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Project Self-Sufficiency Opens "Sister-to-Sister" Prom Shop

Teens are invited to select free, new, or gently-used prom dresses and accessories from the popular "Sister-to-Sister" Prom Shop hosted by Project Self-Sufficiency. Formal wear including prom dresses, bridesmaids' dresses, gowns for mothers-of-the-bride, evening bags, jewelry, wraps and shawls, as well as shoes in good condition are all available at no charge. All items are displayed in a boutique-like setting on Project Self-Sufficiency's Newton campus, and space is available for dresses to be tried on. The public is invited, and no appointment is needed. The "Sister-to-Sister" Prom Shop will be open March 23rd, 24th, 25th, 3:00 – 6:00 p.m.; March 26th, 3:00 – 8:00 p.m.; March 27th, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.; and March 28th, 9:00 a.m. - noon.

"We are delighted to be offering teens the opportunity to receive beautiful gowns and accessories free of charge at the

PROM cont'd on page 2

Patricia Sutter Celebrated for 40 Years of Dedicated Service As Tax Collector In Wind Gap, PA

Patricia Sutter received citations for her nearly 40 years of service as tax collector in Wind Gap, PA and was honored with letters of commendations. Pictured are: Representative Sarah from United States Congressman Ryan Mackenzie's Office; Pennsylvania State Representative Ann Flood; Honoree, Patricia Sutter of Wind Gap; Mayor of Wind Gap, Heather Webber, Representative from Pennsylvania State Senator Lisa Boscola's office and Anna Bet representing Pen Argyl Women's Club. Photo by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

NJ Resident, Victor Gelman,Catches Impressive 45lb Muskellunge, Awaits State Record Confimation

Congratulations to Victor Gelman on his amazing 45.0-pound Muskellunge recently caught in Greenwood Lake! We understand there is great anticipation across the angling community as to whether or not this fish will be certified as a New Jersey State Record.

Once an application is received, a determination will be made based on the following criteria:

1. Fish must be caught in New Jersey waters and be located within the boundaries of the State. This is in alignment with New York's criteria.
2. Conform to NJ State Law and the regulations pertaining to freshwater fishing.
3. Fish must have been caught on sporting tackle, hooked and landed by entrant.
4. New Jersey state records are determined by weight alone. There are no line classes.
5. Fish must be weighed on a certified scale.
6. A photograph must be submitted.
7. Entry MUST be inspected by a NJDEP Fish & Wildlife.
8. Application MUST be submitted within one month of catch.

For more information on the New Jersey State Record Fish Program visit https://dep.nj.gov/.../new-jersey-state-record-fish-program

PROM

Continued from page 1

'Sister-to-Sister' Prom Shop," commented Deborah Berry-Toon, Executive Director of Project Self-Sufficiency. "We believe that every young woman deserves the chance to have a beautiful dress for that special, once-in-a-lifetime event. Thanks to generous donations from the community, we are fortunate to have hundreds of beautiful items in our collection again this year."

Project Self-Sufficiency is located at 127 Mill Street in Newton. The Sister-to-Sister Prom Shop is a program of the Journey Family Success Center at Project Self-Sufficiency. For information about the Sister-to-Sister Prom Shop, or to find out more about any of the programs at Project Self-Sufficiency, call 973-940-3500 or visit www.projectselfsufficiency.org.

Project Self-Sufficiency has assisted low-income individuals and families in northwestern New Jersey since 1986. Services offered at Project Self-Sufficiency include high school equivalency education, computer courses, employment skills training, job placement services, support groups, parenting classes, childcare and preschool, legal assistance and education, counseling and advocacy, referrals, and help with emergency basic needs, like food and clothing. For more information about the programs and services offered by Project Self-Sufficiency, visit www.projectselfsufficiency.org or call 973-940-3500.

The Journey Family Success Center at Project Self-Sufficiency is a program of support which includes parenting skills training, economic self-sufficiency services, family activities, legal education services, information about health and nutrition, referrals, advocacy, and other services. All activities are free and open to the public. Family Success Centers offer services to children, youth, families, individuals, and communities. Funding is provided by the New Jersey Department of Children & Families.

New Hope Emerges for Family of Abducted Government Contractor as Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Day Approaches

New Jersey's inaugural Hostage and Wrongful Detainee Day was March 9th, the date chosen to honor the longest-held U.S. hostage whose family, along with Assemblyman Michael Inganamort, championed to bring this observance to the state, the first state in the nation to recognize the day and fly its flag.

But this March 9 will hit a little differently for the family of Robert Levinson, the retired FBI agent and private investigator who, while on a CIA mission, went missing in Iran 19 years ago to the day. The man they hold responsible for his disappearance and presumed death, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, along with many members of his senior leadership team, was killed in a broad-daylight attack christened Operation Epic Fury in Tehran by U.S. and Israeli airstrikes Feb. 28. The day before that strike, Secretary of State Marco Rubio designated Iran as a "state sponsor of wrongful detention."

The Ayatollah's death may finally bring long-demanded answers and true closure.

"Now Iran must do what it has refused to do for nearly two decades: provide full accountability for what happened to our father, return his remains to our family, and disclose the truth about his kidnapping, imprisonment, and death," the family said in a statement shared with Fox News Correspondent Jennifer Griffin on X March 1. "Our family will not stop demanding the truth. And we will not stop demanding justice."

One of Levinson's seven children, Sarah, is a constituent in Inganamort's district. Her brother, Daniel, spoke to Fox News and said it was an emotional weekend for the family. After years of being ignored and rebuffed by the Iranian government, they hope this show of power by President Donald Trump and the United States military will bring accountability.

"I can imagine the family lost patience many, many times over the years, but they never lost hope that justice would be served. I saw that in the perseverance Sarah brought in working to get this day officially recognized not only for her father, but for the other families who have loved ones taken hostage or wrongfully detained," Inganamort (R-Morris) said. "As a new day dawns for the people of Iran, something people all around the globe are celebrating, we here hope for a new day so-to-speak for the Levinson family as well, that questions will be answered and Robert's remains brought home."

Inganamort and Sen. Parker Space's resolutions, signed into law Jan. 20, follow the federal proclamation sponsored by Rep. Tom Kean (R-NJ) in 2023 and highlighted by President Donald Trump this past March. The flag, designed by these families, now flies above the White House, U.S. Capitol, and State Department each year on March 9, Flag Day, Independence Day, and whenever an American hostage returns home to the United States.

The State of New Jersey is due to fly this flag over the Statehouse on Monday in observance of this important day.

