

AN OINTED

NEWS JOURNAL

The Nation's Premier **WEEKLY** Faith-Based and Professional Publication For Winners
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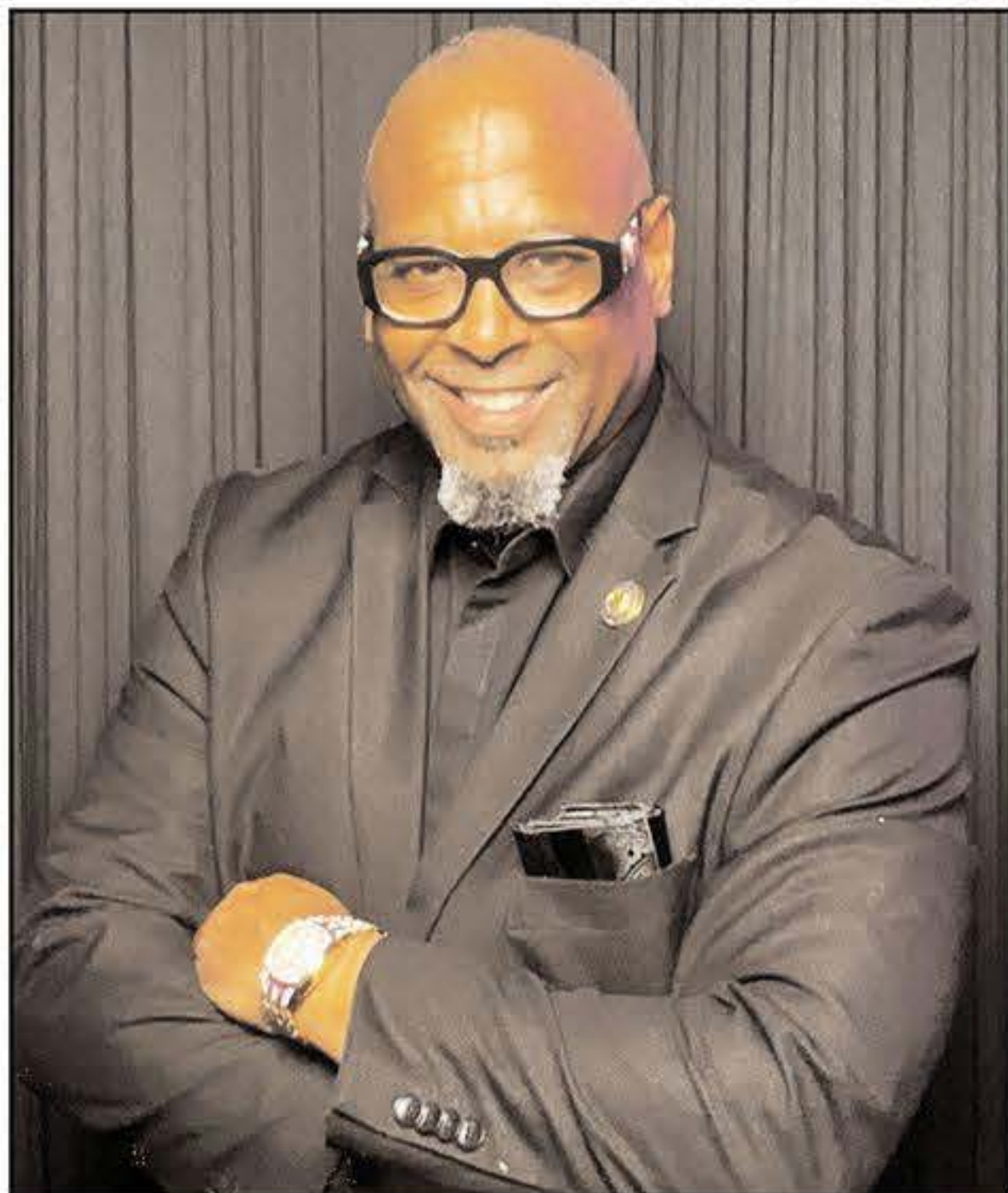
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A Word from the Editor

Celebrating 31 years of providing quality news to our readers

Dear Readers of the nation's premier faith-based and professional newspaper for winners, Anointed News Journal (ANJ). I am taking this time personally to thank each and every individual that has read the Anointed News Journal. I hope you have been inspired by the many positive people interest stories, and stories that have uplifted and empowered our communities.

I am also taking this time to thank our many advertisers that saw the value in utilizing ANJ to accomplish your marketing goals for your companies and/or purpose. ANJ remains the VOICE of Camden city and the SOURCE for connecting people together. If you are in business and need to advertise, we can help. Based in Camden, NJ, the Anointed News Journal has distribution locally in CAMDEN, BURLINGTON, GLOUCESTER, SALEM, CUMBERLAND, DELAWARE, NEW CASTLE, KENT, and PHILADELPHIA COUNTIES. Since 1995 ANJ has provided stories and distribution to 28 states across the country and 11 nations around the world.

Getting your message in front of more than 180,000 readers weekly in print and much more via the world-wide web is a great way to reach the market you are looking for.

I am also thanking those individuals that have given resources to support our mission of publishing positive press. Your contributions are paramount and my heart continues to be filled with joy from the smallest contribution to the largest, every time I receive a contribution I cannot hold my smile in. I am forever grateful. For those that have been reading ANJ for many years and have never given a contribution, now is a great time to do so.

ANJ is a free publication that is supported by its advertisers. We offer cost effective advertising giving advertisers the opportunity to get quality exposure at a comfortable price point. We offer RISK-FREE Advertising, which simply means if you are not satisfied, you will receive a complementary ad in an upcoming edition.

About Anointed News Journal

In May 1994 the CEO/Editor-in-Chief, Chris Collins received a vision from the Creator to write a business plan to seek funding for a grass-roots newspaper. For eight months and through Divine intervention, the business plan was rewritten for the ministry of the Anointed News Journal. The Holy Scripture given divinely to Collins was Habakkuk 2:2 (Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry). As a result and with prayer and seeking God's direction, the name "Anointed" was given.

Knowing that English was not his favorite subject while attending school, and that his career goal had nothing to do with journalism, Collins completely trusted in the Creator while developing this business.

The name "Anointed" comes from the hands that God has anointed to master this work and profession. Collins left a career in law enforcement to pursue the vision he received from the Creator.

Using his hands cutting and pasting stories and artwork is how it all began. Typing, proofreading, and making sure things were camera-ready before the layout was the process before technology was included.

Today, 31 years later, ANJ is recognized as a leader in the newspaper industry. ANJ was awarded Best100 Small Businesses consecutively since 2017. In 2021 Chris Collins was recognized by CIO Magazine as a Top 50 Innovators of the Year.

Although it may seem as if newspapers are becoming obsolete, ANJ continues to thrive. As the daily press struggles due to increase rates that have simply priced them out of the market. Weekly newspapers continue to make their mark serving the community and its advertisers. Although many have embraced the digital divide, people still want their physical newspapers. Because of the types of "Peoples Interest Stories" found in ANJ, most readers save their copies for years. Although mainstream media focus on negative press, ANJ has built its legacy on positive stories. "We have written a lot of stories in the past 30 years, and in 30 years we still have not run out of great stories to write about the great people of Camden and surrounding areas," said Collins. "As we look at the rise of Camden, NJ and the great positive image it has today, I believe we helped to increase that image by sharing the positive stories Camden has to offer, and we've been doing that for 30 years now," said Collins.

My Ask!

This is what I am asking from you today. I am asking every reader of ANJ, those of you who believe in positive press and grass-roots press to make a financial contribution to support our mission. Many have been reading ANJ for 30 years and have never made a contribution but would like to. Now is the perfect time as we have entered into our 31st season. For those who are unable to financially contribute, we are thankful for your continued prayers.

The Holy Scriptures in Matthew 7:7-8 (KJV) states, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Luke 6:38 (KJV) states, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

I'm believing in the POWER of God. I'm believing in the POWER of God's People coming together. Yes, I'm believing in YOU.

1 John 5:14-15 (KJV) states, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."

Please make all contributions payable to: Anointed News Journal, P.O. Box 309, Camden, NJ 08101. You can also visit: www.anointedonline.net click on Donation button. You can also Cash App to SANJEDITOR.

May God continue to bless you! May God continue to bless this world! May god continue to bless ANJ!

Yours truly,
Chris Collins, CEO/Editor-in-Chief

ANointed News Journal

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Call to Salvation

Have you received your salvation? If not just say, "Father, forgive me of my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins and that He arose again from the grave." If you believe this prayer, you are now saved by God's grace. I encourage you to get into a Bible teaching church to learn more about our wonderful Savior Jesus Christ.

Note: Opinions by columnists do not reflect those of the editor or staff. Feel free to respond.

Contents

Page 4	De'veon Williams-Jiles Legends of Heaven
Page 6	Gov Murphy Updates
Page 8	NJ Amer Water Youth Arts Fest
Page 10	Cathedral Kitchen Michael Leibrandt
Page 16	Virtua Health Robotics Assemblyman Moen
Page 20	Rep. Norcross Updates
Page 22	Financial Focus Bishop Levi Combs III



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Legends of Heaven Debuts with Sold-Out Crowd and Powerful Performances

Michael, Whitney, and More Reimagined...

BURLINGTON COUNTY, NJ - In a powerful display of musical excellence and heartfelt tribute, Legends of Heaven made its debut to a sold-out audience, blending timeless R&B classics with visionary performance. Spearheaded by bandleader and creator Chris Pierce, the production honors legendary artists like Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, and James Brown through a series of electrifying performances. At the center of the evening was headliner De'Von Williams-Jiles, whose passionate tribute to Michael Jackson earned a standing ovation and left the audience in awe. Backed by a divine vision and unmatched talent, the evening was more than a concert—it was a celebration of legacy, soul, and the power of music to unite generations.

In an exclusive interview with the nation's premier faith-based and professional newspaper for winners, Anointed News Journal, these talented creatives give us a glimpse into how this special event unfolded and what's to come in the future.

Our conversation with Producer, Chris Pierce:

Collins:
Who is Chris Pierce?

Pierce:
Chris Pierce is a bandleader, director, and drummer. I've been playing in the Tri-State area for close to 40 years. I've been with E.B.E. as a drummer for 20 years and at my church for 25 years, so I've mostly been around as a drummer—always in the background, handling administrative duties. I'm also a visionary. This is probably my fourth band. My other two bands, the Main Event Band and the Earth, Wind & Fire Tribute Band, are probably the two I'm most known for—those tributes to Stevie Wonder and Earth, Wind & Fire. Then came the pandemic, and that's when I received the vision for this.

Collins:
And tell us about Legends of Heaven and what motivated you to come out with Legends of Heaven.

Pierce:
Legends of Heaven is honestly a gift from God. It was a vision He gave me. I was sitting during the pandemic, thinking through some ideas, and I heard some Michael Jackson songs. I thought, "That would be cool." Then God began to open doors and expand my mind. Next thing I knew, I was adding Prince. Then James Brown. The more I thought about it, the more the vision expanded. It got to a point where it became so big, I realized I needed help—and time.

So I've had this vision since 2020, maybe 2021, and I thank God for the provision along with the vision. It opened doors for musicians and everyone who joined the project. We started with the Michael Jackson segment. Next, we'll add James Brown, then Prince, and eventually it will be one complete show.

The second version of Legends of Heaven will feature Whitney Houston, which you heard part of tonight, as well as Luther Vandross, Teddy Pendergrass, and Barry White. I have some amazing vocalists who will be featured in the coming year. We'll finish this current project by the end of the year and begin building the next version of Legends of Heaven in the year ahead.

Collins:
All right. Tonight, you opened with Whitney Houston, and Michael Jackson was the headliner. When you see the audience's response, how does it feel to pay tribute to icons who are no longer with us?

