

## Faculty strives to save English Language Institute

Pitt concerned about enrollment drop-off

By Jordan Anderson  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

One of the oldest intensive English programs in the U.S. may be shutting its doors after nearly 60 years of programming at the University of Pittsburgh.

Thousands of students worldwide have attended the English Language Institute to take courses and learn English as a second language, while experiencing life on

an American campus. The institute may now be teaching its last cohort, as it is set to close at the end of June as a result of enrollment declines.

Since 1964, the institute has served over 14,000 students from more than 130 countries. In a typical term, classes bring together students from about two dozen countries, according to the institute's website.

Scott Kiesling, chair of the Department of Linguistics, said closing the institute would profoundly impact the university's international reach, contradicting its diversity goals. He has appealed



Scott Kiesling



Kathleen Blee

the decision, asking the university to delay it for another year so efforts can be made to boost enrollment.

Many institute students are non-degree seekers, he said. But the center also provides tuition-supported, non-credit English

language courses for Pitt students who come from outside the U.S.

The institute also supports English testing and teaching, including certification in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, or TESOL. Community outreach also has been part of its mission, providing free classes for locals interested in learning English, Mr. Kiesling said.

"This closing reduces our diversity and pulls us back from the world," Mr. Kiesling said last week. "This was a program where students would come from all over to learn wonderful things in Pittsburgh, have a great experience and

take that out into the rest of the world. I think that's completely opposite of the goals and aspirations that the University of Pittsburgh has."

In December, Kathleen Blee, dean of the university's Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences, sent a letter to the Department of Linguistics announcing the plan to close the institute, citing declining enrollment.

Ms. Blee couldn't be reached last week, and the university sent the Post-Gazette her letter when it was asked for comment.

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## BLADES OF STEEL



John Colombo/For the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Steelers mascot Steely McBeam tests his skating ability as he leads a group around the ice Saturday at the Schenley Park Ice Skating Rink in Squirrel Hill. Steely was taking part in the rink's Mascot Skate.

## Pa. officials fly in state plane on dime of taxpayers

pennlive.com

HARRISBURG — Gov. Tom Wolf appeared in Allentown one day last fall to celebrate his success in boosting early education funding. An hour later he was at a news conference 90 miles away in Steelton, touting free breakfasts for students.

Despite the distance, no speed limits were broken. Mr. Wolf winged it from the northeast to south-central Pa. aboard the taxpayer-provided plane that is at the disposal of the governor and other state officials.

Since taking office in 2015, Mr. Wolf has averaged more than one flight per week on the nine-seat, twin-turboprop King Air 350i, racking up 256 flights at a total cost of nearly \$642,000.

His annual plane use is generally on par or far less than that of his predecessors, although COVID-19 reduced air travel to just five flights in 2020.

It has picked up since. In 2021 he made 20 trips on the state plane and in 2022 took 38 trips.

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## Stolen passwords a major issue in state

Report: Pa. most susceptible in U.S.

By Michael Korsh  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

On Jan. 5, Maternal & Family Health Services, a nonprofit serving 17 counties in the Scranton area of northeastern Pennsylvania, announced it had fallen victim to a sophisticated ransomware attack.

Between August 2021 and last April, hackers tapped into its systems and accessed sensitive health information of more than 460,000 people — including Social Security numbers and financial and med-

ical details, according to a statement from the company.

"This has hurt us to the core," said Maria Montoro Edwards, the organization's CEO and president.

Ms. Edwards said that when the company was notified in April, it immediately began working with digital forensics firms to examine what happened and protect MFHS from future attacks.

"As a nonprofit organization, our priority is our clients. And every minute that we're spending doing something else, we're not helping our clients. That's been a challenge and a frustration for us,"

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## HOLIDAY BLUES



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Crews on Saturday disassemble the Unity Tree at Penn Avenue Place, located at the corner of Stanwix Street and Penn Avenue, Downtown. The tree's removal signifies the end of the holiday season.

## GOP effort to impeach Krasner yields \$1M in legal fees

Most billing comes from 1 firm

pennlive.com

The Republican-led impeachment of Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner generated nearly \$1 million in legal fees by the end of November, according to documents obtained by PennLive.