As of October 2025, the federal government believes nearly 50 Americans are being held hostage or wrongfully detained in at least 13 countries; hard numbers are difficult to ascertain.

The family last received a picture of Robert Levinson in 2011. And then nothing. The U.S. government declared him dead on March 25, 2020. There remains a $25 million reward for information leading to the recovery of his remains.

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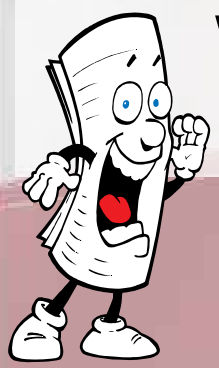

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Senator Rosemary Brown Introduces "Residents First" Data Center Legislative Package

Over the past several months, our region has increasingly been targeted for large-scale data center development.

While final approvals of any development lie with local governments under Pennsylvania law, I believe that legislative action at the state level is also appropriate to protect the interests of our communities and communities across the state facing similar circumstances.

That is why, several months ago, I introduced legislation establishing data center pre-application requirements to ensure transparency and accountability before a project could even formally begin. But I am not stopping there.

Last week, I announced three additional proposals to build out a comprehensive legislative package focused on protecting our communities.

This package is the culmination of a formal policy hearing, one-on-one conversations with hundreds of impacted constituents, discussions with industry representatives, and meetings with state and local government officials. I have listened carefully to concerns about water usage, utility capacity, zoning, and the long-term viability of this rapidly evolving technology.

Here is a recap of my full, "Residents First" legislative package:

- Require data center developers to provide "will-serve" letters confirming utilities can handle a project at full build-out BEFORE a formal application is submitted.
- Limit large-scale data center development to only properly zoned industrial areas.
- Mandate an independent, third-party water impact study and analysis at least 30 days prior to any formal application.
- Direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) to study emerging data storage technology and evaluate whether this current technology will be obsolete and if any new data technology may be emerging that will impact communities less.

I will continue to work diligently at the state level to put stronger safeguards in place since I, too, have been frustrated by local government decisions and processes. This legislation is designed to answer the many questions residents and I share regarding water protections, infrastructure durability, long-term sustainability, and overall community impacts.

Responsible growth requires transparency, thoughtful planning, and putting our neighborhoods first.

I appreciate your continued engagement on this critical issue for our region and remain personally available to discuss this with any resident.

Bill to Ease Shortage in Long-Term Care Workers Approved by Pennsylvania Senate

To help alleviate Pennsylvania's serious shortage of long-term care workers, the Senate approved legislation to allow high school juniors and seniors to earn graduation credit by working or volunteering in these settings so they can consider a career in this crucial field.

Health care leaders and senior advocates strongly support Senate Bill 116 because while Pennsylvania's population over the age of 65 is expected to nearly double by 2040, the number of long-term care professionals declined by 14% from 2019 to 2022.

This bill is part of a bipartisan package aimed at strengthening the long-term care workforce. Along with Senate Bill 114 and Senate Bill 115, it awaits action in the House of Representatives.

New to the Bangor Public Library

Adult Fiction:

Wait For Me: A Novel by Amy Jo Burns; Cleopatra: A novel by Saara El-Arifi; So Old, So Young: A Novel by Grant Ginder; Brawler: Stories by Lauren Groff; Lady Tremaine: A novel by Rachel Hochhauser; Kin by Tayari Jones; More than Enough: A novel by Anna Quindlen; The Wicked and the Damned by Rebecca Robinson; The Lamb: A Novel by Lucy Rose; Felicia's Favorites: A Novel by Danielle Steel; The Red Winter by Cameron Sullivan; Lake Effect: A Novel by Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney; Crown of War and Shadow by J. R. Ward

Adult Non Fiction:

Stripped Down: Unfiltered and Unapologetic by Xo Bunnie

Large Print Adult Fiction:

Hamnet: A Novel of the Plague by Maggie O'Farrell

Junior Fiction:

A Blood Moon by Morr Meroz; The Hybrid Prince by Tui Sutherland; The Unlikely Tale of Chase and Finnegan by Jasmine Warga; All the Blues in the Sky by Renee Watson

Young Adult Non Fiction:

Are My Feelings About My Other Parent Really Mine: A Book for Teens Caught Between Parents, Stories, and Feelings by Nicole Anderson; Are My Feelings About My Other Parent Really Mine: Workbook by Nicole Anderson

New to the Blue Mountain Community Library

Located at 216 S. Robinson Ave. in Pen Argyl, open Mon.-Sat. 10am-12pm and Mon. and Thurs. 6pm-8pm. A library card is free for residents of Pen Argyl, Plainfield Township, and Wind Gap. Call 610-863-3029 with any questions.

Blue Mountain Community Library News for Early March:

- The board of directors has lowered the library card eligibility age to 3. Residents of Pen Argyl, Plainfield Township, and Wind Gap are encouraged to bring proof of residency and get a FREE library card today. (Annual membership is just $12 for non-residents).

The library is in need of adult volunteers for all shifts. This is a great opportunity to serve the community and meet like-minded individuals! Commitment involves just 4.5 hours each month. No special skills are required, and all training is provided. Pick up an application at the circulation desk. Email info@bmcl.org or call 610-863-3029 for more information.

- There's a new scavenger hunt in the children's room, and the prize basket is fully stocked with tiny treasures. Children are invited to find the insects and pick a prize!

- The magazine swap rack and craft/art supply swap basket are both overflowing. Come take some magazines and supplies!

- A limited number of 1040 tax booklets is available at the library.
- The adult book discussion group will meet on Tuesday, March 10 to discuss David Baldacci's Strangers in Time. Email info@bmcl.org or call 610-863-3029 to reserve a spot.

- Order a special from Potsy's on Broadway on Tuesday, March 24, and Potsy's will donate a portion of the bill back to the library. Potsy's is located on 21 S. Broadway in Wind Gap. Visit their Facebook page or call 610-881-4261 for details.

- Pen Argyl yearbooks, going back decades, are for sale at $25 each.