Pierce:
It's two things—validating and inspiring. This was our first show, and we managed to fill a room with over 250 people, plus the ones we had to turn away. That's validating.

It also shows that the tribute industry, respectfully, is still primarily dominated by rock musicians. That's why I created this company, The Ultimate Tribute Experience. It's a tribute to our fallen R&B heroes, because at the time, no one was really doing R&B tributes.

We're working to bring R&B back—to put it in the arena it deserves. Our music is as authentically American as it gets, and it should be selling out theaters just like any other genre.

Collins:
Tell us the name of the young lady who performed as Whitney Houston tonight, and what makes her so special?

Pierce:
Her name is Lady Defined. What makes her so special is that she's a powerhouse. There's a phrase often used in the industry—"the little lady with the big voice"—and that perfectly describes her. She's a monster vocalist. Extremely gifted and very efficient at her craft.

Collins:
And your headliner for tonight, De'Von Williams-Jiles—tell us your thoughts on him and what makes him special.

Pierce:
I literally cannot say enough about De'Von. He's one of those people where, if you believe in divine intervention, that's exactly what happened. We don't run in the same circles. We were introduced by a professional contact—his grandfather—and I first saw De'Von perform on video.

I know Michael Jackson's music, so I assumed he was lip-syncing. I thought, "I can't work with that—I need a live singer." Then he performed some songs that aren't on the album, and I realized, "Oh no—he's really singing. For real."

He's incredibly talented. As for his outlook, the sky's the limit. As a business owner, I've probably seen 40 or 50 different Michael Jackson tribute shows, many of them multiple times. He's the best-sounding Michael I've encountered.

And as I explained to him earlier—with all due respect to others—some performers dress up well as Michael Jackson with wigs, makeup, and everything else. But De'Von can just stand flat-footed and sing.

He sounds better than almost everyone I've heard. I say "almost" just to avoid sounding biased—but I am. He's the best there is to be honest. I truly believe he's going to do great things.

We're going to put as much support behind him as possible to ensure his success. And again, this is just the beginning. I can't wait for the rest of the world to experience who he is.

Collins:
How can people get in touch with you?

Pierce:
We have a Facebook page called The Ultimate Tribute Experience. You can also email me at tuteproductions@gmail.com (which stands for The Ultimate Tribute Experience).

Over the fall, we'll be finalizing our media package and

launching our website. But until then, feel free to reach out to me via email or Facebook.

Our conversation with Artist, De'Von Williams-Jiles:

Collins:
De'Von, we've talked many times before, but tonight is all about you. Who is De'Von Williams-Jiles?

Williams-Jiles:
I'm an entertainer, singer, and songwriter. I love performing Michael Jackson's work—it's a lot of fun and really cool.

Collins:
I first met you a few years ago at community events, where you were singing. Before we get into Michael Jackson, let me say—you're very talented. What makes De'Von Williams-Jiles' voice special?

Williams-Jiles:
It's all about the music. It doesn't matter who the artist is—if a song touches my heart and soul, I give it everything I've got. It's just the passion I feel for the sound and power of music.

Collins:
Tonight's event was a tribute called Legends of Heaven. Whitney Houston opened the show, and you headlined with a tribute to Michael Jackson. What was it like to see such a large audience come out to support you?

Williams-Jiles:
I was shocked. I got a little anxious, but I knew once I hit the stage, all of that would go away. When I'm up there, it feels like home. I don't let fear take over. It's so much fun—it's actually addicting.

Collins:
At the end of the show, the audience gave you a standing ovation. How did it feel to receive that kind of response, knowing you had just paid tribute to one of your greatest musical inspirations?

Williams-Jiles:
Honestly, it felt amazing. But whenever I'm on stage, I never want to leave. Even during rehearsals, I could go on for hours. Performing brings me joy. That standing ovation was wonderful, but I just wish I could've stayed up there forever.

Collins:
It's been said that many performers have taken on the role of Michael Jackson—from Broadway to Hollywood. Some may have the look with wigs and makeup, but when it comes to singing live—pound for pound—no one has the voice like De'Von Williams-Jiles. What do you say to that?

Williams-Jiles:
That's truly an honor. I'm grateful that people feel and believe that. It means a lot.

Collins:
At community events, you've sometimes held back a bit. The vocals are there, but maybe the stages weren't big enough for your dancing and full performance. You've clearly perfected the moves and style. What's your motivation to be as great as you can be?

Williams-Jiles:
Back then, I had a lot of insecurities and things that held me back. I wanted to stay true to myself while also trying to embody Michael—and that didn't always work. But eventually, I told myself: just be free, do what you've always done, and let go of everything holding you back. Now it's pure freedom. Pure bliss. When I'm on stage, I let go, live in the moment, and focus on delivering the performance.

Collins:
We know Michael Jackson has influenced your look, style, and sound—but there's so much more to De'Von Williams-Jiles. You have original songs you've written and a desire to share your own voice. What's next for you?

Williams-Jiles:
I plan to stay busy—continuing to refine my craft while also working on my own music. I want to keep creating and producing. Hopefully, I'll get into a studio soon and release music under my own name.

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

All while continuing to honor the King—the one I’m blessed to have watched and looked up to.

Collins:

For those who want to follow your journey, how can they stay connected?

Williams-Jiles:

You can follow me on Facebook at “De’Von Williams-Jiles” and on Instagram at “_devon3”. I’m also working on a TikTok and other platforms, so stay tuned. More is coming soon.

Collins:

We can’t talk about your success without mentioning someone who has worked hard to support you and help get you in front of people—and that’s your grandmother, Yvette Jiles. Tell us about her and the tribute you gave her.

Williams-Jiles:

From the day I was born, my grandmother has been my best friend—the love of my life. She’ll hold that place forever. She believes in me even when I don’t believe in myself. She’s always there during tough times, a great listener—though she talks a lot too! But that’s my grandmother, and I love her deeply.

Collins:

The Anointed News Journal reaches over 180,000 readers weekly. In conclusion, what would you like to say to our audience?

Williams-Jiles:

I love you all. Stay tuned—there’s so much more to come.

Conclusion:

Legends of Heaven not only honored the icons of R&B but introduced a new generation of talent destined to carry their legacy forward. With Chris Pierce’s visionary leadership and De’Von Williams-Jiles’ unforgettable performance, the tribute experience struck a powerful emotional chord. As the show continues to grow, audiences can look forward to more nights where the music of the past inspires the passion of the present.

About De’Von Williams-Jiles’

De’Von Williams-Jiles: A Local Music Talent Ready to Shine on the World Stage

South Jersey, at just 28 years old, De’Von Williams-Jiles is already making waves with a story as powerful as his voice. Raised in Paulsboro, New Jersey, and rooted in a family rich with musical talent, Williams-Jiles discovered his own passion for music in the midst of personal loss and self-discovery. Inspired by the sounds of Michael Jackson and guided by the support of his beloved grandmother, he has transformed grief into a burning drive to share his gift with the world. De’Von’s journey is one of perseverance, authenticity, and a deep love for music that speaks across generations.

In an exclusive interview with the nation’s premier faith-based and professional newspaper for winners, Anointed News Journal, we have the pleasure of speaking with him fresh off an amazing performance at the “Legends of Heaven Tribute” show where he performed Michael Jackson’s music, singing, and dancing excellently. He now prepares to launch his original work and he stands ready to embrace the world stage with both courage and heart.

Collins:

Who is De’Von Williams-Jiles?

Williams-Jiles:

I’m a 28-year-old male, born in Delaware and raised in Jersey. My grandmothers and grandfathers have done a lot for me in my life—my mother and father as well. I come from a very musical, musically inclined family on both sides. My grandfather was always singing around the house, and whenever we went to do carpet cleaning jobs with him, he was always singing along with whatever was playing in the car.

My grandfather on my mother’s side played guitar and was in bands when he was younger, just like my grandfather on my father’s side. They played in bands and groups.



DE’VON WILLIAMS JILES WITH BACKGROUND SINGERS, INCLUDING LEGENDS OF HEAVEN PRODUCER CHRIS PIERCE FAR RIGHT

My mother is a singer, and my grandmother on my father’s side is also a singer. Believe it or not, this grandmother sings too, but she doesn’t think she’s good at it. Still, I hear something in her that she doesn’t hear in herself.

Williams-Jiles:

I grew up in Paulsboro and graduated from Paulsboro High School. I won a state championship with the Paulsboro Red Raiders basketball team in 2015. After that, basketball just wasn’t clicking with me anymore—especially after my father passed away. I didn’t really want to play anymore, but I chose to stick with it through the rest of high school.

Then one day, I fell into a dark space in my life. I remember before my father died, I visited him in the hospital, and he told me, “De’Von, you’ve got to take care of your mother, your brother, and your sister for me.” At the time, I didn’t fully understand what he meant. I was only thinking of my immediate family. But later, I realized that family includes everyone who’s been there for you—people who’ve done something for you, fed you, put shoes on your feet, clothes on your back.

That message really hit me. I realized I had a talent I hadn’t shared my whole life. People knew I loved Michael Jackson, but they didn’t know I had this fire inside me for music.

Collins:

Let me stop you right there and ask: when did you realize you had a love for music?

Williams-Jiles:

It was one day in either 11th or 12th grade, after school. I went home and just started crying. My house wasn’t the same anymore. My mother was going through a lot after my dad’s passing, and sometimes people lose themselves when tragic things happen.

I went up to the attic—it was hot up there—and I cried. I pulled out my phone, opened the voice recorder, and started recording what I was feeling and hearing in my head. It was sad, but it felt like I had been holding onto something for a long time. Putting that emotion into music made me realize I had something special. But I didn’t know how to bring it out or share it with the world.

One day I went to my friend Jose’s studio in Paulsboro on Delaware Street. I started recording. A few days later, Jose said, “I know you just started this, but the Apollo is holding auditions in Philadelphia. You want to go audition?” I said yes.

Around that same time, there was a funeral on my grandmother’s side of the family. I volunteered to sing. I don’t know why—I just said I would. That’s how my family found out I had a gift. Everything came full circle. I realized that this is what I want to do with my life.

Collins:

At what point did you decide Michael Jackson would be the artist whose music you wanted to take on? What about him inspired you?

Williams-Jiles:

Growing up, whenever my dad was home, he’d be cleaning and playing Michael Jackson. I’d come home from school and hear him playing “You Are Not Alone” or sometimes Tupac. I grew to love those two artists the most.

Michael Jackson made my dad a different person—softer, easier to talk to. I remember one night my parents went out to dinner. I was in bed listening to “Human Nature” on his Walkman. The part where Michael sings, “Oh, why, oh why...” I started singing it. My parents had just come home, and my dad heard me. He ran upstairs, busted into my room, and started singing with me. He was smiling and laughing.

Seeing him smile like that stuck with me. That music touched him, and it touched me too. I love Michael Jackson just as much as my dad did. He always seemed like the number one person to look up to and follow.

Collins:

What was it like the first time someone told you—or you realized yourself—that you sounded like Michael Jackson?

Williams-Jiles:

Honestly, it was kind of freaky, but I love it. In my eyes, he’s the greatest of all time in singing and performance. Everyone’s entitled to their opinion, but when it comes to male vocalists, he’s the pinnacle for me.

The way he was able to take over the world was astonishing. Coming from a place like I come from—as an African American male wanting to be great—it means everything to be loved not just by a few, but by people across the world, from different continents and nationalities. That’s more than a dream come true.

Collins:

You love to sing and make people happy through music. How are you received among your friends?

Williams-Jiles:

I don’t have many friends because not everyone shares the same goals. Some people are content with where they are in life. A few coworkers at work want to see me do great things, and I really appreciate that. There are others who try to paint a bad picture of me, calling me selfish or stuck-up. But I’ve looked out for a lot of people. That’s just the reality of it.

