

The Prince George's Post



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Governor Moore Announces \$1 Billion "Capital of Quantum" Initiative

By JACK BOWMAN
Capital News Service

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (Jan. 15, 2025)—Gov. Moore is pledging to make Maryland the "quantum capital of the world," proposing a significant investment into the industry of super-fast computing amid a budget crisis in the state.

Speaking at the College Park headquarters of IonQ, a leading quantum computing company, Moore said Tuesday he believes quantum is one of the industries in which Maryland has a competitive advantage, industries that could help grow an economy he said has been stagnant for too long.

"I refuse to have, in this moment, with the talent we have in the field, for Maryland to be a state that is just simply going to manage decline," Moore said. "Maryland, if we grow, we win. We're going to grow."

In his address to the crowd, which included representatives from IonQ, the University of Maryland and other industry leaders, Moore announced a \$27.5 million investment in the new "Capital of Quantum" initiative. Moore described the project as a joint venture between the state, the University of Maryland, IonQ and "other partners in the quantum computing space."

Moore described the goal of the investment as a simple one: "to make Maryland the capital of quantum of the world."

The announcement of the initiative follows a week of financial volatility in the quantum industry. Stock for IonQ and other companies in the field have seen dramatic rises and falls over the past several days



GIUSEPPE LOPICCOLO/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

Gov. Wes Moore announced a significant investment in quantum computing Tuesday, part of his push to grow Maryland's economy.

after figures like Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang and Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg questioned the idea of quantum computing being ready in the near future.

Despite this, Moore believes investing in the industry is a good short-term bet, and an even better one in the long-term.

"I think this is actually a smart bet for our GDP growth early," Moore told CNS in a gaggle with reporters, "and I think it's an incredibly smart bet for our long-term prospects of having something that Maryland can really pride itself on as having one of the leading spaces in the industry."

Quantum computing, a rapidly-emerging industry in the technology space, involves using quantum mechanics to produce answers to problems far faster than current computers can. The applications of such technology are wide-ranging, including artificial intelligence, pharmaceutical research and cybersecurity.

"Quantum computing doesn't just bend reality," Lt. Gov. Aruna Miller said at IonQ headquarters. "It redefines it, solving prob-

See QUANTUM Page A2

Council Member Wanika Fisher Hosts "Wicked: Girls Defying Gravity" Empowerment Event

Empowerment Day Celebrates Strength, Creativity, and Leadership

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of Council Member
Wanika Fisher

Prince George's County Council Member Wanika Fisher (District 2) invites the community to an exciting event designed to inspire and empower young girls through art, movement, and leadership. The "Wicked: Girls Defying Gravity" Empowerment Event will take place on **Saturday, January 25**, from 1 to 4 p.m. at Joe's Movement Emporium, located at 3309 Bunker Hill Road, Mount Rainier, MD.

This vibrant, Wicked-themed event, hosted by Sydney Jackson, Miss Teen DC USA, features an engaging lineup of activ-

ities including poetry, dance, career mentorship, and creative workshops. It will be an afternoon filled with opportunities for girls to embrace their creativity, explore new skills, and celebrate their unique potential.

"Empowering young girls is crucial to building confident and resilient future leaders. This event is a space for them to connect, express themselves, and learn how to embrace their power," said Council Member Fisher.

There will be a poetry performance from Prince George's County 2023 Poet Laureate Precious Rose, a movement workshop and dance session led by professional dancer and choreographer Shannon Ashlia, and ca-

reer mentorship discussions featuring Linda Cameron and other inspiring speakers. Attendees will also be able to participate in paint therapy, doll-making, and a hula hoop class, as well as a "Chat & Chew" lunch, sponsored by local businesses.

This event is made possible through a partnership with Joe's Movement Emporium, a community-centered arts organization, and features contributions from outstanding local artists and professionals.

Admission is free, and girls of all ages are welcome to attend. Last year's Barbie themed Empowerment event was a huge success, and Council Member Fisher is thrilled to once again inspire girls to learn, dance, and create!

Listening Sessions Scheduled for Prince George's County to Hear Input on Rent Stabilization Law

By PRESS OFFICER
DHCD

The Department of Permitting, Inspections and Enforcement (DPIE) and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) invite you to attend Listening Sessions regarding the newly-enacted Permanent Rent Stabilization and Protection Act of 2024. The Permanent Rent Stabilization and Protection Act became effective on October 17, 2024. The law is designed to protect renters from excessive rent increases while ensuring landlords can maintain their properties.

Prince George's County is in the process of drafting regulations and creating policies and procedures to implement this new law

and is seeking the input of stakeholders and interested parties as it moves forward. To that end, DPIE and DHCD will be holding a series of Listening Sessions to solicit your feedback and comments. There will be two (2) Virtual Listening Sessions and one (1) In-person Listening Session. The Virtual Listening Sessions will be conducted via Zoom.

To register to attend, submit questions, comments, and/or sign up to speak, complete: "DPIE's Permanent Rent Stabilization Law Listening Sessions Registration Form."

Virtual attendees must also click the date they wish to attend to receive the meeting link. The Listening Sessions will be held on the following dates/times:

• **Thursday, January 30, 2025**, from 11

a.m. to Noon—Virtual
• **Tuesday, February 4, 2025**, from 11 a.m. to Noon—Virtual
• **Thursday, February 13, 2025**, at 6 p.m.—In Person (A separate invitation will be sent regarding the location.)

Visit the website for information regarding the Permanent Rent Stabilization and Protection Act of 2024: https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/departments-offices/housing-community-development/permanent-rent-stabilization-and-protection-act-2024?utm_medium=email&utm_source=go_vdelivery

Email PRSAInfo@co.pg.md.us for more information.

Thiel College Surprises Maryland High School Student With Full Tuition Scholarship

By PRESS OFFICER
Thiel College

GREENVILLE, Pa. (Jan. 15, 2025)—Maryland high school senior **Aliyah Thompson, of Upper Marlboro, Md.**, won an academic scholarship worth \$156,970 to Thiel College during a surprise presentation Wednesday, January 15 morning at Bishop McNamara High School.

Her parents, Thomas and Stacy Thompson, a Thiel College admission counselor as well as members the Bishop McNamara athletic staff, faculty and administrators and students were on hand for the event.

Thompson plans to major in Communications Media at Thiel

College. She is a member of the girls lacrosse team, the music honor society, International Food and Travel Club, Pacific Asian American Cultural Enlightenment, World Hub Club, Film Club, Broadcast Journalism, choir and theater.

Thompson's scholarship ceremony was one of two events held Wednesday. Commodore Perry (Pa.) High School senior Kennedy Cropp was also awarded a scholarship. Students attended one of the College's scholarship competitions in late 2023 where they were interviewed by faculty and staff members. Each year the College awards five full-tuition scholarships from a field of hundreds of eligible candidates.



Aliyah Thompson, of Upper Marlboro, Md., won an academic scholarship worth \$156,970 to Thiel College.

