

The Prince George's Post



A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY *SINCE 1932*

Vol. 94, No. 6 February 5 — February 11, 2026 Prince George's County, Maryland Newspaper of Record Phone: 301-627-0900 25 cents

Still Standing: A Teen Poet Reflects on the Annual MLK Prayer Breakfast

By JASON P. DACANAY

At just 17 years old, I had the honor of performing my original poem, *We Are Still Standing*, before an audience of more than 400 people at the 14th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Prayer Breakfast hosted by the Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc. Prince George's County Chapter at Martin's Crosswinds in Greenbelt. As Mr. Top Teen for the Top Teens of America Prince George's County Chapter, this moment was both humbling and unforgettable.

Standing at the podium, my hands were shaking and my voice trembled as I looked out at a room filled with community leaders, families, and supporters. But, I reminded myself that backing down was not an option. I pushed through the fear, trusted my words, and finished what I started. Seeing the warm smiles, hearing the applause, and feeling the connection from such a large audience made the experience incredibly rewarding. I am truly blessed to have had the opportunity to share my voice on such a meaningful stage.

My poem was inspired by a deep dive into history. I drew influence from music, documentaries, movies, and speeches by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and former President



PHOTO COURTESY TOP LADIES OF DISTINCTION, INC. PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY CHAPTER

Jason P. Dacanay performs his poem *We Are Still Standing* at the 14th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Prayer Breakfast hosted by the Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc. Prince George's County Chapter held on Saturday, January 17, 2026 at Martin's Crosswinds in Greenbelt.

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National Park Service Awards \$24,437 to the Accokeek Foundation to Promote Cultural Tourism and Economic Development in Southern Maryland

By PRESS OFFICER
Accokeek Foundation

ACCOKEEK, Md. (Jan. 27, 2026)—The Accokeek Foundation has been awarded \$24,437.04 by the National Park Service Chesapeake Gateways to implement *Accokeek Reimagined*: Xuyawatuney Tēmìxèq Mòyaon (*We Welcome All to Mòyaon*), a cultural tourism initiative launching in January 2026. Grounded in more than two years of interpretive research, the project will feature signature public events and three community workshops designed to elevate awareness of the Chesapeake region's rich cultural, historical, and environmental legacy.

Signature events will include a June community celebration commemorating the nation's 250th anniversary and an October Indigenous People's Day celebration. These gatherings will feature cultural performances, storytelling, educational activities, and facilitated dialogue to foster deeper understanding of Indigenous histories and living cultures rooted in Piscataway Park and the surrounding region.

The National Park Service is proud to support the Accokeek Foundation's leadership in stewarding Piscataway Park as a place where history, culture, and living traditions come together," said Serena Bellew, Superintendent of National Capital Area Parks—East. "These commemorative events and community workshops create meaningful opportunities for people to engage with the Indigenous and shared histories of this landscape, while strengthening cultural tourism and economic vitality in Southern Maryland. We are excited

to see this initiative bring new and returning visitors into deeper relationship with this remarkable place.

Accokeek Reimagined emerged from a vision to more fully honor Piscataway Park as a living cultural landscape shaped by Indigenous knowledge, shared histories, and enduring relationships to land and water," said Anjela Barnes, Executive Director of the Accokeek Foundation. "This initiative reflects our commitment to welcoming communities into deeper connection with this place, while advancing cultural tourism, stewardship, and economic vitality across Southern Maryland.

The Accokeek Foundation's mission is to cultivate passion for the natural and cultural heritage of Piscataway Park and inspire stewardship and sustainability. Through this initiative, the Foundation will bring together residents, visitors, and community partners to explore the region's heritage, with a focus on the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers and their tributaries.

"By centering dialogue, cultural celebration, and place-based learning, this project strengthens public awareness of the Chesapeake's rich resources," said Tiara Thomas, Managing Deputy Director of the Accokeek Foundation. "It will draw visitors to the region, support local businesses, and reinforce the importance of preserving Southern Maryland's cultural and environmental heritage."

Through Accokeek Reimagined, the Accokeek Foundation aims to create lasting community impact, deepening connection, pride, and understanding of the Chesapeake region's unique history among both residents and visitors.

This project is funded through Na-

tional Park Service Chesapeake Gateways (NPS Chesapeake Gateways), which offers competitive grant opportunities to advance the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act of 1998 within the full 41-million-acre Chesapeake Bay watershed. Chesapeake Gateways grants inspire and help people discover, experience, and connect with Chesapeake Places and Experiences across its rivers, landscapes, and communities to enhance stewardship, heritage, and outdoor tourism economies throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

As a partner of the National Park Service in Piscataway Park, the Accokeek Foundation stewards over 300 acres of the park. By honoring the park's river location, the Piscataway people, and the sacredness of this land, the Accokeek Foundation seeks to share with people and communities the value that this land holds. Visit us at www.accokeek.org, on Facebook www.facebook.com/AccokeekFoundation, and Instagram www.instagram.com/accokeek_foundation/.

Established by Congress in 1998, National Park Service Chesapeake Gateways is a partnership network and community assistance program coordinated by the National Park Service. Headquartered in Annapolis, Maryland, the program serves the full 41-million-acre Chesapeake Bay watershed, supporting and promoting authentic Chesapeake experiences for local communities and visitors. Visit us at www.nps.gov/Chesapeake, on Facebook www.facebook.com/ChesapeakeNPS, and Instagram www.instagram.com/ChesapeakeNPS.

Bowie Mayor Timothy Adams Appointed to Fill District 4 Council Vacancy

By PRESS OFFICER
Prince George's County Council Media

On Friday, January 23, the Prince George's County Council appointed Timothy J. Adams, the Mayor of Bowie, to serve as the new District 4 Council Member, filling the vacancy created by Ingrid S. Watson's resignation. Adams, an accomplished community leader with more than 30 years of experience in business, government, and philanthropy, was selected from a list of seven candidates.

"We congratulate Mayor Adams and look forward to him joining us on the Council," said Council Chair Krystal Oriadha (District 7). "In welcoming the first Council Member to serve while using a wheelchair, we celebrate a milestone in inclusivity. I know his leadership will inspire us to prioritize accessibility and representation in our legislative efforts."

Adams has served as the Mayor of Bowie since 2019, the first African American mayor in the city's history. He is also the founder, president, and CEO of Systems Application & Technologies, Inc. (SA-TECH), a Defense Department contracting firm founded in 1989 and headquartered in Prince George's County. He is a lifetime member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and a former chairperson and member of the Bowie State University Foundation, which provides scholarships to deserving students. Adams also serves as a member of more than a dozen philanthropic, business, education, or healthcare boards and commissions, including the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the University System of Mary-



PHOTO CREDIT: CITY OF BOWIE

Timothy J. Adams, the Mayor of Bowie and new District 4 Council Member

land Foundation.

