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# THE REBUILDING OF BLACK WALL STREET: SCENES FROM THE REVIVAL OF THE COMMUNITY

KIMBERLY MARSH

BLACK WALL STREET

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PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

THE PRODUCTION JOURNEY BEGINS

*The production journey began before the  
Black Wall Street Massacre Centennial  
in May/June 2021.*

By **KIMBERLY MARSH**

**BLACK WALL STREET** *from A1*

**TULSA, OKLA.** The first episode of Sunwise Media’s “Rebuilding Black Wall Street” on OWN TV, which aired Sept. 29, follows the journey of Montika Collins. The nurse and midwife is building the only Black-owned birth center in Tulsa. The A-frame building sits on a majestic eight acres of wooded land in north Tulsa, surrounded by oak trees, serenity, and luxury.

Eventually, visitors will be greeted by calming colors in common areas and family birth rooms. But on this day, the building is very much a work in progress, and the scene quickly turns into chaos. Collins is just learning about potential opening delays and cost increases to construct what is needed to accommodate an entire family, from young children to great-grandparents and the birth mother.

The unfinished birth center that serves the women of north Tulsa is enveloped in permit delays, funding shortfalls, and the sheer scale of creating a birthing oasis. A descendant of Black Wall Street pioneers, Collins carries on their legacy with her vision to provide maternal care in an area void of options for women of color. Collins perseveres, rallying her community around the cause. Under the weight of it all, Collins ultimately answers the call to raise an additional \$50,000 through donations.

Cue the design team. Jon Pierre and Mary Tjon-Joe-Pin of HGTV’s “Two Steps Home,” arrive on the site to transform the construction zone into a Zen palace. The team arrives courtesy of the show’s producers. They will play a role in each of the remodeling projects featured in the

**The stories of “Rebuilding Black Wall Street” are a testament to the power of reclaiming tradition, reconnecting roots, and rebuilding culture.**

six-episode series now showing weekly on Fridays at 9 p.m. (ET) (and at 8 p.m. (CDT) locally) via the Oprah Winfrey Network.

With the design team’s help, the space literally begins to come alive. The remodeling comes with surprises for Collins that are revealed in the show’s second half, just before the ribbon cutting for the grand opening day. The amenities work together to provide a respite for families. New signage announcing the name of the center, “Given,” and its mission is placed on the wall in the perfect spot.

The stories of “Rebuilding Black Wall Street” are a testament to the power of reclaiming tradition, reconnecting roots, and rebuilding culture. Collins has created a living monument to the past, a nurturing space for the present, and a hopeful sign of change to come. Collins’s perseverance and faith reaffirms what visionaries can do to transform a community and make an impact against difficult odds.

**The Producer’s Origin Story**

The production journey begins before the Black Wall Street Massacre Centennial in May/June 2021. Sunwise had been working with Greenwood Bank, a digital institution, to create content since 2020. As the centennial approached, they had the idea to find descendants, tell their stories, and potentially tie them to a TV show about rebuilding.

Then, three events converged, starting with the centennial, when Handy came to Tulsa to film. He discovered that Duncan, a filmmaker friend of

**BLACK WALL STREET** *cont. A3*





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

BLACK WALL STREET from A2

many years and co-executive producer of the series, is a Tulsa native and a Black Wall Street descendant.

“All the pieces started to fall in place,” said Ri-Karlo Handy, co-executive producer. “And then, the third thing is, I did a whole episode with Jim Goodwin (publisher of The Oklahoma Eagle newspaper). We spent the whole day together talking about the history of the Eagle, which gives you a lot of the history of Black Wall Street and Greenwood. He was very transparent about a lot of things. That was one of the people I connected with during that time, who let me know all the depth that was available with this story.”

With the proof of concept ready, the Oprah Winfrey Network was interested in the series by May 2021. The sizzle reel was all that was needed to seal the deal. Karra Duncan, co-executive producer, signed on with Handy because he asked the right questions when other filmmakers and visitors were only focused on the massacre and specifics of what happened 100 years ago.

“Whereas Ri-Karlo’s questions were more about ‘what’s happening with the people now? Who are the people connected with this story.’ So, it was just a matter of calling on the city that raised me,” Duncan said.

Viewers may be surprised to see that the history of Black Wall Street is only a small part of the show. But the show nonetheless honors the past and stages a progressive setting for the future. Handy said many outsiders are focused on the history. Until locals who were part of the show saw the sizzle reel, they couldn’t fully wrap their minds around the purpose of the series and the producers’ intentions.

“Rebuilding Black Wall Street” is not a documentary. It’s not about historical facts, or political agendas, or campaigning for reparations. It’s about the resilience of a community that has faced unparalleled struggles. It’s about winning hearts and minds and telling stories about an underdog, hero, and protagonist who is building a business or on a mission and then focusing on those courageous characters.

With the extreme popularity of remodeling shows (HGTV reports 44 million viewers for remodeling shows), the formula for the series was accepted and welcomed because it gives viewers a bit of history on Greenwood and also present-day developments and drama around the stressors and challenges that arise when remodeling or starting a new business.

“We are making a TV show, and there is kind of a structure for that, right? So, we needed folks that were checking all those boxes but also were actually building something in the community,” Handy said. “This is a home or business renovation show. We needed that before-and-after shot.” To prove that point, the first episode shows that when they found Collins, where

she was actually making her dream come true, and it was serendipitously happening within the production timeline.

The subjects of all episodes could breathe a sigh of relief when Sunwise brought in the design team for the renovations. Duncan said the two-member team also conducted on-location interviews to tell the stories in a fun and lighthearted manner. The team frames the stories to bring in positivity and an emotional connection to the storytellers.

