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February 13, 2024
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Milford Council Limits Public Comments



Workforce Development Luncheon



Victims' Rights Task Force Ideas

HEADLINES



photo link: Milford Community Band



MILFORD COUNCIL LIMITS COMMENTS ON EMINENT DOMAIN CASE

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

Larry Passwaters chided the Milford City Council Monday night over its decision to declare eminent domain over eight acres of property owned by a chicken-raising widow so it could create a park.

“If this was a Hallmark movie, you’d be the bad guys,” Larry Passwaters scolded council members. His comment was met with cries of support from the crowd of more than 100, which filled the chamber and spilled out into the lobby.

It’s the second time in three weeks that a council meeting has overflowed with public questioning. On Jan. 22, members of the public packed the chamber, lobby and a basement room set up for overflow in a four-hour meeting over a proposed tiny house village for the homeless. This time, the public was allotted a total of 15 minutes for comment.

Its plan to pay Annette Billings \$20,000 for the prop-

erty, after voting to condemn it, has been the talk of the town for the last week. She attended the meeting.

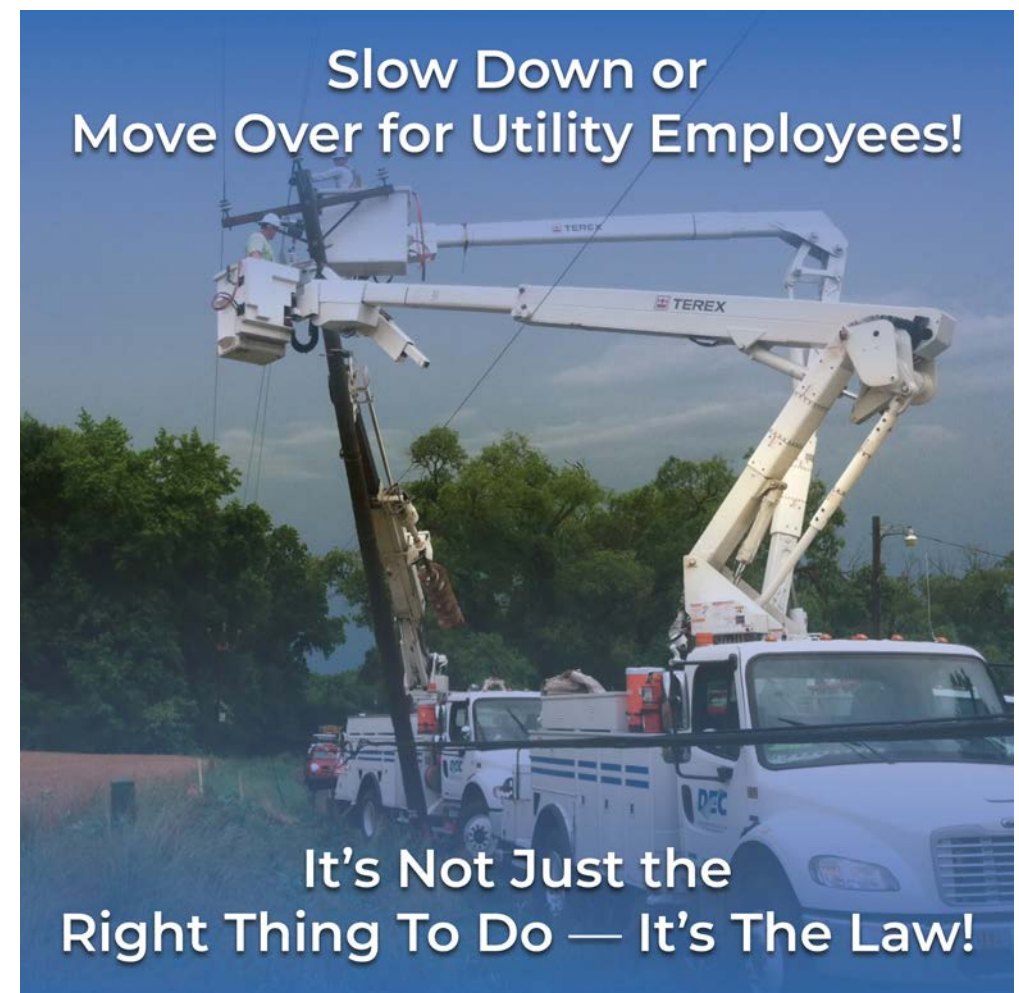
“This was unbelievable,” Billings said about the outpouring of public support.

