schools to give them these opportunities.

"What the research shows is that if you're placed in an advanced academic class or gifted class, even if you're earning C's in there, you're better off long term than if you're just in the standard class," Booker-Dwyer said.

"Sometimes it's just exposure to certain things, just being in a classroom, around students

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Governor Wes Moore and First Lady Dawn Moore to Host Holiday Public Open House

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Nov. 30, 2023)—Governor Wes Moore and First Lady Dawn Moore today announced that they will open the Government House of Maryland to celebrate the holidays during a Public Open House on **Saturday, December 9**. Government House, located at 110 State Circle, Annapolis, MD 21401, will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"Over the last few months, our family has been deeply touched by Marylanders across the state who have supported us in a time of transition," said Gov. Moore. "Dawn and I look forward to opening the doors of the People's House to the people of Maryland as we celebrate this season of reflection and renewal. The holidays call on us to embrace our communities, and this open house honors that beautiful tradition."

"We could not be more excited to welcome you into the People's House. Bring your families, check out some decorations, enjoy some homemade cookies, and maybe even get a Tucker sighting," said First Lady Dawn Moore. "On behalf of our family, we hope your holidays are filled with joy, peace, safety, and rest this season. The Governor and I are honored every day to serve you, and we are so grateful for your partnership as we continue to move forward together."

During this joyous holiday season, visitors are encouraged to bring a donation of a new, safe, unwrapped toy to be collected by Maryland State Police and given to children in need across the State of Maryland.

The governor and first lady thank you in advance for helping spread holiday cheer throughout our communities and look forward to celebrating the holidays together.

U.S. Air Force Band and Singing Sergeants Celebrate the Holidays

By PRESS OFFICER
The U.S. Air Force Band

WASHINGTON (Nov. 28, 2023)—The United States Air Force Band and Singing Sergeants from Washington, D.C. celebrate the holidays through spectacular musical performances in a concert series titled "Season of Hope". These concerts will feature the Concert Band and Singing Sergeants performing timeless renditions of holiday favorites. They'll be joined by the Washington Performing Arts Children of the Gospel Choir, the Alexandria School of Highland Dance, and a special visitor from the North Pole! All concerts are free and open to the public though do require tickets. Free tickets for these concerts are available at:

<https://usafband.ticketleap.com/season-of-hope/dates>

Saturday, December 9 at 3 p.m.

DAR Constitution Hall
1776 D Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

Saturday, December 9 at 7 p.m.

DAR Constitution Hall
1776 D Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

Sunday, December 10 at 3 p.m.

DAR Constitution Hall
1776 D Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

The Concert Band and Singing Sergeants are two of the six performing ensembles within The United States Air Force Band, the premier musical organization of the U.S. Air Force. Stationed at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington, D.C. The United States Air Force Band honors those who have served, inspires American citizens to heightened patriotism and service, and connects with the global community on behalf of the U.S. Air Force and the United States of America.

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Rosalynn Carter: Honoring a Legacy

She shared a very simple philosophy: "I believe that one of the most important things to learn in life is that you can make a difference in your community no matter who you are or where you live."

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TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

In & Around Morningside-Skyline

Santa comes to Morningside

Morningside's annual Breakfast with Santa will be at the Morningside Firehouse on Saturday, Dec. 9, beginning at 9 a.m. And, yes, Santa will be there.

The tasty breakfast menu lists pancakes, sausage, fruit, juice and coffee. And, after breakfast, there will be a Magic Show. Also, door prizes and Santa's Secret Shop (for purchasing small gifts).

Admission is \$5.00 per person. Space is limited. I checked with Karen at the Town Hall and she says reservations are filling fast. You must pre-register by calling 301-736-2301.

Morningside's Breakfast with Santa is always fun.

By the way, Morningside's meetings this month will be the Work Session on the 12th and the Town Meeting on the 19th, both beginning at 7. Morningside information: 301-736-2300.

Upper Marlboro election

Derrick Brooks and Alma Prevatte defeated incumbents Linda Pennoyer and Thomas Hanchett in the municipal election on November 7. Commissioners Sarah Franklin, Charles Colbert and Karen Lott were re-elected. The Town Commission picks a president from among their members. Sarah Franklin, who won the most votes, is currently serving as president.

There were several write-ins. One of them was Tinsel the Cat.

Neighbors and other good people

I've received the sad news that Tim Flaherty, formerly of Skyline, has died. He left nine children from a blended family. He lived in North Carolina, not too far from the ocean because he loved to fish. He was a published author and a wonderful father. By the way, Tim used to mow my lawn; that was a long, long time ago.

Scott Howard lives in Clinton and has a question: Do you know what the Popeyes on Woodyard Road was back in the '70s or '80s? (It had the best onion rings.) As for Scott himself: he's from Hempstead, NY, but lived all over the country during his Naval career. He now works for the Department of Defense as a civilian at the Pentagon.

Samina Nelson, of Suitland High School, won People's Choice in the Maryland Department of the Environment Sculpture Contest with her entry, "The Royal". Among Suitland High artists placing second

were Samadhi Jones for "The Departure" and Azera Graham for her "Esterfester."

Places to go & things to do

Mount Calvary Church, in Forestville, is holding "My Soul Sings Out" on Sunday, Dec. 10 at 4 p.m. It features the Maryland Choral Society, full orchestra and soloists for Bach's Magnificat and festive songs of the season—including a "Muppet Medley." Go to <https://maryland-choral-society-ticketleap.com/my-soul-sings-out>,

ICE! is back at the Gaylord National Hotel in National Harbor through Dec. 31. It's a "dazzling, immersive, story-driven holiday showplace complete with larger-than-life ice sculptures, frozen slides, and awe-inspiring tunnels." Check out time and fees at ChristmasAtGaylordNational.com.

The annual Winter Festival of Lights has returned and continues through January 1, daily from 9.30 p.m. It features dazzling displays with more than 2.5 million LED lights throughout the park and a giant, 54-foot LED musical tree. This year there are also hayrides and horseback riding. It's all at Watkins Regional Park, and costs only \$15. Bring canned goods for local food banks.

Changing landscape

Andrews Manor Shopping Center on Al-lentown Road, directly across from Joint Base Andrews, has a new face. All the tenants, from B Thrifty at one end to Fast Eddie's at the other end, have been painted white—and they look great with the red store names. The Shopping Center opened in 1963. I remember when Food Fair and Drug Fair were at either end with Kresge's dime store in the middle. (Or was it Woolworth's?)

A Go-Go Museum is coming up. Groundbreaking was at 1920 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE, in the building that houses Check It Enterprises.

There is increasing demand for a Metro station at National Harbor via the Blue Line. Among other reasons is efficient travel from National Harbor to the future home of a proposed 23-acre hospital campus in Fort Washington, and to Charles County and back.

A hungry beaver, or perhaps multiple beavers, have damaged at least 15 cherry trees at the Washington Tidal Basin near the Jefferson Memorial.

Be warned—D.C. has doubled the number of traffic cameras, and 140 more are on the way. Slow down.

by Mary McHale 301-735-3451

A home at 4120 Maple Road, in Morningside, has sold for \$390,000.

The Hemmers, Don and Michiko, enjoyed putting on train shows

Donald Charles Hemmer, Jr., 68, of Chesapeake Beach and formerly of Forestville, died Nov. 8 while traveling in Mainz, Germany, with his wife Michiko (Mich).

