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Child welfare algorithm scrutinized

Allegheny County's AI tool draws DOJ probe

By Sally Ho and Garance Burke
Associated Press

The Justice Department has been scrutinizing a controversial artificial intelligence tool used by the Allegheny County child protective services agency following concerns that it could result in discrimination against families with

disabilities, The Associated Press has learned.

The interest from federal civil rights attorneys comes after an AP investigation revealed potential bias and transparency issues about the opaque algorithm that is designed to assess a family's risk level when they are reported for child welfare concerns in the county.

Several civil rights complaints

were filed in the fall about the Allegheny Family Screening Tool, which is used to help social workers decide which families to investigate, AP has learned.

Two sources said that attorneys in the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division cited the AP investigation when urging them to submit formal complaints detailing their concerns about how the algorithm could harden bias against people with disabilities, including families with mental health issues.

A third person told AP that the same group of federal civil rights attorneys also spoke with them in November as part of a broad conversation about how algorithmic tools could potentially exacerbate disparities, including for people with disabilities. That conversation explored the design and construction of Allegheny's influential algorithm, though the full scope of the Justice Department's interest

SEE **WELFARE**, PAGE A-2

URA bids to reshape Golden Triangle

Plan seeks to convert offices into housing

By Mark Belko
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

With \$6 million to dole out, the city has finally launched a new initiative designed to generate more affordable housing in Downtown, where the average one-bedroom apartment rents for about \$1,600.

Now it's waiting to see if it gets any takers.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority began accepting applications Tuesday from developers and others interested in converting vacant or underutilized office space in Downtown buildings into apartments.

"We believe this program is an important step to reimagine parts of Downtown and reimagine buildings that are yawning for new investment and use," said Tom Link, the URA's chief development officer.

Mr. Link said the URA hasn't formally talked to any developers yet interested in taking advantage of the pilot program. But he is curious to see what kind of activity the initiative generates.

"It's an opportunity to see what the real need is and what the demand is," he said.

Jeremy Waldrup, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, which was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the

SEE **URA**, PAGE A-2

FOR THE RECORD



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Aquinas Academy's Vinnie Cugini goes up for a layup early in his team's 68-62 loss Tuesday at Neighborhood Academy in Stanton Heights. He scored 33 points to break Tom Pipkins' WPIAL all-time scoring record of 2,838 points, set from 1989-93. Story in Sports, C-1.

Foundation to put \$50M toward equity causes

By Michael Korsh
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pittsburgh Foundation, one of the largest charitable organizations in the region and one that reports assets of more than \$1 billion, laid out a new strategic plan Tuesday that places racial justice and reducing social inequality at the forefront of its philanthropic commitments.

One of the most immediate measures is a planned \$50 million investment over the next five years toward racial equity and

justice-related causes, according to foundation leadership, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated disparities affecting key communities.

In addition, the foundation is setting a goal to ensure at least half of grants from its unrestricted grant-making pool of funds go to organizations led by and serving members of Pittsburgh's Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities by 2027.

"We'll be prioritizing racial and economic justice based on what data has told us about who has

been left out — particularly based on what has been learned during COVID-19, during a time of racial reckoning, in which it's become very clear that we haven't made the progress that we need to make," said Lisa Schroeder, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Foundation.

The foundation said it had been working on increasing that percentage for a while: About 9% of its grants had been going toward those groups, but last year that rose to 17%.

The foundation, which was

established in 1945, manages about 2,500 individual donor funds and holds \$1.46 billion in total assets with supporting organizations and its affiliate, the Community Foundation of Westmoreland County.

Over the past five years, the foundation's donors have contributed \$173 million to the Pittsburgh community.

The foundation has set a vision statement for its new work: To realize a vibrant, equitable and just

SEE **INVEST**, PAGE A-14

U.S. Debt Limit

Biden, McCarthy to bargain

Will discussions avert unwanted showdown?

By Lisa Mascaro and Seung Min Kim
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Not so long ago, Joe Biden and Republican leader Kevin McCarthy used to talk things over at breakfast in Mr. Biden's vice presidential home at the Naval Observatory.

Mr. Biden was intent in those days on "keeping up relations with the opposition party," as he writes in his memoir, and the new House majority leader often arrived with fellow GOP lawmakers in tow.

But now, with a potential national debt crisis looming, those morning meetings in 2015 seem a political lifetime ago as Democratic President Biden and Mr. McCarthy, the new House speaker, prepare for their first official meeting Wednesday at the White House.

"You know, when I met with him as the vice president, he was always eager to sit down and talk," Mr. McCarthy recalled to The Associated Press ahead of the meeting. "He was always a person who would like to try to find solutions, work together."

Mr. Biden has signaled no such open-ended hospitality this time as newly emboldened House Republicans court a risky debt ceiling showdown.

