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Hundreds of Climate Activists Joined Icy 'Winter Water Games' at Fundraiser for Affordable Clean Energy Action

With the Potomac River off-limits, advocates faced a cold water obstacle course at National Harbor to "Keep Winter Cold" amid federal climate rollbacks

By PRESS OFFICER
Chesapeake Climate Action Network

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. (Feb. 21, 2026)—Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN) hosted hundreds of activists today at its 21st Annual Polar Bear Plunge to "Keep Winter Cold". For two decades, participants have raised donations from friends and family to brave icy conditions in support of CCAN's mission to advance clean energy and combat climate change. In light of last month's wastewater overflow into the Potomac River, this year's event featured a creative twist with "Winter Water Games." Instead of the traditional dip into the river, plungers took on a series of fun, cold-water activities onshore at National Harbor.



PHOTO COURTESY CHESAPEAKE CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK

Hundreds of activists gathered at National Harbor on Feb. 21 at the Chesapeake Climate Action Network's 21st Annual Polar Bear Plunge to "Keep Winter Cold".

"Today's joyous, boisterous event here at National Harbor is yet one more example of the resilience and the strength and determination of our climate movement," said April Moore, Board Chair, Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN). "Even with this terrible situation of sewage in our nation's

river, we were not stopped. We found a way to do something anyway, and what we did was something really fun. We got wet and cold anyway, even though we didn't plunge out into the freezing river. I'm proud of CCAN. I'm so proud to be a climate activist when I see these wonderful people

working hard, and we're winning."

"Every year, our Polar Bear Plunge proves that climate action can be creative and unstoppable," said Mike Tidwell, Executive Director of the

See GAMES Page A5

County Library Celebrates Women's History Month With Book, Film, Art, and STEM Programs

By PRESS OFFICER
PGCMLS

LARGO, Md. (Feb. 26, 2026)—This March, the Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS) is proud to observe Women's History Month with a variety of dedicated programming for all ages. Through special book discussions, film screenings, interactive storytimes, and craft-and-create and STEM programs, the Library invites the Prince George's County Community to join the Library in celebrating the achievements, contributions, and inspiring legacy of women throughout history.

Highlights of this year's Women's History Month programming include four special book discussions featuring "Circe" by Madeline Miller, "Red at the Bone" by Jacqueline Woodson, "Such a Fun Age" by Kiley Reid, and "The Con Queen of Hollywood" by Scott C. Johnson, as well as six special film screenings featuring "Little Women" (dir. Greta Gerwig, 2019), "Till" (dir. Chinonye Chukwu, 2023), "Adam's Rib" (dir. George Cukor, 1949), "Hidden Figures" (dir. Theodore Melfi, 2017), "Lady Sings the Blues" (dir. Sidney J. Furie, 1972), and the PBS American Experience documentary "Fly With Me" (dir. Sarah Colt, 2024).

Children and teens will also be invited to learn about notable women from Prince George's County; fascinating historic figures like Josephine Baker; STEM heroines like Mae Jemison and Katherine Johnson; and artists like Yayoi Kusama, Sonia Delaunay, and Georgia O'Keeffe.

"Following a very robust offering of Black History Month programming in February, the Prince George's County Memorial Library System is pleased to continue its 2026 Heritage Month programs with Women's History Month," says PGCMLS CEO Mark Winston. "Our Women's History Month calendar reflects a dynamic set of programming of all types throughout the library system's locations in the County."

Select Women's History Month programs are listed below. For full program details of all Women's History Month



events at PGCMLS branch libraries, please visit the Library's website.

Featured PGCMLS Events Celebrating Women's History Month
International Women's Day: Women Make History

Free | Saturday, March 7 at 11:30 a.m. | Teens and Adults | Bladensburg Branch Library

In celebration of International Women's Day, commemorated on March 8, community members are invited to join the Bladensburg Branch Library in learning about twelve incredible women from ancient to modern history. Participants will explore these trailblazers' impact on science, economics, politics, sports, human rights, and the environment and will discuss the realities of the challenges women and girls worldwide still face in these fields today. Light refreshments will be served.

STEM Fun: Celebrating Women of NASA

Free | Tuesday, March 10 at 5:30 p.m. | Ages 5-12 | Largo-Kettering Branch Library

For this "STEM Fun" program, kids are invited to celebrate Women's History Month by exploring the amazing achievements of women at NASA through hands-on STEM activities and simple experiments. This program inspires curiosity, creativity, and a

love of science, showing that anyone—regardless of gender—can reach for the stars!

Discover: Prince George's County Women A PGC250 Event

Free | Thursday, March 12 at 4:30 p.m. | Teens | Bladensburg Branch Library

From scientists to spies, innkeepers to enchantresses, the women of Prince George's County have demonstrated courage and creativity in pursuit of better lives. At this special Prince George's County 250 (PGC250) program, participants will explore how to use library resources to uncover some of these women's stories. They will also discuss how the historic women of Prince George's County can inspire us today.

Solidarity Stories: Community-Led Book Discussion—"Red at the Bone"

Free | Tuesday, March 17 at 6:30 p.m. | Adults | miXt Food Hall

Join the Mount Rainier Branch Library and Prince George's County Office of Human Rights for the monthly "Solidarity Stories" book club! For March, participants will be observing Women's History Month by reading and discussing Jacqueline Woodson's "Red at the Bone," which tells the

See WOMEN'S Page A3

Delegate Denise Roberts Highlights Urgent Need for HB901 at House Hearing on Autism Diagnoses in Public School

By PRESS OFFICER
Delegate Denise Roberts (District 25)

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Feb. 25, 2026)—Delegate Denise Roberts (D-25) today presented House Bill 901, Education – Public School Students – Recognition of External Diagnosis of Autism, before the House Ways and Means Committee, calling for Maryland public schools to act promptly when a student has an external diagnosis of autism.

HB901 would require public schools to recognize an external autism diagnosis from qualified medical, mental health, or educational professionals, initiate a school-based evaluation within 30 days of receiving that diagnosis and parental consent, and determine appropriate supports during that evaluation period based on the diagnosis and its recommendations, while preserving school system discretion over which supports are appropriate.

"In Annapolis, we are flooded with calls from parents of autistic children who waited months or years for a diagnosis only to have their public schools say, 'Thanks, but we're starting from zero,'" said Delegate Roberts. "That is unacceptable. If a Maryland family has climbed the mountain to get an autism diagnosis, our public

schools have an obligation to meet them halfway and act, not stall."

Delegate Roberts' testimony drew on extensive constituent casework and on an Autism Supports Summit she co-hosted this past weekend with Prince George's County Council Chair Krystal Oriadha and Prince George's County Board of Education District 7 member Dr. Phelton Moss, where parents shared stories of delays and denials in accessing school-based supports for autistic children.

HB901 is designed to work within the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ensuring that an external diagnosis triggers timely review and evaluation without replacing the requirement to show adverse educational impact and need for specially designed instruction. Amendments prepared with the Department of Legislative Services clarify that outside clinical recommendations inform, but do not control, school decisions about supports during the evaluation period.

