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Pepco Installs First Electric Vehicle Charging Stations in City of Mt. Rainier

Chargers are the first of hundreds coming to Prince George's County

By SEAN MATTHEWS
Pepco, Communications

WASHINGTON (March 31, 2021)—Pepco joined City of Mt. Rainier Mayor Malinda Miles and the Maryland Energy Administration to celebrate the installation of three new Level 2 electric vehicle charging stations, part of the hundreds to be installed by Pepco in Prince George's County as part of the company's EVsmart program. These new electric vehicle charging stations are available for public use at 35th St. in Mt. Rainier.

Pepco's EVsmart program was launched in 2019 to bring public charging networks to Prince George's and Montgomery counties and provide incentives for customers making the switch to this cleaner and more efficient form of transportation. Information about how the program works and how residents and municipalities can get involved can be found here: Pepco - EVsmart. Pepco is excited to work with local governments to install more charging stations on public property across the company's service area.

Pepco has extensive EVsmart plans in Prince George's County. Recently, four new charging stations were energized at the Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro. Additionally, there are five stations in Greenbelt that are currently scheduled to be completed and construction is planned for sites in Capitol Heights, Forest Heights and Oxon Hill. EVsmart installations in Prince George's County will be completed by the end of 2023.

At the event held on March 22, Mayor Miles and representatives from Pepco, among others, gave remarks about the significance of this installation before cutting a ribbon.

Mayor Malinda Miles: "I want to say to Pepco and to Maryland Energy Administration, we have done amazing things together with electric infrastructure, and we're cutting down on energy costs."

Will Ellis, Pepco region vice president:

"Pepco is excited to expand this program to help our communities benefit from this clean energy transformation. I want to thank Mayor Miles for making Mt. Rainier the first Prince George's County community to benefit from these charging stations."

To learn more about Pepco, visit The Source, our online newsroom. Find additional information by visiting pepco.com, on Facebook at facebook.com/pepcoconnect and on Twitter at twitter.com/pepcoconnect. Pepco's mobile app is available at pepco.com/mobileapp.

Pepco is a unit of Exelon Corporation (Nasdaq: EXC), the nation's leading energy provider, with approximately 10 million customers. Pepco provides safe and reliable energy service to approximately 894,000 customers in the District of Columbia and Maryland.



PHOTOS COURTESY PEPCO

Mt. Rainier's new EVsmart electric vehicle charging facility is first of its kind to open in Prince George's County.



Cutting the ribbon from left to right: Barbara Gonzalez, program manager, Pepco; Bryan Knedler, Ward 2 councilmember; Mt. Rainier Mayor Malinda Miles; Celina Benitez, Ward 1 councilmember; Will Ellis, region vice president, Pepco; Vanessa Sanchez, marketing specialist, Pepco; Mary Beth Tung, director, Maryland Energy Administration.

Governor Hogan, County Executive Alsobrooks Announce FEMA Community Vaccination Center in Prince George's County

Site at Greenbelt Metro Station To Open April 7

By SHAREESE CHURCHILL
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 30, 2021)—Governor Larry Hogan and Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks today announced that FEMA has agreed to open a community vaccination center in Prince George's County beginning next week.

The Federal Pilot Community Vaccination Center (CVC)—Maryland will be located at the Greenbelt Metro Station, and open April 7, with its daily schedule to be announced. As more vaccine doses become available, the center's capacity is expected to be up to 3,000 shots per day. This will be the first federally-operated site in Maryland, and it will utilize direct

vaccine allocations from the federal government.

"We are grateful to the White House, FEMA, and all of our federal partners for working with us to expand our vaccination campaign in Prince George's County and across the state," said Governor Hogan. "By the end of April, we will have more than 12 mass vaccination sites across Maryland as part of a rapidly expanding vaccine distribution network. These vaccines are safe and effective, and when your turn arrives, we urge Marylanders to get vaccinated."

"Prince George's County has certainly been the hardest-hit jurisdiction in the region, and we thank

See FEMA Page A5

Md. Mental Health Facilities Will Have to Report Sexual Abuse

By MADISON HUNT
Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau

A Maryland bill would require all mental health facilities to report complaints of sexual abuse and harassment to state agencies within 24 hours.

According to Disability Justice, an online resource for legal professionals dedicated to protecting people with developmental disabilities, only 3% of sexual abuse cases involving people with developmental disabilities are ever reported.

HB881, cross-filed with SB815, mandates all mental health facilities—licensed residential treatment centers, state facilities or hospitals with an inpatient psychiatric service—report complaints of sexual abuse and harassment within a 24-hour pe-

riod to certain state agencies, including the Behavioral Health Administration, the Office of Health Care Quality and Child Protective Services.

Forty-one mental health facilities in Maryland, including residential treatment centers, would be added and required to file sexual abuse complaints to the designated agencies, under the bill.

There have been 38 reports of sexual abuse and harassment from five state psychiatric hospitals in 2020 to the Maryland Health Department, according to the bill's fiscal analysis.

The Maryland Department of

See MENTAL HEALTH Page A5

Distracted Driving Crashes Kill Nine People Per Day in America

AAA unveils new public service announcement during national distracted driving awareness month

By PRESS OFFICER
AAA Mid-Atlantic

WASHINGTON (April 1, 2021)—As traffic begins to pick up across the country with increased vaccinations, and decreased pandemic restrictions, drivers must realize distracted driving escalated amid the pandemic, and grasp the importance of focusing on the road ahead, and not on their smartphones. Distracted driving crashes killed 3,142 people in the United States in 2019, an average of nine deaths per day, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). That number was up 10 percent from the year before (2,839 deaths in 2018). April is designated National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. AAA Mid-Atlantic

is warning drivers of the inherent risks of driving while distracted.

