

Local Man Charged With Embezzling \$60,000

WESTFIELD — George Papadakos, 52 of Westfield, the former director of finance of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOAA), pleaded guilty last week to embezzling more than \$60,000 of GOAA funds for personal expenses. Papadakos surrendered to authorities and pled guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge Sarah Netburn.

Papadakos pled guilty to one count of wire fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. Under the terms of his plea agreement, Papadakos has agreed to both forfeiture and restitution of \$66,499. "As director of finance of the Greek Orthodox Church, George Papadakos was supposed to serve his Church, not himself. As he admitted today, he embezzled from the church for nearly six years. For this sin, he faces the possibility of time in a federal prison," U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Geoffrey S. Berman said in a statement.

USPIS Inspector-in-Charge Philip R. Bartlett said, "Mr. Papadakos used his position at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America to steal from the hand who employed him. Today's plea is a reflection that Karma always

comes from a higher authority and justice escapes no one."

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, between 2012 and September 2017, Papadakos repeatedly embezzled from GOAA. He charged approximately \$66,499 to a corporate credit card for personal expenses without GOAA's authorization. The expenditures included charges for home improvements, clothing, a gym membership, iTunes, and medical bills.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America released a statement, published at www.thenationalherald.com. "After becoming aware of financial irregularities in late 2017, the Archdiocese self reported its discoveries to governmental authorities in the State of New York. In the spring of 2018, the Archdiocese was contacted by the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York and the inspector-in-charge of the New York Office of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. Since that time, the Archdiocese has worked cooperatively with their offices," according to the statement.

Papadakos was scheduled to appear before U.S. District Judge Richard M. Berman on June 24 at 11 a.m. to set a schedule for sentencing.

Candidate Jim Boyes Advocates for RVL Peak One-Seat Ride

Generally, when people are approached by a stranger with a clipboard, the answer is "no" without breaking stride. But on Tuesday, June 18, at the Raritan Valley Line (RVL) Mayors' Alliance rally held at Newark Penn Station, passengers eagerly lined up to sign the petition and advocate for one-seat ride service into New York Penn. The frustration level was evident as commuters added their names just before running up the stairs to Track 5, hoping not to miss their connecting train.

The RVL is one of the fastest growing train lines in New Jersey, and ridership has outpaced that of other lines. Yet since acquiring dual locomotives in 2013, NJ Transit has not granted the RVL a single-peak one-seat ride into NY Penn. For a short time, riders did have direct off-peak trains to New York, but that was suspended last September, the same month as Atlantic City's rail line service. However, on May 12, the AC rail service was reinstated while there is still no word for RVL riders.

As candidate for town council and someone who has been commuting into NYC for decades, I understand first hand the detrimental impact on commuters' quality of life. RVL passengers are forced to switch trains and platforms in Newark significantly lengthening their already hour-long commute. As a result, many commuters arrive to work late in the morning and miss out on family commitments in the evening.

More than just a quality of life issue, a peak one-seat ride would

allow RVL towns to compete equally for residential and commercial investment and enhance current redevelopment efforts already in progress. A peak one-seat ride would enable employers to attract younger, skilled talent from Manhattan ultimately increasing property values in all Raritan Valley Line municipalities.

This is why I joined Mayor Shelley Brindle, dozens of volunteers and hundreds of commuters at the Newark rally. We need to build momentum and create public pressure demanding NJ Transit to act fairly and equitably. I applaud the RVL Mayors' Alliance for hosting this rally and will continue to support their efforts to bring resolution to this critical issue.

For more information or to add your name to the petition, visit rvlmayors.org. To learn more about me and my campaign, head to westfieldtogether.com/boyes or facebook at [BoyesforWard1](https://www.facebook.com/BoyesforWard1).

Thank you,

Jim Boyes, Candidate for Town Council, Ward 1, Westfield

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ADDRESSING GUN SAFETY...New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy last Wednesday addresses the public and reporters at a press conference in the Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building in reference to the arrest of a man with a loaded gun in the parking lot of Tamaques Elementary School in Westfield on June 13. Pictured, from left to right, are: Plainfield Mayor Adrian O. Mapp, Freeholder Chair Bette Jane Kowalski (partially hidden), Gov. Murphy, Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle and Bill Castner, senior advisor to the governor on gun safety.

Bramnick Unveils Bill to Keep Kids in Local Schools

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

TRENTON — In an effort to stop the courts or Union County from redistricting school children to schools outside the boundaries of their hometown, Assembly Republican Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield) last week introduced a constitutional amendment protecting the rights of parents to send their children to local schools.