"HB901 strikes a careful balance," Roberts added. "It respects clinical expertise and the sacrifice families make to get answers, but it keeps IEP decisions where they belong—with

See AUTISM Page A3

Melwood's Innovative YES Program Secures \$235,000 in Federal Funding to Scale Proven Youth Enrichment Model Across Prince George's County and Beyond

By PRESS OFFICER
Melwood Inc.

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (Feb. 25, 2026)—Melwood Community Services today announced that its Youth Enrichment Services (YES) Program has received \$235,000 in Fiscal Year 2026 Congressionally Directed Spending, secured through the leadership of U.S. Senators Chris Van Hollen and Angela Alsobrooks and Congressman Glenn Ivey (MD-4).

The funding recognizes the YES Program's proven success as a nationally distinctive, hands-on after-school model that closes opportunity gaps for students facing social, economic, and disability-related barriers. Since its 2024 launch at Apple Grove Elementary School in Fort Washington, the program has served 87 first- through fifth-graders with free, inclusive enrichment that blends academic support, career exploration, life skills, and emotional regulation. Many of those students have enrolled in the program multiple years because of how valuable they and their families have found the program.

Students engage in immersive, real-world experiences—including drone-building with tech professionals, mock trials, school gardens that feed the community, business-plan development, and visits from local leaders—designed to spark curiosity and connect childhood interests to future careers. The program is fully inclusive of students with IEPs, 504 plans, and undiagnosed disabilities, creating a strengths-based environment where every child thrives.

"Melwood's after-school program provides kids the opportunity to learn real-world skills in a hands-on environment, setting them up for success later in life. We fought to deliver these federal funds to support the YES Program to ensure they can continue helping children in Prince George's County grow and thrive," said Senator Chris Van Hollen, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

"Every child in Maryland deserves the chance to live beyond their wildest dreams and dis-

See FUNDING Page A4

INSIDE

Brandywine-Aquasco

Generations of Impact Network Announces "The Wealth Shift A Community Impact Day"

Efforts to Preserve Black History Continue Towns and Neighbors, Page A2

"Freedom Was in Sight" With Kate Masur, a Book Discussion

Learn-to-Fly Summer Camp Opportunity

BHSNJROTC: Annual Military Inspections 2026
Community, Page A3

ESFCU Leader Appointed to AACUC Eastern Regional Chapter Board

Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Team Members to Join Leadership Maryland's 2026 Classes
Business and Finance, Page A4

Local Warning: Climate Change in Maryland A Small Step Toward Net-Zero Carbon Emissions? Making Power Out of Poop

March Is Pet Poison Prevention Month

Environment, Page A5

TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

Brandywine-Aquasco by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

MY ACTIVE SENIOR SPRING CELEBRATION

My Active Senior Celebration Friday, May 22, 2026, from 11 a.m.–3 p.m. Wear ALL WHITE and join us for music, dancing, connection, and celebration. Address: Martin's Crosswinds, 7400 Greenway Center Drive, Greenbelt, Maryland 20770. Tickets are \$45 General Admission, \$25 for My Active Senior Members. Call 866-594-6249 for questions. myactivesenior.com.

TRIBUTE TO ERNEST JOHNSON, JR.

Ernest Francis Johnson, Jr, also known to his family as "Junior" or Uncle Junior, was born to the late Rev. Ernest Francis Johnson and the late Mary Elizabeth Johnson. He was educated in the Prince George's County Public School System graduating from Frederick Douglass High School in 1966. Ernest was a member of the varsity basketball team that won the 1963 Division B State Championship at Frederick Douglass. As a member of the Track and Field Team, Ernest won statewide Division B Meets in the 100-yard dash and 440 relay, landing him a scholarship to Southwest Missouri State College, Springfield, Missouri. Upon graduating from Southwest Missouri State in 1970, Ernest enlisted into the United States Marine Corps. He was assigned to the Marine Corps Base at Quantico, Virginia as an occupational administrative specialist. In 1974, he was released from active duty with honors.

After leaving the military Ernest, affectionately known as "Mr. EJ" worked for the Maryland- National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC as Assistant Manager of Cavalier Security), during his time at M-NCPPC. Ernest developed sporting and job opportunities for the youth and young adults. He helped organize baseball, football, tennis, and basketball leagues. Ernest received many awards and accommodations for his outstanding service to the citizens of Prince George's County.

Ernest received his early Christian training at John Wesley United Methodist Church in Aquasco, Maryland, where his father was the Pastor and his mother the First Lady. He had a love for music and sang bass in the Youth Choir and Young Men's Choir. This experience started his lifelong involvement in the group. "The Mighty Wonders with his brother Philip who sang tenor, while Ernest sang bass. The Mighty Wonders gospel group is currently showcased in the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington.

March 18, 1968, Ernest married his childhood sweetheart, Brenda Lee Turner. This loving union produced two sons, Ernest Francis, III (deceased) and James Weldon. After a short illness, Brenda died leaving their sons in Ernest's care. Ernest dedicated his time to raising and supporting his sons. The highlight of Ernest's life was his children and grandchildren spending many weekends traveling to Hagerstown and Baltimore, Maryland.

MARCH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Happy Birthday to Elizabeth Davis, Marquis Wallace, Shirley Brown, Dezmond Wood, Anthony Oghogho, Elena Gatling, Safiya Terry-Joseph, Brittany Baker,

Denise Reid Bourne, Mildred Edwards, Vedall Grant, Lloyd Brown, Patricia Stephens, Tina Fields, Niecia Tay, Aja LayLonie, Henry Thomas, Bonnie Droter, Shirley Jackson, Judy Jones-Terry, Shonnell Noel, Amiah Knight, Daniel Jones, Daniel Glee who are Clinton United Methodist Church members celebrating birthdays in March. Hope that you will have many more birthdays to celebrate.

MARCH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to Emmanuel and Claudette Oghogho who are Clinton United Methodist Church members celebrating a Wedding Anniversary in March.

LINE DANCING NIGHT

Brandywine, it is UP! Wednesdays just got BETTER at Piano Keys Restaurant & Lounge! Line Dancing every Wednesday Night from 5–11 p.m. at Piano Keys Restaurant & Lounge. Each and every Wednesday, we are turning midweek into a whole vibe. WEAR YOUR DANCING SHOES!

DJ Carlos on the 1s & 2s Bringing the Heat. Happy Hour Food & Drink Specials 5–7 p.m. So, come early. FREE Line Dancing lessons with LaShea Lyonna 7–10 p.m. FREE VIP TABLE, SO COME EARLY. RSVP or for more information (240) 816-2211. Piano Keys Restaurant & Lounge, 7651 Matapeake Business Drive, Brandywine, Maryland. Tag your crew and let us pack the floor.

LEMUEL HAYNES

Lemuel Haynes was the first Black minister ordained by a Protestant church in the United States (1785). He led predominantly white congregations and used reformed theology to proclaim that the gospel's logic of sin and grace makes racial inequality incompatible with Christian Faith.

