

DEMOCRATIC CLUB OF WILLOW VALLEY

NEWSLETTER

August 2025

Paid for by Democratic Club of Willow Valley
Treasurer, Steve Wright
Editor Ross Fairweather (rossfair63@gmail.com)



Addressing the Issues

IN THIS ISSUE

Political News:

We the Seniors	2
Key PA Issue: Education	5
We Can Walk and Chew Gum at the Same Time	14

Club/Local News:

Milagro House Field Trip Photos	17
Coming Events	21

We The Seniors

Press Release Contact Information:

Mary Mulvihill Founder Email:

marybmulvihill@gmail.com

Phone Number:

(646) 732-5023

Judy Loeb Founder Email:

wetheseniorsusa@gmail.com

Phone Number:

(917) 459-2800

For Immediate Release:

July 17, 2025

“We The Seniors” Launches
Nationwide Coalition to Sound
the Alarm on Detrimental Effects
of Trump Administration Policies



When seniors unite, we all win.

“We The Seniors” Launches Nationwide Coalition to Sound the Alarm on Detrimental Effects of Trump Administration Policies

New York, New York — In response to escalating threats from the Trump administration to dismantle the American social safety net, undermine the rule of law, and betray this country’s founding democratic values, a new coalition of senior-led activist organizations is uniting to fight back. More than 33 groups from across the country have joined forces under the name We The Seniors, declaring that the generation that helped build this country will not stand by as it is torn apart.

Cont’d next page

We The Seniors (cont'd)

“We raised families, built businesses, fought wars, and paid into the system our entire lives — and now we’re being told our government is slashing our benefits to cut taxes for the wealthy.” said Mary Mulvihill, founding chair of Seniors Taking Action, a national advocacy group based in New York. “Let me be clear: the so-called ‘Big Ugly Bill’ is an attack on the benefits we earned and paid for. We’re not going to watch in silence — we’re going to organize, mobilize, and push back.”

“This isn’t just about seniors, it’s about our children, our grandchildren, and the country we’re leaving behind,” said Ron Burd of The Grand Connection, a member organization. “We know these policies aren’t just numbers on a spreadsheet. They’re destroying lives. And we’re going to make sure the country sees that.”

The group is also raising alarm about worsening delays at Social Security offices and the gutting of federal agencies that serve millions of Americans.

“We’re hearing from seniors who can’t get their checks, can’t reach anyone for help, and are being told to just wait. That’s not just bad policy, it’s cruelty by design,” said Mulvihill. “But we are not helpless, and we are not alone.”

This powerful new alliance aims to coordinate messaging, amplify grassroots organizing, and mobilize seniors in every state not just to protect essential safety net programs including Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid but also to sound the alarm about broader damage to core democratic institutions and norms, like the deportation of immigrants. Member organizations span from coast to coast and include urban, rural, red, and blue communities.

“We The Seniors” vows to tell the stories of Americans affected by the federal government’s profoundly detrimental policies, and to hold lawmakers accountable at the ballot box. We have experience, expertise, resources, and most importantly, we vote. We built this country. We won’t let it be dismantled. We invite seniors from all over the country to join us in this effort.

Cont’d next page

We The Seniors (cont'd)

We are excited to announce the launch of “We the Seniors,” a new grassroots project built to push back against the Trump administration’s unconscionable and often unlawful actions by amplifying the voices of seniors across the country.

We are inviting seniors from across our coalition to record short videos of themselves reacting to the news, sharing how federal policies are affecting their lives, or saying anything they feel about what this administration is doing to our country.

These videos will be posted to our new Instagram and Facebook accounts and will be the heart of our campaign, showing that a chorus of seniors who built this nation are refusing to stand by silently while it’s torn apart.

For this to work, we need each and every one of you.

Here’s how you can help us launch:

1. Submit a Reaction Video

We need authentic, heartfelt video messages from seniors. Right now, we’re especially seeking reactions to the “Big Ugly” bill, a major and timely target of our resistance. To send us videos, please follow these instructions:

Text Diane Saatchi at 631-375-6900 with your

- a. Video
- b. Full Name, and
- c. Follow @we_the_seniors on Instagram and friend We the Seniors on Facebook

2. Spread the word ... Forward this email and the video submission link to other organizations, neighbors and friends. We need to grow our chorus.

3. Share this Press Release ... Please send it to any media contacts you have..



Key PA Issue: Education



Extra money offered this Pa. school district a lifeline. Whether more is coming is an open question.