Locally, distracted driving was a factor in 5.4 percent of all traffic fatalities in the nation's capital in the period from 2016-2019, data from Washington, D.C. reveal. What is more, "data from 2016-2019 crashes identified distracted driving as a factor for 4.8 percent (5,117) of all crashes (106,619), 6.3 percent (721) of all injuries (11,357), and 5.4 percent (6) of all fatalities (112) in the District." That's according to the 2020-2025 District of Columbia Strategic Highway Safety Plan, which was published January 31, 2021.

Data also showed that many drivers who drove distracted were also driving aggressively and impaired, reports the District of Columbia Highway Safety

Office. The District concedes: "Unfortunately, it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics on the use of cell phones while driving or using a navigation system or other in-vehicle electronics as a contributor to crashes."

More than 26,000 people are injured and an average of 181 others die each year on Maryland roads because of distracted driving involved crashes, according to the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration's (MDOT MVA) Highway Safety Office. Distracted driving contributes to 48 percent of all crashes in the state.

Across the Potomac in Virginia, 120 people died and more than 13,000 were injured on Virginia's roads in 2019 as a result of distracted driving crashes. Deaths from distracted driving

crashes made up nearly 15% of all traffic deaths in the state in 2019. One out of every five injuries in Virginia in 2019 was from a distracted driving related crash, reports the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles.

"A collision report shows in 2020, phone distraction frequency accelerated 8.1 percent among American drivers amid the March lockdowns, and 7.1 percent during the November virus surge period, comprising a 17 percent increase, November versus January," said John B. Townsend II, AAA Mid-Atlantic's Manager of Public and Government Affairs. "Even if drivers use their cell phones to talk, text, or take Zoom calls, or watch videos or TV on their devices, while parked, or stopped at a red light, once they start moving, their mind is still not fully focused on the task of driving. It takes up to 27 seconds for our minds to regain full attention after issuing voice commands to our car's infotainment system, or talking on our smartphone while driving. This is a danger-

ous situation that could lead to inattention blindness, where you're looking at the road, but not seeing what's in front of you, putting other drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians at risk."

Distracted driving remains a growing traffic safety problem, reveals the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's 2019 Traffic Safety Culture Index. The survey found most drivers (96 percent) believe typing or reading on a hand-held cellphone while driving to be very or extremely dangerous, but 39% admit to reading and 29% admit to typing on a smartphone at least once while behind the wheel within the last month.

Even though using a hand-held device is illegal while driving and while stopped at a red light or stop sign in many states, the survey suggests some drivers do so anyway and aren't aware of the "hangover effect," which comes from interacting with technology while on the road. In a study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, researchers found drivers can experience a "hangover effect" where the mind stays distracted for up to 27 seconds after using smartphones or voice-to-text vehicle infotainment systems to send text messages, make phone calls or update social media.

In Washington, D.C. "approximately of all drivers who drive distracted and were involved in a crash, 38 percent held a permit

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TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

In and Around Morningside-Skyline

by Mary McHale 301-735-3451

Temple Hills Skate Palace due to close April 5—but negotiations continue

Over the years, the establishment went by many names, but most remember it as Crystal's Skate Palace—a place where friends and family came together to let the good times roll. The rink was known for playing the best throwback jams, Go-Go music and current charting tunes.

And it is the largest roller-skating rink in Maryland!

It opened 37 years ago on the abandoned site of a closed department store. It's been busy ever since for those who've skated for years and for the new skaters. And especially for the kids.

My next-door neighbors, John and Stacie Smith, longtime skaters, met at a rink in Waldorf or Clinton. But it closed; they got married and moved their skate nights to Temple Hills.

Here are a couple of reviews:

Kimberly J. said, "This rink is definitely retro. I felt like I was in the '90s. So nostalgic. The staff was friendly, the skates were in good condition, and the music was great."

Amada B.: "Literally nothing has changed. I feel like I'm in a time machine when I walk in."

John and Stacy will have to move those skate nights to Seabrook Skate Center or Kalorama. But they'll miss the Temple Hills Skate Palace. And what happens to the hundreds of kids who love it. Where will they go to use all that energy?

The Smiths are continuing to lobby to keep the Skate Palace open. They'd like to see Maryland Park & Planning get involved.

Town of Morningside

The Town will hold Election for two open Council Seats on Monday, May 3, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Town Hall.

The Annual Spring Clean-Up is coming up: Saturday May 15, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday, May 16, 9 a.m. to noon. A free bag of mulch will be given each resident, while supplies last.

To have your church group, band, scouts, clowns, vintage fire truck or campaigner in the Morningside Independence Day Parade, contact Susan Mullins at 301-412-0135 or call the Town Hall.

McNamara invites you to golf

Bishop McNamara High School invites

golfers to participate in the Mustang Cup Golf Tournament, Friday, June 18, at Renditions Golf Course in Davidsonville. Check-in 7:30, tee time 9. Food & drink included. For more information, go online to Mustang Cup Golf Tournament.

Also, they are seeking sponsors. Go to Melissa.AntonioHuaara@bmhs.org.

La Reine High School due to be torn down!

