

# MILFORD LIVE

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**Vol. 13 • Issue 20**

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photo link: Downtown Milford Inc.



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# HEADLINES



photo link: Joann Kingsley

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# MILFORD SUPERINTENDENT TAKES JOB AT POLYTECH

BY TERRY ROGERS



Milford School District Superintendent Dr. Kevin Dickerson announced that he has accepted a position as the new superintendent at Polytech High School.

Dr. Dickerson will leave Milford during the summer although the exact date has not been determined.

“I am very grateful for the years spent working in the Milford School District and serving the great communities of our district,” Dr. Dickerson said. “Furthermore, I am especially grateful to have had the opportunities to interact with so many wonderful students, staff, families, board members and community members. I wish everyone within Milford School District the best and much success in the future.”

Dr. Dickerson has been in education for 29 years and 22 years of that time was as an administrator. He spent 14 years with Milford, serving as the principal at Milford Middle School for over four years and one year as the assistant superintendent. Prior to coming to Milford, Dr. Dickerson spent 15 years in vocational school districts, including eight years as an administrator at Sussex Tech and two years as transportation supervisor and attendance officer at Polytech.

“The current superintendent at Polytech announced her retirement in early March and is retiring, July 1,”

Dr. Dickerson said. “I have an extensive background with career and technical student organizations, high school and adult program development and fostering business-industry partnerships for workforce development. Furthermore, I am proud of my lifetime full of experiences and connections throughout Kent County as I grew up and have lived in Kent County for almost my entire life.”

Having the opportunity to interact with so many amazing students throughout the schools and working with so many exceptional people within the schools, district and community are among Dr. Dickerson’s greatest achievements in Milford. His advice for the incoming superintendent is to cherish the opportunity as he believes Milford is a great place to work. He stated that the district has a supportive and caring staff, and that the community supports the students and schools.

The Milford School District Board of Education wished Dr. Dickerson well in his new position at Polytech.

“He will have the opportunity to utilize his knowledge and experience in career and technical education,” a statement issued by the board read. “While we will miss Dr. Dickerson’s leadership at Milford School District, we are excited for him and wish him all the best in his new role. In the interim, the Milford Board of Education is currently developing a plan to fill the

See **DICKERSON** on page 4

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vacancy left by Dr. Dickerson's departure. We are committed to ensuring a smooth transition and maintaining the high standards of education that our students, families and community deserve. We thank Dr. Dickerson for his service to Milford School District and look forward to the continued success of our students and district community."

Dr. Dickerson explained that he is looking forward to this new chapter.

"I look forward to joining Polytech School District's highly accomplished district community," Dr. Dickerson said. "I am excited for the opportunity to be part of Polytech's ongoing success in providing individual, educational and career opportunities for a diverse community of high school and adult learners throughout Kent County."



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# CULTURE



photo link: [Downtown Milford Inc.](#)

# VIETNAM MAILBAG PRESENTATION PLANNED FOR LIBRARY

BY TERRY ROGERS

“Vietnam Mailbag,” presented by Nancy Lynch and veteran Rick Lovekin, is planned at the Milford Public Library for Tuesday, May 16 from 5:30 to 6:45 p.m. in Lions Room A. The program is based on a popular newspaper column written by Lynch.

“When American troops in Vietnam answered the call to correspond with a young reporter four decades ago, they could not have envisioned the enduring relevance of their war letters or the rich legacy their words, photographs and memorabilia would leave to succeed-

ing generations,” Carolyn Tabor, program director at the library, said. “This program will include Ms. Lynch talking about and reading selected war letters from her book ‘Vietnam Mailbag, Voices from the War: 1968-1972,’ based on her newspaper column.”

In addition to Lynch, Lovekin, who was a Huey helicopter door gunner in Vietnam as well as a Cogra crew chief, will also be on hand. He was a frequent letter writer to Nancy and he will show slides from Vietnam set to music.



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The event is free to attend, but registration is requested. Anyone interested in attending can register at <https://delawarelibraries.libcal.com/event/10464663>.

