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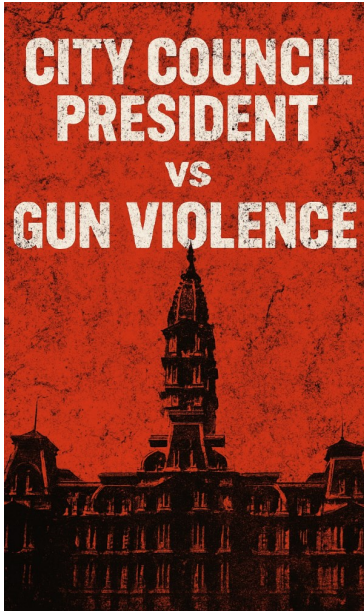
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City Council President vs. Gun Violence



By James Williams, Editor-in-Chief

Philadelphia City Council President Kenyatta Johnson is not new to the crisis of gun violence—he’s lived it, fought against it, and legislated to end it. Since launching his “Peace Not Guns” initiative in 1998 after losing his cousin to gun violence, Johnson has approached public safety not as a slogan, but as a life’s calling. As he steps deeper into his leadership role amid Philadelphia’s ongoing struggle with gun violence, Johnson is showing that steady, grassroots-rooted leadership can still cut through political noise.

This spring, Johnson reconstituted City Council’s Special Committee on Gun Violence Prevention, appointing nearly two dozen members that include councilmembers, advocates, health experts, clergy, and law enforcement. The goal? Bring all sectors of the city together in a united, strategic push to reduce gun violence and create safer communities. He is not interested in symbolic gestures—he’s demanding measurable results.

And the numbers show progress. Philadelphia recorded 562 homicides in 2021, the peak of the city’s recent gun violence crisis. That

number dropped to 269 in 2024. As of May 26, 2025, the city has seen 88 homicides—a 16% decrease from the same time last year. Non-fatal shootings are also down. These improvements reflect the impact of targeted investments, community partnerships, and policy reform—many of which have come from or been championed by Johnson.

Critics have often asked whether another committee can truly make a difference. But Johnson’s leadership has already demonstrated that collaboration, when properly resourced and executed, can save lives. His efforts have unlocked millions in city funding for grassroots anti-violence groups and trauma support services. Under his watch, the creation of the Office of the Philadelphia Victim Advocate has provided crime victims and their families with critical resources, including relocation assis-

tance and the first city-funded crime scene cleanup program in the nation.

Johnson is not afraid to take unconventional stands. At a recent budget hearing, he made headlines by holding up a realistic toy gun to highlight how such items—often sold without proper markings—can endanger both children and police. It was a controversial move to some, but it underscored Johnson’s message: Philadelphia cannot ignore the everyday ways violence is normalized in Black and brown communities. “You’re taking advantage of our neighborhoods,” he said. “This is destruction.”

As the city enters another potentially volatile summer, Johnson’s focus is on prevention, not just reaction. His roundtable with dozens of frontline organizations in April centered on youth protection—developing summer strategies to keep children engaged, men-

tored, and safe. His approach reflects not only a deep understanding of policy, but also lived experience, community trust, and a long memory of what works and what doesn’t.

Is the job done? No. Johnson would be the first to admit that. But under his leadership, Philadelphia is not standing still. The homicide rate is declining. Partnerships are growing. Programs are being funded. And most importantly, the fight against gun violence is being led by someone who understands the stakes—not just as a policymaker, but as a survivor, father, and lifelong Philadelphian.

In a time when many public officials talk around the issue, Kenyatta Johnson is doing the work. That matters. And so does the progress.

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PHILADELPHIA BLACK WEDDING GUIDE

CELEBRATING
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Philadelphia is home to a vibrant community of Black-owned businesses that bring culture, elegance, and expertise to every facet of wedding planning. From planners and florists to caterers, photographers, venues, and bridal boutiques, this guide highlights the best in the city to help you curate a meaningful and unforgettable celebration.