But before the ball crashes into it, alumnae can attend The Last Chance Dance. Of the 3200 La Reine graduates between 1964 and 1992, the Facebook page has 1.2K members. Some will turn out on June 12 for the Last Chance Dance, which is not a dance, but a final opportunity to gather in the beautiful La Reine building before it's demolished.

More about this unusual event in next week's column.

They're coming

The Washington Post says, "What is most important is what the cicada does not do. It does not bite or sting us, it is not poisonous to the touch, and it does not eat our plants, or give them disease, or cover our patios and outdoor furniture in foul secretions."

What they do is make a lot of noise, and I look forward to their coming every 17 years.

Changing landscape

Make D.C. the 51st State? Some members of the House Oversight and Reform Committee spoke in a hearing on March 22, in favor of Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton's bill, which would do just that.

A two-story Silver Diner will open next spring on Half Street next to Nats Stadium, with an outdoor terrace overlooking Nationals Park. (I enjoy diners because they usually offer liver & onions and chicken-fried steak, two of my favorite dishes.)

uBreakiFix, an electronics repair shop in Brandywine, is open for business. They fix smartphones, tablets, computers, drones, hoverboards, game consoles—anything with a power button. Info: 301-782-4352.

A home on Maple Rd., in Morningside, just sold for \$227,000.

Mary's COVID-19 report

Seventeen more Marylanders have died

of COVID-19, bringing the total of Maryland deaths to 8,303. And through April 1, at 5 p.m., the State has had 412,928 cases, of which 1,584 are new!

Gov. Hogan said all Marylanders 16 & up can soon register for an appointment at one of the State's mass vaccination sites. He also suggested making an appointment at the first walk-up mass vaccination site in Salisbury, then do an Ocean City weekend!

May they rest in peace

• Virgil Edward Click, 93, of Clinton, former owner of Virgil's Sunoco Station in Suitland, died Sept 21, 2020. Survivors include wife Barbara, son Michael, daughter Bernidine, stepdaughters Joyce and Janet, grand- and great-children.

• Francis Francois, 87, previously of Bowie, chief judge of the Orphan's Court 1962–1966, member of the County Council 1971–1980, president of the National Association of Counties, Washingtonian of the Year, and a member of the Metropolitan Council of Governments, died of COVID-19 Feb. 17 in Chicago where he had moved in 2013. His wife Eileen preceded him in death. He was the father of Joseph, Marie, Michael, Monica, and Susan, and a grandfather.

• The Rev. Anthony "Big Tony" Lee, 52, former coach at Oxon Hill High and D.C. schools, and founder of Pillar of Truth Bible Church in Capitol Heights, died Jan. 4 of complications of COVID-19. He played football at Dunbar and Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, graduating in 1991, worked for the D.C. Department of Employment Services and the United Planning Organization. But mostly he loved coaching. He and his wife Earline Lee have four daughters.

Milestones

Happy birthday to Donna Wood, April 11; Darlie Fay Norton and Donald Brown Jr., April 13; Jean Osterkamp, Donald Brown Sr., Sarah Shipman, Autumn Williams and Fr. Jeffrey Samaha, April 14; Bill Ward, Eva Hay and Les Borhman, April 15; Tara Destiny Proctor, Edna Ducote and Wanda Brooke, April 16.

Happy anniversary to Chuck and Laura Smith Jenkins, their 45th on April 10; and to Tex and Rickie Beardmore, their 57th on April 11.

Around the County

County Library System Launches Bilingual COVID-19 "Vaccine Hunter Hotline"

Through the Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS) Foundation and a grant from Capital One Foundation, PGCMLS has launched an English/Spanish COVID-19 Vaccine Hunter Hotline. The hotline will assist the public by directly booking vaccination appointments based on eligibility and availability, adding County residents and workers to vaccine pre-registration lists, and answering any questions about the vaccination process. The goal of the hotline is to assist Prince George's County residents and workers with obtaining vaccine appointments as quickly as possible. This hotline differs from existing county and state hotlines in that it reviews vaccination options across all available providers: retail pharmacies and grocery stores, healthcare facilities, Prince George's County, the State of Maryland, Veterans Administration (VA), and more. The Hotline number is 240-392-3622.

—COUNCIL CONNECTIONS, April 2, 2021

Luminis Health Doctors Community Medical Center Announces

Chief Nursing Officer and Vice President

LANHAM, Md. (April 1, 2021)—Luminis Health Doctors Community Medical Center (LHDCMC) announces Crystal Beckford as its chief nursing officer and vice president of patient care services.

Beckford brings more than 25 years of executive healthcare experience to this role and has a proven track record in hospital, health plan, long-term care and health insurance leadership. She will work with the medical center's clinical team, medical staff and members of the executive team to set nursing and clinical strategies, and drive quality and operational excellence in clinical operations.

"Everyone who met Crystal during the interview process commented about her knowledge level, energy, passion for excellence and inclusive leadership style," said Deneen Richmond, president of Luminis Health Doctors Community Medical Center. "She will empower our nursing staff to continue to provide and expand high-quality care for our patients."

"I am committed to working with an exceptional team to deliver an impeccable clinical experience for the patients we serve," said Crystal Beckford, chief nursing officer and vice president of patient care services. "While the work can be daunting at times, it is also very rewarding. I look forward to the endless possibilities at Doctors Community Medical Center."