Milford Public Library is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday and Friday; from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday; from 12 noon to 6 p.m. on Wednesday and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday. The Teen Center is open Monday through Friday from 3 to 6 p.m.

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# MISPILLION ART LEAGUE ANNUAL STUDENT SHOW BEGINS

BY TERRY ROGERS

This exhibit showcases what the art educators are doing for the students and presents it to our gallery visitors who might not have a reason to go into a school. MAL is committed to supporting arts education because a quality arts curriculum builds learning skills, increases academic performance, and provides opportunities to reward the skills of children who learn differently. This collaboration with Milford School District is a delightful way to honor MAL's mission to our community, providing community-wide access to quality visual arts programs.

The Mispillion Art League is located at 5 N. Walnut Street in Milford, Delaware. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

**MILFORD  
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# BUSINESS



photo link: Marcia Reed



John Mollura  
MILFORD, DE

## LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER'S IMAGE CHOSEN FOR ROCK AND ROLL EXHIBIT

### STAFF REPORT

“It is an amazing feeling to see my art occupy the same space as the legendary photographs of my musical heroes.”

Milford portrait photographer, John Mollura, has been a fan of rock and roll since finding his uncles' vinyl collections in his grandmother's attic in the late 1980s. John's photograph was one of 30 images selected, out of hundreds of national submissions, chosen to be a part of the Biggs Art Museum “Front Row Center—Icons of Rock, Blues, and Soul” exhibit, featuring the concert photography of Larry Hulst.

Larry Hulst was likely the person behind the camera who created the photographs that come to mind when you think of the most famous rock musicians in history. The exhibit features Hulst's captivating concert photo-

graphs of the biggest names in rock, such as The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin and The Grateful Dead, just to name a few.

Mollura's image in the exhibit captured the moment when Dayne Jordan (the MC for the legendary DJ Jazzy Jeff) took flight mid-song amidst a downpour. The spotlight was laser focused on Dayne as he seemingly defied gravity under the purple stage lighting in the intense rain at a packed outdoor summer show.

“It was a once-in-a-lifetime capture,” Mollura said. “As soon as I clicked the shutter, I knew it was going to be epic.”

John Mollura's photography studio is in Milford where he specializes in creating empowering and creative portraits of his clients. The exhibit is on display at the Biggs Art Museum in Dover until June 19.

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BY BETSY PRICE

After Kate Maxwell's firefighter fiancé died in the 2016 Canby Park fire, she crawled into a tunnel of grief and substance abuse. Nine months later, when she got sober with the help of her parents, she was overwhelmed with the amount of love and support she had been shown during that time.

Her best friend, Meg Hurst, and others came to check on her, cooked for her and her kids, cleaned the house and did a number of chores and errands on her behalf while Maxwell sat on the sofa "comatose with grief"

## SHE WANTED TO HELP. NOW WINGMOM SERVES 5,000 CLIENTS

after the death of Capt. Chris Leach.

"The community totally surrounded me and showed me so much love and support," Maxwell said. "When I kind of got back on my feet my thought process was 'I've got to find a way to give back.'"

The result was Wingmom, a company that offers all kinds of services including giving kids rides, doing laundry, cleaning, organizing, senior care and even cooking a dish for an overwhelmed mom to take to a party.

The six-year-old company had total sales of \$1.1 million in 2022, all while employing an army of moms who are able to work as much or as little as they want for wages that start at \$19 an hour.

"We have this amazing byproduct that I never thought about in that we're taking women that wouldn't traditionally be employable because they are stay at home moms or they are trying to support their family through a second job and we are giving them jobs because of our flexibility," Maxwell said.

Wingmom has franchises in Middletown, serving all the way to Dover; southern Pennsylvania; Bucks County, PA; Catskills, NY; and, soon, Washington Township, NJ.

In total, the franchises serve more than 5,000 customers with 250 Wingmoms—and as of 2020 some

See WINGMOM on page 11

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Wingdads. The original north Delaware franchise alone has 125 Wingmoms and Wingdads on their payrolls.

Maxwell said she never expected the growth that the company has seen.