New to the circulating collection:

Adult fiction: Dear Debbie (Freida McFadden), Woman Down (Colleen Hoover), It's Not Her (Mary Kubica), Jigsaw (Jonathan Kellerman), Nash Falls (David Baldacci), Vigil (George Saunders), The Wife Upstairs (Freida McFadden), We Do Not Part (Han Kang), Last Twilight in Paris (Pam Jenoff)

Adult nonfiction: Neptune's Fortune (Julian Sancton), Framed (John Grisham)

Large print: Overkill (J.A. Jance), Code Blue (Fern Michaels), Close Your Eyes and Count to 10 (Lisa Unger)

Young adult fiction: War Stories (Gordon Korman)

Juvenile fiction: Let's Go for a Drive! (Mo Willems)

Juvenile nonfiction: What a Waste (Jess French)

Patricia Sutter Honored For Nearly 40 Years as Wind Gap Tax Collector

Photos by Dale Young/The Free Weekly Press

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WARREN COUNTY, NJ CELEBRATE ST.PATRICK'S DAY IN HACKETTSTOWN

The Warren County Board of County Commissioners celebrated St. Patrick's Day in Hackettstown this past week as they marched in the town's 17th Annual St. Patrick's Day Parade and attended the annual Grand Marshal Reception. This year's grand marshal, Shawn Burke, was presented with his sash on Thursday March 5. Burke was also presented with a proclamation from the Warren County Board of County Commissioners, congratulating him on being named the 2026 Hackettstown St. Patrick's Day grand marshal. On Sunday March 8, Warren County Commissioners James R. Kern III and Jason J. Sarnoski marched alongside fellow elected officials in the Hackettstown St. Patrick's Day Parade. The Warren County Board of County Commissioners thanks those who attended the parade and wishes everyone a safe and joyful St. Patrick's Day. (Photos and Caption Courtesy Warren County, New Jersey, Government - Facebook)

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Bangor Women's Club Announces Arts Festival Winners

The Bangor Women's Club proudly announces the results of the 2026 Arts Festival.

Art and photography from the area schools were judged once again by Jim & Angeline Gloria at our January meeting: Division 1 (K, 1, &2): #1 Quinn Kiskaddon's "Arithmetic" #2 Bryan Simm's "Stay Active" , both 5Pts. Elementary students. Quinn's art is now entered in the District contest. Division 2 (3, 4, & 5): #1 Matthew Aulisio's "Football" De Franco #2 Penae Stolten's "Life in the Jungle" Washington Elementary and tied for #3 Alani Blount's "Shelly" Washington Elementary and Christopher Gardener's "Positive City" De Franco. Matthew's collage also went to the District. In High School Photography Color Scenic: #1 Gabriel Laclair's "A Mist in Time" and in Color Living Things: #1 Christian Fekete's "The American Pokeweed" and #2 Kaela Shade's "Grazing" (from Bangor H.S.) have garnered awards. We had a tremendous turn-out for the literature portion of our festival. Our six literature judges had 95 entries to carefully look over. Faith Christian always has a wonderful participation in our short story and poetry competitions. In Category 2 (grades 3, 4, & 5) short story: #1 Matthew Aulisio's "The Unbeatable Escape Room" De Franco #2 Zachary Cecchini's "Gingerbread Man Retold by Zachary Faith Christian #3 Duncan Hero's "Gingerbread Man" Faith Christian and in poetry #1 Matthew Aulisio's "Yellowstone" De Franco #2 Asher Lessig's "Teachers" Faith Christian #3 David Miller's "Decoration Day" won awards with first place entries going on to the State contest. In Category 3 (grades 6, 7, & 8) short story: #1Brielle Cecchini's "Gingerbread Thief" #2 Iliana Green's "The Carbonation Chronicles" #3 Autumn Isabella Laviena's "The Straykids Sibling" all won awards and all are Faith Christian students. Brielle's story and Nadya Calder's 1st place poem, "I Wanna Fit In" from Faith Christian have gone on to the State contest. Category 4 (grades 9, 10, 11, & 12) short story: #1 Emma Confalone's "Clocks" Bangor H.S. #2 Sophie Watson's "The Merry Life of a Ghost" Faith Christian and Category 4 poetry: #1 En-Ai John's "Proof" Faith Christian #2 Judah Grauso's "The Blessing of the Wise" Faith Christian, were winners with Emma's story and En-Ai's poem going on to State. Congratulations and thank you to all the dedicated students who have entered our annual contest. It has been an exciting year with eight new club members and interesting projects planned. We always enjoy having guests share our luncheon and meeting the third Tuesday of the month at Stone Church's Trinity United Church of Christ. Spring is in the air!

Senate Budget Hearings in Harrisburg Conclude

Over the past two weeks, as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I have been in Harrisburg to review the Governor's proposed $53.3 billion state budget, which would increase spending by $2.7 billion, or 5.4%, over the current fiscal year. These hearings are an important part of the budget process and allow the legislature the opportunity to question agencies directly about their spending requests, priorities, and long-term financial outlook.

This week's hearings included discussions with the Governor's Budget Office and Department of Revenue, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), and others.

Energy policy and consumer costs were discussed during the Public Utility Commission's hearing. The commission regulates more than 8,000 utility providers in Pennsylvania, and we questioned whether current energy policies could be contributing to higher costs for Pennsylvania consumers.

You can find complete recaps and videos of each hearing at: www.pasenategop.com/budget-hearings/

Comments On Proposed Pennsylvania Waterfowl Seasons Now Being Accepted

Hunters and members of waterfowl organizations have several options to ask questions and voice opinions on the 2026-27 proposed migratory game bird seasons.

Questions or comments can be submitted by email to waterfowlcomments@pa.gov, or by mail to Pennsylvania Game Commission, Bureau of Wildlife Management, 2001 Elmerton Ave., Harrisburg, PA 17110-9797.

An informational livestream, followed by a live question-and-answer session, will be held on the proposed seasons on Wednesday, March 11 at 6:30 p.m. on the Game Commission's YouTube channel. The briefing will be recorded, and a link will be available to view at https://www.youtube.com/pagamecommission.

And a Waterfowl Open House is scheduled to take place at the Game Commission's Northeast Regional Office, 3917 Memorial Hwy, Dallas, PA 18612 on Saturday, March 14 from noon to 4 p.m. Attendees will have the opportunity to interact with Game Commission staff and view proposed seasons presented.