The Community Reacts

Community members were on hand for a panel at the Greenwood Cultural Center and for a preliminary screening of the first episode in advance of the series launch. Panelists included AJ Johnson, owner and founder of Oasis Fresh Market; Victor Luckerson, journalist, Black Wall Street historian, and author; Lael Alexander,

founder and president of Noitavonne Inc. of Houston, and Montika Collins, star of the first episode.

Rather than give a critique of their work, Handy prompted the panelists’ remarks with the question of their hopes and dreams. “What do you want people to gain and learn from watching your story?” he asked. The conversation centered on the return to a thriving and sustainable community for north Tulsa.

Collins said she loved the angle the production took to portray her work. She added that her dream is for north Tulsa to be self-sufficient again. She wants to be a catalyst for other businesses to see north Tulsa as a viable community where skilled professionals may flourish, and consumers find what they need nearby without traveling south for services, groceries, and new home goods.

“We used to be, and we can be again.

“Rebuilding Black Wall Street”... is “about the resilience of a community that has faced unparalleled struggles.

I’m huge on building economic stability. Our goal for the nonprofit is to train black women, and if it works out with us, give them a place to work where they can make good money and live in north Tulsa so that that money can start there,” Collins said. “Even if they don’t work with us, that’s how we’re going to live and change the trajectory of our people to bring more influence on maternal mortality rates and have Black women and Black men taking care of our own.”

Echoing the sentiments, panelist Johnson said the overarching goal for north Tulsa is to create resilient, sustainable businesses to have an ecosystem that serves the community well, build the pillars for restoration, and fill the gaps.

“The Black dollar is spent the fastest, and most of the time it is spent outside our own community,” he said. “To rebuild and have a strong, viable, continuing community, we must rebuild that together.”

Luckerson, author of “Built From The Fire,” had a different view of the series from a historian’s perspective. Luckerson’s book, released earlier this year, focuses on the history of Black Wall Street. It revealed many facts about the massacre and the attitudes that still prevail.

“So often this place is...sort of treated like a fossil,” Luckerson said. “I was very excited about seeing this story captured in a really authentic way. I thought that it was also great to see so many facts. I love that you can really bind both the personal stories with the facts and figures that show that north Tulsa can be self-sustaining, but also that more resources have been given.”

The remaining five episodes in the “Rebuilding Black Wall Street” series are:

“The Family House” – Oct. 6 at 9 p.m. ET/PT: Tulsa massacre descendant Rachel Walker preserves the home passed down to her through generations with help from the nonprofit 1256 Movement. The history of home ownership in Tulsa is explored as the design team renovates her kitchen.

“The Transition Home” – Oct. 13 at 9 p.m. ET/PT: Tulsa’s complex history lays the groundwork for massacre descendant D’Marria Monday (Block Builderz) to build a haven for recently incarcerated women reintegrating back into society, with the design team adding special touches to the home.

“The Farm” – Oct. 20 at 9 p.m. ET/PT: As part of an ongoing effort to change the food desert of

North Tulsa, Rodney, and Sheila Clark’s family farm gets a significant upgrade from guest expert Ron Finley, while Jon Pierre and Mary put their farming skills to work.

“The Mansion” – Oct. 27 at 9 p.m. ET/PT: Special guest Ananda Lewis helps Jon Pierre and Mary Tjon-Joe-Pin upgrade the historic Skyline Mansion, which serves as a studio for local rap group, Fire in Little Africa. Educators take steps to restore Black history studies in Tulsa.

“Finale” – Nov. 3 at 9 p.m. ET/PT: Description to be determined.



# Rosenwald Schools: Historic African American Schools

By CYNTHIA SAVAGE , THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



During the first half of the twentieth century educational opportunities for African American schoolchildren were stifled by racism, a shortage of money, and inadequate facilities. Beginning in the mid-teens, however, black schools throughout the south received much needed financial assistance from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. In 1913 Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company and philanthropist for a variety of causes, began providing limited funding for the construction of black schools in Alabama. Due to the success of this endeavor and the persistent need in Alabama and other southern states, the Julius Rosenwald Fund was formally established in 1917. The fund

was active in the states of Oklahoma, Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The Rosenwald Fund’s initial activity was to aid in the construction of new buildings for black schools. Although the fund did not supply all the money necessary for the erection of new buildings, it did provide sufficient money to act as an impetus for the local district to better their facilities. In Oklahoma the Rosenwald Fund aided in the construction of 198 education-related buildings in forty-four counties between 1920 and 1932. Of the 198 buildings, 176 were schoolhouses, ranging in size from one-teacher to twenty-two-teacher,

sixteen were teacherages, and six were shops. The Rosenwald school building program ended in Oklahoma and nationally in 1932. In addition to constructing schools the Rosenwald Fund contributed money for black school libraries, transportation to separate consolidated schools, African American teacher education, and black colleges and universities. The fund also had programs related to health and medicine, race relationships, and miscellaneous other activities related to human well-being. The Julius Rosenwald Fund continued in operation until 1948 when, as intended by Julius Rosenwald, all monies had been spent, and the trustees dissolved the fund.