BRIDGE TO RECOVERY

Helping you build a Bridge to Victory. The Bridge to Recovery is a FAITH-BASED RECOVERY PROGRAM. Find Support. There is hope for you. Are you looking for a way out? Are you looking for weekly support? The Bridge to Recovery offers a place of love, hope, and healing for you to overcome your battles and gain victory in your life. We have been helping people find God and rebuild their lives for over 20 years. Come visit us for a new look at support and recovery.

One-on-One Support. During our second Connect you will be given a moderator and a peer to help you on your journey. 52-Week Curriculum, easy to use, simple curriculum built to help you draw closer to God and overcome your battles. 12 Core Truths, we have 12 foundational truths based on the Word of God to help you grow and live sober each day. Connect, first we connect with God. Second, we connect with others. Third, we connect with self.

THE BRIDGE TO RECOVERY. Independent Baptist Church, 9255 Piscataway Road, Clinton, Maryland 20735. Meeting Times: Friday 7 p.m. Telephone (301) 856-1616 www.ibcministries.org

Generations of Impact Network Announces "The Wealth Shift A Community Impact Day"

A Transformative Business & Community Experience Coming to Accokeek

By PRESS OFFICER
Generations of Impact Network

ACCOKEEK, Md. (Feb. 27, 2026)—The Generations of Impact Network (GOIN) proudly announces its upcoming event, The Wealth Shift A Community Impact Day, a community-centered empowerment event bringing together entrepreneurs, families, youth, and local leaders from across Charles County and the surrounding region.

Held on **Saturday, April 11, 2026**, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 15806 Livingston Road, Accokeek, Maryland, this event is designed to strengthen local economic development, expand access to business resources, and foster meaningful connections across the community.

This year, GOIN is honored to partner with Stella's Girls, Inc., a local nonprofit dedicated to educating and equipping youth and women "to become leaders, advocates, and agents of social change." This collaboration reflects a shared mission to uplift underserved voices, build community capacity, and expand leadership pathways.

A High-Impact Experience for Entrepreneurs & Families

The Wealth Shift, a Community Impact Day will feature:

- Executive-Led Panel Discussion on entrepreneurship, leadership, and generational impact
- 90-Minute Business Operations & Development Workshop for emerging and established business owners
- Community Vendor Marketplace highlighting local small businesses
- Youth Inspiration & Exposure Activities
- Networking and Collaborative Engagement Opportunities

"The Wealth Shift is about shifting not just wealth, but access, information, and opportunity," said Danielle Bowie, GOIN's Founder. "Our goal is to create an ecosystem where community members can grow, entrepreneurs can scale, and families can feel supported."

EVENT DETAILS

The Wealth Shift a Community Impact Day
Date: April 11, 2026
Time: 10 a.m.–2 p.m.
Location: 15806 Livingston Rd, Accokeek, MD
Host: Generations of Impact Network
Partner Organization: Stella's Girls, Inc.

Call for Small Business Participation & Sponsorship

Local businesses and entrepreneurs are invited to increase their visibility by:

- Becoming an event sponsor
- Joining the vendor marketplace
- Contributing promotional items to community engagement bags (pens, keychains, stickers, informational cards, and more)

Sponsorship tiers range from community-level support to high-visibility partner opportunities that include speaking placements, brand integrations, and premium engagement benefits.

A Community Movement Rooted in Collaboration

The Generations of Impact Network envisions this Community Impact Day as a long-term catalyst for growth and unity.

"This event is more than a gathering—it's a strategic investment in our community's potential," said Bowie. "We are building something that will outlast the day itself."

The Generations of Impact Network (GOIN) is a community-centered organization dedicated to creating environments that strengthen families, amplify entrepreneurs, and develop the next generation of leaders. Through strategic partnerships, community programming, and empowerment initiatives, GOIN works to increase access, opportunity, and generational transformation.

'These Are Stories That Need to Be Told': Efforts to Preserve Black History Continue

By NOLAN ROGALSKI
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Feb. 26, 2026)—Maryland advocates, conservationists and museum leaders said they will continue working to preserve the state's Black history despite what they call federal attempts to dismantle programs.

"If you want to learn how to be a positive agent of change, I don't care what your walk of life is, learn about Black history," said Chanel C. Johnson, executive director of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture (MCAAHC) and the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum. "Sometimes, it's just learning about the Black history in your own local community ... That is incredibly empowering."

Local and state organizations have helped protect historically significant sites, created a commission to study lynching and awarded grants, including one to launch a forensic investigation. Organizations have also fought to restore federal funds for a museum focused on Black history, and just last week Maryland congressional lawmakers introduced legislation to create a national council to preserve African American history and culture.

Advocates said the continued fight to protect Black history across the state comes in the wake of efforts to eliminate it in other places.

"There's been a growing sense of urgency that we cannot ignore what is going on in the federal arena because it impacts us all," Johnson said. "We're all in it. None of us are safe."

Fighting federal efforts

In 2025, a Black Lives Matter mural in Washington, D.C., was ripped up after pressure from Republican congressional lawmakers to remove it. The National Parks Service briefly removed a photograph of abolitionist and Maryland native Harriet Tubman and mentions of slavery from its Underground Railroad website. President Donald Trump issued executive orders ending federal diversity, equity and inclusion policies and challenging some exhibits at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

"Over the past decade, Americans have witnessed a concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation's history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth," Trump wrote in an executive order last March.

The City of Philadelphia recently sued the National Parks Service for removing an exhibit on slavery at a historical park site last month. A federal judge ordered the exhibit restored.

Maryland's fight to preserve Black history and culture has been underway for years.

In 2019, state lawmakers passed legislation establishing the Mary-



NOLAN ROGALSKI/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

A bronze statue of Harriet Tubman stands outside the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum, which Maryland officials helped fight to recover funding.

land Lynching Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the first statewide, government-backed commission investigating lynching in the nation.

The committee delivered its final report in December 2025, acknowledging 38 lynchings that occurred between 1854 and 1933.

"I'm proud of a lot of what Maryland has done," said David Armenti, vice president of education and engagement at the nonprofit Maryland Center for History and Culture, who served on the commission. "The boldness to even pass legislation that has those words in it shows you what kind of commitment a state and certain legislators and representatives would have toward truth-telling and not shying away from difficult conversations or ones that are going to call out historical wrongs."

In February, Sen. Angela Alsobrooks, D-Md., and Rep. Kweisi Mfume, D-Baltimore, introduced a bill to establish a National Council on African American History and Culture. The council would recommend ways to boost federal support for "the preservation and celebration" of African American history and culture.

"African American History is American history, and it is both our duty and responsibility as a nation to conserve and protect it," Mfume said in a statement. "The empowering and liberating story of Black people in this country—woven into the founding of this

country—is amidst a series of attacks from the Trump administration and is at risk of erasure."

Johnson, the museum director, said when the federal Department of Government Efficiency rescinded a congressional grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum in 2025, the State's Attorney Office reached out to the museum and helped it write an affidavit that eventually recovered the funds.

"When we stand together and we hold the line, change can happen," Johnson said.

Building local bonds

Organizations have created coalitions to share information and strategies partly because of a growing sense of urgency, according to Johnson.