It still hasn't been determined whether Sundays will be included

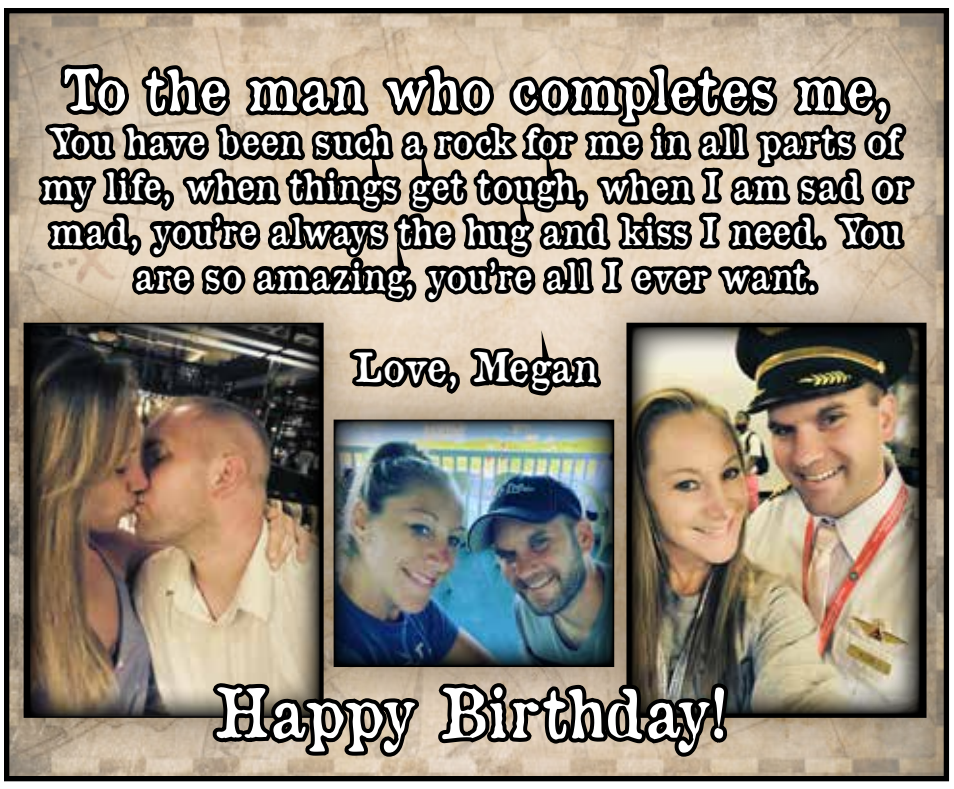
in the 2026-27 migratory game bird seasons. Because migratory seasons follow federal frameworks that establish the maximum number of hunting days for each season, including Sundays would create more-compact seasons. The Game Commission is conducting a random survey to find out more about which option waterfowl hunters prefer, and all who are interested in this matter can submit comments to the agency. If Sundays are included in the migratory game bird seasons, they cannot be closed in the future.

The season proposal document that's posted on the Game Commission's website shows two proposed season structures, one with Sundays and one without. Both proposals follow the federal framework. These proposed migratory seasons are in accordance with the preliminarily approved 2026-27 general hunting seasons that, if adopted, would allow small game hunting during regular firearms deer season, meaning woodcock and snipe hunting would be open then.

Another notable proposal for 2026-27 seasons would increase the Atlantic Population Canada goose regular season to 45 days, with a daily bag limit of 3. This change to the framework would take effect once published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Additionally, the regular snow goose season is proposed to run from November through March 10, with the light goose conservation order not utilized unless 2026 spring snow goose surveys indicate its necessity. This recommendation to drastically reduce or forgo the conservation order will be followed by all high-harvest states within the Atlantic Flyway due to 2025 spring snow goose surveys indicating populations are below the target range.

If you have questions or are interested in commenting on proposed seasons, please provide the species, zone (if applicable) and County/Counties you are specifically commenting on. The comment period closes March 22.



Garden Dilemmas? Ask Mary?

Mary E. Stone
Stone Associates Landscape Design & Consulting, Blairstown, NJ

Hello, fellow readers,

Some walks stay with us long after they end. Last week, Jolee and I wandered through the woods on a rainy morning dense with mist. Patches of snow lingered beneath the trees. Rain rarely keeps us from walking. We head out in all kinds of weather except thunder and lightning. Being in nature is a daily routine — a way to stay grounded.

As we stepped into the woods that morning, the world felt hushed except for the steady rhythm of raindrops falling through the branches onto the soggy leaves. Walking in nature has a way of opening quiet spaces inside us — places where thoughts and feelings we've been carrying finally have room to breathe.

Beside me, my faithful companion. Dogs don't require explanations. They walk beside us, present in the moment, accepting whatever the day holds. We can learn much from dogs. Though Jolee sometimes puts on the brakes in the rain, her way of saying, "I'd rather not, thank you very much." But that day, she walked steadily along as if she knew the walk mattered.

The forest holds many reminders of how life works. Storms pass. Roots hold. New growth follows disturbance. Those truths are sometimes harder to remember in our lives.

As I walked that rainy morning, I found myself thinking about a column I wrote during another unsettling time in the world, in the thick of the pandemic. The column was titled March Folklore of Hope. At that time, fear was both real and amplified by the constant stream of alarming headlines.

Today, the news again carries stories of conflict and war. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by worry. Perhaps that is why March folklore has endured for generations. People have always looked to nature's signs for reassurance that change is coming—that winter never holds the landscape forever.

Many are familiar with the saying that March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. My mom used to say it in reverse: "If it comes in like a lamb, it goes out like a lion."

Upon researching the history of the old proverb, it seems the saying isn't reversed. Maybe it was simply an Emma Stone original. Still, it seems logical that the expression could work both ways. Think back on all the snowy Easters we've experienced after a mild start to March.

As I write, we've leapt forward with the time change, and the temperature followed suit. Sixty degrees feels like a small miracle after a long winter. And this morning, another hopeful sign — daffodil foliage a few inches above the ground.

Soon the snowdrops will emerge — those delicate white flowers that seem to wondrously push through winter's last crust of frost. Their presence reminds us that life continues beneath the surface even when we cannot see it.

Nature gives us many such examples of quiet trust. Consider the acorn. A single acorn falls to the ground and grows into an oak tree that will produce thousands more. Those acorns feed wildlife. Some become future forests.

If you ever wish to plant just one thing to help nature, plant an oak tree. It nurtures hundreds of species and becomes a pillar of life in the landscape.

Perhaps the challenging seasons we experience are similar. We may not understand their purpose in the moment, but they shape who we become and sometimes allow us to nourish others along the way.

As I finished that rainy walk, the mist thickened where the last drifts of snow gathered among the trees. It felt as though I was walking inside a cloud. And yet even in the fog, one thing felt certain. Spring is coming. The snowdrops will bloom. The woods and meadows will green again.

And whatever storms we face — in our gardens or in our lives — they are part of the seasons we pass through. Nature reminds us that life continues to grow through every one of them.

Garden Dilemmas? AskMaryStone.com or tune in on your favorite Podcast App.