Invoices received through a Right-to-Know request show that two law firms retained by House Republicans had billed a total of about \$916,000 as of Nov. 29.

The Wednesday scheduled start of Mr. Krasner's impeachment trial in the GOP-controlled state Senate was postponed after



Larry Krasner

Commonwealth Court ruled that the seven articles of impeachment filed against him did not meet the legal standard of "misbehavior in office."

Among the charges in the impeachment articles: that Mr. Krasner failed to prosecute some minor crimes, engaged in mismanagement and obstructed the House investigation into his conduct.

On Friday, a Senate GOP spokeswoman released a statement saying session days for the weeks of Jan. 23 and Jan. 30 had been canceled because of the ongoing turmoil over leadership in the House.

"Additionally, the Commonwealth Court opinions on the impeachment process create more questions than answers, leaving our proceedings on the matter in flux," wrote Kate Flessner. "Given that an open appeal period on the litigation runs through Jan. 30, until further notice no impeachment actions will be taken by the Senate."

By late Friday, House Republicans had not responded to requests for comment about the legal expenses.

A Krasner spokeswoman declined to comment on Thursday, citing the pending litigation. She also referred questions about how much Philadelphia has spent on defending

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## 2 will be honored at annual MLK breakfast

County Bar Association will salute Lee, Keating

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Allegheny County Bar Association will honor a new congresswoman and the association's director of diversity at its annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast on Monday.

The annual event commemorates King's efforts for changes in law and social justice.

U.S. Rep Summer Lee will receive the Drum Major for Justice Award. Ms. Lee, a Democrat, was sworn in this month to become the first Black woman from Pennsylvania to be elected to Congress.

A news release called her "a dedicated organizer, attorney, and progressive legislator. She worked as labor organizer, joining the Fight for \$15 to increase the minimum wage."

A Woodland Hills High School graduate, Ms. Lee grew up in Braddock and Swissvale before graduating from Penn State University, followed



Summer Lee

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# Shapiro announces picks for public safety posts

pennlive.com

Gov.-elect Josh Shapiro has announced his Cabinet nominees for positions tasked with ensuring the public safety of Pennsylvanians and their communities and all come with experience of having worked in the departments they are being tapped to lead.

Ahead of his Tuesday inauguration Mr. Shapiro has released the names of most of his Cabinet nominees and appears to be moving in a manner that reflects a desire to hit the ground running. As part of his latest round of Cabinet announcements Friday, he is nominating Laurel Harry to serve as his corrections secretary and Christopher Paris as state police commissioner.

He has asked Gov. Tom Wolf's Adjutant General Mark Schindler, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency director Randy Padfield, and Acting Fire Commissioner Tom Cook to stay on in the jobs they currently hold.

All except Mr. Padfield require Senate confirmation with a simple majority vote.

Mr. Shapiro, currently the state's attorney general, lists public safety as a top priority. He called these individuals exemplary public servants who will work with emergency responders to make communities safer and prepare and respond for



Mark Makela/Getty Images Gov.-elect Josh Shapiro

emergencies.

"Pennsylvanians deserve to both be safe and feel safe in their communities, and these experienced leaders will help us address critical shortages among frontline workers and ensure our police officers, firefighters, service members, and veterans have the support they deserve," Mr. Shapiro said in a statement. "Working together, we will ensure the commonwealth is prepared to respond to emergencies and continue the work to protect Pennsylvanians and make our communities safer."

His corrections secretary nominee, Ms. Harry has 24 years of experience in that department, and currently is serving as the acting Western Region deputy secretary. She previously was superintendent of the State Correctional Institution at Camp Hill for the past

decade. Throughout her time in the department, she has worked at six different state prisons.

A Greene County native, she holds a bachelor's and master's degree from West Virginia University and a doctorate from California University of Pennsylvania.

"With over two decades of commonwealth experience in the Department of Corrections — from managing staff and inmates to overseeing drug and alcohol treatment programs — I know we can address the root causes of crime in Pennsylvania while making our communities safer," Ms. Harris said. "As Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, I will lead the administration's efforts to reduce criminal behavior by providing individualized treatment and education to inmates, supporting all Department of Corrections staff, and ensuring those who have served their time can successfully reintegrate into our communities."