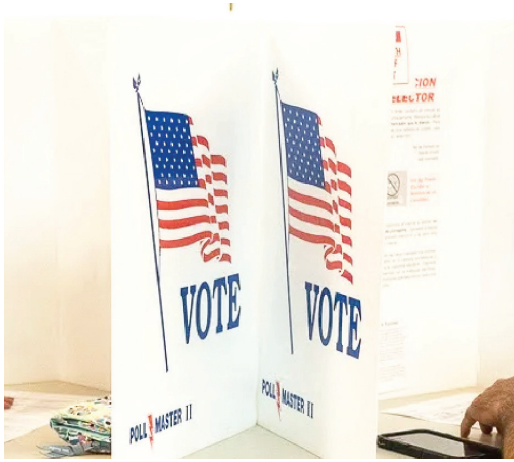
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ROSENWALD HALL AT NEW LIMA (19687.  
TO.N033.67.1.4, Chester R. Cowen Collection, OHS).

## Featured Last Week



A Conversation With Traci Manuel, Oklahoma Teacher of The Year



OK Lawmakers Weigh Restrictions on Ranked-Choice Voting



Schools Just Won’t Stop Policing Black Bodies

## The Oklahoma Eagle

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# Why are students *not on grade level being* **PROMOTED** *anyway*

By AZIAH SIID, WORD IN BLACK

A RECENT VIRAL VIDEO FROM SEVENTH-GRADE TEACHER QB THE DON CALLED OUT HOW NO MATTER IF STUDENTS FAIL, THEY’LL BE PASSED TO THE NEXT GRADE.

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, school shutdowns required 55 million K-12 students across the United States to stay home. But kids were still required to learn — all while being separated from outside activities, friends, and in some cases, family.

The result: Reading scores and math scores tanked, and the phrase “pandemic learning loss” became a part of our vocabulary. Kids are way behind.

Talk to teachers and many of them will tell you that students not reading or doing math on grade level is nothing new — but thanks to social promotion, many go on to the next grade anyway.

Indeed, in a now-viral video, QB The Don, a seventh grade math teacher in Atlanta calls out parents and administrators for promoting students to the next grade, even when kids are significantly behind.

“Ima just say this,” he said in the video. “I teach seventh grade. They are still performing on a fourth grade level.”

He expressed how people aren’t talking enough about the low performances throughout schools, although teachers are being blamed for the low scores.

“Why they not talking about that? And why don’t y’all know that y’all kids not performing on their grade level? Y’all be quick to talk about the teacher this,” he said.

He’s not alone in taking to social media to express concern — or outrage — over how behind some kids are. One X (formerly Twitter) user recently uploaded a photo of an alleged assignment from an eighth grader. Every word is misspelled.

In the recent Education Recovery Scoreboard project, researchers found that by 2022, the typical student in the poorest districts had lost three-quarters of a year in math, more than double the decline of students in the richest districts. The declines in math scores were twice as large as the declines in reading scores, and were similarly much larger in poor districts than rich districts.

“Nobody is talking about how they keep passing em on,” QB The Don said. “I could put as many zeros in this grade book as I want to, they gon’ move that child to the eighth grade next year.”

## Students Are Still Behind, But Why?

Ernest Crim III, a former Chicagoland-based veteran classroom teacher and current anti-racism and Black history educator with nearly 600,000 followers on TikTok and Instagram, says the issue QB The Don raised is a conversation he’s had countless times with educators, family, and close friends. It’s a conversation he has with his wife, who’s still a classroom teacher.

“He was correct about how kids were passed along. That definitely does happen.” Crim tells Word In Black. “It was implied before the pandemic, but it became dang near mandatory during the pandemic and when we transitioned back. That revealed to me more than anything the school industry is a business.”

The former high school history teacher say principals, administrators, and educators need to pay closer attention to the data coming out of the classrooms, to see which students need to receive individualized attention.

“Our system just presupposes that like, you’re 10, you’re 10, y’all at the same level, and that’s not the case,” Crim says. Individualized Education Plans can help specific students diagnosed with learning disabilities, but the vast majority of kids need help.

Schools need to figure out “what kids need to be pulled out and receive extra attention where the curriculum and content is being reemphasized,” Crim says.

## The Crisis of Student Mental Health

“I provide mental health at a middle school,” one user replied to the X post with the misspelled words. “Some of my kids can’t read Cat in the Hat. It’s not my job to teach them how to read, but they can’t make it through simple mental health lessons b/c they can’t read.”

Crim says students were dealing with a lot post pandemic. Many of them were even suicidal, which is part of the difficulty to seamlessly transition back into producing high scoring results.

“I had Black children telling me, on assignments anyway, that they attempted suicide,” Crim says. “They wanted to end their life. These kids sat behind a screen for two years almost, no interaction, and we kind of just threw them back in there and said, ‘Go ahead, get those test scores up.’”

As studies show, suicide rates among Black youths have more than doubled, with researchers attributing it to various “sociological factors and structures.”

Black boys ages 0-19 have more than twice the suicide rate of Black girls in their age group, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention .

For progress to happen, schools have to continue to acknowledge how difficult the pandemic was, and still is for many students, while also continuing to implement new teaching styles, Crim says.

“Because of the pandemic and also social media, I think mental health and trauma, and stuff we deal with in this country, especially as Black folks, I think it’s exacerbated,” he says.

## Looking for Solutions

QB The Don didn’t offer specific solutions in his video. But Crim says that as far as education legislation and policy goes, decision makers and legislators have to take a back seat and listen to community leaders and educators about what students really need.

Although many TikTok commenters agreed with the Atlanta educator, others felt his commenting as a teacher on such a sensitive topic wasn’t appropriate. But, says Crim, people become teachers “because they have the right intentions and right reason.

“However, the reality is educators have a difficult job,” Crim says. “They don’t always get the support they need, and the pressure is on them to ensure kids move on to the next grade.”

That trickles down to students. “Kids are overworked, kids are getting homework daily, kids are preparing to take a test, not to learn,” Crim explains. They’re trying to hit the half court shot, not learn the fundamentals of hitting the layup first.”