CASA/Prince George's County Wins 2024 Aging Out Institute Award

By PRESS OFFICER
CASA/Prince George's County

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Prince George's County has been named one of eight winners of the 2024 Aging Out Institute (AOI) Awards Program.

The AOI Awards Program celebrates the positive impact and influence of organizations that work with youth who age out of foster care. The awards program supports AOI's mission to identify and share award winners' best practices with foster care professionals throughout the world.

"We are thrilled to be recognizing such wonderful organizations this year," said Lynn Tonini, Founder and Executive Director of Aging Out Institute. "This is a peer-judged awards program as the winners from the 2023 AOI Awards Program served as judges this year. This judging model lends significant credibility to the selection of the winning organizations from all the applications we received. We

are pleased to be able to support the winners' programs and look forward to hearing how the funds were utilized to help youth aging out of care transition to adulthood successfully."

This year's panel of judges included experienced practitioners in the field of foster care throughout the country (Arizona, California, Maryland, Nevada, New York, and Ohio). After careful consideration, these judges selected the following organizations as the winners of the 2024 National Awards Program (by category and prize amount):

Small Organization or Program – Flame Award (\$40K each)

Cleveland Angels (Cleveland, OH)

Finally Family Homes (Culver City, CA)

Olive Crest (Las Vegas, NV)
The Felix Organization (Locust Valley, NY)

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INSIDE

In & Around Morningside-Skyline

Brandywine-Aquasco

Families to Find New Opportunities at School Choice Fair Serving Maryland Families

Towns and Neighbors, Page A2

The Prince George's Chamber of Commerce to Host its Annual Economic Business Meeting Community, Page A3

Assisted Living Locators Opens Greater Laurel Location Health and Wellness, Page A3

ChildWatch: A Definition of Greatness

...by placing value on being the most powerful or famous or the wealthiest or best-educated, we forget one of the Gospels' and life's largest truths: the real path to greatness is through service.

Commentary, Page A4

Greenbelt Welcomes Gizelle Alvarez as New Constituent Services Coordinator

Prince George's County Appoints Acting Director of the Office of Human Resources Management

Business and Finance, Page A5

TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

In & Around Morningside-Skyline by Mary McHale 301-735-3451

Remembering the Challenger

On January 28, 1986, the space shuttle Challenger broke apart shortly after it lifted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, killing all aboard.

Among the seven crew members was Christa McAuliffe, a schoolteacher chosen by NASA as the agency's first citizen astronaut. The resulting public fascination with her made sure the launch was witnessed by millions, including schoolchildren in their classrooms who tuned in to watch it live on TV.

I watched the lift-off. I saw it break apart and crash.

There's no way I can describe the horror across the U.S. But here in Morningside it was personal—Christa McAuliffe had been a teacher at Benjamin D. Foullois Middle School.

Christa

Christa had completed her MA at Bowie State College and

taught English and social studies for seven years in Prince George's, three years at Foullois Middle School, 1971 to 1973. Meanwhile, her husband Steve was a law clerk for then-State Senator Steny Hoyer.

Christa's mission continues now at the Christa McAuliffe Planetarium which was erected in her memory. In April 1988, the New Hampshire Legislature appropriated funds to build the Planetarium. Groundbreaking took place October 26, 1988.

Let me know (muddmm@gmail.com) if you were one of Christa's students.

Read about her

Several books have been written about her. I'm sure they're available in the County Library:

"Christa McAuliffe: Teacher In Space", by Corinne J. Naden and Rose Blue.

"Christa McAuliffe: Reach-

ing for the Stars", by Patricia Stone Martin.

"A Journal for Christa: Christa McAuliffe, Teacher in Space", by Grace George Corrigan.

"I Touch the Future: The Story of Christa McAuliffe", Robert T. Hohler.

We remembered Kenny

In a recent column detailing the tragic death of Kenny Hedrick, I suggested you drive by Kenny's memorial at the Morningside Volunteer Fire Department.

My daughter Sheila and I did so. We found that someone had, indeed, done that and left a bottle of Dr. Pepper and a bag of Haribo gummy bears.

I'm sure, up in Heaven, Kenny appreciated that.

Changing landscape

I wrote recently about the County's new street-sweeping

program.

I notice—from a sign at the end of Skyline Drive—that we're #9 due for sweeping. (I think it has to quit snowing first.)

The new D.C. hospital, Cedar Hill Regional Medical Center, GW Health, in Southeast, is hiring directors, nurses and staff members, and will open next year. Or maybe sooner. It's located on 10 acres at the St. Elizabeth campus in Ward 8.

A home at 6528 Suitland Road, in Morningside, has sold for \$375,000.

Zoo News

Pygmy hippos are an endangered species, native to rivers and swamps in West Africa. The Metro Richmond Zoo in Virginia has one. And, after a contest, she has been named. She is now Poppy and is very popular. She even became material for a skit on Saturday Night Live.

Annie May Bates dies at 102

Annie May Bates was born October 13, 1922, to Deacon Johnnie and Bessie Pugh in Boykins, Va. She attended Rising Star School in Branchville, Va.

Annie's first husband was Henry Clayton Kee of Southampton County, Virginia; they made their home in Washington. Henry Kee preceded Annie in death.

In 1980, she married Arthur F. Bates.

She enjoyed playing soft ball with her family and friends. She had a great love of houseplants and a flair for fashion. Her career was almost exclusively in sales, which suited her well.

She became a member of the Queens organization of the Knights of Columbus, St. Pius X Council, Forestville, and served as their historian in 1993.

She was predeceased by her husband Arthur in 2011 and step-

daughter Lorraine Bates Akins in 2024. Survivors include daughter Mary Elizabeth Kee, step-son Arthur Anthony (Tony) Bates, step-daughter Carol Bates-Morris, sisters Ruth Claud-Thomas and Doris Mildred Marshall, niece Earnell Patricia Keels, step-grandchildren Joy Akins and Arthur Anthony Bates, Jr., and a host of nieces and nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

Her funeral was at Saint Francis Xavier Catholic Church, on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Milestones

Happy Birthday to John R. Stevenson, Jan. 20; Father Thomas LaHood and Yvonne Garvin, Jan. 27; San' Tori Dixon, Jan. 28; Sister Zion and Lisa Call, Jan. 29; David Call, Joanne (Clark) Bunch and my brother Lt. Col. Joseph Frances Mudd, Jan. 30.

Email your birthday to muddmm@aol.com.

Brandywine-Aquasco by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Kick off Black History Month with Howard University's premiere jazz ensemble, Afro Blue. Voted "Best A Capella Group" five years in a row by the Washington Area Music Association. The ensemble has been featured on NPR's All Things Considered, Tiny Desk Concert, and has shared the stage with the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) Pops and reached the top four on The Sing-Off on NBC. Join us for a special celebration for Black History Month as this virtuosic ensemble showcases black excellence in a one of kind, intimate concert experience at SAARC. Afro Blue: A Black History Month celebration Saturday, February 1, 2025, from 2-4 p.m. at Southern Area Aquatics and Recreation Complex (SAARC) Telephone: 301-782-1442. Ticket Price: \$20 Age: All. Telephone: 301-782-1442 saarc@pgparks.com. Address is SAARC 13601 Missouri Avenue, Brandywine, Maryland.