The legislation, ACR249, is in response to a lawsuit filed by retired New Jersey Supreme Court Judge Gary Stein, challenging the law requiring that students attend public schools in their own districts because New Jersey schools are "so segregated," according to Mr. Bramnick's interpretation of the lawsuit.

"Unelected judges in Trenton should never block children from attending their neighborhood schools," Mr. Bramnick said in a press release. "Taking away a parent's option to send their child to a school in their home district is not negotiable."

Mr. Bramnick's legislation proposes a constitutional amendment to prohibit forcing students to attend a public school other than in the district where the student resides.

"No student shall be compelled to attend a public school other than the public school nearest the residence of the student, which public school is located within the school district in which the student resides and provides the course of study pursued by the student," according to the legislation.

"This (Stein) lawsuit is being downplayed by the Democrats," Mr. Bramnick told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* in a phone interview.

He said his constitutional amendment is aimed at preventing school kids from being required to attend schools run by the courts or the county.

Mr. Bramnick said the legislation would keep children in their hometown school districts which, he said, is what parents want.

"(Governor Phil) Murphy has not taken a position on this lawsuit," Mr. Bramnick told *The Leader/Times*.

The Republican Assembly leader said if two school districts agreed to merge on their own, "I [wouldn't] have a problem with that." However, he believes it should be unconstitutional to force parents to send their kids to schools in other towns.

If passed by the Legislature, a question would appear on the ballot in the General Election.

Lawmakers OK Bill for Gateway Panel

TRENTON — The state Senate and Assembly last week voted to create a bi-state commission to secure funding to complete the Gateway Program, a series of passenger rail transportation projects between Newark Penn Station and New York Penn Station. It now goes to the governor's desk for his signature.

"Hundreds of thousands of commuters are relying on us to get this done," said Assembly Republican Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield), a sponsor of A-5570. "New York and New Jersey have come together to fast track this measure so we can start moving forward."

The measure forges a partnership with New York to create the bi-state Gateway Development Commission with the ability to receive government grants and loans to finance the projects. Any costs not covered by the federal government will be split equally between New Jersey and New York.

Considered the most crucial infrastructure project in the nation, the Gateway Program would expand service along the Northeast Corridor by building a double-track tunnel under the Hudson River, fixing the two existing tunnels, reconstructing the Portal Bridge and replacing the Sawtooth Bridge, among other improvements.

Murphy Pushes Bills to Combat Gun Violence

By JILL BURKE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Governor Phil Murphy promoted his series of bills intended to curb gun violence in the state during a press conference in Westfield last Wednesday to a crowd of about 75. Framed by a banner reading "Building a Safer New Jersey: Combating Gun Violence," Gov. Murphy outlined his plan to "get tough on gun violence."

Gov. Murphy's visit came in the wake of a man being found in the Tamaques Elementary School parking lot with a .45-caliber handgun loaded with hollow-point bullets and with 130 additional rounds of ammunition in the trunk of his car.

Gov. Murphy has proposed a four-part plan involving what he promoted as a "common-sense" gun legislation package encompassing 13 bills. Part one of the four-part plan calls for closing loopholes to make it easier to go after gun traffickers. Part two intends to regulate and track the sale of ammunition. Gov. Murphy's proposed bill would require photo identification to purchase ammunition. Gov. Murphy said that his senior advisor on firearms, Bill Castner, reminds him that "a gun without ammunition is a paper weight." The bill also would require retailers to keep an electronic record.

"You'd be shocked by how much of the records today are still on paper," he said. The bill also would require any purchases of ammunition to be reported to the state police so that highly-suspicious purchases can be tracked.

Part three involves better promoting the development and commercialization of smart-gun technology. Part four would invest in community-based nonviolence and gun-violence prevention programs.

Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3rd, Gloucester) is expected to post some of the bills in this package. "That is a good thing indeed. But we need more, and we need it now," Gov. Murphy said. "What is being left out are bills that would enact meaningful ammunition regulation and firearms ID modernization and training, and those are big omissions."

Gov. Murphy noted that the Senate president removed entirely from the state budget his proposal to "bring New Jersey's gun-licensing fees into the 21st century." Current state gun-licensing fees were established in 1966 and have not been updated since, he said, noting that these increased fees would account for 53 years of inflation, as well as adjust for the risk gun violence presents, as shown by the disasters of the past decades.

In most communities throughout

the state, "it will continue to cost New Jerseyans more to buy a license for their dog than it will for someone to get a license for a gun," Gov. Murphy said.