"District 4 reflects many of the same priorities I've addressed at the municipal level, including strong schools, reliable transportation, affordability, environmental stewardship, and thoughtful development that serves existing communities as well as future generations," Adams told the Council during Friday's public selection process. "My commitment is to listen first, govern responsibly, and be a reliable partner focused on advancing the best interests of District 4 and Prince George's County as a whole."

Pursuant to the County Code, when there is a vacancy in the Office of a Council Member that occurs during the last year of a term, a majority of the remaining Council Members make an appointment to fill the vacancy.

Bowie State University Expands Experiential Learning Through Internship Partnership With Anne Arundel County and Gaudenzia

New rolling internship cohort program offers Bowie State students a one-of-a-kind experience

By PRESS OFFICER
Bowie State University

BOWIE, Md. (Jan. 29, 2026)—Bowie State University joins Anne Arundel County to advance the county's multiyear effort to transform the former Crownsville Hospital into a space that promotes healing, wellness and generational change through a new educational partnership. Gaudenzia, a nonprofit serving people in need of treatment for substance use and co-occurring disorders, and Bowie State University are collaborating on the Gaudenzia Crownsville Campus Internship Program following a signed Memorandum of Understanding. This initiative enrolls students on a rolling basis in spring, summer and fall cohorts and has already celebrated and welcomed its first group of students.

"As Maryland's oldest HBCU, Bowie State University is deeply committed to transforming lives and advancing equity through education," said Bowie State University President

Dr. Aminta H. Breaux. "This partnership at Crownsville provides our students with meaningful, hands-on experience across critical fields, including healthcare, mental and behavioral health, social work and criminal justice—areas that are vital to the well-being of our communities. We are proud to contribute to the site's legacy of healing and transformation while preparing the next generation of professionals to lead with intellect, compassion and purpose. We look forward to continuing this important collaboration with Anne Arundel County and Gaudenzia."

"Crownsville holds a complex and painful history, marked by the medical mistreatment and discrimination faced by Black patients," said Anne Arundel County Executive Steuart Pittman. "This partnership with Gaudenzia and Bowie State University is a way for the county to address that history—

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The program is a national effort designed to prepare the next generation of drone professionals through high-quality education, training, and industry partnerships.

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Eight Prince George's County Chapters Unite for MLK Day of Service

Collectively, more than 12,000 items were donated across all sites, along with \$500 in monetary contributions, benefiting families, schools, and community organizations throughout Prince George's County.

Community, Page A4

Free Entrepreneur Training for Veterans

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union Celebrates National Customer Service Week With Ambassador Recognition and Activities

Business and Finance, Page A5

TOWNS *and* NEIGHBORS

Brandywine-Aquasco by Audrey Johnson 301-922-5384

CUMC FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Happy Birthday to Brandon Freeman, Vincent Woodard, Darion Smalling, Janice Patterson, Rachel Cain, Lauren Crawford, Marvies Davies, Gloria Garrett, Fern Green, Emmanuel Oghogho, Ronald Davis, Jean Noel, Malcolm Terry, Anthony Davis, Matthew Oghogho, Isabella Oghogho, Karmalita Contee, Maleke Glee, Lynn Harper, Lawrence Oghogho, Romonia Pinkney, who are Clinton United Methodist Church members celebrating birthdays in February. Also wishing Rev. Melaina Trice who is our Pastor a very Happy Birthday. I hope that everyone will enjoy many more birthdays to celebrate in the future.

CUMC WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Congratulations to Wendell and Florella Wallace, Steven and Denise Bouyer Carter who are Clinton United Methodist Church members celebrating Wedding Anniversaries in February.

DISTANT ECHOES: BLACK FARMERS IN AMERICA

Frank DeVille and James Isaiah Lee, both of Brandywine, Maryland, were featured in the DISTANT ECHOES: BLACK FARMERS IN AMERICA exhibition that opened on Friday, February 3, 2006, at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum, 830 E. Pratt Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202. The opening of this tour consisted of a lavish reception and a curators’ tour. The Distant Echoes exhibition was on display until April 30, 2006. After this date, it will be on display at various locations in thirteen states. Frank and Isaiah, who are now deceased, and the work of others like these two men were a genuine tribute to our ancestors and our African American heritage here at home and across the great country of America.

HARRIET TUBMAN

Harriet Tubman was an American abolitionist and social activist. After escaping slavery, Tubman made missions to rescue approximately 700 enslaved people, including her family and friends, using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known collectively as the Underground Railroad. Wikipedia.

Harriet Tubman was born March 1822, Dorchester County, Maryland. She died March 10, 1913 (age 91 years), Auburn, New York. Spouse: Nelson Davis (m. 1869–1888), John Tubman (1844-1851). Parents: Harriet Greene Ross, Ben Ross. Full name: Araminta Ross.

When Harriet Tubman was around 13, she suffered a severe head injury after an overseer threw a heavy metal weight, intending it for another enslaved person she tried to protect; the blow fractured her skull, causing lifelong seizures, headaches, and vivid visions, which she interpreted as divine premonitions. This traumatic event, stemming from her refusal to help capture a runaway, marked her with debilitating pain, but also fueled her strong will and eventual quest for freedom. History.com

PIANO KEYS RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

Piano Keys Restaurant & Lounge located in Brandywine is a sanctuary creating an environment of exceptional food, exceptional conversation, exceptional people and an exceptional relaxed ambiance to brighten the spirit.

Piano Keys Restaurant & Lounge Business Information: Call (240-816-2211). Address: 7651 Matapeake Business Drive #104 Brandywine, MD 20613. Hours of Operation: Monday 6 p.m.–12 a.m., Tuesday 6–11 p.m., Wednesday 5–11 p.m., Thursday 5 p.m.–12 a.m., Friday 5 p.m.–2 a.m., Saturday 5 p.m.–2 a.m., Sunday 11 a.m.–11 p.m. *(Hours are subject to change without notice.)

CIAA

The Baltimore Hilton Inner Harbor is the host hotel for Bowie State University, and we are ready to make it our home, for the week. From the welcome mixer to the Friday brunch, we want to see you involved with your alma mater. Stay engaged for updated CIAA information.

Get ready to head to Baltimore for the CIAA 2026 February 24–February 28, 2026. Bowie State University continues to be the university host for this exciting basketball tournament! BSU Shuttle Service: If you are a BSU Alum and want to attend the CIAA games without the hassle of driving to Baltimore let us know that you are interested. More information forthcoming.