Wedding Planners

Whether you're planning a small gathering or a grand celebration, these expert planners bring vision, precision, and cultural authenticity:

Elegant Events Planning & Design (Philadelphia, PA & Newark, DE) – Multicultural weddings, design, and destination events. elegant-events.net

Prestige Event Design (Clifton Heights, PA) – African-inspired traditions, floral design, and full planning. prestigeeventdesign.com

Crystal Bailey Events (Philadelphia, PA) – Luxury and large-scale wedding production. crystal-baileyevents.com

Phuliffects Events (Philadelphia, PA) – Coordination, planning, and floral design. phuliffects.com

Black N Ivory Events (Philadelphia, PA) – Social justice-inspired planning. weddingwire.com

Statuesque Events (Philadelphia, PA) – Mul-

ticultural and African-American traditions. statuesqueevents.com

Event Loft (Philadelphia, PA) – Event and floral design studio. eventloftpa.com

Shining Moments Event Planning (Philadelphia, PA) – Seamless full-service coordination. shiningmomentseventplanning.com

Florists Add a blooming touch of style with these talented floral artists:

Paul Beale's Florist – A West Oak Lane family business since 1971. paul-bealesflorist.com

Elegant Events Florist – Custom wedding arrangements. eleganteventsflorist.com

Tissarose Florist – Heartfelt designs and Philadelphia Flower Show debut. tissarose.net

Jasmine Johnae Floral Services – Stunning citywide floral delivery. @jasminejohnae

Blossom'Li Florals – Modern, artistic event florals. blossomli.com

Bloom Bold Co. – Bold, contemporary arrangements. bloomboldco.com

Botanic Village – Sustainable, garden-style designs. botanicvillageacc.com

Event Loft Floral (Willow Grove, PA) – Floral design and event services.

eventloftpa.com

Flowers by Alexis – Custom floral creations. flowersbyalexisfba.com

Marie Stems Floral – Elegant and upscale wedding designs. marie-stems.square.site

Caterers Make your reception unforgettable with flavor-packed menus:

Eatable Delights Catering – Southern and Creole cuisine. 1540 Wadsworth Ave. eatabledelightscatering.com

Victoria's Kitchen – Southern comfort food. 7304 Ogontz Ave & Sicklerville, NJ. victoriaskitchen.com

Blitz Soulfood & Catering – Affordable soul food packages. 310 S 48th St. blitzsoulfoodcatering.com

Jacobs Northwest/Brotherly Grub – Fusion Southern cuisine. 7152 Ogontz Ave. jacobsnorthwestphl.com

Sinfully Wright Catering – Southern and Caribbean blends. sinfully-wrightcatering.com

B&S Soul Food – Traditional catering. 2548 S 58th St. eat-blackowned.com

Ms. Meek's Sea 2 Soul – Seafood meets soul food. Facebook: Ms. Meek's Sea 2 Soul Catering

Photographers Capture every moment with photographers who honor love and culture:

Áfrik Armando – Cinematic storytelling. afrikarmando.com

SGW Photography – Inclusive and documentary style. sgwphotography.com

Ade & Gina Studios – African-American wedding traditions. adeandgina.com

J&J Studios – Full photo & video coverage. jjstudiosphiladelphia.com

Black, White and Raw – Artistic, offbeat portraits. blackwhiteandraw.com

Petronella Photography – Multicultural elegance. bypetronella.com

Wedding Venues Host your event at one of these culturally rich and stylish venues:

The Deacon – 1600 Christian St, historic church turned boutique venue. thedeaconphl.com

Vibe Philly Events – Manayunk luxury event space. @vibephillyevents

Haven Hall Philly – Cozy, affordable venue. haven-hallphilly.com

Venue Vibes Event Space – 4951 N 5th St, intimate event setting. Yelp: Venue Vibes Event Space

Akwaaba Tea Salon – High tea gatherings with flair. akwaaba.com/tea-salon

Ridgeland Mansion – 804 Oak Lane Ave, a grand historic estate. the-knot.com/...

Bridal Boutiques & Designers Find the perfect gown or tuxedo at these locally owned bridal salons:

Kinfolk Bride – Sustainable bridal fashion in Bok Building.

The Dress Matters – Bridal and formalwear in Media, PA.

Madelange Laroche Bridal – Custom gowns with Haitian artistry.

Cake Bakers Sweeten the day with designer cakes:

Denise's Delicacies – 2916 N. 22nd St. North Philly institution.

4 Every Occasion Cakes – 1821 Cottman Ave. Custom creations.

Affinity Confections – Modern desserts for refined receptions.

Sweet T's Bakery – Inside Reading Terminal Market.

Transportation Ride in style with these professional transportation services:

Philly Black Car – Town cars and SUVs.

FreeMo LiMo – Family-owned black car service.

Cartier Black Limousine – High-end chauffeurs.

J&J Transportation – Luxury wedding fleet.

Party Rentals Furnish your celebration with these event rental specialists:

Black Diamond Party – Photo booths and decor.

Party Next Door – Eco-friendly rental solutions.

Steppin' Out on Faiths – Thrones, tables, and lighting.

Sitting Pretty – Delivery and setup of premium furniture.

BOM (Black Owned Movements) – Inflatables and concessions.

