



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2025

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WINGING IT FOR THE SUPER BOWL

With the price of a Super Bowl party menu for 10 people estimated to cost around \$139 this year, check out suggestions to ensure your food dollars go further downfield. Page C9

TODAY'S MUST-READS

AGAWAM

High school will briefly lose 100 parking spots

Agawam High School will lose about 100 student parking spaces when construction of its replacement begins this summer.

Mayor Christopher Johnson told the City Council on Monday that there's no way to avoid losing part of the parking lot along Mill Street during the first phase of the project, which will build the "community wing" of the new school on top of what are now athletic fields.

Full story, Page A4

STATE

Nonprofits see second threat in Healey plan

As nonprofits across Massachusetts face uncertainty over the future of federal funding, some are also expressing concern over a proposal from Gov. Maura T. Healey that they fear could further strain their budgets.

The proposal would cap the state's tax deduction for charitable donations.

Full story, Page A4

STATE

Bill gives female athletes new option

Supporters gathered at the Statehouse on Wednesday promoting a bill to allow student athletes to sit out games if players of the opposite sex are competing.

The proposal's backers emphasized the Massachusetts bill is not aimed at transgender people.

Full story, Page A3

WEATHER

Snow turning to ice.
High: 30°; Low: 26°

EXPANDED WEATHER, A10



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STATE

AG: Court must OK release of probe into clergy sexual abuse

Investigations into Catholic dioceses changed state laws. Mass. victims want the same

By NANCY EVE COHEN
New England Public Media

Survivors of child sexual abuse in western and central Massachusetts have been calling on the state attorney general's office to release its investigation into the Worcester, Springfield and Fall River Catholic dioceses.

But the office says it needs court approval to make it public.

Reports like this have been held up in courts

in other states. When reports are released, some have made a big difference to victims.

More than 20 years ago, Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas Reilly published an investigation into child sexual abuse at the Boston Archdiocese. It did not directly result in criminal charges, but concluded the leaders of the Archdiocese allowed the widespread abuse of children and did not report it to law enforcement.

SEE CLERGY, PAGE A9



"I inherited this. And where it is, is in the courts. And I can't say anything more."

I want folks to know we're not just sitting

at the office doing nothing ... with respect to ensuring there's transparency on this issue."

Attorney General Andrea Campbell



SPRINGFIELD

The beat goes on

Students in the Sonita Musica program at the Community Music School of Springfield show off their bucket drumming talents to the Springfield School Committee in City Hall. From left are Emma Renaud, 8; Rosy Cruz, 8, and Jesus Santiago Jr., 10. (JEANETTE DEFORGE / THE REPUBLICAN)

SPRINGFIELD

Judge thins out sexual assault lawsuit brought by former high school student

All claims against the city of Holyoke dismissed

By STEPHANIE BARRY
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A federal judge thinned out a lawsuit filed by a former Holyoke High School student who argues she was sexually assaulted and bullied while the school system stood idly by.

A lawsuit filed by "Jane Doe" against the city and its school sys-

tem focuses on two alleged sexual assaults by fellow student and a pervasive campaign of bullying as the plaintiff is among the LGBTQ community, according to the complaint filed last year.

Three years before the lawsuit was filed, the allegation and alleged indifference by school officials prompted a high-profile walkout by students and advocates. The plaintiff in the federal claim argues she — the only female member of the football team — was the sole student disciplined was retaliated against

by officials and her peers for her participation along with writing an essay in the school newsletter about her experience.

The lawsuit alleged several civil rights claims, which U.S. District Judge Mark G. Mastroianni sifted through and issued a ruling on in late January. He dismissed all claims against the city — reasoning the city cannot be held liable because the schools had been placed in receivership by the state for under-performing benchmarks.

SEE LAWSUIT, PAGE A2

CHICOPEE

Regional 911 dispatch center seeks interim director

By NAMU SAMPATH
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Westcomm, a regional 911 dispatch center serving five Western Massachusetts communities, is looking for an interim executive director.

Erin Hastings, who was hired in March 2019 as the center's first executive director a year after the center was formed, resigned in January, according to Tom Christensen, a board member for Westcomm who is also East Longmeadow's town manager.

Christensen is overseeing the search to fill the interim position. The ideal candidate, he explained, is someone who has led a regional dispatch center in the past.

"We voted at a board of directors meeting (in January) to hire an interim executive director ... to run a diagnostic of the organization with fresh eyes," Christensen said in a phone call Wednesday.

Christensen said there were communication issues that created inefficiencies within the organization.

The interim director, he explained, would "help keep the lights on while we search for a permanent solution."

The interim executive director would also be tasked with helping dispatch operations move into "newly renovated headquarters," according to the job posting.

