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Part 2: Child Care: Missing in Maryland?

Finding Child Care in Maryland Is Hard. Finding the Right Child Care Is Even Harder.

By KHUSHBOO RATHORE
Capital News Service

When Stephanie Jovine searched for child care for her nearly 4-year-old daughter Luz-Marie in Prince George's County in 2015, she found two options, both of them bad. Jovine couldn't afford the first one, and the second denied the young girl snacks and then sheets for sleeping.

"I was so upset, you know, it was so hard to trust anyone," said Jovine, a teacher in the District of Columbia Public Schools at the time.

After six months of searching, Jovine found a grandmother who ran a small before-and-after care service, LiLi's Child Care Center, in Temple Hills. The times the program was open aligned perfectly with Jovine's needs.

"She's a godsend, for real," said Jovine, who's now 33.

Jovine's arduous search for child care is not unique—and it would not even be her last search. Interviews with several Maryland families showed that while finding child care is hard, finding a facility that fits a family's needs and budget is even harder.

Maryland offers a rating system to help parents select the right child care facility, but providers say the rating system is difficult to navigate. Most parents interviewed by the Local News Network said they never looked at the state rating system.

Similarly, the state offers a generous scholarship program to help pay for child care, but providers complain they often have to wait months for the state to pay for child care for those scholarship recipients. Parents like Jovine struggle with the scholarship program, too.

The complications of finding child care in Maryland often leave families waiting for a place for their child, and that



PHOTO CREDIT JESS DANINHRSCH/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE
Stephanie Jovine of Charles County has struggled to get child care for her daughter Lily.

can lead to trouble, said Doug Lent, communications director for Maryland Family Network, which helps parents find child care and helps providers manage their businesses.

"When you're on that waiting list, that's when you're more likely to be tempted to rely on unlicensed care, unregulated care, and get into a situation that's maybe not safe or maybe not high quality," Lent said.

The ratings dilemma

Linda Garey woke up at 6 a.m. on a springtime Saturday at her home in Dundalk to create a communication board for the autistic children she cares for daily in her home. Eleven hours later, she was still working on the project. She isn't paid for the time she spends preparing her classroom.

Garey is a level-3 provider with Maryland EXCELS, the child care quality rating system in the state that offers a top rating of 5 to the state's top child care centers. Garey created a 65-page handbook outlining her teaching philosophy. She also assists other programs with their handbooks.

"I've typed probably about 20 to 30 handbooks and turned them in for other people, right? And they're all level 5," she said.

EXCELS—which stands for "Excellence Counts in Early Learning and School Age Care"—is an optional program for licensed child care providers. It offers them training and guidance and, if they qualify for it, a rating that parents can refer to when choosing a place to care for their child.

The Maryland EXCELS rating is based on five categories: licensing, staff qualifications, accreditation, developmentally appropriate practices and administrative policies. The highest overall rating a facility can get is the lowest rating it gets in any of those five categories.

And even though Garey has more than 20 years of experience, her lack of national accreditation as a child care provider means she can't go higher than level 3.

Garey is working on getting her child development associate credential and becoming accredited—but she won't be submitting that information to Maryland EXCELS. She said whenever she submits new documents and information to the Maryland State Department of Education, it goes to waste.

"I turned in some information about 20 times and it was denied," she said.

State officials insist they are trying to help. Jena Smith, the

director of quality improvement initiatives at the state's Division of Early Childhood, said quality assurance specialists work with each child care facility to improve its quality rating.

The Maryland State Department of Education also publishes a provider toolkit that outlines the documents necessary to rise up the ratings ladder, Smith said. The requirements for each level build on the last, she said.

"It's a scaffold, and so that's really how our quality assurance specialists work with our programs," Smith said. "They help them assess where they currently are and where they want to go."

Since January 2020, the number of level-5 providers in Maryland has increased by 9.6%, according to state statistics retrieved by the Local News Network. However, 15 of the state's 24 jurisdictions have lost level-5 providers, and providers overall appear to have mixed feelings about the EXCELS program.

Asked to rate the EXCELS program's effectiveness on a 1-to-5 scale, with 1 being least effective and 5 being most effective, the 256 child care providers who replied to a Local News Network survey gave the program an average rating of 3.

"I answered 3 because part of the program, I feel, has been extremely helpful, such as writing policies for guidance (on nutrition and such)," Cheryl Thomsen, a child care provider in Salisbury, wrote in her survey response. "I did obtain accreditation but found it was very difficult to actually follow all the requirements properly on a daily basis."

A difficult search

Jovine moved from Prince George's County to Charles

See CHILD CARE Page A3



PHOTO COURTESY NLEOMF
Sergeant Matthew Titman of the Bowie Police Department

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund Announces May 2024 Officer of the Month

Officer rescues teenage boy and his dog from drowning in a pond

By PRESS OFFICER
NLEOMF

WASHINGTON (July 2, 2024)—The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) today announced Sergeant Matthew Titman of the Bowie (MD) Police Department as their Officer of the Month for May 2024. Sgt. Titman was selected for his actions when he jumped into a pond to save a boy and his dog from drowning.

On Thursday, May 16, Sgt. Titman responded to a call about a dog in distress at the deep end of a pond at Centennial Park. The dog's owner, a teenage boy, had entered the water to rescue

the dog but began to struggle and called for help. Sgt. Titman, who was at the nearby police department, arrived at the scene, removed his gear, and entered the water. Using his lifeguard experience, Sgt. Titman swam 20 yards from the shore to the boy and the dog, calmed them down, and brought them to safety. Both the boy and the dog were unharmed.

"These officers are heroes, and their actions serve to highlight the countless acts of valor which often go unnoticed and without the recognition or fan-

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SAVE THE DATE:

NCRTV's Birthday Bash! Join NCRTV in Celebrating its 25th Anniversary!

By PRESS OFFICER
NCRTV Museum

When: Saturday August 10, 2024, 12-4 p.m.

Where: 2608 Mitchellville Rd., Bowie, Maryland, 20716

The National Capital Radio & Television Museum (NCRTV) is proud to announce a significant milestone—our 25th anniversary! To celebrate, we will be hosting a Birthday Bash for all to attend. In conjunction with the party, we will also be launching a new exhibit NCRTV's 25th Anniversary, a retrospective look at NCRTV's founding and first quarter-century as a museum.

The Birthday Bash and the exhibit opening will be held on **August 10, 2024, from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.** To celebrate, admission to the museum will be free on August 10, with guided tours of the Museum leaving at the top of each hour. We will also have birthday cake and kids activities (while supplies last).

The Museum is in the 1906 Harmel House located at 2608 Mitchellville Rd., Bowie, Maryland, 20716. For more informa-



tion, call us at 301-390-1020, or email info@ncrtv.org.

The National Capital Radio & Television Museum collects, preserves, and interprets artifacts, programming, and publications to educate the public about the development and impact of electronic media. Explore radio from Marconi's earliest wireless telegraph to the primitive crystal sets of the 1920s, from Depression-era cathedral radios and post-War plastic portables to the development of radio with pictures (a.k.a. television). In conjunction with the City of Bowie, The National Capital Radio & Television Museum presents the history of broadcasting, a medium which so dramatically shaped our lives from the 1920s to today.

Governor Moore Announces Recipients of Maryland Department of Commerce 'Build Our Future' Grants

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (June 25, 2024)—Governor Wes Moore today announced that the Maryland Department of Commerce has awarded 11 grants totaling \$9 million through the Build Our Future Grant Pilot Program. The recipients represent projects that will support innovation infrastructure development in eligible technology sectors.