Don was born in Washington to the late Donald Sr. and Jeanne Hemmer. He was the oldest of ten; his nine siblings survive him.

He graduated from the electrical IBEW local 26 apprenticeship in 1978. He retired in 2010 from Freestate Electric as a master electrician. After his retirement you could find him on the golf course, going to Nationals Baseball games, at the beach, or on adventurous bike rides with Mich and friends. He loved to travel.

He was a member of the National Capital Trackers Club where he enjoyed his time with other train enthusiasts and, with Mich, putting on train shows for the surrounding communities in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. He enjoyed it most of all when his kids and grandkids would come check out their layouts and he would often allow the grandkids to run trains with him.

He's survived by his wife of 48 years, Michiko; his mother Jeanne Hemmer; five children, Denise, Charlie, Joey, Michael, and Michelle; eleven grandchildren; nine siblings and numerous nieces and nephews. Mass of Christian Burial was at Jesus the Good Shepherd Church in Owings, with interment at Resurrection Cemetery in Clinton.

Milestones

Happy Birthday to Mary Doyle, Susan McKay and Jon Foster, Dec. 1; John Anthony, Jr., Vonn Branch and Tyonda Simms-Taylor, Dec. 2; Louise Lantz, Mary Straud, Dec. 3; Mark Witherow, Jr. and La'Keshia Johnson, Dec. 4; Denise (Eskeew) Simms, Dec. 5; Mae Boone, Sandra Mickey, Brian Doyle and Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory, Dec. 7; Crystal Pruitt and Charles Boxley, Dec. 8; Beth Shipman, Dec. 9; Sharon Fowler and Diane Zirkle, Dec. 10; Michelle Anderson, Dec. 11; Bernie Barbour Pace, Thomas Shipman Jr. and Jim Trexler, Dec. 13; Linda Gryskewicz, Dec. 15; Stacie Branham-Smith and Erin Nicole Brown-Sandoval, Dec. 16.

Happy 21st Anniversary to Johnny and Helen Richardson who were wed December 14, 2002.

Jurassic Quest, Nation's Biggest Dinosaur Experience, Migrates to Capital-Area— Tickets on Sale Now

Walk among the dinosaurs as North America's most popular, can't-miss dinosaur adventure stomps into Dulles Expo Center, Jan. 26–28

By PRESS OFFICER
Jurassic Quest

CHANTILLY, Va. (Nov. 28, 2023)—North America's most popular interactive dinosaur experience is BACK, BIGGER and BETTER than EVER! Capital-area families can walk among the nation's biggest herd of photorealistic dinosaurs when Jurassic Quest® opens at the Dulles Expo Center for one weekend only, Jan. 26–28.

Loved by millions, only Jurassic Quest can bring families memories this BIG! Walk through 165 million years of the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods to learn about the creatures that ruled the Earth! In addition to life-like dinosaurs, Jurassic Quest's classic experiences for the whole family include some of the largest rideable dinosaurs in North America, live dinosaur shows, interactive science and art activities including a fossil dig and real fossils like T-Rex teeth, a triceratops horn and life-size dino skull, a "Triceratots" soft play area for our little explorers, bounce houses and inflatable attractions, photo opportunities, and more.

New for this year's visit to the Dulles Expo Center! Jurassic Quest is bringing more hands-on activities, education and fun. This evolution, Jurassic Quest includes an expanded Excavation Station and more Jurassic-themed rides and inflatables. Even our animatronic herd has expanded to include fan favorites, the Utahaptor and Giganotosaurus. In addition to "The Quest," a self-guided scavenger hunt style activity where budding paleontologists can become Jr. Dinosaur Trainers, Jurassic Quest has launched a new video tour that's already getting "roaring good" reviews from families and features our star dino trainers: Safari Sarah, Dino Dustin, Prehistoric Nick and Park Ranger Marty (available onsite and on your phone via QR code)! All expanded activities are included with general admission. New attractions include kids facing off with the notoriously fast Jurassic Quest Utahaptors for "Raptor Run" races, and "Rope-a-Raptor," where experienced "BrontoBusters" help kids lasso stray dinos to get them back to their pens.

The Jurassic Quest herd of animatronic dinos—from the largest predators to playful baby dinos—are displayed in realistic scenes with some that move and roar, allowing guests to experience them as they were when they roamed Earth millions of years ago. Jurassic Quest works in collaboration with leading paleontologists to ensure each dinosaur is painstakingly replicated in every detail, from coloration to teeth size, to textured skin, fur or feathers, drawing on the latest research about how we understand dinosaurs looked and moved. Families also have the unique opportunity to meet the babies, hatched only at Jurassic Quest: Cammie the Camarasaurus, Tyson the T-Rex and Trixie the Triceratops.

Tickets & Logistics

Advance purchase online recommended to ensure desired date and availability at www.jurassicquest.com, or tickets are available on-site, and include a 100% ticket guarantee that in the event of a show cancellation or postponement for any reason, ticket purchases will be automatically refunded for the full purchase amount.

General admission tickets include access to the dinosaur exhibits, arts and crafts activities, and dinosaur shows. There are rides and activities that require activity tickets available on site, or guests can upgrade to the Kids Unlimited Ticket (the best value for children ages 2–10). Entry is free for children under age 2. Guests can walk through the dinosaur experience at their own pace, and strollers are permitted. Socks required for inflatable attractions. Some venues may have wheelchairs for use, but please contact the venue in advance to make arrangements.

Event: Jurassic Quest

Admission: Tickets available online (Standard, Senior and Kids pricing available) General admission includes live shows, arts and crafts activities, and dinosaur exhibits. Tickets for individual activities available on-site. Free entry for children under 2. KIDS UNLIMITED TICKETS: Includes admission, plus unlimited access to stationary and walking dinosaur rides, fossil dig, and dinosaur themed inflatable attractions (Note: maximum weight for rides is 140lbs.).

Where: Dulles Expo Center (4320 Chantilly Shopping Center, Chantilly, VA 20151)

When (Public Hours): Friday, Jan. 26: 12–8 p.m.; Saturday, Jan. 27: 9 a.m.–8 p.m.; Sunday, Jan. 28: 9 a.m.–7 p.m.

Jurassic Quest is the largest and most realistic dinosaur experience in North America and part of the Family Quest Entertainment portfolio. Since 2013, Jurassic Quest has entertained more than 10 million fans in more than 250 cities across the U.S. and Canada with an up close and personal look at the giants that once ruled Earth. Developed with leading paleontologists, each dinosaur is brought to life using realistic likenesses, movement and sound. Jurassic Quest is a leader in edutainment, bringing the prehistoric era to life for families, educators and dinosaur fans of all ages. Visit www.jurassicquest.com.

Brandywine-Aquasco

NATIONAL HARBOR

The Cirque Dreams Holiday (Touring) lights up the stage in this dazzling family holiday spectacular Sunday, December 17, 2023, at MGM National Harbor Theater 101MGM National Avenue, Oxon Hill Maryland 20745. This annual tradition wraps a whimsical, Broadway-style musical infused with contemporary circus artistry into the ultimate holiday gift for the entire family. Show schedule: matinee Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday 12 p.m. Tickets cost \$20 or \$30 dollars. Purchase your tickets on Goldstar.com/.