ANNUAL PRE-BIG FOOTBALL DAY SPAGHETTI DINNER

St. Philip's Church Baden Parish will have their Annual Pre-Big Football Day Spaghetti Dinner Sunday, February 2, 2025, at 11 a.m. Donation \$8.00, children 10 and under \$4.00. Pre-orders and pre-paid only. Dinners include Homemade spaghetti (Beef or Turkey), salad, garlic bread, homemade desert. Pre-orders accepted until January 26, 2025. Cash App available \$stphilipschurchbaden. Address: 13801 Baden Westwood Road, Brandywine, Maryland 20613. Telephone is 301-888-1536. Contacts are Michele Chase 240-882-3369. Doretha Savoy 301-233-3136. Vivian Rich 804-301-9530.

LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

Join us for Lunar New Year Celebration at Tanger National Harbor, 6800 Oxon Hill Road, National Harbor, Maryland February 7, 2025, from 5-7 p.m. in the fireplace courtyard by Nike. The Wong People Association will bring the tradition to life with an exciting

lion dance performance throughout the center. In addition to the lion dance, the event will feature educational elements to honor and celebrate the rich culture and traditions of the New Year. All Tanger Club Gold & Platinum members will receive Tanger/store swag.

VALENTINE'S DAY BRUNCH

Brunch is in the air at (SAARC) Southern Area Aquatics & Recreation Complex, 13601 Missouri Avenue, Brandywine, Maryland 20613. Telephone 301-782-1442/TTY: 301-699-2544. Join us for a morning of food and fun at our Valentine's Day Brunch Friday, February 14 from 9:30-11 a.m. FEE: \$12 PARKSDIRECT: SPPD-SPEC-GA-20250214.

SPRING 2025 CONVOCATION

Spring Convocation which officially kicks off the spring semester and the campus-wide celebration of the Black History Month is February 12, 2025, 10 a.m. at Bowie State University, 14000 Jericho Park Road, Bowie, Maryland 20715 in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center Room 224.

CELEBRATING US FASHION SHOW

Just us for a family fun event while we showcase various styles, African Attire, Urban Style, Smart Casual, semi formal Saturday, February 22, 2025, from 2-4 p.m. Admission: Adults \$15, children 5-17: \$5 (Under 5 Free). Address is St. Philip's Episcopal Church, 13801 Baden Westwood Road, Brandywine, Maryland 20613. Proceeds: Benefit St. Philip's. Ticket Contacts: Mrs. Butler 301-520-3145, Mrs. Hall 703-201-3863, Mrs. Somerville 240-682-3657.

BLACK FOUNDERS IN I-CORPS

Join us for an inspiring celebration of Black excellence in innovation of Black excellence in innovation, entrepreneurship, and STEM February 20, 2025, from 4:30-7 p.m. in the Beacon Room, Center for Natural Sciences, Mathematics & Nursing! Hosted by

Bowie State University's Entrepreneurship Innovation Center (EIC) in collaboration with the University of Maryland, College Park. This event honors the remarkable achievements of Black entrepreneurs, students, faculty, and staff in the National Science Foundation's (NSF) I-Corps program.

Event Highlights: Panel Discussion: Hear from experts and innovators who will share insights into how I-Corps supports business idea validation, resource access, and navigating the innovation ecosystem. Guest Speaker: Be inspired by a special guest who will highlight the power of I-Corps in shaping successful STEM-based ventures. Celebrating Black Founders: Learn about the journeys of Black entrepreneurs who have used I-Corps to build impactful businesses. This event is a collaborative effort between Bowie State University and the University of Maryland, focusing on the importance of diversity in driving success within the STEM and entrepreneurial spaces. We invite you to join us and be part of this exciting celebration of Black excellence and innovation. Cost: \$0. Bowie State University address is 14000 Jericho Park Road, Bowie, Maryland, 20715. Contact: Lonell Johnson Email: ljohnsonl@bowiestate.edu Phone: 301-860-4753.

DIFFERENT SISTERS

Different Sisters at American Legion Post 60 Saturday, February 15, 2025, from 7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Always a great time with some great folks. Love to see you there and open to the public. The Different Sisters Band www.differentsisters.rocks/. Style: Cover, Rock, Classic Rock, Country, R&B, Blues & Funk. Members: Bill Whitelock- Drums Mike Foreman-Keyboards & Vocals Paul Mckown-Guitar. Lauren Satterfield-Lead Vocal & Bass, Lindsay Satterfield-Lead Vocal. How to Book: E-mail Mike Foreman at micfor@msn.com or call 443-686-2646 also call Bill Whitelock at 410-299-6033. Address American Legion Post 60 at 2 Main Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, telephone 301-725-2302 MDparty Home.

Quantum from AI

lems in ways we never, ever thought possible."

Along with the focused spending in quantum computing, Moore also announced a larger \$750 million investment in "economic

growth and workforce development," with a focus on leveraging the assets that Maryland has to grow the state's economy.

"Ofentimes," Moore said, "we have been asset-rich and strategy-poor. We haven't prioritized the areas that need to be prioritized. Well, today that changes."

Award from AI

Mid-Size or Large Organization or Program – Fire Award (\$50K each)

City Living (New York, NY)
CASA/Prince George County (Riverdale, MD)
Good Samaritan Boys Ranch (Brighton, MO)

Youth Impact – Phoenix Award (\$90K)

DFW Angels (Dallas, TX)

About CASA/Prince George's County:

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Prince George's County is a non-profit dedicated to advocating for the best interests of youth experiencing foster care. Since 2001, they have served thousands of children, providing them with a strong volunteer advocate and a pathway to a brighter future. With a deep commitment to diversity and inclusion, they provide training and support to volunteers from the community to strengthen the voice of our children. They aim to promote the timely placement of children in foster care into safe, permanent homes while recognizing and respecting each child's unique identity and circumstances.

Over 75% of the young people they serve are 14 years of age or older. It is crucial that they are prepared to age out with the proper

tools and resources. CASA/Prince George's County does this by providing a variety of support services to ensure that youth have the best possible outcomes, such as volunteer training, educational planning, collaboration with court and community partners, and emergent financial assistance for older youth and those who have aged out of care. (Riverdale, MD)

2024 AOI Award Winner Press Release

"Being selected for the Aging Out Institute Fire Award is an honor and a powerful testament to the relentless dedication of our staff, board members, and volunteers. This award strengthens our ability to elevate our brand to raise awareness about the needs of our young people and attract more volunteer advocates to help us disrupt the challenges faced by youth aging out of care."—Yolanda Johnson, Executive Director, executivedirector@pgcasa.org

Learn more about how you can help to support youth aging out of foster care in Prince George's County, Maryland: Donate: GiveDirect Fundraising Platform: Court Appointed Special Advocates - Casa Prince George's County, Inc. : https://donate.givedirect.org/migrate/?cid=4450

Volunteer: Become a Volunteer – PG Casa : https://pgcasa.org/volunteer/become-a-volunteer/

Families to Find New Opportunities at School Choice Fair Serving Maryland Families

Event to feature school representatives, family-friendly activities, and resources for parents

By PRESS OFFICER
National School Choice Week

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, Md. (Jan. 17, 2025)—Parents know their children best, and they can put that knowledge in action at a school fair gathering more than 30 education options under one roof. The Maryland School Fair will bring together schools, educators, and community organizations to spotlight the diverse K-12 education options available across the state.