Prior to joining LHDCMC, Beckford was a senior leader at CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield in the Patient Centered Medical Home program. She has held similar positions at Kaiser Permanente, Mid-Atlantic, St. Luke's Hospital in Jacksonville, FL, and Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, MD.

—Justin McLeod, Doctors Community Hospital



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health Dennis R. Schrader (center), Lt. Governor Boyd K. Rutherford (second from left) and National Guard Brigadier General Janeen Birkhead (right), at City of Praise Ministries, Landover, MD.

Secretary Dennis R. Schrader Attends Opening Of COVID-19 Testing Center and Visits COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic Targeting Minority Populations in Prince George's County

BALTIMORE (April 3, 2021)—[Last Saturday], Maryland Department of Health (MDH) Secretary Dennis R. Schrader attended the opening of a new COVID-19 testing site at the City of Praise Family Ministries in Landover, MD, and visited a Vaccine Equity Task Force Mobile (VETF) vaccination clinic serving the LatinX and Hispanic population in Adelphi, MD.

Maryland Lt. Governor Boyd K. Rutherford; National Guard Brigadier General Janeen Birkhead, who is also the head of Maryland's Vaccine Equity Task Force; and officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also attended the opening of the testing site at City of Praise Family Ministries, which has more than 10,000 congregation members, in Landover.

At Mary's Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center serving over 60,000 people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds and located in a MDH target underserved zip code, 20783, healthcare workers members of the VETF, administered more than 200 first-dose vaccines to community members.

"Testing is one of the four pillars of Governor Hogan's Maryland Strong Roadmap to Recovery and has been and remains a critical tool in this fight," said Acting Secretary Dennis R. Schrader. "I am thrilled that this community and Prince George's County has this testing site, which is one of several hundred we have established across the state."

"Dr. Elliott and his team at Mary's Center reaching into the community to identify people to vaccinate and the Vaccine Equity Task Force providing medical and administrative support is another example of how we are vaccinating populations in target zip codes," said Acting Secretary Dennis R. Schrader. "Forging these partnerships is critical to our vaccinating underserved Marylanders and leaving no one behind."

—Maryland Department of Health

Brandywine-Aquasco

by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

2020 TOP U.S. ARMY SOLDIER

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore is the alma mater of the U.S. Army's 2020 Soldier of the Year. Sgt. James B. Akinola, a combat medic assigned to Moncrief Army Health Clinic at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C., earned the honor this past fall with the best cumulative performance on a series of physical military skill and written tests.

"I always had that sense to serve," Akinola said during an interview on a "Military Matters" podcast. "I always wanted to give back to the country." A 2009 Bowie High School graduate, Akinola shared with podcast host Rod Rodriguez that he is the son of Nigerian immigrants and views military service as a way of showing appreciation for a nation that provided his family an opportunity for a new life.

He earned a bachelor's degree in biology from UMES in 2015. Akinola enlisted in 2017 and recalled in the November podcast interview a conversation with a friend where one of them said "let's continue the greatness we started in college" joining the army. "I took that leap of faith," he told Rodriguez, "and it hasn't steered me wrong yet."

The 19th annual "Best Warrior Competition", conducted during the early fall, was modified because of the novel coronavirus pandemic. Organizers took "unprecedented steps to ensure the safety of our soldiers, while still creating a positive environment to encourage competition and recognize the best," said Sgt. Maj. Of the Army Michael Grinston, according to the competition's website.

Akinola and 10 other finalists completed a standard "combat fitness test" demonstrated weapons' marksmanship, endured a (timed) 12-mile trek known as a "ruck march" over rough terrain that included carrying a rifle and a 45-pound load and performed other "warrior tasks and drills." Competitors also wrote an essay and met with senior enlisted leaders for an interview.

"There's a lot of tests, both fiscally and mentally," Akinola told the Federal News Network's Tom Temlin. "My leaders helped me prepare for it. And when it came to competing, all I had to do was execute."

While in the midst of pursuing the title of top enlisted man, he earned a promotion to sergeant. In addition to being named 2020 Soldier of the Year, Akinola participated in a socially distanced dedication ceremony Nov. 11 at the Museum of the U.S. Army in Fort Belvoir, Va. CBS Evening News reporter Chip Reid interviewed him as they strolled among the new museum's exhibits.

In the November Military Matters podcast interview, "Akinola said he was honored to be among the first to see the museum's 1,300 artifacts, including a moving exhibit about integration of troops." "To see what people who came before you have been through, what they used and what you use today, and how time has changed" impressed him.

"I'm very happy and humbled to continue the legacy that was left for me to continue passing (on)", he said. "I feel like I'm holding the Olympic torch." "I'm just ready to inspire the next generation and continue to be inspired by my battles." Akinola said during the interview, "Anybody who feels like they want to make it to this level, I want to assure them they can make it."

His immediate career goals include qualifying for an Expert Field Medical Badge and completing Airborne School. UMES THE KEY (A newsletter for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends) February 2021 Edition.

AQUASCO SPEEDWAY

Aquasco Speedway in Aquasco, Maryland was a pioneering track in the east. Aquasco Speedway was pretty much carved out of the woods located off route 381. In operation for a short 22 years. It hosted the best and fastest racers from all over the USA. Developed by Alfonso and Albert Procopio in the mid 1950s. It was intended for it to be a purpose-built strip for quarter mile racing and the first of its kind in the area. The track was home to the President's Cup Nationals, which are now held at Maryland International Raceway. Richard Petty, Shirley Muldowney, Don Prudhomme, Bunny Burkett were among some of the great drag racers. The track was located just minutes south of Washington, DC. The track is no longer in operation. Information from Wikipedia.