"To make Maryland more competitive, we need to turbocharge those areas of our economy that are producing fresh ideas and innovative new technologies," said Gov. Moore. "These grants will not only help individual businesses grow, but will also help establish tools and resources to support growing industries."

The Build Our Future Grant Pilot Program—part of the governor's Innovation Economy Infrastructure Act of 2023—pro-

vides grants of up to \$2 million to private companies, nonprofit entities, local governments, or colleges and universities. Eligible industry sectors include advanced manufacturing, aerospace, agriculture, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, blue technology, cybersecurity, defense, energy and sustainability, life sciences, quantum, and sensors and robotics.

After a two-phase application process, the department approved [the following Prince George's County] projects for funding:

- **Ion Storage Systems**—\$1,000,000 for buildout of solid-state battery research and development and manufacturing facility. The batteries use a ceramic solid-state electrolyte structure and are meant to replace lithium-ion batteries. (Prince George's County)
- **QC82**—\$200,000 for construction of a 1,000 square-foot integrated photonics,

testing and packaging facility for its unique detectors and quantum optics devices, part of an investment to build room-temperature quantum computers. (Prince George's County)

- **University of Maryland Advanced Quantum-Centered Experience for Startups and Students (AQCESS)**—\$118,600 for the implementation of a "shared lab" concept for quantum technology startups—equipment, platforms, and training—at the Quantum Startup Foundry. (Prince George's County)

"The Build Our Future Program is a bold new way to accelerate growth in the innovative sectors where Maryland is poised to lead and dominate," said Maryland Department of Commerce Secretary Kevin Anderson. "These grants will support innovation and spur economic growth across Maryland and help make sure we're competitive in these key industries."

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TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

In & Around Morningside-Skyline

by Mary McHale 301-735-3451

MD 4 at MD 337 Interchange Project won't be complete 'til 2028

That means Pennsylvania Avenue at Suitland Parkway. And, apparently it's already underway.

The purpose is "to improve traffic operations and safety and increase roadway capacity to address existing demand and accommodate future traffic growth."

The project team will construct a new diamond interchange to replace the existing signalized intersection at MD 4 and Suitland Parkway. It will:

- Realign Pennsylvania Avenue Service Road and Armstrong Lane,
- Reconstruct on- and off-ramps to Joint Base Andrews,
- Construct a new signalized intersection at Presidential Parkway and Central Park Drive.
- Construct a new two-lane ramp over MD 4 and westbound Suitland Parkway.

Work will take place mainly during off-peak traffic hours, including daytime and some overnight periods. The project is estimated to be complete by fall 2028.

More information, 240-354-1456 or 240-467-0500.

I love a Parade—and we had one

Not sure if I could make the trip from 4304 Skyline Dr. to the Parade-walkers under the Baptist tree, I actually drove the half-block to the church parking lot and found a handsome guy headed for the Parade who had an arm to lend.

I was delighted to see Suitland Road Baptist Church there with water, pamphlets for all ages, and chairs. I chatted with their pastor, Dr. Kelvin McCune, who promised to come visit me in the near future.

I took advantage of one of the chairs and sat next to Stephen Matthews, a retired fireman who lives on John Street in Skyline. He gave me information to pass on to my grandson Richard who wants to be a firefighter.

The Parade started with all the usual pomp, including the usual candidates walking along, pushing for votes. (It was so hot I'd vote for anyone who marched up Suitland Road hill in that heat.) Members of the Clerk of the Court, the County Sheriff's Office, Prince George's Sheriff's office John Carr and George Nichols, County Judges asking us to vote them in, the president of Skyline Hills, and others who moved too fast. I sat and talked with Adel Benjamin and Dyone and Charles Mitchell

and waved to familiar faces sitting in the chairs.

Mostly, I stood at the curb, waving my flag. Marchers and drivers waved back. Skyline Citizens Association passed by with their well-decorated float and Skyline Queen Yvonne Garvin.

A handsome red 1955 Bel Air drove past along with other vintage autos.

The stars of the show had to be the Star Struck dancers dancing by, doing great steps in 97 degree heat.

As the Parade ended (too soon), my neighbor Stacie Smith saw me to my car. Three of the Daughters of St. Anne (the order that staffs the convent behind my home) headed home, disappointed that they had come late and missed some of the excitement. I gave Sr. Hy a ride home after she helped me into my car.

Now, I have my flag ready for July 4, 2025.

Town of Morningside

Thank you, Morningside, for a delightful Parade and glorious fireworks!

Morningside's Monthly Town Meeting will be July 16, 7 p.m. at the Town Hall. Info: 301-736-2300.

Neighbors & other good people

Jolene Ivey is running for County Council At-Large in the August 6 Special Election coming up. She has served as County Council Chair, and before that, as a broadcast journalist and state legislator.

Father James A. Fangmeyer, Jr., newly ordained, has been assigned as parochial vicar, pro-tempore, at St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Upper Marlboro.

Academia

Maykla Monique Holmes-Williams will be attending Averett University in Danville, Va., on a track scholarship. She'll major in Biology, with plans to pursue a degree in Sports Medicine. She currently holds a Certificate in Nursing and graduated from a high school in St. Mary's County. Maykla is the oldest granddaughter of Stanley Holmes, former President of the Skyline Citizens Association.

Author Frank Cottrell-Boyce has been named the Waterstones Children's Laureate. Among some of his books: "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," "The Great Rocket Robbery" and "The Astounding Broccoli Boy." Waterstones is a British book retailer.

Prince George's County Public Schools is hiring School Bus Drivers. Among the amenities: paid CDL (Commercial Driver's License Program) training, health insurance, retirement benefits, personal and sick leave, summer opportunities. Info: pgcps.org/drivewithus

Changing landscape

Metro fares are set to rise by 12.5 percent. Maximum rail fare will increase from \$6 to \$6.75. Base rail and base bus fares will go from \$2 to \$2.25. Late-night and weekend charges will also increase.

There are several new laws in Maryland, taken effect on Monday. They include Liquor delivery, indoor vaping ban, Noise abatement monitoring systems, Stop sign monitoring systems in Prince George's, a Ban on legacy admissions, and more.

A home at 6809 Lou Lane, in Morningside, has sold for \$225,000.

William Chesley dies at 100

William Thomas "Uncle Billy" Chesley was born October 5, 1923, and died April 22, 2024, a span of 100 and a half years. His obituaries don't say much about his long life, but he is buried at Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery; he must have been in the military.

He was the father of Cora Rose (Tom) and William Chesley Rusunungoko (Kimberly); brother of Georgia Chesley. Also survived by eight grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and friends. He was predeceased by his daughter Phyllis and siblings Robert, Walter and Frank Chesley, Charlotte Young and Dorothy Williams. Mass of Christian Burial was at St. Philip's Church on May 11.

A nephew in his published obit said, "I don't know of any person that was more positive and upbeat than Uncle Billy."

Milestones

Happy Birthday to Laverne Peggy Simms, Krista Lanehart and Laura Thompson Hoffmann, July 14; Helen Jurney, July 15; Norma Wright and Gary Lewis, Jr., July 16; my granddaughter Claire Mudd, and Michael Busky, July 17; former Morningside Police Chief Stephen Armhold, July 17; Allyssa Frederick and Russell Butler, July 18; Mike Fowler Sr and Eddie Hall, July 19; Kaye Proctor, Donna Buchin, Dorothy Gessner and Tina Nichols, July 20.