LET'S CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS TOGETHER

Let us celebrate Christmas together on Saturday, December 23, 2023, Pre-Christmas Eve. It is a Community Event. "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" at St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Baden, 13801 Baden Westwood Road, Brandywine, Maryland with Tyrone Johnson. We will be having Holy Eucharist Service at 10 a.m. You, Me, the Children and All. Followed by Brunch with Christmas music, family pictures, games, fun, and cheer. Please sign up for accountability for food preparation. RSVP with numbers for eating, for food accountability to 301-888-1536. Come on out and have fun with us.

PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Prince George's Community College is a public community college in Largo in Prince George's County, Maryland. The college serves Prince George's County and surrounding areas, including Washington, D.C. (Wikipedia).

The College provides higher education to the local population and offers over one hundred fields of study. Common programs offered are liberal arts and science, general studies and humanities, management information systems, registered nursing, business/commerce, computer and information series security/information assurance, health information/medical records technology/technician, elementary education and teaching, hotel/motel administration/management, accounting, computer, and information sciences,

Some of the notable alumni are Frank Cho, Ginuwine, Shalana Hunter, Rosa Salazar, Noor Tagouri, Aracely Quispe, Alex Morales, Karen Handel, Seyi Sodimu, Dennis Felton, Veronica L. Turner, Deborah Pueschel, Andrea Harrison, Daniel R. Williams, Amber Wittner and George W. Owings III.

THE DESIGN STUDIO

Join us for an unforgettable New Year's Eve celebration at the Design Studio. New Years Eve at the Design Studio is happening on Sunday, December 31, 2023 at 9 p.m. at 9215 Oxon Hill Road, Fort Washington, Maryland. Get ready to welcome the upcoming year in style with an evening filled with music, dancing, and good vibes. The party starts on Sunday, December 31, 2023, at 9 p.m.

by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

and will continue into the early hours of the morning.

Their talented DJ will be spinning the hottest tracks, guaranteeing a night of non-stop dancing. The Design Studio will be transformed into a vibrant and energetic space, creating the perfect ambiance for a memorable celebration.

Gather your friends and loved ones and come dressed to impress so that you can capture those magical moments at our designated photo both areas. Sip on delicious cocktails and indulge in delectable bites from our gourmet food stations.

Do not miss this incredible event. Purchase your tickets now and get ready for an evening of fun, laughter, and new beginnings. Cheers to a fantastic New Year's Eve at the Design Studio. Door prizes 50/50 raffle. Organized by Changing Threads. Check the event page for more information if you have a question for the organizer. If you have questions text 202-596-6844. Tickets cost \$75–\$300.

A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

The Music and Drama Ministry of Westphalia presents A Christmas Celebration "The Birth that Saved All Generations" Sunday, December 17, 2023, at 6 p.m. House opens at 5:30 p.m. Westphalia Christian Community Church, Rev. Dr. Timothy West, Senior Pastor. Address is Westphalia Christian Community Church, 9363 D'Arcy Road, Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20774. For additional information, email: dramaministry@westphaliaum.org.

HARMONY HALL REGIONAL CENTER

Fame/Foundation for the Advancement of Music Education presents Tis the Season 2023 December 16, 2023, from 2 p.m.–4 p.m. at Harmony Hall Art Center, 10701 Livingston Road, Fort Washington, Maryland 20744. Join us and experience the holiday community spirit as the Fame Jazz Band, directed by Dr. Clarence Knight, Fame Jazz Ensemble and Fame graduates come together for a live performance. Doors open at 1:30 p.m. Please contact us at info@famemusic.org or at 301-805-5358 for additional information.

BOWIE SENIOR CENTER

Put on your finest outfit and celebrate Friday, December 29, 2023 at the Welcome 2024—"Noon Year's Party" 12:30 p.m. at the Senior Center located at Bowie Community Center, 3209 Stonybrook Drive, Bowie, Maryland 20715, telephone 301-464-1737. DJC-Well will provide entertainment, and there will be noisemakers, and light refreshments. This party is for Seniors 55+ only. Pre-registration fee is \$5 for residents, or \$6 for nonresidents.

COMMUNITY

Pathway to Purchase Homebuyer Assistance Program Issues New Guidelines

Program Now Offers Up to \$25,000 to First-Time Home Buyers

By ALEXIS R. YEOMAN
PGCDHCD

LARGO, Md. (Nov. 27, 2023)—The Prince George's County's home ownership assistance program, "Pathway to Purchase," has issued new guidelines for eligible first-time home buyers. The program now offers up to \$25,000 in down payment and closing cost assistance toward the purchase of a home. Home buyers can purchase a home anywhere in Prince George's County. Eligible residential properties include new construction, resales, and foreclosures.

"This important partnership with MD-DHCD and the private sector allows us to meaningfully address affordable homeownership," said Aspasia Xypolia, Director of the Prince George's County Department of Housing and Community Development. "This dedicated funding will help people get on the path to home ownership. We are eager to continue our progress in helping families begin their pursuit of the American Dream."

Pathway to Purchase is a 0% interest loan program that must be paid back when the home is sold, trans-

ferred, or ceases to be the primary residence of the buyer(s). However, if the home buyer resides in the home for 10 years, the loan is forgiven, and the lien is released.

This year, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has partnered with the State of Maryland's Mortgage Program and eligible home buyers can receive an additional \$6,000 toward the down payment and closing cost. Additionally, if the home buyer participates in the State's Partner Match, they can receive a dollar-to-dollar match of up to \$2,500.

The maximum price for homes purchased with Pathway to Purchase assistance is \$432,000 for re-sale homes and \$467,000 for new construction. The home must pass a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) Inspection as part of the application process.

The Redevelopment Authority of Prince George's County administers the program. Home buyers must work with an approved mortgage lender to submit an application. More information can be found on the Pathway to Purchase website.

Pyramid's Annual 10x10 Invitational

200 Artists | 300 Works | \$60 Prices

By KATE TAYLOR DAVIS
Pyramid Atlantic Art Center

HYATTSVILLE, Md. (Nov. 29, 2023)—Pyramid Atlantic's annual 10x10 Invitational opens to the public **Saturday, December 9!** Pyramid's gallery will be bursting with over 300 artworks donated by 200 local and national artists who love the nonprofit art center. In this exhibition-slash-fundraiser, works each measure 10"x10" and are priced at \$60. The 10x10 is a great opportunity for collectors of all levels to purchase interesting pieces by talented artists at a remarkable price. Prints, drawings, paintings, and mixed media will be on display.

10x10 opens to the public on Saturday, December 9 with FREE RSVP from 5-9 p.m. at pyramidatlantic.org. Gallery hours after the 9th do not require an RSVP. The opening reception will include music by DJ Laura Lopez, light refreshments, and community. The exhibition runs through December 23, and is free to the public. Gallery hours are Wed-Thu 10-8 p.m., Fri-Sun 10-6 p.m. Pyramid Atlantic is located at 4318 Gallatin Street, Hyattsville, MD 20781. More information and RSVP details at pyramidatlantic.org or by calling 301-608-9101.

The full exhibition will be on view in person December 9-10 and online thereafter. Starting December 15, buyers may take their work home, same day, for instant gratification. The show will be rearranged each week to promote new discoveries and return visits are encouraged.

NEW this year is a Members' Silent Auction Preview, which will take place Friday, December 8. (Basic memberships are \$60 for a year.) At this virtual preview event, the starting bid for each work will be \$60 and members can take their time to look at the work before it gets snapped up. (This means some pieces may go for more than \$60 during the auction, raising even more money for the organization). When the auction is complete, all unsold work will be priced at the usual flat \$60.