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

# “It’s A Domino Effect...” Wage Garnishments & Repossessions

## MINORITY DEBT *from A1*

When Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma citizen DJ Koon bought a 2005 Nissan Sentra in 2012, he didn’t expect to find himself fighting a debt collection lawsuit for the next 10 years.

Indebtedness lawsuits are the most common type of civil litigation in the state, according to a recent study by the Oklahoma Access to Justice Foundation, and available data suggests they are disproportionately filed against low-income Black, Hispanic, and Native American Oklahomans.

Koon had landed a job at an oil field in El Reno that required a reliable means of transportation. His 2001 Oldsmobile wasn’t fit for the task, so when he received a pamphlet in the mail for The Key, a used car lot marketing to people with poor credit, he thought he was in luck.

“They seemed legit,” Koon said. “When I called they said all I needed to do was bring \$500.”

Koon, who lives in Moore, said the process was smooth. He put \$300 down, agreed to a bi-weekly payment of \$242 and an interest rate of 20.93%.

The Nissan’s title was supposed to arrive within 30 days, he said. It never did.

Court records show Koon got pulled over in late November for having an expired temporary tag. The vehicle was impounded and Koon stopped paying for it. Over the next two months, Koon and The Key argued about who had the title. During that period, Koon said he paid a coworker \$150 per week to drive him to work.

In June 2013, Koon was served a summons for defaulting on his car loan. The Key wanted to collect \$7,596, according to court documents. By then, the dealership had repossessed the car and sold it.

“I thought it was a joke,” Koon said.

The process server assured him it was not.

During the trial, The Key revealed Koon’s title was at the dealership the entire time they were telling him to find it at his house. Records show The Key mailed the title in August and it was returned to them a few days later. Where they mailed it is

## Indebtedness lawsuits are the most common type of civil litigation in the state.

### The Downward Debt Spiral: A Study of Oklahoma’s Judicial Debt Collection System

Oklahoma Access to Justice Foundation

unclear because the address on the package was covered by the Postal Service return-to-sender sticker. The package was also thrown away before the trial date, which kept the court from inspecting it.

The Key and company attorney Mark Stonecipher refused to comment.

Few defendants secure lawyers to help them fight their cases like Koon did. Without counsel, they often get their wages garnished, bank accounts cleared, and homes and cars taken away. The culmination is often bankruptcy and a tattered financial record.

The burden, Koon’s attorney Minal Gahlot said, falls on Oklahoma taxpayers in the end.

“It’s a domino effect,” Gahlot said. “If someone gets their wages garnished, they can’t pay their car or house and those items get repossessed or foreclosed. If it’s the provider of a family who is getting garnished, and it usually is, they end up tapping into public assistance. We all end up paying.”

### Debt in Oklahoma By the Numbers

340,998 debt collection cases were filed in Oklahoma between 2018 and 2022, according to an August study by the nonprofit Oklahoma Access to Justice Foundation. That’s about 68,200 cases per year.

The number of cases decreased each year, however, falling by more than 20,000 from 2019 to 2020. Katie Dilks, the Oklahoma Access to Justice Foundation’s executive director, said the drop-off in filings correlated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a time when courts closed down and federal aid made its way to struggling Americans.

“With the help of federal pandemic relief, many Oklahomans were able to pay off debts they owed, or didn’t have to take out debts to make ends meet in the first place,” Dilks said. “My suspicion is that we’ll see those numbers go back up as more pandemic aid programs come to an end.”

Prices are up 20% since 2019. Boosted unemployment benefits and the federal eviction moratorium ended in the summer of 2021. Emergency rental and utility assistance ran out in the fall of 2022.

This year, the pandemic-related public health emergency ended in May, meaning about 300,000 Oklahomans will face disenrollment from Sooner Care over the next few months because of adjusted eligibility requirements.

The Urban Institute, a research organization with the goal of advancing upward mobility and equity for low-income Americans, published an updated map in June showing where Americans are most in debt and the debt differences between communities that are 60% or more white and at least 60% people of color.

The map shows the majority of debtors in the collection in Oklahoma, Caddo and Tulsa counties are people of color, a statistic that does not align with the population of those counties.

In Oklahoma County, where about one-third of residents have debt in collections, 55% of those debtors are people of color, while the population is 46% people of color. By comparison, 45% of debtors in collections are white, while white people make up 54% of the county.

Statewide, the discrepancy is much greater. A fact sheet about debt collections in Oklahoma by the National Consumer Law Center shows the percentage of people with debt in predominantly non-white areas is 62%, compared to 36% in predominantly white areas.

Dilks said that indebtedness litigation is not limited to Oklahoma’s metro areas. The rate of filings in rural counties is the same, and sometimes greater, than it is in the state’s most populated counties. Data shows that while many rural counties are majority white, most of the debtors are people of color.

One such county is Caddo, where people of color make up half the debtors in collections while accounting for only 44% of the county’s population. White residents make up 56% of the county’s population and the other half of collections cases, making people of color over-represented.

In Oklahoma and Tulsa counties, Black and Hispanic Oklahomans account for a majority of people of color, census data shows. In rural counties like Caddo and Adair, most people of color are Native American and Hispanic.

MINORITY DEBT *cont. A7*

The Oklahoma Eagle

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To amplify our core value of equity, through journalism and editorial” is the cornerstone of our continued success.