The center would prefer to have a new executive director sooner rather than later, he said.

There have been four applicants for the position already, Christensen said. The board of directors will be conducting interviews at its next meeting on Feb. 13.

Westcomm handles calls for emergency service in Chicopee, East Longmeadow, Ware, Longmeadow and Monson.

SEE DISPATCH, PAGE A2

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WASHINGTON
DOJ official
accuses FBI chief of
‘insubordination’

A top Justice Department official accused the FBI’s acting leaders of “insubordination” in a Wednesday memo in which he sought to soothe anxiety inside the bureau over the potential for a broad purge of agents involved in investigating the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

The memo from acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove said agents “who simply followed orders and carried out their duties in an ethical manner” while investigating the Capitol attack face no risk of being fired.

But the memo also provided no reassurances for any agents found to have “acted with corrupt or partisan intent” and suggests those employees, if there are any, are at risk of discipline or even termination as part of a highly unusual review process the Trump administration is embarking upon to identify what it says is potential misconduct.

The scrutiny of career FBI agents being undertaken by the department is highly unusual given that rank-and-file agents do not select the cases they are assigned to work on and are not generally disciplined because of their participation in matters seen as politically sensitive. There’s also been no evidence any FBI agents or lawyers who investigated or prosecuted the cases did anything wrong.

NEVADA
Second type of bird
flu detected in US
dairy cows

Dairy cattle in Nevada have been infected with a new type of bird flu that’s different from the version that has spread in U.S. herds since last year, Agriculture Department officials said Wednesday.

The detection indicates that distinct forms of the virus known as Type A H5N1 have spilled over from wild birds into cattle at least twice. Experts said it raises new questions about wider spread and the difficulty of controlling infections in animals and the people who work closely with them.

“I always thought one bird-to-cow transmission was a very rare event. Seems that may not be the case,” said Richard Webby, an influenza expert at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

A version of the H5N1 bird flu virus known as B3.13 was confirmed in March after being introduced to cattle in late 2023, scientists said. It has infected more than 950 herds in 16 states. The new version, known as D1.1, was confirmed in Nevada cattle on Friday, according to USDA. It was detected in milk collected as part of a surveillance program launched in December.

“Now we know why it’s really important to test and continue testing,” said Angela Rasmussen, a virus expert at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, who helped identify the first spillover.

WASHINGTON
Senators protest
Musk’s staff access
to classified info

Democrats on the Senate Intelligence Committee are demanding answers after they say President Donald Trump gave Elon Musk’s staff access to sensitive and classified government information.

The lawmakers wrote to the White House on Wednesday asking what security precautions had been taken to prevent unauthorized leaks of information by the staff at the Department of Government Efficiency, an agency led by Musk that has been granted access to sensitive information contained in the systems of dozens of agencies.

The Democratic senators say the material includes personal medical or financial information about millions of Americans, as well as classified secrets and foreign intelligence.



CYNDI MACKENZIE, LEADER OF A SUPPORT GROUPS IN MAINE FOR SURVIVORS OF ABUSE BY PRIESTS

Clergy

CONTINUES FROM PAGE A1

Attorney John Stobierski, who has represented more than 100 survivors from the Springfield Diocese, said Reilly’s work caused significant change — in Boston.

“Why doesn’t Western Mass. deserve equal justice, equal attention that Eastern Mass. has gotten? I don’t understand it. It doesn’t make sense to me,” he said.

Back when now-Gov. Maura T. Healey was attorney general, Stobierski said he wrote her several times asking her to investigate. When she did, sometime around 2019, he met investigators from her office more than once.

But the results from that investigation — which focuses on the Springfield, Worcester, and Fall River dioceses — have never been released.

In an interview on GBH Radio, the current attorney general, Andrea Campbell, said her office needs court approval before she can release it.

“I inherited this. And where it is, is in the courts. And I can’t say anything more,” Campbell said. “I want folks to know we’re not just sitting at the office doing nothing ... with respect to ensuring there’s transparency on this issue.”

‘They wanted to cover up the cover-up’

Top prosecutors have published investigations like this in many places, including Maine, Michigan, Maryland and Pennsylvania.

When Pennsylvania’s attorney general at the time, Josh Shapiro, released the results of his investigation in August 2018, survivors — now adults — joined him on stage. The report identified more than 1,000 victims and 301 alleged perpetrators — Catholic priests.

But Shapiro, who is now Pennsylvania’s governor, said people implicated in the investigation went to court to try to stop it.

“These petitioners, and for a time, some of the dioceses, sought to prevent the entire report from ever seeing the light of day. In effect, they wanted to cover up the cover-up,” he said in that press conference.