Artists with studios, residencies, or exhibitions at Pyramid over the past year are invited to participate. Additional artists are nominated either by a self-nomination form or by the nomination committee. This year's committee included Jenny Axner, Margaret Boozer, Kate Taylor Davis, Tabitha Jacques, Sarah Matthews, John Paradiso, Edgar Reyes, Sharon Robinson, and Danny Varrillas. Thanks to their work, the exhibition boasts an impressive roster of artists.

Confirmed artists: Beth Abel, Camilla Angel, Sarina Angell, Rhosean Asmah, Jennifer Axner, Joanna Axtmann, Patricia Baca, Abol Bahadori, Kanchan Balsé, Elaina Barbour, Anne Barnes, Scip Barnhart, Leonid A. Bendersky, Nannette Bevan, Paige Billin-Frye, Chelsae Blackman, Sara Blumberg, Elisabeth Boerwinkel, Jeanette M. Bolden, Gregory Boyd, Pamela J. Bozzi, Phylisia Bridgewater, Nikki Brooks, Kimberley Bursic, Momma Rain - Maria Buszinski, Ann Butwell, Amy Callner, Stéphane Calvin, Natasha Campbell, Sue Canuteson, Michele Casto, Anna Child, Caroline

Christner, Eliza Clifford, Nico Coen, Sam Contrino, Loucien Cooper, Ellen Cornett, Ariane D'Souza, Idus Daniel, Alonzo Davis, Jared Davis, Chase DeForest, Sarah Dickson, Marissa DiDonna, Monet Dominique S, Lauren Emeritz, Theresa Esterlund, Rosemary Fallon, Helen C. Frederick, Jenny Freestone, Ruth Gainer, Jon Gann, Essier Garcia, Mary Gathercole, Claudia "Aziza" Gibson-Hunter, Michele Godwin, Angela Goldstein, Romello Goodman, Colin Gore, Allison Gragg, Trisha Gupta, Megan Haidet, Beth Hansen, Francine Haskins, Pam Heemskerck, Michelle Lisa Herman, Elisabeth Hess, Tom Hill, Gabrielle Holder, Curlee Raven Holton, Robbie Hood, Sophia Hoodis, John Horowitz, Li Howard, Jonathan Huff, Imar Hutchins, Elayne Bond Hyman, Brooke Ann Inman, Tyla Inyamah, Marty Ittner, Elisabeth Jacobsen, Rose Jaffe, Alex Jeffrey, Fleming Jeffries, Cynthia Farrell Johnson, Wayson Jones, J'Nell Jordan, Kelsey Joyce, Sarah Kahle, Nilou Kazemzadeh, Cookie Kerxton, Josh Kery, Megan Koeppel, Alice Kresse, Priyanka Kumar, Selene LaMarca, Caroline Lampinen, Elaine Langerman, Pamela Harris, Lawton, Jun Lee, Maggie Letvin Lew, Liza Boyce Linder, Caroline MacKinnon, Bonnie Magness-Gardiner, Ellen Maidman-Tanner, Trish Manzke, Betsy Martin, Sarah Matthews, Sharon Williams Matthews, Carolina Mayorga, Kerry McAleer-Keeler, Laura McCaron,

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BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Governor Moore Announces Record-Setting Housing Bond to Support Affordable, Sustainable Homeownership for First-Time Homebuyers

By PRESS OFFICER
Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Nov. 29, 2023)—Governor Wes Moore today announced that the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development issued the largest mortgage revenue bond in the agency's history. The \$400 million bond from the department's Community Development Administration through the Residential Revenue Bond program generated tax-exempt and taxable bond

proceeds that may be used to finance affordable, sustainable mortgage loans to first-time homebuyers through the Maryland Mortgage Program.

"This record-setting bond reaffirms our commitment to providing pathways to homeownership, helping to create a brighter future for all Marylanders," said Gov. Moore. "By opening the door for more families to create generational wealth, we are fostering a more equitable and competitive economy."

The Maryland Mortgage Program has been the state's flagship home-

ownership program for more than 40 years, providing fixed-rate mortgages primarily to first-time homebuyers. The program offers an array of mortgage products, including Maryland SmartBuy, the first government mortgage program in the nation designed to eliminate student loan debt as part of the homebuying process.

In part due to the Community Development Administration's solid credit rating and the high level of expertise provided by the department's bond portfolio management team, this historic issuance received a strong response from bond investors. The strategic combination of tax-exempt and taxable interest rates achieved through the bond sale will enable the department to continue to offer Maryland Mortgage Program loans at competitive interest rates, providing annual

savings to Maryland homebuyers.

All bonds in the issuance were designated as social bonds, indicating that the bonds will raise funds for programs and projects that seek to achieve positive social outcomes. The use of the proceeds from the bond sale to finance mortgage loans for low- and moderate-income families meets sustainable development goals outlined by the International Capital Market Association.

"Homeownership is an important foundation for resilient, sustainable communities, providing opportunities for Maryland families to achieve economic independence and build generational wealth, opportunities that must be equitable and accessible for all," said Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Jake Day. "The resources for the Maryland Mortgage Program come primarily from the sale of these types of bonds, and supported with a small State budget appropriation for down

payment and settlement expense assistance, making the American dream of owning a home affordable and attainable for thousands of low to moderate-income households annually at virtually no cost to Maryland's taxpayers."

Maryland Mortgage Program borrowers can receive additional down payment and closing cost assistance, helping to address one of the biggest barriers for many homebuyers. The program also routinely partners with local jurisdictions, combining state and local resources to further reduce costs and incentivize homeownership in targeted areas.

Empowered by a variety of successful products and consistent, effective marketing, the Maryland Mortgage Program has issued on average \$1 billion in mortgage loans annually over the past four years.

For more information, visit mmp.maryland.gov.



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Business Owners Welcome Jan. 1 Maryland Minimum Wage Increase to \$15

By PRESS OFFICER
Business for a Fair Minimum Wage

(Nov. 28, 2023)—Maryland's minimum wage will increase to \$15 on Jan. 1 thanks to legislation signed in April by Gov. Wes Moore. Business owners across Maryland are welcoming the increase, saying it will boost consumer spending and strengthen businesses and the economy.

Maryland business owners who are members of Business for a Fair Minimum Wage joined Gov. Moore at the State House in April when he signed the Fair Wage Act of 2023 into law, accelerating the state minimum wage increase to \$15 for employers, regardless of size.

Prior to the Fair Wage Act, under Maryland's old minimum wage timetable, the minimum wage for employers with 15 or more employees would not have

increased to \$15 until Jan. 1, 2025; for employers with fewer than 15 employees it would not have increased to \$15 until July 1, 2026. The Fair Wage Act raises the minimum wage to \$15 on Jan. 1, 2024, removing the distinction by size.

Montgomery County's minimum wage for large employers with 51 or more employees is already \$16.70 and increases are scheduled for large and small businesses in the future. Howard County is phasing in a minimum wage increase to \$16 by Jan. 1, 2025, or July 2026 for businesses with 14 and fewer employees.

Business for a Fair Minimum Wage is a network of business owners and executives and business organizations that believe a fair minimum wage makes good business sense.