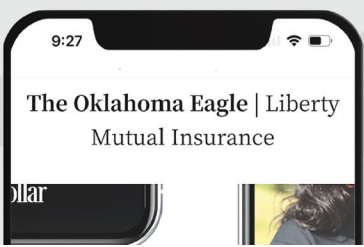
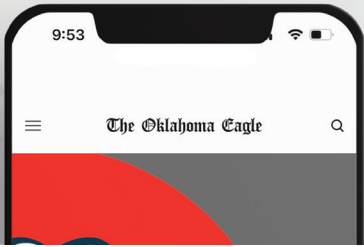






PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

# The trouble starts when people begin to miss multiple payments

## MINORITY DEBT *from A6*

### Types of Debt and The Debtor’s Journey Through Court

Oklahomans find themselves in debt for many reasons. They might lose their job and use a credit card or take out a payday loan to pay for groceries or rent. They could have a baby or experience a health crisis and leave the hospital owing thousands.

The trouble starts when people begin to miss multiple payments on those debts and allow late fees to pile on top of already unmanageable balances, Dilks said. After months of making phone calls and sending letters to debtors, creditors turn to the courts as a last resort.

There are two avenues to resolve debt collection cases in Oklahoma. If the amount is less than \$10,000, cases are usually filed in small claims court, which requires minimal documentation and a hearing within 60 days. The goal is to hurry the process and avoid a backlog in the court system.

Creditors can also file debt collection lawsuits of any amount in district court. That process is more formal, requiring the debtor to file a response before the court schedules a hearing. It also necessitates more documentation supporting the plaintiff’s claims, so they are more likely to have representation.

Not all creditors use attorneys for small claims filings, but more than 90% do for district court cases, according to the Access to Justice study. Only 3% of debtors have representation.

Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, a nonprofit providing free legal assistance to low-income Oklahomans, handled 2,199 indebtedness cases from 2018 to 2023 by providing Oklahomans with legal advice, assistance with negotiations and help writing letters, the organization’s director of litigation, Teressa L. Webster, said by email. Of those, 208 involved representation in court.

Without representation, debtors typically have little or no knowledge of the court process or defense options

“The most a debtor will know when they get served is their hearing date and that a default judgment will be made if they don’t appear in court,” Dilks said. “They may not know what that means, and any documents they get are only produced in English, making the legal jargon harder to understand for some.”

They might never find out if they’re collection-proof, Dilks said.

“People can claim exemptions if they have undue hardship,” she said.

Those exemptions apply to individuals

## Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, a nonprofit providing free legal assistance to low-income Oklahomans, handled 2,199 indebtedness cases from 2018 to 2023 by providing Oklahomans with legal advice, assistance with negotiations and help writing letters, the organization’s director of litigation.

receiving public benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, unemployment or social security.

Koon said finding someone willing to defend him without an upfront fee spared him from filing for bankruptcy, but he has struggled to finance anything since he was sued.

“I had no clue about the process,” Koon said. “If I didn’t have my lawyers by my side I would’ve been really hurting financially for a while. They were a godsend for me.”

Small claims proceedings play out differently. An observation of Oklahoma County’s 8:30 a.m. Thursday docket revealed almost no one shows up to defend their small claims case.

Attorney Scott Suchy was there representing multiple lenders.

He said the few people who appear are rarely represented and that his only option is to offer them payment plans. If they refuse a plan or don’t show up, all that’s left to do is find out where they work and garnish their wages, he said.

Suchy said most debtors he meets agree to a payment plan and are good about keeping up with it. He said he does his best to be clear with people about what may happen if they don’t work with him to set up a payment plan.

“I’ve got to be able to sleep at night,” Suchy said. “I try to be upfront by telling people about wage garnishments and the expensive court fees. I think the court fees could be lowered because they can be punitive to debtors.”

In Oklahoma County, the cost of filing a small claims indebtedness lawsuit is \$58 for amounts under \$5,000 and \$219 for amounts between \$5,000 and \$10,000. For cases filed in district court, that cost can be up to \$242 for amounts more than \$10,000. To file a garnishment affidavit the cost is \$76 the first time and \$116 every time a continuation of that collection is filed.

When a debtor receives a judgment against them, they become responsible for paying the balance they are sued for, the court fees, and the amount the plaintiff paid its attorneys. A missed bill of a few hundred dollars can spiral into a debt of thousands after months of nonpayment and court fees.

### Possible Solutions for Debtors

Suchy said the system is fair.

“For small claims cases, the hearing date and time is on the affidavit,” Suchy said. “Everybody has a fair opportunity to say ‘no, this isn’t me’ or present a defense. We have a good system.”

Dilks and Gahlot said the language of the law sounds fair, but reality is more complex. A fair opportunity for everyone

assumes people understand exactly what it means when they’re served and what to do next. It assumes everyone can skip work for a court hearing. It assumes someone is able-bodied. It assumes people don’t have kids to drive to school or daycare. It assumes people can pay for child care in the first place.

The Oklahoma Access to Justice Foundation report recommended ways to help ensure easy access to the courts and fair outcomes for debtors.

Among the suggestions are making court documents easier to read and providing them in languages besides English, allowing defendants more flexibility when it comes to making scheduled hearings, dismissing cases with prejudice if a plaintiff does not appear and expanding free mediation services, which can help reduce the number of cases that come before a judge.

For many low-income Oklahomans who face debt collection lawsuits, the only solution is filing for bankruptcy, sometimes years later, Gahlot said.

For Koon, having attorneys on his case spared him that fate. Still, the lawsuit changed his life forever, he said.

The repossession of the Nissan he drove for four months stayed on his credit history for seven years. It effectively barred him from financing another car and securing a home loan when his circumstances changed and he could afford it. As far as he can tell, he’s stuck with high down payments and interest rates for the foreseeable future. Buying a home is a distant prospect.