NOTE: At this time, the Baltimore Inner Harbor is completely booked. You may make your reservations at any available CIAA hotel and check with the Hilton in February to see if host hotel has had cancellations. You may still participate in all of the BSU CIAA hosted activities in the Hilton even if you are registered in another hotel. Beyond the games at the arena, there is something for everyone. Receptions, mixers, panel discussions, restaurant tours, career fair and more!

MARRIED COUPLES FELLOWSHIP

Join us for a fun evening of games, laughter, and good food at the Married Couples Fellowship. Welcome to the MARRIED COUPLES FELLOWSHIP event. Join us at Craig Memorial Fellowship Hall, located at 5305 Farmingdale Place, Capital Heights, Maryland on February 14, 2026, at 4 p.m. for a time of connection, laughter, building stronger relationships with your spouse. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet other couples, share experiences, and grow together. Do not miss out on this special gathering designed for you. THEME: Ain’t Nothing Like the Real Thing.” SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 4:8—Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. We cannot wait to see you there!

The Married Couples Fellowship is 4 hours, ages 18+, in person, doors open at 3:40 p.m. Refund policy no refunds. General Admission \$97.88 incl. \$7.88 Fee Sales end on February 7, 2026. Powered by Eventbrite.

BSU ALUMNI APPRECIATION DAY

Join us at Bowie State University Leonidas S. James Athletic Complex, Saturday, February 14, 2026. MEN’s GAME 2 p.m. WOMENS GAME 4 p.m. CIAA activations, giveaways, hospitality room, recognition of BSU Love Couples. Stay engaged for further information on how to register for Alumni Appreciation Day. The Bold Buzz (Weekly Publication from the Office of Alumni Engagement & Stewardship).

Partnership from A1

not by rewriting it, but by striving to create an equitable future. I want to thank our partners for working with the next generation to ensure that our residents can access the mental health and medical care they need.”

This new program integrates higher education directly into critical community service, offering Bowie State students purpose-driven, real-world experience at the intersection of behavioral health, community reintegration and equity.

Designed for counseling, psychology, nursing, social work and criminal justice majors, the internship is a rare, multidisciplinary experience in which interns are immersed in trauma-informed care. It heavily emphasizes mission-based learning and multidisciplinary collaboration, backed by high-touch mentorship and crucial hands-on experience with justice-involved populations across the full continuum of care.

“Bowie State students are gaining meaningful, hands-on experience through their Gaudenzia internships from day one,” said Dr. Deja Gilbert, CEO of Gaudenzia. “They’re learning alongside our teams in real-world care environments, building the skills and confidence to serve others with compassion. This partnership reflects our shared commitment to preparing the next generation of professionals while strengthening the communities we serve. We’re honored to walk alongside these students as they grow, contribute and prepare to lead in powerful ways.”

The educational partnership aligns directly with the county’s vision for the Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park. After Anne Arundel County acquired the former Crownsville Hospital Complex from the State of Maryland in December 2022, Pittman unveiled the Final Master Plan in February 2025.

The Master Plan, created based on extensive community outreach and collaboration, serves as a blueprint for future development, providing detailed recommendations for land use and building programming to foster healing. The Gaudenzia Crownsville Campus Internship Program is one of the first steps in laying the groundwork for a lasting legacy that will inform and inspire future generations.

Watch an informational video featuring Bowie State University President Dr. Aminta H. Breaux and cohort interns from Bowie State’s College of Professional Studies: <https://youtu.be/km3qiTwDujU?si=qQUxttsZqTkcWruc>.

Students interested in the internship program can find more information at gaudenzia.org/internships.

To learn more about the steps taken to develop Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park, visit AACounty.Org/CrownsvillePark.

Founded in 1865, Bowie State University is the first Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in Maryland and one of the ten oldest in the country. Bowie State has earned the 'Research College and University' designation in the 2025 Carnegie Research Activity Classification. As a leading institution of higher learning, Bowie State offers more than 65 bachelor's, master's, doctoral and certificate programs across arts and sciences, technology, business, education, healthcare and related disciplines. The university provides high-quality and affordable educational opportunities in a supportive environment that empowers students to think critically, make new discoveries, value differences and emerge as leaders in a highly technical, rapidly changing global society. For more information about Bowie State University, visit howiestate.edu.

Calendar of Events

Film Screening: Amazing Grace
Date and time: Saturday, February 7, 2026, 2–5 p.m.
Description: “Queen of Soul” Aretha Franklin assembled a choir at the New Bethel Baptist Church in Watts, Los Angeles, in 1972 to record her live album, Amazing Grace. Footage of this remarkable gospel concert was shelved for decades over technical and legal issues; it was finally edited and released to critical acclaim in 2018. This is a must-see documentary for Aretha Franklin fans.
Cost: Free
Ages: All Ages
Location: Montpelier Arts Center, 9652 Muirkirk Road, Laurel, MD 20708
Contact: Beth Crisman, 410-409-6291, Beth.Crisman@pgparks.com

Exhibit—She Speaks: Black Women Artists and the Power of Historical Memory
Date and time: February 7, 2026–January 16, 2027
Description: The Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum proudly announces its newest exhibition, She Speaks: Black Women Artists and the Power of Historical Memory—a visionary presentation that examines the 250-year history of the United States of America through a Black Feminist lens. This exhibition brings together a powerful constellation of contemporary Maryland-based and internationally recognized Black women artists whose deeply personal and politically charged works bear witness to the past, illuminate its impact on the present, and conjure Afrofuturist visions.
Cost: Free
Location: Banneker-Douglass-Tubman Museum, 84 Franklin Street, Annapolis, MD 21401
Contact: (410) 216-6180

The Annapolis Film Society proudly presents YOUNGBLOOD
Date and time: Monday, February 16, 2026, 7 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.
Description: Detroit hockey prodigy Dean Youngblood joins the Hamilton Mustangs, where his pride and prowess are tested. Directed by Hubert Davis, starring Ashton James, Blair Underwood, Shawn Doyle
Cost: General Admission Tickets \$20 / Cash only rush line at the door. Purchase tickets: <https://annapolisfilmsociety.eventive.org/films/696c1ae2001aa14dc4a282d>
Location: Maryland Hall - Bowen Theater in the Goldstein-Cunitz Film and New Media Center, 801 Chase St, Annapolis, MD 21401

In and Around Morningside-Skyline

With Mary McHale, will return soon!

PGCPS Graduation Rates Improve for Key Student Groups in 2025

Graduation rates increased for African American students, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and students with disabilities, mirroring statewide improvements.

By PRESS OFFICER
Prince George’s County Public Schools

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. (Jan. 28, 2026)—Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) sustained progress in graduation outcomes in 2025, with the district’s graduation rate at 79 percent, according to data released this week by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

While the 2025 graduation rate of 79 percent reflects a slight dip from last year’s historic high of 80.02 percent, it represents a significant and sustained increase from the district’s 2023 graduation rate of 74.38 percent, demonstrating long-term growth and stability across the system.