“I thought that Wingmom was just going to be a way to make some extra cash while helping moms with their day-to-day while I figured out my next move,” Maxwell said. “And it ended up becoming this large company.”

The company has a lot of vocal fans praising it on social media.

Sarah Goldfarb Weeden hires Wingmom to clean her house and has found Vickey Smith, who runs Wingmom’s home management department, to be remarkably more reliable than other cleaning companies. But Goldfarb Weeden’s favorite Wingmom story took place on her first day back at work after taking leave when her youngest daughter needed major surgery at CHOP in Philly.

“She was finally back at daycare and I got a call from them that she had a major diaper blowout and her outfit was ruined,” Goldfarb Weeden said. “I was not on top of it and didn’t pack an extra set of clothes for her that day so I had Wingmom run to Target, buy her a new outfit and deliver it to the daycare.”

Maxwell started Wingmom with Hurst, who Maxwell calls her own personal wingmom. The name is a twist on pilot terminology and the way guys will call a buddy their wingman when they’re heading out to drink. It’s meant to evoke the image of someone looking out for you, even protecting you.

“We all need a wingmom,” Maxwell said.

See WINGMOM on page 12



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### Wingmom's first services

Hurst left the company in 2020 to focus on her Sweet Lucy's ice cream store and Cajun-sno food truck.

The company's first offers to help included providing rides for kids.

"I was a single mom and couldn't pick both kids up at the same time from two different schools," she said.

Requests for help started coming in and included doing laundry, errand running, grocery shopping before pandemic's delivery boom—the kind of things moms needed each day.

"We expanded, very grudgingly I might add because I never wanted to own a cleaning company, into cleaning and home organizing because we saw the necessity," she said.

One of Wingmom's messages is that you don't have to have a clean house in order to have a cleaner, Maxwell said, and you don't have to have your house organized to have an organizer.

"We're a judgment-free zone," Maxwell said. "You'll never see a before and after picture on social media because I think people are like, 'Oh, I could never have a room organizer here because they would feel so judgey about my space.'"

Chief Wingmom organizer Vickey Smith was aware of the company as soon as it opened, partly because the man she was dating at the time knew Maxwell and said good things about her. Smith hired Wingmom to make a cheesy chicken dip she needed to have for a party and to set up the hall where her family was holding a luncheon after a grandmother's funeral.

She thought about picking up some of their small jobs, such as helping with parties, for additional income, but her schedule didn't allow it. Then Smith was laid off in January 2020. She thought she might take a few months to get her life in order and tackle projects she was too busy to handle while working full time. But when Maxwell advertised for help, Smith decided to apply.

Wingmom workers are required to undergo background checks, be fingerprinted and trained in the Wingmom Way. The company is licensed, insured and incorporated in Delaware. Traditional 9-to-5 jobs as well as smaller jobs are offered through Wingmom. The work is posted on an app's bulletin board that allows workers to see what's needed and accept the job.

When Maxwell realized in 2020 that more people were staying home and had jobs they wanted done around the house, she added Wingdads to help install shelves, hang mirrors and more. Some one-off jobs become regular gigs for Wingmoms.

Customer Marisa Pennell of North Wilmington, a married mom with three children and a demanding job, now has a long-standing arrangement with Smith, who has helped her pack one house, move and then unpack and organize the new house.

She books Smith for four hours at least every other week, often working alongside her so they can get things done more quickly.


Pennell followed Wingmom on Facebook and hired the company first for house cleaning.

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A smiling woman with curly hair, wearing a yellow sweater, is making a heart shape with her hands.

# GOVERNMENT & POLITICS



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# CITY OF MILFORD TO HOST TOUCH-A-TRUCK COMMUNITY EVENT

## STAFF REPORT

The city of Milford is hosting its Annual Touch-A-Truck Community Event—its first since COVID—on Saturday, May 20 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Walnut St. in downtown Milford. This family-friendly event will feature city Public Works vehicles (i.e., trash and electric bucket trucks), Milford Police Department vehicles, Carlisle Fire Company trucks, food trucks and city department information tables.