Area Residents Graduate From Mercer University

MACON/ATLANTA, Ga. (June 25, 2024)—Mercer University conferred bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees to more than 2,200 students at five commencements held in May in Macon and Atlanta.

Founded in 1833, Mercer University is a dynamic and comprehensive center of undergraduate, graduate and professional education. The University enrolls more than 9,100 students in 12 schools and colleges—liberal arts and sciences, law, pharmacy, medicine, business, engineering, education, theology, music, nursing, health professions and professional advancement—on major campuses in Macon and Atlanta, medical school sites in Macon, Savannah, Columbus and Valdosta, and at regional academic centers in Henry and Douglas counties.

The following area students were among those who graduated from Mercer during the 2023–2024 academic year:

Bowie, Maryland:

Mary Allen, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Bachelor of Arts

Fort Washington, Maryland:

Taylor Perry, College of Education, Master of Arts in Teaching Upper Marlboro, Maryland:

Christian Ingram-Maske, College of Professional Advancement, Master of Science

Christian Ingram-Maske, School of Theology, Master of Divinity

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

Will IRA Withdrawals Affect My Medicare Premiums?

By RUSSELL GLOOR, National Social Security Advisor at the AMAC Foundation, the non-profit arm of the **Association of Mature American Citizens**

Dear Rusty: I am a member of AMAC and learn so much from the Ask Rusty column. I hope you can give me some information about a question that has come up in my family. My husband is retired and has reached full retirement age. He is considering withdrawing money from an IRA to pay off our mortgage. We are wondering what, if any, penalties may be incurred on Social Security, Medicare, and income tax. Thank you for your help in this matter. **Signed: Concerned Taxpayer**

Dear Concerned: Thank you for contacting the AMAC Foundation Social Security Advisory Service. Regarding your question on the impact of withdrawing IRA funds, there is no impact to your husband's gross Social Security benefit. The amount withdrawn, of course, is considered ordinary income for federal income tax purposes, and will need to be included as such on your federal income tax return and will therefore affect your federal income tax liability when you file the return.

Depending on the amount withdrawn, there could be an impact to the Medicare premium due to the Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA) provision. Assuming you file jointly, you will pay a higher Medicare Part B premium if your modified adjusted gross income is above certain thresholds (i.e., more than \$103,000 for an individual and \$206,000 for a married couple). Please note that Medicare's procedures will not note this income change for two years, so if you make the withdrawal in 2024 it will not trigger the increases until your 2026 Medicare premiums. A change to your Medicare premium might also result in a change to your net Social Security payment at that time (since Medicare is automatically deducted from your Social Security payment).

Also depending on the amount withdrawn, you may have to pay an additional amount on top of your Medicare Part D premium. The Part D adjustment amount is calculated based on a percentage of the Part D national base beneficiary premium, not on a percentage of the plan premium.

The Social Security Administration mails letters to beneficiaries who currently pay a Part B Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA) and, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), are in a Part D plan. The letter explains the additional Part D amount, and how exactly Social Security will collect it. You can contact SSA at 1-800-772-1213 or your local SSA agency if you have any further questions about your Part D IRMAA premium.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] www.amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at www.amac.us/join-amac.

Brandywine-Aquasco

by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

REV. DOROTHEA BELT STROMAN

Rev. Dorothea Belt Stroman was honored for 38 years of Ministerial Service at Martin's Crosswinds in Greenbelt, Maryland on Sunday, June 9, 2024, hosted by Clinton United Methodist Church. Dorothea Joanne Belt is the third offspring born to the late Dorothy & Joseph Belt, Jr. She is the proud mother of one son, William B. Stroman, III; mother-in-law of Quivianna Davis Stroman; the dotting mother of a granddaughter, Madison Rae Stroman and two grandsons, William Boyd Stroman IV and Mason Alexander Stroman, adopted grandmother of Anthony G. Davis.

Pastor Stroman began her ministerial service as Associate Pastor at Simpson-Hamline United Methodist Church in Washington, DC (1986–1988). She was later appointed to attend school (1988–1989) and thus began work on her Doctor of Ministry degree, followed by her service as Associate Pastor of Outreach at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, DC (1989–1991). Pastor Stroman then served as Senior Pastor at Albright Memorial United Methodist Church in Washington, DC (1991–2004) before her appointment as pastor of Clinton United Methodist Church (CUMC) in Clinton, Maryland for the past 20 years (July 1, 2004–June 30, 2024).

Pastor Stroman has taught several courses—Basic Lay Speaking: Advanced Lay Speaking: Lay Pastoral Caregiving: Preaching: "From Your Heart to Theirs," and "Leading Worship" for at least 27 years in the Washington-Columbia District and the Washington-East District.

In addition, Pastor Stroman has received several citations from the Sing and Praying Bands of Maryland, Prince George's County government officials, the State of Maryland government officials, Hearth Hospice, and the Prince George's County Chapter of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness).

Pastor Stroman has served on the Washington-Columbia District Committee on the Superintendency and the Committee on Ordained Ministry. She also served on the Baltimore-Washington Conference Committee on Disabilities and was a Mentor for the Washington-East Committee on Ordained Ministry.

Pastor Stroman is a contributor in The Woman of Color Study Bible, 1993. An excerpt from a sermon titled, "The Potter Shapes Our Lives, Turning Flaws into Strength," appeared in the Washington Times, February 14, 2000. She is currently the published author of a Christian fiction titled, The First Man.

Pastor Stroman is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, The Crystal Dove (50+years), Alpha Zeta Chapter, Baltimore, Maryland. During the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Centennial, which was celebrated January 2020, Rev. Stroman was one of the recip-

ients of The Zeta 100 Award for Religion, which recognizes career accomplishments, leadership, and dedication in their field. In addition, Rev. Stroman received recognition in the field of Religion during the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Alpha Zeta Chapter Finer Womanhood Awards Ceremony (March 2021).

In her 38 years as a faithful servant and spiritual leader, Pastor Stroman has been highly visible and active within the communities she has served, thereby making many friends along the way. During her tenure at CUMC, several ministries were formed, including the Mental Health, Evangelism and Young Adult ministries, and the Young Adult Choir, and most recently, the Media Audio Visual Ministry. The Mental Health Ministry, which supports National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and many other charitable groups, agencies, and ministries, was established in 2005 under Pastor Stroman's leadership. The Evangelism Ministry, especially their monthly visit at Future Care-Pineview, Clinton, Maryland (third Sunday) and the Fall Revival in September, provides kindness baskets to District V Police, in Clinton, MD and Prince George's Fire Department #825, in Clinton, MD. In 2023, the Media AV Ministry was officially established to enhance the worship experience online and via conferences call members.

Additionally, under Pastor Stroman leadership, the Clinton United Methodist Church, a Prayer Garden was constructed in 2023, on the west lawn of the church's grounds. A dedication ceremony was held on April 29, 2023, for the prayer garden, which was built around three existing crosses.

EDUCATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS: B.S. Degree in Home Economics, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD, May 19, 1973. Inducted into Kappa Omicron Phi National Home Economics Honor society in 1977. Outstanding Young Woman of America 1981. Master of Divinity Degree, Howard University School of Divinity, Washington, DC May 10, 1986. Listed in the 1986 Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges. Certificate of Training in Clinical Pastoral Education, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, DC.

MINISTERIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Ordained a Deacon in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, June 19, 1986. Ordained an Elder in the Baltimore Washington Annual Conference, June 12, 1988. President Joseph Biden Lifetime Award.