COMMENTARY

Marian Wright Edelman

Founder and President Emerita,
Children's Defense Fund



ChildWatch:

Rosalynn Carter: Honoring a Legacy

On November 28, the family of former First Lady Rosalynn Carter held a beautiful memorial service for her at the Glenn Memorial Church at Emory University. Guests included President Joe Biden and Dr. Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, former President Bill Clinton and Secretary Hillary Clinton, former First Ladies Melania Trump, Michelle Obama, and Laura Bush, and Mrs. Carter's devoted husband and partner of 77 years, former President Jimmy Carter. Several speakers paid tribute to the Carters' long love story, including their daughter Amy, who read a letter President Carter had written to Mrs. Carter

75 years ago while he was in the Navy. Mrs. Carter's friends, family, and pastor also all emphasized her lifetime of service to others, including her longtime leadership as a mental health advocate.

Mrs. Carter often spoke about one encounter that helped spark that service. During her husband's first gubernatorial campaign in Georgia, she visited a cotton mill at 4:30 a.m. to meet with workers just finishing their overnight shifts and seek their support. When Mrs. Carter told one woman who looked especially tired that she hoped she was about to go home and get some rest, the exhausted woman explained that she and her husband had a child with

mental health care needs and took turns with their shifts so while one was at work the other cared for her. Mrs. Carter later wrote that the image of that mother haunted her all day. That evening she surprised her husband by joining other voters in a receiving line at a campaign event, and when Mrs. Carter got to the front of the line to shake his hand, she asked how he planned to serve families with mental health care needs. He answered that they were going to have the best program in the country, and she was going to be put in charge of it. Rosalynn Carter followed up with decades of research, advocacy, and leadership.

In 2008, I was honored to serve as a keynote speaker for the 24th annual Rosalynn Carter Symposium on Mental Health Policy at the Carter Center in Atlanta: "Unclaimed Children Revisited: Fostering a Climate to Improve Children's Mental Health." That symposium presented new research from Dr. Jane Knitzer and her colleagues at the National Center for Children in Poverty on the status of children and youths' mental health care policy in the United States, and it built on a framework Dr. Knitzer had developed more than 25 years earlier in the Children's Defense Fund report "Unclaimed Children: The Failure of Public Responsibility to Children and Adolescents

in Need of Mental Health Services." Dr. Knitzer had been outraged by CDF lawsuits on behalf of children and teenagers who had been sent far from home for residential treatment, and the report covered the deep need for accessible, age-appropriate mental health care and support. At the Carter Center symposium, Dr. Knitzer remembered that when the original report was published, she had said to me and our colleague MaryLee Allen that there were probably about five people in the country who would read it. In fact, "Unclaimed Children" brought focused attention to public policy needs surrounding children's mental health care, and its impact was amplified again years later by one very influential person: Mrs. Carter and her dedicated, long-haul advocacy.

In the keynote at that Rosalynn Carter Symposium, I said something Mrs. Carter also believed: if we can change things for children, we will end up changing things for everybody. Rosalynn Carter was a change agent for countless people throughout her long life of service. She shared a very simple philosophy: "I believe that one of the most important things to learn in life is that you can make a difference in your community no matter who you are or where you live." This lesson is a fitting legacy.

—December 1, 2023

Results from A1

who are performing at a certain level will kind of unintentionally make you perform at a higher level," she said.

Grade 8 science proficiency hits five-year low

Science scores continue to lag, especially for grade 8.

In grade 5, science proficiency in the last five years peaked in 2021 at 41%, a 12-percentage point increase from 2019. In 2022, the passing rate dropped to 31% before rising again to 35% in 2023, according to MSDE.

Grade 8 scores have been on a steady decline since 2021, with the passing rate dropping from 35% in 2022 to 26% in 2023, the lowest it's been in the last five years.

With the exception of Dorchester, every county had at least a 10% decline in grade 8 science proficiency from 2022 to 2023. Six counties had over a 30% decrease from 2022: Kent, Charles, Prince George's, Washington, Allegany and Queen Anne's.

MSDE states that this decline is likely due to the grade 8 students being in grade 6 during the 2020-2021 school year, which was predominantly online.

As a result, students missed key science instruction during their first year of middle school.

"The results on the grade 8 assessment make clear the impact of grade 6 and 7 disruptions on a cumulative grade 8 assessment," MSDE said in the press release.

Booker-Dwyer stated that rollout for the new Next Generation Science Standards for K-12 education, which has lessons in engineering, technology, earth and space sciences in addition to traditional sciences, was delayed by the pandemic. She remains optimistic that scores will improve as curriculum con-

tinues to change.

"I do believe it will get better as people are getting more and more comfortable with the science standards and more teachers are getting trained and the resources are getting better, as far as the instructional material," Booker-Dwyer said. "But initially it was tough."

Booker-Dwyer discusses the need for a "systems approach" to address learning-loss in the school system, as learning is sequential. Students who aren't prepared with the foundations necessary for the new grade-level won't be able to pick up the curriculum as easily.

"We have to look at this holistically.

It's not a one-size-fits-all approach to fixing this issue with our school systems," Booker-Dwyer said. "This is where I think the Blueprint for Maryland's Future has some potential because it can give school systems some flexibility to get a little bit more innovative in how they're approaching the learning."

"But the thing about it is you can only be as innovative as the state allows. And so until there's some major changes at the state level, we won't see those innovative schooling approaches happen at the school level," she said.

The 2024 MCAP tests are set to begin in the spring.

Trans Patients Face Geographic, Availability Barriers to Care, Medications

By TOMMY TUCKER
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Dec. 1, 2023)—Paisley Parsons is 10 years into his medical gender-affirming transition, and a majority of that time he's spent looking for a good team of doctors in Maryland.

Parsons, from near Hagerstown, had limited access to nearby care when starting his transition. Driving to Philadelphia, the District of Columbia or Baltimore were the best options to receive what he needed.

"It took me probably six or seven years to find a team of doctors that I felt like was up to par, but prior to that, finding someone educated and competent was few and far between," said Parsons. "A lot of it was a proximity issue, and most doctors around me just had no idea about anything trans related."

While access to gender-affirming care has improved since Parsons first started his transition, it still varies across Maryland. From finding experienced doctors to availability of prescribed hormones, trans care can require a lot of work on the patient's part.

Gender-affirming care is a medically necessary group of treatments, including hormone therapy, alterations to voice, laser treatment and surgeries. But medical "care" also includes using the patient's preferred pronouns and staying up-to-date on gender identities and protocols.

"Some of my patients travel hours to see me," said Dr. Helene Hedian, the director of Clinical Education at Johns Hopkins' Center for Transgender and Gender Expansive Health in Baltimore. "There has been an increased demand for services in the past year, which at times has led to long wait times."

There is a concentration of qualified doctors in urban areas like D.C. and Baltimore, with less access the farther a patient is from a major city. Geographic centralization of care is not unique to Maryland, according to Hedian, particularly for doctors who pro-

vide hormones and surgeries.

Addressing the geographic centralization issue is something the Hopkins center is working on by providing training to clinicians outside of Baltimore, "but it remains an ongoing challenge everywhere," said Hedian.

For those looking for a doctor with experience in gender-affirming care, Hedian recommends looking through the provider directory on GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality's website.

The directory confirms the concentration of doctors in urban areas. For example, a search for gender-affirming hormone therapy in Easton, shows the closest doctor is over an hour away in Baltimore, D.C. or Odenton, Maryland.