EMERGENCY ROOM

Seek emergency care immediately in a potentially life-threatening situation. Best for: allergic reactions, breathing problems, babies needing immediate care, serious eye or head injuries, severe burns, suspected drug overdose, poisoning, severe abdominal pain, severe chest pain, possible heart attack or stroke symptoms, high fever. To find out how to access care near you, including telemedicine virtual visits with a doctor, visit umcapitalregional.org. Information from UM Capital Region Newsletter that I received.

"HAPPY EASTER TO ALL MY READERS"

COMMUNITY

Distracted from A1

in the District, 31 percent were from Maryland, and 13 percent were from Virginia. 10 percent were from other states, and 8 percent were unknown," reports the District of Columbia Highway Safety Office. The District's distracted driving law lays it down. It states: "No person shall use a mobile telephone or other electronic device while operating a moving motor vehicle in the District of Columbia unless the telephone or device is equipped with a hands-free accessory." First offense is a fine of \$100, the third offense is a fine of \$200 plus a 30-90 day suspension of driving privileges.

All drivers in Maryland are prohibited from using a cellphone without a hands free device while operating a motor vehicle. Maryland law prohibits the use of a handheld cellphone and texting while driving. First-time offenders caught using a cell phone while driving face a maximum of an \$83 fine, second-time offenders a maximum of \$140 fine and third-time offenders a maximum of \$160 fine. These are primary offenses and police officers can stop drivers when those activities are observed, regardless of the presence of other violations. Texting laws prohibit a person from using a text-messaging device to write, send, or read a text or electronic message while operating a motor vehicle. The Maryland State Police issued 16,050 citations and 18,671 warnings for distracted driving violations in 2018.

As of January 1, 2021, driving with a cell phone in your hand is illegal in Virginia. Violators of the new hands-free law face an initial fine of \$125. This year, the Virginia General Assembly voted to require the dangers of distracted driving danger be included as part of driver's education training for Virginia teens.

This year, AAA continues its distracted driving prevention initiative, titled "Don't Drive Intoxicated. Don't Drive Intoxicated." The goal of the multi-media initiative is to remind drivers that the consequences of both alcohol-impaired driving and smartphone use behind the wheel could be the same—crashes that result in deaths and injuries. AAA is releasing a new television public service announcement (PSA) which targets drivers who text while they are alone in their vehicle. The PSAs can be viewed here. For more information visit aaa.com/dontdrivedistracted.

AAA provides automotive, travel, and insurance services to 61 million members nationwide and nearly 88,000 members in the District of Columbia. AAA advocates for the safety and mobility of its members and has been committed to outstanding road service for more than 100 years. AAA is a non-stock, non-profit corporation working on behalf of motorists, who can now map a route, find local gas prices, discover discounts, book a hotel, and track their roadside assistance service with the AAA Mobile app (AAA.com/mobile) for iPhone, iPad and Android. For more information, visit www.AAA.com.

Expansive COVID-19 Bill Advancing in Maryland Legislature

By CALLAN TANSILL-SUDDATH
Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau

A bill that would require the Maryland Department of Health to create and implement a two-year plan for COVID-19 recovery by June 1, among other measures, is nearing passage in the Maryland General Assembly.

With a price tag of at least \$152.5 million in federal funds, the COVID-19 Testing, Contact Tracing, and Vaccination Act of 2021 (SB741) offers a multifaceted approach to COVID-19 recovery through the next two years.

Central to the measure is a framework that would require the state health department to collaborate with local health departments to organize efforts to "monitor, prevent, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19," the fiscal note says.

Included in the guidelines the bill lays out for state and local health departments are requirements to set precise targets for the number of COVID-19 tests to administer each month, creating methods for addressing responses that have fallen short, and a requirement to bill health insurance, when applicable, for all COVID-19 tests.

But insurance companies can abstain from covering the cost of tests administered for preemptive workplace safety or other similar reasons; if passed, this bill would remove that caveat.

Residents without health insurance can access free COVID-19 tests at any state-run or county-run testing site, according to the Maryland Department of Health.

Pharmacies and local health departments will also be required to look for ways to abate barriers to accessible, at-home COVID-19 tests and to encourage more pharmacies and healthcare practitioners to offer testing services.

The bill also prioritizes the assessment

and improvement of contact tracing in each individual jurisdiction, including a method for departments of health to self-monitor how well contact tracing is working.

Through the proposed Maryland Public Health Jobs Corps, local health departments would recruit unemployed or displaced workers to serve in different roles that aid in the response to the coronavirus.

When their duties are complete, the workers would transition to more permanent roles that target "Post-pandemic population health needs of underserved communities and vulnerable populations," the bill says.

Contact tracing, for example, is a role even those with little or no medical experience can perform.

"The idea is to recruit people who are available because of unemployment... Tracing is basically calling people on the phone, asking them questions, writing down the answers, and that's very much what waiters and waitresses do. There are all these laid-off waiters and waitresses, so it seems like a perfect match of opportunity and need," Sen. Jim Rosapepe, D-Prince George's, the bill's sponsor, told Capital News Service.

The Maryland Health Department must award grants totaling \$15 million to local jurisdictions to fund vaccination efforts during the 2021 and 2022 fiscal years; additional funding can be requested if the initial amount proves insufficient.