“This issue needs to be brought to light,” Koon said. “The common person doesn’t worry about law. They worry about getting to work, feeding their family and what bills they have to pay every week.”



# Indigenous people have been uniquely affected by the Dobbs decision



**KAILEY VOELLINGER**, former clinic director at Trust Women in Oklahoma City, sits in a treatment room on June 29, 2023. Before the state's abortion ban, Trust Women was a go-to clinic for Indigenous patients seeking abortion care.  
PHOTO **MADDY KEYES/NEWS21**

**ABORTION ACCESS** *from A1*

(Editor's note: This article is part of "America After Roe," an examination of the impact of the reversal of Roe v. Wade on health care, culture, policy and people, produced by Carnegie-Knight News21. For more stories, visit [americaafterroe.news21.com](https://americaafterroe.news21.com). News21 reporters [Tori Gantz](#) and [Kevin Palomino](#) contributed to this story.)

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.** — Rachael Lorenzo calls it their "auntie laugh," a powerful chuckle that lasts long and fills any space. Aunties are prominent figures in Indigenous culture who offer comfort when one needs help. Aunties answer the phone when no one else does.

That's what Lorenzo, who is Mescalero Apache, Laguna and Xicana, does as founder of Indigenous Women Rising, a national fund that covers the costs of abortions — and the traditional ceremonies that follow — for Indigenous people.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson decision reversed the precedent of Roe v. Wade a year ago, demand for the organization's services has skyrocketed. The group funded 37 abortions in 2019, 600 in 2022 and over 300 in the first six months of this year. From January to June, it's spent more to help people than in all of 2022.

"We're investing more money into (...) airfare, bus, gas, child care, elder care, after care for the individual who's getting an abortion," Lorenzo said. "If there are special needs that they have, we do our best to fund that, as well."

Indigenous people have been uniquely affected by the Dobbs decision.

Abortion was never readily available to Native Americans, thanks to a federal law that has prohibited nearly all abortions at Indian Health Service clinics since 1976. That's always meant traveling long distances for the procedure.

But now states with some of the largest Indigenous populations also have some of the strictest restrictions on abortion: places like North and South Dakota and Oklahoma, home to the Cherokee Nation, the second-largest tribe in the U.S. with over 300,000 enrolled members.

Across the country, some 2 million Native Americans live in the 20 states with laws on the books

SINCE THE  
U.S. SUPREME  
COURT'S DOBBS V.  
JACKSON DECISION  
REVERSED THE  
PRECEDENT  
OF ROE V. WADE A  
YEAR AGO,  
DEMAND FOR THE  
ORGANIZATION'S  
SERVICES HAS  
SKYROCKETED



**MELISSA ROSE**, a midwife based in Santa Fe, N.M., has been learning about traditional plants and herbs Indigenous women use to regulate menstrual cycles and manage abortions. PHOTO **NOEL LYN SMITH/NEWS21**

banning abortion at 18 weeks of pregnancy or earlier, according to a News21 analysis.

"There are clinics closing, providers moving out of those states that we have served or serve, and so we're seeing more people need to travel from very rural states in order to get abortion care," Lorenzo said.

Add into the mix disproportionate rates of sexual assault and unintended pregnancy, a crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, high rates of maternal mortality, and poor access to preventative care and contraception, the end of Roe protections has made a bad situation much worse.

"Roe has never been accessible for Native women," said Lauren van Schilfgaarde, a tribal law specialist at UCLA who has studied abortion care in Indigenous communities. "When you add in the rates of violence and the complete gutting of tribal governments' abilities to respond, you have a real dangerous recipe in which Native women have a lack of reproductive health. "Dobbs has exacerbated that."

## 'Lowest-hanging fruit'

The federal government provides health care to Native people as part of the treaty agreements for seized land. Those living on tribal lands or in big cities can use the Indian Health Service, or IHS, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that covers 2.6 million Native Americans and Alaska Natives across 574 federally recognized tribes.

However, the system is perpetually underfunded, forcing facilities to limit the services they provide.

On tribal lands, the clinics can

be hours away by car — a trek that comes with a price tag for Native Americans, a quarter of whom live in poverty. And once they arrive, the clinic may or may not have gynecological or obstetric services.

"Reproductive health care has always been considered, for some reason, outside of the mainstream," said van Schilfgaarde, who is Cochiti. "It's always the lowest-hanging fruit for budget cuts."

The Hyde Amendment further restricted reproductive access for Indigenous women.

First approved by Congress in 1976, it banned the use of federal funds for abortion except to save the life of the mother. Exceptions were later added for rape and incest. While the measure was not directed at Native people, they are among those most affected because they rely on federal clinics.

And exceptions for abortion are rarely granted, even though Indigenous women are 2.5 times more likely to be raped than other women in the U.S., and some 34 percent of Native American women report having been raped at some point in their lives.

One study published in the American Journal of Public Health found that from 1981 to 2001, IHS performed 25 abortions. A 2002 study published by the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center found that 85 percent of IHS facilities did not have abortion services available or did not refer to abortion providers — even for women in permitted circumstances.

Dr. Antoinette Martinez, who is Chumash, is a family medicine and obstetrics provider at United Indian Health Services, a federally funded clinic serving reservations in Humboldt and Del Norte, two northern California counties.

She can't provide abortions because of the Hyde Amendment

and has seen firsthand the effect of that.

"It really does create another hoop for young and middle-age Native women who do not desire pregnancy, who live either in a rural area or in a remote area," she said. "Sometimes they come down from three hours away for care."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Martinez also worked part time at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Eureka, California, where she provided abortions to women of all ethnicities and ages.

