

# Images of Epstein’s home released

Letter says Maxwell to file petition with court seeking her freedom

By Michael Gold  
The New York Times

House Democrats on Wednesday released photographs and videos of disgraced billionaire Jeffrey Epstein’s home on the private Caribbean island where

his accusers have said he trafficked underage girls for sex. Epstein, who was also accused of shuttling dozens of girls between his homes in New York City and Palm Beach, Florida, owned two private islands in the U.S. Virgin Islands, both off the coast of St. Thomas. One of the islands, Little St. James, was where Epstein lived for the better part of two decades and was at the center of allegations that it had been a place where he sexually abused teenage girls.

Also on Wednesday, a letter filed in New York City federal court said that Ghislaine Maxwell, the long-time companion of Epstein who is serving a 20-year prison sentence for sex trafficking, plans to ask a court for her release. The letter, submitted by her lawyer, offers no details about what grounds Maxwell will cite in her filing, known as a habeas petition. But the letter indicated that she would file the request shortly and that it would be done without

a lawyer representing her. Maxwell has already been moved from a federal prison in Florida to a minimum-security camp in Texas. The move occurred after she was interviewed over two days about the Epstein case by Todd Blanche, the Justice Department’s second-in-command and one of President Donald Trump’s former private lawyers. The release of the cache of 10 photos and four videos of Epstein’s secluded home appeared to be the

latest bid by Democrats to intensify pressure on the Justice Department to make public all of its investigative files on the convicted sex offender’s case following enactment last month of a law requiring it. Rep. Robert Garcia of California, the top Democrat on the Oversight Committee, said the panel had received Epstein’s financial records from J.P. Morgan and

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# Tariffs coming after Christmas decor

Mass-produced ornaments and other decorations are subject to higher prices



Top: Emma Mills, assistant manager at the Christmas Mouse, hangs ornaments on display at the store on Atlantic Avenue in Virginia Beach on Monday. Above: Decorative holiday items line the shelves at the Christmas Mouse in Virginia Beach. STEPHANIE KALIS/PHOTOS FOR THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

It might cost a bit more to get your holiday cheer on this year. With continued tariffs placed on imports from China, mass-produced ornaments and other decorations are subject to higher prices. In 2023, the U.S. imported 88% of its total supply of Christmas decorations from China, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Tariffs on imported Christmas decor can be 30% or higher, and some items, such as holiday lights, face a tax as high as 63% on top of the previously established 33% tariff, according to the American Christmas Tree Association. Jim Abicht stocks his shop, the Christmas Store on Main Street in downtown Smithfield, with an abundance of holiday items for indoor decorating, including one-of-a-kind and limited-production

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# Legislature gears up for retail cannabis market

By Kate Seltzer  
Staff writer

A cannabis retail market could be coming to Virginia as soon as next November, if the General Assembly passes the legislation and Gov.-elect Abigail Spanberger signs off on it. Since 2021, Virginians have been able to legally possess marijuana for personal use but unable to legally purchase it. The Joint Commission to Oversee the Transition of the Commonwealth into a Cannabis Retail Market rolled out the legislative proposal Tuesday afternoon, which amends legislation passed last session but was vetoed

by Gov. Glenn Youngkin, then and previously. “States following this path have seen adverse effects on children’s and adolescent’s health and safety, increased gang activity and violent crime, significant deterioration in mental health, decreased road safety, and significant costs associated with retail marijuana that far exceed tax revenue,” Youngkin wrote in his veto explanation. That legislation contained a provision that would have allowed localities to opt out of a retail market. But this year’s proposal gets rid of that option. It also increases the amount localities can tax from 2.5% to 3.5%. “By allowing opting out, what



we’re really doing is allowing opting in to the illicit market,” said Commission Chair Paul Krizek, D-Fairfax. “So there will not be any dry counties, like in the days of alcohol.” That’s a problem for the conservative Christian group Family Foundation. “I think that our opposition to

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## SMITHFIELD

# Hospital plans to open in January

Smithfield to have first health care facility with 24/7 emergency department

By Nate Delesline III  
Staff writer

SMITHFIELD — On a bright and chilly morning, laughter and people in scrubs filled the emergency department during training sessions about a month ahead of the opening of the community’s first ever hospital. “We get asked a lot if we’ll be open 24/7, and I think it speaks to the fact that this community has never had access to 24/7 care before,” Jessica Macalino, the hospital’s president, said during a tour. “Once we turn the lights on, we never turn them off again.” In celebration of that upcoming milestone, a ribbon-cutting ceremony — with 400 guests expected, including Gov. Glenn Youngkin — is set for 3 p.m. Thursday. Riverside Smithfield is targeting Jan. 6 as the first day to receive patients, pending all necessary regulatory approvals. In the meantime, equipment installations, finishing touches, testing and training are ongoing. One challenge in organizing and training a new team is bringing together the 70 people who will staff the ER who may not have worked together before, said Kristy Makula, the

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The main entrance of Riverside Smithfield Hospital on Wednesday. NATE DELESLINE III/ THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

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Virginia lost 10% of community pharmacies over five years, according to a study. Page 2

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A liquor store employee found a raccoon drunk and passed out on the bathroom floor after it broke into the store. Page 3

## PARTLY SUNNY

High: 52 Low: 31

Details on the back of news