The event will take place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on **Saturday, January 25** at St. Mary's Catholic School in Landover Hills. Parents and students can explore traditional public, public charter, magnet, and private schools, homeschooling, online learning, and microschooling, as well as summer programs, all in one place. Hosted by Parents Alliance for Education Options (PAEO) and The Black Student Fund, the fair will provide a platform for families to connect with local educators and explore opportunities that can support their children's academic journeys.

This year's event will feature two workshops: Five Tips for Finding the Right School for Your Child and ABCs of Independent Schools. Par-

ents can also learn more about summer enrichment programs. Attendees will also have the opportunity to meet educators from more than thirty schools; connect with education support organizations such as Mocha Moms, X is Possible, ConnectDMV, and many more; and enjoy family fun activities like face painting, a DJ, and refreshments.

The Maryland School Choice Fair will also feature Higher Learning: The DMV HBCU Experience College Expo, a taste of the American HBCU tradition. With alumni admissions tables from more than 20 HBCUs, a Step-And-Scroll Drumline and an academic demonstration featuring the only HBCU platform showcasing the academic offerings of HBCU's.

"The Maryland School Fair is a back this year and ready to help parents connect with local educators and organizations to learn more about how to make the best and most informed choice from the variety of school options offered in Maryland," said Delvin Champagne, founder and executive director for the Parents Alliance for Education Options (PAEO). "We're excited to provide a space where parents can make informed choices and students can discover programs

that help them thrive academically and socially."

The event is timed to coincide with National School Choice Week, from Jan. 26 to Feb. 1. This year marks the 15th anniversary of the Week, which will include more than 27,000 activities and events nationwide aimed at celebrating and raising awareness of educational opportunities for families.

Location Details:

St. Mary's Catholic School is located at 7207 Annapolis Rd, Landover Hills, MD 20784. The event will take place in the school gym and in several other spaces throughout the school.

Event Registration
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2025-md-school-choice-fair-tickets-1053632967569?aff=oddtcreator
For more information, contact Delvin Champagne at strategic.collegiate@yahoo.com or 757-343-1877.

The National School Choice Awareness Foundation (NSCAF) NSCAF does not advocate for or oppose legislation at any level of government and is steadfastly nonpartisan and nonpolitical.

COMMUNITY

Announcing the Winners for the 2024 Frederick Douglass Oratorical Contest

By PRESS OFFICER
National Park Service

WASHINGTON (Jan. 15, 2025)—The National Park Service announces winners for the 2024 Frederick Douglass Oratorical Contest. The Frederick Douglass National Historic Site hosts an annual oratorical contest for students ages 6 to 18. To participate in the contest, students must memorize a portion of one of Frederick Douglass's famous speeches and recite it to a panel of judges. This year's contest was held online and in person at the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site between December 4 and December 7. Students from 12 states, the District of Columbia and Ontario, Canada participated in this year's contest.

Winners are awarded plaques and additional prizes. Later this year, first place winners will be invited to perform their award-winning speeches in Washington DC at special events regarding Frederick Douglass. The contest features 4 divisions based on students age with each group having a different required recitation time.

The 2024 Winners by Division are as follows:

Elementary 1

First Place: Owen Galarza, age 6, of Garden City, NY
Second Place: Selma Jeyathurai White, age 7, of Oakland, CA
Second Place: Kai Antoine, age 8, of Laurel, MD
Third Place: Neev Kotandon, age 6, of Saratoga, CA

Elementary 2

First Place: Yael Gustafson, age 10, Oak Park, IL
Second Place: Varsh Varun, age 11, of Scottsdale, AZ
Third Place: Ishan Prasad Mohanty, age 9, of Fairfax, VA

Middle School

First Place: Fiona Fisher, age 12, of Milton, DE
Second Place: Ayanfeoluwa Adu, age 13, of Randallstown, MD
Third Place: Saanvi Jahagirdar, age 12, Georgetown, Ontario Canada

High School

First Place: Ryan Wade Garrus II, age 16, Mariottsville, MD

The Legacy of Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass became the most important leader of the movement for African American civil rights in the 19th century. His journey from an enslaved young man to an internationally renowned activist is an inspiration for millions. He is known for his brilliant words and brave actions, and he continues to shape the ways we think about race, democracy, and the meaning of freedom. The Frederick Douglass Oratorical Contest celebrates Douglass's activism and the many famed speeches he gave in his efforts to end slavery and promote racial equality and women's rights. The National Park Service has held the Frederick Douglass Oratorical yearly for over 40 years. Students from around the world are encouraged to compete for prizes and honor the legacy of Frederick Douglass. Students interested in competing in the 2025 contest can find more information at www.NPS.gov/FRDO.

About the National Park Service: More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for more than 430+ national parks and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Learn more at nps.gov, and on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

The Prince George's Chamber of Commerce to Host its Annual Economic Business Meeting 'The State of the Chamber'

CHAMBER FORWARD: A 2025 Look Ahead Will Focus on Strengthening Partnerships, Driving Advocacy, and Advancing Economic Opportunities

By PRESS OFFICER
Prince George's Chamber of Commerce

LANHAM, Md. (Jan. 13, 2025)—The Prince George's Chamber of Commerce (PGCOC) proudly announces its Annual Economic Business Meeting, known as 'The State of the Chamber.' This year's theme: "Chamber FORWARD: A 2025 Look Ahead," will be held on **Wednesday, January 29, 2025**, at the Crowne Plaza College Park (6400 Ivy Lane Greenbelt, MD 20770). This pivotal event brings together business leaders, entrepreneurs, and Chamber members committed to fostering economic development and expanding access to capital within the region. The Chamber's strategic outlook for 2025 will focus on fostering collaboration among stakeholders to address shared challenges and opportunities. Attendees will be able to understand the strategies to advocate for community priorities and drive economic growth through partnerships.

Key topics of discussion will include:

- **Collaborative Power:** Unlocking Opportunities through Strategic Alliances, Driving Economic Momentum
- **Advocating for an Expansive Ecosystem:** Empowering Businesses through Policy and Community Engagement

- **Building a Resilient Future:** Strategies for Advanced Economies and Sustainable Growth

"This meeting is an opportunity for our business community to come together, share insights, and forge solutions that will strengthen the economic fabric of our region," said Alexander K. Austin, President & CEO of the Prince George's Chamber of Commerce. "We are committed to creating a vibrant, inclusive environment where businesses can thrive and contribute to the prosperity of Prince George's County."