[by Kate Huangpu of Spotlight PA | May 12, 2025](#)



SCRANTON — When Pennsylvania began sending hundreds of millions of dollars to its most underfunded public school districts last year, Erin Keating realized hers might finally get some breathing room.

Cont'd next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

Keating is the superintendent of Scranton School District. More than three-quarters of its 9,300 students qualify as low-income, and the district received the sixth-most supplemental funding in the commonwealth — \$8.4 million in total.

All told, lawmakers sent poor districts across the state nearly \$500 million, an unprecedented effort that came as a direct result of a court ruling that Pennsylvania's school funding system was unconstitutionally inequitable.

Like many of the districts that received this new funding, Scranton has recently dealt with some tough budget cycles.

Pennsylvania's Department of Education placed it on a fiscal watchlist in 2017 after a state audit found "serious financial instability," and the agency eventually directed the district to work with a recovery officer to cut costs.

During recovery, Scranton closed an elementary school, reduced its electives, and got rid of its pre-K program. The district is still climbing out of that financial hole, a long process that Keating described as "not fun for anybody."

So when the money — which lawmakers call "adequacy funding" — came, it made a difference there.

"You don't usually have a lot of money to play with for education and curricular opportunities," Keating told Spotlight PA. This year, she said, she has been able to ask, "Is there a new class we want to offer? Is there technology we don't have that other districts have?"

But while Scranton and other districts say the money has helped with rising costs and maintaining programs for students, there's no guarantee the state will keep approving it.

Gov. Josh Shapiro [asked for another](#) \$500 million in adequacy funding for poor districts in his February budget pitch, and the Democrats who control the state House are on board. But the Republicans who control the state Senate [say they have concerns](#).

Cont'd next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

Senate Majority Leader Joe Pittman (R., Indiana) told Spotlight PA in a statement that he wants to revisit the formula that distributes the money.

“As we look at the Governor’s proposal, 97% of his funding increase would go to 348 school districts and 3% would go to 152 school districts,” Pittman said. “This proposed breakdown raises valid questions of fairness.”

He said in the coming budget talks, “looking at how adequacy dollars are dispersed will remain a topic of conversation.”

This uncertainty, Keating said, has been a major hurdle when planning the district’s budget. Without consistency, the school district does not know if it can sustain new funding for academic programs or staffing.

“You kind of have to wait and see,” she said.

What does this money look like on the ground?

The \$8.4 million Scranton School District received in adequacy funding accounts for nearly 4% of its total revenue in the 2024-25 school year.

According to administrators, it allowed the district to bring back previously cut art electives, hire new staffers focused on student mental health, invest in its Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Medical — or STEMM — Academy, and maintain salaries and benefits for teachers in the district’s Cyber Academy, an online education option.

Maintaining the online school was the district’s biggest adequacy expenditure, at \$5.2 million. Keating said it was an attempt to control a burden that public school districts in Pennsylvania are increasingly saddled with: costs associated with cyber charter schools.

Public districts in the commonwealth have to pay tuition for students within their borders who opt to attend charter schools. Many districts say high tuition rates put a significant [burden on their budgets](#), especially as cyber charter enrollment has increased since the pandemic.

Cont’d next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

Keating said that she hopes the district stands a better chance at keeping students — and lowering its charter school burden — if it invests in its own online school.

“Everyone's seeing continued growth in the choice of cyber education, be it in internal programs or cyber charters,” she said. “It's not something that could be ignored.”

[As Spotlight PA previously reported](#), Scranton wasn't alone. Many districts used their adequacy money to either directly pay for growing charter or cyber charter tuition, or to fund competing, in-district online school or credit recovery programs.

But while it took up most of the new adequacy money, Scranton's investment in cyber school wasn't the only spending that made an impact.

Ninth grader Sara Williams is one of the students studying science, math, and more at Scranton's STEMM Academy, and this year she got a chance to practice mock surgeries with her anatomy class's virtual autopsy table.

Sara loves the program, her mother, Vivian Williams, told Spotlight PA. It sparked her daughter's interest in college, she added.

"Back in eighth grade, my daughter was already talking about what she wanted to do after high school," Williams said.



STEMM Academy program supervisor Katona Miller demonstrates how to use the program's virtual autopsy table.

Cont'd next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

That's the entire goal of the program, according to Keating: to give students a head start in breaking into fields with high demand and high pay.

STEMM Academy isn't new. The district launched it in 2022 using federal pandemic relief funds, but after that money expired, Keating said the adequacy funding enabled the district to sustain the program without tapping into alternative revenue sources.