Boscola Proposes Temporary Suspension of Gasoline and Diesel Taxes to Provide Relief for Drivers and Businesses

Senator Lisa M. Boscola (D-Lehigh/Northampton) announced plans to introduce legislation that would temporarily suspend Pennsylvania's gasoline and diesel taxes for 60 days to provide relief for consumers and businesses facing rising fuel costs.

Boscola said the two bills are intended to help Pennsylvania drivers and businesses cope with fuel price increases tied to instability in global oil markets.

"Pennsylvania drivers are already starting to see prices at the pump climb as global oil markets react to instability in the Middle East," Boscola said. "At a time when families and businesses are already facing rising costs, we should use every tool available to provide some short-term relief."

Pennsylvania motorists currently pay one of the highest fuel taxes in the nation. The state gasoline tax is 57.6 cents per gallon, while the diesel tax is approximately 74 cents per gallon.

Boscola noted that while fuel taxes are an important source of funding for transportation infrastructure, the temporary suspension would be structured to ensure those commitments remain intact.

"Our legislation would temporarily suspend these taxes while authorizing bonding to replace any short-term loss to the Motor License Fund," Boscola said. "This ensures we can provide relief at the pump without disrupting funding for State Police or critical road and bridge projects."

The proposed 60-day suspension would provide relief for commuters while also helping businesses that rely heavily on diesel fuel, including trucking, agriculture, manufacturing, and construction industries.

Senator Boscola previously introduced similar legislation during the summer of 2022 after global energy markets were disrupted following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Boscola said the proposal reflects the need for government to respond when rising costs begin to put additional pressure on working families and small businesses.

"When affordability becomes a challenge for Pennsylvania families and business owners, government has a responsibility to step in and look for ways to help," Boscola said. "Providing temporary relief at the fuel pump is a practical step we can take right now."

Blairstown Hose Co. #1 Hosts Friday The 13th Boot Drive

Looks like 46 Fire has a new member lingering around, and he's ready to mingle with you all! Join the community as they hit the streets for a "FRIDAY the 13th" BOOT DRIVE! If you're driving by, stop and say hello and drop a donation in the Boot, and don't forget to Welcome Our Newest Member, Jason, along the streets of downtown Blairstown, he will be happy to take a photo with you too! Your support helps us continue giving back to the community we love and proudly serve! See you this Friday the 13th at 3pm. Courtesy Blairstown Hose Company #1 - Facebook Page

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Project Self-Sufficiency Programs Educate Public, Support Trauma Survivors, Promote Prevention

Project Self-Sufficiency will offer three workshops regarding adverse childhood experiences with the goal of educating the public, supporting trauma survivors, and offering tips for prevention and healing within the community. A virtual "Understanding ACEs: Building Self-Healing Communities" presentation on Wednesday, March 25th, 3:00 p.m., will address the neurological and biological effects of adversity on development and its corresponding impact on the health of the overall population. The workshop and discussion series, "Connections Matter", which facilitates the conversation about issues surrounding childhood trauma, will be offered virtually in English, Tuesday, April 21st, 2:00 p.m., and in Spanish, Wednesday, April 22nd, 2:00 p.m. Tips for protection, prevention, and promoting resilience within the community will also be discussed. All workshops are free, hosted on Zoom, and open to the public; interested participants are invited to call 973-940-3500 to receive log-in details.

During the Understanding ACEs workshop, parents, caregivers, and other community providers will learn how childhood trauma impacts physical and neurological development and discuss methods for improving health and well-being across the lifespan.

The Connections Matter curriculum invites providers, parents, and community members to build caring connections to improve resiliency. Discussion during the workshops will focus on understanding adverse childhood experiences and demonstrating how caring connections can serve as a primary buffer in the negative effects of trauma. The training is appropriate for parents and providers raising and teaching school aged children. All three workshops are funded by the New Jersey Department of Children and Families and led by Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey.

Speakers will address the impact of adverse childhood experiences on social, emotional, and cognitive development, and offer tips and strategies for building resilience. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are widely recognized as falling into three distinct categories, abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction.

Haley McCracken, Project Self-Sufficiency, will host workshops regarding adverse childhood experiences.

Examples of negative behavior said to result from ACEs include smoking, alcoholism, drug use, absenteeism, and lack of physical activity. These behaviors can cause a cascade of physical and mental health problems, from diabetes to cancer to suicidal thoughts. It is estimated that approximately 67% of the population has experienced at least one adverse childhood experience.

Project Self-Sufficiency is bringing together professionals, providers, and parents who are committed to increasing awareness of the impact of childhood trauma on juvenile development, future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. "Our goal is to help make our community a place in which every child can thrive by providing education and training on adverse childhood experiences and assuring safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments," explains Project Self-Sufficiency Executive Director Deborah Berry-Toon. "Protection, prevention, and resilience promotion can profoundly improve health according to recent discoveries in neuroscience, epigenetics, and epidemiology. The tools identified in these workshops can positively impact public health, safety, and productivity, and reduce public and private costs now and for future generations."

Project Self-Sufficiency is a non-profit organization located in semi-rural northwestern New Jersey which has assisted low-income families along the path to economic self-sufficiency since 1986. The agency is dedicated to empowering individuals and families to achieve economic independence and self-reliance, providing a safe and inclusive environment that fosters growth, learning, and opportunity. Services include career guidance and assessment, computer classes, high school diploma instruction, parenting workshops, childcare, legal assistance and education, help with emergency basic needs such as clothing and food, health education, support groups, life skills classes, family activities, home visitation, and more. For more information, visit www.projectselfsufficiency.org or call 973-940-3500.

Shapiro Administration to DHS: No Schuylkill or Berks Detention Warehouses Without Complying with State Law

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued five administrative orders yesterday, two to the Department of Homeland Security and three to local authorities – one to each of Schuylkill County Municipal Authority (SCMA), Tremont Township, and Upper Bern Township. The orders direct that water and sewage cannot be supplied to the warehouses DHS has recently purchased to use as detention centers— and that the buildings cannot be occupied— until DHS demonstrates compliance with federal and state environmental regulations.

"Based on what the Department has learned about DHS's plans to convert two commercial warehouses into detention centers for 9,000 people, there are serious concerns about the environmental impacts of these actions. The conversion of warehouses to detention facilities risks harming the communities in and around Tremont and Upper Bern townships, overwhelming their sewage facilities and exceeding the available drinking water supply," said DEP Secretary Jessica Shirley. "Doubling the populations of these areas could drain drinking water sources and lead to polluted waterways from overwhelmed sewage facilities leaking raw waste into our streets and rivers. Just like anyone else, DHS needs to demonstrate its facilities comply with environmental standards."

