

County Names New Head Of Division of Social Services

COUNTY — Union County Manager Edward T. Oatman has announced the appointment of Kamili A. Williams to head the county's Division of Social Services, within the Department of Human Services. She began her job November 25. Ms. Williams succeeds former director Charles Gillon who retired in September after 30 years of service.

Ms. Williams leads approximately 500 employees located in the Elizabeth and Plainfield offices of the Division of Social Services in the Department of Human Services. The Division of Social Services is Union County government's largest single service unit.

"I would like to welcome Director Williams to the Division of Social Services," Mr. Oatman said. "Her leadership, depth of knowledge, and wealth of experience will enable the division to continue providing assistance and guidance to thousands of county residents monthly."

Ms. Williams holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration and Accounting from Howard University in Washington, D.C., and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Seton Hall University in South Orange.

Her professional background includes experience as president and chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity based in Plainfield. Previously, she held an executive position at the Community FoodBank in Hillside. Ms. Williams' experience in the private sector includes accounting positions at The Prudential Insurance



Kamili A. Williams

Company in Newark, and Deloitte and Touche, LLP, in Parsippany.

The Division of Social Services is Union County's welfare agency. It implements federal and state welfare-to-work programs, that help income-eligible individuals and families become self-sufficient.

Assistance is provided for job training, education and placement as well as homeless prevention and shelter, supplemental food assistance, medical care including child immunizations, and other support services including refugee resettlement, an area in which Union County handles the highest caseload of any county in New Jersey.



BECOME AN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARD...The Rutgers Environmental Stewards of Union County program is looking for new members. The all-volunteer program helps members learn how to take specific steps leading to improvements in the environmental health of their communities.

Rutgers Enviro. Stewards Seeking New Members

COUNTY — Union County residents can make a New Year's resolution that will have a lasting impact by joining the Rutgers Environmental Stewards of Union County. The all-volunteer Environmental Stewards program helps members of the public learn how to take specific steps leading to improvements in the environmental health of their communities.

"The Environmental Stewards program equips residents who have a passion and desire to improve the quality of the environment locally, with the knowledge and tools to be effective," Freeholder Chair Bette Jane Kowalski said.

The Environmental Stewards program is designed to help non-scientists learn more about the science behind the environmental issues impacting their communities.

The Environmental Stewards hold weekly classroom training sessions on Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. beginning January 30 through early June. Classes are held at the Extension offices in the Union County complex, located at 300 North Avenue East in Westfield. Registration for the program ends on January 30.

The training sessions include classes on habitat conservation, pollinator preservation, climate change and its impacts on the Union County region, protection of the Rahway River watershed, and much more. Field trips are part of the interactive experience.

Participants also work on environmental internship projects of their choice.

Previous Environmental Stewards have applied their knowledge in Union County with projects such as assisting in the effort to combat the destructive Ash borer beetle. The Stewards identified hundreds of Ash trees in county parks, collecting data that will help guide the effort.

Stewards have also created programs in multiple municipalities throughout the county. A program was developed by a steward through the New Providence Recreation Department to help children spend more time in the outdoors and learn how to care for their environment.

The Rutgers Environmental Stewards program is run by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Union County, part of the national Extension system, established more than 100 years ago under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In New Jersey, Rutgers University runs Extension programs in each county through the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station.

The Freeholder Board supports the Union County Extension with administrative assistance and office space in Westfield, land for the Demonstration Garden in the Watchung Reservation in Mountainside, and funding for special projects.

For more information about the Rutgers Environmental Stewards program, visit envirostewards.rutgers.edu or contact Michele Bakacs, county agent and associate professor for the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Union County at bakacs@njaes.rutgers.edu or (732) 398-5274.

Bill Would Allow Voters to Choose How They Vote

TRENTON, N.J. — Assembly Republican Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield) has introduced legislation, A-6085, to repeal the law requiring county clerks to automatically send mail-in ballots to those who voted by mail in any election since 2016.

"No one expects to become a permanent voter by mail forever," Mr. Bramnick said. "Too many people were showing up at the polls who were placed on this list. Voters have the right to choose how they vote."

Twice the Democrat-controlled State Legislature passed, and Governor Phil Murphy signed, bills

just weeks before elections requiring counties to send mail-in ballots to hundreds of thousands of New Jersey residents who did not request them, according to a press release from Mr. Bramnick's office.