The event will feature corporate sponsors, business and community leaders, elected officials, and PGCOC members who will share expertise and insights to empower attendees with the tools they need to succeed. Purchase tickets to The State of the Chamber: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1119748801809?aff=oddtcreator>.

Founded in 1924, the Prince George's Chamber of Commerce is a vibrant network of businesses dedicated to driving economic growth and fostering innovation in Prince George's County. With over 700 (+) members representing various industries, PGCOC catalyzes collaboration, advocacy, and professional development.

University of Maryland Extension Workforce Development Internship

By PRESS OFFICER
University of Maryland Extension

This Spring, the University of Maryland Extension will hire the fourth Cohort for Creating Leadership and Professional Development Through Extension Internships, Summer 2025.

The University of Maryland Extension received a grant on April 15, 2021. The grant was endowed by the United States Department of Agriculture and sponsored by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture to create a summer internship program that will provide meaningful and technical skills to students at underserved institutions, community colleges, or non-Land Grant institutions to train a future agricultural workforce.

University of Maryland Extension (UME) created a summer internship program with seven interns annually paired with competent mentors; interns will gain hands-on experience and par-

ticipate in leadership and professional development training. The project will address the eight core competencies in career readiness. Along with professional development and one-on-one pairing with a faculty mentor, interns will have networking opportunities with private industry professionals. The experience will be a ten-week program in which interns work full-time.

The objectives of the project are to 1. Provide experiential learning opportunities in Extension and agricultural research to undergraduate students, including those at community colleges and underserved institutions in Maryland, through creating a summer internship; 2. Develop internal hiring and mentorship skills in UME Faculty; 3. Increase student interns' career-readiness and leadership skills; and 4. Increase the number of students from these institutions continuing their education and entering the agricultural workforce.

The Application for Summer Internship 2025 is open. For more information and to apply, visit

<https://go.umd.edu/extensioninternships>

Program Contacts:
Shannon Dill, Extension Educator - AgFS
410-822-1244 | sdill@umd.edu
Andrea Franchini, Program Coordinator

301-226-7416 | andrea1@umd.edu
Ms. Shannon Dill, PI, is the Project Director and oversees the entire project. Co-PI's include Dr. Nicole Fiorellino. The project runs from April 15, 2021, to April 14, 2026.

This work is supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, AFRI Competitive Grant Workforce Development, project MD-UME-09312.

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HEALTH and WELLNESS

Assisted Living Locators Opens Greater Laurel Location

No-Cost Senior Placement Service Now Available to Help Families in Laurel, Columbia and Silver Spring Communities Find Quality Senior Care Solutions

By PRESS OFFICER
Assisted Living Locators

LAUREL, Md. (Jan. 15, 2025)—Assisted Living Locators, a leading nationwide senior placement and referral service, announces the opening of its newest franchise in Greater Laurel, MD, serving Laurel, Columbia and Silver Spring communities. Led by Senior Living Advisor Shannon Ross, this new location provides personalized, no-cost support to families seeking senior care solutions, including independent living, assisted living, memory care, and in-home care options.

Shannon Ross, a resident of Columbia, MD, brings extensive experience in human resources, organizational leadership, and employee relations to her role as franchise owner. With a career spanning over 15 years in senior-level HR roles,

including Director of Talent Experience at The Arc Central Chesapeake Region, she has demonstrated a commitment to fostering community and improving lives. Ross is passionate about leveraging her expertise to guide families in Greater Laurel and surrounding areas through the complex senior living journey.

"Helping families navigate the challenging process of finding the right care for their loved ones is a calling I am deeply committed to," said Ross.

Assisted Living Locators of Greater Laurel offers a range of services, including:

- Personalized consultations to assess care needs and preferences.
- Tailored recommendations for senior living facilities, including cleanliness, accessibility, and amenities.
- Support with guided tours

and placement for independent living, assisted living, memory care, and in-home care options.

- Financial guidance to help families navigate elder care expenses.
- Emergency placement assistance for urgent situations.
- Ongoing support from the initial consultation to post-placement follow-up.

For more information about Assisted Living Locators' services in Greater Laurel, visit <https://assistedlivinglocators.com/care-advisor/laurel> or call Shannon Ross at (410) 928-8049.

Assisted Living Locators, part of the Evive Brands family, is one of the nation's largest senior placement and referral services, with over 150 franchise locations across 39 states and the District of Columbia.

Hospice of the Chesapeake Expands Inpatient Care With High-Flow Oxygen Therapy

By PRESS OFFICER
Hospice of the Chesapeake

PASADENA, Md. (Jan. 13, 2025)—Hospice of the Chesapeake is proud to announce the addition of high-flow oxygen therapy to its inpatient care centers, enhancing the quality of care for patients with complex respiratory needs. This innovative therapy provides critical support to individuals facing serious illness, ensuring they receive the best possible comfort and care.

High-flow oxygen therapy is designed to deliver precise oxygen levels, improving breathing efficiency and overall comfort for patients. This therapy is especially beneficial for those experiencing respiratory distress, allowing for better management of symptoms and an improved quality of life.

"Adding high-flow oxygen therapy to our inpatient care centers represents our commitment to providing comprehensive, patient-centered care," said Dr.

Sonja Richmond, Vice President of Medical Affairs & Hospice Medical Director. "This advancement enables us to better meet the needs of our patients and their families during a challenging time."

The integration of high-flow oxygen therapy will be available immediately at Hospice of the Chesapeake's Rebecca Fortney Inpatient Care Center in Pasadena and Charles Inpatient Care Center in Waldorf. This will be a suitable option for hospital patients discharged when patients still need noninvasive oxygen support while maintaining comfort and ease of use compared to other methods. This new service is part of the organization's ongoing efforts to incorporate the latest medical advancements and best practices in hospice care. Hospice of the Chesapeake is the only hospice in our area providing this option in a free standing inpatient care center environment.

The not-for-profit organiza-

tion remains dedicated to offering compassionate, individualized care for patients and their families, ensuring that each patient receives the dignity and respect they deserve.

Hospice of the Chesapeake is the leading provider of compassionate, expert care for individuals and families facing serious illness across Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, and Prince George's counties. As Maryland's largest independent, not-for-profit hospice, the organization is committed to enhancing the quality of life for patients by managing symptoms, providing education, and focusing on what matters most to each individual and their loved ones. With a team of highly skilled professionals, Hospice of the Chesapeake offers personalized support to help families navigate the challenges of advanced illness and loss, ensuring comfort, dignity, and peace of mind throughout the journey. For more information, visit <http://www.hospicechesapeake.org>.

COMMENTARY

Marian Wright Edelman
*Founder and President Emerita,
 Children's Defense Fund*



ChildWatch:

A Definition of Greatness

"If you want to be important—wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's a new definition of greatness. And this morning, the thing that I like about it: by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

As we celebrate the national holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which coincides with Inauguration Day in Washington, D.C., this year, it is an opportune moment to return to Dr.