PGCPS’ results closely align with statewide trends reported by MSDE, including notable year-over-year gains among African American students, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and students with disabilities—student groups that also saw improvement at the state level.

“These results affirm that when we stay focused on what matters most—student belonging, high expectations, and clear pathways beyond high school—our students rise,” said Interim Superintendent Dr.

Shawn Joseph. “College and career readiness is one of our big rocks. Through expanded internships, dual enrollment, and real-world learning experiences, we are creating clear pathways to college, high-wage careers, and the 4Es: ensuring every graduate is enrolled, enlisted, employed, or on the path to entrepreneurship.”

Several student groups showed improvement year over year:

Students with Disabilities: Increased from 66.49% to 68.42%

African American Students: Increased from 84.65% to 86.63%

Economically Disadvantaged Students: Increased from 77.22% to 80.07%

These gains reflect targeted supports, expanded academic and career pathways, and a continued focus on equity and access across PGCPS schools.

Twelve PGCPS high schools improved graduation rates from 2024 to 2025, with several posting especially strong gains:

International High School at Langley Park: +9.26 points (78.65% → 87.91%)

Suitland High School: +6.93 points (69.83% → 76.76%)

Largo High School: +4.74 points (86.21% → 90.95%)

Dr. Henry A. Wise, Jr. High School: +2.78 points (83.33% → 86.11%)

Northwestern High School: +2.43 points (66.39% → 68.82%)

The district will continue strengthening academic achievement and graduation outcomes by scaling high-impact strategies aligned to student success beyond high school.

“Our work does not stop at graduation,” Dr. Joseph added. “Our goal is to ensure every student leaves us prepared—not just with a diploma, but with purpose, options, and a future they can see themselves in.”

Statewide and local data on four-year and five-year cohort graduation rates, as well as the four-year cohort dropout rate, can be found on the Maryland Report Card website.

Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS), *one of the nation’s 20th largest school districts, has 201 schools and centers, has more than 130,000 students and 22,000 employees. The school system serves a diverse student population from urban, suburban and rural communities located in the Washington, DC suburbs. PGCPS is nationally recognized for college and career-readiness programs that provide students with unique learning opportunities, including dual enrollment and language immersion.*

COMMUNITY

Prince George’s Community College Joins the Federal Aviation Administration’s Unmanned Aircraft Systems Collegiate Training Initiative Program

By PRESS OFFICER
PGCC

LARGO, Md. (Jan. 29, 2026)—Prince George’s Community College (PGCC) is proud to announce its acceptance for accreditation in the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) Unmanned Aircraft Systems Collegiate Training Initiative (UAS-CTI) program. The program is a national effort designed to prepare the next generation of drone professionals through high-quality education, training, and industry partnerships.

“PGCC’s inclusion in the FAA’s (UAS-CTI) program un-

derscores our commitment to academic excellence and innovation,” Barbara McCreary, PGCC program director of Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics, said. “This distinction demonstrates that we are intentionally aligning our programs with a technological future where drones will be critical to various industries, from public safety to environmental science. Our strategic goal to deliver high-impact learning and reimagine workforce partnerships positions our graduates as competitive, future-ready professionals.”

The FAA launched the UAS-CTI Program in April 2020 to

fulfill Section 631 of the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act, which called for establishing collegiate training programs focused on unmanned aircraft systems (UAS). The program recognizes institutions that offer UAS-related curricula and demonstrate a commitment to advancing safe, responsible, and innovative drone operations nationwide. As a participating institution, PGCC joins a growing network of colleges working collaboratively with the FAA, industry, law enforcement, local government, and economic development leaders to strengthen the nation’s UAS workforce pipeline.

PGCC offers three foundational drone education courses: an introduction to drones, a seven-hour recreational drones course, and a drone pilot license preparation course. These offerings equip students with a fundamental understanding of recreational drone operation, aviation safety, and federal regulations. Through this collaboration with the FAA, Prince George’s Community College continues to expand cutting-edge learning opportunities that prepare students for high-demand, technology-driven careers.

Named a National Center of Ac-

ademic Excellence in Information Assurance, designated by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security (2022–2027), Prince George’s Community College (PGCC) provides high-quality education and training for the progressive and career-oriented residents of Prince George’s County. From new high school graduates and career seekers to more seasoned professionals and senior citizens looking to enhance their skill sets, PGCC comprises students who represent a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and goals. Serving nearly 25,000 individuals annually, the College is the first choice

for higher education for residents of Prince George’s County. Collaborative partnerships, responsive degree and training programs, and a commitment to student success enable PGCC to address diverse education and workforce development demands. For more information, visit the College’s website at www.pgcc.edu. Prince George’s Community College is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council on Higher Education.

M-NCPPC Prince George’s County Planning Board and Department Announce February 2026 Events and Meetings

By PRESS OFFICER
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

LARGO, Md. (Jan. 29, 2026)—The Prince George’s County Planning Board and the Prince George’s County Planning Department of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) announce their upcoming public events and meetings for February 2026. For more details, review the list of events and meetings below or visit www.pgplanningboard.org and www.pgplanning.org. Events and meetings are subject to change.

Prince George’s County Planning Board Meetings

Thursday, February 12 | 10 a.m.
Thursday, February 19 | 10 a.m.
Thursday, February 26 | 10 a.m.
Online and M-NCPPC Largo Headquarters (Auditorium), 1616 McCormick Drive, Largo, MD 20774

The Prince George’s County Planning Board meets on Thursdays to consider planning, zoning, subdivision, and other matters within its jurisdiction. The meetings may be viewed in person at the M-NCPPC Largo Headquarters and via live streaming video. Public participation is encouraged. Everyone who wishes to speak virtually or in person at the Planning Board meeting must register online by noon on the Tuesday, two days prior to the Planning Board meeting. Written comments, documents, and exhibits must be received via email, hand delivery, or mail by noon on the Tuesday before the Planning Board meeting to be included in the record. For more details, visit: www.pgplanningboard.org.

Subdivision and Development Review Committee Meeting

Friday, February 13 | 9:30 a.m.
Friday, February 27 | 9:30 a.m.
Subdivision and Development Review Committee (SDRC) is a coordination and interagency meeting early in the development re-

view process with the applicant and M-NCPPC staff, where the public can be invited to virtually view the meeting only. The meetings are held virtually and may be viewed via live streaming video. The agendas are posted online.

Brown Bag Lunch Series: Permitting Innovation – IRRD & DARTS

Tuesday, February 10 | noon–1 p.m.
M-NCPPC Largo Headquarters, 1616 McCormick Drive, Largo, MD 20774

The Prince George’s County Planning Department will host a monthly Brown Bag Series covering various planning topics at the M-NCPPC Largo Headquarters. The session on Tuesday, February 10, 2026, will cover Permitting Innovation – IRRD & DARTS. Register at least a week in advance at <https://pgplan.org/brownbag>.