Collins:

Now I want to go back to the Apollo. You did your audition and passed. What was it like performing there?

Williams-Jiles:

At the time, I didn’t have any real stage presence. I had only sung in small churches and local events. So being at the Apollo was terrifying. I remember it like it was yesterday—my legs wouldn’t stop shaking, I couldn’t control my breathing or my voice.

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

I don't even know how I won the first show, placing first and making it to the finals. I lost the final because I didn't listen, but still, it was fun. It was nerve-wracking and something I wasn't prepared for back then.

Collins:

What's the difference between De'Von Williams-Jiles at Showtime at the Apollo and De'Von Williams-Jiles today?

Williams-Jiles:

Today, I'm more experienced. I'm hungrier. I'm not getting any younger, so I know I've got to go for it now—before I get too old, before I don't look or sound the same.

Now I give it my all, knowing I'm talented, knowing I'm good. I don't let fear or rejection stop me. I just do what I love to do. Back then, I had a lot of fear—not just about music, but other things too. It was a lot on my shoulders. Now I'm more clear-minded, level-headed, and ready for the world. That's what I want.

Collins:

Speaking of being ready for the world, the world loves you when you perform Michael Jackson. Kids dress up like him and come to your shows. But you also have your own music. What's next for De'Von Williams-Jiles?

Williams-Jiles:

I want to find a good studio and the right team around me—people who can help take my music to the next level, get it published, and out into the world. I know people will love it. If I enjoy my own music, I know others will too. It's really good.

Collins:

Who is your biggest influence right now?

Williams-Jiles:

Michael Jackson will always be number one for me. But I also draw inspiration from Frank Sinatra, Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, and Teena Marie. I love music with soul—music that speaks to you across generations and genres. I have a lot of inspiration.

Collins:

And your motivation locally—what's it like having your grandmother in your corner, acting as your “grand-manager”?

Williams-Jiles:

It's awesome. You always want someone really close to you backing you 100%. We butt heads sometimes—she talks a lot—but I love her. Ever since I was born, she's been my best friend. Nothing will ever come between us. I love it.



DE'VON & YVETTE JILES (GRANDMA)

Collins:

What words of encouragement would you give to a young man or woman who might be in the shadows, but has a desire to express their talent?

Williams-Jiles:

Don't let anything stop you. Don't let what others have done—or haven't done—keep you from reaching your potential. Anything is possible with drive and determination. You just have to put your all into it.

Collins:

The Anointed News Journal has over 180,000 readers. In conclusion, is there anything you'd like to say to our readers?

Williams-Jiles:

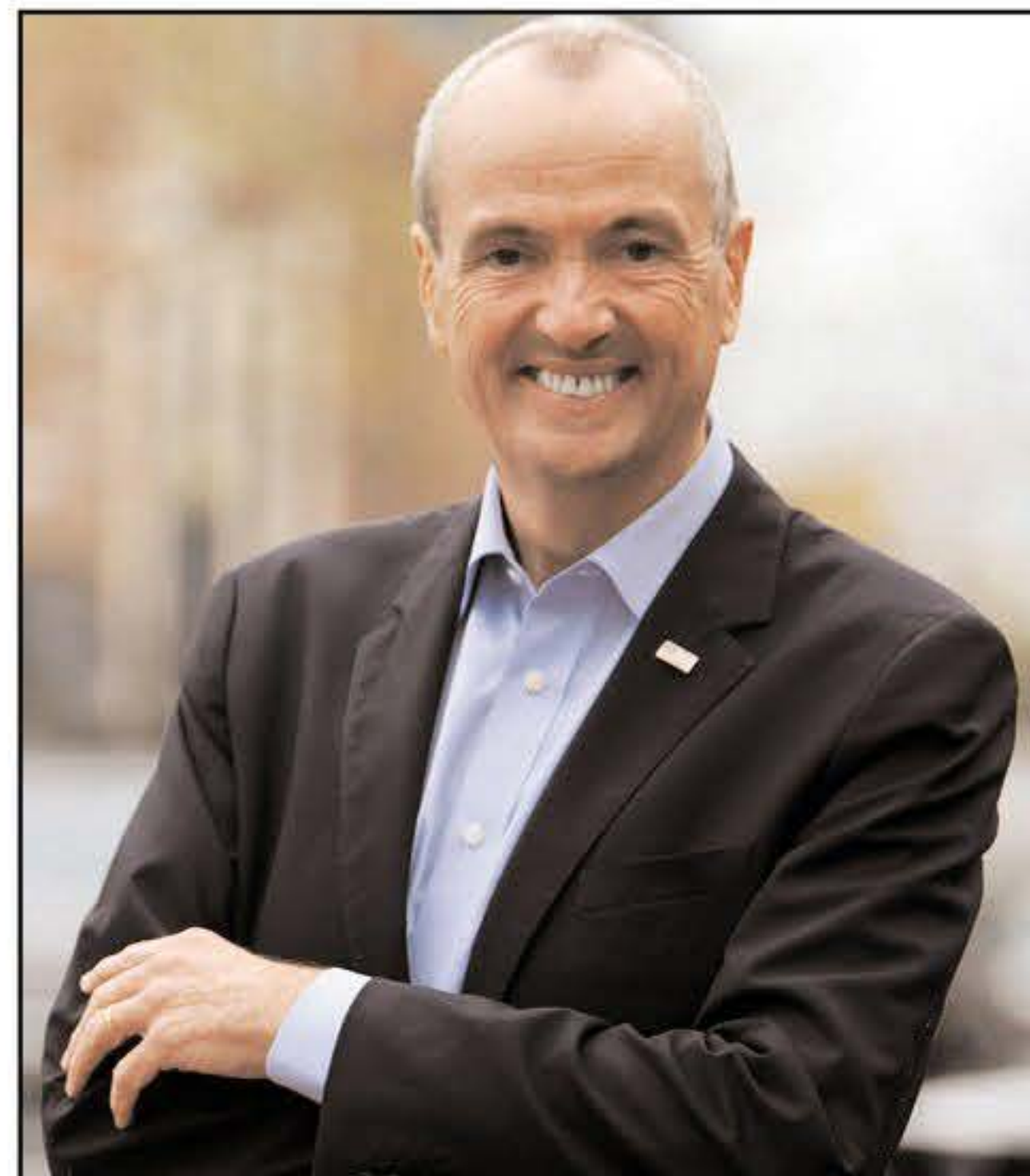
I hope I've sparked your interest, and I hope you'll be on the lookout for what I have coming in the future. Just like last time—I love you.

Conclusion:

De'Von Williams-Jiles is a shining example of how passion, perseverance, and purpose can turn pain into power. With his family's support and his unwavering love for music, he is determined to make his mark on the world. As he continues to pursue his dreams, audiences everywhere can expect to be inspired by his voice, his heart, and his journey.

The nation's premier faith-based and professional newspaper for winners, Anointed News Journal, salutes De'Von Williams-Jiles as a real mover-and-shaker. Stay tuned to the Anointed News Journal for upcoming performances. De'Von Williams-Jiles “VON'STAR”, the name given to him from his uncle, is expected to perform locally in Camden, NJ this July. Date, time and location TBD.

By Chris Collins



ICYMI: Murphy Administration Highlights Historic Support for Schools in Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Plan

TRENTON, NJ – Governor Phil Murphy's proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget provides a historic amount of \$21.3 billion – plus an additional \$882.4 million from the Lottery Enterprise Contribution Act, bringing the total investment to \$22.2 billion – in funding for pre-K to 12 education, a \$444 million increase from FY2025 and over one-third of the entire State budget. This amount includes preschool aid, direct payments for pension and health benefits payments for school staff, and a \$386 million increase in direct K-12 formula aid for a total of \$12.1 billion in K-12 aid – an increase of 48 percent since the Administration took office. The proposed budget will continue to advance the State toward the goal of universal preschool, give greater stability in local school funding, and increase funding for critical academic programs aimed at accelerating learning.

District allocations of state aid are available on the New Jersey Department of Education's School Finance webpage.

“Our annual budget is a reflection of our values and, here in New Jersey, we value a quality education for every student,” said Governor Phil Murphy. “The funding we provide to support school communities translates to stronger, safer, and more dynamic learning environments. We remain committed to working in close collaboration with local school districts to provide our students with the opportunities they need to succeed and to help build a stronger, fairer New Jersey.”

“This historic investment in Preschool to Grade 12 education demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the students and staff in New Jersey's public schools,” said Kevin Dehmer, Commissioner of Education. “By instituting a cap on decreases in State aid and providing fiscal stability for school districts, school leaders will be able to better plan their budgets and ensure a consistent education for all students.”

Improving Stability in School Funding

Responding to feedback from school officials and other stakeholders – and delivering on its commitment to review the funding formula to improve predictability and alignment to district needs – the Administration is:

- Establishing “guardrails” in the FY2026 calculations designed to reduce year-to-year volatility. Specifically, no district will receive a reduction of more than 3 percent in K-12 formula aid across the four primary aid categories;
- Using multiple years of property valuation and income measures to bring greater stability to the formula's measure of a community's capacity to support its education costs;
- Ensuring that the formula's measure of the costs necessary to educate students to the State's academic standards include mental health and up-to-date school security resources;
- Calculating special education aid using special education enrollment, replacing the use of a census-based method; and
- Providing a mechanism for additional flexibility in the tax levy growth limitation for some districts.

Expanding Preschool

The Governor remains committed to bringing high-quality preschool programs to more school districts in New Jersey. The FY2026 budget provides a total of \$1.3 billion in pre-school funding, a \$34.6 million increase, which fully funds existing programs, including those that started in FY2025, and uses \$10 million to expand programs into new districts. Under the Murphy Administration, funding for preschool increased by over \$550 million since 2018, making early education available for nearly 20,000 additional students in 229 new districts. State-funded, high-quality preschool programs now operate in 293 New Jersey school districts.

Supporting Academic Achievement and Improving the Classroom Environment

To continue offering additional academic support to students, the Governor's budget proposal includes \$7.5 million in new grant funding to provide high impact tutoring. High impact tutoring is a key part of the Administration's literacy initiatives and aims to improve students' overall academic performance.

Additionally, the Governor's budget proposal includes \$3 million to provide grants for phone-free schools, which will help improve classroom environments and lessen distractions for students.

The proposed budget also includes ongoing support for computer science education, an initiative the Governor has championed since FY19. Through these efforts, the Administration has increased high school participation in computer science in New Jersey by nearly 20 percent.