The state health department must provide grants of up to \$9 million and \$36 million to cover testing services for assisted living facilities and home health agencies in fiscal years 2021 and 2022, respectively.

The health department must also provide grants of up to \$5.5 million and \$22 million the next year to cover testing services in nursing homes in fiscal years 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Funding for these allocations comes from the money Maryland received from President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package passed March 11.

In return, home health agencies, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes must create and implement COVID-19 testing plans that ensure every staff member and resident is regularly tested for the virus.

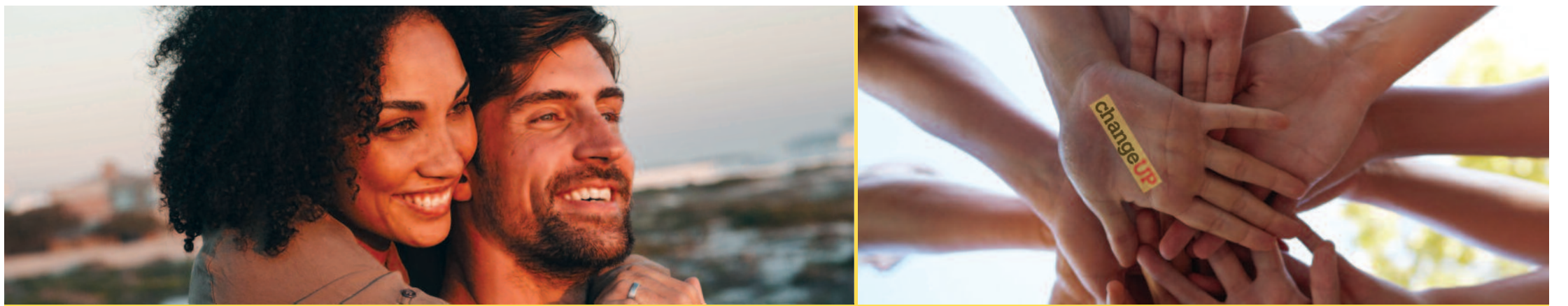
Institutes of higher education must create similar testing policies, including a requirement of students to provide valid test results before attending class in-person.

Finally, the bill proposes the formation of the Maryland Public Health Infrastructure Modernization Workgroup, which will be composed of two state senators, two state delegates, one representative of the Department of Budget and Management, and representatives from both local and state health departments, as well as miscellaneous subject experts and stakeholders.

The group will determine what needs to be done to improve the state's public health services and offer suggestions for what can be done to prepare for future public health emergencies; the health department must submit a report of these findings to the General Assembly by Dec. 1.

Among the concerns going forward are uncertainty about how long vaccines provide protection, the possible need for booster shots down the line, and new COVID-19 variants. Acting Health Secretary Dennis Schrader said during a Vaccine Oversight Work Group Committee meeting Monday [March 29].

"The thrust of the bill is essentially for the state for this year and next year to have a plan that is visible, that is accessible that is understandable ... about how we're going to do the testing, tracing and vaccinations that we need to do," Rosapepe said during the bill's hearing in the House Tuesday [March 30].



This is more than health care. It's a movement.
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COMMENTARY

Marc Morial

President and CEO, National Urban League



To Be Equal:

Vanita Gupta and Kristen Clarke Are the Nation's Greatest Hope for Real Reform Within the Justice Department

"We are concerned with what seems like foot-dragging and an effort to slow down the confirmation process of eminently qualified individuals and the fact that these nominees are women, people of color, sons or daughters of immigrants. There seems to be a pattern that is very troubling. It seems like this treatment is a double standard because we're seeing that historically other administrations have been able to move much more quickly."

—Unidos US President and CEO Janet Murguía

Vanita Gupta, President Biden's nominee for Associate Attorney General, and Kristen Clarke,

his nominee to lead the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, are two of the most highly-qualified, experienced, and principled civil rights attorneys in the nation.

As I said when their nominations were announced, "It is the nomination of my esteemed sisters in the civil rights movement—Vanita Gupta and Kristen Clarke—that gives the nation its greatest hope for real reform within the Justice Department. They both have spent their entire careers fighting for racial justice. President-elect Biden could not have made a better choice to fill these vital roles."

They will lead the fight against racially-motivated voter suppression, defend the nation against

white supremacist terrorism, and reinvigorate the Justice Department's commitment to racial and social justice.

That's precisely why they are the target of a shockingly dishonest, racist, and misogynistic smear campaign intended to derail their confirmation by the Senate.

"If the GOP's strategy is to try to restrict voting rights as much as possible, then delaying these two nominees from taking office is totally consistent with that," Gerry Hebert of the Campaign Legal Center said. "That's what's likely motivating the opposition."

Gupta has been endorsed by half a dozen leading law enforcement organizations including the National Fraternal Order of Police, whose president said of Gupta, "... her open and candid approach has created a working relationship that is grounded in mutual respect and understanding."

Yet the ironically-named Honest Elections Project, a dark-money voter suppression group, ran a wildly dishonest ad regarding her relationship with law enforcement. A Washington Post editorial called the ad "mainly notable for the magnitude of the lies and distortions it crams into 30 seconds."

Clarke spent much of her career defending the religious rights of Jews. Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO and national director of the Anti-Defamation League, wrote in a letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee of her "deep and unambiguous personal commitment to justice for all, including her

steadfast support in the fight against antisemitism."