In addition to the Touch-A-Truck event, Mayor Archie Campbell, City Manager Mark Whitfield and Chief of Police Cecilia Ashe will be hosting a City Hall Open House at 201 S. Walnut St. from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. The public is encouraged to visit City Hall, chat with these city representatives, enjoy light refreshments and take a tour if they wish.

“Our Touch-A-Truck Community Event is for kids of all ages to enjoy,” said Whitfield. “Folks can see the best of our service equipment and how it operates. We also welcome citizens to an Open House at City Hall to have coffee and conversations with the mayor, city manager and Chief Ashe.”

Scheduled food trucks include Cinnabon, Holy Smokes BBQ, Sabor Latino and Smash N’ Dash Burgery.



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# FOUR CLIMATE BILLS DRAW SUPPORT, CRITICISM AHEAD OF HEARINGS

BY SAM HAUT

Three House bills and one Senate bill were set to be heard May 10 by the House Natural Resources and Energy committee and the Senate Environment Energy & Transportation committee. All of them are part of an initiative by Gov. John Carney and Democratic legislators to lower harmful emissions in Delaware to improve air quality. The package includes eight bills, seven in the House and one Senate bill. House Bill 8, 9, and 10 were set to be heard by the House Natural Resources & Energy Meeting May 10.

**House Bill 8**, sponsored by Rep. Ed Osienski, D-Newark, requires that sustainability and carbon impact data be considered when awarding construction contracts and preference be given to contracts that use materials with lower carbon emissions.

David Stevenson, director of the Center for Energy & Environment at the Caesar Rodney Institute, said the bill doesn't provide enough details on what alternatives

construction companies can use.

"I don't even know how you're going to do HB 8 with these clean construction materials," Stevenson said. "You start laying out the cradle to grave cost of all these raw materials and decide, gee, we're not going to use concrete anymore. Please, what's the alternative here? It's just impractical."

**House Bill 9**, sponsored by Rep. Krista Griffith, D-Greenville, requires more of the state-owned fleet of vehicles to be zero emission vehicles, starting with 15% by 2026, increasing to 25% by 2029, to 50% by 2032, and up to 100% by 2040.

**House Bill 10**, sponsored by Rep. Deb Heffernan, D-Bellefonte, requires that more school buses be electric, with 5% of new vehicles purchased needing to be electric in 2026, increasing by 5% each year until it reaches 30% by 2030.

Kim Klein, associate secretary of operations support for the Delaware Department of Education, said it would cost an additional \$250,000 per electric bus, along with \$75,000 per bus for electric infrastructure. Klein said buses have been advertised as having a range of 120 miles, but several factors contribute to a decrease in that range.

"So some of that information we expect to really learn as we get buses in place because if you have the air or heat on, obviously that drains your battery faster," Klein said. "If you have hills versus flat area, obviously your battery is going to drain faster. So there are a lot of factors that go into ultimately what the range is for an electric school bus."

While the Delaware Department of Education doesn't now have any electric buses in its fleet of around 500 buses, they received a grant from the EPA for three buses and a grant from DNREC for another bus. Klein said they expect those buses to be delivered by late spring or early summer of 2024.

Also May 10, **Senate Bill 103** was set to be heard by the Senate Environment, Energy & Transportation. SB Bill 103, sponsored by Sen. Sarah McBride, D-Wilmington, requires residential buildings completed in 2025 and beyond to have at least one parking space for charging electric vehicles.

Stevenson said he doesn't think it's necessary to install electric vehicle charging stations in every new home.

"You're going to assume every building is going to need an EV charger. And yes, I know that the state thinks that's a great goal but it's not happening," Ste-

See CLIMATE on page 16

venson said. “Last year we had about 2% EV sales in the state...so you’re spending all this money on construction, raising the price of houses and maybe 90% of the houses are never going to use it.”

Rounding out the package of bills are ones that deal with solar power, an electric vehicle rebate program, reporting on electric vehicle charging and net greenhouse emissions.

**House Bill 11**, also sponsored by Heffernan, would require commercial buildings that are 50,000 square feet or greater to have roofs that are equipped to handle solar power.