School Construction

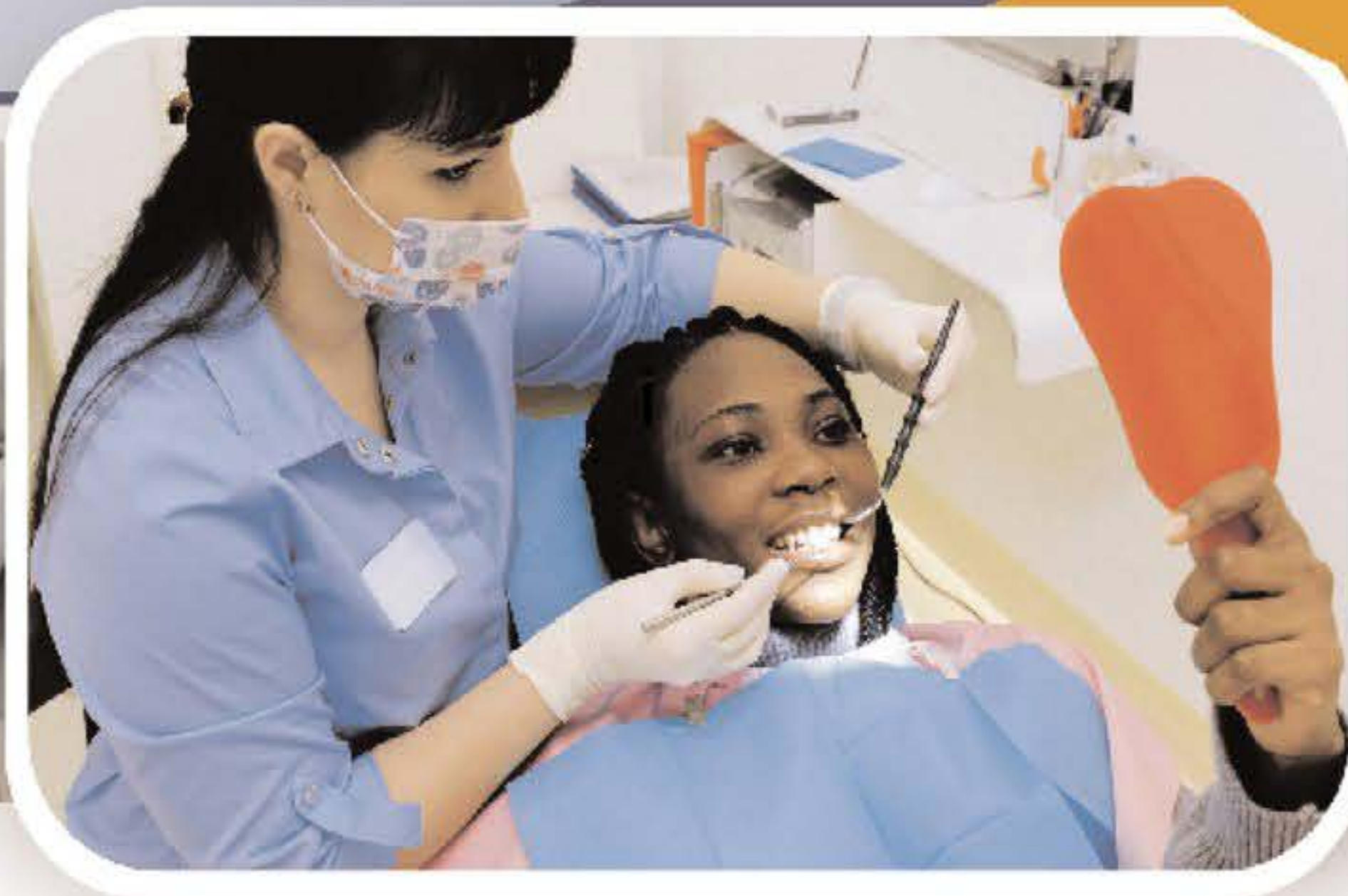
Approximately \$350 million in funding will be made available to the Schools Development Authority for current projects and new projects identified in its Statewide Strategic Plan. An additional \$50 million will support capital grants in SDA districts to ensure students have safe classrooms.

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NEW JERSEY AMERICAN WATER

New Jersey American Water Provides Tips for Planning a Water-Smart Landscape as New Jersey Drought Warning Remains in Effect

CAMDEN, N.J. – APRIL 28, 2025 – As temperatures rise and homeowners prepare their yards for spring, New Jersey American Water is reminding customers that smart irrigation and landscaping practices are essential for conserving water, especially as New Jersey remains under a drought warning.

“After months of dry conditions, it’s more important than ever to use water wisely, especially as the weather begins to warm,” said Mark McDonough, president of New Jersey American Water. “We’re asking our customers to limit outdoor watering to no more than twice per week—or even less if it rains—and to follow smart irrigation practices that can make a big difference in preserving our shared water resources.”

Despite recent precipitation, the state is still recovering from a significant rain deficit from late last summer that continued into winter. In response to the ongoing drought warning issued by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), New Jersey American Water’s Mandatory Conservation Notice remains in effect statewide.

“When each New Jersey resident and business does their part to conserve water today, we can ensure a strong water supply is available throughout the warm months ahead,” said Shawn M. LaTourette, New Jersey’s Commissioner of Environmental Protection. “Using water wisely this spring, especially by limiting outdoor water use, will help maintain water supply reliability through times of stress. Let’s work together to use our water responsibly.”

To help alleviate stress on water sources and infrastructure, New Jersey American Water offers the following smart irrigation and landscaping tips:

Upgrade Your Irrigation System:

- Use smart controllers: These devices automatically adjust watering based on weather conditions.
- Install rain sensors: Prevent unnecessary watering during or after rainfall.
- Consider drip irrigation: This system delivers water directly to plant roots, reducing evaporation and runoff.
- Inspect and maintain regularly: Fix broken sprinkler heads and check for leaks or overspray.

Landscape Thoughtfully:

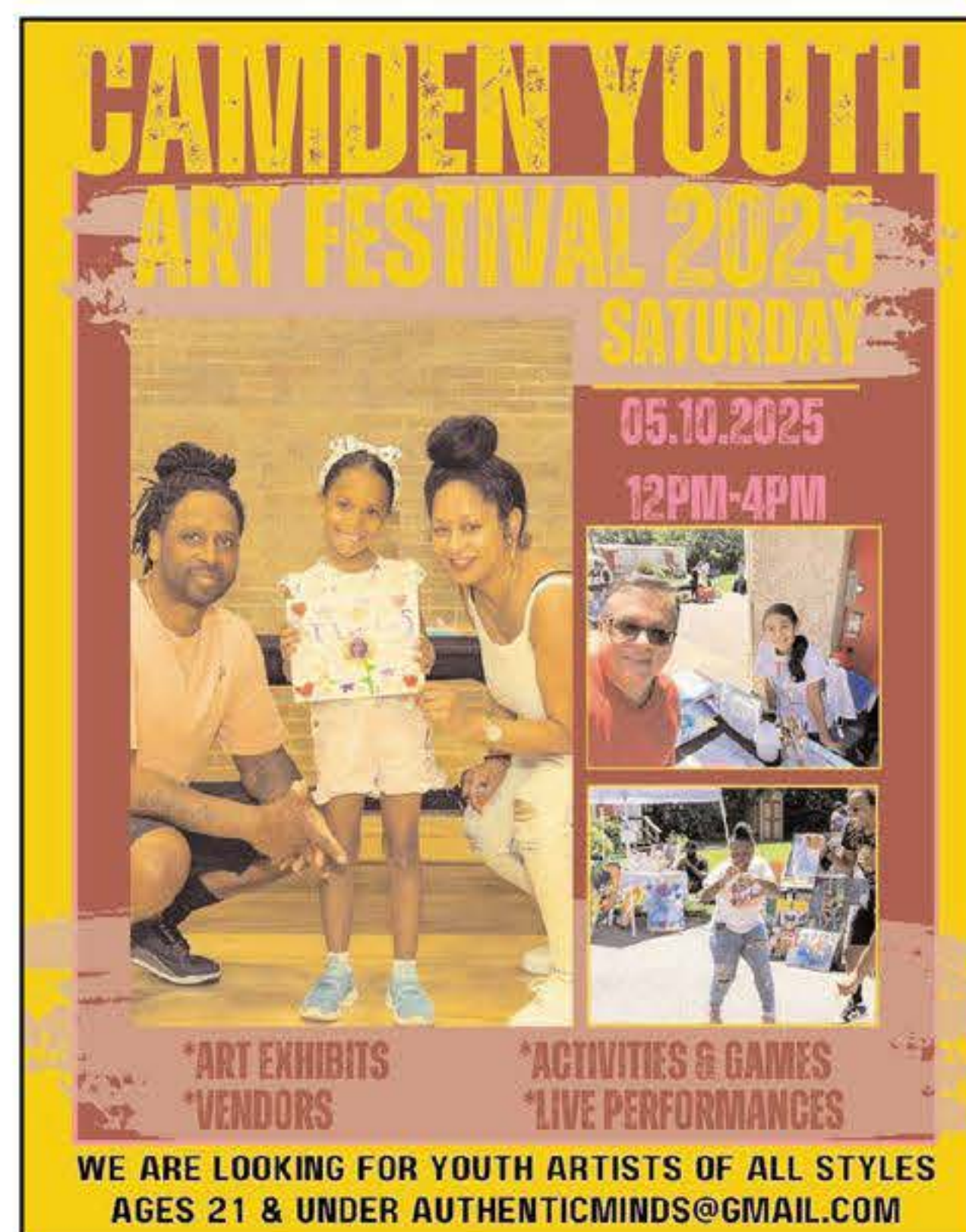
- Plant drought-resistant and native species: These plants require less water and thrive in local conditions.
 - Mulch matters: Apply 2–3 inches of mulch around plants to retain moisture and reduce weed growth.
 - Mow wisely: Keep grass height between 2.5 and 3.5 inches to improve drought resistance and reduce water needs.
 - Group plants with similar water needs: This helps avoid overwatering or underwatering certain areas.
- Water Smart:**
- Water early or late: Irrigate in the early morning or late evening to reduce water loss through evaporation.
 - Water two times per week at a maximum: Most lawns only need watering once or twice a week, and watering more frequently can harm your plants.
 - Check soil moisture: Stop watering when the soil is moist 4–6 inches deep. This is typically enough for healthy root growth.

- Turn it off when it rains: If rain is in the forecast, skip the watering day altogether.

New Jersey American Water continues to monitor water supply conditions and is working closely with NJDEP and local authorities. The company has implemented operational adjustments to maintain service reliability, but conservation remains a critical part of managing the ongoing drought. Customers can learn more about wise water use and track their usage by logging into their MyWater account at newjerseyamwater.com. Additional tips and tools are also available at newjerseyamwater.com/conservation and on NJDEP’s Water Conservation website at dep.nj.gov/conservation.

About New Jersey American Water

New Jersey American Water, a subsidiary of American Water (NYSE: AWK), is the largest regulated water utility in the state, providing safe, clean, reliable and affordable water and wastewater services to approximately 2.9 million people. For more information, visit www.newjerseyamwater.com and follow New Jersey American Water on LinkedIn, Facebook, X, and Instagram.



Join Us at the 2nd Annual Camden Youth Art Festival Saturday, May 10th, 2025!

Date: Saturday, May 10th, 2025
Time: 12:00 PM - 4:00 PM
Location: The Neighborhood Center
278 Kaighn Ave. Camden, NJ 08103

About the Event:

The Bridges Teen Program proudly presents the 2nd Annual Camden Youth Art Festival—a celebration of creativity and community. Join us for an unforgettable day filled with art and fun, highlighting our area's youth artists of all artistic mediums! Last year we had more than 20 arts vendors, arts activities, games, a variety of food, live performances, a crowd rocking fun DJ, 150+ patrons in attendance, including the Mayor, City Council members, local artists, arts organizations, arts lovers and more!

What to Expect:

Art Exhibits: Explore the stunning artwork of Bridges program students, youth artists, and premier local artists and organizations.

Interactive Activities: Engage your creativity with art activities and a community arts project.

Variety of Art Forms: Discover a diverse range of art forms, including visual art, digital art, pottery, sculpture, fashion design & more.

Community Engagement: Connect with local organizations, explore community resources and enjoy games, food trucks, cooling stations and refreshments.

Why It Matters:

The Camden Youth Art Festival serves as a fundraiser to support the Bridges Teen Program, providing a safe and empowering space for teens aged 13 to 18 in the Camden area. Help us nurture creativity and inspire the next generation of artists! This event will highlight youth of all ages, including young adults. We will also feature established adult artists and art advocates in a variety of exhibits.

Special Features:

Award Ceremony: Honor the area's leading art instructors and creators who have made a significant impact on the community.

Exhibits and Presentations: Enjoy a variety of exhibits and presentations from artists of all ages.