The academy initially served only 7th and 8th graders, but has steadily expanded and its oldest students are now in 10th grade. This school year, the district allocated approximately \$780,000 in adequacy funding to support it, and STEMM Academy now employs 12 full-time teachers

Katona Miller, STEMM Academy's program supervisor, noted that since the adequacy funding kicked in, district administrators have gotten a little less cautious about her requests for more staff, equipment, and resources. They have "at least been open" to requests, she said.

One of her recent purchases? Virtual reality glasses that will allow students to walk through the Acropolis or see the pyramids when studying ancient Greece and Egypt in history class.

These kinds of tools allowed the Scranton kids to keep up with "all the things the college kids were talking about and were doing" when they visited local universities, Miller said.

"We're making sure we're matching what industry is looking for," she added.

Other adequacy spending focused on maintaining funding levels for general operating costs to free up budget space elsewhere.

For instance, \$840,000 in adequacy funding is now going toward the salaries of kindergarten teachers and paraprofessionals like teacher's aides. That created enough flexibility to bring back previously cut electives for kids in fifth through eighth grades, such as art, music, and physical education.

Cont'd next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

Keating and the school board also put \$1.5 million toward existing guidance counselors' salaries so they could hire three licensed professional counselors and two licensed social workers.

"I can't get you to sit in a seat and understand algebra if you're not in the right mental place to be able to do that," Keating said of the move.

How did we get here, and where are we going?

The state legislature's decision to give districts like Scranton supplemental funding [can be traced back more than a decade](#) to a 2014 lawsuit. The plaintiffs, a group of parents, public school advocates, and school district leaders, argued that the state's K-12 education funding system, in which districts rely substantially on property tax revenue, was so inequitable that it violated the state constitution.

Two years ago, Commonwealth Court [sided with the plaintiffs](#), finding that Pennsylvania's funding system was depriving students in low-wealth districts of their fair shot at a high-quality education. The judge ordered state lawmakers to find a solution.

After a statewide series of listening sessions, they came up with the concept of an adequacy gap — defined as the difference between the amount a district spends per student and the amount that district would need to spend to serve each child at an acceptable level.

This metric sets a baseline amount of per-student spending, then adds in additional spending based on a district's student body and factors like poverty and level of English proficiency. If a district spends less than the resulting number, it misses its adequacy target.

Of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts, lawmakers identified adequacy gaps in 348. The districts are located across the commonwealth, [with roughly one-third in rural areas](#).

Cont'd next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

PA 'Adequacy gap' payments as proposed in Pa.'s 2025 budget

Gov. Josh Shapiro's proposed budget would send \$494 million to the poorest school districts through "adequacy" payments and \$32 million to those with high property tax burdens. See if your school would benefit.

[Note from your editor: I've shortened this illustration to only show you our closest schools. For entire details, go to this link:

<https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2025/05/school-funding-scranton-adequacy-education-legislature-pennsylvania/>

School District	County	Total Adequacy Gap	First Adequacy Installment (2024/25)	Proposed 2nd Adequacy Installment (2025/26)	Total Tax Equity Gap	First Tax Equity Installment (2024/25)
Lampeter-Strasburg SD	Lancaster	\$2,342,265	\$255,980	\$255,986	\$0	\$0
Lancaster SD	Lancaster	\$32,324,411	\$3,532,652	\$3,532,739	\$0	\$0

Source: [PA House Democrats](#), [Budget documents](#) • The "adequacy gap" and "tax equity gap" for each school district was defined via formula in Act 55 of 2024.

Last year, when [the legislature and Shapiro allocated \\$500 million](#) to start spending down those gaps, they also calculated the amount it would take to put all districts on adequate footing: [about \\$4.5 billion](#).

The budget also allocated \$32 million to a new supplement for 50 districts with high property tax burdens, along with broad funding increases for basic education and the commonwealth's Head Start early education program.

Cont'd next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

Adequacy funds must be spent on expanding or maintaining educational programs or other student resources, such as mental health programs and English language classes. The adequacy funds need to be spent by the end of this school year, and the districts must report to the Department of Education how they used the funds.

After allocating their first year of funding, Keating and other administrators in Scranton are already thinking about the future.

Along with continuing Scranton's attempt to control cyber charter costs and maintaining this year's program expansions, her goals include offering more electives and hiring instructional coaches for specific subjects like reading and math.

But that's going to depend on whether the state legislature decides to maintain adequacy funding.