This comprehensive Black Wedding Guide offers everything you need to plan your Philadelphia wedding with excellence and authenticity. Support local Black-owned businesses while bringing your dream celebration to life.

For additional assistance, referrals, or custom event planning, contact your preferred vendors directly.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

PGW Major Infrastructure Upgrades; Record Greenhouse Gas Reductions in Philadelphia

GW is turning federal dollars into real change across Philadelphia, starting with a major infrastructure upgrade in the Olney section this month and continuing its push toward a cleaner, more sustainable energy future.

Backed by a \$125 million grant from the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA)—secured through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—PGW is replacing 66 miles of aging cast iron gas mains across the city. The Olney project is the latest step in this historic overhaul. In addition to improving safety and reliability, this work is creating 120 new skilled jobs for local workers and dramatically reducing harmful methane emissions.

These aren't just temporary jobs. Replacing aging gas mains requires union laborers, pipefitters, equipment operators, and engineers—many of whom will be trained through apprenticeships and placed into long-term careers with living wages. In addition, PGW's contracting process opens the door for local and minority-owned businesses to bid on support services—whether that's paving, equipment rental, or environmental oversight—keeping more of the investment in Philadelphia's economy. The ripple effect supports even more local employment, as wages spent by workers flow into nearby stores, restaurants, and services.

The environmental impact is just as significant. PGW projects a reduction of 412 metric tons of methane emissions as a result of the upgrades. That effort is a key component of PGW's broader plan to reduce methane emissions by 80% by 2050. Replacing the old

pipes with corrosion-resistant materials stops methane from leaking into the atmosphere—one of the most effective steps a gas utility can take to reduce its environmental footprint.

In a newly released Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Report, PGW shared that it had removed 10,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) from the atmosphere in 2024—exceeding its forecasted reduction target. That reduction is equivalent to taking more than 2,000 cars off the road for an entire year.

PGW is also signaling a clear shift toward clean energy innovation. In 2025, the company ramped up efforts in its EnergySense portfolio—a collection of customer-focused energy efficiency programs offering financial incentives for upgrades. PGW is also partnering with the School District of Philadelphia to explore geothermal energy through a new site survey and feasibility study. These efforts reflect PGW's intention to diversify and modernize energy delivery in the decades ahead—and they create a pathway for future green jobs in fields like energy auditing, HVAC retrofitting, and environmental engineering.

With infrastructure upgrades now visible on the ground and emissions reductions setting new records, PGW is moving toward a future where public health, job creation, and environmental responsibility align. The transformation is underway—and it's happening block by block, pipe by pipe.

###

SEPTA to Suspend Chestnut Hill East Regional Rail Line for Summer Bridge Rehabilitation

SEPTA will temporarily suspend service on the entire Chestnut Hill East Regional Rail Line from Sunday, June 15 at 12:00 a.m. through Tuesday, September 2 at 5:00 a.m. to complete a major bridge rehabilitation project.

This summer-long effort includes structural upgrades to five key bridges between Wayne Junction (Nicetown-Tioga) and Cresheim Valley Drive (Northwest Philadelphia):

Wayne Avenue Bridge
Logan Street Bridge
Chew Avenue Bridge

Mt. Pleasant Avenue Bridge
Cresheim Valley Drive Bridges

Impact on Riders:
No service will run on the Chestnut Hill East Line during this period.

Riders are encouraged to use the Chestnut Hill West Line, which will have expanded service. It's a short 10-minute walk from the Chestnut Hill East Station.

The Route 23 bus also offers frequent service and direct access to Center City.

Visit plan.septa.org for real-time trip planning and alternative routes.

Construction Notes:

Lane restrictions will be in effect Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., on impacted streets such as Chew Avenue and Wayne Avenue.

Work at Logan Street, Mt. Pleasant Avenue, and Cresheim Valley Drive will begin by the end of April.

Residents and businesses should expect temporary noise, vibration, and traffic delays, though all access will be from public roads and no property access will be required.

For more information and updates, including a recap of the January 2025 community webinar, visit SEPTA's official website.

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California vs. Pennsylvania: A Tale of Two Policies on Transgender Athletes

PA Could Follow California's Lead on Trans Athletes in Girls' Sports



By James Williams,
Editor-in-Chief

As the debate over transgender athletes intensifies nationwide, Pennsylvania and California have become case studies in how differently states can approach the issue. One restricts access, and the other expands it. One complies with political directives, and the other creates space for compromise. The question for Pennsylvania is simple: can we do better?