At a fundraiser Tuesday in New

SEE **DEBT**, PAGE A-4

New Pa. speaker hopes to keep job

By Mark Scolforo
Associated Press

HARRISBURG — The rank-and-file Democrat who was unexpectedly elected speaker of the Pennsylvania House as a compromise candidate last month is saying he hopes to keep the job even after three vacant Democratic-leaning seats are filled in special elections next week.

In a lengthy interview late Monday in his state Capitol suite, Speaker Mark Rozzi said he won't necessarily step aside and support the Democratic floor leader, Rep. Joanna McClintock of Philadelphia,

as speaker.

"I know how to count votes, first of all," said Mr. Rozzi, who represents a mostly suburban area around Reading. "So, you know, at the end of the day she still has to get the votes to become speaker of the House."

Democrats won 102 seats in November to Republicans' 101, which was enough for a bare Democratic majority after 12 years under Republican control, but one re-elected Democrat died in October and two others resigned in December because they also won higher offices.

SEE **ROZZI**, PAGE A-14



Associated Press

Pennsylvania House Speaker Mark Rozzi, a Berks County Democrat, listens to public comment during a field hearing Friday in Philadelphia. The Capitol is now rife with speculation that another candidate may soon try to evict Mr. Rozzi from the speaker's rostrum.



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Foundation to fund equity causes

INVEST, FROM A-1

Pittsburgh region that supports everyone — regardless of race, identity or circumstance — to thrive and fulfill their potential.

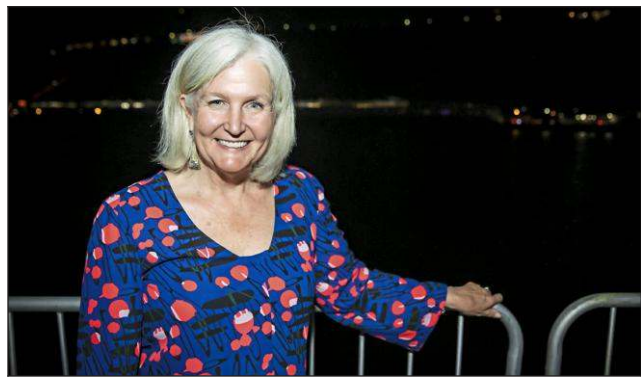
Its unrestricted grant-making pool accounts for about 40% of its charitable contributions, Ms. Schroeder said. The other 60% of grants are open to donors' individual recommendations.

"The foundation has a 78-year history of providing the means for donors, individuals and families to pursue their own passions around the causes that they care about most. And we are 100% committed to continuing to support those donors," Ms. Schroeder said.

In 2015, the foundation adopted racial equity as part of its grantmaking values when it introduced the 100 Percent Pittsburgh initiative, which was meant to help residents that hadn't fully benefited from the region's transition from manufacturing to medical and technology industries because of racism or poverty.

In 2020, the Pittsburgh Foundation partnered with other large foundations in the city to fund a regional emergency action fund for COVID-19 relief. That year, it also created a Grantmaking for Racial Justice fund, which gave grants to organizations such as Alliance for Police Accountability, Black Women's Policy Agenda and Pittsburgh Black Worker Center.

While Tuesday's announcement did not identify specific grants that might be part of the \$50 million commitment to racial equity and justice-related causes, the foundation said it will focus its strategic plan grantmaking on five community issue areas: basic needs, equity and social justice, environmental action, economic mobility, and arts and culture. The plan, unveiled



Maranie R. Staab

Lisa Schroeder, president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Foundation: "We'll be prioritizing racial and economic justice based on what data has told us about who has been left out ... it's become very clear that we haven't made the progress that we need to make."

Tuesday in Bellevue at the site of a program for minority-owned food businesses run by nonprofit Catapult Greater Pittsburgh, details the foundation's reshaped goals to "build a society in which race is no longer a determinant of who thrives and who gets held back," according to a release.

Catapult Greater Pittsburgh, on its website, describes its mission as "emergency resource distribution, peer-to-peer support, wealth building, trauma-informed financial counseling, and policy advocacy to ensure systematically disenfranchised communities can meaningfully achieve economic justice and lead dignified and equitable lives."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, in 2021, poverty in Pittsburgh increased to 20.2% — almost eight percentage points higher than the national rate.

In addition, the Census Bureau found that Pittsburgh's racial and ethnic minorities were facing poverty at disproportionate rates: More than a third of Black and Latino residents — and more than 1 in 4 Asian residents — lived below the poverty line last year. Board Chair John R.

"Jack" McGinley, who led the yearlong strategy development, said navigating the new course will not be easy, "but it is the right course for us to take at this time in the Foundation's history. It is precisely during a period when our disparities are glaring and well documented that a community foundation must demonstrate the value of building community for the benefit of all of us."

