

HEEDING HIS CALL

UCONN COACH DAN HURLEY PLEASSED WITH TEAM'S EFFORT, RESPONSE AT XAVIER, PAGE 10A



QUIET NIGHT FOR RIVALRY

RIVALRY NIGHT IN BERKSHIRE LEAGUE GYMS WAS EERILY QUIET DUE TO PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS, PAGE 10A

Eyeing school board vacancies

Ed De Cortin, a former Region 14 Board of Education member, is seeking a return to the board following the announcement of two recent resignations. PAGE 3A



COVID-inspired real estate rush

Real estate agents in Litchfield County say they've never seen a rush of home buying like the purchases made in 2020 triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. PAGE 1B

Food program gets Hayes' focus

U.S. Rep. Jahana Hayes, D-5th District, has been selected to lead the House Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations. PAGE 4A

Support for Capitol siege inquiry

Despite Donald Trump being acquitted, bipartisan support appears to be growing for an independent Sept. 11-style commission into the Capitol riots. PAGE 7A

COMMUNITY NEWS, PAGE 3B

OPINION OF THE DAY: "If the work, sacrifices and deaths of all the people over the last 160-plus years were not enough to convince those in power that America is a truly welcoming and fair nation, nothing ever will."

— Bill Bastenbeck, Dayton, Tenn.

READ THE FULL LETTER ON PAGE 8A

RA TODAY AT REP-AM.COM

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High **30** Cloudy, occasional light snow and a wintry mix. Page **8B**
Low **28**

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- Classified **2B**
- Comics **6B**
- Crossword **7B**
- Dear Annie **8B**
- Editorials **8A**
- Horoscope **8B**
- Jumble **7B**
- Local news **3A**
- Lottery **2A**
- Obituaries **4B**
- Sports **9-10A**
- Sudoku **7B**
- Television **7B**
- Your Day **2A**

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Rail service gets boost

Lamont budget recommends more trains for Waterbury line

BY ANDREW LARSON
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — Train riders who use the Waterbury branch of Metro-North Railroad may finally get what they've been wanting for more than a decade: more frequent service.

Gov. Ned Lamont's proposed budget recommends \$1.2 million to increase the number of trains servicing

the Waterbury line from 15 to 22 beginning in fiscal year 2023.

The seven additional trains include two in the morning, one midday, two in the evening, and two at a time yet to be determined, said Max Reiss, a Lamont spokesman. Specific times need to be worked out with Metro-North Railroad.

See **TRAIN**, Page **6A**



A Metro-North Railroad train leaves the Waterbury station on its way to Bridgeport.

RIDE THE RAILS The Waterbury branch has eight inbound and seven outbound trains per day, with two- to three-hour headways. The first one leaves the Waterbury station on Meadow Street at 6:04 a.m. and arrives in Bridgeport at 7 a.m. The last train leaves Waterbury at 10:03 p.m. and arrives in Bridgeport at 10:58 p.m.

Following the EVIDENCE

How DNA and multiple interviews helped Waterbury detectives crack a 16-year-old murder investigation



Waterbury police have charged Willie Robinson with the killing of 16-year-old Jessica Keyworth, who was found dead on Pearl Street in 2004. He remains jailed on a \$2 million bond and is due in Waterbury Superior Court on Tuesday.

BY JONATHAN SHUGARTS
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

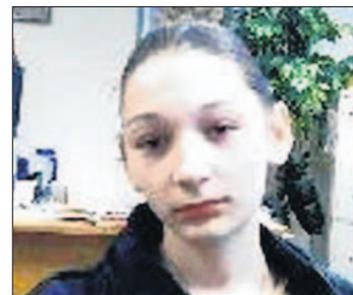
WATERBURY — Willie Robinson didn't know it yet, but police suspected he might be involved in a murder.

Robinson sat in a Waterbury police interview room in 2016, prepared to give detectives a statement about a domestic-violence incident. In front of him were two pens, blue and black.

Robinson picked up the black pen to ink his statement about the domestic incident to investigators, but unbeknownst to Robinson, police had set those pens out from a fresh box to capture a sample of Robinson's DNA.

After Robinson walked from the room, a lieutenant from the police forensics unit picked up the pen with gloved hands, then boxed it as evidence in connection with the brutal killing of 16-year-old Jessica Keyworth, whose murder had stymied detectives since 2004.

With the DNA from the pen, police linked Robinson to a DNA sample on



Jessica Keyworth was a student at a Job Corps Center in central Massachusetts and had been visiting friends and family members in Connecticut.

Keyworth's body, which was cast aside in a basement stairwell of 23-25 Pearl St. on Memorial Day weekend more than 16 years ago.