In two separate orders to the Department of Homeland Security, DEP directed the federal agency not to use the Upper Bern or SCMA sewer systems for any proposed detention facilities until it has been proven that DHS can safely do so. The orders further specify that holding tanks and septic systems are not allowed without required permits. Additionally, DEP directed DHS not to use SCMA infrastructure for drinking water nor use the private well at the Upper Bern Township warehouse for the proposed facilities without legally required DEP approval. DHS has been directed not to occupy the buildings until the applicable legal requirements are met.

The orders to Tremont and Upper Bern Townships prohibit occupancy of the warehouses until further sewage planning and permitting is obtained from DEP and prohibits each Township from accepting sewage from holding tanks or portable toilets without further authorization. Each Township operates a sewage treatment plant that could need to be redesigned and significantly modified to receive the amount of expected wastewater from a detention center.

The order to SCMA prohibits providing drinking water to a detention center from the SCMA Tremont water system, which protects against excessive strain on a water infrastructure system that is already being supported through emergency measures. For sewage, DEP similarly ordered SCMA that it could not provide sewage service or accept sewage from portable toilets at the detention center without further permitting and approval from Tremont Township and DEP.

Permits or approvals from DEP are needed for the construction and operation of all changes to drinking water and sewage treatment systems.

Corrado & Space Bill To Make Schools Safer With Portable Anti-Choking Devices Advances

Legislation sponsored by Senator Kristin M. Corrado (R-Passaic, Bergen, Essex) and Senator Parker Space (R-Sussex, Morris, Warren) to require portable anti-choking devices in schools passed the Senate Education Committee.

S-1123 would require nurses and school employees to receive training in the use of anti-choking devices and develop related policies. A portable anti-choking device must be available in the cafeteria, school nurse's office, and/or similar areas. These devices would be provided at no cost to schools or the State.

"Every second counts in an emergency, and this bill ensures that schools are prepared to act swiftly and effectively," said Sen. Corrado. "With trained staff and devices in designated areas, we can be better prepared to respond to a choking emergency."

"No parent should ever have to worry about their child being at risk of choking while at school," said Sen. Space. "This bill is a vital step towards ensuring that every school is prepared to keep students safe in any situation."

Read the full text of the bill online at: www.njleg.state.nj.us/billsearch/2026/S1123

A previous version of this bill was approved by the Senate Education Committee last year but had to be reintroduced at the start of the new legislative session.

To speak with Sen. Corrado or Sen. Space, contact Jennifer Collins Pistritto, SRO Associate Director of Digital Communications, at jcollins@njleg.org.

Sherrill Administration Awards $90,000 In Grants To Help Communities Reduce Risk In Advance Of Wildfire Season

Ahead of the spring wildfire season, the Department of Environmental Protection's Forest Fire Service today announced $90,000 in grants to 22 communities statewide to support wildfire risk-reduction projects, part of the Sherrill Administration's mission to deliver to protect New Jersey communities from lengthening wildfire seasons amid a changing climate.

Communities receiving funds are located within New Jersey's high-risk wildland-urban interface, areas where forest lands and human development intertwine, and have an approved Firewise Action Plan through the Forest Fire Service's Firewise Communities program.

"The Firewise Communities Program supports concrete actions to help save lives and raise awareness for both vigilance and action to reduce wildfire risk," said Environmental Protection Acting Commissioner Ed Potosnak. "The partnerships supported by this initiative are vital for ensuring the protection of lives and property in New Jersey's most wildfire-prone areas."

"As New Jersey approaches spring wildfire season, preparation is critical, and community level action to reduce wildfire risk through implementation of the Firewise Communities program is an important step to take," said John Cecil, DEP's Assistant Commissioner for State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites. "These grants empower communities to take meaningful action to reduce wildfire risk in their own backyards."

The grant program is part of the National Fire Protection Association's Firewise USA initiative, which helps residents understand wildfire risks. It further supports communities in reducing those risks through planning, preparedness, education, and technical and financial assistance.

Funding for the grants was made available through the USDA Forest Service's Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program provided to the Middle Atlantic Interstate Forest Fire Protection Compact and distributed by the DEP Forest Fire Service. The Compact coordinates forest fire protection, planning and training among Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.

How the Grants Are Used: Funded projects may include reducing wildfire risk through the maintenance of firebreaks to keep them clear of vegetation, along with strategic forest-thinning activities to reduce low and midstory trees and shrubs known as ladder fuels. Those ladder fuels can allow fire to spread rapidly from the forest floor into the tree canopy, making fires more difficult to control and extinguish.

Other potential projects include community education and outreach, as well as home-hardening initiatives. Home hardening involves modifying building materials, design features and landscaping to reduce the likelihood that a home will ignite during a wildfire.

Homes are typically not destroyed by direct flames but by embers and burning debris carried by wind. Home hardening focuses on preventing these ignition points by removing dead vegetation near structures, creating defensible space, planting fire-resistant landscaping, keeping gutters clear of leaves and pine needles, and modifying structures, such as installing mesh screens over vents, to prevent embers from entering.

"New Jersey has one of the most successful Firewise Community programs in the country, which not only helps keep residents safe in the event of a wildfire, but gives our firefighters a deeper knowledge of the issues in the communities they protect," said Bill Donnelly, Chief of the Forest Fire Service. "When residents and firefighters collaborate, they support better planning, prevention and response to wildfires."

Grant recipients are required to provide a matching contribution through monetary funds and/or documented volunteer hours.

The following communities had their Firewise grant applications approved:

Atlantic County: Egg Harbor: Victoria Crossing Community Association, $4,200

Burlington County:

Leisuretown Association, Inc., Southampton and Tranquility Ridge Homeowners Association, Vincentown: $4,200 each

Camden County: Waterford Township: $4,200

Monmouth County: Hamilton: Horizons at Woods Landing Homeowners Association, $4,200

Ocean County: Barnegat: Brighton at Barnegat Firewise Association, $3,500; Four Seasons at Mirage Homeowners Association, Heritage Bay Homeowners Association, Heritage Point Homeowners Association, Horizons at Barnegat Homeowners Association, and Pheasant Run Barnegat, $4,200 each; Pinewood Estates Firewise, $2,000

Little Egg Harbor: Four Seasons at Harbor Bay Homeowners Association and Four Seasons at Sea Oaks Homeowners Association, $4,200 each

Manchester: Crestwood Village Five Homeowners Association and Crestwood Village Six Community Association, Inc., $4,300 each

Manahawkin: Atlantic Hills Homeowners Association and Paramount Escapes Ocean Breeze, Manahawkin, $4,200 each

Toms River: Greenbriar Woodlands Homeowners Association, $4,200

Tuckerton: Cranberry Creek Homeowners Association, Inc., $4,200

Waretown: Greenbriar Oceanaire Community Association, Inc., $4,200

Warren County: Hardwick Township: $4,300

About Firewise and Spring Wildfire Season

New Jersey has participated in the Firewise Communities program since 2004, when Hardwick Township in Warren County became the state's first Firewise Community. It is one of several programs offered by the DEP Forest Fire Service to help educate residents about wildfire risk, reduce forest fuels and plan for future wildfires.