That hasn't stopped voting rights opponents from attempting to tar her with the work of a controversial author whose only connection to Clark is that the Harvard Black Students Association, which she led as a 19-year-old undergrad, accepted his offer to speak on campus nearly three decades ago. She recently apologized, saying the author should not have been given a platform to share his racist views.

Elie Mystal, justice correspondent for The Nation pointed out: the smear campaigns are part of a long-game effort to "delegitimize the quest for social and racial justice and accuse anybody who strives for equality under the law to be harboring anti-white (which to them means 'anti-American') views."

The facts are clear. The eminently qualified nominees Vanita Gupta and Kristen Clarke must be confirmed immediately so the nation can begin the process of restoring faith in the rule of law and defeat the wave of racially-motivated voter suppression efforts that arose in response to record Black turnout in the 2020 election.

As Senate Judiciary Committee member Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island wrote, "I get it. If I were a right-wing special interest group, the last thing I would want is these two experienced lawyers wielding the power of the Justice Department to defend voting rights. But for everybody else, these women are two appointments to applaud."

Marion Wright Edelman

President Emerita,
Children's Defense Fund



ChildWatch:

A Season for Hope and Just Action

Passover and Easter celebrations are times of joyous sacredness with family and community rituals centered on the promises of deliverance, new hope, and rebirth—promises we desperately need. As beloved Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu said about Easter: "In the middle of our faith is the death and resurrection. Nothing could have been more hopeless than Good Friday—but then Easter happened, and forever we have to become prisoners of hope."

The American World Jewish Services supplement to their Global Justice Haggadah for Passover

in 2020, "Hope Amidst the Tears", said: "In the telling of the Passover story, we recount the oppression that our ancestors experienced when we were slaves in Egypt. We dip a growing vegetable—karpas—into saltwater, to taste their tears of grief mingled with our hopes for life, health and renewal for a more just world.

"This year, the tears are ours.

"They are the tears of the sick and their loved ones who worry or mourn. They are the tears of those who have lost their jobs, are uninsured, live in isolation, or must go to work each day to provide

essential services to others. They're the tears of courageous health care workers who save lives and risk their own.

"We must acknowledge this pain and suffering and allow ourselves the space to grieve. Yet, as the karpas ritual beckons, we must also look toward the future with a sense of hope and possibility. Passover arrives on the precipice of spring, when new growth is just around the corner. All over the world, resilience, strength, compassion and innovation will grow from under this tragedy.

"We honor the tears, but we also bless the hope."

This holy season portends signs of hope as we strive to live into the meaning of Passover and Easter to combat oppression and injustice and help fulfill the promise of freedom and justice. We must ensure that death-dealing empires and injustice do not have the last word. In our celebrations may we experience new meaning in the present movement and mount new efforts to build a more just world especially for children and families left behind in poverty.

The Children's Defense Fund's recent annual State of America's Children® report showed again this year that children remain our poorest age group

and that children of color and our youngest children suffer the highest poverty rates. Shame on us. The pandemic and economic downturn have negatively affected children's lives in multiple ways but there is hope on the horizon with the passage of the Biden administration's American Rescue Plan Act which seeks to cut child poverty in half. There is hope our nation will continue to confront economic and racial injustices exacerbated by COVID-19. And there is hope of significant action to staunch gun violence in our nation. But we must all raise our voices to ensure that hope becomes reality.

God, guide our faith that by it we might make our children and nation whole again.

God, help us to believe with every ounce of our being that we, with Your help, can save our children and make them well.

God, renew our spirits—Your spirit within us—and make us worthy carriers of Your message of love and hope and life in all we say and do this day and forever more.

Brown, Hoyer, Cardin and Van Hollen Applaud New FEMA Vaccination Site For Prince George's County

"It is clear that we must meet vulnerable communities where they are."

WASHINGTON (March 31, 2021)—Congressman Anthony G. Brown, Congressman Steny H. Hoyer and U.S. Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen (all D-Md.) applauded the announcement that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will establish a community vaccination center in Prince George's County beginning on April 7, located at the Greenbelt Metro Station.

The American Rescue Plan invests more than \$20 billion to implement a national vaccination strategy. Under President Biden's leadership, 148 million doses have been given, at a rate of 2.77 million doses per day. In February, Brown and Hoyer wrote to the Biden-Harris Administration requesting a federally run vaccination site in Prince George's County to ensure equitable vaccine distribution in communities of color.

"The new vaccination site in Prince George's County is wel-

come news for the residents of the National Capital Region and for our country as we accelerate efforts to quickly and equitably vaccinate every eligible adult. In order to defeat this pandemic, we cannot leave any individual or community behind," the lawmakers said. "Prince Georgians have been hit especially hard by this pandemic and have accounted for a disproportionate number of COVID-19 deaths and cases. This federal site will improve vaccination rates among Black Marylanders and the Latino community, which have had the lowest vaccination rates across our state. It is clear that we must meet vulnerable communities where they are, and this site will also ensure Marylanders are able to access vaccine appointments through public transit options like WMATA.

The lawmakers continued, "Vaccination equity must be central to our overall distribution strategy. Congress and the Biden

Administration promised to aggressively ramp up vaccinations for every American in order to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic, and we're delivering. We are hopeful that community vaccination sites, like this one in Greenbelt, will become a model for success nationwide."

Prince George's County, a majority-minority jurisdiction, has consistently trailed the rest of the state in vaccinations. Communities of color continue to face barriers, despite these populations being the hardest hit by the pandemic. Lawmakers have previously raised issues with vaccine allotments, appointment accessibility, website issues and unclear state guidance.