King's definition of greatness. The well-known words above are from Dr. King's sermon "The Drum Major Instinct," delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta on February 4, 1968. Dr. King was explaining that we all start out with the ingrained instinct to be "drum majors": everyone wants to be important, to be first, to lead the parade. Watch a group of small children pushing and shoving to form a line and you'll see this instinct in action. But Dr. King correctly pointed out that too many people never outgrow it—and by placing value on being the most powerful or famous or the wealthiest or best-educated, we forget one of the Gospels' and life's largest truths: the real path to greatness is through service.

This is one of the key lessons we should teach children and young people about Dr. King. Many of them have just studied Dr. King in school in the days leading up to his birthday—at least, those whose schools allow lessons on Dr. King's

life and legacy. Young people today often see him as a history book hero, a larger-than-life, mythical figure. But it's crucial for them to understand Dr. King wasn't a superhuman with magical powers, but a real person. He gave us a blueprint for true servant-leadership everyone can follow.

I first heard Dr. King speak in person at a Spelman College chapel service during my senior year in college. Dr. King was just 31, but he had already gained a national reputation during the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott five years earlier. He became a mentor and friend. Although I do remember him as a great leader and a hero, I also remember him as someone able to admit how often he was afraid and unsure about his next step. It was his human vulnerability and ability to rise above it that I most remember. "If I Can Help Somebody Along the Way" was his favorite song. He was an ordinary man who made history because he was willing to stand up and serve and make a difference in extraordinary ways, and children and young people need to know that they can and must make a difference too. Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve.

Towards the end of this sermon, Dr. King told the congregation he sometimes thought about his own death and funeral. He said when that day came he didn't want people to talk about his Nobel Peace Prize or his degrees or hundreds of awards: "I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to

say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. And I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind. And that's all I want to say."

Dr. King was assassinated two months to the day after delivering this sermon. But a recording of "The Drum Major Instinct" was played at his funeral at Ebenezer Baptist Church, and many people think of these moving words in Dr. King's voice as his own eulogy. He knew how he wanted to be remembered. A very similar emphasis on service was echoed in the recent national tributes to President Jimmy Carter. Who among us today will be remembered as servant-leaders, and who will be remembered as drum majors?

Servant-leadership remains the path to true greatness.

—January 17, 2025

Marc Morial

President and CEO, National Urban League



To Be Equal:

Demand Diversity Roundtable to Convene in Response to Incoming Administration's Threat to DEI

"A second Trump administration intends to abandon efforts to advance and legally defend affirmative action and DEI policies within military academies, federal minority contracting programs, and other federal programs shown to open opportunities—as well as create inclusive education and workplace environments—unfairly denied to people of color, women, and other marginalized groups ... A second Trump administration would not only refuse to enforce civil rights regulations on behalf of individuals from historically marginalized groups, but to actively weaken these protections in housing, education,

health care, and other essential resources."

—Alexis Agathocleous, Kim Conway, ReNika Moore, ACLU

Less than 48 hours after Donald Trump once again becomes President of the United States, a historic coalition of civil and human rights leaders will gather to plan a strategy to defend equal opportunity.

The Demand Diversity Roundtable convenes at 11:30 a.m., Eastern Time, at the National Press Club. A livestream of the event will be available on NUL.org, Facebook, and YouTube.

The lively, rapid-fire, roundtable will focus on confronting the disinformation campaign to discredit diversity, equity, and inclusion, exposing the myths used to divide communities, setting the record straight with facts, and reaffirming participants' unwavering commitment to justice, unity, and the values that strengthen our nation.

Trump has vowed that on his first day in office, he will revoke President Biden's executive order on racial equity, and pursue the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives both within the federal government and among private institutions.

Project 2025, the policy blueprint Trump is expected to follow, calls for the Department of Justice'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. It calls for references to "sexual orientation and gender identity" to be deleted from all federal rules, LGBTQ workplace discrimination protections to be sharply limited, and a ban on transgender troops in the U.S. armed forces.

The Demand Diversity Roundtable represents a refusal to remain silent in the face of an unprecedented assault on DEI measures, and a commitment to fostering unity, resilience and proactive leadership in defense of equal opportunity for all.

America's strength lies in its diversity, and abandoning DEI would endanger the nation's progress and future.

While Trump professed to know nothing about Project 2025 during his campaign, as President Elect he has selected its authors and influencers for key roles in his administration. The agenda is alarmingly hostile to any measures it designates as "woke"—a term the "anti-woke" movement has defined as "the belief there are systemic injustices in American society and the need to address them." The movement holds that acknowledging discrimination is, in itself, discrimination.

Several organizations that have been designated hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center are among Project 2025's advisory board, including Alliance Defending Freedom, infamous for restricting access to the abortion pill and support for anti-LGBTQ+ policies, and Center for Immigration Studies, known for providing a platform for racist writers along and associating with white nationalists.

The incoming administration's policies, aligned with frameworks like Project 2025, threaten to undermine principles of equal opportunity and roll back progress toward a multiracial democracy. The National Urban League and our co-conveners of the Demand Diversity Roundtable will resist these threats.

—January 17, 2025

IRS Announces Jan. 27 Start to 2025 Tax Filing Season; Agency Continues Historic Improvements to Expand, Enhance Tools and Filing Options to Help Taxpayers

Free File program now open; Direct File available starting Jan. 27 for taxpayers in 25 states

By PRESS OFFICER
 Internal Revenue Service

WASHINGTON (Jan. 10, 2025)—The Internal Revenue Service today announced that the nation's 2025 tax season will start on Monday, Jan. 27, 2025, and will feature expanded and enhanced tools to help taxpayers as a result of the agency's historic modernization efforts.

The IRS expects more than 140 million individual tax returns for tax year 2024 to be filed ahead of the Tuesday, April 15 federal deadline. More than half of all tax returns are expected to be filed this year with the help of a tax professional, and the IRS urges people to use a trusted tax pro to avoid potential scams and schemes.

The 2025 tax filing season will reflect continued IRS progress to modernize and add new tools and features to help taxpayers. Since last tax season, the improvements include more access to tax account information from text and voice virtual assistants, expanded features on the IRS Individual Online Ac-

count, more access to dozens of tax forms through cell phones and tablets and expanded alerts for scams and schemes that threaten taxpayers.

The IRS has also expanded features and availability of last year's Direct File program. This year, Direct File will be available starting Jan. 27 to taxpayers in 25 states. In addition, the IRS Free File program opens today. Available only on IRS.gov, IRS Free File Guided Tax Software provides millions of taxpayers nationwide access to free software tools offered by trusted IRS Free File partners.

The IRS is also working to continue the success of the 2023 and 2024 tax filing seasons made possible with additional resources. The past two filing seasons saw levels of service at roughly 85% and wait times averaging less than 5 minutes on the main phone lines, as well as significant increases in the number of taxpayers served at Taxpayer Assistance Centers across the country. Based on the IRS' current plan and funding levels, the

agency will work to provide similar levels of performance on these key service metrics in the upcoming filing season.

"This has been a historic period of improvement for the IRS, and people will see additional tools and features to help them with filing their taxes this tax season," said IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel. "These taxpayer-focused improvements we've done so far are important, but they are just the beginning of what the IRS needs to do. More can be done with continued investment in the nation's tax system."

