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WEAVERS WAY PREPARES TO UNVEIL ITS NEWEST STORE IN GERMANTOWN



By Maleka Fruean
Germantown Info Hub

Weavers Way has been in the process of opening a new store in Germantown. There have been big renovations at the new location, on the corner of Cheltenham Avenue and Morris Street (328 W. Cheltenham Ave.), which used to be an old ACME Market and will have a small parking lot on the side. And now, at the end of 2023, the opening is very near. Currently, they plan on a March 2024 opening and some kind of grand opening, with plans still to be determined.

It made sense for the cooperative grocery store to open its fourth location in Germantown, where over 1,000 members live. Still, some neighbors wondered if Weavers Way would prioritize community engagement and integration into the neighborhood as they expanded.

The store hired Germantown neighbor Camille Poinvil as the Community Outreach Coordinator for Weavers Way Germantown to help lead the process. She's now their membership coordinator and has focused on food security and accessibility issues for most of her adult life.

Along with a Weavers

Way Germantown outreach committee, she has been busy this year, creating and hosting programming in the outreach office right next to the new Germantown location, tabling at community events, and hosting meet-and-greets. They've also provided co-operators (Weavers Way co-op members who work hours as part of their membership) to do community work in Germantown.

They've partnered with Philly Herb Hub, with co-operators packing herbs and tinctures for them, co-operators helping with gardens around Maplewood Mall in conjunction with Germantown United CDC, and other members doing volunteer shifts at the Kelly School library and garden (if they have their FBI and Child Abuse clearances).

Desiree Thompson, an organizer of the Philly Herb Hub and Germantown United CDC's office manager, said Poinvil was key in helping the Herb Hub survive when they needed support the most.

"Weaver's Way is so great for assisting and helping folks, especially local folks, be able to keep up their good work, and especially if it's community-engaged work. And she essentially set me up with four shifts between three

four people each shift twice a month," said Thompson.

But Thompson said Weavers Way definitely needs to listen and let the community and Poinvil's outreach leadership take priority. "I really want them to support her and let her kind of lead in trying to be attentive to what folks in the neighborhood are asking and for the type of accountability that I know Germantown folks deserve and will demand," said Thompson.

Accountability to Thompson looks like making sure the store listens to their Black and brown employees and the majority Black Germantown neighborhood and working hard to let folks know about their Food for All program (that gives a 15% discount to almost everything in the store if you currently receive food stamps (SNAP), Medicaid, TANF—Cash Assistance, WIC, SSDI, SSI or Military Disability), and the other benefits that Weavers Way membership has to offer.

Poinvil and the Weavers Way team have been using the Weavers Way Outreach office space to provide a physical location for Germantown community organizers and leaders to connect and for the

to store to hear feedback from neighbors in general. They've also been receiving feedback at their different meet-and-greets throughout the neighborhood.

The meet-and-greet hosted at Four Freedoms House of Philadelphia, an apartment complex for seniors over 65 years old, was one of Poinvil's favorites throughout the year. They got a lot of questions and a lot of engagement around the new location. They also had meet-and-greets in people's homes and even some community gardens. The Community Baby Item Drive was another event Poinvil thought went well throughout the year.

Weavers Way partnered with multiple organizations to provide clothing, diapers, and other resources for new parents who came to the office and could give away extra baby items to organizations after the event. Tabling at ENON Tabernacle's Senior Health Fair also connected them with many people, and there was a lot of energy around the discussion of the new store. Other workshops they've hosted in the outreach office this year have been on buying your home in ten steps, financial literacy, candle making, and dyeing fabrics with invasive plants. Sometimes, Poinvil connects with co-op members who have been shopping at Weavers Way for years and want to do a workshop on a specific topic. Other times, it's just about running into people around the neighborhood and talking to them about what they do, which starts the connection.