Milford wants to install bike and pedestrian paths in a park planned near South Rehoboth Boulevard to create a citywide bike and pedestrian path. Some of Billings’ supporters waved signs printed with slogans that said, “I stand with Annette and her wetlands;” “This is land is your land. This is land is my land. Unless Milford Council wants to steal it from you,” and “What would WWJD? I have questions.”

The crowd listened intently, often cheering in agreement with those speaking against the council’s decision.

Sen. Dave Wilson, R-Lincoln, took the stand and questioned why Milford was going after property that is not in its city limits. Wilson said the land is considered

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to be in the county's jurisdiction. "I have a heartburn thinking about what is going on tonight," Wilson said.

Council's eminent domain decision also has Wilson questioning how much future support he will show Milford as a legislator. "I'm going to have to take serious consideration when I talk to my colleagues about the city of Milford," he said.

"My concern is that each one of you council members do what is right for your ward," Wilson continued. Wilson told the council they should focus on what the town needs, not what the council wants.

Sue Lindale, an avid road biker who rides close to 30 miles a day, said the bike path proposed on Billings' land is not a need.

"Us bikers don't even want it," Lindale said, adding that she represents a Milford cycling group that doesn't want the town's decision to reflect poorly on them.

Lucius Webb said the lack of respect and dignity shown Billings puts the town in an unsavory light. "What landowner will now want to be annexed into your governing body," he asked the council. "We can't trust Milford," Webb said. Again, the crowd clapped and erupted into cheers of agreement.

The council did not respond to the comments. After public comment, the crowd dissipated, leaving a much smaller crowd for the rest of the meeting. It was then business as usual with the city's different departments reporting updates to council.

City Clerk Terri Hudson told council Deputy Clerk Katrina Wilson will begin taking over duties, including reporting to council, as she transitions into retirement later this year.



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CULTURE



photo link: [Second Street Players](#)



BIKERS, WALKERS EXAMINE PLANNED MILFORD BIKE, PEDESTRIAN PATHS

Bike paths' future

Lindale and Mullican were two of the dozens of people who attended a city workshop held to get public input on routes that are years from becoming reality. This was the second public input meeting with city representatives and the Dover/Kent County Metropolitan Planning Organization. The primary focus was bike and pedestrian paths to enhance safety along the North Rehoboth Boulevard and North Walnut Street corridor.

“Over the past 70 years we have become more car centric. We automatically assume if we have a car we own the road,” said Helen Wiles, of the planning organization. “For some people walking and bicycling is their only form of transportation and they have to try to borrow a piece of the road to get from point A to point B.”

To make transportation safer in Milford, the study recommends better sidewalk connectivity, intersection improvements and designated bike paths.

Transportation Planner Malcolm Jacob said the planning organization collaborated with I.G. Burton, KSI, Perdue and the Milford School District and High School to identify areas of concern.

“Everyone wants to make sure this has positive outcomes,” Jacob said.

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

Bikers found things they didn't like about proposed Milford biking and pedestrian paths, and walkers found things they liked. Sue Lindale, an avid biker who rides dozens of miles a day, liked the overall plan.

“But there are some parts that aren't practical for road cycling,” she said. “Some of the plan restricts the roads and narrows them, which means when we ride on the road we're going to be holding up a whole line of traffic.”

Combining bike and walking lanes means bikers riding 20 mph will be moving fast compared to the average pedestrian, so bikers often move into a road for safety. “That's a problem,” Lindale said.

South Walnut Street resident Kevin Mullican studied the maps at Tuesday's workshop and said he felt the plans covered everything. “I walk a lot, so it's nice they are filling in the sidewalks,” Mullican said.