"Baltimore City is probably the nexus of the trans community in terms of access, but the wait times are really long for our experienced providers," said Lee Blinder, the executive director of Trans Maryland, a trans-led community organization. "Many people in our more rural areas of the state, or even in some of our counties in our suburban areas, are not able to access an affirming provider."

Blinder is a founder of Trans Maryland, formerly known as Trans Healthcare MD, which started as a community resource for connecting trans and non-binary residents to qualified practitioners.

"Trans Maryland started out of my own and our other co-founders' lack of access to gender-affirming care," said Blinder. "We are extraordinarily lucky to be based in Maryland, certainly looking at the national landscape."

In May this year, Gov. Wes Moore signed the Trans Health Equity Act, which requires the state's medical assistance program and Medicaid to provide coverage for gender-affirming care beginning Jan. 1, 2024. Moore also signed an executive order in June, protecting anyone seeking gender-affirming care in Maryland from legal punishment by other states.

"Those two events in the past year have contributed to increased demand for gender care in the state of Maryland," said Hedian. "People are traveling into the state, especially because in many states they're not able to receive the care that they used to get."

As of 2022, 24,000 transgender adults live in Maryland, with an estimated 6,000 enrolled in Medicaid, according to a study by the Williams Institute on Medicaid coverage for gender-affirming care.

The Maryland Department of Health estimated that the number of Medicaid enrollees seeking gender-affirming treatment under the bill would increase by approximately 25 individuals per year, up from 98 in 2022.

Numbers for 2023 are not available, but providers have seen a large increase in the past year.

"We're aware of the issue and we know that being able to address health care shortages, (is) something that has been long standing within the state," Moore said to Capital News Service. "I also know that things like the Trans Health Care Act was the right thing, in the right manner, and we want to make sure that our state is welcoming."

Moore said that having the medical facilities and personnel to treat people is a priority, and that doctor and nursing shortages extend to other areas of medicine.

To adjust to the demand, Dr. Julius Joi Johnson-Weaver, a board-certified family physician, offers gender-affirming care through a program at their private practice. Johnson-Weaver is transgender and non-binary and has experienced many of the care-access issues their patients have dealt with.

It sparks a lot of anxiety, Johnson-Weaver said, when someone is ready to transition "in whatever way it typically starts to feel urgent," and they are told, "Oh yeah, it's gonna be six months, you know, or it's gonna take a long time to get an appointment."

At the start of Johnson-Weaver's medical transition, they

found that they often had to educate doctors on basic terms related to their care. Often, office staff and doctors would misgender them, making the whole process more uncomfortable. This is common for trans patients.

Trans patients having to educate medical providers about trans people is associated with an increase in depression, anxiety or suicidal thoughts, according to a study done by the University of Michigan and Michigan State University Schools of Social Work. The study also found that over a third of trans and non-binary patients experienced disrespect from providers.

"Seeing specialists as a non-binary trans person, oftentimes, I'm really not able to access an affirming experience," said Blinder. "I'm providing information, sometimes basically, even what does non-binary mean, and what does that mean for me as a patient within this care."

These days, trans patients living in major cities have an easier time of finding an experienced doctor. Kerrigan Dougherty, a trans/non-binary Baltimore City resident, had few issues finding qualified care, initially going to Chase Brexton before switching to Hopkins.

"I've had a relatively positive experience getting primary care," said Dougherty. "I've been pretty happy with my medical care."

Dougherty does, however, run into issues with pharmacies not filling prescriptions.

"The pharmacy is the bane of my existence, a never-ending source of stress," said Dougherty. "Sometimes it's that my prescription is rejected and other times it is that they say they don't have the prescription, which doesn't make sense to me because they can see in my chart that the prescription has been sent."

Several factors contribute to trans patients' pharmacy problems. For one, the insurance classification of a patient's gender often leads to denied claims.

If the insurer sees that a customer is classified as female, a claim for prescribed testosterone could be rejected automatically, according to Richard DeBenedetto, associate professor at University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, and a pharmacist spe-

cializing in HIV and transgender care.

"Some of the problems with trying to get patients that are transgender their medications have to do with systemic problems," said DeBenedetto. "Silly as that is—issues with how people are coded on their driver's license and insurances—to resolve those issues is a legal rigmarole that can take years at times."

Ongoing drug shortages also contribute to fulfillment problems. In the last two months, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists reported shortages of the injectable versions of both estrone and testosterone.

Testosterone is a Drug Enforcement Administration-controlled substance, which limits the amount pharmaceutical companies can manufacture and how much pharmacies can order.

"One manufacturer is not able to just produce more because there's a need, because another manufacturer can't, based on the controlled substance regulations," said DeBenedetto. "This has been a difficult issue to supply people that need hormones for their medications, you know, and you're kind of hopping around from one to another, trying to make it work."

Pinpointing what needs to be

addressed, whether it's manufacturers, insurance or health care systems as a whole, is difficult, said DeBenedetto.

"Unless we clearly make decisions that are appropriate, we will continue to run into some issue or another," said DeBenedetto. "We see lots of transphobia, and until we can really have people seen as people that aren't any different from anyone else, we're going to continue to create systems that are classifying people as other."

Del. Bonnie Cullison, D-Montgomery, vice-chairman of the House Health and Government Operations Committee, cosponsored the Trans Health Equity Act. She said she is aware of the access issues and works closely with Trans Maryland to solve them. And, she said, she agrees with Moore that the bill was the right step for protecting health care for trans Marylanders.

Trans Maryland was "amazingly supportive" in helping to draft the bill and in helping to answer questions from colleagues," Cullison said.

Cullison encourages transgender constituents to reach out about these issues: "Talk to us, keep us informed. Let us know what we can do policy-wise, or advocacy-wise."

The Prince George's Post

The Prince George's Post
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Contents © 2023, The Prince George's Post

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Prince George's County, Md. Member National Newspaper Publishers Association, and the Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia Press Association.
The Prince George's Post (ISSN 10532226) is published every Thursday by the New Prince George's Post Inc., 15207 Marlboro Pike, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772-3151.
Subscription rate: 25 cents per single copy; \$15 per year; \$7.50 senior citizens and students; out of county add \$1; out of state add \$2.
Periodical postage paid at Southern Md. 20790.
Postmaster, send address changes to Prince George's Post, P.O. Box 1001, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20773.

HEALTH *and* WELLNESS

Maryland Department of Health Launches Community Survey to Understand Health Needs in the State

By PRESS OFFICER
Maryland Department of Health

BALTIMORE (Nov. 29, 2023)—The Maryland Department of Health today announced the launch of the Building a Healthier Maryland community input survey to identify the critical health needs of residents and their communities. The Department will use the survey results to address the most important health priorities in Maryland over the next few years.

“We want all Marylanders to make their

voices heard so please share your thoughts by completing the community survey,” said Maryland Department of Health Secretary Laura Herrera Scott. “We need a wide range of input from residents to help the State address our most pressing health needs.”

The survey questions focus on finding the most important healthcare issues affecting different communities. The questions also cover healthcare accessibility and inequalities, as well as the demographics of respondents. Knowing how different communities experience health

outcomes can help the Department better target care and create equity.

The survey can be taken at bit.ly/HealthierMD23. It is available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Korean. Other languages are available upon request. Responses to the survey are voluntary and anonymous. The last day to take the survey is January 4, 2024.

Survey respondents must be at least 18 years old and live in Maryland. The survey takes no more than 5–10 minutes to complete. Respon-

dents can direct any questions about the survey to mdh.bahm@maryland.gov.