Mr. Shapiro's nominee for state police commissioner also is no stranger to the department he would lead. Mr. Paris enlisted in the Pennsylvania State Police in 1999 and has progressed through the ranks including serving as station and troop commander and as deputy commissioner of administration and professional responsibility.

He holds a degree from

the University of Scranton and a law degree from Temple University.

"With over 20 years of experience in the Pennsylvania State Police, I know the sacrifices our officers make each and every day to protect Pennsylvanians — and I know they need support from the governor's administration to continue that work," Mr. Paris said. "I am grateful for the trust that Governor-Elect Shapiro has placed in me to lead my fellow law enforcement officers, and I look forward to working with him to hire more police officers in our communities, hold criminals accountable, and make our communities safer."

Mr. Schindler was confirmed as the state's 54th adjutant general in 2021 and served in that role six months prior to his confirmation. In that post, he heads the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, overseeing a budget of over \$966 million and commanding the nation's second largest National Guard unit with more than 18,000 Army and Air National Guard members, among other responsibilities.

Prior to his current post, he served as assistant adjutant general of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and as chief of staff of the Pennsylvania National Guard, as well as in a variety of other command and staff

posts with the Guard. A Buffalo, N.Y., native, he holds a bachelor's degree from Edinboro University, a master's from Clarion University and another master's from the U.S. Army War College.

"The women and men of the Pennsylvania National Guard and the employees of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs show their commitment to public service and our community every day," Mr. Schindler said. "We will continue to support them and ensure our National Guard remains among the most highly trained and operationally effective in the nation. Furthermore, I look forward to renewing our commitment to Pennsylvania's more than 700,000 veterans and their families, to ensure we provide resources and assistance they've earned."

Mr. Padfield, who has served as director of PEMA for the past four years, has more than 35 years of experience in public safety spanning the disciplines of fire/rescue services, special operations, emergency medical services, and emergency management. Prior to joining PEMA, he was the director of the Senator John J. Shumaker Public Safety Training Center at Harrisburg Area Community College overseeing training programs for emergency responders.

"When Pennsylvanians need us most, PEMA and the

Shapiro Administration will be there to support them — and we will vigorously plan and prepare to ensure we are ready for future emergencies and disasters," Mr. Padfield said.

As acting state fire commissioner, Mr. Cook brings extensive experience in various public safety and emergency management roles, including as assistant fire commissioner and as administrator of the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy. He is a retired firefighter who served in various departments in Allegheny County. All told, he has over 36 years of emergency services experience.

He holds bachelor's degrees from Carnegie Mellon University and Columbia Southern University and a master's from the University of Phoenix.

"Pennsylvania has the largest number of fire departments [2,400] in the nation and is a national leader in the number of career and paid personnel providing emergency services — underscoring the critical importance of the commonwealth's fire and emergency service community," Mr. Cook said. "As fire commissioner, I will work diligently to advance the Governor-Elect's agenda to make our communities safer and ensure the commonwealth is ready for a wide range of emergency situations."

## Pitt language institute to close in June

LANGUAGE, FROM C-1

"Over the past two years, the leadership of the ELI and the Department of Linguistics have been in discussions with the Dietrich School Dean's Office regarding the impact of declining enrollments on the ELI's continued operations," the letter said. "The University has made several attempts to bolster enrollment numbers, however after much consideration, the Dietrich School has made the difficult decision to close the unit."

Mr. Kiesling said he learned about the plan just a day before in a meeting with Ms. Blee.

"It really did come without any previous discussion that this was even something that was on the table," he said.

In response, the institute issued a statement later in December, saying the Department of Linguistics and others in the university community were "shocked, saddened, and in many cases angered" at the decree.

"The ELI's nearly 60 years of contributing to the academic success of thousands of students of English, TESOL, and Linguistics around the world is coming to an end, but it is hoped that a close review of the decision will allow for an alternative path that enables the ELI to continue its service to the Department, School, University, and global community," the letter said.