While the press conference was attended by representatives of Moms Demand Action of Union County and the Brady Campaign, there were opponents of Gov. Murphy's proposals that took to Twitter to express their contempt.

Some Twitter users questioned why Gov. Murphy brought this issue to Westfield, rather than Newark, Camden or East Orange. They say that while gun violence occurs every day in New Jersey's cities, those attacks are primarily single-victim shootings, while the most recent incident in Westfield was a potential massacre of school children.

Many other users urged Gov. Murphy to focus on tax reforms and fixing the ever-problematic NJ Transit before delving into gun laws.

Throughout the United States, as in New Jersey, some oppose common-sense gun laws, arguing they will not prevent all shootings, including some school shootings.

"These laws will not end gun violence in our state," said Union County Freeholder Chair Bette Jane Kowalski of Cranford, who also spoke at the press conference. "But they are a step in the right direction."

Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle, the daughter of a hunter and Air Force pilot killed in Vietnam when she was 6, said her dad would agree that Americans have the "right to live; especially our right to live without fear that an armed gunman would use weapons of war to murder our school children; parishioners; concert, movie and club goers; our friends; our neighbors, and family simply living life."

"He (her father) would agree, as well as the majority of responsible gun owners, that gun ownership as well as common-sense gun laws are in keeping with the intent and spirit of the Second Amendment," Mayor Brindle said.

Plainfield Mayor Adrian Mapp also expressed sentiments in support of Gov. Murphy's proposed plan. "I have a healthy respect for the Constitution and the Second Amendment. But I have a greater respect for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," Mayor Mapp said.

The arrest at Tamaques School hit close to home and the Governor wondered if it will be a catalyst for change.

"The time for piecemeal legislation ended when the time of thoughts and prayers ended," Governor Murphy said. "The time for bold, comprehensive action is right here and right now."

Pappas, Marks Attend Murphy Press Conference

WESTFIELD — New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy traveled to Westfield last Wednesday to hold a press conference where he touted his plan for even more firearm regula-

tions "under the guise of public safety," according to a press conference from Conservative Party State Assembly candidate Harris Pappas.

"Noticeably absent were District 21 Republican Assembly members Jon Bramnick and Nancy Munoz. Common courtesy would dictate that the two Assembly representatives would offer the Governor the respect the office deserves and attend his visit to their district," Mr. Harris said in his release. Mr. Pappas said he was in attendance.

"The fact that Phil Murphy is advocating even more infringements on our Second Amendment rights is no surprise. He is arguably the most liberal governor New Jersey has ever seen. What is particularly outrageous though is that our two Republican representatives in the General Assembly were not in attendance in the district they represent to hear the governor's plans and then advocate for our Second Amendment rights."

"More egregious is that Murphy came directly to Republican Minority Leader Jon Bramnick's hometown of Westfield and Bramnick was nowhere in sight. The public has every right to know what their legislators are doing and why. In this case, they have every right to know, where was Jon Bramnick when we needed him?"

Mr. Pappas' 21st District Assembly running mate Martin Marks, the former mayor of Scotch Plains, added, "Governor Murphy is advocating a twenty fold (2,000 percent) increase in gun permit licensing fees under the guise of 'Gun Safety.' This is nothing more than yet another money grab from our governor and will only present a further hindrance for lower-income individuals wishing to protect themselves and their families."

"Further, it gives New Jersey citizens the false impression that their government is making them safer, which of course is nonsense. I am in total agreement with Mr. Pappas that Bramnick's lack of advocacy right here in his district and his hometown is egregious. Bramnick proudly proclaims himself a 'moderate.' He certainly lived up to that moniker today with his no show," Mr. Marks said in the release.

Westfield Police Warn of Fire

Protection Inspector Impersonator

WESTFIELD — Westfield Police Chief Christopher Battiloro is warning local businesses to be aware of an individual who impersonates a fire protection inspector from a fictitious fire protection company called "Metro Fire Prevention" and offers to inspect and service fire extinguishers for a fee.

The suspect visited two local businesses during the late morning hours on Sunday, June 23, and either charged or attempted to charge them for services that he never performed. He is described as a white male, approxi-

mately 40 years old, 6 feet, 2 inches tall, with a heavy build, and is either bald or has a crew cut.

Chief Battiloro said the suspect is likely a former fire protection inspector, as he appears knowledgeable about fire extinguishers. He pretends to inspect and service fire extinguishers, prepares and presents handwritten receipts, and then demands cash payments.

If you encounter this individual, please contact the Westfield Police Department at (908) 789-4000 (Extension "0" for the dispatch center.)

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