In January, the African American Heritage Preservation Program, a joint collaboration between MCAAHC and the Maryland Historical Trust, awarded \$5 million in grants to 29 organizations working on the "acquisition, construction, or improvement of sites related to

COMMUNITY

Marietta Historic Site & Museum Presents “Freedom Was in Sight” With Kate Masur, a Book Discussion

By STACEY HAWKINS
Marietta Historic Site & Museum

To commemorate Women's History Month, please join us online on **Thursday, March 12, at 6:30–8 p.m.** for an inspiring talk by Kate Masur, author of “Freedom Was in Sight,” for a look at the women who made lives for themselves and their families after Emancipation and during the Reconstruction period. Kate Masur will discuss the local impacts of Reconstruction and Emancipation, the transformation of laws, Black women and men working to reunite their families and build their communities, while trying to claim rights that were long denied. Q & A will follow this presentation.

Kate Masur is Board of Visitors Professor of History at Northwestern University and author of “Freedom

Was in Sight” and “Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, from the Revolution to Reconstruction.” She specializes in the history of race, politics, and law in the United States.

This is a virtual program. This program is in partnership with Prince George's County Historical Society. \$5/county resident & \$7/non-county resident. Visitors must register to receive the TEAMS link to the program. Please register on www.pgparksdirect.com and use Ticket Code: MHM-SPEC-GA-20260312.

For more information, please call 301-464-5291 or email marietta-house@pgparks.com. Marietta Historic Site & Museum is located at 5626 Bell Station Road, Glenn Dale, MD, and is a property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Learn-to-Fly Summer Camp Opportunity at Capitol Technology University

By PRESS OFFICER
Capitol Technology University

LAUREL, Md. (Feb. 23, 2026)—Capitol Technology University will host its first-ever AeroCamp day camp for high school students from **July 13–17** at the Fort Meade Executive Airport (FME) in Odenton, Maryland. Presented in partnership with the Flight School Association of North America (FSANA), the camp is open to rising 9th through 12th graders who want to explore the world of aviation and piloting through hands-on learning, real and simulated flight experiences, and mentorship from professional flight faculty.

Participants will learn about flight dynamics, airplane engineering, ground control, and the broad spectrum of careers in the aviation industry. The program includes piloting experience opportunities using the university's new full motion Redbird FMX flight simulator on their Laurel, Maryland campus and an option to fly a plane at the nearby FME Airport. Campers will also take a field trip to the historic College Park Aviation Museum.

The five-day camp costs \$650, including lunch each day. Parents can take advantage of a \$100 early bird discount by registering and placing their deposit by June 1.

Students who complete the camp receive a Certificate of Completion, and also get a great head start on their professional pilot education, becoming eligible for a \$5,000 FSANA AeroCamp Scholarship toward Capitol Tech's BS in Aviation Professional Pilot program. This undergraduate program is the only four-year pilot degree located within Washington, DC's Special Flight Rules Area (SFRA). The program has also earned a Restricted Airline Transport Pi-



lot (R-ATP) designation from the FAA—offering significant time and cost savings for a comprehensive piloting education.

“AeroCamp gives students a chance to experience what it takes to fly an airplane and a glimpse into the future of different careers in aviation,” said Dr. Bradford Sims, President of Capitol Technology University. “We're thrilled to open our hangars and classrooms to students who dream of taking to the skies.”

“AeroCamp will be an exciting adventure for young aspiring pilots, giving them a hands-on look at what it truly takes to fly an aircraft. Students will explore the fundamentals of aviation, experience real-world flight training environments, and gain the confidence that comes from stepping into a pilot's role,” said Frank Turney, Chair of Aviation at Capitol Tech.

Visit capl.link/aerocamp to learn more and register today!

Capitol Technology University is a leading STEM university located in Laurel, MD near the vibrant DC metropolitan area. Ranked #1 in Maryland for graduate salaries at all degree levels, the university's mission is to educate individuals for successful professional careers in STEM research, engineering, management, and business by providing relevant learning experiences. Visit www.capttechu.edu

Autism from A1

the public school team acting under IDEA. Schools still decide what is appropriate; they just can't pretend the diagnosis doesn't exist.”

The bill has bipartisan support in the Maryland House of Delegates. Roberts emphasized that HB901 aims to bring greater consistency to autism-related supports across school

systems and to move Maryland toward best-in-the-nation practice in how public schools respond when a child receives an autism diagnosis.

House Bill 901 remains before the House Ways and Means Committee.

For more information about HB901 or to learn how to submit additional testimony, please visit the Maryland General Assembly's website and search for “HB0901.”

Women's from A1

story of an “unexpected teenage pregnancy [that] pulls together two families from different social classes and explores their histories—reaching back to the Tulsa race massacre of 1921—and exposes the private hopes, disappointments, and longings that can bind or divide us from each other.”—from the catalog

Computer Basics: Research and Explore Women's History

Free | Wednesday, March 18 at 6 p.m. | Teens and Adults | Hillcrest Heights Branch Library

Join the Hillcrest Heights Branch Library at this special Women's History

Month “Computer Basics” program, where participants will learn how to use the Library's many online resources to conduct research for school, work, or personal history projects.

Kids Create: Her Story Edition
Free | Thursday, March 26 at 4 p.m. | Ages 5–12 | Hillcrest Heights Branch Library

At this special “Kids Create” program, kids will get to observe Women's History Month by playing a matching game to celebrate and recognize the contributions of women throughout history. After that, children will create a craft to continue honoring and acknowledging women in history!



PHOTO COURTESY BOWIE HIGH SCHOOL NJROTC

The Bowie High School NJROTC Battalion held its annual military inspection on January 21, 2026.

Bowie High School NJROTC: Annual Military Inspections 2026

By PAO C/SA HENDERSON
Bowie High School NJROTC

On Wednesday, January 21, 2026, The Bowie High School NJROTC Battalion held its annual military inspection. The inspection focused on the Battalion's overall readiness and organization. Cadets were evaluated on uniform appearance, drill performance, ad-

ministrative records, and knowledge of NJROTC standards. Throughout the inspection, cadets demonstrated discipline, and confidence. The inspection reflected the battalion's thorough preparation and sustained training efforts. The Battalion staff played an important role in keeping the inspection organized and running smoothly. The battalion received two special guests, one of them

being Rear Admiral Arthur Johnson, a navy flag officer, and Lieutenant Teresa Hicks, the first African-American woman to be promoted to an Area Manager position. Overall, the inspection reflected the battalion's commitment to improvement, accountability, and representing Bowie High School in a positive manner.

‘I Wish I Could Give Them all a Hug’: Senate Considers Probe Into Black Boys’ Deaths

By ALEXANDER TAYLOR
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Feb. 26, 2026)—Some state officials said they support a bill to launch a probe into the deaths of hundreds of Black boys at a once segregated reform school in Cheltenham, saying it might help with healing.

The Senate bill would create a commission to investigate conditions at the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children in southern Prince George's County. The commission would also “promote healing and reconciliation” through acknowledgment and recommendations for systemic reform, according to the bill's text.

Lawmakers have raised concerns about the estimated 230 youths buried in unmarked graves at the site.