Special guest artist include: To be announced!!

Be a Part of It:

We invite artists, vendors, arts organizations and sponsors to join us in making this event a success! Your support will provide art supplies, exhibit display equipment, tables & chairs, food, beverages and financial assistance to the Bridges teen program. Volunteers needed too! We are looking for sponsors!

Admission: Donation of any amount (Donation can be paid at the door or in advance.)

Vendor Fees:

Youth Art Vendor: \$5
Adult Art Vendor: \$15
Arts Organizations Vendor/Community Resource Vendor: \$15
Non-Arts Vendor/Food: \$20

Tables will be available upon request. Tables are limited and are on a first come first served basis. If you have a table, please feel free to bring it. We will provide a location map a week before the event to inform vendors of their set up area. Vendors and exhibits will be set up indoors and outdoors. Outdoor vendors are welcome to bring a tent. Bathrooms are available for patrons.

(An additional donation of any amount from sales would be greatly appreciated.)

To secure your slot please make your donation to: [https://cash.app/\\$theAuthenticMinds](https://cash.app/$theAuthenticMinds) or Donation Form (Title - Youth Art Fest)

Contact Us: REGISTER HERE: <https://forms.gle/RsTe-qjX7Pn26e3r8>

For more information or to participate, please contact: AuthenticMinds@gmail.com

Let's Celebrate Camden Arts at Its Finest!
Follow us on IG @BridgesTeenProgram
www.neighborhoodrising.org

Maurice "The Authentic" Hayman
Authentic Minds
Public Relations Professional
(c) 267-474-1383
AuthenticMinds@gmail.com
[@theauthenticminds](https://theauthenticminds.com)

WATER MAIN FLUSHING PLANNED IN CAMDEN

Each year, the City of Camden flushes its water distribution (pipeline) system to help ensure that our customers continue to receive high-quality water service.

FLUSHING SCHEDULE

American Water, the City's contracted water service provider, will be conducting fire hydrant flushing for approximately 10 weeks beginning the week of April 7, 2025 during the hours of 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

WHY WE FLUSH

Flushing helps us to clean out any build up of mineral deposits and sediment inside the pipes. These harmless deposits can occur when water service demands are reduced during the winter months. It also allows us to use the hydrants to make sure they are operational and to check fire flows.

WHAT TO EXPECT

When crews are in the area, you may experience a drop in water pressure or discolored water. If discolored water occurs, let the **cold water** run until it is clear.

HOW TO PREPARE

- Draw water for cooking ahead of time.
- Store a large bottle of water in the refrigerator for drinking.
- Check for discolored water before using the washing machine or dishwasher.

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amwater.com/camden

WATER SERVICE IN THE CITY OF CAMDEN



Cathedral Kitchen Hosted 35th Culinary Arts Training Program Graduation on April 17

CAMDEN, NJ – On Thursday, April 17, Cathedral Kitchen (CK) hosted the graduation ceremony for the 35th class of its Culinary Arts Training (CAT) program. The celebration took place from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM, followed by a lunch from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM, at Cathedral Kitchen (1514 Federal Street, Camden, NJ 08105).

This ceremony honors the determination and resilience of students who have successfully completed CK's 15-week, American Culinary Federation-accredited program. CK prepares unemployed, underemployed, at-risk, and low-income Camden residents for professional success in the food service industry. Since its launch in 2009, the CAT program has been a cornerstone of Cathedral Kitchen's mission, empowering residents of Camden to achieve economic independence. The program is offered three times per year, training approximately 60 students annually. Over its 15 years, the program has provided hundreds of individuals with the skills, certifications, and support needed to launch meaningful careers in the food service industry.

The event featured a delicious meal prepared by the graduates themselves, showcasing the culinary talent they have developed throughout the program. Families of the graduates are invited to join in the celebration, honoring their loved ones' hard work and dedication.

In addition to the graduation certificates, awards were presented to exceptional graduates by various Rotary Clubs in the area, recognizing their commitment and perseverance. A highlight of the event will be the announcement of the CAT Apprentice, an exciting opportunity awarded to an outstanding student who will continue working in Cathedral Kitchen's kitchen for an additional four months post-graduation. This hands-on apprenticeship allows them to further refine their skills and gain valuable experience in a professional culinary setting.

Offered at no cost to students, the CAT program includes:

- Academic and hands-on training led by CK staff and guest chefs. Recent sessions have featured head chefs from Campbell's teaching soup-making techniques and experts from Puratos leading lessons on working with chocolate.
- ServSafe Certification, an essential food safety credential for food industry employment, supported by several weeks of test prep and free tutoring to ensure student success.
- Wrap-around job readiness training, including interpersonal skills development, financial literacy workshops, mock interviews, résumé building support, and job placement assistance.
- Personalized support from CK case manager Ja'Net Dingle, MSW, who helps students navigate personal and professional challenges.

Graduates also benefit from CK's robust employer network, with over 85% securing employment within three months of graduation. Employers that have hired our graduates include Compass Group at Subaru; Sodexo at Cooper Hospital and the Campbell's Company; the University of Pennsylvania; and Morrison's at Virtua. Some graduates even go on to work at Cathedral Kitchen itself, supporting the organization's mission of helping those who are food insecure by offering hot, nutritious meals to the public. CK also employs graduates to create delicious meals for our full-service public catering company, CK Catering from the Heart. CK Catering from the Heart offers delicious, made-from-scratch meals for all types of events—birthday parties, corporate gatherings, graduations, and more. Best of all, every dollar spent directly supports Cathedral Kitchen's programs and services that fight food insecurity in the community.

To learn more or to book your event, visit <https://www.cathedralkitchen.org/catering/>.

For more information about the CAT program or how to support Cathedral Kitchen, visit www.cathedralkitchen.org or call (856) 964-6771.



Cathedral Kitchen is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) with a mission to help people out of food insecurity and champion their pursuit of stability and prosperity. Founded in 1976, Cathedral Kitchen is the largest emergency meal provider in South Jersey, serving more than 180,000 meals annually. In conjunction with the free meal program, Cathedral Kitchen provides a comprehensive social services program, a Culinary Arts Job Training program that readies economically marginalized individuals for sustained employment in a living wage job, and a social enterprise program that provides jobs to Camden residents and improves community awareness about hunger and poverty in our region.

Cathedral Kitchen has earned platinum-level status from Guide Star Exchange and a 4/4-star rating on Charity Navigator.

John Wanamaker and 76 Place —A Parallel Opportunity Lost.

By Michael Thomas Leibrandt

John Wanamaker—was a self-made man from South Philadelphia. The son of a brickmaker—he did not come from opulence or wealth. His life and his career were not without hardship. His first clothing store—constructed utilizing the walls of George Washington and John Adams' President's House at 6th and Market—had to weather a grand opening just weeks before the outbreak of the American Civil War. He lost two children in infancy.

The realization of his vision of a shopping mecca in Center City Philadelphia would take nearly fifty years to come to complete. When his original sixth and Market Street location proved to be not large enough, he bought the old Pennsylvania Railroad Depot at 13th and Market. His "Grand Depot" would eventually become the twelve-story Wanamaker Department Store that housed that incredible bronze Eagle, Crystal Tea Room, and the largest Pipe Organ in America—plucked from the St. Louis World's Fair.

Two months ago—a plan for a new Center City Arena for the Sixers that was years in the making—was shuttered in favor of a South Philadelphia proposal instead that would house both the Flyers and Sixers like the current Wells Fargo Center and will be partnered by Comcast Corporation. This month—we found out that aided by the current ownership of 1300 Market Street—will preserve the iconic organ of old.

At a time when New York City was the place to go for the American shopping experience—Wanamaker's wasn't just a regional shopping destination. It drew shoppers to Philadelphia from all over the country to see a sparkling retail experience from the man from Grey's Ferry who seemingly invented the Department Store in America. The priority of the Charelle Parker Administration—76 Place at Market East—was a proposal to add a major draw to Center City.

Not only would it have taken advantage of the ease of proximity to those traveling to see a 76ers game from outside Philadelphia and especially for New Jerseyans right across the river—it would be a draw for tourists visiting the City who may not otherwise want to travel South Philadelphia from Center City. Thus adding more tourism revenue for Philadelphia.

Philadelphia's commerce district on Market Street—which includes Daniel H. Burnham's designed Florentine-Style shopping destination at 13th and Market—has provided retail enjoyment to Philadelphia residents and tourists alike as both Wanamaker's and Macy's. The portion of the 76 Place proposal which included an overhaul of the Fashion District and a hub for potential Philadelphia jobs now appears to be lost in Center City.

Like the proposal for 76 Place—John Wanamaker added additional economic impact to the City with the opening of his new department store in Philadelphia—dedicated by President Howard Taft in December of 1911. The original 76 Place proposal was estimated to add \$1.3 Billion of economic impact to Philadelphia.

The attention from Philadelphia's business and elected leadership now should not be the lost opportunity for a downtown arena for the Sixers—but rather a comprehensive plan to save both the Market East Commerce District as well as the history therein. The livelihoods of our fellow Philadelphians—as well as the history that exists in it to this day from the time of William Penn—depends upon it.

It's unclear how the remaining revitalization funding that Mayor Parker has promised to still be allocated to Market East will be able to save the Shopping District and to join with the Philadelphia Historical Commission to preserve that iconic Organ and Eagle still in John Wanamaker's Grand Court to this day. We have to at least hope that the opportunity for preservation is not lost—even if a proposal worthy of Philadelphia's John Wanamaker adding value to the heart of Center City—is.

Michael Thomas Leibrandt lives and works in Abington Township, PA.



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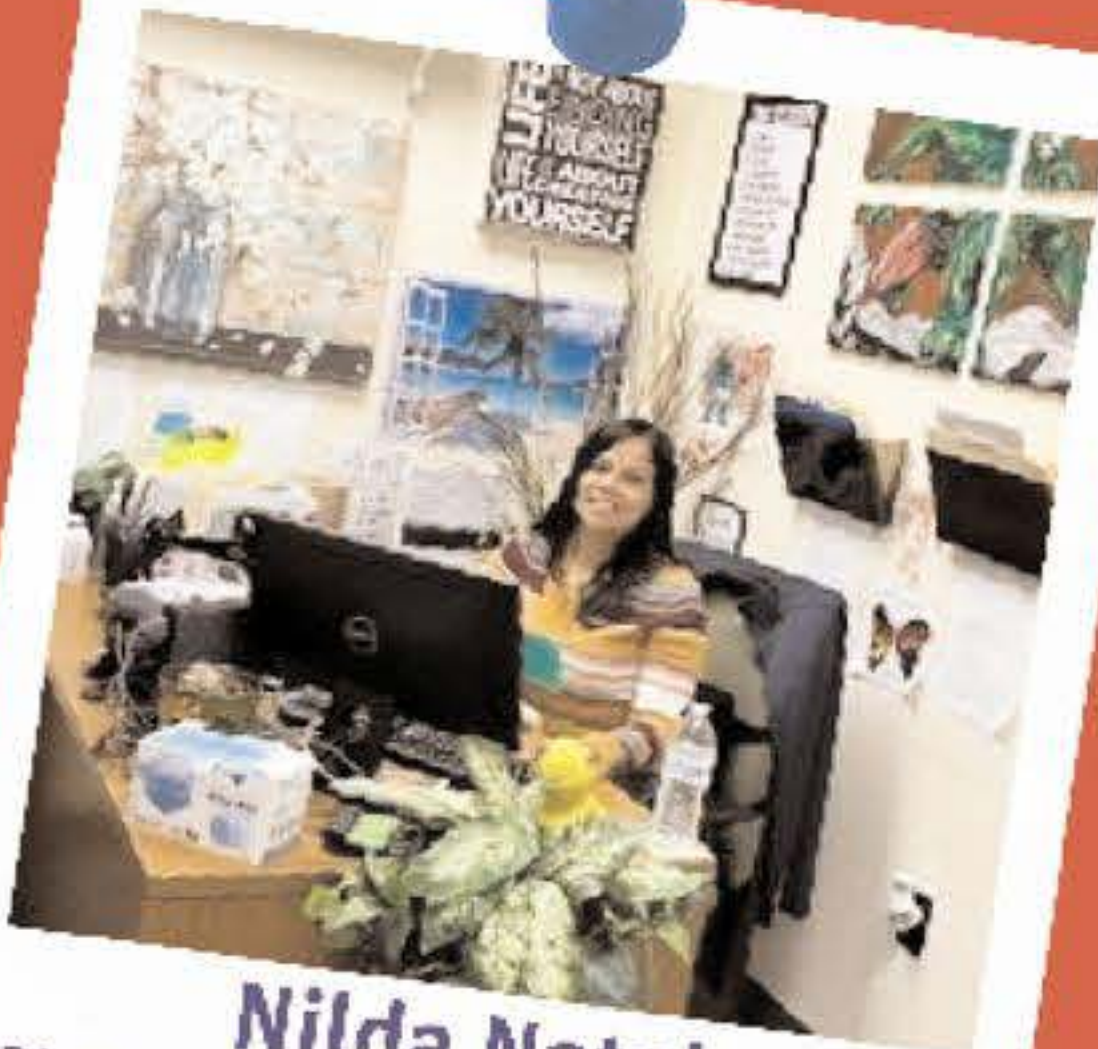
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Senior Housing Coordinator
Safe Return Navigator