JULY WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Congratulations to Bonnie and Daniel Droter, Karl and Romonia Pinkney, Ugo and Mamou Mbakwe, Anthony and Joelle Oghogho who are Clinton United Methodist Church members celebrating Wedding Anniversaries in July.

COMMUNITY

Prince George's County Kicks Off Stuff The Bus Back to School Supply Drive

Opening Day Event is on Monday, July 15 at 10 a.m.

By PRESS OFFICER
Department of Public Works and Transportation

LARGO, Md. (July 3, 2024)—The Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T) is excited to announce the return of its annual Stuff The Bus Back to School Supply Drive, scheduled to run from **Monday, July 15 to Friday, August 16, 2024**. This initiative provides

an opportunity for DPW&T, its partners, and community members to support students by providing new backpacks and essential classroom supplies. DPW&T will kick off the school supply drive with an opening day event on Monday, July 15, 10 a.m. at DPW&T headquarters in Largo.

"Stuff The Bus is our premier community event, and we are Prince George's Proud for the opportunity to provide families and children with free backpacks

and school supplies, especially when finances are tight," said DPW&T Director Michael D. Johnson. "We encourage residents who are able, to pick up a few extra school supplies during their regular shopping and join DPW&T, along with our partners as we Stuff The Bus with essential classroom supplies."

About Stuff The Bus:

Since its inception, the Stuff The Bus School Supply Drive has garnered over-

Prince George's County Stuff The Bus Back to School Supply Drive

Donations Accepted: July 15–August 16: Monday–Friday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

WHERE: 9400 Peppercorn Place, Largo, MD 20774 (End of the cul-de-sac)

whelming support and donations from County Government agencies, staff, community organizations, and residents. To date, Stuff The Bus has collected and distributed over 40,000 school supply items. Stuff The Bus 2024 event partners include Prince George's County Office of Community Relations, Prince George's County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma

Theta Sorority, Inc., Prince George's County Association of Realtors, and Proud Pearls of Prince George's, An Official Interest Group of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Prince George's County Public Schools 2024–2025 academic year begins Monday, August 26, 2024. DPW&T invites the community to donate supplies and join this year's effort to support Prince George's County's future leaders. For more information on how to participate, please visit https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/departments-offices/news-events/news/stuff-thebus?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery, or contact Angela Rouson, Chief of Communications, at AJRouson@co.pg.md.us.

Prince George's County Native Stamaur 'Ayye Pap' Mitchell Returns Home for Second Rap Session to Empower Youth

Seat Pleasant, MD, July 23, 2024, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

By PRESS OFFICER
Rap Sessions

Stamaur 'Ayye Pap' Mitchell is excited to return home from LA for his second Rap Session on **July 23, 2024**, from 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Seat Pleasant Activity Center, located at 5720 Addison Road, Seat Pleasant, MD 20743. This event comes at a crucial time as our communities face numerous challenges daily, with a notable rise in youth crime.

With violent crime up 39% last year, the youth crime emergency in the DMV area has reached a critical point. Many of our young people are caught up in this surge, making it more important than ever to engage and support them. This interactive panel discussion, moderated by Talk2Trey of 93.9 WKYS, will bring together passionate advocates for underserved causes. They will share their personal insights and experiences while offering solutions to overcome life's challenges.

"This isn't just a discussion;

it's a movement to meet our youth where they are, offering sound advice and guidance," says Mitchell. "Let's come together to support, uplift, and keep inspiring the next generation."

Discussion Contributors:

Sommer Hill

Sommer Hill is a journalist and social media strategist who uses her skills to advocate for social justice and the arts. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Sommer grew up in several cities, including Detroit, Toronto, and the District of Columbia. She holds a BA in Media, Journalism, and Film from Howard University with a minor in Spanish. Sommer gained production experience working with NBC, CBS, Fox, and BET. She is currently the senior social media associate for NPR and the host of her own talk show 'It's Sommer Time'.

Amber Rayne

Amber "Amber Rayne" Matthews is a Black woman vi-

sual artist and filmmaker from Maryland known for producing a range of film projects including commercials, short films, music videos, documentaries, and creative content. Additionally, she also works as an event coordinator, production coordinator, and stage manager for various music-based events including the annual Broccoli City Festival in DC, Roots Picnic in Philadelphia, and various other events and showcases. As an HBCU graduate of Bowie State University with a Bachelor's of Science in Visual Communication and Digital Media Arts with a concentration in Advertising Design, she aims to provide opportunities and education for minorities and specifically women of color through her production work. Her goal and purpose is to explore the music, fashion, and beauty industry through the lens of film making and event production by producing creative projects, curating experiences, and creating visual images.

Yaddiya

Justin "Yaddiya" Johnson is a star in D.C.'s arts community, founder of Long Live GoGo, and a member of the Kennedy Center's Culture Caucus. He is dedicated to advancing racial equity and preserving go-go music, the heartbeat of D.C.'s Black culture.

Abu Sillah

Abu Sillah, from Prince George's County, MD, is a dynamic professional excelling as a Business Owner, Educator, and Media Relations expert. As CEO of The DMV Daily, he showcases entrepreneurial prowess and strategic marketing. Abu inspires as a dedicated Middle School Teacher and contributes to RadioOne DC as a Promotions Assistant. He holds a Bachelor's in Sociology from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and a Master's in Organizational Communications from Bowie State University, where he is also pursuing a second Master's in Teaching. A proud member of Iota Phi



PHOTO COURTESY RAP SESSIONS

Pictured: Officer Miller - Seat Pleasant Police Community Relations Unit, Mrs. Wanda Frink Little - Regional Director of Juvenile Services [PG County], Corporal Charles - Maryland National Capital Park Police Community Engagement Unit, and Terra Stephens - Rap Sessions Coordinator

Theta Fraternity Inc. and the National Association for Black Journalists, Abu actively engages in professional networks to stay current and foster community connections.

PATisDOPE

Landover, Maryland native Patrick Blanchard, also known as

See **YOUTH** Page A4

Child Care from AI

County in 2020 and left teaching. Two years later, she returned to the District of Columbia Public Schools system while pregnant with her second child—only to discover searching for child care was still difficult and time-consuming.

"I was looking and looking and looking for child care," she said.

Jovine experienced exactly what other young mothers have experienced in recent years. She went on a frantic search for child care without referring to the state's EXCELS ratings.

Priya Mahfooz's son Zakir was born in May 2019. She sent Zakir to a child care facility near the family home in Clarksburg, in Montgomery County, a few months later. But that operation shut down at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, never to reopen.

Desperate for child care, Mahfooz and a friend banded together to hire the teacher who ran that closed facility to look after their children. Each family paid the teacher \$425 a week.

In the summer of 2021, Mahfooz decided to send Zakir back to a child care facility. During her search, Mahfooz said, she didn't rely on Maryland EXCELS or the state inspection reports.

"When you're searching, it's really just whatever you're being fed in your feeds," Mahfooz said. "You're thinking about price, location, [online] ratings."

Mahfooz found a child care slot for Zakir later that summer in Germantown and then enrolled him in Green Valley Montessori School in September 2021.

Meanwhile, Javiera King, an administrator at the University of Maryland, had to hire a nanny to take care of her young daughter, Layla, while the family searched for a slot in a child care facility.

While pregnant, "I had to put myself on a waitlist already because most day cares have a waitlist a year out," she said.