See **MURDER**, Page **6A**

Mental illness registry weighed

Police task force studying idea to avoid violence

BY DAVE COLLINS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

HARTFORD — Victoria Mitchell wishes police would have had the full picture of her son's struggles with mental illness and reacted differently before an officer shot and killed him last year in Ansonia.

Her son, Michael Gregory, had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and attempted suicide several times. He was in crisis when he was shot on Jan. 2, 2020, while charging officers with a knife, after telling them they were going to have to shoot him.

Mitchell, a nurse who cares for people with mental illness, supports some parts of a proposed statewide law enforcement registry of people with disabilities including mental illness. The idea is being studied by the state's Police Transparency & Accountability Task Force as a way to alert officers about someone's disability and avoid deadly use of force.

See **DISABILITY**, Page **6A**

COVID cases in U.S. decline, daily average below 100,000

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — Average daily new coronavirus cases in the United States dipped below 100,000 in recent days for the first time in months, but experts cautioned Sunday that infections remain high and precautions to slow the pandemic must remain in place.

The seven-day rolling average of new infections was well above 200,000 for much of December and went to roughly 250,000 in January, according to data kept by Johns Hopkins University, as the pandemic came roaring back after it had been tamed in some places over the summer.

See **VIRUS**, Page **6A**

TRAIN: Valley towns may get economic boost

Continued from Page One

Lamont's budget says the expanded service will "align with constituent demands."

Mayor Neil M. O'Leary said he talked to Lamont about the fact that use of the Waterbury branch remains strong despite COVID-19.

"That increase in ridership, along with the governor's commitment, allowed us to get the seven additional trains," O'Leary told the Naugatuck Valley Regional Development Corp. on Friday. "I think we're going in the best direction that we've been going in a long time, so I'm really happy."

Better train service is seen as a key to unlocking transit-oriented development in the Naugatuck River Valley.

Naugatuck Mayor N. Warren "Pete" Hess believes it will help galvanize the Parcel B project, a mixed-use development at the former Uniroyal site in the borough's downtown. It will include a combination of residential and commercial uses, he said.

"Train service will dramatically enhance the quality of the project," Hess said. "In other words, it's a very good project now, but it's a sensa-

RIDERSHIP ON THE WATERBURY LINE

Recent trends show greater ridership on the Waterbury branch than other branches, including the Danbury line and Shore Line East. The Waterbury branch carried more riders in December (12,010) than Shore Line East (4,919), which lost nearly 90% of its customers.

Ridership on the Waterbury branch decreased 58.7% during 2020 — the lowest loss for any passenger rail line in the state. In comparison, ridership was down 68.7% on the New Haven Main Line and 70.4% on the Danbury line.

tional project when you have an effective commuter line."

He said he believes the service upgrades will make properties more marketable and attractive.

The state has nearly finished a \$120 million project to signalize the Waterbury branch, and the work is set to be completed by April.

Three passing sidings have been built on the single-track railroad, allowing northbound and southbound trains to pass.

The line has also been outfitted with signals, which direct traffic and prevent collisions, and Positive Train Control, a system that automatically enforces safety rules, such as speed limits, if the engineer fails to act.

The proposed service upgrades are needed to justify the state's \$120 million in-

vestment, said Jim Gildea, chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council, who lives in Derby.

He and other rail advocates have long touted untapped demand along the 27-mile line that runs between Waterbury and Bridgeport. He pointed to the addition of a 6 a.m. train in 2008, which caused ridership to increase 34% in one year.

"And that was just one train," Gildea said.

Gildea said he balances his optimism with the fact that last year Lamont abruptly deleted from the State Bond Commission's agenda a proposed \$72 million investment on the Waterbury and Danbury branches. It included 12 new rail cars from the Waterbury line.

The move was largely seen as retaliation against legisla-

tors who helped sink Lamont's tolling plan.

O'Leary believes the trains will be funded this year.

"I know there was a lot of political back forth about it not that long ago, but the governor has given us his word ... to honor his commitment to the Waterbury line," O'Leary said.

Last March, leaders of the newly formed Waterbury Rail Line Caucus proposed the DOT acquire eight dual-powered locomotives and 24 new rail cars, which it said were necessary to meet the branch's long-term service needs.

The additional cars would allow for 30-minute headways during peak hours, and 60 minutes during off-peak hours, by 2025.

Metro-North Railroad operates the Waterbury branch under contract with the state Department of Transportation. The DOT will accommodate the additional service with existing rail equipment across its rail fleet, Reiss said. Any new cars would need to be procured through action by the State Bond Commission.

The DOT is required to hold public hearings on any proposed service changes.