“There was never a formal effort undertaken to document these grave sites in a manner that reflects the dignity and the respect that these boys are owed,” said Sen. William C. Smith Jr., D-Montgomery, the bill's sponsor. “I think it's past time we started doing that.”

At a hearing Wednesday of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, which Smith chairs, officials from the Office of the Attorney General and the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services testified in favor of the bill.

“I wish I could give them all a hug that children deserve, and that I know they must have cried out for in their suffering and fear,” said Tiana Davis, who leads the Juvenile Services' Office of Equity and Inclusion. “While we can't do that any longer, what we must do is say their names, tell their stories and make sure these horrors never happen again.”



ALEXANDER TAYLOR/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

Sen. William C. Smith Jr., D-Montgomery, testified Feb. 25 at a hearing about a bill he introduced that would investigate the House of Reformation in Cheltenham.

One of the leading causes of death for boys at the Cheltenham facility and similar facilities in the state was tuberculosis, a Capital News Service investigation found.

Sens. Chris West, R-Baltimore County and Carroll, and Charles E. Sydnor III, D-Baltimore County, questioned whether the Attorney General's Office was the appropriate agency to lead the investigation. If a civil suit was brought against the state, they argued, the Attorney General's Office—which represents the state in civil suits—would be a witness for the plaintiff and an attorney for the defendant.

Deputy Attorney General Zenita Wickham Hurley said the office would set up “conflict walls” to keep the investigation independent.

She also clarified that the office

would not conduct the investigation, but hire independent investigators with the approval of the commission.

“While this commission will not undo what happened, it can begin the work of acknowledgment, accountability and healing that they and their descendants have long deserved,” Wickham Hurley said.

A companion bill sponsored by Del. Jeffrie E. Long Jr., D-Calvert and Prince George's, faced no public opposition at a hearing last week. The investigation is also a priority for the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland.

Last month, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services received a \$200,000 grant from the Maryland Historical Trust for a ground-penetrating radar survey and restoration of the cemetery grounds.

Black History from A2

African American heritage.”

One recipient, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, was awarded \$200,000 to investigate a gravesite at a once segregated boarding school in Cheltenham. Maryland lawmakers have introduced a bill to investigate the deaths of hundreds of Black boys there, Capital News Service reported.

“In the moment of time that we are in, historically, nationally [and] in our state, I think it's a great opportunity for us to capture and embrace this tragic history and to teach it,” Sen. William Smith Jr., D-Montgomery, who introduced the bill, said at a hearing Wednesday.

In another effort, the Maryland Department of Natural

Resources partnered with the Conservation Fund, a national land conservation organization, to protect land where Tubman's childhood home was located.

Bill Crouch, the Conservation Fund's Maryland state director, said that was important.

“It's almost like we're writing a story, and it's chapter by chapter,” he said. “Through land conservation we are telling the story, and that's pretty powerful.”

The groups continue to work on projects in Maryland, including protecting the 28,300-acre Harriet Tubman Rural Legacy Area in Dorchester County.

“These are stories that need to be told, especially now,” Crouch said.

Alexander Taylor contributed to this report.

BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

I Lost Money as a Widow and Ex-spouse by Not Knowing the Rules

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 just found out, as someone who was collecting widow's benefits on my second husband (a very small amount) for some time, that I was, all along, entitled to divorce benefits from my first husband which are much more. I thought I had to wait until my first husband passed before I could collect anything from him. Now I learned I have the right to collect as a divorcee. All of these years I have been missing out on a bigger benefit because I didn't know this. Please make this clear and stress it for others in my position. Signed: Lost Benefits

Dear Lost Benefits: I am truly saddened that you lost out on benefits from your first husband for such a long time. Although you could not collect an ex-spouse benefit from Husband #1 while you were married to Husband #2, as soon as your current husband died you again became eligible for ex-spouse benefits from Husband #1. Basically, the rules say you cannot collect benefits from an ex-spouse if you have remarried and remain married. In other words, you cannot be "currently married" to collect benefits from an ex-spouse. But the death of Husband #2 meant that you were now eligible to collect ex-spouse benefits from your first husband—husband #1. I hope when you later filed for your ex-spouse benefits you asked for six months of retroactive benefits.

In your situation, when your Husband #2 died, you actually had a choice—either collect your surviving spouse benefit from your recently deceased husband #2, or to collect a regular ex-spouse benefit from your first husband if that is more than your benefit as your second husband's widow. Regular ex-spouse benefits from your first husband are available even though he is still living (and, indeed, even if he remarried) because you are no longer married to husband #2.

This, however, is not always the way things work out for someone who has had multiple marriages. It all depends on the SS benefit each former spouse was entitled to. That's because your survivor benefit as your 2nd husband's widow is based on the full (100%) amount he was receiving from Social Security when he died. In contrast, your benefit as your first husband's ex-spouse while he is still living will be based upon half (50%) of his full retirement age SS entitlement. And often, 100% of a deceased person's SS benefit is more than 50% of another living person's amount. But not always.

It's important to also know that if you claim any SS benefit before reaching your personal full retirement age (FRA), the monthly amount will be reduced. Benefits as a spouse (or a surviving spouse) do not reach maximum until the spouse reaches FRA, which is somewhere between age 66 and 67 depending on the spouse's year of birth. It's also important to know that if a surviving spouse is working, any SS benefit received will be subject to Social Security's Annual Earnings Test (AET), which limits how much can be earned before SS benefits are affected. For 2026, the earnings limit for those collecting early SS benefits is \$24,480 and, if that limit is exceeded, Social Security will take away some of your benefits. Note that the earnings test goes away when you reach your full retirement age.

Finally, be aware that if your first husband also predeceases you, you will then become eligible for a surviving ex-spouse benefit from him, even if he has remarried.

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.

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union Leader Appointed to AACUC Eastern Regional Chapter Board

By PRESS OFFICER
Educational Systems Federal Credit Union

GREENBELT, Md. (Feb. 25, 2026)—Educational Systems Federal Credit Union is proud to announce that Nicole Galloway, Assistant Vice President, Member Solutions, has been appointed to serve as a Board Director for the African American Credit Union Coalition (AACUC) Eastern Regional Chapter.

In this role, Galloway will collaborate with credit union leaders across the Eastern Region to support sound governance and advance initiatives focused on advocacy, leadership development and equity within the credit union movement. Her appointment reflects a continued commitment to service-driven leadership and strengthening opportunities across the communities credit unions serve.

"Being appointed as a Board Director for the AACUC Eastern Regional Chapter is deeply meaningful to me both personally and professionally," said Galloway. "This role represents purpose and responsibility, and it allows me to help create access, visibility and opportunity for others. I am honored to contribute to work that uplifts diverse voices and supports



PHOTO COURTESY ESFCU

Nicole Galloway, Assistant Vice President, Member Solutions

inclusive, intentional leadership across our industry."

In her role as Assistant Vice President, Member Solutions, Galloway focuses on delivering consistent, member-centered experiences while supporting team development and operational excellence. Known for balancing strategy with empathy, she approaches leadership with integrity, accountability and a focus on long-

term impact for members, Ambassadors and communities.