While Mr. Kiesling said he knew the COVID-19

pandemic had affected institute enrollment numbers, they were beginning to take a turn for the better.

In 2016, Mr. Kiesling said, the institute had about 150 students. When the pandemic arrived in 2020, the number dropped to 30 to 40 students. Yet 2022 showed promise, as the number had jumped to 85 by the fall semester, he said.

He credits that leap to the work of faculty, eight of whom could lose their jobs if the institute closes. Those employees are represented by the faculty union's bargaining unit, which is in early negotiations with the university. Two others are faculty in the linguistics department and will keep their jobs, Mr. Kiesling said.

According to Mr. Kiesling, the enrollment decline was nothing new to the institute — world events have always impacted it. The 9/11 attacks, the Iraq war, Trump-era immigration policies and the Russia-Ukraine war all have affected international students' ability to attend, he said.

While the pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, Mr. Kiesling said he believes faculty should have been consulted to find ways to keep the institute afloat.

He also points to the institute being self-sustaining financially, though it has suffered in recent years due to the dwindling enrollment.

In the letter, Ms. Blee said the department would continue to teach English as a

second language courses.

"The dean has said that some things can continue, but it's not really clear how they're going to be funded," Mr. Kiesling said. "To figure out where faculty are going, where to have their offices, that's totally unclear. There's really no plan on what to do with [the institute]. It was just decided to shut it down. This could have been done in a somewhat rational manner."

While the institute will be open through the winter/spring semester, Mr. Kiesling said he worries about students whose education might be cut short.

The institute's impact can be heard directly from the students themselves.

A student from Colombia, who identified herself as Rosa, shared how the program impacted her during a speech in a 2021 closing ceremony, which the institute holds at the end of each semester. She told how her father stressed that it was important to speak English and how far she had come in her language skills since her family got lost in a U.S. airport and had to use their phones to try to translate directions.

"When I remember the English classes at [the institute], they were amazing," she said. "Thank god for this experience because we had excellent teachers, excellent professors. We learned a lot, and we made amazing friends too. If we hadn't had perseverance, we wouldn't have achieved a higher level of English pro-

iciency, but we did."

Mr. Kiesling said the closing announcement has drawn letters from alumni and graduate students urging Ms. Blee and Provost Ann E. Cudd to reconsider.

The timing of the institute's closure also overlaps with the departure of Ms. Blee, who will step down as dean to return to a faculty post June 30, the same day the institute is set to close.

Mr. Kiesling said the institute's future may be a matter for the new dean to consider instead.

"My official appeal has been really asking to delay so that we can have a proper conversation about this and to think about the impact of all the other functions that the ELI has on the university," he said. "This current dean is stepping down, so it might be a better thing for the new dean to think about where they want to put their resources coming in."

Mr. Kiesling said he plans to meet with Ms. Cudd this week.

"I think there's a good case to be made that the English Language Institute is an investment in our research and student and teacher training programs," he said. "We have multiple missions, and it's not just teaching people because they're paying and making money off of it."



Ann E. Cudd

## Wolf racked up 256 flights during his terms in office

PLANE, FROM C-1

"You can get to a lot more places, see a lot more people, do a lot more events if you can get there faster," Mr. Wolf said. "The plane allowed me to do that. I'm not sure how you do a cost-benefit analysis of that but I think the benefits outweigh the costs there."

Republican lawmakers agree that in a state the size of Pennsylvania it makes sense for the chief executive working in the Capitol to have access to a plane. After all, as Sen. Dave Argall, R-Schuylkill County, put it, "it's a long way to Erie."

Mr. Wolf can attest to that from his days as Gov. Ed Rendell's revenue secretary in 2007-2008 when he didn't have access to the plane.

"That was the policy of that administration, so I drove everywhere," Mr. Wolf said. "It takes a long time to drive to Pittsburgh or Erie from here."

Mr. Wolf's spokeswoman said flying allows the governor to quickly respond to emergency situations around the state and gives him the opportunity to visit areas that typically don't receive a lot of attention, while still being able to get back to Harrisburg to attend to business in the Capitol.