Victoria Mitchell, right, holds her son Michael Gregory's ashes as his daughter Mikaiya Gregory Mitchell, left, sits with her at home in Bridgeport. Connecticut officials are debating a statewide program of voluntary registries of people with mental health problems and disabilities to inform responding officers.

DISABILITY: Goal is to avoid deadly force

Continued from Page One

"Maybe had something like that had been available, they would have proceeded differently — knowing that he's not in his right mind," she said. "They could have called someone in to de-escalate the situation."

The Connecticut proposal would be a major expansion of voluntary registry programs already in place at a large number of police departments across the country, which are primarily aimed at helping officers find people with Alzheimer's disease or dementia who go missing and get them back home.

A smaller number of departments have added people with autism and bipolar disorder in efforts to improve their interactions with people with developmental and mental health disabilities, in response to public outcries about shootings by police.

Since 2015, nearly a quarter of the nearly 6,000 fatal shootings by police in the U.S. have involved mentally ill people, according to a Washington Post database of police shootings.

Advocates for disabled people, however, said there are significant problems with the registries including further stigmatizing people with disabilities and privacy concerns.

Registries are a "terrible idea," partly because of a flawed assumption that they will result in better outcomes in police encounters, said Kathleen Flaherty, executive director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project, which provides legal services to low-income people with psychiatric disabilities.

"I think it could just as easily be that knowing they are dealing with somebody with X,Y,Z diagnosis, because of the bias and stigmatized views that people have of people with certain diagnoses, you may just be setting things up for failure, unintended but that could be what happens," she said.

Advocates for the disabled also have concerns about the government collecting information about people's disabilities and how long the information would be stored.

After the registry was

brought up by Connecticut's police accountability task force, similar concerns emerged and the panel recently decided to study the issue more before deciding whether to formally recommend it to state lawmakers.

"It's a difficult balancing act," said Jonathan Slifka, chairperson of the task force's subcommittee on improving police interactions with the disability community. "There is an inherent hesitation on behalf of people within the disability community to self-identify because of the potential for stigma, bias, anything else."

Slifka and Flaherty are members of the disability community.

Names on Connecticut's registry would be entered voluntarily by people who want to be on the registry, or possibly by their families.

Registries are one of many ideas being considered around the country to improve police interactions with disabled and mentally ill people. Others include sending mental health experts on calls with police, or instead of police, and providing more crisis intervention and de-escalation training to officers.

Many police officials believe registries help officers when encountering people with mental illness and other disabilities.

Police in Westport, Connecticut, created a voluntary registry for people with any disability or mental illness in 2018. It allows people with disabilities, or their relatives, to sign up for the list. About 20 people are now on the registry in the town of about 28,000 people, police Lt. David Wolf said.

"We do see people and deal with people in crises pretty regularly, so it's just really important for us to be prepared, have good strategies in place and actually have great resources we can reach out to, which we do," Wolf said.

Mitchell, the Connecticut mother whose son was shot by police, said at the very least, police should record in their own computer systems when they encounter people with mental illness and other disabilities and make that information available to officers during calls.

MURDER: DNA match led to suspect's arrest

Continued from Page One

Those details are included in an arrest warrant obtained by the Republican-American and show the multiple interviews, DNA evidence and hurdles detectives overcame to charge Robinson with Keyworth's murder Jan 30.

Robinson, a 52-year-old pizza deliveryman, has refused to confess to the murder, saying he had never even met Keyworth, who had ridden a train to Waterbury from Bridgeport in the hours before her homicide.

Police have said Keyworth arrived in Waterbury at about 11:30 p.m. on May 30, 2004. She was a student at a Job Corps Center in central Massachusetts and had been visiting friends and family members in Connecticut. She traveled to Waterbury with plans to meet up with a classmate and return to school. Her body was found in a stairwell behind the three-story home, which is about four blocks from the city's Green, on June 1, 2004.

It was unclear how she ended up in that part of the city. Police would later learn that Keyworth had spoken to a man on the train as she was trying to get directions to a specific street in Waterbury. The man eventually pointed her to a McDonald's in the city that was near the street, but he later told police he realized he had given her wrong information, according to the warrant.

Keyworth was strangled during an apparent struggle and had suffered multiple injuries, including scrapes to her back, elbows, jaw, knees and neck.

Her shoes were missing, her jeans had been pulled down and a piece of gold tinsel was in her hair. That tinsel appeared to have come from a second-floor landing where police found Christmas decorations. Disturbances in the dirt on that second floor indicated she may have been dragged from that landing to the basement, according to Robinson's warrant.

Detectives would later interview a woman who had slept in the home the night before Keyworth's body was found. She was awoken by a woman screaming for help, cries that went on for about a minute. One of the woman's children also awoke to the screams, but the woman told police she ignored the sounds and went back to bed, according to the warrant.