In addition to reshaping its grant-making priorities, the Pittsburgh Foundation has launched a series of community engagement initiatives, such as a "Community Conversations" series, a project involving more than 300 nonprofit and community leaders across Allegheny County, and a "More-Than-Money" program to connect nonprofits with non-monetary resources.

Ms. Schroeder said that through these initiatives, the foundation has strengthened relationships with smaller nonprofits in the area and eased their burden to access funding by streamlining the proposal process.

"We're really trusting those who do the work to put the emphasis on their work, rather than the grant-making process," Ms. Schroeder said.

Rozzi wants to keep speaker role

ROZZI, FROM A-1

Elections are next Tuesday to fill those three vacancies, all in the Pittsburgh area.

Republicans were not able to muster enough votes to elect their own speaker when the new session began Jan. 3, leading to Mr. Rozzi's emergence as an alternative. Ms. McClinton and all Democrats voted for him, along with all seven members of House GOP leadership and nine other Republicans.

The Capitol is now rife with speculation that Ms. McClinton or some other candidate may soon try to evict Mr. Rozzi from the speaker's rostrum.

Ms. McClinton responded to Mr. Rozzi's talk of keeping the job by saying she "would be honored" to be speaker, and that once the House vacancies are filled, she will "trust my colleagues will make the best decision to move Pennsylvania forward."

The House has been frozen since Mr. Rozzi took the speakership and has not passed internal operating rules or assigned members to committees.

Instead, Mr. Rozzi has convened a group of three representatives from each party to work on rules, hold listening sessions to come up with a way to pass what has been his primary objective for many years — a two-year window for victims of child sexual abuse to file otherwise outdated civil lawsuits. Mr. Rozzi and the group kicked off their statewide listening sessions at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh last week.

Mr. Rozzi, 51, who has described being molested by a now deceased parish priest for over a year at about age 13, said he wants to use his time in the top job to do some good. He acknowledged that some members from both parties are not happy with him, seeing that as sign he's on the right path.

"I think that if I can show people I can lead this House, maybe I could stay in this position," Mr. Rozzi said.

It may prove a tall order for a speaker who did not work his way up the ladder, building relationships along the way and leaning on a core of caucus support.

"Mark is not certain about how long his tenure lasts," said a friend from the Reading area, Republican state Rep. Mark Gillen. "There's no textbook that he's going to be able to pull out and read the next play from."

In two public hearings by Mr. Rozzi's group, the Speaker's Workgroup to Move Pennsylvania Forward, he has heard a range of suggestions, many from people active with groups that have sought to ban gifts to lawmakers, improve transparency and weaken the tight grip that majority leaders have held on bills and amendments.

After it conducts two more listening sessions this week — in State College on Wednesday and Wilkes-Barre on Thursday — Mr. Rozzi hopes the working group will then formulate viable proposals on internal operating rules and the lawsuit window legislation. He insists he's not stalling and suggested he may soon convene the 2023-24 session's first voting floor session.

Rep. Paul Schemel, a Franklin County Republican who Mr. Rozzi picked for the working group, said the new speaker has been feeling some heat, particularly when he chose to shut down the chamber for the time being.

"I'm sure it's hard on him, but I think he genuinely wants reform of the system," Mr. Schemel said.

Mr. Rozzi said he became active in politics through grassroots participation in efforts to spotlight and combat sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, including his partic-

ipation in protests in the state Capitol before he was elected. When his local state representative in Berks County was retiring, he called Mr. Rozzi to suggest herun.

The divorced father of one daughter won that race in 2012 and sold his family's window-and-door installation company six years later.

He considers himself a Catholic but not a "practicing Catholic within the institution." He declined to disclose the amount of a settlement he reached over claims of abuse a couple years ago with the Allentown Catholic diocese.

"Believe me, it wasn't enough to ever make things right, I can tell you that," Mr. Rozzi said. "It's not enough to put my life back together."

The statute of limitations window has far and away been his primary issue, but Mr. Rozzi considers himself as a centrist, fiscally conservative and socially liberal.

He supports abortion rights, gun rights and business tax cuts, and voted with Republicans last year on a bill to prohibit transgender athletes from playing school sports that align with their gender identity.

That measure was vetoed by then-Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf. He is not against expanding voter ID requirements, a proposal opposed by most legislative Democrats.

Despite their temporary, 101-99 majority, Republicans had fallen short of majority support for their caucus' choice for speaker, Rep. Carl Walker Metzgar of Somerset County. Mr. Rozzi then found himself in a conference room with the Republican floor leader, Rep. Bryan Cutler of Lancaster County, and several aides.

By all accounts including his own, Mr. Rozzi agreed to position himself as an independent speaker.

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