

The Philadelphia Inquirer

ALWAYS ASKING. ALWAYS PHILLY.

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HOSKINS RETURNS TO PHILLY; WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN?



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A WAWA FAN VISITS THE SOUTH'S BELOVED BUC-EE'S: 'HOLY BEAVER!'

LIFE & CULTURE D1
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE BOSS' MAY 30 SHOW



INQUIRER SPECIAL REPORT

ADVOCATE TO ADVERSARY

With a chance at freedom, they faced an unexpected obstacle: Their own lawyers.



Milique Wagner spent more than a decade in prison fighting his murder conviction. One obstacle he faced along the way to winning his freedom was opposition from his own lawyer. *Jessica Griffin / Staff Photographer*

By **Samantha Melamed** and **Dylan Purcell**
 Staff Writers

Milique Wagner always insisted that his 2013 murder conviction was built on an informant's lie. But Wagner said he couldn't persuade his trial lawyer to investigate that, even after the informant confessed to the murder and testified that Philadelphia police and prosecutors knew the truth. In 2015, Wagner's appeal failed, and he faced life in prison. But Wagner had another chance

at freedom under a state law that allowed him to get a new court-appointed lawyer to help him challenge his conviction. Court records show that the attorney never spoke with the informant or looked into the detective on the case, who made headlines after being benched for secretly paying a witness. Instead, Wagner's lawyer urged the judge to shut down his client's petition, writing in June 2017, "There are no meritorious issues that could be raised."

Wagner would remain in prison another six years before prosecutors acknowledged that police had hidden evidence suggesting that the informant had committed the murder and the detective was corrupt. Although Wagner maintains

his innocence, he agreed to a plea deal for third-degree murder that allowed him to leave prison.

The opposition Wagner faced from his own lawyer is permitted under Pennsylvania's Post Conviction Relief Act, the law that allows people in prison to raise newly discovered evidence or argue that

“The fault lies with [my client], not the courts.”
 Attorney Earl Kauffman, in a “no-merit” letter

their previous lawyer mishandled the case. The state provides a lawyer in these cases, but with a catch: The attorney can argue against the client's claims and withdraw from the case by filing what's known as a “no-merit” letter.

A Philadelphia Inquirer and ProPublica investigation found case after case in which court-appointed attorneys did minimal work to examine their clients' claims and rejected what later turned out to be legitimate legal issues. The findings reveal that Philadelphia's post-conviction system repeatedly delayed or denied justice for wrongfully convicted people who then spent years or decades behind bars.

The news organizations reviewed
 → SEE LAWYERS ON A4

Suit over trans care at CHOP could aid DOJ effort

Miles Shore alleges he was irreversibly harmed by his gender-affirming treatment. The Trump administration took note.

By **Wendy Ruderman**
 Staff Writer

Earlier this year, Miles Shore filed a lawsuit claiming he suffered irreversible harm after receiving gender-affirming care at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia roughly a decade ago.

Then his lawyer received an email from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The feds wanted to know if Shore would be a potential witness in its investigation into how CHOP's medical providers are prescribing puberty blockers and hormones.

"It was two or three sentences, basically saying, 'Would Miles be willing to undergo an interview with us in connection with an investigation we're pursuing relating to these types of treatments?'" the lawyer, Tim Wojton, said earlier this month.

The DOJ says it is investigating off-label medication use and possible fraudulent billing by doctors. Advocates of transgender youth say the investigation is a pretext to fulfill President Donald Trump's mandate to prohibit gender-affirming treatment for children and teens.

Shore could be a crucial witness to reinvigorate the DOJ's unsuccessful attempts to force CHOP to hand over private patient records, legal experts said.

"His evidence would be extremely important," said Bennett Gershman, a law professor at Pace University in New York. "If he's claiming that they engaged in some kind of misconduct causing him serious harm, he would be a key witness for the government."

Shore, now 28, filed a medical malpractice lawsuit in February in Philadelphia Common Pleas Court that says CHOP providers failed to treat his underlying medical conditions before "enthusiastically and somewhat aggressively" pushing him to take "experimental and harmful cross-sex hormones" beginning at age 17.

CHOP was one of 19 children's hospitals and medical providers nationwide to receive from the DOJ last year an administrative, or civil, subpoena seeking detailed patient records.

CHOP successfully petitioned a U.S. District Court judge in
 → SEE CHOP ON A15

ELECTION 2026

How Rabb charted a progressive path to victory

In the 3rd Congressional District, one strategist said, the lawmaker from Northwest Philly "energized the base."

By **Anna Orso** and **Sam Janesch**
 Staff Writers

As the results of Philadelphia's highly contested congressional race began to trickle in Tuesday evening, politicians and casual observers alike were a bit surprised by the first batch of votes that encompassed residents who cast their ballots by mail.

For more than an hour after polls closed, State Rep. Chris Rabb — a

progressive who gained momentum in the final days of the race — was in third place. Leading the field was Ala Stanford, a physician whose campaign had seemed to sputter in the final weeks.

But inside Rabb's campaign, operatives were not worried. They drilled into the numbers, zooming in on Rabb's home turf in the voter-rich Northwest Philadelphia. In the 50th Ward, the highest turnout slice of the city, Rabb was pulling nearly 40% of the vote.

That's when Rabb's campaign manager Alon Gur knew: "We won."

Two hours later, after dancing with supporters in a Germantown banquet hall, Rabb declared victory in the Democratic primary to represent Pennsylvania's 3rd
 → SEE RABB ON A13



Chris Rabb smiles for a selfie with Laura Murphy, his aunt, after casting his vote in Tuesday's primary election at Grace Epiphany Episcopal Church in East Mount Airy. Rabb said "grassroots organizing" was key to his win. *Alejandro A. Alvarez / Staff Photographer*

WEATHER B8
RAIN ENDING, CLOUDY
HIGH 65 / LOW 59

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