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The final report and plan documents would be used to develop construction plans for future city and state capital projects. Milford and the planning organization will take public input from the study to further develop a plan that will eventually be shown to City Council. Once approved by the city, the planning organization will recommend the project to the Delaware Department of Transportation.

“There is no timeline for the project,” said City Planner Rob Pierce.

This study is one of several that could potentially morph into official plans with DelDOT. Other studies include an intersection at 10th Street, a bike path on Marshall Street and bike lanes from South East Second Street to Watergate Boulevard South. Maps depicting these goals can be found on www.cityofmilford.com.

Comments or questions should be directed to Pierce at (302) 424-8395 or rpierce@milford-de.gov.



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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT LUNCHEON HELD IN MILFORD

BY TERRY ROGERS

All business owners are trying to help the employees they grow and to attract new workers in order to expand the business. The Chamber of Commerce for Greater Milford's recent Workforce Development luncheon pointed to several programs available from the state to help them do just that.

"Most of the time when we deal with business owners and new businesses, they are really struggling with keeping employees or finding employees, so we try to figure out how to get them in contact with the Department of Labor and make sure that they're able to get the capacity that they need to succeed," said Anastasia Jackson, Kent County regional business manager and Main Street coordinator. That includes spreading work about the state's Workforce Training Grant.

"So if you hear from us, we are going to be like, 'Hey, do you know of any businesses who can use this help?'" Jackson said.

The Delaware Division of Small Business is a service-focused agency that is committed to helping businesses start and grow in Delaware, she said. Their goal is to make Delaware the No. 1 state in the country for small business.

Jackson stated that the Delaware Tourism Office and the Office of Supplier Diversity is also part of the department.

"The Business Resource Connection is available," said Lauren Swain, Sussex County regional business manager. "If we are not able to help a business, we have many connections that may be able to provide the assistance

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they need,” she said. “Funding opportunities, we partner with the SBA, Delaware One Stop, the Small Business Development Center and SCORE Delaware. We also have a newsletter you can sign up for that is free.”

Jackson said the regional business managers serve as a liaison between small businesses and the state, helping assist with regulatory issues. They also connect small businesses to resource organizations while providing access to capital funds and other funding options

The Office of Supplier Diversity helps minority owned businesses certify in order to qualify for preference in state contracts. This includes Minority Business Enterprises, Women Business Enterprises, Veteran Owned Business Enterprises, Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Business Enterprises and Individuals with Disabilities Owned Business Enterprises. Certification allows businesses to receive updates on opportunities related to their certification.

Jackson pointed to the state’s EDGE Grants, some of which were announced last week. It opens up twice a year, in the spring and the fall, offering grants up to \$100,000 for five entrepreneur businesses and five STEM businesses.

“Last round, we had over 100 applications with 16 finalists that presented before a panel of judges,” Jackson said. Since 2019, the EDGE grants have awarded over \$5 million.

“The business must be open less than seven years with 10 or fewer employees, majority located in the state of Delaware,” she said.

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Businesses headquartered out of the state are unlikely to win, even if they are owned by Delaware residents, she said. The EDGE Grant **application** is currently open and the deadline for applications is March 1, at 4 p.m.

“One of the most important things we do is working with new businesses because we try to make sure everyone understands their relationship with the Department of Finance, the Department of Labor, making sure they don’t owe anything,” Jackson said.

“A lot of times we meet with a potential business owner, and they say ‘Oh, I have my LLC.’ And I’m like ‘Why?’ because you’re not there yet. The first step is a business plan and understanding how these agencies can help you grow your business.”

Swain noted the Workforce Training Grant is designed for those who demonstrate a need for training. This could be an organization with staff that must be certified each year or must have training to enable a business to improve or meet demands for their products or services.

Denise Burke of the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation described how the division can help businesses diversify their staff while providing employment assistance for the disabled.

“Our mission is to provide individualized services to employers and develop career pathways that qualify the job seeker in greater locations across the state,” Burke said. “We know that most businesses are really looking to diversify their workforce and we are ready to help you do that.”

Burke said they offer services for both those who have been disabled since birth and others who have developed a disability as they age or after an accident.