Shapiro even wrote Pope Francis, saying he had planned to release the results of the investigation earlier, but a court had stopped its release.

“Credible reports indicate that at least two leaders of the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania — while not directly challenging the release of this report in court — are behind these efforts to silence the victims and avoid accountability,” Shapiro wrote.

Shapiro asked the pope to



Terence McKiernan, president of Bishop Accountability.org, met with the Massachusetts attorney general’s office for its investigation into the sexual abuse of children at the Springfield and Fall River dioceses. His organization keeps a database of investigations like this in other cities and states. (NANCY EVE COHEN / NEW ENGLAND PUBLIC MEDIA)

“direct church leaders ... to permit the healing process to begin.”

In Massachusetts, Attorney General Campbell said she is not allowed to say who is stopping the release of her office’s report.

Terence McKiernan, president of the advocacy group Bishop Accountability, met with the attorney general’s investigators in October 2021 and provided them with more than 1,500 pages of documents. He said, at the very least, Campbell should explain who is stopping the report.

“There’s certainly no reason pertaining to grand jury secrecy why that fact can’t be stated,” McKiernan said. “Instead, we’re getting ... it appears politically motivated wariness about admitting any details at all here. And this is not about politics. This is not about Governor Healey looking good or [Attorney General] Campbell looking good. This is about the safety of children.”

Survivors who met with investigators want answers

David Lewcon, 70, was abused starting when he was 15 at St. Mary’s Parish in the Diocese of Worcester. He met with the attorney general’s



DAVID LEWCON

investigators more than three years ago, but said he hasn’t heard from them since.

“It would be more fulfilling for me to realize that the information that I gave the attorney general’s office actually did some good. There’s a side of me that feels like it was sort of a waste of time,” Lewcon said.

Lewcon said a public record of crimes against minors would help victims and their families, who have also suffered. He remembers back in 1996 after he filed a lawsuit against the Worcester Diocese, a newspaper reported

on it and his abuse became public.

He got a phone call.

“There was a man crying on the other side of the phone,” Lewcon said.

The man said he was also a survivor of abuse. The man’s girlfriend had seen the newspaper article, showed it to him, and said, “Now, I believe you,” Lewcon recalled.

“I heard from other people — the same thing. It was validating. It was information that was needed to be known. People could deal with it if it comes from a credible source.”

‘An expectation the laws would change’

One of the earliest investigations by a credible source was conducted by former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham. That 2005 report provided explicit detail about alleged sexual crimes by dozens of named priests against hundreds of children.

Mark Basquill, 63, who testified before a grand jury for that investigation, had been one of those children.

“To be officially acknowledged by law enforcement that this did happen and they were investigating it, that was actually a relief right there. It was like, oh my gosh, somebody recognizes what was going on and I can’t just play a shell game about it,” Basquill said.

Basquill said he was horrified to learn from the resulting public report that his abuser had more than a dozen other victims. And yet, Basquill said the act of testifying and later reading the report changed him — from victim to survivor.

Still, only one of the 63 priests named in the Philadelphia report was charged. No one was put behind bars.

“Because of the statute of limitations for many of the alleged perpetrators, many of whom simply admitted what they had done, that there was no realistic expectation of prosecution for the specific offenses. There



A photograph of Cyndi MacKenzie at age 4 or 5, around the same time she was sexually abused by her parish priest in Southbridge. “As long as the attorney general in Massachusetts doesn’t release this report [on abuse of children at Catholic dioceses], they are protecting the church and not the survivors,” MacKenzie said. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

was an expectation that the laws would change for future generations, at least when I testified,” Basquill said.

Laws did change. Charles Gallagher, the senior prosecutor of that Philadelphia investigation, said it led to extending the statute of limitations so victims had another 20 years, until age 50, to file a criminal complaint.

“So that law enforcement could go after older cases,” Gallagher said. “And we also changed the law to include stronger penalties for sexual abuse of children, and also expanded the realm of who could be charged with endangering the welfare of a child.”

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia also made changes. It began reporting abuse of children to law enforcement. Back then, investigators found the church had used loopholes in the law to avoid that.

Since the 2005 Philadelphia investigation, at least 17 other reports by top law enforcement officials have become public, according to Bishop Accountability.

But some get delayed by the courts. That happened when the Maryland attorney general wanted to release his office’s report, as Campbell noted on GBH Radio.

“He went through a process in order to be able to release certain information, even in redacted form,” she said. “We’re going through a similar process [in Massachusetts].”

A similar investigation was also held up in New Jersey.