Environmental Technical Manual Updates – Public Information Session

Tuesday, February 24 | 6:30–8 p.m.
Virtual via Microsoft Teams
The Prince George’s County Planning Department invites residents and community stakeholders to a virtual public information session to learn about important updates to the Environmental Technical Manual. With the passage of new ordinances by the County Council—including updated Woodland and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Ordinance (CB-20-2024, CB-077-2024, and CB-046-2025) and Subdivision Regulations concerning Environmental Strategy Areas (CB-022-2024)—this session will provide: an overview of revised definitions and processes, updated conservation requirements, and guidance on preparing environmentally related plans and documents for submission. Register to receive the virtual meeting link at <https://pgplan.org/EnvTechManual>.

Poet from A1

Barack Obama. I also listened closely to music such as “Letter to the Free” by Common, which influenced several lines in my poem.

Through We Are Still Standing, I wanted the audience to go back in time—to feel my words, my emotions, and even my pain. While I have not personally experienced the hatred my ancestors faced, their stories live within me. Many of them are no longer here to tell those stories themselves, so I felt it was important to carry that flame forward and honor their resilience.

Dr. King’s values of service, justice, and unity strongly connect to how I see myself as a young leader today. Service is something I truly enjoy, whether it’s cleaning streets or helping distribute food in the community. Justice reminds me that even though I am young, my voice still matters and deserves respect. Unity

shows up in how I connect with others—I love building relationships and being someone people can rely on. During my performance, I felt that sense of unity in the room, as the audience connected not only with my poem, but with Black history.

Participating in the prayer breakfast has deepened my understanding of Dr. King’s legacy. I used to think of him mainly as the “I Have a Dream” speaker, but I now see him as a powerful example of courage, leadership, and collective action. His influence inspires me to want to make an impact, change lives, and inspire others.

In addition to performing, I enjoyed meeting new people and connecting with the community throughout the event. The breakfast reminded me of the power of coming together with a shared purpose. Despite the struggles of the past and present, Dr. King’s message remains clear—we are still standing.



PHOTO COURTESY TOP LADIES OF DISTINCTION, INC. PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY CHAPTER
Jason P. Dacanay performs his poem *We Are Still Standing*. Poem is shown at right.

We Are Still Standing

I live in a world built off the blood of my people
All these problems flooding my head,
It makes my mind foggy,
And I can’t go to bed
How can I with the knowledge I have?
Two generations ago down my family vines,
Both grandparents of mine had to deal with “colored” signs
Had my people on the sidelines like they ain’t enough
No matter what, we still remained tough
But in the end, we’re the ones thats hand cuffed
I wish you could call my bluff,
But this stuff is real
Those hateful people can try all they want to steal and conceal
my history
But I know who I am
It is no mystery
And something else is scary
Some of my own don’t know the truth about their home
White washing has thrown the truth over their heads
Deep into the unknown cus’ the schools have not shown the
true darkness that’s a search away on your phone
But as I’ve grown and the more I’ve known,
I’m more than disgusted with the hate we went through
How can someone be so mean?
There’s so many infuriating images and videos I’ve seen
We weren’t seen as human beings with feelings
Will the U.S ever be “us?”
Lord willing
Police and policies patrol philosophies of control
It’s such a cruel hand taking hold
The man in office couldn’t be more cold
And there’s too much he’s done for just me to unfold
It’s like we’re going back in time
The people in power don’t share a common mind-
So we’re staring in the face of hate again
That’s the same hate they say will make America great again
I’ve come to realize
For America to rise it’s a matter of Black Lives
So “Still I Rise” in others hateful eyes
I won’t give up, no matter how hard they despise-

We are not about to turn back,
We are on the move now!
No racism or hate will stop us!
No law against us will hold us!
No comment will tear us down!
No actions will halt us!
We are on the move I say!
And like an idea whose time has come
We are right there
Gradually moving to that forgiving tomorrow
And with the consistent hate and oppression I say to you,
However difficult the hour,
However frustrating the moment,
It won’t be long
Ignited for Service and United for Change, we are
To have come this far with all of these scars,
We are STILL standing.
No lie will live forever and justice will come
You reap what you sow,
So I know we gon’ be alright
We are what? Still standing!
Through God almighty we are lead through the shadows
No dwelling on our past but becoming stronger from it
We are what? Still standing!
Like my people before me,
My eyes have seen the glory
I know my people’s story!
We are what? Still standing!
The trumpets will blow with sounds of freedom,
Never retreat!
It will lift up the hearts of our people to never give up
Follow the footsteps of The Lord cus’ our God is marching
on
To that I say,
“Glory, Hallelujah”
“Glory, Hallelujah”
And “Glory, Hallelujah”

—Jason P. Dacanay

COMMUNITY

Eight Prince George’s County Chapters Unite for MLK Day of Service

By CHRISTINA ROYSTER
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®
Iota Gamma Omega Chapter

PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY, Md. (Jan. 20, 2026)—As part of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® Prince George’s County “We Are One” MLK Day Service Project, eight county chapters united for a coordinated Day of Service across three locations. The Northern Area Site by the Psi Epsilon Omega and Alpha Alpha Lambda Omega Chapters; the Central Area Site by the Iota Gamma Omega and Alpha Gamma Chi Omega Chapters; and the Southern Area Site by the Upsilon Tau Omega and Alpha Alpha Sigma Omega Chapters. The effort was further strengthened by the participation of two undergraduate chapters, Eta Chapter of Bowie State University and Theta Nu Chapter of the University of Maryland, College Park, as well as members of other National Pan-Hellenic Council (Divine Nine) organizations.

Collectively, more than 12,000 items were donated across all sites, along with \$500 in monetary contributions, benefiting families, schools, and community organizations throughout Prince George’s County. Items collected included nonperishable food, winter clothing, warming kits, school uniforms, hygiene items, and backpacks.

The day was marked by strong volunteer engagement and a shared commitment to service. Congressman Glenn Ivey joined members during the initiative, offering words of encouragement and support. The collaboration reflected the enduring legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and demonstrated the power of unity and collective impact in addressing community needs.



PHOTO COURTESY ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY, INC.® IOTA GAMMA OMEGA CHAPTER

Members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® participate in the Prince George’s County “We Are One” MLK Day of Service collecting and sorting donations.



PHOTO COURTESY ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY, INC.® IOTA GAMMA OMEGA CHAPTER

Prince George’s County Alpha Kappa Alpha chapter leaders with Congressman Glenn Ivey and Delegate Karen Toles



PHOTO COURTESY ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY, INC.® IOTA GAMMA OMEGA CHAPTER

Some of the donation items collected for sorting and packaging.