State Rep. Pete Schweyer (D., Lehigh), who heads his chamber's Education Committee and has championed adequacy funding, noted that despite comments questioning the fairness of the funding from Pittman, the state Senate majority leader, the formula passed last year with bipartisan support.

"It doesn't mean everybody loves it," Schweyer told Spotlight PA. "But it was a bipartisan bill."

Education talks in Harrisburg often involve some horse-trading. Over the past several years Senate Republicans have repeatedly tried to work private school vouchers into the discussion, and just last week, the chamber's Education Committee once again advanced a voucher bill.

Democrats have balked in the past, and Schweyer said as far as he's concerned, this year will be no different.

"It ain't the first time, and it ain't gonna be the last time," Schweyer said of the Senate's voucher proposals. "But it's not something I'm personally interested in supporting."

Cont'd next page

Key PA Issue: Education (cont'd)

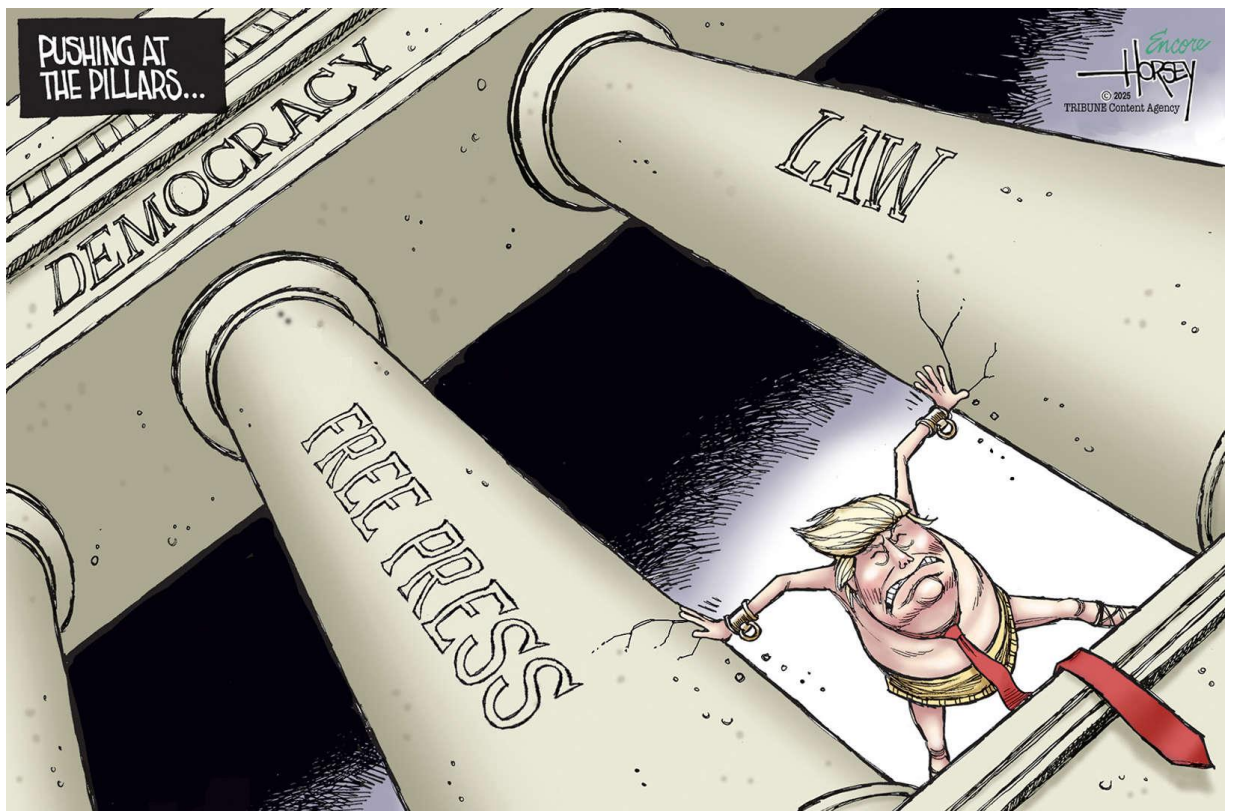
Administrators like Keating are watching Harrisburg closely, and so are the public education advocates who took the state to court over school funding in the first place.

If they think lawmakers are shirking the order to fix Pennsylvania's unconstitutional school funding system, they warn they'll go right back to court.

Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg is an attorney with the Public Interest Law Center who represents the people who brought the original funding suit. He has [previously argued](#) that even the state's new supplemental funding scheme is too small and will be rolled out too slowly to truly put Pennsylvania's schools on equitable footing.