"Nicole consistently demonstrates thoughtful leadership and a deep commitment to service," said Girardo Smith, President/CEO of Educational Systems Federal Credit Union. "Her appointment to the AACUC Eastern Regional Chapter Board is a reflection of her experience, values and dedication to advancing equity and leadership within the credit union movement. We are proud to see her represent Educational Systems FCU in this capacity."

The African American Credit Union Coalition is a national organization dedicated to increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the credit union industry through advocacy, professional development, and leadership opportunities.

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union has proudly served the education community since 1955. With \$1.3 billion in assets and 13 branches, the Credit Union serves over 80,000 members of the education community including school employees, students, parents and individuals working for education-related organizations. For more information, visit www.esfcu.org.

Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Team Members to Join Leadership Maryland's 2026 Classes

By PRESS OFFICER
MDHCD

NEW CARROLLTON, Md. (Feb. 25, 2026)—Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Jake Day announced that two team members will join Leadership Maryland's 2026 professional development classes. Scott Gottbreht, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Strategy and Research, will join Leadership Maryland's 2026 Executive Program Class. Mira Morgan, Project Manager in the Community Development Administration, will be a member of the Emerging Leader Program 3rd Class.

"At DHCD, we believe our people are our greatest asset," said Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development Secretary Jake Day. "Scott and Mira bring curiosity, integrity, and a deep commitment to public service to everything they do. Their participation in the 2026 classes of Leadership Maryland is well deserved, and we look forward to the ideas and partnerships they will carry back to our work across Maryland."

Scott Gottbreht joined the Department as Assistant Secretary of Policy, Strategy and Research in August 2023, bringing with him nearly two decades of expertise in the areas of housing policy advocacy, community organizing,



PHOTO COURTESY MDHCD

Scott Gottbreht, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Strategy and Research

academic research, and housing program management. Prior to coming to the Department, Gottbreht worked at United Way of Central Maryland, where he worked for 10 years to help build a diverse portfolio of innovative housing stability programs and led a team of 40 staff. In 2018, he received his PhD from the Department of Comparative Thought at Johns Hopkins University, where he championed interdisciplinary approaches to homelessness and housing insecurity.

"Leadership Maryland has a great reputation for its rigorous and challenging curriculum, and I'm excited to put what I learn in this program into practice for the benefit of Maryland's residents," said Gottbreht.



PHOTO COURTESY MDHCD

Mira Morgan, Project Manager for Community Development Administration

Mira Morgan has been with the Department's Community Development Administration (CDA) since 2023. She currently serves as the Project Manager for CDA's programs, working on multifamily policy development, the UPLIFT program, Whole Home Energy and Repair programs, and other programming and software integrations. Mira has a background in local, state, and federal government, nonprofit advocacy, and policy research and data. In her previous work, she has focused on an array of housing, health, and environmental issues facing Maryland and the United States. Mira at-

tended the University of Maryland, earning her Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy and African American Studies and her Master in Public Policy.

"I am honored to be a part of the newest class of Emerging Leaders and I am excited to learn from my peers in different industries across the state," said Morgan.

The department's recent Leadership Maryland graduates include Deputy Secretary Juila Glanz (Executive Program 31st Class), Chief Operating Officer Garret King (Executive Program 32nd Class), Director of Communications Allison Foster (Emerging Leader Program 1st Class) and Asset Management Officer Dolores Deel (Emerging Leader Program 2nd Class).

Established in 1992, Leadership Maryland is a statewide nonprofit offering professional development programs by harnessing the strength of the state's business and community leaders. Supported by an alumni network of leaders from all industries and regions of the state, Leadership Maryland has provided professional development to thousands of Marylanders to influence positive change and build a better Maryland.

Funding from A1

cover their true potential. I am so grateful the YES Program provides exactly that: a place where students in Prince George's County can explore, grow, and see what's possible for their futures. The federal funding I was proud to help secure alongside Senator Van Hollen and Congressman Ivey will help expand these critical opportunities for our young people," said Senator Alsbrooks.

"Programs like YES give students the tools and confidence they need to succeed, no matter what challenges they face," Rep. Glenn Ivey (MD-4) said. "Melwood Community Services is doing extraordinary work in our district, and I'm grateful for their commitment to opening doors and creating opportunities for our young people."

"YES changes lives by allowing children to explore interests and hobbies they might not otherwise have access to, while demonstrating how an interest in childhood can lead to a career later in life. The program has already delivered measurable growth in self-esteem, emotional regulation, and career readiness. One student used the emotional-regulation skills learned in the program to calmly call 911 during a family medical emergency—literally saving a life. With this support, we can deepen our impact and explore opportu-

nities to bring this proven model to more schools and more students across our region. We invite educators and leaders across Maryland and the region to contact us to explore hosting YES. We're grateful to Sens. Van Hollen and Alsbrooks for believing in our mission and fighting for our young people," said Larysa Kautz, president and CEO of Melwood.

The YES Program is offered at no cost to families and is strengthened by partnerships with the Minority Tech Foundation, Prince George's County Police Department, and local professionals.

Melwood Community Services offers innovative programming that empowers children, youth, and adults with disabilities to live, work, and thrive in their communities. Melwood Community Services focuses on developing bold new ideas and activities designed to foster community integration and personal growth and fulfillment for people with disabilities. With a focus on overcoming barriers and expanding opportunities, Melwood Community Services' programs and services are designed to support people to live fully in their communities, enjoying recreational activities, exploring and retaining career choices, and providing respite for caregivers. For more information or to partner on the YES Program, visit melwood.org/yes or contact Jewelyn Cosgrove at jcosgrove@melwood.org.

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ENVIRONMENT



PHOTO COURTESY CHESAPEAKE CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK

“With cold water games and big hearts, we showed that nothing, not sewage spills, not setbacks, not corporate polluters, can dampen the spirit of people fighting for a livable planet,” said Mike Tidwell, Executive Director of the Chesapeake Climate Action Network.

Games from A1

Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN). “Even when the Potomac River was off-limits this year, our community turned challenge into inspiration. With cold water games and big hearts, we showed that nothing, not sewage spills, not setbacks, not corporate polluters, can dampen the spirit of people fighting for a livable planet. This is what climate resilience looks like.”

Adding to the festivities, local musician Teresa Jiménez performed an energetic song to kick off the day’s events. Participants experienced a day of spirited climate activism and fun featuring chilly obstacle course activities, from water blasters and a wind-turbine sprinkler to icy buckets and more. The celebration continued after the course with live music, pizza, cold beer, and a hot cocoa bar.

“To have 245 million gallons of sewage dumped in the river, watching 40 million gallons a day gushing into the river you love and fight for every day hurts,” said Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper with the Potomac Riverkeeper Network. “...We are right about clean water. We are right about clean air. We are going to continue to fight climate change and fight for our communities and our future because we are right about these things.”