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Nilda Natal
Director of Substance Use Counseling
Addiction Treatment Program

“A paycheck couldn’t give me what I feel when I’m able to be that person for clients to talk to. I always tell my staff ‘Don’t underestimate the power of planting the seed. You’ll never fully know the impact you’ve had on someone.’”



Kim Love
Director of Specialized Offender Services

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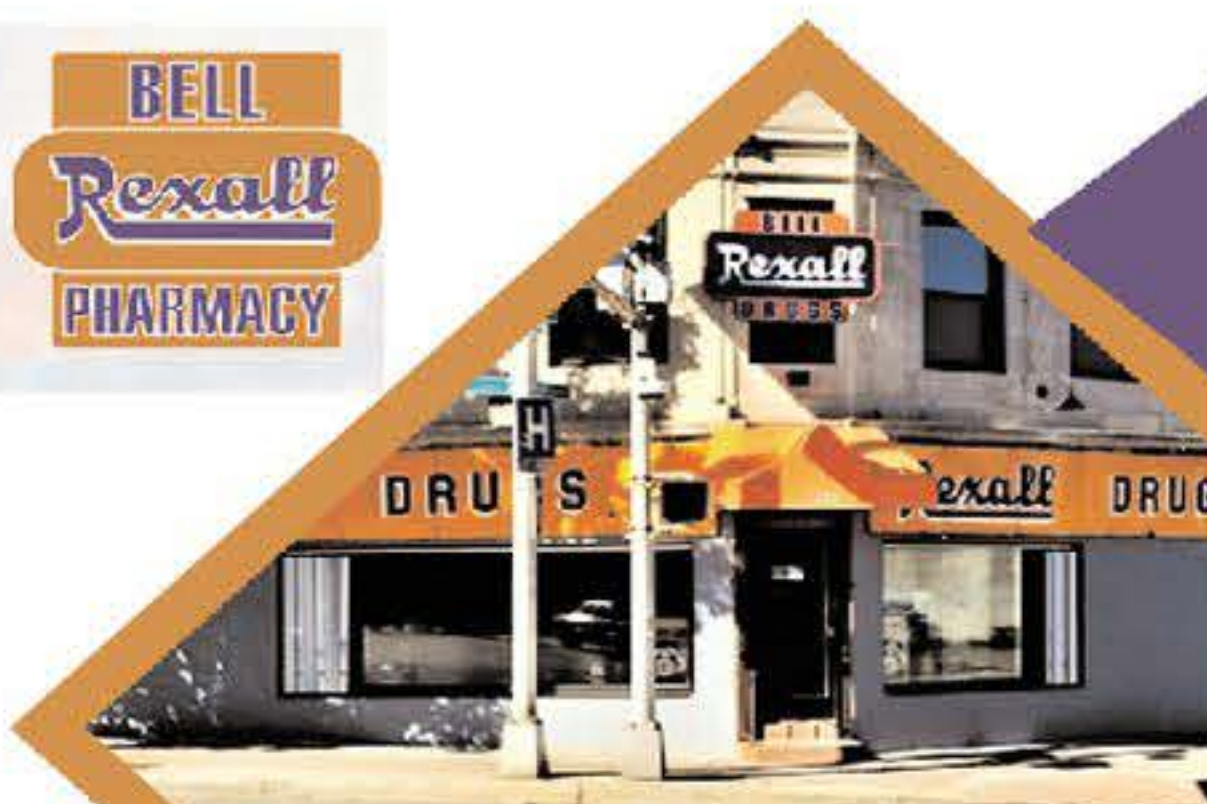
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Vice President, Pharmacist in Charge

Allen R. Morton, RPh
Executive Director in Charge of Long Term Care at Home and Remote Fulfillment Services

Virtua Health Launches Large-Scale, System-Wide Transition to Most Advanced Robotic-Surgery System of its Kind

MARLTON, N.J. - A longtime leader in state-of-the-art, robotic-assisted surgery, Virtua Health is breaking new ground: The N.J. health system is the first in the Eastern United States and second in the country to make a large-scale transition to the **da Vinci 5 system** across all applicable operating rooms. This system, the latest by robotic surgery pioneer Intuitive, is the most advanced platform of its kind.

Marlton, N.J.-based Virtua, which has 19 robotic-surgery operating rooms using da Vinci technology across its five hospitals, expects to complete this transition by early June.

"This milestone reflects our shared commitment to advancing minimally invasive surgery and delivering the best experiences and outcomes to our community," said John Matsinger, DO, MBA, executive vice president and chief operating officer for Virtua. "We want our patients to know that we continually invest in the best tools and the best people so that they can have the best possible quality of life."

Virtua worked with Intuitive to help develop the kind of robotics program that could meet Virtua's vigorous demands. Among the first 100 health systems to implement da Vinci 5, Virtua will soon offer the system throughout applicable operating rooms.

Robotic-assisted surgery enables smaller incisions and greater precision, often leading to faster recovery, less pain after surgery, and fewer complications, among other advantages. Da Vinci systems are designed for a range of soft-tissue surgeries, such as hernia repairs, lung and other thoracic procedures, bariatric (weight loss) surgery, and urologic, gynecologic, and colorectal procedures, among others.

The da Vinci 5 system offers more than 150 enhancements to its predecessor, including improved accuracy and precision, enhanced views inside the body, novel force-sensing technology that may reduce trauma to tissue, and better positioning options for surgeons. Click here for more details.

"As Intuitive releases more technology advances for the da Vinci 5 over the next few years, this standardization across our health system will position Virtua to seamlessly access these updates," noted general surgeon Craig Zaretsky, MD, chair of Virtua's Department of Surgery.

"Every advancement helps us do our jobs even better, so we can provide the best possible results for our patients," he added. "As technology continually evolves, we're committed to embracing and implementing these life-changing developments."

This collaboration will also help Virtua to expand robotic-surgery training opportunities for surgical residents, including more access to virtual reality simulators, which enable trainees to develop their skills in a risk-free setting.

An early adopter of robotic surgery, Virtua has performed more than 43,000 robotic-assisted operations since 2006, making the not-for-profit, academic health system a national leader. Virtua uses other specialized robotic platforms, as well, to address different types of surgical needs, such as hip and knee replacements. Read more here.

Virtua's staff includes more than 60 surgeons trained in the da Vinci system. The organization leads the Greater Philadelphia region for robotic-assisted surgery volume. Virtua also offers same-day surgery for certain robotic-assisted procedures, through its affiliated ambulatory surgery centers.

For more information, visit virtua.org/RoboticSurgery or call 888-847-8823.



About Virtua Health:

Marlton, N.J.-based Virtua Health is an academic health system committed to helping the people of South Jersey be well, get well, and stay well by providing the complete spectrum of advanced, accessible, and trusted healthcare services. Virtua's 15,000 colleagues provide tertiary care, including renowned cardiology and transplant programs, complemented by a community-based care portfolio. In addition to five hospitals, two satellite emergency departments, 42 ambulatory surgery centers, and more than 400 other locations, Virtua brings health services directly into communities through Hospital at Home, physical therapy and rehabilitation, mobile screenings, and its paramedic program.

Virtua has 3,000 affiliated doctors and other clinicians, and its specialties include cardiovascular and gastrointestinal health, orthopedics, advanced surgery, and maternity. Virtua is academically affiliated with Rowan University, leading research, innovation, and immersive education at the Virtua Health College of Medicine & Life Sciences of Rowan University. Virtua is also affiliated with Penn Medicine for cancer care and neurosciences, and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia for pediatrics.

As a not-for-profit health system, Virtua is committed to the well-being of the community and provides innovative outreach programs that address social challenges affecting health, most notably the "Eat Well" food access initiative, which includes the unparalleled Eat Well Mobile Grocery Store. Discover more at virtua.org.

Assemblyman Moen Introduces Legislation to Address Concerns Following Camden Fires

Legislation proposes regulations creating stricter requirements & enhanced oversight on scrap metal facilities

TRENTON, NJ — Assemblyman William F. Moen Jr. today announced that he has introduced a package of bills in response to an industrial fire in Camden City in February that displaced residents, shuttered roads, and led to environmental and health concerns.

"Though the flames of this fire have long been extinguished, the questions and anguish by residents still remain," said Assemblyman Moen (D-Camden, Gloucester). "As a legislator and someone whose family has called the city of Camden home for five generations, I share the community's concerns. The package of bills I have introduced seeks to minimize the chances that a fire of this magnitude can happen again."



The industrial fire, which broke out on February 21, 2025 at a recycling facility, forced the evacuation of approximately 100 residents, including senior citizens, disabled residents, and children. The owner of the company where the fire broke out determined that the fire was likely caused by a lithium-ion battery that was wrongly sent to the scrap recycling facility. Currently, the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety has a fact sheet outlining the risks of lithium-ion battery fires as well as how to safely use and dispose of them.

One bill, A5533, would establish requirements for receipt and purchase of scrap metals containing propulsion batteries, including but not limited to lithium-ion batteries. Another bill, A5535, would prohibit owners or operators of scrap metal facilities from storing or processing automotive shredder residue without first obtaining a permit from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. It would also amend the "Solid Waste Management Act" to define "hazardous waste" and "automotive shredder residue."

The Assemblyman also introduced A5534, which would require any business that receives a state economic development subsidy and is found to have violated state environmental laws to forfeit either 20 percent of the subsidies or the total costs to address the environmental incident, whichever is greater. The bill would also require the proceeds of any payments received by the State to be deposited into a new Environmental Incident Recovery Fund, which would be used to reimburse residents impacted by certain environmental incidents.

Assemblyman Moen was in contact with New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection immediately following the fire and is awaiting a briefing from its investigation. The Assemblyman plans to review the findings and may craft additional legislation as needed.



What We Do

The Camden Education Fund (CEF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to accelerating progress in Camden's public school system. CEF works with families, school partners, and community leaders to identify citywide needs in education. CEF then provides grants and develops strategic partnerships to address these citywide needs. Grantees may include schools, non-profits, and universities.

Our Vision

Camden will be home to a vibrant public school system that inspires all students and prepares them for success after high school.

Our Mission

To sustain and accelerate progress in Camden's public school system.