As they get ready to stock the shelves of the new Germantown location, they've been reaching out

with a product preference survey during all their outreach activities to get feedback from neighbors about what groceries and other items they would like to see the new store carry. Poinvil said the main two questions they've been getting about the new store are employment and when they are opening. "A lot of the painting has been done, a lot of the produce, chillers, and dairy fridges are all in place. They've been able to restore a lot of the original terrazzo flooring from back when it was an ACME, which is nice. The external painting is done, and all the external paint is done. The roof is done," said Poinvil. She said they're waiting on some key components being delivered, but they will be done after that process is in place.

To learn more about Weavers Way and the new Germantown location, you can follow their updates on their website.

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PA. GOV. SHAPIRO SIGNS PROBATION REFORMS SPURRED BY PHILLY RAPPER MEEK MILL'S IMPRISONMENT



Gov. Josh Shapiro joined Meek Mill and the REFORM Alliance, Speaker Joanna McClinton, Sen. Lisa Baker, legislative leaders, and reform advocates for a ceremonial bill signing celebrating landmark probation reform and clean slate legislation that won bipartisan support. (Commonwealth Media Services photo).

'What you need to do is take what happened to Meek and fix this for everybody,' REFORM Alliance found Michael Rubin said.

By Peter Hall,
Penn Capital Star

Five years after Philadelphia rapper Meek Mill was sent to prison for popping a wheelie on a dirt bike, Gov. Josh Shapiro signed reforms to Pennsylvania's probation system that advocates say will prevent similar injustices for hundreds of thousands of people.

The legislation, passed on Wednesday in the state House and Senate, limits when a person serving probation can be sent to prison for technical violations, such as the infraction that led a Philadelphia judge to sentence Mill to two to four years behind bars in 2017. "We all learned from

Meek's case because it shined a light on the injustices in our probation system, how someone could be sentenced to prison for years for not committing a

crime, but for just a technical violation of a long probation," Shapiro said at a bill signing ceremony Friday in Philadelphia.

Mill, then an established artist, had called his friend Michael Rubin to go to court with him the day he was sentenced.

"That day, that phone call, that changed a lot of lives," Rubin, the owner of sports merchandise retailer Fanatics, said at the bill signing Friday.

"It was the most out of control, crazy experience I ever felt in my entire body, because I saw something so wrong happening that we had no ability to fix," Rubin said. "I remember looking at Meek's mom, and her looking at me and saying, 'We will not stop until we get him out of prison together.'"

Mill was released after serving five months pending an appeal of his original conviction on drug and gun charges. The Pennsylvania Superior Court in 2019

granted Mill a new trial but the case was dropped amid questions about the credibility of the officer who originally arrested him. Former Gov. Tom Wolf pardoned Mill before he left office in 2022.

Rubin said he discussed Mill's situation with Shapiro, then in his first term as attorney general. He said Shapiro told him: "What you need to do is take what happened to Meek and fix this for everybody."

Rubin enlisted leaders in the sports and entertainment world, including Sean "Jay-Z" Carter and New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft, to start the REFORM Alliance. Since then the coalition has played a role in passing 18 criminal justice reform bills in 11 states, Rubin said.

Mill spoke tearfully at times about about the decade he spent on probation in and

out of prison and risking violations to visit his son and mother in New Jersey. "We tried to be better but they labeled us as felons, sent us back to jail. I had to fight against that the whole time to gain my respect and be who I am today," Mill said. "I didn't ask for this position. I don't want to do it. It's not for clout. It's something that I stand for, and something that I live for, and I appreciate you all for helping me."

Senate Bill 838, that Shapiro signed Friday, creates a presumption that probation terms end after two years for misdemeanors and four years for felonies, or after half has been served if that is a shorter time. It creates incentives of a chance at early termination for people to maintain employment or pursue education while on probation. The legislation also requires courts to take people's individual risk and needs into consideration when setting probation conditions and take into account people's abilities to pay fines and restitution.

Some criminal justice reform advocates have been critical of the REFORM Alliance-backed legislation, saying that they were not included in drafting the language and that many of their concerns are not addressed.

"As a former public defender in Pennsylvania, I know firsthand just how badly Pennsylvania's probation system is in need of meaningful reform," Veronica Miller, senior policy counsel for criminal legal reform at the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, said in a statement this week. "Unfortunately, this bill still falls woefully short

of that goal."