King's nanny gave her two weeks notice in December 2023. That meant King had to quickly piece together a schedule where family members took turns caring for her daughter, who was 11 months old at the time. The family then found a child care facility that had a part-time slot for Layla, meaning the family's piecemeal plan for caring for the young girl would continue.

Finally, in February, Layla's part-time slot at that facility became full-time.

"We were really lucky with how everything played out for us," King said.

Jovine wasn't so lucky. When she was five months pregnant with her second child, she called 12 child care facilities. All of them had a waiting list of a year or more for infants.

Her daughter Lily was born at the end of February 2023, and Jovine finished the school year on maternity leave. She had to go back to work in August, but the earliest availability at most nearby child care facilities was in October.

"There was one spot that had an availability. I wasn't too satisfied with it," Jovine said.

There were few toys and learning tools. The outdoor play equipment was dirty and the facility had no curriculum for promoting development in infants, Jovine said.

She found another option on a billboard. Jovine called that facility and when she found they had a spot, she took it. She only took three days off work to care for Lily.

The facility Jovine sent Lily to after a 10-month search is enrolled in the EXCELS program but is not yet rated.

Asked if she referred to the EXCELS system during her search, Jovine said she didn't even know about the state rating system at the time.

Jovine has seen her daughter develop significantly at the day care. Lily is happy to go and a little reluctant to leave in the evenings, Jovine said.

"This is how I know she's in good hands. She likes it there," she said.

A scholarship program

In addition to offering ratings of the state's child care providers, Maryland expanded its child care scholarship program in 2022, making it easier to afford child care, said Heather Harding, coordinator at the Federalsburg Judy Center in Caroline County.

But providers said the scholarship program doesn't work as well in practice as it does in theory.

The eligibility requirements for the scholarship program allow middle class families to apply. Any family of two making less than \$61,222 per year is eligible; for a family of four, the limit is \$104,438.

A new fast-track program, launched on July 1, 2023, aims to reduce the wait time for parents to receive approval for a scholarship. Three days after applying, eligible families can get 60 days of child care paid for while their long-term aid application is processed. Scholarship values each year can range from \$9,000 to \$25,000 per child.

Lent, of the Maryland Family Network, said the new fast-track has vastly improved the scholarship program. Previously, parents would be placed on a waiting list to receive help with their child care expenses, he said.

But other requirements can make the system a catch-22, Harding said. Parents are required to be enrolled in school or working to be eligible for the scholarship, she said. But many of them can't do either unless they have child care guaranteed. "Even if they find it, then they can't pay for it till they get the scholarship," Harding said.

These scholarships can only be used in facilities that are enrolled in the EXCELS program. After parents receive a voucher from the state, they present it to the provider. The provider then has to send paperwork to the state in order to be paid.

Garey, the child care provider from Dundalk, said this is one of the most frustrating parts about the process. Multiple times, she filed paperwork and had to wait three months to be paid. At one point, the state owed her \$15,000 in scholarship pay. This happened after the state moved to an advance-payment system that was supposed to provide providers with income more quickly.

"It's this delay after delay after delay," Garey said.

She finds ways to deal with the months-late payments because she refuses to make the parents pay or to drop families from her list of clients.

"One little girl is nonverbal. She sang and pointed to every single letter of the alphabet," Garey said. "I did that. So why in the world would I drop that family?"

Other providers also complain about late scholarship payments. Christine Morris, the director of Trinity Lutheran Christian School and Early Learning Center in Joppa, in Harford County, said this spring that the state owed her \$40,000 in scholarship payments. And Shantel Rouzer, who runs a facility in Baltimore City, said she turned away students on the scholarship program because she knows the state's reimbursements will come so late.

"It's not the families' fault, but (Maryland State Department of Education officials) don't hear us!!!! And providers are tired!!!!" Rouzer wrote in response to a survey from the Local News Network.

Solving her own problem

Parents like Jovine don't always know about the scholarship program. When she found out about the program in February, months after Lily,

her youngest daughter, started day care. Jovine applied, and a day later, the program's new fast-track program temporarily covered child care for two months.

"It took a huge load, And it's amazing to have that option," she said.

Before that, Jovine was paying \$1,360 per month for child care for Lily. On top of that, she had to provide snacks, milk, lunch and other resources to the center.

But four days before Jovine's temporary aid expired, she hadn't gotten a final decision from the state. Jovine didn't receive a response until June. By then, she was already paying out of pocket.

She'll have to continue to do so because the state decided she was earning too much money to qualify. Noting her application listed extra money from her old job at D.C. Public Schools that doesn't reflect what she's making now, she has reapplied.

Jovine and her longtime partner, Abdul Dopson, now need child care more than ever. Their third child, Mia, was born on June 14.

Knowing infant spots are difficult to find, Jovine decided to leave her teaching job—and do her own small part to alleviate Maryland's child care shortage.

"I got licensed to start a day care myself: a home day care," she said. "The need is that prevalent, you know, I might as well try to open up a day care myself and see what happens."

Jovine's fledgling child care facility, Elite Kidz Clubhouse, opens in August—but it's already overtaken her home's living room and dining room. She's spent more than \$2,500 on cots, desks, developmentally appropriate toys and other necessities.

A large, colorful tree painted on the wall of the facility showcases the skills Jovine wants her students to get out of their day-to-day activities. Jovine said she wants her facility to work its way through the EXCELS system and eventually qualify as a preschool under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the state's education reform plan.

"Why not start this beautiful generation how it should, educating them and giving them what they need to be successful little children?" she said.

Local News Network reporter *Laura Shaughnessy* contributed to this report.

Editor's Note: Part 1 of this series published in the July 4 edition of *The Prince George's Post*. It is a 4-part series.

COMMENTARY

Marc Morial

President and CEO, National Urban League



To Be Equal:

Project 2025 Is the New Southern Manifesto

“Project 25 is a radical, extreme, pro-authoritarianism plan pushed by conservatives who are desperate to take our country backwards. It is a movement led by far-right extremists that attacks our nation’s founding principles, such as our system of checks and balances, freedom of speech and of the press, and separation of church and state. These are the very principles that keep our country strong and make America the best nation on earth.”

—U.S. Rep. Ted Lieu

Eliminating safe, legal abortion and effective contraception. Obliterating of the very mention of sexual orientation and gender identity, diversity, equity, and inclusion, reproductive health, and reproductive rights from every federal rule, regulation, contract, grant, or piece of legislation. Replacing skilled civil servants with extremist partisan hacks.

This is Project 2025, the new Southern Manifesto. It is almost certain to be America’s future if Donald Trump is elected to another term.

Drafted in response to the Supreme Court’s

landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* and signed by 19 Senators and 82 Representatives from the South, the Southern Manifesto—officially titled “Declaration of Constitutional Principles”—was a vow to uphold racial segregation and white supremacy.

Project 2025 goes even further. It seeks to reimplement a rigid social hierarchy that oppresses not only people of color, but also women, non-Christians, the LGBTQ+ community, working families, and immigrants.

Key to this dystopian agenda is purging the government of nonpartisan civil servants who are loyal to the Constitution and replacing them with extremist partisan hacks loyal only to Trump.

A list of non-partisan government officials who might stand in the way of Trump’s agenda already is being compiled by a dark-money “slime machine,” the Associated Press revealed this week.

With the entire federal government under his direct control, Trump would be free to act on his vow to turn the Department of Justice into an instrument of retribution against his political adversaries.