Our Focus Areas



Talent

Recruiting, developing, retaining, and appreciating excellent teachers



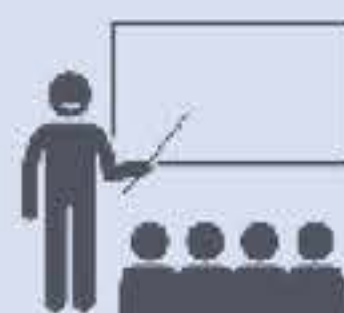
Equity

Ensuring a great school for every child and services that meet all children's needs



Engagement

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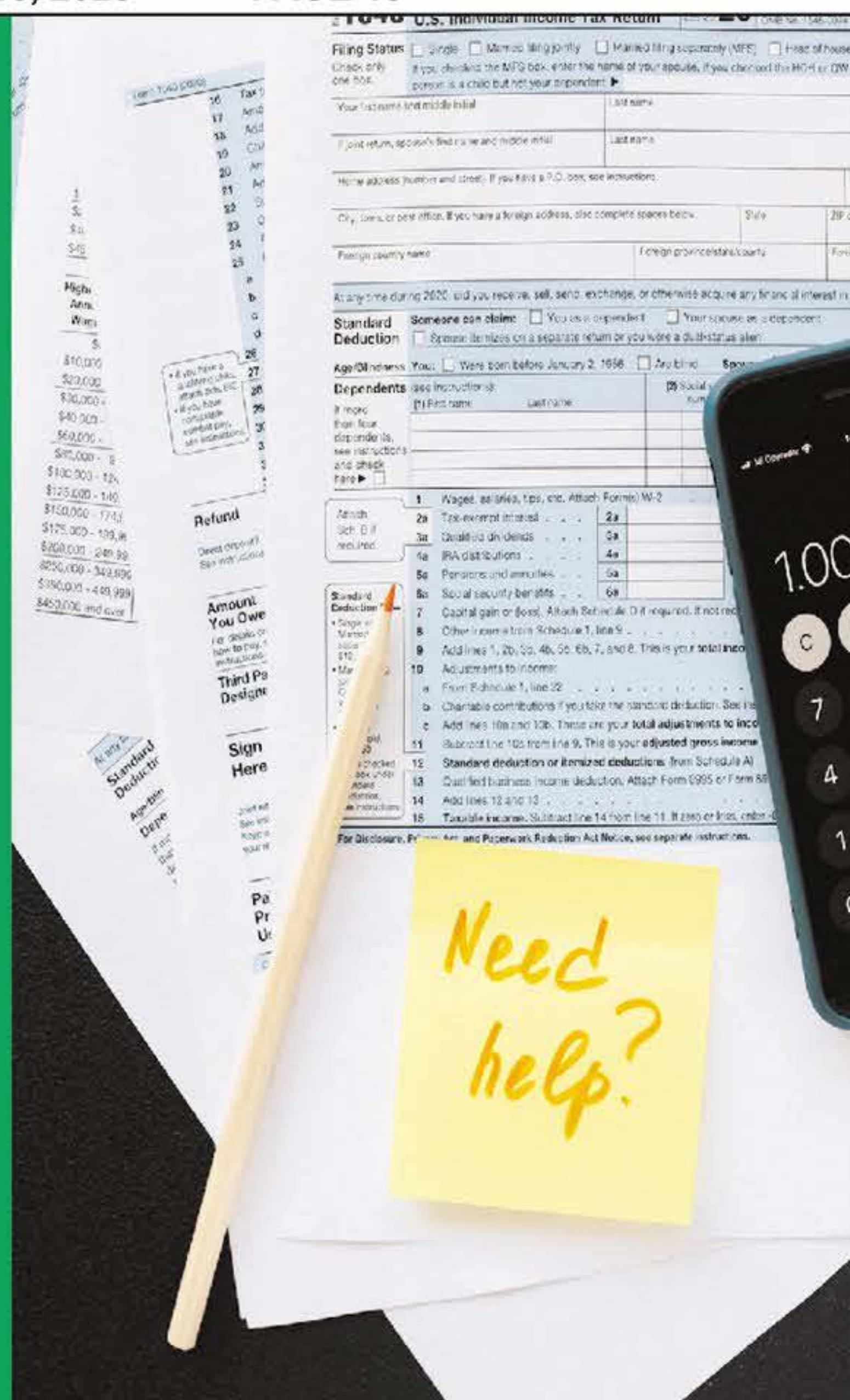
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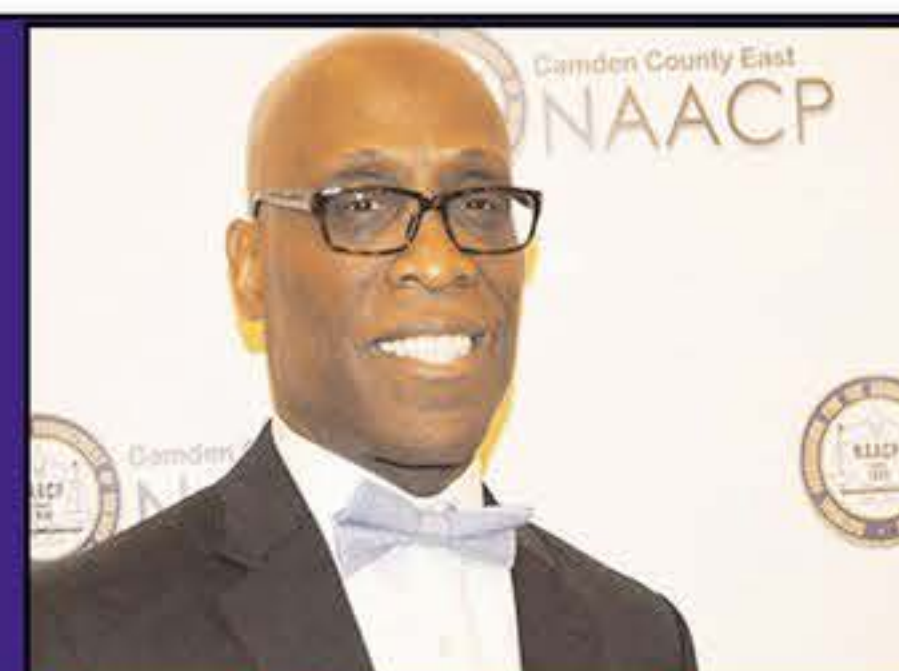
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Norcross, Hirono Introduce Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, Representative Donald Norcross (D-NJ) and Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) reintroduced the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act, bicameral legislation to guarantee the right of public sector employees to organize, act concertedly, and bargain collectively in states that currently do not afford these basic protections. The lawmakers were joined by Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Chris Deluzio (D-PA) in introducing the legislation.

"I know the power of collective bargaining because I've lived it," said Congressman Norcross, a union electrician, member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), and co-chair of the Congressional Labor Caucus. "I spent decades at the negotiating table standing up for working families—fighting for fair pay, safer jobs, and better benefits like health care and retirement. This bill ensures public-sector workers across the country have the same rights to a voice on their job and a seat at the table."

"Public sector workers teach our children, protect our safety, and keep our communities moving forward—they deserve the right to organize," said Senator Hirono. "The Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act will help ensure that millions of public sector workers across our country have the federal protections they deserve as they fight for fair wages, benefits, and improved working conditions. Private sector workers are already guaranteed the right to organize under federal law, it should be common sense that public sector workers are afforded those same rights. As President Trump works to gut our public sector workforce, this bill is crucial to protect workers' freedom to organize and bargain collectively. I'm proud to lead this important legislation with Representative Norcross to help ensure that every public employee has their voice heard in the workplace."

"No matter where they live, American workers in every sector should have the ability to form and join a union, or to collectively bargain to improve their workplace," said Congressman Deluzio. "Public servants should have this right, just like other workers. Now is the time for solidarity: let's come together and stand with hardworking Americans, defend the union way of life, and pass the bipartisan Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act."

"Passing this legislation has never been more urgent — especially now, as federal workers face unprecedented attacks on their collective bargaining rights," said AFSCME President Lee Saunders. "We believe, as most Americans do, that every worker deserves a union — no matter who they work for. This bill is about something fundamental: respect. Respect for the public service workers who've devoted their careers to serving their communities. And respect means the freedom to negotiate."

"When workers stand together in a union, their jobs and lives improve. But in half of the country, the people who keep our cities and towns running are banned from collectively bargaining for a good union contract. Every day, the attacks on the fundamental freedoms of workers who keep our streets and water clean, our public transportation moving, and our children learning are increasing from the highest level of government. We need federal law to protect their rights to form a union and negotiate fair contracts that allow them to continue to do the work that is so essential to our communities. We call on every member of Congress to stand with working people and support the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act," said AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler.

"For years now, the rights of workers like nurses, librarians, educators, and all our essential public servants who dedicate themselves to our communities have been chipped away at, despite their dedication and selfless service to their communities," said Claude Cummings Jr., president of the Communications Workers of America. "That's why the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act is so vital. It protects public sector workers' fundamental right to join together, bargain for fair pay, and stand up for decent working conditions. Congress needs to step up and pass this now and push back against efforts trying to undermine these essential rights."

"As education, healthcare and public service workers, our members make a difference in the lives of others every day. But too many states don't allow the people who do the work to have a voice," said Randi Weingarten, President of AFT. "The Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act would change that, ensuring public servants, no matter where they reside, have a means to influence their own lives. Whether it's higher wages, safer working conditions, or a secure retirement, the ability to organize a union and bargain collectively lifts working families, students, patients, and entire communities up. That's why we enthusiastically support this legislation and are committed to moving it forward."

The Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act would establish baseline federal protections to ensure all public service workers can join a union and negotiate workplace conditions—regardless of state law. The bill comes at a critical time, as recent federal actions have renewed attention on the collective bargaining rights of public employees, including those serving in national security-related agencies.

Specifically, The Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act would set a minimum nationwide standard of collective bargaining rights that states must provide, including allowing public service workers to join together and have a voice on the job to improve both working conditions and the communities in which they live and work. The legislation gives public service workers the freedom to:

- Join together in a union selected by a majority of employees;
- Collectively bargain over wages, hours and terms and conditions of employment;
- Access dispute resolution mechanisms;
- Use voluntary payroll deduction for union dues;
- Engage in concerted activities related to collective bargaining and mutual aid;
- Have their union be free from requirements to hold rigged recertification elections; and
- File suit in court to enforce their labor rights.

The bill is supported by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); the Communications Workers of America (CWA); American Federation of Teachers (AFT); AFL-CIO; Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU); Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE); International Brotherhood of Teamsters; International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM); International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE); International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE); International Union of Police Associations (IUPA); International Union of Painters & Allied Trades (IUPAT); Laborer's International Union of North America (LIUNA); National Education Association (NEA); National Nurses United; Service Employees International Union (SEIU); Transport Workers Union of America (TWU); UNITE HERE!; United Autoworkers; United Steelworkers (USW).

Rep. Norcross Releases Statement in Opposition to Largest Proposed Medicaid Cut in American History

April 9, 2025

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, Congressman Donald Norcross (NJ-01) released a statement in opposition to Trump and Republicans' budget plan to direct Congress to slash healthcare and prescription benefits for our seniors, veterans, and more, including a minimum of \$880 billion in cuts to Medicaid, so that they can afford to give the wealthy tax cuts.

"I would vote 'no' a thousand times to stop Trump and Republicans from cutting earned benefit programs, including Medicare and Social Security, that our seniors rely on. Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security are all lifelines for millions of Americans across the country, including hundreds of thousands of families, veterans, and seniors in South Jersey," said Congressman Donald Norcross. "It's disgusting that Republicans would disrespect our veterans, who have sacrificed so much to defend this nation, by cutting the programs they deserve and were promised. The draconian cuts to Medicaid, a program that millions of seniors and people with disabilities depend on for healthcare and long-term care, are just plain wrong. With this budget plan, Trump and Congressional Republicans are making one thing clear: they don't care about seniors, veterans, or hardworking American families."