“CCAN has given me a way to make my voice heard, and the amount that I’ve learned from it cannot be understated, said Kaede Thomas, Youth Member of the CCAN NoVa New Leaf Action Team. “Now I’m helping the Nova New Leaf team start a new educational campaign on data centers, one of the most pressing environmental issues facing our region. We are working together to educate ourselves and others and to push for accountability and clean energy requirements. The work we do and the effort we put in now serve as evidence to my generation and future generations that people care.”

CCAN’s 2026 Polar Bear Plunge came at a critical time as environmental protections face alarming federal rollbacks and the effects of climate change grow ever more evident. Following the recent record-breaking winter storm Fern, the need for bold action on climate has never been clearer. The ‘Winter Water Games’ continued the Plunge’s legacy of passionate activism, with hundreds of climate activists braving chilly water challenges together while also helping raise funds for CCAN’s campaigns.

Chesapeake Climate Action Network is the first grassroots organization dedicated exclusively to raising awareness about the impacts and solutions associated with global warming in the Chesapeake Bay region. Founded in 2002, CCAN has been at the center of the fight for clean energy and wise climate policy in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

March Is Pet Poison Prevention Month

Pet Poison Prevention Month, observed every March, is a dedicated time to raise awareness about the dangers of accidental pet poisoning and to educate pet owners on how to keep their furry friends safe. Many common household items—including cleaning products, certain foods, medications, and even some plants—can be toxic to pets if ingested. The month serves as a reminder for pet owners to review what substances are accessible to their pets and to make necessary changes to their homes to prevent accidental exposure.

During Pet Poison Prevention Month, veterinarians, animal welfare organizations, and pet advocacy groups share valuable information on recognizing the signs of poisoning and what immediate steps to take if an incident occurs. Symptoms of poisoning in pets can range from vomiting and drooling to lethargy, seizures, or more severe reactions. By spreading knowledge and encouraging preventive measures, Pet Poison Prevention Month helps protect pets from harm and ensures they continue to live happy, healthy lives.

Visit the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) for more information about pet poison control—<https://www.aspcapro.org/apccgraphics>.



STORY AND IMAGE COURTESY DOE - ANIMAL CHATTER NEWS

LOCAL WARMING: CLIMATE CHANGE IN MARYLAND

A Small Step Toward Net-Zero Carbon Emissions? Making Power Out of Poop

By ANASTASIA MERKULOVA
Capital News Service

Just by flushing their toilets, almost 2 million residents across Montgomery and Prince George’s counties may reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to cleaner air in the national capital region.

The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission’s Piscataway Bioenergy Project serves those counties. And the facility in Accokeek turns “poop to power” by converting the methane gas from biosolids—the byproduct of wastewater treatment—into renewable natural gas that helps power Montgomery County’s Ride On public bus system.

The facility uses anaerobic digestion—a process that breaks down organic materials in the absence of oxygen—to capture methane gas, which is then upgraded to renewable natural gas on site.

Of the 16,000 U.S. wastewater treatment plants, more than 1,200 capture biogas from their wastewater sludge using anaerobic digestion. Only 4% of these plants upgrade the biogas to renewable natural gas, according to data from the American Biogas Council. Upgrading to renewable natural gas is the most expensive option.

But renewable natural gas creates an economic incentive to do the right thing for the environment and create better waste handling, said Dylan Chase, senior manager of communications for the Renewable Natural Gas Coalition.

“Out of literal waste, literal human waste, out of poop, you are creating something that can power trucks or heat homes or power ships or other forms of vehicles,” Chase said.

Inside the Piscataway Project

The \$271 million Piscataway project, located in southern Prince George’s County, opened in October 2024. The facility began processing biosolids from all six of WSSC Water’s resource recovery facilities last April, according to Brian Mosby, the facility’s biosolids management division manager.

The Piscataway facility also plans to get the certification to classify the leftovers from the treatment process as Class A biosolids to market as soil additives. Class A biosolids are the cleanest form and can be used to improve soil on public sites as well as residential lawns and gardens.

Before the Piscataway Bioenergy Project, all six of WSSC Water’s resource recovery facilities had separate processes for treating biosolids.

“It became obvious to us that we should try to narrow this down and deal with it as a whole, as a company, instead of having all of these different people doing different processes,” Mosby said.

The company sent engineers to observe what some European countries were doing when it came to wastewater treatment, he added. One of the things European experts were implementing was anaerobic digestion.

This process creates a “win-win” situation, said Stephanie Lansing, director of the Bioenergy and Biotechnology Lab at the University of Maryland. She said implementing anaerobic digestion allows for a biocircular economy—one that turns waste into something useful.

A Step Toward Net-Zero Emissions

Limiting the amount of methane-generating waste that enters landfills serves as one part of the Maryland Department of the Environment’s climate pollution reduction plan, which aims for the state to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045.

Methane causes more than a quarter of today’s global warming, according to the Environmental Defense Fund.

The potent greenhouse gas, which is present in wastewater, has more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide in the first two decades it reaches the atmosphere. According to a study from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, urban areas could account for up to nearly a quarter of global methane emissions.

The Piscataway Bioenergy Project is one of the waste-diversion projects meant to assist Maryland in its carbon emission



ANASTASIA MERKULOVA/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

Anaerobic digesters at WSSC Water’s Piscataway Bioenergy Facility on Nov. 20, 2025.



ANASTASIA MERKULOVA/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

A truck brings wastewater sludge to process at WSSC Water’s Piscataway Bioenergy Facility on Nov. 20, 2025.

reduction goals.

“Projects like [the Piscataway Bioenergy Project] address emissions in a couple of really important ways,” said Mark Stewart, manager of the Maryland Department of the Environment’s climate change program.

Stewart said sewage is often processed in a way that releases methane into the air, but this project instead captures the methane, cleans it up and puts it into a natural gas pipeline.

Last July, a five-year contract between WSSC Water and Montgomery County went into effect. Under this deal, renewable natural gas from the facility gets sent to Washington Gas, which ensures it meets its standards, according to Mosby.

The gas returns to power the wastewater treatment plant, which gives the facility renewable natural gas credit, Mosby said. Now, the Washington Gas pipeline does not have to power the plant and has more renewable natural gas to power buses.

“It creates an environment where a waste product that is harmful to the environment is captured and reused for transportation,” said Calvin Jones, division chief of fleet management services in Montgomery County.

Approximately 95 Ride On buses in the county were already running on natural gas before this agreement, Jones said, but the deal allows the county to buy the renewable natural gas from the facility at a cheaper rate. This contract is also what creates the market for the facility to create the renewable natural gas, he said.

“If the county did not agree to offtake that renewable natural gas, it wouldn’t be economical for [WSSC Water] to produce it,” Jones said. “Therefore, it would just be waste methane going up into the atmosphere.”

Purchasing renewable natural gas from this facility is in line with Montgomery County’s Zero Emission Bus Transition Plan, which is set to assist the county in achieving zero emissions by 2035. However, the Piscataway agreement is just a step for the county, which plans to transition out of renewable natural gas and electrify its bus fleet by 2033.

While the county may end the use of the renewable natural gas from the facility for its bus fleet, it may extend the contract to continue using the gas in other areas once the agreement expires, Jones said.