Mr. Wolf allows his Cabinet officers to use the

plane, which is flown by a state pilot, but they pay for it out of their departmental budgets.

When it comes to using the plane to fly to political events, the longstanding practice has been that campaigns reimburse the state.

Mr. Rendell, for example, used campaign funds to reimburse the state for 42 flights that involved campaign business in 2005 and 2006.

Mr. Wolf has never used the plane expressly to travel to political events, said his spokeswoman, Beth Rementer.

"The governor only uses the state plane for government business, but if political activity occurs during that period, the governor's office bills the campaign for that portion of the travel," she said.

Mixing the two uses of the plane has raised questions from Capitol observers in the past who ask whether a government-related business trip is a pretext for traveling to a destination for the campaign event.

The state of Ohio, for instance, avoids that situation by limiting the use of its state aircraft to official state business only, said Matt Bruning, a spokesman for the Ohio Department of Transportation.

## Report: Pa. paces U.S. in stolen passwords

HACKERS, FROM C-1

Ms. Edwards said.

Cybersecurity threats like those MFHS experienced are on the rise, according to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center.

Between 2017 and 2021, the center recorded more than 2.76 million complaints and \$18.7 billion in losses. Pennsylvania was among the biggest states to fall victim to cyber threats — both in number of victims (more than 17,000) and the amount of losses (\$207 million) — in 2021.

A December report from digital forensics company Secure Data Recovery has named Pennsylvania as one of the most digitally vulnerable states — and the single most susceptible state to stolen passwords.

Julia Keating, Secure Data Recovery's director of marketing, said the company typically focuses on data recovery after a

cybersecurity threat and decided to conduct a nationwide poll to better understand how consumers are proactively protecting themselves.

"Data recovery is a very complex process. Sometimes it's hard to explain to our customers why certain things can be recovered and certain things cannot be recovered," Ms. Keating said. "We wanted to help our customers and potential customers to be more informed of what's going on."

The company polled almost 2,500 people nationwide, asking about individual users' digital security habits, such as whether they use protective tools like multi-factor authentication or password managers.

Using the survey responses, Secure Data Recovery calculated a "total safety score" to compare states' digital preparedness based

on four weighted categories: data backups, hacking prevention, passwords and personal information.

According to the report, Pennsylvania is the ninth-most digitally vulnerable state in the U.S., with a total safety score of 53.4 out of 100.

Most strikingly, the state ranked at the very bottom of the country in terms of preparedness against stolen passwords, with a score of 6.2 out of 18. Pennsylvania also received a 15.4 (out of 30) for backups, 25.6 (out of 40) for hacking prevention, and 6.4 (out of 12) for personal information.

Ms. Keating said that vulnerability to stolen passwords is especially dangerous for two reasons. First, passwords are an extremely widespread type of data security, often protecting sensitive financial and banking information.

Additionally, because many companies that store users' personal information are also vul-

nerable to cybersecurity threats, passwords are often the last and only line of defense against hackers.

According to the poll, Pennsylvanians have lagged in adopting important protective measures: 55% of residents polled said they did not use a password manager, for example.

A password manager is a digital service that acts as a vault for storing and organizing passwords for various internet accounts. Many password managers offer free versions, while others include enhanced protections for a premium subscription.

But even sophisticated digital operations — including password managers themselves — have experienced their share of hacking threats. On Dec. 22, LastPass, a password manager service with more than 30 million users, announced it had fallen victim to a major data breach.

Other measures Ms. Keating recommended that Pennsylvanians adopt included using auto-

generated passwords, which are more complex and secure by default, and creating a unique password for different website accounts.

"Better habits in terms of passwords will prevent you from having data security issues. Secure yourself — don't rely on others," Ms. Keating said.

While Ms. Edwards of MFHS said working closely with digital forensics firms had reduced the "learning curve" behind digital threats, her organization's experience has shifted her perspective about how pervasive they can be.

"I can say that I'm going to pay much more attention to the topic. I work with other nonprofit leaders, and I will be making sure that I help them to understand the critical nature of cybersecurity — and that it is real and it can't happen to you," Ms. Edwards said.

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