**House Bill 12**, Rep. Sophie Philips, D-Christiana, would provide a rebate program of up to \$2,500 for electric vehicles and a rebate of up to \$1,000 for hybrid vehicles.

**House Bill 13**, sponsored by Phillips, requires the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and the Delaware Department of Transportation to put out a report by the end of 2023 on electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the state and then every three years until 2032.

**House Bill 99**, sponsored by Heffernan, requires net state greenhouse gas emissions in the state to be 50% of the 2005 levels by 2030 and have net zero emissions by 2050. That bill passed the House Natural Resource & Energy Committee last week with eight votes in favor and has been placed on the House ready list.

Dustyn Thompson, director of the Delaware chapter of the Sierra Club, said that House Bill 99 is the most

important bill in the package because it’s necessary for the other climate bills to work.

“How do we plan and prepare for the impacts that we can no longer avoid? And so House Bill 99 is really the key to doing that,” Thompson said. “Everything else is just to help make the transition easier and more equitable.”

Last year, **Senate Bill 305**, which passed the Senate 13 to 6 but didn’t appear before a House committee, would have set emission reduction goals, similar to House Bill 99.

However, Senate Bill 305 specified gross emissions, while House Bill 99 specified net emissions, meaning pollution that could be offset by other sustainable practices such as planting more trees.

Thompson said this was part of the process of the bill getting more support from the business community.

“There was some sausage making that happens anytime there’s a big bill like this and we had to make some compromises, particularly with the business community, to make sure they were comfortable,” Thompson said. “But in the end, it is still a monumental piece of legislation.”



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# EDUCATION



photo link: [Milford School District](#)



# CONNELL WINS SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION

we have achieved another victory for traditional principles and conservative, results-oriented board governance. I will join the board in a time of great challenges and opportunities for the Milford School District.”

Connell continued, congratulating her opponent.

“Firstly, I want to congratulate my opponent, Danielle Dienert, for her hard work, both on this campaign and in the district. It has not gone unnoticed,” Connell said. “To all my supporters and volunteers, I want to give you my heartfelt thanks. To the parents and grandparents, bus drivers, teachers, students and community members who shared with me your stories and concerns, I want you to know, above all, that I heard you. Please join me now in congratulating my fellow brand new board members, Butch Elzey and Jen Massotti. Above all, I call on our community to rededicate our support for our many great frontline teachers and, of course, our precious children.”

When the results were announced, Deinert congratulated Connell for winning.

“I would like to congratulate Ashlee Connell for her success in the school board election,” Deinert said. “I wish her the best of luck in her upcoming term. I would also like to thank the Milford community for taking

See **CONNELL** on page 19

**BY TERRY ROGERS**

The state of Delaware Department of Elections announced that Ashlee Connell has been declared the unofficial winner of the Milford School District Board of Education At-Large Seat. Connell will replace David Vezmar who chose not to run for reelection.

Connell received 1,050 votes (56.09%) and her opponent Danielle Deinert received 822 votes (43.91%). According to the Department of Elections, 7.99 percent of voters cast ballots in the election.

“Thank you to the great Milford community!” Connell said. “After a hard-fought, three-month campaign,

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CONNELL from page 18

the time yesterday to come out and vote in the school board election.”

Connell will be sworn in at the July school board meeting along with Victor “Butch” Elzey, who will represent District A and Massotti, who will represent Area B. Massotti’s term will expire in 2024 as the seat was vacated by Kris Thompson in 2022. Both Elzey and Massotti ran unopposed for their seat.



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# ARTC PROGRAM AIMS TO ADDRESS TEACHER SHORTAGE

BY TERRY ROGERS

Dr. Jason Peel, director of Human Resources and School Climate at Milford School District, says that the Alternate Route to Certification program (ARTC) offered in partnership with the Department of Education and institutes of higher learning like the University of Delaware and Delaware State University, is aimed to help address a current teacher shortage. The program offers options for those who may not have taken a traditional path to teaching become certified.