The Maryland Department of Health is dedicated to protecting and improving the health and safety of all Marylanders through disease prevention, access to care, quality management and community engagement. Follow for more updates: Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube and LinkedIn.

Lead Persists as Problem in Holiday Gifts, Environmental Cost

By CECELIA SHILLING
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Nov. 30, 2023)—Lead poisoning has hit the news recently with pollution from leaded aviation gasoline, poisoning from applesauce pouches and federal lead pipe replacement projects. But some lead poisoning threats come during the holiday gift-giving season from jewelry, toys, makeup and other gifts.

In October, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency highlighted the dangers of lead exposure from leaded gasoline still used by some small planes. Communities near general aviation airports experience disproportionate exposure from emissions, the release said.

The Food and Drug Administration is investigating lead found in cinnamon applesauce pouches sold under WanaBana, Weis and Schnucks brands. As of Nov. 22, there have been 52 cases of elevated blood lead levels in young children potentially linked to these pouches.

On Nov. 30, the EPA announced a proposal to require replacement of lead service lines nationwide within 10 years, according to a press release. The administration is investing \$15 billion in replacing lead service lines, providing technical assistance to communities and developing a national inventory of lead pipes.

“The lead dust equivalent of only three granules of sugar is all it takes to poison a child,” said a University of Maryland Medical Center release.

Added to all those threats during the holiday season is the lead sometimes hidden in common gifts like jewelry, makeup or toys, said Jay Apperson, a spokesperson for the Maryland Department of the Environment. Vintage items or things manufactured in other countries are more likely to be contaminated.

“No child should be left behind because of lead poisoning,” said Apperson. “Public education about the importance of getting tested, along with strong enforcement, will all go a long way towards eradicating lead poisoning.”

Children are the most vulnerable to lead poisoning and experience symptoms like irritability, issues with attention and learning, delayed growth and hearing issues. Severe cases can cause brain damage and neurological dysfunction, even death. And lead poisoning can impact cardiac health, pregnancy and hypertension.

In Maryland, children must be tested for blood lead at 12 months and 24 months according to the Maryland Department of Health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention uses a reference value of 3.5 micrograms per deciliter to identify children with blood lead levels higher than average.

Lead paint found in older homes is a leading cause of lead poisoning, with most childhood exposure coming from hand-to-mouth contact with lead dust.

“If a child has a very elevated blood lead level, that’s almost surely the root cause of lead-based paint. If you get down to these relatively lower levels, say in the 3.5 (micrograms per deciliter) range, then you might need to look at other potential sources that might not be so obvious,” Apperson said.

Inexpensive jewelry has often been found to contain lead. Lead allows metals to be shaped easily and is cheaper than alternatives like zinc, said the California Department of Toxic Substance Control. “Lead is also sometimes used as a stabilizer in some plastics, such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), which is often incorporated into children’s jewelry items,” said the department.

Jewelry containing lead is particularly harmful to small children, who may place things in their mouths, which can cause dangerous levels of absorption and an even bigger risk if the item is swallowed.

The CDC discussed one instance in 2016 when an infant was found to have blood lead levels of 41 micrograms per deciliter caused by a natural teething bracelet.

“The parents reported that the child intermittently wore a handmade “homeopathic magnetic hematite healing bracelet” that they

had purchased from an artisan at a local fair. The child wore the bracelet for teething-related discomfort and was sometimes noted to chew on it. Small spacer beads from the bracelet tested at the Manchester Health Department were positive for lead,” the report said.

Another common gift item, makeup, can also be a problem. Kohl eyeliners, used in Asian and African cultures for example, may contain large amounts of lead and other metals, according to the FDA.

One 2013 case from the New Mexico Department of Health began when an Afghan refugee family brought eyeliner to the U.S. An Albuquerque clinic reported that a toddler had a blood lead level of 27 micrograms per deciliter linked to the use of kajal eyeliner, the report said. Lab testing later identified the eyeliner’s lead content as 54%.

Dangerous lead levels have also been found in other cosmetics like “Bentonite Me Baby,” a clay product sold by Alikay Naturals in Target and Sally Beauty Supply stores meant to detoxify hair. The FDA advised anyone who used this product to consult a health care professional immediately.

Inexpensive toys can also have lead in paint, metal or plastic. Vintage toys made before 1978, when lead paint was banned for residential use, or imported toys are more likely to contain the substance.

In 2007, for example, about 253,000 “Sarge” toys, a character from the Cars movie, were recalled by Mattel for containing lead paint, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. About 675,000 Mattel Barbie accessory toys were also recalled that same year due to lead paint. Both toys were manufactured in China.

The non-profit organization Kids in Danger said recalls of children’s products due to excessive lead content increased to 19 instances in 2022, the highest rate of lead-related recalls in the last 10 years, according to a 2023 document called “Hidden Hazards: 2022 Children’s Product Recalls.” Nine lead-related recalls were announced in 2020.

“We really have to focus in on what will be permanent eradication of exposure and poisoning and that job needs to be finished,” said Ruth Ann Norton, president and CEO of the Green and Healthy Homes Initiative. “And that takes both funding and diligence.”

Governor Moore Announces Expanded Access to Contraceptive Care Across Maryland

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, M. (Nov. 28, 2023)—Governor Wes Moore today announced a new four-year partnership to provide Marylanders with more equitable access to contraceptive care. In partnership with the Maryland Department of Health, Upstream USA will begin offering contraceptive care resources to health care providers, including free technical assistance, training and education in settings where most women already receive their health care.

“This is about making sure that we treat contraception like basic health care, because contraception is basic health care,” said Gov. Moore. “Under

this partnership with Upstream, we will help ensure that more of our health care providers are trained on the ins and outs of contraceptive care; we will bring contraception to communities that have too often been overlooked—including our rural communities—and we will build on Maryland’s growing reputation as a state that is ready to lead on health care and close gaps in our healthcare system.”

According to Guttmacher, Maryland has one of the highest rates of unintended pregnancy in the United States. As of 2023, nearly 285,000 Maryland women in need live in areas where there is not reasonable access to health organizations that offer a full range of contraceptive methods. The public-pri-

vate partnership is another crucial step taken by the Moore-Miller Administration to provide high quality, all-encompassing health care statewide.

“Today’s announcement doubles down on our administration’s commitment to protecting reproductive health care freedoms and our commitment to equity,” said Lt. Gov. Miller. “By partnering with Upstream, Maryland is eliminating barriers and expanding access to the basic health care that enables women to make choices about their reproductive care. This is just another example of Maryland leading the way on progress.”

CCI Health Services, a Federally Qualified Health Center, will be the first healthcare partner to receive sup-

port and services as part of the statewide initiative. With locations across Maryland, CCI Health Services will be able to provide high-quality, accessible care to its members, who typically live in medically underserved communities.

“Tens of thousands of women live in areas of Maryland where there is not reasonable access to health care,” said Maryland Department of Health Secretary Dr. Laura Herrera Scott. “This partnership puts a much-needed emphasis on women’s health by protecting their rights and offering equitable access to a full range of contraceptive methods on demand.”

Upstream USA is a non-profit organization that aims to reduce unintended pregnancy and improve contraceptive care for patients across the nation. The organization trains community healthcare organizations, hospital practices, and primary care facilities to

provide well-rounded, patient-centered and prompt contraceptive care as part of basic healthcare. Through providing these resources over the past six years, Upstream USA reports the non-profit is on a trajectory to reach health centers that will serve more than 1 million patients annually.