“For example, someone graduates from high school and decides to go into carpet laying for 20 years. All of a sudden, his knees are shot and he cannot do that any longer, but he still has a lot of years left to work,” Burke said. “He comes to DVR and we say, ‘Okay, let’s put you on a pathway for a career change.’”

That includes helping a worker get credentials, whether it is a degree or certifications, to be successful.

“We have an eager talent pool of people who want to get into employment,” she said. “I mean really truly qualified candidates who want to be employed.”

The division works with both the employer and the employee to be sure it is a good match. Sometimes, the problem preventing a business from hiring a work is a minor issue, such as the employee needing to sit rather than stand for long periods of time or needing a specific schedule for meals or medication. In those cases, the accommodation may easily be met and have no costs for the employer.

For more information about the many programs available from the state, call 302-739-4271 or email business@delaware.gov.



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photo link: Marcia Reed

COUNCIL HOMELESS WORKSHOP WEDNESDAY; VOTE SET FOR FEB. 26

BY JACOB OWENS

Milford City Council will discuss a proposed tiny home village for the homeless at a workshop 6 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall. A council vote on the village is expected Feb. 26 during the regular council meeting, Campbell said.

“We know we need to help people,” said the mayor.

If approved by council, the tiny homes village will be developed by **Springboard Collaborative**, the same non-profit that developed the Georgetown tiny home village that opened late last year.

On Wednesday, council will be studying some of the opinions brought forward during a Jan. 29 **public hearing** about the village. They include the location of the village, long-time funding and how addiction issued will be handled. Milford Mayor Archie Campbell said about 60 percent of those attending the hearing were for the village, 25 percent were against it and 15 percent weren't sure.

“Both sides brought up some really great points,” said

Martha Gery, founder and president of **Milford Advocacy for the Homeless**.

Gery said since the hearing she has been in discussions to address concerns brought up about the village with the mayor and other organizations.

“Part of the problem we have and I learned — we don't want to put it **downtown**,” Campbell said. Gery said a better spot would be near Walmart or Walgreens, near locations where services and stores homeless people use are located. “Homeless people don't make purchases downtown. They can't afford to,” Gery said.

She said representatives from the state's social services office would be available at the tiny home village, eliminating the need for clients to travel downtown to the state building.

Another concern is funding for the village. She has been told there are enough funds available to develop and operate the tiny homes for two years. What hap-

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pens after those funds run out is a question Gery said needs to be resolved.

“I do not want this going on the taxpayers,” Campbell said. A five- to 10-year funding plan is something that will be explored at Wednesday’s council workshop.

Addiction issues of the homeless concern citizens opposed to the village. At last month’s hearing, Springboard Collaborative Director Judson Malone detailed amnesty boxes used at the Georgetown tiny home village. The boxes, about shoebox size, are available for residents to lock up any items before entering the village, “no questions asked.”

Gery said Milford Advocacy for the Homeless is not in support of amnesty boxes. They also don’t support allowing anyone with an active addiction to live in a tiny home village. “There are other **programs** out there for those with addiction issues,” said Gery.

The homeless advocacy group wants people with addiction to first seek help and once in recovery apply for residency in the village. Milford Advocacy estimates that there are approximately 200 homeless individuals in town limits. “That’s a lot of people in cars, empty houses and tent cities,” Campbell said.

The mayor said there are three types of homeless people: those who prefer being on the streets; those who don’t want to be homeless and want to start their life over; and those with mental health or addiction issues. He said at least once a day he gets an email or a phone call related to the homeless population.

“There’s nothing I can do,” Campbell said. “They aren’t breaking the law.”



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MARIJUANA LAWS COME WITH PRICE TAG FOR TWO STATE DEPARTMENTS

BY JAREK RUTZ

Marijuana and the implications of its legalization in Delaware on certain state agencies, was part of the discussion in the Jan. 31 Joint Finance Committee hearings.

The Department of Safety and Homeland Security is set to receive a little over \$5 million of the total request specifically in response to the marijuana legislation. The Department of Justice, which also had its JFC hearing Feb. 1, asked for \$356,000 to reallocate positions relating to the marijuana control act.