A Neighboring Facility

While the Piscataway facility has not operated long enough to demonstrate its impact on the environment, other wastewater treatment plants using anaerobic digestion show benefits.

A decade ago, DC Water’s Blue Plains Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant in Washington, the largest of its kind in the world, implemented anaerobic digestion. The plant’s process produces gas used to generate more than a quarter of the electricity it needs to operate, said Chris Peot, director of resource recovery of DC Water.

As a result, the facility saw more than a 40% reduction rate in greenhouse gas emissions by the end of 2023. The plant has also reduced its grid electricity purchase by about 30%.

Anaerobic digestion has roughly cut the amount of solids leaving the plant in half since implementation. The facility exports Class A biosolids as a soil additive to farms in Maryland and Virginia.

Before, the plant used to send out 65-70 waste-filled diesel-powered trucks a day, but that number is down to 22-25 trucks of biosolids a day, Peot said.

“We’re not pulling power off the grid, which is generally from fossil fuel gas,” Peot said. “We have reduced the number of trucks on the road, and we’re bringing material out to farmers.”

Cost and Challenges

Despite its long-term benefits, implementing anaerobic digestion and upgrading to renewable natural gas comes with its own challenges.

Changes of temperature, acidity and toxicity levels can slow down or disrupt the treatment process, according to Green-Tec Energy, a Singaporean waste management company.

This past winter, a few months after the Piscataway Bioenergy Project’s grand opening, employees had to find solutions to warm the freezing instruments and pipes, according to Mosby. These issues hindered the ability to create Class A biosolids, so part of the equipment had to be shut down.

Above all, high initial costs may be a barrier for facilities to implement anaerobic digestion.

Wastewater treatment plants such as

EarthTalk® Q&A Toxic Headphones? Workout Music Lovers & Others Beware...

By Roddy Scheer | February 20, 2026

Dear EarthTalk:
Is it true that most if not all over-ear headphones can leach toxic chemicals into our bloodstreams—and what other consumer products that we use daily impart similar types of risks—and how can we mitigate harm?
—Anders Johanssen, Duluth, MN

Recent research does suggest that everyday electronics like over-ear headphones can expose users to small amounts of potentially harmful chemicals—but the risk is more nuanced than alarming headlines imply. A 2026 investigation of 81 headphone models found that all contained substances such as bisphenol A (BPA), phthalates and flame retardants—chemicals associated with hormone disruption, reproductive harm and cancer risk. Scientists note that some of these compounds can migrate out of plastics, especially under conditions of heat and sweat, and may be absorbed through the skin during prolonged use.

However, most experts emphasize that these exposures are typically low-level and not an immediate health hazard. The concern is cumulative: repeated, long-term exposure to “endocrine-disrupting chemicals”—compounds that interfere with hormone systems—may contribute to chronic health risks over time. In that sense, headphones are less a unique danger than a visible example of a broader issue: mod-

ern consumers are surrounded by low-dose chemical exposures from everyday products.

Indeed, many common items pose similar risks. Plastics used in food containers, water bottles and packaging can release bisphenols and related compounds. Vinyl products and synthetic fragrances often contain phthalates. Upholstered furniture, electronics and textiles may contain flame retardants. Even personal care items—shampoos, lotions and cosmetics—can contain preservatives and plasticizers linked to hormone disruption. Studies have also detected toxic chemicals such as chlorinated paraffins and PFAS (“forever chemicals”) in everything from toys and clothing to electronics and indoor dust.

Importantly, these exposures rarely occur in isolation. Researchers increasingly focus on the “cocktail effect”—the combined impact of multiple chemicals interacting in the body over time. While each individual exposure may be small, the aggregate burden may be biologically meaningful, especially for vulnerable populations such as children and pregnant women.

So what can consumers do? While it’s impossible to eliminate exposure entirely, practical steps can significantly reduce risk. First, limit prolonged skin contact with plastics where feasible—taking breaks from headphones or avoiding wearing them during sweaty workouts, for example. (Or unlash the music and let it play out loud on speakers.) Choose products labeled “ph-

thalate-free” or “BPA-free,” though keep in mind substitutes may carry similar risks. Opt for glass, stainless steel or ceramic for food and beverage storage when possible. Ventilate homes regularly and vacuum with HEPA filters to reduce chemical-laden dust. For personal care, favor simpler formulations with fewer synthetic additives.

Ultimately, the burden should not fall solely on consumers. The ubiquity of these chemicals reflects regulatory gaps and complex global supply chains. Meaningful risk reduction will require stronger chemical safety standards, better labeling and a shift toward safer materials. In the meantime, informed choices can help reduce—but not eliminate—everyday exposure.

CONTACTS: These chemicals are not just additives; they may be migrating from the headphones into our body—<https://www.musicradar.com/music-tech/these-chemicals-are-not-just-additives-they-may-be-migrating-from-the-headphone-into-our-body-research-shows-nearly-all-headphones-contain-chemicals-that-are-dangerous-to-human-health>; Potentially harmful chemicals hiding in everyday products—<https://vitalrecord.tamu.edu/7-potentially-harmful-chemicals-in-everyday-products/>

EarthTalk® is produced by Roddy Scheer & Doug Moss for the 501(c)3 nonprofit **EarthTalk**. See more at <https://emagazine.com>. To donate, visit <https://earthtalk.org>. Send questions to: question@earthtalk.org

Power from A5

WSSC Water and DC Water initially require hundreds of millions of dollars to implement anaerobic digestion, and the payback period can be many years.

The Piscataway facility is looking at the payback period for the Piscataway Bioenergy Project to be under 20 years, Mosby said.

DC Water’s anticipated payback period was expected to be 19 years, Peot said, but the payback is ahead of schedule due to the sale of biosolids. Including the value of the steam generated with waste heat instead of buying natural gas, the facility is looking at a 12½-year payback period.

Benefits associated with implementing anaerobic digestion are worth the millions in investment, according to Patrick Serfass, executive director of the American Biogas Council.

“While you’re making your money back, you’re going to get all these other community benefits on top of it,” Serfass said.

Advantages from anaerobic digesters last for decades after the initial investment is paid back, Serfass added.

A Wider Outlook

The European Union has long known of the advantages of turning waste into energy. There, more than 2,300 biogas plants used sewage sludge in 2023, according to a European Biogas database. This is more than twice the amount in the U.S. Also, 6% of European biogas plants used sewage sludge to upgrade to renewable natural gas.

Europeans are generally more interested in renewable energy and recycling than people in the U.S., Serfass said.

“When you have a society that is motivated to produce renewable energy and also motivated to recycle, it makes it easier to approve investments in the community that helps to do both of those things,” Serfass said.

Overall, there has been a growth in implementing biogas systems to various kinds of facilities, including wastewater treatment plants, for at least the last five years, Serfass said. About 100 new anaerobic digestion projects are coming online every year in the U.S.

Serfass said the American Biogas Council is trying to help people understand how biogas systems work.

“When you tell people that they take organic material and recycle it into renewable energy for homes, vehicles, businesses, and then fertilizer for growing crops and making your garden flourish, I think it’s a really easy thing to get behind,” Serfass said.

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