‘Now the world knew I spoke the truth’

In Maryland, two days after Attorney General Anthony Brown released a redacted version of his office’s investigation into the Archdiocese of Baltimore, state lawmakers voted to eliminate the statute of limitations in child sexual abuse lawsuits.

“It was crazy. It was like a one-two punch to the church,” said Teresa Lancaster, 70, a Maryland attorney who represents survivors.

Lancaster is also a survivor. She said she was abused by a priest — her guidance counselor — in 1970, when she was 16. When she filed a lawsuit decades ago, she was told she was making it up. But when the attorney general’s report became public, she cried tears of joy.

“It validated everything I had said all along. And now the world knew I spoke the truth,” Lancaster said.

That Maryland law eliminating the statute of limitations is on hold. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington and others are challenging its constitutionality in the state supreme court.

In addition, the Archdiocese of Baltimore declared bankruptcy two days before the law allowing more lawsuits would have gone into effect.

But in Michigan, an investigation into all the dioceses in the state has led to prosecutions. So far, Attorney General’s Dana Nessel’s office said it secured convictions in nine cases involving 38 survivors.

More often, though, prosecutions don’t happen.

Cyndi MacKenzie led support groups in Maine for survivors of abuse by priests there. And she provided records to the Maine attorney general for a 2004 investigation of allegations from survivors.

“They felt vindicated. They felt heard, but they didn’t feel like the law was ever going to stop the powerful church — no matter how high it went, all the way to the attorney general, no one was arrested for molesting children. That’s something that, as a survivor, all of us don’t understand,” she said.

MacKenzie is herself a survivor of abuse at Notre Dame Church in Southbridge, where she said her parish priest sexually abused and raped her, starting when she was 4.

MacKenzie said she was not contacted by the attorney general’s office for its investigation into the Worcester Diocese, but she said other survivors entrusted the investigators to do their job.

“As long as the attorney general in Massachusetts doesn’t release this report, they are protecting the church and not the survivors,” MacKenzie said.

Asked to comment, a spokesperson said Campbell and her office “are bound to rules of law that do not allow us to publicly comment on our efforts to release the report.”

The Fall River, Springfield and Worcester dioceses did not respond to multiple requests for comment. Neither did Gov. Healey’s office.

NATION

Racial gap widened in deaths among moms around time of childbirth

By MIKE STOBBE
Associated Press

Black women in the U.S. died at a rate nearly 3.5 times higher than white women around the time of childbirth in 2023, as maternal mortality fell below prepandemic levels overall but racial gaps widened, according to federal health data released Wednesday.

In 2021 and 2022, the maternal death rate for Black women was about 2.6 times higher than white women.

The data suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic, at its peak, impacted all pregnant women. But “once we went back to ‘usual activities,’ then the impact of systemic racism and unequal access (to medical care) ... came right back into place,” said Dr. Amanda



A couple awaits the arrival of their first child in Carlsbad, Calif. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, FILE)

Williams, interim medical director for the March of Dimes.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s report Wednesday on the 2023 deaths was drawn from death certificates. The CDC counts women who died while pregnant, during childbirth and up to 42 days after birth. Acci-

dental deaths are excluded.

The report found:

- The maternal death rate for white women dropped from 19 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2022 to 14.5 per 100,000 in 2023.
- The rate for Black women went from 49.5 to a little above 50, though the report says that increase was not statistically significant.
- The rate for Hispanic women dropped from about 17 to about 12.
- The rate for Asian Americans fell from about 13 to about 11.

In total, 669 women died in 2023 during pregnancy or shortly after childbirth, the CDC reported. That’s down from 817 deaths in 2022 and 1,205 in 2021, when it was the highest in more than 50

years.

Excessive bleeding, blood vessel blockages and infections are leading causes of maternal deaths.

Among those infections is COVID-19. The coronavirus and its complications proved dangerous to pregnant women. And, in the worst days of the pandemic, burned out physicians may have added to the risk by ignoring pregnant women’s worries, experts say.

COVID-19’s overall impact on pregnancies declined as the pandemic subsided and as hospitals and birthing centers returned to normal operations.

Also, the federal Medicaid program expanded to cover postpartum care for up to 12 months, instead of just seven weeks. That helped more

moms recover and made them healthier for the next time they tried to have a baby, Williams said.

The number of maternal deaths is also tied to the number of pregnancies. U.S. births have been declining, and fewer pregnancies contributes to fewer pregnancy-related deaths, noted Eugene Declercq, a maternal deaths researcher at Boston University.

CDC officials refused an Associated Press request to talk to a report author.

The government is still receiving and processing death reports from last year. But Declercq said his analysis of available data suggests the number of 2024 maternal deaths may end up about the same as 2023.