Mid-March to Mid-May is typically peak wildfire season in New Jersey. At this time of year, trees and underbrush are still leafing out, relative humidity is generally low, and windy days are common. The combination of these factors means forested lands dry out quickly, particularly in the Pinelands of southern New Jersey. The sandy and porous soils in this vast region do not retain moisture for long, exacerbate drying and increase the potential for a fire to spark only hours after rainfall.

Residents and community leaders can learn more about wildfire threats to homes and businesses through the New Jersey Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal (NJWRAP), which compiles data and resources to help residents, community leaders and fire professionals take actions to mitigate wildfire risk.

In 2025, the Forest Fire Service launched the NJ Wildfire SMART (Safety, Mitigation, Awareness, Response, Training) initiative, a series of actions that emphasize steps and information resources for reducing wildfire risk and spread.

To learn more about wildfires in New Jersey, steps to protect property, and other resources, visit wildfire.nj.gov

Help Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful!

Now through May 31 is your chance to clean up litter around Pennsylvania! Not sure where to start? Visit Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful website at www.keeppabeautiful.org/programs/pick-up-pa/ to find information on how to organize an event. Remember, when you're stream side to always to leave no trace! Whatever you bring with you, make sure you take back out with you. Do not leave behind fishing line, hooks, unused bait or empty bait containers.

Safety Reminders For Bears Waking Up For Spring

As Pennsylvania black bears begin wake from winter dormancy (torpor) in early spring, which begins on March 20th, they actively seek food, often roaming neighborhoods. To ensure safety, remove bird feeders, secure trash, clean grills, and keep pet food indoors. Never approach a bear, and if encountered, do not run; make yourself look large, talk calmly, and back away slowly.

Remeber these safety tips this Spring:

- Remove Food Sources: Bears are hungry and looking for easy meals. Remove bird feeders, bring in pet food, and clean grills after every use.
- Secure Garbage: Store trash in, or in a secure,, tight-fitting container, or inside a garage/shed. Place it out on the morning of pickup, not the night before.
- Encounters: If a bear is in your yard, give it space and let it move on. If you see one, do not run; make noise, make yourself look large, and leave the area slowly.
- When Camping/Hiking, never store food in a tent. Use bear-resistant containers or hang food 10 feet high and 10 feet away from a tree.
- If a bear causes damage or acts aggressively, contact the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Remeber bears are most active at dawn and dusk, practice these safety tips to help keep yourself and wildlife safe. Happy Spring!

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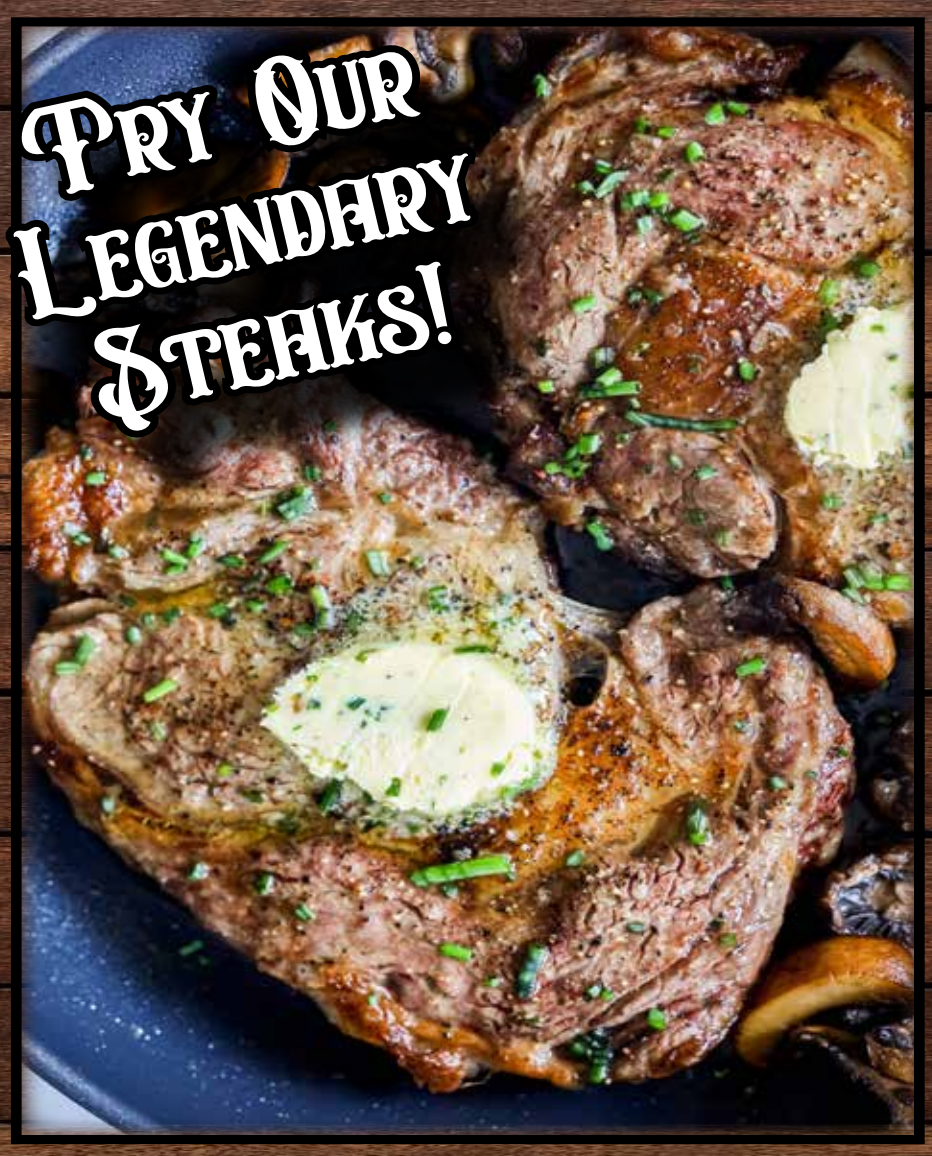

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Kean Advocates for Robust Amtrak Service to Trenton, Metropark along Northeast Corridor

Representatives Tom Kean, Jr. (NJ-07), Nicole Malliotakis (NY-11), and Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-01) announced that they sent a letter to Amtrak President Roger Harris urging robust Acela and Northeast Regional train service to Trenton Transit Center (TRE) and Metropark (MET) ahead of a historic year for the region.