Miller said that while an amendment to the bill shortly before its passage corrected a glaring error that would have excluded defendants' lawyers from probation review conferences, it does not address many of the structural problems in the probation system.

"From creating a debtor's probation that keeps those who can't afford restitution on probation indefinitely to making it easier for a judge to revoke probation because of a technical violation to failing to cap probation terms, this bill is a disappointment to those hoping for comprehensive probation reform," Miller said. Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne), one of the bill's prime sponsors, addressed the criticism Friday, pointing to another piece of criminal justice reform legislation that headed to Shapiro's desk this week as an example of how reform can evolve over time.

Clean Slate 3.0 is the third iteration of a law first passed in 2018 that automatically seals the records of conviction for lower level non-violent offenders who have not been convicted of another crime for 10 years. In 2020, the state passed an expansion and this year extended the automatic record sealing to certain low-level, non-violent drug felonies. "We're just getting started on this issue. This is not the end, I want to be clear about that," state Rep. Jordan Harris (D-Philadelphia), who was a prime sponsor of the Clean Slate Law, said.

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STATE REP STEPHEN KINSEY 65TH BIRTHDAY PARTY



MARTINA WALLACE 50TH BIRTHDAY PARTY



OPERATION HUG THE BLOCK ENDS AFTER 77 NIGHTS THROUGHOUT PHILADELPHIA, BUT THE WORK CONTINUES



By Maleka Fruean
Germantown Info Hub

Operation Hug The Block was a huge undertaking. Philly Truce, co-founded by Mазzie Casher and Steven Pickens, and community activist Jamal Johnson partnered to peace patrol 77 blocks across Philadelphia most affected by shootings. It involved direct on-the-ground action, with participants walking each block from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. every night for 77 nights and ending the morning of the general election in Philadelphia. Germantown Info Hub got to speak with Casher to get an overall debrief of the peace patrols and what's next for the organizers and the project.

Casher and Pickens have been working on Philly Truce since 2020 when homicide numbers and violence rose. It started as a mediation and conflict resolution service app and has since evolved, and as Casher puts it, it now focuses on “sustainable Black manhood.” The platform of sustainable Black manhood involves many clear objectives for Philly Truce. It includes zero involvement with the criminal justice system, family court system, and state welfare system and infinite pursuit of self-knowledge, useful education, and ethical financial freedom. They aim to accomplish these objectives through programs like Safe City Boys, peace

patrols, and other ways to engage youth and community members.

There was no better choice than a partnership with Jamal Johnson, known in the community for his direct-action approach to bringing awareness to high rates of gun violence. Johnson has held hunger strikes and has marched many times to push political leaders and others to treat gun violence as a citywide emergency. Casher said he and Johnson prepared themselves for the major 77-night commitment and that mental preparation sustained them. But they also had help from Pickens and many regulars, folks, and community leaders who came out throughout the

multiple months, even to blocks not close to their neighborhoods—most nights had about ten people come out, most of them Black men.

Casher explains: “I think if you can commit, everything else will take care of itself. And that's pretty much how we sustained ourselves. But in terms of just physical repair and rejuvenation, we just figured out some times when we could have a night or two off, Jamal and I as the leads, and the rest were the people who came out that sustained us. The regulars, they really sustained us because there were people you could count on no matter where you went.” Casher noted that a true sense of kinship and camaraderie was built during the downtime. He said, “We had food, we had music. The downtime between walks was pretty lit, I have to say.”

Casher spoke more about the participation, saying, “And people would be gone for a few days, and they would be like, oh, man, what happened to such and such? And then they would pop right back up, like, man, I got tired, or I had a cold, but I missed you all, and jumped right back in.” “And on the last night, so many people were like, I'm going to miss this. So we formed a brother and a sisterhood, and we had very rich conversations, very silly conversations, busting on each other, food, [and] music. And we had a lot of fun between walks. I mean, even when we did walk, and we came back to decompress, we'd ask what happened. Where did you all go? How were they? It was like coming backstage from a show. How were they out there? Did you get friction?”