"I knew the hardships in getting there," she said of her Indigenous patients. "Sometimes they were very, very forthright about the difficulties that were going on in their life and the obstacles in getting to Planned Parenthood — both financially and physically — because of travel distances due to rural locations or other issues such as child care."

In Oklahoma City, Trust Women was a go-to clinic for Indigenous patients seeking abortion care and partnered with Native organizations such as Indigenous Women Rising. About 10 percent of Oklahoma's population is Indigenous.

Now, with Roe overturned and a near-total abortion ban in place in the state, the facility's treatment rooms hold unused chairs, plastic folding tables and boxes of medical supplies stacked in a corner collecting dust.

States neighboring Oklahoma — including Texas, Arkansas and Missouri — also have restrictive abortion policies. New Mexico is the nearest state that allows unrestricted abortion, and it's an eight-hour drive from Oklahoma City to Albuquerque.

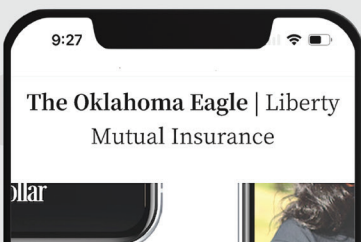
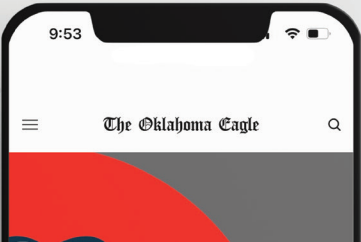
"It's obviously a really egregious violation of people's rights and dignity to not be able to access

**ABORTION ACCESS** *cont. A9*

The Oklahoma Eagle

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health care where they live,” said Kailey Voellinger, former clinic director of Trust Women in Oklahoma City.

DakotaRei Frausto, who is Mescalero Apache and lives in San Antonio discovered the complications of having to seek an abortion out of state when, at 17, they learned they were eight weeks pregnant. It was March 2022, six months after Texas enacted a six-week abortion ban.

Frausto’s mother found someone to loan them a car for the only option — a 700-mile, 11-hour drive to New Mexico, where clinics were so overwhelmed Frausto had to wait a month for an appointment.

They said the experience drove them to speak out.

“My whole entire life of being an Indigenous woman, I’ve felt silenced. I’ve felt like I was told to be submissive and quiet and small and just not take up space,” Frausto said. “And I was like, I can’t let this stigma — I can’t let racism and sexism — hold me back from talking about an issue that needs to be talked about.”

Frausto started a chat room, which now has more than 500 members from around the world, to debunk myths about abortion, give advice and connect individuals with resources. Frausto said it’s become a community where people feel safe sharing their own abortion stories.

“I want these people to focus on their health, focus on their family and focus on being OK,” they said. “I want to be there to take that weight off of other people when there wasn’t someone to take that weight off of me.”

Other Indigenous reproductive justice advocates are also stepping up to help —establishing support networks and reclaiming traditional knowledge about reproductive health, including traditional birthing practices.

### ‘We’ll find a way’

Lorenzo founded Indigenous Women Rising after their own emergency abortion 10 years ago. At the time, they were a 23-year-old graduate student at the University of New Mexico and parent to a toddler.

The doctor told Lorenzo they had an unviable pregnancy but would have to “wait it out.”

“I didn’t know that I could get an abortion for a situation like this,” Lorenzo said. “I just waited it out for a few months, until I started having a miscarriage. Having to go to the emergency room, where I was humiliated by providers (...) it was just a really awful, dehumanizing experience.”

Lorenzo figured there must be other Native people with similar experiences who needed help.

The fund’s first clients were Navajo, who continue to be the largest group it serves.

“We serve all Native folks, whether they are on or off a reservation, whether or not they’re enrolled,” Lorenzo said.

Jonnette Paddy, a member of the Navajo Nation, oversees the organization’s abortion fund and said that post-Roe, most states served are those with some kind of abortion restrictions.

“So we assist in Arizona. We assist in Oklahoma, North and South Dakota, Texas,” Paddy said.

In just the first six months of 2023, the fund has distributed \$180,000 to support patients. That’s compared with \$110,000 in all of 2022.

The end of Roe protections has left Americans now experiencing what Native people have lived for decades, Lorenzo said. Abortion care — “now it’s an emergency.”

“It should have always been an emergency about who was getting the least care, how we can create equity and make sure that no one is without care,” they said.

Indigenous Women Rising is one of the bigger community groups in the abortion realm, but not the only one.

Following an outbreak of youth suicides in Indian Country in 2015, Sarah Adams, who is Choctaw and lives in Moore, Oklahoma, co-founded Matriarch to provide suicide prevention education and resources to the community. She recalls parents telling her they had called IHS for help, only to be told the next appointment was months away.

Today, the organization provides critical services — including help with abortion care — that the tribal government is unable or unwilling to provide. Its members help people schedule appointments at out-of-state abortion clinics, fund procedures and assist with everyday needs, such as child care and food.

She noted that the lack of abortion access for Indigenous women has not even come up among most tribal leadership, which is



SANDY HARRIS, left, and Jonnette Paddy, right, with Indigenous Women Rising talk about abortion care and reproductive health with attendees at the “Women Are Sacred” conference on June 27, 2023, in Albuquerque, N.M. PHOTO NOEL LYN SMITH/NEWS21

### ABORTION ACCESS from A8

“MY WHOLE ENTIRE LIFE OF BEING AN INDIGENOUS WOMAN, I’VE FELT SILENCED. I’VE FELT LIKE I WAS TOLD TO BE SUBMISSIVE AND QUIET AND SMALL AND JUST NOT TAKE UP SPACE.”