"Anyone who asked for an absentee or vote-by-mail ballot in three previous years got one whether they wanted it or not. This sudden flood of mail-in ballots caused errors and chaos in the election process, and cost counties at least \$3 million, according to the release.

Mr. Bramnick's bill requires voters who wish to vote by mail to complete an application for a mail-in ballot each calendar year.

House Passes Voting Rights Advancement Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The House last Friday passed H.R. 4, the Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA).

This legislation restores the protections and enforcement of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) to its former strength, before it was gutted by the 2013 Shelby County v. Holder Supreme Court decision. Congress-

man Tom Malinowski (D-7th, Somerset) is a co-sponsor of this legislation.

Following the Shelby decision, several states passed voter suppression laws that disproportionately prevent minorities, the elderly, and young people from voting, according to a press release from the Congressman's office.

The VRAA creates a new process to determine which states with a recent history of voting rights violations over the last 25 years must pre-clear election changes with the Department of Justice.

Bills for End-of-Life, Palliative Care Advance

TRENTON, N.J. — The Assembly Health Committee advanced two bills last Thursday, sponsored by Assemblywoman Nancy Munoz (R-21st, Summit), aimed to strengthen treatment for patients with serious illnesses or dealing with end-of-life issues. The first bill, A-4683, requires certain medical facilities to undertake end-of-life planning and training.

"It's very important to make sure patients are aware of all options when dealing with their health care or health care of a loved one," Mrs. Munoz stated.

It requires health providers and administrative staff at hospitals and nursing homes to undergo annual end-of-life care training and the use of POLST forms and advanced directives. Facilities must also implement policies to address end-of-life care issues for patients upon admission and provide patients with information.

"This bill will put patients first and help put them in control of their care," continued Mrs. Munoz. "Patients must make intimate personal decisions and need the tools to do that with help

from those who are looking out for their health and well-being."

A medical facility found to be non-compliant would be required to submit a corrective action plan to the Department of Health or be subject to penalties or administrative disciplinary action. Mrs. Munoz's second bill, A-4685, would require emergency departments of general hospitals in the state to develop and implement a plan to integrate palliative care services for patients when appropriate. Palliative care is medical care that attempts to optimize the quality of life by anticipating, preventing, and treating the effects of chronic serious illness.

"Sometimes people turn to emergency rooms to receive medical relief from a serious illness that could be better managed through palliative care," Mrs. Munoz said. "These patients need to be informed of how such care can help manage their symptoms and address their individual needs."

Both bills have passed the Senate.

Watson Coleman Resolution Seeks to Halt Nation's 'War on Drugs'

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-12th, Trenton, NJ) and several of her colleagues have reintroduced a House resolution that acknowledges "the War on Drugs has been a failed

policy in achieving the goal of reducing drug use, and for the House of Representatives to apologize to the individuals and communities that were victimized by this policy," according to her Twitter account.

Congresswoman Watson Coleman introduced similar legislation calling for an end to the drug war in 2018.

The 12th Congressional District includes Scotch Plains and Fanwood.

County Responds to NYC Relocation of Homeless

COUNTY — The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders has announced that it is investigating all options, including legal action, to put an end to New York City's practice of relocating homeless families from the city into Union County communities without notice and without support services, according to a county press release.

More than 50 families are known to have been relocated from New York City to seven municipalities in Union County under the city's "Special One Time Assistance Program" or SOTA.

The program provides one year of rent to relocated families, but does not provide any other forms of assistance to families relocated outside of the city. The SOTA program commenced in 2017. Union County was added to the program as an out-of-city relocation destination, without notice, in August 2019.

"The families in the SOTA program are already in crisis, and it is heartless for New York City to move them around like so many pieces on a board game, forcing our local municipal and county services to shoulder the additional costs while brokers and landlords pocket the money," said Freeholder Chair Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford.

"Union County is coordinating a united effort by the impacted municipalities to bring this appalling practice to a halt as quickly as possible, and to seek reimbursement for any costs incurred. We will go to the courts if necessary," County Manager Edward T. Oatman said.

So far the Union County municipalities reporting SOTA placements from New York City are Elizabeth, Linden, Rahway, Roselle, Hillside, Union Township, and Plainfield.