But at the very least, he said, they need consistency.

"Districts need a timeline for funding," Urevick-Ackelsberg told Spotlight PA. "Then people can really get into the long-term planning that they need to do."



Walk and Chew Gum

"We Can Walk and Chew Gum at the Same Time"

The Epstein spectacle may dominate the headlines, but the silence surrounding real crises is more damning than any scandal.

Michael Cohen

July 26, 2025

There's a dangerous illusion we're being fed right now; that the only story worth our time, our energy, our outrage, is the one making headlines in bold: Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell, and the slow drip of names and connections that everyone's speculating about but no one's fully disclosing. And yes, it matters. It's serious, disturbing, and demands accountability at the highest levels. But while the circus unfolds center stage, the rest of the world; our world, is being buried under silence.

And that silence? That's the real scandal.

Let's take a moment and look at what we've conveniently brushed aside. In Texas, a catastrophic flood displaced thousands and left over a hundred people unaccounted for. A hundred. And yet not a single official update, not a televised plea, not even a whisper about those still missing. Have the bodies been found? Have families received answers? Where's the follow-through? The recovery? The leadership? We're staring at a disaster not just of climate, but of communication and compassion. What about a solution so this doesn't occur again, in Texas or anywhere? Crickets!

Then there's Ukraine. What once dominated our foreign policy discourse has all but vanished from the news cycle. But the war hasn't ended. Bombs are still falling. Lives are still being lost. Cities are still being reduced to rubble. Yet you'd think peace had broken out overnight, based on the current coverage. Has a diplomatic path been carved out? Have negotiations resumed? Is anyone even asking?

Cont'd next page

Walk and Chew Gum (cont'd)

And what of Gaza? Are we supposed to just accept the suffering there as a permanent condition? Thousands dead. Entire neighborhoods leveled. Palestinians cut off from clean water, food, and medical aid. The humanitarian crisis is no longer unfolding; it's settled into place. And still, no resolution. No plan. No viable path forward. Just silence and stagnation. My friends, regardless of your position on this issue, children, aged men, women and children are starving to death.

Meanwhile, families of Israeli hostages still wait; day after day, for their loved ones to come home. Where are the briefings? The updates? Are negotiations happening behind closed doors, or have they stopped entirely? We were told this would be a priority. Actually, resolved within 24 hours of Trump's return to the Oval Office. We were promised swift, forceful action. So where is it?

And we can't ignore the brutal, heartbreaking murder of Melissa Hortman, a Minnesota state legislator and her husband Mark by a man radicalized by a toxic stew of rage and disinformation. It was shocking. It was tragic. And then...it was gone. Vanished from the headlines almost as fast as it entered them. No follow-up. No national conversation about extremism. No federal acknowledgment of the deeper threat. Just another story lost in the churn.

All of this: the missing, the dead, the displaced, the abandoned, it's not just about news coverage. It's about responsibility. These are the very issues politicians spent months campaigning on. Promises were made, solutions were floated, soundbites delivered. "We'll fix it on day one." "We'll bring peace in 24 hours." "We'll restore order, protect families, solve crises." And yet, here we are; 6 months into a new administration, and not a single resolution in sight. No answers. No progress. Just silence. Just a brand new daily news cycle to occupy our attention.

The truth is, we're being trained to think we can only focus on one crisis at a time. That our collective attention span can't handle multiple truths, multiple tragedies, multiple priorities. But that's nonsense. We can walk and chew gum at the same time. We must.

Cont'd next page

Walk and Chew Gum (cont'd)

The Epstein investigation must proceed. It must reach every corner, follow every lead, no matter how uncomfortable. But it can't be used to blot out everything else. We can demand transparency on that front and demand answers for those still waiting for news in Texas, in Minnesota, in Palestine, Israel, Russia and Ukraine; to name just a few. We can push for justice for victims of abuse and for hostages still in Hamas captivity. We can seek accountability for the past and action in the present.

Because if we don't, if we let ourselves be conditioned to accept the noise of scandal over the silence of inaction, we will have surrendered our own ability to demand more. To demand answers. To demand care. To demand leadership. To demand accountability.

I've seen how this game is played. I know how easy it is to redirect public focus, to let scandal become smoke while real fires rage behind the curtain. But now I'm on the other side. And I'm telling you: we owe it to ourselves, and to every one of the people still waiting for help, justice, answers, or even a mention, to stay alert.