Police found DNA on Keyworth's body, including evidence of semen, according to the warrant.

At the time, Robinson's sister had been living at the Pearl Street home on the third floor, while the other two floors were vacant. A resident of the home discovered



REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN ARCHIVE PHOTOS

Waterbury police say they have solved the more than 16-year-old cold case homicide of Jessica Keyworth, a 16-year-old girl who was found strangled in 2004 in a rear basement stairway of a home at 23-25 Pearl St., shown here. Police say 52-year-old Willie Robinson of Waterbury was charged with Keyworth's murder.

Keyworth's body while trying to reach the basement to grab a dog leash, according to the warrant.

As their investigation progressed, police collected DNA samples from 21 men who either lived at the home, or were seen near it, at about the time of the murder. Police compared those samples to the sample left on Keyworth's body, eliminating each of those men who volunteered their DNA. Robinson, who a witness said was also seen near the Pearl Street home on Memorial Day weekend, refused to give a sample, according to police.

That led police to set out the pair of pens from a new box on the desk of a police interview room, as they waited for Robinson to give a written statement following a domestic incident in 2016. After they collected his DNA in the form of skin cells left on the pen, they had it analyzed, which revealed Robinson could not be eliminated as a contributor to the DNA sample left on Keyworth.

With that new information, they obtained a search warrant in 2017 for a sample of Robinson's DNA, which they took with a swipe of his saliva. That more complete DNA sample was a match for the sample left on Keyworth, according to police.

During an interview with detectives, Robinson was adamant he never had any contact with Keyworth, saying he was "100% positive" that he never saw her. He told police he had hung out with a woman he was seeing on the day of the murder, but police tracked down that woman who denied that Robinson was with her that day.

Robinson was the



Willie Robinson is shown here during a fundraising event in 2010 that followed the murder of his then stepson, Jon Frazier, who was gunned down during a robbery. Robinson was arrested recently after police say DNA connected him to the murder of a 16-year-old girl in 2004.

boyfriend of the mother of 17-year-old Jon Frazier, who was gunned down during an attempted robbery in 2010. Two men who fired at the teen, Vance Wilson and Anthony Collymore, were later convicted of felony murder in connection with the killing.

Police noted Robinson had multiple opportunities to explain why his DNA would be found on Keyworth's body, including when he was interviewed by detectives following Frazier's homicide.

Robinson remained in the area in the years after the killing, delivering pizza and food for area restaurants.

But there's a gap of almost four years between when police obtained the DNA sample from Robinson in 2017 and Robinson's arrest on Jan. 29. Robinson's attorney, Martin J. Minnella, questioned that span, saying he didn't understand it despite his 46 years practicing law. If they thought they knew who killed Keyworth, wouldn't they

want to take him off the streets, Minnella asked.

"What happened during that four-year period? Why didn't they make an arrest? There has to be something that's exculpatory or that led to another individual or individuals," Minnella said. "What's their excuse for waiting four years before they arrest him? It doesn't make sense, in my experience."

Police Chief Fernando Spagnolo said after the DNA results came back from the lab, detectives went over the evidence again looking for other items that could be tested and sent detectives across the country to find witnesses who could provide more information about the case. That took nearly 18 months, he said, all while police dealt with new, but equally serious cases that came in.

Robinson remains jailed on a \$2 million bond and is due in Waterbury Superior Court on Tuesday.

VIRUS: Experts stay wary

Continued from Page One

That average dropped below 100,000 on Friday for the first time since Nov. 4. It stayed below 100,000 on Saturday.

"We are still at around 1,500 to 3,500 deaths per day. And the cases are more than two-and-a-half-fold times what we saw over the summer," Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "It's encouraging to see these trends coming down, but they're coming down from an extraordinarily high place."

On Saturday, the seven-day rolling average for deaths was around 2,500. That number peaked at more than 3,300 earlier in the winter, according to Johns Hopkins.

The U.S. saw a spike of more than 5,400 deaths reported Friday — nearly half

from Ohio, where authorities said earlier in the week that they planned to add deaths to the state's tally over the course of a few days after discovering as many as 4,000 unreported COVID-19 fatalities.

Walensky added that new variants, including one detected in the United Kingdom that appears to be more transmissible and has been recorded in more than 30 states, will likely lead to more cases and more deaths.

"All of it is really wraps up into we can't let our guard down," she said. "We have to continue wearing masks. We have to continue with our current mitigation measures. And we have to continue getting vaccinated as soon as that vaccine is available to us."

The U.S. has recorded more than 27.5 million virus cases and more than 484,000 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins data.