“The traditional route to becoming a teacher is to graduate from a college/university with a degree in teaching and apply for teacher certification. The applicant must be able to show that they have completed student teaching, passed the required exams and earned a degree,” Dr. Peel said. “However, there also exists two non-traditional programs in Delaware, the Alternate

Routes to Certification (ARTC) and the Relay Graduate School ARTC Residency program.”

The ARTC program requires a bachelor’s degree and interested parties must apply to Delaware State University, Wilmington University or the University of Delaware Relay Graduate School. They then must apply for a position at a teacher and qualify for a two-year emergency teaching license before completing coursework required to achieve a continuing teaching license and work as a first-year teacher. The Relay Graduate School ARTC Residency program requires a bachelor’s degree and those interested must apply for and be accepted to the Relay Graduate School. They must then apply for a Milford School District Residency posting and complete a year-long teacher residency experience and earn \$35,000 during the first year.

See ARTC on page 21

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## ARTC from page 20

“A person does not have to be fully certified. They can work under an emergency certification as long as they are enrolled in an ARTC program and actively taking courses,” Dr. Peel said. “If a person does not have a bachelor’s degree in education, then they can enroll in an ARTC program at one of the programs in the state of Delaware and become a fully certified teacher while simultaneously working as a teacher.”

Dr. Peel explained that science and special education teachers are in short supply currently. For those who are interested in teaching, Dr. Peel suggests starting as a substitute.


“I would suggest signing up to be a substitute teacher. As a substitute teacher you can earn some extra money, get to know the students and staff at each school, and get a good sense of what it is like to be a teacher,” Dr. Peel said. “To become a substitute, please call our district office at 302-422-1600 and inquire about becoming a substitute with Milford School District.”

Dr. Peel explained that there is a comprehensive hiring process that must be completed to work for the district. He noted that district employees are also state employees and that all staff must undergo a state and federal criminal background check, reference checks and completion of the Child Protection Registry.

MilfordLIVE will highlight two teachers who entered the field through the ARTC program over the next two weeks. Mackenzie Reed and Ilianny Abad are both teachers in Milford School District who successfully completed the ARTC program and are now fulfilling their dream of teaching.



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# JOHN MOLLURA

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# HEALTH



photo link: Bayhealth Medical Center

## BUCKSON CRITICIZES MATERNAL BILL FOR DROPPING TERM 'WOMAN'

BY SAM HAUT

Sen. Eric Buckson, R-Dover, had issues May 10 with a maternal health bill changing the words “woman” and “women” to “person” and “people.”

**Senate Bill 106**, sponsored by Sen. Kyle Gay, D-Elsmere, would replace those words in the Delaware code on maternal health and also change the term maternal depression to perinatal mood and anxiety disorder. These changes would apply to the part of the Delaware code that deals with maternal health, which specifies who receives informational materials on maternal health, including depression, that can occur during and after pregnancy.

During the Senate Health & Social Services Committee meeting, Buckson asked if, as a father of four, the bill as written would include him in spaces meant for expectant mothers.

“Sen. Buckson, I don’t want to make any assumptions about your personhood,” Gay said. “I know that you identify as male and have presented as such to me and asked me to use he/him pronouns with you.”

“However, if you are neither in the pregnancy stage and you are neither carrying a baby, or if you are not postpartum, then my understanding of the language of this bill is that it would not apply to you.”

Sen. Stephanie Hansen, D-Middletown, said that she doesn’t understand Buckson’s concern with the bill, as she feels it will only help people. Buckson said that he takes issue with changing the word women to person.

“It is when you strike out and then simply add person” Buckson said. “In the language we adopted, I believe, was it yesterday or last week, whatever it was, where we did these gender silencing bills. In the language of that

See **BUCKSON** on page 25

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law, it said specifically, except when obvious, or something like that. And for me, this is obvious. A person giving birth is a woman. We shouldn't strike that out."

On May 4, the Senate passed 19 to 1 **Senate Bill 97**, which would make the Delaware code gender silent and replace references to gender with language that doesn't mention gender. Senate Bill 97 states that "The Revisors...shall ensure a solely masculine or feminine designation occurs only when it applies to one gender." Buckson voted for Senate Bill 97, which now heads to the House.