We have the capacity for more than single-issue outrage. We can see the distraction for what it is, and still demand better from those in power.

Because silence, too, is a choice. And in moments like these, it's the loudest one of all.



Milagro House Field Trip Photos



L to R: Anastasha Lebron, Family Advocate; Felicia Catizone-Hughes, House Manager; Ashley Bievenour, Director Of Fundraising and Development; Christina C. Duncan, Executive Director; Rosa Villaman, Director Of Advocacy And Community Engagement.

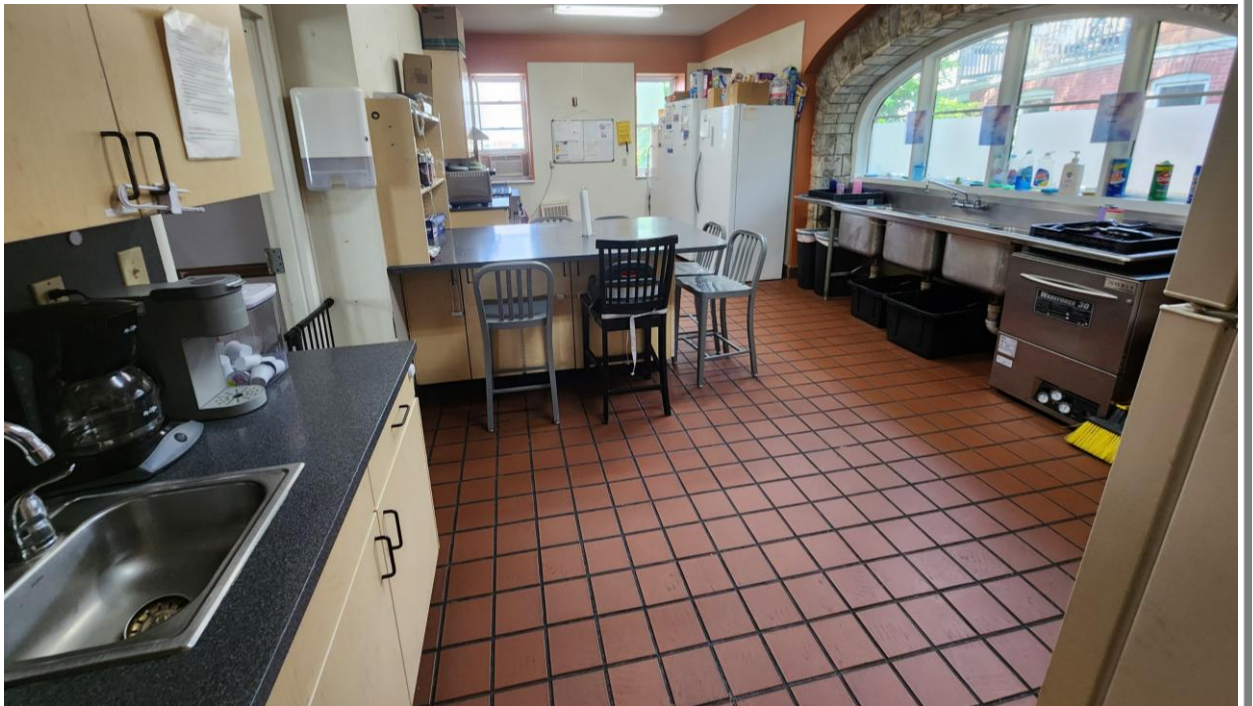


Lots 'n lots of kids' books!.

Milagro House Field Trip Photos



The kitchen at Milagro House.



Milagro House Field Trip Photos



Tour group #1 participants.

Milagro House Field Trip Photos



Executive director Chris Duncan (in black top) explains various aspects of Milagro House to tour-group attendees.



House Manager Felicia Catizone-Hughes (in red) describes the daily lives of the nine women who live at Milagro House with their children.

Coming Events

Understanding Our Democracy

Tuesday, August 19th at 10 AM
Cultural Center Education Room

Court Appointed Special Advocates

Our guest speaker, Erin Small, will talk to us about CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children).

Their Mission is to provide a qualified and compassionate court-appointed volunteer advocate to every child who is abused and neglected, to ensure the fundamental human right of having a safe, nurturing, and permanent home is met. To date, they have served over 1,200 children. Please join us; everyone is welcome.

Dems Club General Meeting

Tuesday, August 26th at 1 PM
Cultural Center Education Room

Come hear School Board candidates Sarah Cook & Kirk Williard, as well as West Lampeter Supervisor candidate Tracy Arnold.