In their letter to the President of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), the lawmakers highlighted the critical role both stations play as connection points to the Northeast Corridor for communities across North, Central, and South New Jersey, as well as parts of Southeast Pennsylvania and Staten Island. They noted that since the September 2023 schedule update, Trenton has been left entirely without Acela service (making it the only state capital on the Acela line without a dedicated stop), while Metropark has seen a decrease in daily stops by both Acela and Northeast Regional trains.

The Members also pointed to the 2026 FIFA World Cup Final and the Nation's Semiquincentennial as events expected to drive significant ridership increases between Philadelphia and New York City this year, with millions of visitors anticipated across the region.

"Our constituents rely on Amtrak services for regular commutes and other travel," the lawmakers wrote. "As the rollout of the Next-Gen Acela trainsets continues and as these high-profile events approach, we request that you ensure Trenton and Metropark are adequately served in the face of this anticipated ridership growth, including by Acela trainsets."

Read the full letter:

Dear Mr. Harris,

As Members of Congress representing communities served by the Northeast Corridor, we write in support of robust Acela and Northeast Regional train service to key points in the New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania region.

Our constituents rely on Amtrak services for regular commutes and other travel. Stations like Metropark (MET) and Trenton Transit Center (TRE) serve dense constituencies and economic drivers. These stations are the nearest direct access to the Northeast Corridor for communities in broad swathes of North, Central, and South New Jersey, as well as parts of Southeast Pennsylvania and Staten Island. Located in New Jersey's state capital, Trenton serves tens of thousands of yearly commuters and visitors to state government and surrounding areas, while Metropark provides direct access to the Garden State Parkway, New Jersey Turnpike, and other major thoroughfares.

This year, our region will serve as host to both the 2026 FIFA World Cup Final and events related to the Nation's Semiquincentennial, attracting millions of visitors in what is anticipated to be a record year for tourism. Events commemorating America's historic revolutionary battles will draw visitors throughout New Jersey and the Northeast, while celebratory events surrounding the World Cup promise to bring substantial increases in ridership to points between matches in Philadelphia, PA and New York City, N.Y.

Unfortunately, since the September 2023 schedule update, Trenton has been entirely without Acela service, while Metropark has seen a decrease in daily stops by both Acela and Northeast Regional trains over the same timeframe.

We appreciate and welcome any efforts to improve reliability and service, especially in the wake of the cascading service disruptions seen in the summer of 2024. However, these changes should not come at the expense of service to these important population and economic hubs. Decreased service to Trenton and Metropark risks distancing the government, residential, and tourism hubs they serve from access to the Northeast Corridor, and the cancellation of Acela service to the historic city of Trenton leaves it as the only state capital on the Acela line without a dedicated stop.

As the rollout of the Next-Gen Acela trainsets continues and as these high-profile events approach, we request that you ensure Trenton and Metropark are adequately served in the face of this anticipated ridership growth, including by Acela trainsets. Thank you for your partnership in ensuring that communities in our region of the Northeast Corridor enjoy regular and reliable Amtrak service in 2026 and into the future.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Kean, Jr., Nicole Malliotakis, and Brian Fitzpatrick

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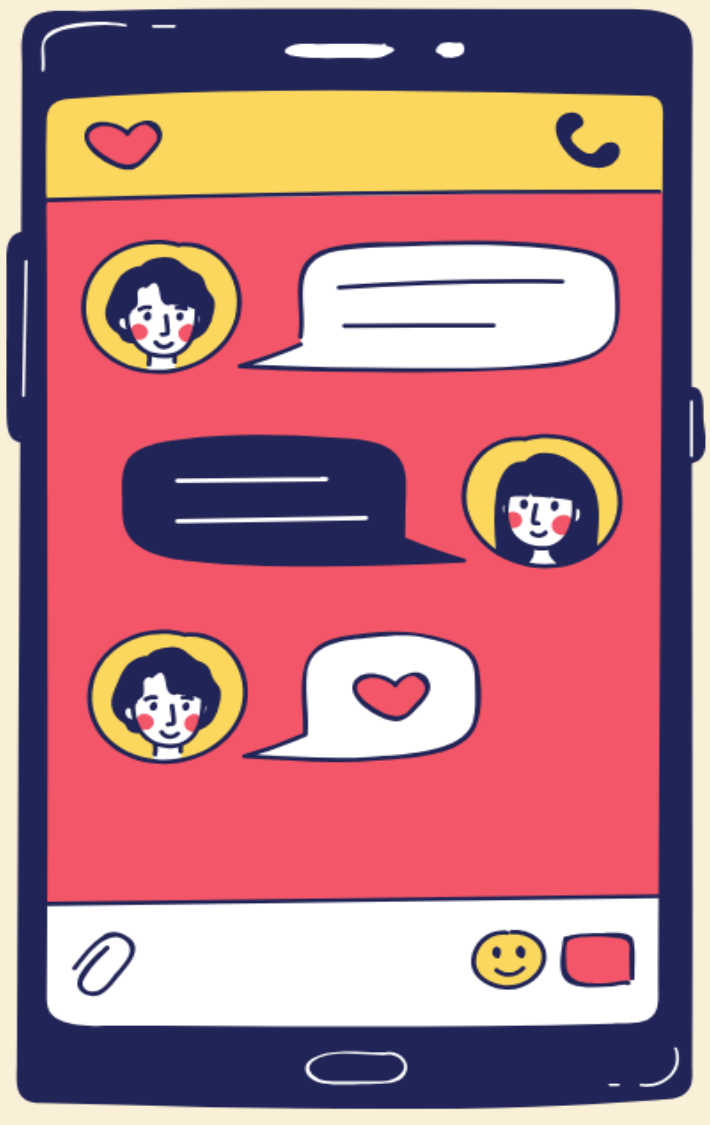

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