Imagine No Social Security

By RUSSELL GLOOR
Association of Mature American Citizens

In 1971, the iconic song writer John Lennon penned the lyrics to his famous song “Imagine,” asking us to picture a world in total peace and harmony. Although it was a call to imagine what life would be like in a utopian world, it was also, perhaps, overly optimistic given the realities of that time—realities which are largely similar today, over 5 decades later.

Nevertheless, it is always good to imagine life as it might be. And that goes both ways—we can and should always picture life in a better world, but we might also take pause, at times, to picture how life might be worse. How often have we lamented that “things could be much worse?” when confronting adversity in our daily lives? So, today I’d like to suggest that you picture what life would be like without Social Security.

First Some Statistics

First, some statistics: Social Security provides benefits to about 70 million Americans, senior citizens as well as those not yet old enough to be so designated. That’s about 20% of the entire U.S. population. The benefits offered are financial, providing usually crucial money to those fortunate enough to be eligible. That includes those who have earned benefits by working and are old enough to claim, and others—such as minor or disabled adult children—who have not personally earned a benefit but are dependent on a parent who has. Benefits are also available for dependent spouses, ex-spouses and, sometimes, dependent parents. And let’s not forget that even working Americans who become disabled often find financial relief at a younger age with the Social Security disability insurance program. Fact is, Social Security provides a “major” source of income for a majority of senior Americans and, in most cases, those collecting say it is critical to their ability to make their financial ends meet. In a nutshell, a large majority of Social Security recipients say Social Security is critically important to their financial well-being. But what if Social Security were to go away?

What If Social Security Went Away?

Well, that’s not something we like to think about because it would negatively impact so many millions of people. Senior citizens would suffer harshly because the poverty rate for those aged 65 and over would jump from around 10% to nearly 40%. That means another 22 million people would be added to the total 36 million who already live below the U.S. poverty line. And statistically, the ones most affected would be older women, people of color, and children (about 4 million of whom receive Social Security benefits). Another 9 million or so Americans who collect Social Security Disability Insurance benefits would also be seriously affected.

What would American life be like without Social Security? As a student of U.S. history, I can imagine what it was like in the 1930s—the decade of the so-called “Great Depression.” The years immediately preceding the advent of FDR’s Social Security program were a time of abject poverty in the United States. Many Americans had very little money and scant resources, with men wandering from town to town to find work to provide food for their kitchen table. Many wore tattered clothing, often the only clothes they had, and minor children had to work (if they could) to help the family survive. That was the environment which gave birth to the U.S. Social Security program. And the program, funded by taxes on workers and their employers, worked well. Starting when monthly SS benefits

began flowing in 1940, Social Security has continued to sustain America’s seniors and their dependents for about 90 years. In other words, Social Security is an extremely effective anti-poverty program which would devastate millions if the program went away. But what are the chances that Social Security will actually go away?

Will Social Security Ever Go Away?

You might have heard that Social Security is now having some financial difficulties—and that is true. But is it in danger of every going away completely? The answer to that is a resounding “No.” Despite its current financial dilemma, Social Security will never go away completely. As long as Americans are working and contributing to the program, it will always be here to provide some benefits. But the more important question is, will Social Security be able to pay for all of its benefit obligations in the future? And the answer to that is “No, unless Congress acts soon to reform the program.” You see, right now Social Security revenue (mainly income from working Americans) is less than needed to pay all benefit obligations. Social Security revenue in 2024 was about \$1.418 trillion, but SS expenses were about \$1.485 trillion – a deficit of about \$67 billion. And that shortfall has been taken from Social Security’s Trust Fund reserves in order for full benefits to be paid to everyone.

The Social Security Trust Funds have supplemented the money needed to pay full benefits since 2021, which means the reserves in the Trust Funds have gone from about \$2.9 trillion in 2020 to about \$2.7 trillion today—a trend that will result in the reserves being completely depleted in about the year 2033 (this according to the Trustees of the Social Security program). If the Trust Fund reserves are fully depleted, Social Security can only pay out in benefits what it receives in revenue, which would mean about a 23% cut in benefits for every Social Security recipient.

Since so many Americans rely on Social Security as a major contributor to their financial well-being, the result of a 23% cut to everyone’s Social Security income would be devastating. It likely wouldn’t make things as bad as they were in the 1930s preceding Social Security’s birth, but it would nevertheless present a very serious problem which would thrust many more Americans into poverty. And that is the crux of the Social Security dilemma—cutting everyone’s SS benefit to only 77% of what is now received would mean a return to high levels of American poverty. But it doesn’t need to happen.

Fixing Social Security

Congress has been aware of this looming Social Security issue for several decades but has chosen to “kick the can down the road.” Now, there is little time remaining to fix the problem. We are only a short 7 years away from when the SS Trust Funds will no longer have money to supplement Social Security benefit payments. Therefore, Congress must act soon to restore this crucial program to financial solvency. And the longer it waits, the more difficult the problem will be to solve. Indeed, Congress, instead, recently exacerbated Social Security’s financial dilemma by passing legislation which provided additional benefits to a segment of beneficiaries (see H.R. 82—The Social Security Fairness Act). Regardless of the merits of that recent legislation, it added about \$200 billion to Social Security’s expenses over the coming decade, at a time when Congress should be seeking ways to reduce Social Security’s costs.

For its part, the Association of Mature American Citizens (AMAC) recognized this looming Social Security issue years ago and developed a potential Social Security reform proposal. AMAC has promoted (and continues to promote) its Social Security Guarantee to Congress and, in fact, also to the new Commissioner of Social Security. AMAC’s proposal provides common sense adjustments

to the Social Security program—program adjustments which retain the poverty-reduction aspects of Social Security while still providing the full benefits all have earned from a lifetime of working. You can see a summary of AMAC’s Social Security Guarantee proposal at <https://amac.us/social-security-guarantee>.

In any event, now is the time to mobilize by contacting your Congressional Representatives to demand that Congress take action to reform the Social Security program and restore it to financial solvency. The year 2033, when everyone’s Social Security benefit will be cut by almost 25%, is just around the corner. Just imagine the consequences of that!

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

The Prince George’s Post

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Contents © 2026, The Prince George’s Post

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Prince George’s County, Md. Member National Newspaper Publishers Association, and the Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia Press Association.
The Prince George’s Post (ISSN 10532226) is published every Thursday by the New Prince George’s Post Inc., 15209 Marlboro Pike, Suite 209, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772-3151.
Subscription rate: 25 cents per single copy; \$15 per year; \$7.50 senior citizens and students; out of county add \$1; out of state add \$2.
Periodical postage paid at Southern Md. 20790.
Postmaster, send address changes to Prince George’s Post, P.O. Box 1001, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20773.

BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

Am I Entitled to More Social Security as a Veteran?

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

Dear Rusty: I served in the U.S. Army from July 1964 to July 1967. Am I eligible for a higher Social Security payment? Thank you.
Signed: Vietnam Era Army Vet

Dear Army Vet: Please accept my sincere thanks for your military service. I believe you are referring to the "Special Extra Credit for Military Service" which has been the subject of many published articles. That refers to a special Social Security accommodation available only to those who served in the military during specific periods of time - but it does not add to your monthly Social Security payment. Rather, it adds to your military earnings record for the years you served, which may (or may not) result in a higher Social Security benefit when you later claim Social Security.

Here’s how it works in your case:

Serving between 1964 and 1967, if you told Social Security of your military service when you applied for Social Security benefits (or gave them a copy of your DD-214), they would have added up to \$1,200 per year to your military pay record (FYI, those who served after 1966 were automatically given earnings credit for their military service years). However, whether those special extra credits would affect your monthly Social Security benefit depends on your lifetime earnings record when you later claimed Social Security.

When you applied for benefits, Social Security reviewed your lifetime earnings and used the highest earning 35 years of earnings over your lifetime (adjusted for inflation) to calculate your “Primary Insurance Amount” (or “PIA,” which is what you get if you claim benefits to start at your Social Security full retirement age). If, after your military service, you had 35 or more years of earnings which were higher than your earnings while serving in the military, Social Security would have used your later higher earning years to calculate your benefit, and your military earnings would not have had an effect on your Social Security benefit. However, if any of your military earnings (including the “special extra credits”) were among the highest over your lifetime, then those higher military earnings would be included when calculating your Social Security benefit.

So, whether you would benefit from these “special extra credits for military service” depends largely on your earnings history after you were discharged from active duty. If your military earnings were among the highest earning years over your lifetime, and you provided SSA with a copy of your DD-214 when you applied for Social Security, then your current SS benefit already includes consideration of your military service (FYI, Social Security should have asked about your military service when you applied). If you didn’t tell SS about your military service when you applied for Social Security, or if you aren’t sure, you should contact the SSA at 1.800.772.1213 and ask if you were given those “special extra credits for military service” for your 1960s military service years when you applied for Social Security. But if you had at least 35 years of higher earnings after you left military service, your current SS benefit is already based on those later higher earning years, and you will not get any additional /Social Security benefit because of the “special extra credits” for your military service years.

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Prince George’s County Economic Development Corporation

40th Annual Women’s History Month Luncheon

Thursday, March 26, 2026 • 11 a.m.–3 p.m.

The 40th Annual Women’s History Month Luncheon, (WHML), hosted by Prince George’s County Executive Aisha N. Braveboy, celebrates the dynamic accomplishments of women who serve in and partner with the government to influence and impact our communities.

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By JOE GIORDANO
Project Opportunity

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www.project-opportunity.com/class/registration

Attendance at the Orientation Session is a mandatory step in our application process. If you are interested in this class but unable to attend you must contact Program Director Joe Giordano, joe.giordano@project-opportunity.com



**PROJECT
OPPORTUNITY™**

Classes Begin **Wednesday March 25, 2026**. Project Opportunity is an intensive curriculum based 10-week cohort program. The Spring 2026 program will meet every Wednesday March 25–June 3, 2026, from 6:30–9:30 p.m. at Prince George’s Community College Lanham Hall Room 206. This program is free to all veterans. The curriculum and material are facilitated by small business professionals and subject matter experts. The program concludes with a formal business pitch and Graduation Ceremony on Wednesday June 3, 2026.

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Educational Systems Federal Credit Union Celebrates National Customer Service Week With Ambassador Recognition and Activities

By PRESS OFFICER
Educational Systems FCU

GREENBELT, Md. (Jan. 22, 2026)—This past fall, Educational Systems Federal Credit Union celebrated National Customer Service Week with a series of recognition and engagement activities that highlighted Ambassador contributions and strengthened a culture of member-centric service.

Led by the Member Experience team, the celebration blended appreciation, connection and wellness. Highlights included a kickoff gratitude wall and leadership video message; peer-to-peer recognition and virtual awards; a coffee/tea social and lighthearted, team-building activities such as Virtual Bingo, Digital Desk Décor, “Who’s That Ambassador?” (baby photos) and a Pet and Plant Parade. Ambassadors also joined wellness sessions like Virtual Deskercise and Virtual Meditation. In branches, member testimonial boards showcased real stories of service.

“National Customer Service Week is an opportunity to spotlight the everyday moments that define our service culture,” said Girado Smith, President/CEO of Educational Systems FCU. “When Ambassadors care for one another—coaching, collaborating and recognizing great work—that spirit is reflected in every member experience.”

Ambassadors emphasized how recognition and leadership presence reinforced the Credit Union’s values. “The moment that best captured our service culture during Member Service Week for me was the recognition segment during the week. Having the opportunity to both give and receive



PHOTO COURTESY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS FCU

Celebrating National Customer Service Week with warm smiles and warm drinks! Credit Union Ambassadors shared their favorite mugs and meaningful conversations at our coffee/tea social.

from peers really stood out to me—it was a pleasant and unexpected reminder that our daily behaviors can brighten someone’s day,” said Kylie Crest, Assistant Branch Manager.

Recognizing colleagues also connected directly to member outcomes. “A sense of value and belonging is created when Ambassadors are recognized for milestones and hard work,” said Barry Schenberg, Member Care Representative. “This positive reinforcement encourages and strengthens loyalty between Ambassadors and members, along with promoting employee motivation. I was recently recognized for consistent high performance during Member Service Week—I’m committed to improving on past performance and reaching new milestones.”

Educational Systems FCU’s celebration of National Customer Service Week reflects its ongoing investment in people-first service, continuous improvement and community partnerships—foundations that enable the Credit Union to deliver exceptional experiences in branch and through digital channels.

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union has proudly served the education community since 1955. With \$1.3 billion in assets and 13 branches, the Credit Union serves over 95,000 members of the education community including school employees, students, parents and individuals working for education-related organizations. For more information, visit esfcu.org.

Governor Moore Launches \$5 Million Incentive Program to Expand Maryland’s Apprenticeship Workforce

By PRESS OFFICER
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Jan. 28, 2026)—Governor Wes Moore today announced the launch of the Maryland Apprenticeship Incentive Program, a new \$5 million initiative to help employers—including small businesses—hire and train registered apprentices. The initiative is the latest action taken under Governor Moore to grow the state’s workforce and unlock economic opportunity for Marylanders through registered apprenticeship programs.