The radical, repressive, and regressive regime previewed in Project 2025 includes:

- Dismantling the foundations of immigration policy, tearing families apart, turning away desperate refugees, and stripping away protections for Dreamers.
- Undermining climate change mitigation, environmental justice, and the transition to clean energy
- Eliminating racial justice initiatives and preserving advantages for white Americans, even perverting the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division to “investigate and prosecute all state and local governments, institutions of higher education, corporations, and any other private employers” with diversity, equity, and inclusion policies.
- Gutting public education, wiping out Head Start and other support for low-income students, and withdrawing federal oversight of public schools.
- Slashing health care insurance, putting 18 million Americans at risk of losing coverage entirely, killing the drug price provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act and Affordable Care Act’s protections for pre-existing conditions.
- Shutting down access to safe abortions, contraception, and other reproductive health care, putting women’s lives at risk.
- Deleting “sexual orientation and gender identity” from all federal rules, reinstating a transgender military ban, and limiting LGBTQ workplace discrimination protections.

Even the architects of Project 2025 understand that its grisly agenda appalls and disgusts a majority of Americans who would reject it in a free and fair election—just as they rejected Trump in 2020. But democracy prevailed then only because

the Vice President and officials in the departments of Justice, Defense, and Homeland Security thwarted Trump’s attempted Trump coup. If Trump manages to seize a second term, there won’t be anyone left in the federal government to stop him from undermining future election.

There won’t be anyone left in the federal government to stop his most extreme proposals, like disassembling the Veterans Administration, allowing Russian spies to remain in the country, shooting racial justice protestors, deploying the military against migrants, kicking undocumented children out of schools, or dropping nuclear bombs into the eyes of hurricanes.

The echoes of the Southern Manifesto’s in Project 2025 should come as no surprise, given the racist history of the Heritage Foundation, which spearheaded its production. The organization is rooted in the mid-1970s movement to protect racially segregated schools, waging its first public battle against multicultural textbooks—“n****er books,” as some opponents called them.

In fact, the coalition that developed Project 2025 includes at least nine SPLC-designated hate and antigovernment groups, including Alliance Defending Freedom, Center for Immigration Studies, and Moms for Liberty.

The original Southern Manifesto took aim at “outside meddlers” who sought racial justice. The new Southern Manifesto takes aim at “woke culture warriors.” Trump’s allies say “woke” means as “the belief there are systemic injustices in American society and the need to address them.”

We stand guilty as charged and gladly assume the mantle of “warriors” in the battle for equity, inclusion, and democracy.

—June 28, 2024

Ben Jealous

Executive Director, Sierra Club



We Can Fulfill America’s Promise by Throwing Everything We’ve Got at the Climate Crisis

Independence Day at its best is a call to action to leave our children an America as good as its promise.

This time of year makes me think about my family’s journey in this country. My father’s family is white. He descends from the youngest combatant at the Battle of Lexington and Concord. My mother’s family is Black. She descends from two Black Virginia statesmen who helped to rebuild the Commonwealth after the Civil War. One of them descended from Thomas Jefferson’s grandmother.

Today, both families, like many Americans, live at or near some version of the same address. It is that place where there used to be factories and when

they shut down, what shot up was poverty, despair, suicide, and opiate addiction. And as if all that were not enough to deal with, it keeps getting hotter. The floods come more often. The super storms do as well.

If there is a silver lining in all this struggle, it is this: There is one solution that can tackle all these problems, and that is throwing everything we’ve got at stopping the climate crisis. If we do that, we will turn around the economy, our neighbors’ lives, and the fate of the planet itself.

The next five years will define who leads the world economy, us or China. Our leadership in innovation and design allowed us to take an early lead

in the areas of electric vehicles (EVs) and other green technologies. But China leads in manufacturing. Today they dominate solar panel production and have overtaken the US on EVs as well. Still, we have not given up the fight, despite calls from Fox News and others for us to do just that.

Georgia is home to the largest solar panel production facility in the Western Hemisphere. The same company that owns that plant, Qcells, is about to open another one in Georgia that will be the only plant outside of China producing every component of the panel, from ingot to finished product.

Tennessee, North Carolina, and other southern states have a battery belt. EVs are rolling off the assembly lines in Detroit and elsewhere. Illinois has very recently become home to a boom in production of both EVs and EV components. In short, because of the green economy America has helped the world give birth to, and the investments in manufacturing and infrastructure made under President Biden, we are opening new factories with increasing frequency and beginning to see the signs of an economy that will lift all boats again. This means thousands upon thousands of good jobs coast to coast. It has been revolutionary in places like Dalton, GA, the location of Qcells’ existing Georgia plant. There, a wall is decorated with the artwork of employees’ children showing their parents as heroes saving the planet.

The other part of the equation to save the planet requires us to protect and rebuild our forests. Expanding wild areas and protecting nature brings more jobs to rural America and helps preserve ancient

ways of hunting, fishing, and connecting with the natural world.

The benefits of protecting and planting more trees are not just for rural areas. Restoring our urban tree canopies is one of the most effective things we can do to combat the urban heat crisis in cities across the country. Recently I have been out visiting cities around the country, from Phoenix, Arizona to Lansing, Michigan, with US Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Homer Wilkes promoting the administration’s \$1.5 billion tree planting initiative.

Every new tree casts shade and its shade makes the temperature feel 10–15 degrees cooler than it does in the sun. That encourages people to get outdoors. More people outside and on the street means communities are better protected, safer, and more connected. And better connected communities are more content and, due to reduced social isolation among its members, experience less suicide.

The pursuit of America’s promise is an ongoing journey. Although we may feel separate from each other at times, we walk this road together. And we will all rise or fall together. On America’s birthday, let us choose to rise by meeting the challenge of the climate crisis and making the world a better place for everyone along the way.

—July 1, 2024

Ben Jealous is the Executive Director of the Sierra Club and a Professor of Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

Governor Moore Launches Maryland SUN Bucks Program to Help Families Buy Groceries During Summer

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (July 1, 2024)—Governor Wes Moore today announced the launch of Maryland SUN Bucks, a new program to help families buy groceries for eligible school-aged children during the summer months. Building on the state’s existing Summer Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program, Maryland SUN Bucks will serve a record 543,000 children across the state through more than \$60 million in new funding from the federal government.

“During the summer, many children lose the free and reduced-price meals they receive at school, and households may need help putting food on the table. Our administration is here to help fill that gap,” said Gov. Moore. “Tackling childhood poverty requires consistent, targeted action so all Marylanders can stay healthy as they play, grow, and learn. The launch of Maryland SUN Bucks marks one such action—and it won’t be the last.”

Maryland SUN Bucks builds upon Maryland’s existing Summer SNAP program and expands the reach six-fold. Families in all of Maryland’s 24 jurisdictions are now able to receive benefits and local government matching funds are no longer required.

“There isn’t a single jurisdiction in Maryland that isn’t interested in helping fight childhood poverty. Maryland SUN Bucks extends food security provided by school meals to summertime; and it represents the single largest investment Maryland has seen to help feed our children,” said Maryland Department of Human Services Secretary Rafael López. “We are grateful for our partners in the state legislature and the Biden Administration for working with us to make sure Maryland’s children do not experience hunger.”

Households that qualify for the Maryland SUN Bucks program will receive \$40 each month in June, July, and August—totaling \$120—to buy food for each eligible student. Benefits may be used at authorized retailers, including grocery

stores and farmers markets.