The finance committee is responsible for setting the fiscal year 2025 state budget which starts July 1, and allocating funding to different programs and organizations throughout Delaware. It uses Gov. John Carney's proposed budget as one of the touchstones for decisions.

Its members had questions on how the recent marijuana legislation would affect staffing and finances.

Marijuana and jobs

In addition to Homeland Security's nearly \$227 million in Gov. John Carney's recommended budget for next year, the department asked the committee for an additional \$175,900 for uniforms, supplies and other start-up needs for the capitol police officers at the Sussex County Family Courthouse. The extra ask would also cover the cost of handguns for capitol police.

The fiscal note on the bill that authorized the state to set up and oversee the growth and sale of marijuana said the state would need \$4,765,969 in total state cost for fiscal year 2025.

The marijuana money would go to:

- Office of the Marijuana Commissioner: Funds would purchase a software application that can track marijuana "seed to sale." The program provides

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compliance oversight, process guidance, product tracking, guidelines and support to licensed businesses in the cultivation, processing and selling of marijuana.

- Marijuana Control Act Structural Changes: Funds would be used for reallocation of positions in the Attorney General Office and the Division of Alcohol and Tobacco Enforcement, as well as other agencies to reflect structural changes.

When marijuana is sold, Robert Coupe, a former Delaware State Police superintendent who is the state's first marijuana commissioner, said there will be a 50% sales tax on marijuana products. "It will create the implementation of over 34 state positions," Coupe said. "Only five of those positions are actually in existence."

Coupe pointed out that applications will start rolling in this year and the state must determine how it charges applicants for a license. He said if each license cost \$50,000, it would generate a few million dollars for the state. Or, they could come up with some formula, like [New Jersey](#) has, which weighs factors such as the size of the business, for example.

He also said the commission projects about 85,000 customers, which will generate about \$42 million in tax revenue each year.

Also in committee hearing, Sen. Laura Sturgeon D-Hockessin, and others, including public commenters, wanted to make sure there was set funding for victim specialists in both departments to engage with those who have suffered from domestic and other types of abuse.



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MILFORD MAYOR, FOUR COUNCILMEMBERS UP FOR ELECTION

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

The April 27 Milford elections will see two names on the ballot for mayor. The deadline to **file** a city council or mayor nomination is Feb. 27. Current Mayor Archie Campbell will be running against current Councilmember Todd Culotta of the Second Ward.

“He was the person who ran against me when I first ran for mayor,” Campbell said.

In Milford, the council is made up of two representatives from each of the four wards. Council members serve two-year terms and one councilman from each ward is up for re-election every year.

As of Feb. 6, uncontested council members up for re-election are Michael J. Boyle of the Ward 1, Andrew P. Fulton of the Ward 2, Brian C. Baer of the Ward 3.

Election filing

Apparently, Katrina E. Wilson of the 4th Ward will have competition if she wants to continue her 30-year tenure on the council. Phillip Ruiz confirmed Tuesday that once he has all of the required signatures for his nomination he will be filing to run in the 4th Ward. Were he elected to council, Ruiz said he would bring to the table his ability to speak fluent Spanish, along with his goal for affordable housing and career-focused jobs.

“I want to be part of the growth in progress in the city,” Ruiz said. “I know it is going to take a lot of work.”

With the deadline still weeks away, there’s a possibility more nominees for council seats will be on the ballot.

“I’ve had people pick up ballots, but we don’t release their names until they officially file,” Milford City Clerk



Teri Hudson said.

Milford residents 18 years and older must be **registered** to vote in the the state by March 28 to cast ballots in this year’s election. Non-resident property owners who are eligible to vote must have registered through Milford City Hall. Eligible non-residents who own property in more than one ward must declare on or before 4:30 p.m. Feb. 27 the ward in which they wish to vote.