The center's capacity is expected to reach 3,000 doses per day. This will be the first federally-operated site in Maryland, utilizing direct vaccine allocations from the federal government.

Council Chair Calvin S. Hawkins, II Responds to County Executive Selection for New Prince George's County Chief of Police

The Prince George's County Council welcomes County Executive Angela Alsobrooks' announcement of her selection for the County's next Chief of Police, City of Dallas Deputy Police Chief Malik Aziz.

We appreciate the leadership and partnership of County Executive Alsobrooks and her executive team in the nationwide search for a new police chief.

The Council believes it is important for our next police chief to build trust in the community, and improve relationships, accountability and inclusiveness across the department.

With the recommendations of the County's Police Reform Work Group and other important public input as a guide, the selection of a new police chief offers a critical step forward to

achieve the work to transform our police department and better serve our community.

The Council looks forward to active community engagement during its confirmation proceedings, which will be scheduled once the appointment is officially transmitted by the County Executive to the Council.

Congressman Anthony Brown: Governor Hogan Must Answer for This Serious Breach of the Public's Trust

"While Marylanders, particularly communities of color, were dying and desperate for help, Governor Hogan prioritized an expensive photo-op and book sales."

WASHINGTON (April 5, 2021)—Congressman Anthony G. Brown (MD-04) released the following statement on the recent state audit of Governor Hogan's flawed purchase of half a million South Korean LabGenomics coronavirus tests, most of which were likely never used:

"Marylanders deserve full honesty and transparency from their leaders, especially during a crisis as serious as the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Hogan's failure to be forthright about his administration's multi-million dollar purchase of flawed and ultimately un-used COVID-19 tests cannot and should not be waved away. While Marylanders, particularly communities of color, were dying and desperate for help, Governor Hogan prioritized an expensive photo-op and book sales based on falsehoods, distortions and deceit.

"From the outset, I urged Governor Hogan to make clear what our state needed to ensure these

tests could be deployed quickly to our hardest hit communities and residents. Instead of engaging his federal partners for aid, Governor Hogan and his Administration dismissed questions and criticism as either 'confused' or politically motivated.

"This audit shows that these concerns were very much grounded in reality. The facts are clear - Governor Hogan overpaid for these defective tests, with no contract and then tried to hide these issues from the public. Cheaper and functioning tests were available domestically at the time. That deserves scrutiny.

"Marylanders can forgive mistakes, especially in a time of crisis. They cannot, however, accept defiant disinformation and outright lies which put a politician's image and future ambitions ahead of their own health. Whether Governor Hogan wants to run for president or not, he is still the governor of Maryland and must answer for this serious breach of the public's trust."

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The Prince George's Post

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FEMA from A1

the White House, FEMA, and our other federal partners for selecting our county as a location for a federally-run mass vaccination site,” said County Executive Also-brooks. “It is absolutely critical that we can continue to quickly and equitably administer vaccine to our community. This new site will help us increase the number of Prince Georgians and others who are proud to be protected from COVID-19.”

“From the start of the vaccination mission, the federal government has committed itself to ensuring safe, equitable, and efficient vaccinations for all Americans,” said FEMA Region 3 Acting Regional Administrator Janice Barlow. “We consider this mission a trust and an honor to carry out. Here in Maryland, as throughout the United States, we will make sure every res-

ident who wants a vaccination can get one.”

FEMA will have socially-distanced staff on site to ensure prompt service is available to all and that proper COVID-19 protocols are adhered to. Translation services will be available for people whose primary language is not English and interpretation services for those who are deaf or have hearing loss. This is the second site in the state to have support from FEMA, which provides personnel and infrastructure for the mass vaccination site in Waldorf.

Maryland has opened six vaccination sites to serve eligible residents, with six more set to open throughout the month of April. Marylanders interested in receiving a vaccination at any state-run mass vaccination site should visit covidlink.maryland.gov or call 1-855-MD-GOVAX (1-855-634-6829).

Mental Health from A1

Health projects at least 240 additional reports from mental health facilities annually once the bill is implemented, the analysis states.

Patients at residential treatment centers are vulnerable to sexual violence because of their diagnosis, the isolation of the facility and lack of resources to report these allegations, advocates told Capital News Service.

Under current law, any reports of sexual abuse in any inpatient facility must be reported to the local department of social services and the appropriate law enforcement agency, according to the legislative analysis.

However, most sexual assault cases in inpatient facilities are handled internally even after reporting it to the police, advocates said.

There are a number of negative effects to one's development from sexual abuse—depression, post-traumatic stress, poor self-esteem and more—according to advocates.

The bill states the Behavioral Health Administration must: develop policies and training for staff, assist patients with complaints and provide patient education to address and identify sexual abuse and harassment.

Del. Geraldine Valentino-Smith, D-Prince George's, House sponsor, said the bill will increase Maryland's integrity at its private facilities.

“We'll see a lot of positive change with the use of trauma-informed responses and proactive policies,” Valentino-Smith said during the House hearing.

State expenditures are expected to increase by \$85,000 in fiscal year 2022, to hire staff in the Office of Health Care Quality to investigate the sexual abuse complaints and implement the bill, according to the fiscal analysis.

The Senate bill awaits a vote in the House Health and Government Operations committee, and the House version of the bill advanced in the Senate on Thursday [April 1].

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