Seth Anderson-Oberman, a union organizer and community leader in Germantown, made it out to two nights, one in Germantown and another in Kensington, during the 77 nights.

“There's this idea that resonates with a lot of people that we need approaches to community safety that are community-led, that aren't led by the police, that are not kind of carceral in nature,” said Anderson-Oberman. “I know one of the things that struck me when I was first hearing about this project was the term that they decided to use, which was Hug the Block.”

He continued, “To me, that communicates this idea that we need to show love to each other, and we need to look out for each other and build community where we live. So that's an attractive idea, and I think a lot of people have been motivated to participate on that basis, and I think that was true as well when I attended in Kensington and also when I attended in my own neighborhood in Germantown.”

One of the takeaways that Casher pointed out was the effective way they could keep the peace patrols community-led and -directed. But there were also surprising and unexpected points of support that came in most significantly with their evolving partnership with police officers. Casher himself was surprised at the level of engagement most officers had as soon as they learned what they were doing. Some officers who were there for longer periods of the process started helping with the night-to-night logistics and became regular helping hands. He said, “They were helping us set the tent up, break the tent down, and

we got into many personal conversations about politics and sports. So getting to start to dig into that stigma, or that antagonistic shadow between Black men and often white police officers... that was another pleasant surprise and something we should continue to explore and use to our benefit as a city."

"And we try to stress that to people, like, look, we want them to do this right," said Casher. "We are just here to temper the situation and also kind of demonstrate that, number one, we are in the lead. We are the architects of this and the way it's going down. And that's the kind of relationship we need to start to have with police." Andre Carroll, another community leader born and raised in Germantown, also attended a peace pa-

trol in Germantown. He walked with them on the night at the block of Pastorius and Baynton, nearby Germantown High School, where he attended.

"Philadelphia is a small, big city, but it's a big city," said Carroll. "I definitely think that it is important for community members to recognize that they have the power, they actually have exactly what it takes to continue this and move this forward. And it doesn't have to stop once Operation Hug The Block leaves this neighborhood. And that's the hope. That's the hope that I would love to see."

The need for peace patrols and for neighbors to feel empowered on their own blocks is exactly what Casher hopes to move forward, and he's organizing

just that as Operation Hug The Block has ended. Moving forward, he hopes to raise funds needed to operationalize the program, which he believes could support many areas of the city.

One of their plans to operationalize will be creating paid patrol shifts. "So going forward, it's going to be two shifts, 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., 8:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., 12 hours of coverage. It's going to be staffed by justice impacted men. That means they're going to be sourced from parole and probation and/or as a condition of release from the county or some kind of diversionary program. We're doing that because that's restorative, and we're not going to have to scramble to hire people. I don't want to use the word mandate. We're going to make them do it, but we're going to pay them to do it," said Casher, explaining the plan.

Neighbors and leaders who didn't attend but were interested in the patrols have reached out to him, and he wants folks to know they are working on following up with as many people as possible to try and start these kinds of actions for themselves and their community.

Casher admits it's been slow as the holiday season approaches, but they've begun reaching out to folks who have contacted them about peace patrols on their own blocks. Many folks who have reached out don't want to do the actual patrolling themselves but want to enlist Philly Truce's help getting people out there. Casher understands their concerns.

"So in this little interim period, the idea was that we would get the people that expressed interest together, see how many bodies we could pull, and see if we could take turns sup-

porting each other so that somebody doesn't have to be on their block doing it. So if it's six of us, five of us will go, you don't have to do it on your block, but (maybe) you do it on the next block, and that person sits out, or some kind of system like that," said Casher.

He continued, "But that was the idea we're going to explore because we are pressing different government officials— city council and some state reps, and applying for money, so we're in the process of funding it the way we envision it. But in an attempt to keep the momentum, we wanted to at least engage the people who've expressed interest."

You can visit www.phillytruce.com to learn more about Operation Hug The Block, Philly Truce's work in general, or how to support or donate to their organization.



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