Up to 90% of eligible Maryland families will receive the benefits automatically, though some parents will need to apply. For families receiving SNAP benefits, Maryland SUN Bucks will be automatically applied to the head-of-household’s Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. If a child does not receive SNAP, a white Maryland SUN Bucks card will be issued in the child’s name.

Maryland SUN Bucks is in addition to free meals that kids of all ages can get at summer meal sites in their communities.

“For many children, schools are lifelines to regular and nutritious meals. Maryland SUN Bucks will improve access to healthy food options during the summer months,” said State Superintendent of Schools Dr. Carey M. Wright. “This innovative partnership connects families to a basic resource at a critical time.”

For more information is available at dhs.maryland.gov/sunbucks or 1-800-332-6347.

Youth from A3

PATisDOPE, has established a name for himself through his successful fashion-forward social media platforms and a keen understanding of streetwear culture and marketing. With a background in communications from Salisbury University and a passion for fashion, today, Blanchard owns What Should I Call My Store? located in Bowie Town Center and has become a nationally recognized brand with high-profile clientele. Patrick Blanchard’s journey from a student with a passion for fashion and entertainment to a renowned blog connoisseur and entrepreneur serves as a testament to the power of hard work and dedication. The What Should I Call My Store: Entrepreneur Track Program embodies his belief in local success, providing high school students who are aspiring entrepreneurs the tools and support to achieve their goals within their own communities, while integrating valuable STEM concepts to prepare them for a future in business.

Diamond Frazier

Diamond B. Frazier is a 5-year Certified Youth Mentor and Life Coach and a 10-year personal finance instructor. Diamond specializes in helping clients achieve their personal and financial goals

by providing a client-focused, result-driven, motivational learning approach and experience.

Event Highlights:

- Raffle giveaways
- Supportive service vendors

Be there and be part of the change! All ages are welcome to join this empowering event aimed

at making a positive impact on our youth and communities.

For more information, contact: Terra Stephens (301) 455-9319

Rap Sessions, an organization founded by *Stamaur Mitchell* with the intention of facilitating meaningful dialogue between influential community members and youth.

The Prince George’s Post

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ENVIRONMENT



CREDIT: FLOWCOMM, FLICKRCC.

The pangolin is the most heavily trafficked animal in the world.

EarthTalk® Q&A

An Uphill Battle Against Wildlife Trafficking Continues

By TIM WEIGHART JUNE 25, 2024

Dear EarthTalk:

How is the fight to prevent wildlife trafficking going?

—L.K., Chicago, IL

Wildlife trafficking, defined as the illegal trapping and/or poaching of wildlife for consumer trade, is second only to habitat loss as one of the largest modern threats to wildlife. The criminal practice overwhelmingly targets elephants, large reptiles and coral, and has resulted in the extinction of rare species of plants, reptiles and fish. High extinction risk is common among species targeted by wildlife crime; of the 4,000 species worldwide that are currently poached for trafficking, 40 percent are already listed as threatened or near-threatened.

The trade also harms people, as many foreign animals can spread dangerous diseases to previously unexposed people and livestock. Impoverished peoples in the poached animals' countries of origin are especially harmed by the industry, as the profiting criminal organizations often blackmail people with limited financial options into doing dangerous work for them.

Despite the harm wildlife trafficking has caused to wildlife and people, the industry has continued to expand over the last century, and now has an estimated annual value of roughly \$23 billion. Thanks to practices such as trophy hunting, hoarding and exotic tourism gaining momentum over the years, the demand for poached wildlife goods has only increased.

Additional access to the industry has been provided by the convenience, safety and relative anonymity of online transactions, making it harder than ever to track the transportation and delivery of goods. Many nations that suffer from high rates of wildlife trafficking also lack sufficient law enforcement and security to adequately monitor their borders for illegal traders. However, many governments, nonprofits and environmental workers are making efforts to remedy these issues.

In 2022, the United States Agency for International Development committed \$75 million per year towards reducing trafficking in more than 35 African, Asian and Latin American countries. The money will go towards behavior change campaigns, more careers in conservation, and increased law implementation and security capacity so that borders are more consistently monitored. Similar efforts from the likes of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime and the non-profit Wildlife Conservation Society have already led to a 35 percent increase in convictions for wildlife crimes. These programs are key in our societal efforts to collaborate with governments, indigenous peoples, local communities and local tourism and transportation to discourage wildlife crime.

Trafficking often feels like a distant issue, but there are still ways for us to help combat wildlife crimes. For starters, any evidence of online trafficking should be reported to the Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online or the National Wildlife Crime Unit. Tourists should also exercise caution when encountering especially exotic goods, experiences or foods. You can verify if some organic products—specifically fish, supermarket goods, and products made with palm oil—are sustainably sourced by visiting the websites for Good Fish Guide, the Giki app, and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil respectively.

CONTACTS: The Coalition To End Wildlife Trafficking Online, <https://www.endwildlifetraffickingonline.org/>; Good Fish Guide, <https://www.mcsuk.org/goodfishguide/>; Giki, <https://giki.earth/>; Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, <https://rspo.org/>.

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Save the Date – 2024 Green Summit

When: Saturday, October 19, 2024, from 11 a.m.–4 p.m.

Where: David C. Driskell Community Park, 3911 Hamilton Street, Hyattsville, MD 20781

Join your Department of the Environment as we commemorate ten years of the Prince George's County Green Summit!

This free, one-day event will feature green exhibitors, pet adoptions, eco-friendly vendors, sustainable tips, giveaways, food trucks, music, kid-friendly activities, and fun for the whole family! Registration is preferred, though not required. Visit mypgc.us/greensummit

Engage, promote, and empower action to tackle various environmental and health issues in our County.—*The DoE Sprout*

For the Chesapeake Bay, Federal Leadership Is Sorely Needed for 2025 and Beyond

By ANN MILLS & NANCY STONER
for the Bay Journal News Service

Right now is a pivotal moment for the unifying environmental issue in our region: the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams.

For more than a decade, federal agencies, the six states in the Bay watershed, the District of Columbia and hundreds of nonprofit organizations have worked collaboratively toward a 2025 deadline to meet goals for a healthier Chesapeake Bay. While we will not fully meet most of those goals by next year, we have made notable progress in reducing pollution to the Bay.

And we can point to some major successes, such as reestablishing the Chesapeake's historic oyster reefs and upgrading sewage treatment plants throughout the watershed.

But the remaining challenges are daunting, and there's no clear roadmap yet for the next phase of Chesapeake Bay restoration. Still, there is plenty of reason for hope.

Thanks to the work of President Biden and Congress, an influx of federal funding from legislation like the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, along with increased appropriations for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program, has the potential to turn the tide and get the restoration on track. It's vital that federal agencies coordinate to ensure those investments lead to the greatest possible benefits for the nearly 19 million people in the Bay watershed.

Meanwhile, we're happy to say, EPA Administrator Michael Regan has committed to reviving the Chesapeake Bay Federal Leadership Committee, which will convene this fall for the first time since 2015.

To understand the significance of this, consider that the Chesapeake's restoration touches nearly every other issue facing our region—from climate change to fisheries to development to agriculture and, of course, tourism.

Success requires six states and the district working together in lockstep on initiatives to improve local waterways and communities throughout the watershed. This includes helping farmers adopt conservation practices that boost stream health, planting trees along trout streams, working with communities to increase access to greenspace, upgrading wastewater treatment plants and much more.

Federal investments have mobilized further support with increased funding, capacity and expertise from state agencies, nonprofits, universities and community leaders.