Gay said that the gender silent legislation wouldn't apply to Senate Bill 106, as the change was made to make the Delaware code more inclusive.

"I do think that referencing the gender silent legislation, this is a situation where we feel appropriate outside of that initiative to make sure that we are capturing as many people who may suffer from PNDS," Gay said. "And so the initial idea here was...to make sure that we were capturing non birthing parents and birthing parents who do not identify as women."

Gay said that she is considering a substitute to Senate Bill 106 that would change one instance of the word women that was missed, and include everyone both before and after pregnancy, and not just people presenting symptoms of perinatal mood and anxiety disorder.

During public comments, six representatives for healthcare organizations spoke in support of the bill, with only perennial General Assembly public commenter Robert Overmiller speaking against the bill because it removes the word women. Kristen Dwyer,

the external affairs manager for Nemours Children's Health, said that they support the bill because it helps caregivers with raising children.

"Ensuring that there is clear educational information provided in a consistent manner around maternal mental health care and mood disorders is an important step for caregivers of getting the support they need," Dwyer said. "Caregivers who experienced perinatal mood disorders understandably can have a difficult time parenting."

Laura Najemy, a board member of the Delaware chapter of Postpartum Support International, said she supports the bill because when she was pregnant, she wished she knew about postpartum anxiety.

"Had I been screened and received treatment earlier, I could have avoided months and months of suffering and medical complications," Najemy said. "And my story is far from unique. That is why this bill is so important for families in Delaware. And I ask that you support it because it allows us to have information that will hopefully lead to treatment being obtained faster."

The bill has 18 additional sponsors and cosponsors, 16 of which are Democrats and two Republicans, Rep. Ruth Briggs King, R-Georgetown and Sen. Dave Wilson, R-Milford/Bridgeville. A fiscal note for the bill is not required.

Because Senate committees do not take public votes, the outcome of SB 106 was unclear early Wednesday afternoon. The Senate allows committee members to sign the backs of bills and reports the tally later on the bill tracking system.



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# POLICE & FIRE



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## MPD UNIT ADDRESSES MENTAL HEALTH OVER INCARCERATION

BY TERRY ROGERS

A few years ago, Milford Police Department established a Behavioral Health Unit, an idea suggested by Councilman Jason James. According to statistics provided by Chief Cecilia Ashe at a recent board meeting, through April 2023, there have been 72 diversions from arrest, 98 diversions from the ER and 893 follow-ups by the unit.

“Some of the biggest benefits to this unit is that it allows individuals to be diverted from the criminal justice system when relevant which lessens the burden on the criminal justice system,” Jenna Haines, Behavioral Health director/Embedded clinician, said. “It also reduces strain on emergency rooms by connecting individuals with appropriate level of care and lessens recidivism by linking individuals with needed behavioral health treatment.”

Currently, Milford’s unit has one full-time clinician, Haines, as well as two part-time subcontracted clini-

cians, Greg Bisset and Danielle Blackwell. The clinicians ride along in the car with police officers and respond to calls for service, providing necessary resources and/or interventions. They also do a brief case management and follow-up with individuals throughout the treatment continuum. Officers also refer individuals to clinicians if they were not present at the call.

In addition to reducing arrests and emergency room visits, the Milford Behavioral Unit is being used as a model for other departments. Haines explained that is because the Milford unit is somewhat unique.

“Having a clinician ride with police allows them to engage with an individual as the situation unfolds in order to complete an appropriate evaluation,” Haines said. “It also allows people to be met where they are and, even if something is not a behavioral health call, there is often a behavioral health component to calls, so having a clinician ride with the police allows more indi-

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viduals to be engaged with resources. Overall, the goal lessens time that police spend on these repeat calls and lessens the stigma associated with mental illness and substance abuse disorder.”

The unit is not without its challenges, however, Haines said. “There is a lack of resources in southern Delaware, including minimal transportation options, long waiting time for affordable housing and difficulty finding treatment for uninsured individuals,” Haines said. “We also face overall challenges due to the increase in the opioid crisis.”

Chief Ashe and Haines both hope that the department can expand the unit in the future.

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