“We are at a crucial point in history, where there should be no wrong door for patients to access birth control,” said Upstream Chief Executive Officer Mark Edwards. “Under the direction of Governor Moore and in partnership with Upstream, the Maryland Department of Health is taking a leadership role to close gaps in contraceptive care by integrating best-in-class contraceptive services into primary care settings.”

For more information on services, visit health.maryland.gov/phpa/mch/Pages/women.aspx.

Scientists Uncover How Fermented-Food Bacteria Can Guard Against Depression, Anxiety

Findings Set Stage for New Treatments for Mental-Health Conditions

By PRESS OFFICER
UVA Health

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (Nov. 28, 2023)—University of Virginia School of Medicine researchers have discovered how *Lactobacillus*, a bacterium found in fermented foods and yogurt, helps the body manage stress and may help prevent depression and anxiety. The findings open the door to new therapies to treat anxiety, depression and other mental-health conditions.

The new research from UVA’s Alban Gaultier, PhD, and collaborators is notable because it pinpoints the role of *Lactobacillus*, separating it out from all the other microorganisms that naturally live in and on our bodies. These organisms are collectively known as the microbiota, and scientists have increasingly sought to target them to battle disease and improve our health. UVA’s new research represents a major step forward in that effort, providing scientists an innovative new approach to understand the role of individual microbes that could facilitate the development of new treatments and cures for a wide variety of diseases, both mental and physical.

“Our discovery illuminates how gut-resident *Lactobacillus* influences mood disorders, by tuning the immune system,” said Gaultier, of UVA’s Department of Neuroscience, the Center for Brain Immunol-

ogy and Glia (BIG Center) and the TransUniversity Microbiome Initiative. “Our research could pave the way towards discovering much-needed therapeutics for anxiety and depression.”

The Microbiota and Depression

Our guts are naturally home to countless bacteria, fungi, and viruses. There are more microorganisms living in and on us than there are cells in our bodies. That may sound disgusting, even alarming, but scientists have increasingly realized that these tiny organisms and their endless interactions are critical to our immune systems’ health, our mental health, and many other facets of our well-being. Disruptions of the microbiota, whether from illness, poor diet, or other causes, are known to contribute to many diseases and even help cancer spread. So, researchers have been hugely excited in recent years about the potential to battle diseases by targeting the microbiota.

Early attempts to manipulate the gut flora with beneficial bacteria, called probiotics, have produced mixed results. A big part of the problem has been the sheer complexity of the microbiome. It’s estimated that there are 39 trillion microorganisms inside each of us, so trying to understand what specific bacteria or fungi do—much less how they interact with all the other microorganisms and their host—can be like trying to count grains of sand on the beach.

Gaultier and his team took an innovative approach to hone in on *Lactobacilli* in specific. Prior research from Gaultier’s lab suggested that the bacteria could reverse depression in lab mice—a hugely promising finding. But the researchers needed to understand how.

Gaultier and his team decided to continue their depression research using a collection of bacteria, known as Altered Schaedler Flora, which includes two strains of *Lactobacillus* and six other bacterial strains. With this rarely used bacterial community, the team was able to create mice both with and without *Lactobacillus*, circumventing the need for antibiotics.

Sure enough, the Altered Schaedler Flora produced exciting results. Gaultier and his colleagues were able to explain exactly how *Lactobacilli* influence behavior, and how a lack of the bacteria can worsen depression and anxiety. *Lactobacilli* in the family *Lactobaccillacea*, they found, maintain the levels of an immune mediator called interferon gamma that regulates the body’s response to stress and helps stave off depression.

Armed with this information, researchers are poised to develop new ways to prevent and treat depression and other mental-health conditions in which *Lactobacillus* plays an important role. For example, patients struggling with (or at risk for) depression might one day take specially formulated probiotic supplements that will optimize their levels of helpful *Lactobacillus*.

Findings Published

The UVA scientists have published their findings in the journal

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10x10 from A3

Laura McClure, Scot McKenzie, Matthew McLaughlin, Philip Mecham, Anna Meyer Zachurski, Dianna Miguez, Alex Miller, Jim Modrick, Margaret Molinari, Rashad Ali Muhammad, Steven Muñoz, Daniella Napolitano, Dominic Nash, Luis Navas-Reyes, Kaisa Lily Nichols-Russell, Sarah Noreen, Amie Oliver, John Ortiz, Sukie Page, Tanya Paperny, John Thomas Paradiso, Nicole Parker, Gloria Patton, Lara Payne, Andre Pellerin, Vicky Perry, Sylvie Phaelan, Holly Porter, S.M. Prescott, Elina Press, Mary Proenza, Julia Rajan, Edgar Reyes, Elisabeth Rhyne, Philippe Ricard, Alan Rich, Corey Richardson, Sharon Robinson, Nan Roche, Dave Roeder, Etai Rogers-Fett, Coreah Rollins, Chris Rusinko, Nathalie Ryan, Tracey Salaway, Kate Samworth, Katie Santa Ana, Gretchen Schermerhorn, Olivia Schreengost, Jason Scott, Anokhi Shah, Gail Shaw-Clemons, Daniel Shay, Jen Sheckels, Elzbieta Sikorska, Susan Silva, Alec Simpson, Gabriel Soto, Alison Spain, Milena Spasic, Dan Sprinkle, Kamala Subramanian, Margaret Sulvetta, Varun Tangri, Oluwatoyin Tella, Josh Evans Tetzlaff, Fid Thompson, Jerry Truong, Susan Tuberville, Roy Ricci van der Stok, Danny Varillas, Mava aka Manuel Vazquez, Anastasia Walsh, Jenny Walton, Mark Wamaling, Cynthia Warshaw, Jen White-Johnson, Clare Winslow, Lenora Yerkes, Rebecca York, Némesis Zambrano.

This exhibition is made possible in part through support from the Maryland State Arts Council (msac.org); The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation; the Maryland Department of Commerce; and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County.

Founded in 1981, Pyramid Atlantic Art Center is a nonprofit contemporary art center fostering the creative disciplines of papermaking, printmaking, and book arts within a collaborative community. We equip, educate, and exhibit in our historic Hyattsville home. Our vision is to create an artistic hub in Hyattsville that inspires and enables local, national, and international artists to create and innovate in our core disciplines; elevates the local arts and small business scene; and enhances the quality of life for artists and neighbors. We value artistic excellence, infrastructure for artists, hands-on experiences, and collaboration.

Fermented-Food Bacteria from A5

Brain Behavior and Immunity. The research team consisted of Merchak, Samuel Wachamo, Lucille C. Brown, Alisha Thakur, Brett Moreau, Ryan M. Brown, Courtney Rivet-Noor, Tula Raghavan and Gaultier. The researchers have no financial interest in the work.

The work was supported by the National Institutes of Health, grants T32 NS115657, T32 GM008136, F31 AI174782, T32 GM007267 and T32 GM148379; the Owens Family Foundation; the Miller Family; the UVA TransUniversity Microbiome Initiative; and the UVA Presidential Fellowship in Neuroscience.

UVA's TransUniversity Microbiome Initiative, or TUMI, serves as the central hub for the University's cutting-edge microbiome research. The initiative aims to expand our understanding of the microbiome to better treat and prevent disease.

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