In addition to the EPA, there are numerous federal departments working with Bay watershed states toward meeting Chesapeake Bay restoration goals. They include the departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Homeland Security, Interior and Transportation—each department playing a critical role in the overall effort.

President Barack Obama created the Federal Leadership Committee in 2009 in through a Chesapeake Bay restoration executive order. The committee guided the restoration effort for six years, culminating in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement among the federal government, six Bay watershed states and the District of Columbia. The agreement set clear goals for Bay restoration with a 2025 deadline.

We were both honored to serve on this team, which played a pivotal role in ensuring broad and consistent federal leadership of the restoration effort. But the committee has not met for nine years, and we think the time is right for its second act.

Successes so far in the Bay's restoration are largely because of collaboration among many partners toward common goals. This laser focus helps investment and resources make the biggest difference for the Bay. It improves the lives of the watershed's residents; boosts local economies; ensures safer and cleaner water for people; and

protects habitat for fish, birds and other aquatic and terrestrial species.

President Obama's 2009 executive order was a historic moment that set the modern-day Bay restoration partnership in motion. Echoing President Ronald Reagan's words from a quarter century earlier, Obama recognized the Chesapeake as "a national treasure" and called on the federal government to lead a renewed effort to restore and protect the Bay and its landscapes, habitats and wildlife. Even in these divisive political times, restoring and protecting the Chesapeake continues to be a bipartisan endeavor.

Now, as we approach 2025, we've reached another important moment for the Chesapeake Bay region. Federal leadership is once again key to making the next chapter in the cleanup effort successful.

We applaud the EPA for its recommitment to taking on a leadership role in the Bay restoration effort and ensuring federal agencies and departments use their collective resources, capacity and expertise. As we embark on the next phase of restoration, we need the federal agencies to join forces and set a bold new vision for clean water in the region. With federal investments still coming and the 2025 deadline approaching, it is time to seize the moment and build on current momentum.

Ann Mills is the former U.S. Department of Agriculture deputy undersecretary for Natural Resources & Environment, a former member of the Chesapeake Bay Federal Leadership Committee and current executive director of the Agua Fund. Nancy Stoner is the former acting assistant administrator for water at the EPA, a former member of the Chesapeake Bay Federal Leadership Committee and current president of Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Their views do not necessarily reflect those of the Bay Journal. This commentary first appeared June 25, 2024 on Bayjournal.com and was distributed by the Bay Journal News Service.

Going Green in Your Community

(Family Features) Preserving your community for future generations can take many forms. It might mean volunteering with local organizations and participating in community improvement initiatives. Taking steps to protect the environment is another critical way to ensure your community remains safe and livable for generations to come.

These ideas show that going green can be as simple as making small modifications to everyday actions you already take.

Donating Unwanted Goods

Landfills are overflowing with items that still have plenty of useful life. Often, those discarded items could be repurposed to provide an affordable option to those who can't afford new, full-price versions. Before loading up your trash can, consider donating things like household goods and clothing that could still serve a purpose. Numerous organizations accept gently used goods that they either distribute directly to those in need or sell to the general public, with proceeds benefiting a specific cause or population. Look into the options in your area to find the best fit for items you have that can be donated.

Rethinking Transportation

Pollution from transportation accounts for 29% of the United States' emissions, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). That's a higher percentage than any other category measured by the EPA. Carpooling, public transportation and even carefully planning your route are ways you can take personal accountability to help reduce the problem.

Another way to improve transportation emissions is by talking to your school district about its school bus choices. Diesel school buses are not only expensive to operate, but they are harmful to children's health, the community and the climate, according to data compiled by the Propane Education & Research Council. Conversely, propane reduces harmful emissions that impact student health and air quality in the community. By advocating for your district to convert to a more environmentally friendly transportation option, such as propane, you can help further reduce harmful emissions in your community.

Find more information about propane-powered buses at BetterOurBuses.com.

Recycling and Composting

Another way to reduce landfill waste is recycling and composting. Many of the items you throw away can be recycled into all-new materials. For example, recycled plastic can be used in a wide range of products, from sleeping bags and backpacks to dishes and reusable water bottles. Food waste represents a large share of landfills, too. Eventually it will biodegrade, but composting what you can at home gives you nutrient-rich material you can use to support your garden or lawn with healthier soil and less need for pesticides.



Cleaning with Natural Products

Keeping your home clean takes more than a little elbow grease, but the harsh chemicals found in many household cleaners are actually quite damaging. The chemicals can be poisonous or contain allergens that negatively impact your home's air quality. Natural cleaners are often more cost-efficient, so you can enjoy cleaner air and minimize your impact on the environment.

Taking Advantage of Natural Light

If you're in the habit of flipping on a light switch as you walk in a room, next time pause and consider whether you really need additional light. During daylight hours, many rooms offer more than enough natural light. Sunlight can also help warm spaces naturally when it's cool outdoors, so throw open the curtains and let those warm, bright rays shine. If you do need additional light, consider relying on task lighting to illuminate your project rather than an overhead light that consumes more electricity.

Benefits of Propane School Buses

Over the last several decades, there have been many advances in student transportation. However, one area that could still use improvement is the number of students who ride to school on diesel buses that pollute the air. Today, there are two meaningful energy choices for clean student transportation: propane and electric. While both can achieve clean transportation, propane buses cost one-third the price of electric, allowing districts to replace their aging diesel fleet faster.

As an affordable, available and clean energy source, propane buses make practical sense. The buses reduce harmful emissions by 96% compared to diesel. They can also meet school districts' needs with a range of up to 400 miles and the resiliency to continue operating across all terrains and in any weather. In fact, more than 1,000 school districts have already made the switch. Every day, 1.3 million children ride to school in 22,000 propane school buses across the country.

In 2022, the EPA introduced the Clean School Bus Program, which provides \$5 billion over five years (2022–26) to replace existing diesel school buses with zero-emission and low-emission models.

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Officer from A1

fare such acts deserve," said William Alexander, CEO of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. "We are humbled and proud to honor Sgt. Titman as our Officer of the Month for May 2024."

The Officer of the Month Award Program is sponsored by the Police Unity Tour and recognizes federal, state, and local officers who distinguish themselves through exemplary law enforcement service and devotion to duty.

Established in 1984, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund is a nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring the fallen, telling the story of American law enforcement, and making it safer for those who serve. The first pillar of this mission, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., honors the names of all the 24,067 officers who have died in the line of duty to date throughout U.S. history. Additionally, NLEOMF maintains and publishes comprehensive details on the circumstances surrounding official line-of-duty deaths. The Officer Safety and Wellness pillar uses that data, coupled with best-practice program models, to produce programming directed at solutions to improve survivability and enhance wellness. NLEOMF's third pillar, the National Law Enforcement Museum (LawEnforcementMuseum.org) is committed to preserving the history of American law enforcement and sharing the experiences of service and sacrifice for generations to come.

Green from A5

Through three rounds of funding, the EPA program has allocated more than \$2.8 billion for 8,427 electric school buses and 440 low-emissions propane buses. However, for the same amount of money that was distributed for the electric buses (about \$2.77 billion), the program could have helped fund as many as 92,635 propane buses, assuming each propane bus received the \$30,000 incentive.

When considering full lifecycle emissions, replacing 92,635 diesel buses with propane buses would have reduced harmful nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions by 24,664 metric tons over the three years the program has funded buses. By comparison, replacing just 8,427 diesel buses with electric buses will reduce NOx emissions by just 2,379 metric tons over the three years.

Source: Propane Education & Research Council

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