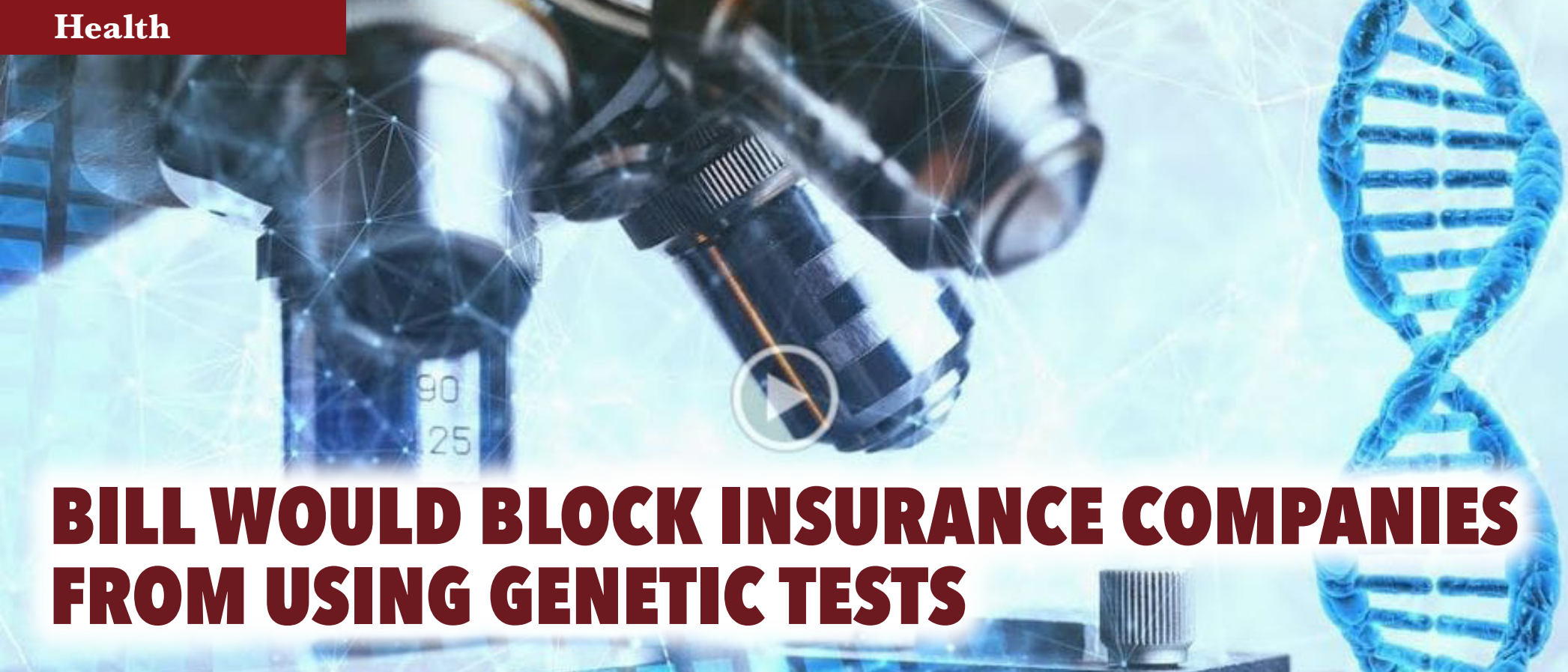
Residents who need to register to vote must contact the Department of Elections Sussex County Office at 302-856-5367. Registration can also be completed **on-line**. Those wishing to vote by absentee ballot can be placed on a list by contacting Hudson at 302-422-6616, ext. 1300 or 1142.

MILFORD
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HEALTH



photo link: Bayhealth



BILL WOULD BLOCK INSURANCE COMPANIES FROM USING GENETIC TESTS

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

For decades, public health officials have fretted about insurance companies having access to genetic testing and using the results to deny coverage or set higher rates for people likely to get certain diseases. That was true even before people could casually send in a swab to a company like 23andme, AncestryDNA or FamilyTreeDNA, to be tested. Those results end up in huge databases and can be purchased by other businesses.

If **House Bill 286** passes in the General Assembly this year, it will forbid insurance companies from using that kind of genetic testing results as a basis for life insurance company rates.

“The knowledge that you’ve gained from a recreational genetic product could have a financial impact on your life insurance,” warned Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, R-Clayton, the primary sponsor of the bill. Those impacts

could include higher premium rates, denying coverage or terminating policies based on what Spiegelman said is private data.