The Get Ready page on IRS.gov highlights steps taxpayers can take now to streamline the filing process and the many resources available to interact with the IRS before, during and after filing their federal tax return.

Direct File opens Jan. 27 for taxpayers in 25 states

On the first day of the filing season, Direct File will open to eligible taxpayers in 25 states to file their taxes directly with the IRS for free: 12 states that were part of the pilot last year,

plus 13 new states where Direct File will be available in 2025. During last year's pilot, Direct File was available in Arizona, California, Florida, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington State and Wyoming. For the 2025 tax filing season, Direct File will also be available in Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Direct File will include new features this year to make filing taxes quicker and easier. Similar to commercial tax software, a data import tool will allow taxpayers to opt-in to automatically import data from their IRS account, including personal information, the taxpayer's IP PIN and some information from the taxpayer's W-2.

This year, Direct File users can try a new chat bot to help guide them through the eligibility checker. Live chat will again be available in English and Spanish, and users can opt into additional authentication and verification, which will al-

low customer service representatives to provide more information.

Also, this year, Direct File will cover more tax situations.

During the pilot, Direct File supported taxpayers claiming

See TAX FILING Page A5

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BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

About When to Claim Social Security and Taxation of Benefits

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 65 and currently working full-time. Can I apply for and start receiving my Social Security benefit? I'd expect to have to pay income tax on it if/when I do. **Signed: Curious Worker**

Dear Curious Worker: If you are working full time, you should likely delay claiming Social Security at this time. At age 65, you haven't yet reached your SS full retirement age (FRA), so you will be subject to Social Security's "annual earnings test" which limits how much you can earn from work while collecting early benefits. The earnings limit for 2025 is \$23,400 and if you earn more than the annual limit, SS will take away \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit. If you earn significantly over the limit, you may even be temporarily ineligible to collect SS benefits. FYI, the annual earnings limit goes away when you reach your full retirement age, which for you is 66 years and 10 months, or March 2026.

As you obviously already know, a portion of your Social Security may be subject to income tax after you start collecting. The threshold for taxation of SS benefits depends on your IRS filing status—if you file your taxes as a single and your combined income from all sources (including half of the SS benefit you received during the tax year) exceeds \$25,000 then 50% of your received SS benefits are taxable. But if you file taxes as "married/jointly" and your combined income is over \$32,000, then up to 85% of your received SS benefits are taxable. Thus, whenever you claim SS, you may wish to consider having income tax withheld from your SS benefit. This is optional, and you can do this by submitting IRS Form W-4V to your local Social Security office, or you could choose to increase your income tax withholding at work or, alternatively, pay estimated income taxes quarterly.

So, whether you can claim Social Security now depends entirely on how much you will earn from working full time prior to your FRA. If you exceed the annual earnings limit before your FRA, SS will take away some of your benefits or, if you greatly exceed the earnings limit, you may even be temporarily ineligible to get benefits (until you either reach your FRA or earn less). But note, if you decide to claim early and any SS benefits are withheld because you exceeded the earnings limit, you will get credit for that (in the form of a slightly increased benefit) after you reach your full retirement age.

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.

Greenbelt Welcomes Gizelle Alvarez as New Constituent Services Coordinator

By PRESS OFFICER
City of Greenbelt

GREENBELT, Md. (Jan. 14, 2025)—The City of Greenbelt is excited to announce the appointment of Gizelle Alvarez as the new Constituent Services Coordinator. With her strong background in housing, public policy, and a passion for community service, Gizelle brings a wealth of knowledge and dedication to this important role.

A Maryland native, Gizelle has a deep-rooted connection to the region and a commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of its residents. She holds a bachelor's degree in Public Policy from the University of Maryland, where she developed a strong foundation in addressing complex social and economic issues. Her experience spans a variety of sectors, including low-income housing, mortgage loans, property management, and real estate.

Gizelle's career began with an internship at Prince George's County's Office of Management and Budget, where she contributed to policy research and data analysis. This experience further fueled her passion for public service and affirmed her dedication to creating meaningful, lasting change within local communities.

In addition to her professional qualifications, Gizelle is bilingual in English and Spanish, which allows her to connect with and advocate for the city's diverse population. Her commitment to fostering equitable solutions and supporting Greenbelt residents is at the heart of her work.

"I am thrilled to be joining the City of Greenbelt and contributing to the growth and well-being of this wonderful community," said Gizelle Alvarez. "I look forward to working with residents and local leaders



IMAGE COURTESY CITY OF GREENBELT

to address their needs and ensure that every voice is heard."

As Constituent Services Coordinator, Gizelle will play a crucial role in connecting residents with city resources and services, ensuring effective communication, and addressing community concerns in a timely and compassionate manner.

The City of Greenbelt is confident that Gizelle's expertise, passion, and dedication will help strengthen our community and improve the quality of life for all who live here.

For more information about the Constituent Services Coordinator or to contact Gizelle, please visit the City of Greenbelt's website or call 240-542-2020.

Greenbelt is a vibrant and inclusive community of 25,000 residents and 600 businesses, located just outside Washington, D.C. Known for its affordable, cooperative roots dating back to the New Deal era, the city places a strong emphasis on sustainability, offering an abundance of parks, trails, and lakes for outdoor enjoyment. Greenbelt is home to a National Historic Landmark District and boasts the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, the nation's first space flight complex. It will also soon be the future headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). For more details, visit www.GreenbeltMD.gov.

Prince George's County Appoints Acting Director of the Office of Human Resources Management

By PRESS OFFICER
Prince George's County, Maryland

LARGO, Md. (Jan. 10, 2025)—Prince George's County has announced the appointment of Ms. Valerie A. Farrar as the Acting Director of the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). With more than 25 years of extensive human resources experience and deep institutional knowledge, Ms. Farrar is well-prepared to lead OHRM.

"We are excited to appoint Ms. Farrar to the role of Acting Director of our Office of Human Resources Management," said Acting County Executive Tara H. Jackson. "With more than 25 years of experience, Ms. Farrar brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to this role. I am confident that she will lead OHRM with integrity and a continued commitment to enhancing the workplace for all Prince George's County Government employees."



PHOTO COURTESY PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
Valerie Farrar, Acting Director of Human Resources Management

Previously serving as the Deputy Director of OHRM's Office of Talent Management and Acquisition, Ms. Farrar

played a key role in shaping the County's talent strategy. Her contributions include advancing critical executive priorities such as reducing time-to-fill, overseeing the Summer Youth Enrichment Program (SYEP), and managing countywide and Engineer Classification and Compensation studies.

"I am thrilled to step into the role of Acting Director of the Office of Human Resources Management," says Acting Director Farrar. "With extensive experience in human resources, I am eager to collaborate with County leadership and our HR community to advance our agency's initiatives."

Ms. Farrar holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Ms. Farrar began her new role as the Acting Director of OHRM on December 16, 2024.