"The lack of communication and the underhandedness of New York City to relieve some of their homeless problems to our city is despicable," Elizabeth Mayor J. Christian Bollwage said. "Clearly, this relocation program has not been thought through or seemingly, Mayor (Bill) de Blasio does not care where these people are being moved to, the impact these programs are having on the cities they are sending them to or where they will end up after their year in the program is up. I guess once they are out of his city, he really doesn't care what happens to them."

Union County officials met with mayors and other representatives from the seven impacted municipalities by conference call, along with state representatives, to discuss next steps.

Union County has also filed a request under New York City's Freedom of Information Law to the Department of Homeless Services requesting a full listing of all individuals housed in Union County through the SOTA program. The request includes information for all 21 municipalities.

The SOTA program fails to account for social support services,

counseling, employment assistance, medical care, and other costs, according to the press release. In particular, the program places new demands on municipal school districts. News reports have cited unsafe and illegal housing conditions as no procedures are in place to verify housing quality standards, contrary to normal protocols for supportive housing programs.

Families from New York City newly placed in Union County under the SOTA program do not qualify for social services because they have not yet established residency, potentially placing additional demands on local charities to fill the gap. The SOTA program also cuts off after one year, leaving homeless families on their own to continue paying premium rents in their present apartment or search for new housing.

In addition, local homeless families in Union County are reporting that landlords will not accept their housing vouchers because the landlords stand to gain more by offering their apartments to relocated New York City families. The SOTA program involves a broker's fee of 15 percent and thousands of dollars in bonuses for landlords in addition to a one-year rental guarantee, according to the county release.

"If the City of New York is serious about collaborating on a regional solution to homelessness, then it must come to the table and collaborate instead of shifting the problem without notice or planning," Freeholder Chair Kowalski said.

Kean's Prescriptions Expenses Bill OK'd By Budget Panel

TRENTON — Senate Republican Minority Leader Tom Kean's (R-21st, Westfield) legislation to limit out-of-pocket prescription costs was approved by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

"Patients battling cancer and other chronic diseases have a tough enough time before they face the challenge of paying for expensive treatments and prescriptions, which can cost thousands of dollars a month or more," Sen. Kean said. "Many other states have succeeded in limiting these outrageous fees for necessary prescriptions. Our efforts to make co-pays more affordable for life-saving prescriptions is the right thing to do."

Sen. Kean's bipartisan legislation, S-1865, would require certain health insurers, under certain policies or contracts that provide coverage for prescription drugs, to place limitations on covered persons' cost-sharing for the drugs.

The bill would limit a covered person's out-of-pocket costs to \$200 per prescription under the Affordable Care Act's Bronze Level Plan, and \$100 per prescription for all other insured plans.

Drunk Driving Crackdown To Be Conducted In Summit

SUMMIT — Law enforcement officials from Summit will be cracking down on drivers impaired by alcohol or drugs as part of the annual end of year "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" statewide campaign. The campaign, began December 6 and continues through January 1, 2020. Local and state law enforcement officials will conduct saturation patrols and sobriety checkpoints looking for motorists who may be driving while intoxicated.

The national "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" effort endeavors to raise awareness about the dangers of impaired driving through a combination of high-visibility enforcement and public education.

"During the last five years New Jersey has experienced nearly 37,000 alcohol involved crashes resulting in more than 679 fatalities," according to the Summit Police Department Traffic Unit. "This is a critical law enforcement program that can save lives during a time of the year when social gatherings with alcohol increase the risk of impaired driving."

Last year, 20 percent of all motor-vehicle fatalities in New Jersey were alcohol-related. Nationally, 10,511 people died in 2018 in drunk-driving crashes. The societal cost associated

with these crashes is estimated to be \$44 billion annually.

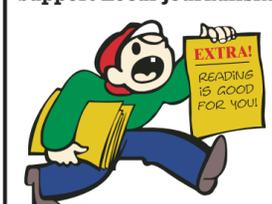
Law enforcement agencies participating in the Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over 2019 Year End Holiday Crackdown offer the following advice for the holiday season:

- Take mass transit, a taxicab, or ask a sober friend to drive you home;
- Spend the night where the activity or party is held;
- If you see an impaired driver on the road, contact law enforcement. Your actions may save someone's life, and inaction could cost a life;
- Always buckle-up, every ride. It's your best defense against an impaired driver;
- If you are intoxicated and traveling on foot, the safest way to get home is to take a car or have a sober friend or family member drive or escort you to your doorstep;
- Be responsible. If someone you know is drinking, do not let that person get behind the wheel.

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