Ancestry.com and 23andMe both include a disclaimer that consumers’ results may affect life insurance, but many users don’t realize it, Spiegelman pointed out.

“I thought that wasn’t fair,” he said. “And I didn’t think that was fair for Delawareans.” At the same time, he said, “I don’t want people kept in the dark about potentially serious health issues because they are worried about the financial implications of the results. This is a deterrent to wellness that we should eliminate.”

Under HB286 life insurance companies could not request, require or purchase information obtained from a direct-to-consumer genetic testing business.

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POLICE & FIRE



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VICTIMS' RIGHTS TASK FORCE GIVEN DOZENS OF UPDATING IDEAS

BY KATIE KAZIMIR

Making sure crime victims have access to police body camera footage is one of the recommendations made Monday for revising Delaware's **Victims' Bill of Rights**. Other recommendations include an amendment to allow people to submit an impact statement during sentencing whether or not they make a statement during an investigation; eliminating the current \$6 million rollover cap on compensation fund; and updating the victim notification system.

The recommendations were among dozens that came from four subcommittees of the Victims' Bill of Rights task force, which is updating the 1992 law. The subcommittees looked at **victim safety**, **special victims**, **victims' compensation** and **notification procedures**.

Victims now have a right to submit a pre-sentence re-

port piece of the Bill of Rights and the committee wants to make it clear all victims can do that, even if they don't want to say something about a crime, said Angela Seguin, chair of the Special Victims Subgroup.

The cap on the rollover seems unnecessary, one committee decided. "We have about a \$4 million rolling balance from year to year," said Victims' Compensation Subgroup Chair Brian Pettyjohn, R-Georgetown.

As it stands, anything in the fund that exceeds \$6 million annually is put back to the state's general fund. Pettyjohn said that the state has not yet reached a point where that has happened.

However, he said, protecting the long-term solvency of the victims compensation fund needs to be a priority,

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especially if expansions to categories of eligibility are made.

“It is possible that we would go over \$6 million,” he said. “And the last thing that we would want is for money to go into the general fund and then not have enough for reimbursement to victims that put in valid claims,” he said.

Victims info system

Simplifying the ease of registration and notification delivery of the **Victim Information and Notification Everyday** (VINE) system for victims notifications was another proposal. VINE is an automated service that allows users to track the status of an offender’s custody or court case, or the status of a protective order.

“Given some of the age and cognitive abilities of some of the victims, some folks felt as though VINE was a little bit difficult to register and get those notifications going,” Victim Notification Subgroup Chair Spencer Price said.

In addition, the subgroup recommended changing the notification system so that it includes only information directly related to incidents that impact the victim.

“Right now the VINE system is person driven, so a person can be getting a notification from an offender that has nothing to do with their case,” Price continued. That means that any legal actions regarding the offender, whether they are related to the incident involving the victim or not, are reported to people who are not involved, which causes confusion.

“Unfortunately, that’s a shortcoming, but there are ways to address that,” he said.

Discussion on each subcommittee’s recommendations were minimal, which Committee Chair Brian Townsend, D-Newark, attributed to the subgroups’ focus on feasibility and efficient collaboration.

“We’re not used to such a harmonious agreement on such an important topic,” Townsend said.

A draft report of the recommendations will be distributed to committee members for review by Feb. 22. A vote to approve the draft report is expected at the next Victims’ Bill of Rights Committee meeting on Feb. 27. If approved, which is expected, the report will be distributed to state legislators no later than March 1.

From there, matters in the report will be separated into two categories, those that require legislation and those that do not. An example of the latter would be administrative changes that can happen without being written into law. Townsend said state policy makers will quickly file legislation encapsulating the recommendations. “It could be drafted in a variety of ways,” Townsend said, either as an overarching bill or multiple single-issue bills.

Non-legislative matters will be looked at to see what changes have already started happening and which need action. Townsend said the recommendations heard today will take anywhere between four months to two years to implement. He said there will be a need to balance timelines with reasonable expectations as staff and legislators work to enact any approved changes.

Public comments on the Victims’ Bill of Rights can be sent to Madeline.Starling@delaware.gov.



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