Rep. Norcross Releases Statement on Republicans Plan to Raise Costs for Students

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, Congressman Donald Norcross (NJ-01), a member of the Education and Workforce Committee, released a statement on Republicans plan to raise costs for students and make it harder for them to find good-paying jobs.

"Not only are Trump and his Republican friends in Congress trying to take away Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, they are now making draconian cuts to grants that support education for low-income and middle-class students. Families are struggling to make ends meet, and Trump's only solution is to take funding away from working families and give their hard-earned money to his billionaire friends," said Congressman Donald Norcross. "By cutting the Pell Grant program that helps lower-income students afford college, eliminating an income-driven repayment program for student loans, and repealing regulations that are designed to protect students, Trump and House Republicans are doing everything they can to make education and good-paying jobs less accessible for American families."

Republicans plan to raise costs for students and make it harder for them to find good-paying jobs includes:

- Cuts to Pell Grant eligibility by setting full-time attendance as 30 credits per year instead of 12 per semester — which would decrease the average Pell awards by 20%.
- Eliminating an income-driven student loan repayment program.
- Repealing regulations designed to protect students, including:

*The bipartisan 90/10 regulation, which prevents for-profit colleges from duping veterans out of their hard-fought GI bill benefits.

*The Borrower Defense regulation, which provides student loan relief for millions of borrowers defrauded by their schools.

*The Closed School Discharge regulation, which provides loan relief for students whose institutions closed before they completed their programs.

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LRAP

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Households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income for the County in which the municipality is situated, residing in one to four family residential properties constructed prior to 1978, are eligible.

QUALIFICATIONS

01

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02

TO APPLY
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03

READY TO APPLY?
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FINANCIAL FOCUS

Time to Consider a Business Retirement Plan?

If you're a business owner, you're always thinking about the days ahead. What can I do to boost sales in the next year? What trends should I be watching? What's the forecast for my industry? But there's one element of the future you might be overlooking: your retirement plan.

Consider these advantages of establishing a retirement plan for your business:

- You'll build resources for your retirement. You might sell your business one day, but can you count on that to fund your retirement? By investing in a retirement plan for many years, you can help accumulate the resources you will need to enjoy life as a retiree.
- You can help your business attract and retain employees. In a tight labor market, you'll want to employ all the advantages you can to attract and keep good employees — and a retirement plan can help.
- You can gain tax benefits. Your contributions to a retirement plan — on behalf of yourself and your employees — can be tax deductible. Plus, you can get tax credits for starting a new plan.

Here are some retirement plans to consider:

- **Owner-only 401(k)** — This plan is available to self-employed individuals and business owners with no full-time employees other than themselves or a spouse. You may even be able to choose a Roth option for your 401(k), which allows you to make after-tax contributions that can grow tax free. In 2024, the combined employee and employer contribution limit was \$69,000, or \$76,500 for those 50 or older. These limits are likely to rise in 2025.
- **Personal defined benefit plan** — You can establish a pension plan, also known as a defined benefit plan, for yourself if you're self-employed or own your own business. For 2024, the annual defined pension benefit for a business owner cannot exceed the lesser of \$275,000 or 100% of their average compensation for the previous three highest consecutive calendar years.
- **SEP IRA** — If you have just a few employees or are self-employed with no employees, you may want to consider an SEP IRA. In 2024, your contribution limit was 25% of your salary or \$69,000, whichever was less. The percentage of your salary you contribute to your SEP IRA is the same percentage of your eligible employees' salaries you must contribute to their SEP IRAs.
- **SIMPLE IRA** — A SIMPLE IRA is easy to set up and maintain, but while it may be advantageous for your employees, it's less generous to you, in terms of allowable

contributions, than an owner-only 401(k) or a SEP-IRA. In 2024, you could contribute up to \$16,000 to a SIMPLE IRA, or \$19,500 if you are 50 or older. You must put in 2% of your employees' salaries, regardless of whether they contribute, or match their contributions dollar for dollar, up to 3% of their salaries.

And keep this in mind: The SECURE 2.0 legislation has made it possible for you to offer a Roth version of a SEP or SIMPLE IRA. Although contributions to either Roth account are not deductible, earnings and withdrawals are tax free, provided you (and your employees) are at least 59½ and have had your account at least five years.

To learn more about these and other business retirement plans, you might want to contact a financial professional. But don't wait too long — the sooner you start preparing for your retirement — and helping your employees plan for theirs — the better.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. For more information contact: Marcus T. Coleman at Financial Adviser 856-778-2076



"The McCombs Mid-Day Massacre: Camden's Children Deserve Better"

By Bishop Levi Combs III

They say budgets are moral documents. If that is true, then what we have witnessed in Camden is a moral catastrophe. The proposed budget cuts by the Camden City School District, resulting in over 100 job losses and the dismantling of essential services are not simply administrative decisions. They are spiritual violations. They are political failures. They are moral crimes against our children.

Let me be clear: I stand with Camden Education Association president Pamela K. Clark when she says these cuts will impact every corner of our community. She is absolutely right. But let's go further. Let's be honest. The crisis we are witnessing today is not about the teachers. It's not about the counselors. It's not about the deans, the nurses, or the principals. It's about the people at the top who have consistently failed to steward this district with vision, integrity, and accountability.

The truth is simple: Camden has lost confidence not in its educators but in its administrators.

This \$91 million deficit didn't appear overnight like manna from heaven. It is the result of years of mismanagement, silence, and complicity. We deserve to know: What did Superintendent know, and when did she know it? She has a spiritual and civic obligation to give a full account of her stewardship. And make no mistake: she was appointed by the State of New Jersey to lead, not to abandon ship when the waters got rough.

What is most shameful is the timing. As she prepares to take on a more prestigious role at the state level, she leaves behind a city in academic and emotional crisis. The captain doesn't

leave her crew mid-storm. A shepherd doesn't flee the sheep when the wolves arrive. Yet that is precisely what this feels like.

And now the district proposes to gut our schools further by converting Morgan Village into an alternative school for middle and elementary students. What kind of logic is that? We have long known that child development requires structured, age-appropriate environments. God separated day from night, land from sea and even we understand that teenagers shouldn't be in the same school structure as 5-year-olds. This plan is not reform. This is chaos with a necktie.

To suggest that one principal can effectively manage four merged high schools is managerial malpractice. It places an impossible burden on leadership and guarantees that oversight, safety, and instruction will suffer. And who suffers most when systems fail? The student. The Black and brown student. The student who has already been failed by poverty, over-policing, and underfunding.

This isn't just bad policy. This is the dismantling of public education by design. Just like the Trump administration attempted to hollow out the U.S. Department of Education, we are watching the Superintendent's administration hollow out the soul of Camden's schools.

And here is the great hypocrisy: The very people who've been given power to uplift our children are the same ones putting nails in the coffin of our public education system. All while buildings were handed over for pennies to charter operators and "renaissance" schools that became havens of gentrified education, while our district schools were left to wither.

It's time for a reckoning.

This city is majority Black and brown. That means we are witnessing not just a fiscal crisis but a moral one. A racial one. A spiritual one. Our clergy, our leaders, our people must rise and say: "Not this time. Not our children."

We must call on the state to provide emergency funding. We must demand that budget cuts should start at the top, not from those who clean the classrooms, guard the doors, or nurture our babies. And most importantly, we must demand that Superintendent give a full and transparent account of her tenure.

As a pastor, I speak from a Black theological lens. As the late Rev. Dr. William Augustus Jones once preached, "The crisis in the Black community is not just economic, it is spiritual, and until we deal with the sin in the system, we will never be free." We cannot keep sacrificing our own people to maintain systems that do not serve us. We must stop crucifying the innocent while letting the guilty walk free.

Jesus did not die for this. He did not die for political promotions or institutional neglect. He died for the poor, the voiceless, the forgotten. And so must we live.

To every pastor, priest, imam, rabbi, educator, and community elder, I issue a sacred charge: It's time to untie our hands. We cannot afford the silence of the sanctuary while our schools are slaughtered. How long will we sit and nod politely at meetings while being fed crumbs from the master's table? God did not call us to be spectators, He called us to be fruit inspectors, as the prophet Amos declared, crying out against injustice in the name of righteousness. Jesus didn't sit quietly in the temple; He turned over the tables when corruption infected the religious leadership.

Yet today, too many of us turn a blind eye while Camden Community Partnership, Rutgers, and partisan politics serve us polished lies on silver platters.

The great father of this city, Rev. J. A. Jones, pastor emeritus of First Nazarene Baptist Church, once told me: "Combs, never let them tie your slapping hand!" And I say to you now: It's time to untie our hands and start flipping some tables. Flip the table of silence. Flip the table of complicity. Flip the table of systemic sabotage. Because if we don't, the blood of this generation's future will drip from our pulpits as much as from their policies.

Camden deserves better. Our children deserve more. And clergy, we've got some slapping to do.

NOTE: Thoughts and ideas of columnist does not necessarily reflect those of the editor and/or staff. Feel free to respond.

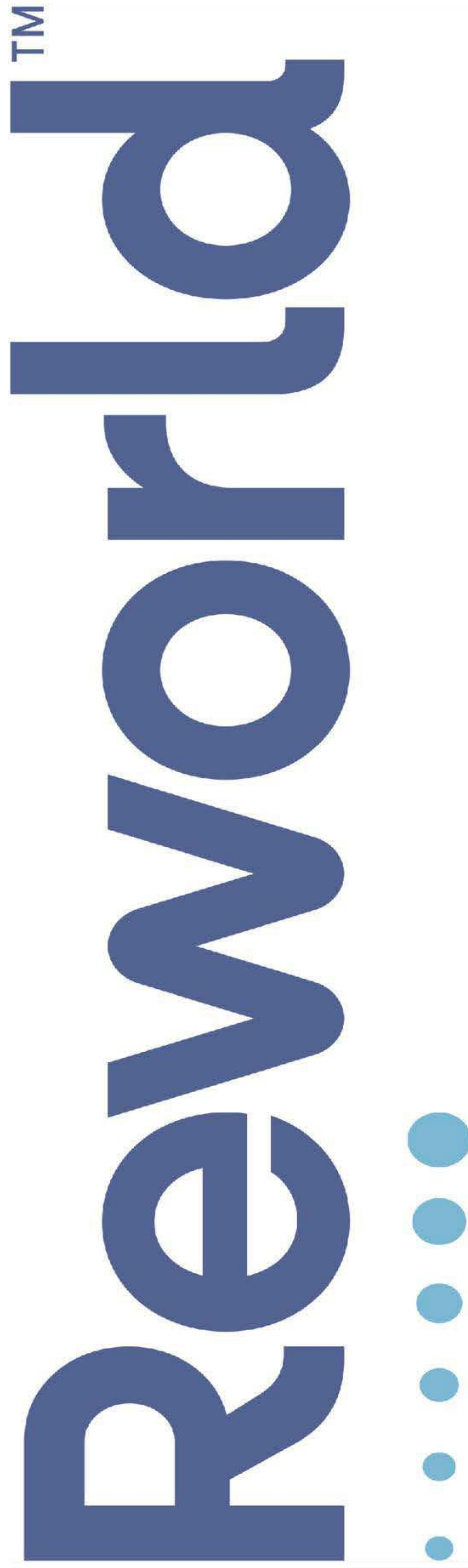


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It was a wonderful honor having Bishop Barbara Ward Farmer in our lives. She was a true servant of God whose love, wisdom and kindness touched countless lives.

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