Tax Filing from A4

the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Credit for Other Dependents. This year, Direct File will also cover taxpayers claiming the:

- Child and Dependent Care Credit
- Premium Tax Credit
- Credit for the Elderly and Disabled
- Retirement Savings Contribution Credits

In addition to covering taxpayers claiming the standard deduction and deductions for student loan interest and educator expenses, this year, Direct File will support taxpayers claiming deductions for Health Savings Accounts. The Treasury Department estimates that more than 30 million taxpayers will be eligible to use Direct File across the 25 states.

Direct File is a web-based service that works on mobile phones, laptops, tablets or desktop computers. It guides taxpayers through a series of questions to prepare their federal tax return step-by-step. Last year, thousands of Direct File users got help from IRS customer service representatives through a live chat feature in English and Spanish. Once taxpayers have completed their federal tax return, the Direct File system automatically guides them to state tools to complete their state tax filings.

Free File program opens early; available in English and Spanish

Although the IRS will not begin accepting tax returns until Jan. 27, taxpayers have several options available now to get a head start on their taxes.

Starting today, almost everyone can file electronically for free by using IRS Free File, available only on IRS.gov. Now in its 23rd year, Free File offers free tax preparation software from eight companies in the public-private partnership between the IRS and Free File Inc. As part of this partnership, tax preparation and filing software partners offer their online products to eligible taxpayers for free. To access these free tools, taxpayers must start from the IRS Free File page on IRS.gov.

This year, eight private-sector partners will provide online guided tax software products for taxpayers with an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of \$84,000 or less in 2024. Additionally, one partner will offer a product in Spanish.

Although the IRS official tax filing season begins later this month, IRS Free File providers will allow taxpayers to prepare and file returns now and hold them until they can be electronically filed on that date. Many other

software companies offer a similar option.

Other free options to file tax returns

In addition to Free File and Direct File, the IRS reminds taxpayers there are important programs available to help taxpayers:

- **Volunteer Income Tax Assistance/Tax Counseling for the Elderly.** Taxpayers can find organizations in their community with IRS certified volunteers that provide free tax help for eligible taxpayers including working families, the elderly, the disabled and people who speak limited English.
- **MilTax.** A Department of Defense program, MilTax generally offers free return preparation and electronic filing software for federal income tax returns and up to three state income tax returns for all military members, and some veterans, with no income limit.

Highlights of other IRS changes to help taxpayers

As part of ongoing IRS improvement efforts, the agency is working to build on the success of the 2023 and 2024 filing seasons.

The IRS is once again working to provide taxpayers expanded help in-person through more hours at Taxpayer Assistance Centers nationwide. The IRS also will be focused on continuing high levels of service on its main taxpayer phone lines, with a goal of up to 85% level of service.

The IRS also continues to urge taxpayers to visit a trusted tax professional for help with their taxes or visit IRS.gov first. As part of IRS improvement efforts since 2022, the agency continues to add and expand a variety of online tools and services to help people with their taxes.

Included among the improvements taxpayers will see during the 2025 filing season are:

IRS Individual Online Account: The IRS continues to add more functionality to this important tool. Individuals can create or access their IRS Online Account at Online Account for individuals. With an IRS Online Account, people can:

- View key details from their most recent tax return, such as adjusted gross income.
- Request an Identity Protection PIN.
- Get account transcripts to include wage and income records.
- Sign tax forms like powers of attorney or tax information authorizations.

View and edit language preferences and alternative media.

- Receive and view over 200 IRS electronic notices.
- View, make and cancel payments.
- Set up or change payment plans and check their balance.

New scam alert available on Individual Online Account: To help protect taxpayers against emerging threats, there's a new banner on the Online Account homepage that alerts taxpayers of potential scams and schemes, along with a link to their Digital Notices and Letters page to view correspondence sent to them from the IRS. The feature helps to educate taxpayers on common scams and fraudulent efforts to steal taxpayer information and provide taxpayers with more ability to validate the legitimacy of IRS communications.

Redesigned Notices: The IRS successfully redesigned 284 notices in 2024, exceeding the agency's 200 notice goal. It is important to note that 200 notices were redesigned and deployed in 2024 and that the 84 additional

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Upper Marlboro, MD

Church (301) 627-7389

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Office (301) 839-1166

Fax (301) 839-1721

E-mail: FHBC@verizon.net

Pastor: Rev. Waymond B. Duke

Tax Filing from A5

tional redesigned notices are in line to be deployed in 2025. All notices will be added to Individual Online Account so taxpayers receiving a specific letter can see them.

Mobile-Adaptive Tax Forms: Taxpayers can now access 67 forms on cell phones and tablets. The most recent forms feature "save and draft" capabilities, which allow the taxpayer to start a form, save it and return to it later. The addition of save and draft allows for future capabilities, including the ability for multiple spouses to sign a form.

Virtual assistants to help with refunds, others questions: Whether a taxpayer uses an online tool or calls the IRS, they will experience upgraded help features. During filing season 2025, the IRS will offer voicebot services to all taxpayers calling the IRS for refund information. The voicebot is available in English and Spanish and has helped thousands of callers without the need to wait for the next available representative. Taxpayers will have to authenticate their identity to gain access to their refund information by providing select information from their tax return.

Last year the IRS began using online chatbots for various functions. These chatbots use either

guided help through choice buttons or an open text box for a customized question. The chatbots use natural language processing and understanding to interpret the input from the taxpayer to provide an appropriate response. To launch the chatbot, the taxpayer simply clicks on the "Chat" button in the lower right corner of the webpage. Currently taxpayers can use chatbots from eight webpages.

Taxpayers should check 'Where's My Refund?' on IRS.gov

Most refunds are issued in less than 21 calendar days. Taxpayers can use Where's My Refund? to check the status of their 2024 income tax refund within 24 hours of e-filing. Refund information is normally available after four weeks for taxpayers who filed a paper return. Information on Where's My Refund? will update overnight so there is no need to check the tool more than once a day.

The easiest, safest and fastest way to receive a refund is to file electronically (e-file) and select direct deposit. According to Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, paper refund checks are 16 times more likely to have an issue, like the check being lost, misdirected, stolen or uncashed. People should check FDIC and National Credit Union Adminis-

tration websites if they don't have a bank account. Veterans can use the Veterans Benefits Banking Program to find participating financial institutions.

The IRS also notes that starting Jan. 1, 2025, people will no longer be able to buy paper Series I savings bonds with their tax refund. Instead, Series I bonds are available in electronic format in TreasuryDirect.

Choose a trusted tax professional

More than half of taxpayers turn to a tax professional for filing a tax return. While most tax preparers deliver exceptional and professional service, selecting the wrong preparer can lead to financial harm.

Taxpayers should review the tips for choosing a tax preparer and learn how to avoid unethical "ghost" return preparers. Taxpayers can also use the IRS Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications to find trusted professionals. The IRS also reminds taxpayers that choosing someone affiliated with a recognized national tax association is always a good option.

Tax professionals accepted into the IRS electronic filing program are authorized IRS e-file providers, qualified to prepare, transmit and process electronically filed tax returns.

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