“This program is a direct investment in a proven model: apprenticeships that prepare and make Maryland’s economy more competitive,” said Gov. Moore. “By removing financial barriers for employers, we are expanding pathways to work, wages, and wealth for Marylanders.”

The Maryland Apprenticeship Incentive Program was established and funded through the governor’s Registered Apprenticeship Investment for a Stronger Economy (RAISE) Act of 2025. Signed by Governor Moore last year, the law invests \$5 million for FY 2026, offering apprenticeship sponsors and employers up to \$3,000 per adult registered apprentice, or \$7,500 per high school age registered apprentice.

The funding directly offsets financial burdens for employers by covering a range of costs, including instructional expenses such as tuition and books; marketing materials and other recruitment expenses; and

supportive services such as transportation assistance and essential equipment—helping more Maryland employers participate in the governor’s vision for workforce growth.

“Apprenticeship is one of Maryland’s most effective tools for connecting residents with meaningful careers and helping employers shape the workforce they need to grow, and the Maryland Apprenticeship Incentive Program will help more employers participate,” said Maryland Department of Labor Secretary Portia Wu. “By supporting the real costs of training, we are helping businesses thrive and helping Marylanders gain the skills they need to succeed.”

Eligibility requirements:

- Applications must be submitted within 30 days before or after an apprentice’s initial registration with the Office of Apprenticeship
- Apprentices must be within their first year of employment as a registered apprentice
- Apprentices must remain employed and registered for at least seven months following application submission to receive reimbursement

Today’s announcement follows the administration’s fulfillment of the Governor’s Apprenticeship Pledge—in which the State sought to engage 500 employers in registered apprenticeship programs, including at least five additional public agencies. Governor Moore announced the fulfill-

ment of the apprenticeship pledge last month, after the State partnered with more than 500 employers to recruit and hire more than 5,200 new registered apprentices—a sign that businesses across the state are embracing the apprenticeship model for workforce growth. Today more than 1,000 Maryland businesses, organizations, and agencies employ and train registered apprentices, and 14,000 Marylanders participated in apprenticeship programs last year—an all-time high.

The Maryland Department of Health, for example, launched the nation’s first environmental health specialist apprenticeship program in partnership with the Maryland Professional Employees Council and Morgan State University, enabling participants to obtain real-world public health experience. Additionally, the Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland State Education Association last year launched the first statewide teacher registered apprenticeship program, which will help all 24 school districts in Maryland recruit, train, and retain future educators by providing them with a paid pathway to careers in the classroom—reducing the out-of-pocket cost of earning a degree and license.

To learn more about the Maryland Apprenticeship Incentive Program, visit labor.maryland.gov.

Registered apprenticeship sponsors and employers may contact info@mdapprenticeship.com with questions.

EarthTalk®
Q&A

Groundwater Depletion at Crisis Levels
Across American West

By Kristy Chan | January 29, 2026

Dear EarthTalk:
Given the multi-year droughts facing the American West, how are groundwater levels there holding up?
—Charles Talarico, via email

Groundwater levels are the level of the water table below underground aquifers and are crucial to water security. In dry states like California, 40 percent of water is from groundwater; during droughts, this rises to around 60 percent. Due to this dependence and the declining water levels of surface reservoirs, such as Lake Mead (currently at 19 percent capacity), groundwater in the American West is being overexploited, particularly in regions like the San Joaquin Valley in California’s Central Valley and the Ogallala Aquifer beneath the Great Plains in the Midwest.

Groundwater recharge is slow already, and drastically worsens during drought. Aquifers recharge even in non-drought years at the rate of just inches per day, so years of overuse and additional reliance will deplete them very quickly. In addition to the multi-year-long drought, several other factors contribute to the depletion of groundwater levels.

Agriculture needs water to irrigate; but drought has reduced irrigation to just 20 percent of normal levels in California, and farmers have had to overuse underground aquifers. And due to global warm-

ing, snowpack, which provides up to 80 percent of California’s water, melts sooner and faster. Late January levels hover at 25 percent of the usual level, reducing the critical transfer to the underground aquifers.

The good news is that 2023 marked the end of a four-year drought in California, and underground aquifers in the San Joaquin Valley were recharged 7.6 million acre-feet, marking a 17 percent increase compared to 2017’s recharge levels. Governor Gavin Newsom acknowledged this in his 2022 Water Supply Strategy, stating, “increase average recharge by half a million acre-feet a year.” With increasing attention to groundwater levels by policymakers, it’s essential to acknowledge that an additional 3.5 million acre-feet of water could have been stored in the underground aquifers of the San Joaquin Valley if it had been captured through catchments or dams.

Climatic conditions between 2020 and 2022 were very arid, and almost no recharge of California’s aquifers occurred during this period. Despite Newsom’s 2022 Water Supply Strategy aiming to foster sustainable and reliable water usage and the end of the multi-year drought in 2023, there remains a need to intensify efforts and research into American West groundwater levels for water security and to understand the impact of climate change. Readers can help address groundwater shortages by advocating for smarter water management policies, volunteering with local groups that educate the public on water usage, and engaging with reputable water education networks that advise on global water governance.

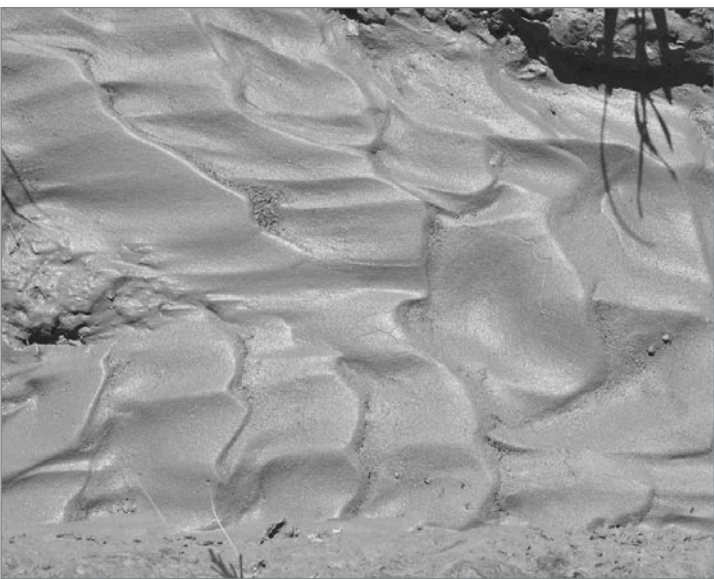


PHOTO CREDIT: PEXELS.COM

Groundwater levels across the American West are at crisis levels thanks to the multi-year drought and climate change. .

CONTACTS: Public Resources on Groundwater Levels: <https://linky.link/2A8Qr>.

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

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