The case of Plymouth Whitmarsh senior Luce Allen—a transgender girl who finished 12th in the 200 meters at the PIAA District 1 championships—put the state's policy squarely in the spotlight. Allen's time of 25.89 seconds wasn't enough to qualify for the state meet, but the controversy surrounding her participation underscores just how contested this issue has become.

Earlier this year, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) revised its policy on transgender athletes, a change widely seen as a quiet ban. In response to a 2025 executive order from former President Donald Trump that seeks to prohibit transgender girls and women from competing in female sports, the PIAA removed its existing "Transgender Policy" from its manual. The new policy now defers to school principals to determine a student's "sex" when "questioned or uncertain" and requires schools to consult with legal counsel to ensure compliance with the executive order.

The language is vague, but the intent is clear: limit participation. While the policy stops short of an outright ban, it sets up enough legal red tape to make it extremely difficult for transgender

athletes to compete—unless, as in Allen's case, a federal court intervenes. A March ruling from U.S. District Judge Wendy Beetlestone denied a temporary restraining order that would have barred Allen from participating. The court's decision allowed her to run, but only after legal wrangling.

Compare that to California.

When transgender athlete AB Hernandez qualified for the state track championships in the triple jump, long jump, and high jump, the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) didn't ban her. They didn't hide behind legal ambiguity. Instead, they created a compromise.

CIF implemented a temporary rule that allowed one additional "biological female" to compete in each event Hernandez entered. If Hernandez medaled, the podium placements for cisgender girls would still be preserved. In other words, California added space instead of drawing lines. Hernandez competed. Other girls weren't pushed out. The result? A shared podium, a fair meet, and a rare example of policy that put athletes first.

The best thing about California's policy is that it allows both the transgender

athlete and the cisgender female athlete to earn the same amount of points for their teams. No one is replaced. No one is erased. Everyone competes.

This prevents the kind of outcome that unfolded in the 2024 Maine Indoor Girls State Track & Field Championships, where Greely High School edged out Freeport by a single point—72 to 71—triggering national outrage. The deciding factor? Katie Spencer, a trans-identifying male athlete, won the girls' pole vault title with a jump of 10 feet, 6 inches—more than six inches higher than any other competitor. That victory secured the championship for Greely, and sparked widespread debate about fairness and competitive equity, with many critics questioning Spencer's participation in the girls' division.

California's policy seeks to avoid that scenario entirely. It ensures that both trans and cisgender athletes can contribute to their teams' success without displacing one another or fueling unnecessary conflict.

California's approach isn't perfect. The definitions around "biological female" remain unclear. The policy is temporary. But it's a serious, good-faith effort to find

middle ground. It recognizes the legitimate concerns of fairness in competition while refusing to erase the identities or ambitions of transgender athletes.

Pennsylvania should follow suit. Rather than enforce vague rules that lead to courtrooms and controversy, the PIAA could allow expanded fields in objectively measured events like track and swimming. It could develop policies that respect both gender identity and competitive equity. Most importantly, it could treat these athletes—cisgender and transgender alike—not as legal liabilities, but as students who deserve the chance to compete.

This isn't about scoring political points. It's about creating a path forward that doesn't sacrifice fairness for inclusion—or vice versa.

California showed it can be done. Now Pennsylvania needs to decide if it has the courage to try.



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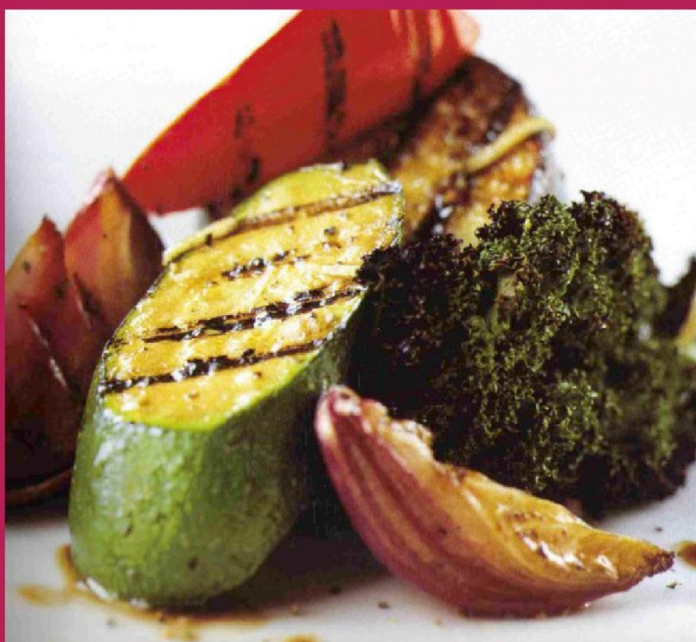


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