DakotaRei Frausto, Mescalero Apache and lives in San Antonio, Texas



THE OKLAHOMA CITY AREA INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE serves Native Americans in Oklahoma, Kansas and parts of Texas. The federal government provides health care to Native people as part of the treaty agreements for seized land, but IHS cannot provide abortions except in very rare cases. PHOTO MADDY KEYES/NEWS21

predominantly male.

After Roe was overturned, the Suquamish Tribe in Washington state was the only one to speak out publicly, issuing a statement saying, “Our bodily integrity and our right to make decisions over whether or when we bear children are foundational to human dignity.”

“We’ve always known that the community is really the only thing that is protecting us, and that we’ll find a way,” Adams said. “We’ll find ways to make sure that we get the health care that we need.”

### ‘Safe and sacred’

One of those ways is a return to traditional practices.

Melissa Rose lives in Santa Fe. She’s been a midwife for 10 years, but with the end of Roe v. Wade, she has seen her role in reproductive justice change.

Now, self-managed abortion is also part of her practice. Between restrictive state laws and the availability of the abortion pill and traditional herbs used for centuries to end pregnancies, people are choosing home abortions just as they would choose a home birth, she said.

“In our communities, traditionally, we would just do that at home — in a safe and sacred way,” she said. “And so that’s not different now.”

Abortion has always been a natural part of pregnancy in Native culture, where women are viewed as sacred and, before colonization, had sovereignty over their bodies.

“Self-managed abortion is traditional,” said Rose, who is Akwesasne Mohawk and from the tribe’s territory in northern New York and Canada. “The first abortion that ever happened on the Earth was self-managed. We knew what plants to take, and we would stay home. We’ve only been a handful of generations separated from this being the norm. (...) And in some families, this knowledge has been really carefully protected and passed down and, luckily, we have all of that still.”

In Indigenous culture, unlike the western debate, there is no conflict between managing a pregnancy or ending one, she said.

“From a provider standpoint, the treatments are exactly the same for a miscarriage or an abortion,” Rose said. “And midwives have always helped people with those pregnancy transitions.”

Native people sometimes choose to have ceremonies to honor the loss and bring closure by burying the tissue. But in states with strict bans, burying remains could bring criminal charges.

North Dakota has some of the country’s strictest abortion laws. Red River Women’s Clinic used to provide abortions in Fargo but last year moved to Moorhead, Minnesota, where abortion is still legal.

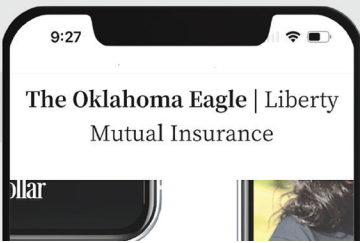
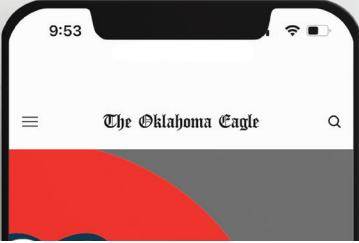
Clinic Director Tammi Kromenaker said her patients include Native Americans from North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota who often learn about the clinic by word of mouth.

This year, an Indigenous woman asked if she could take home the tissue from her abortion because she wanted it blessed by a medicine man. In Minnesota, working with a funeral home, she could.

“In North Dakota, we couldn’t have done that,” Kromenaker said. “It was just so nice to be able to accommodate that request (...) to honor somebody’s cultural wish.”

The Carnegie-Knight News21 initiative, a national investigative reporting project by top college journalism students and recent graduates from across the country, produces a series of stories on a different topic every year. News21 is headquartered at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

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DR. EBONY JOHNSON, interim Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) Superintendent. PHOTO FACEBOOK

# “The Critical Work That Needs To be Done

By JOHN NEAL  
TPS SUPERINTENDENT from AI

Tulsa, Okla. Newly appointed interim Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) Superintendent Dr. Ebony Johnson used a Sept. 28 meeting to address the conditional expectations the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE) placed on TPS.

In an August meeting, OSBE said that TPS must improve student reading proficiency, upgrade the performance of “failing” schools, and correct accounting processes that had led to an embezzlement of school funds, identified in 2022. In that meeting, OSBE also renewed the accreditation of TPS. OSBE requires TPS to make monthly presentations on how it is meeting the requirements.

Johnson provided a 20-minute update to the board on “the critical work that needs to be done” that she said is “urgent...to achieve student academic excellence.”

Johnson shared “outcomes and improvements for Tulsa Public Schools.” She added that she is results-oriented and resilient, and provided board members thick notebooks addressing each issue that had been raised.

## Strategies and Tactics

The Superintendent’s presentation first walked the board through TPS’s strategies and tactics to “make student academic performance paramount,” including the “targeting of our more vulnerable schools.” Johnson detailed a myriad of testing and site-monitoring evaluation programs that occurred on a quarterly and weekly reporting basis. She further reported that these efforts were part of the district’s strategic plan and are expected to yield improved scores on the Oklahoma State Testing Program.

Johnson and Jorge Robles, chief financial and operating officer for TPS, also shared new “internal controls” meant to shore up the security of the district’s financial system and provide greater reporting transparency to the local school board.

State School Board member Donald Burdick quizzed Johnson on the strategic plan’s Pathways to Opportunity goals, expressing a desire for faster progress on student reading proficiency. Johnson responded that she shared Burdick’s desire for “higher levels of proficiency and expectation,” but that the goals were developed based on realistic trend data working closely with teachers and other professionals. Johnson said Tulsa faces similar challenges to other urban districts in surrounding states.

“We all understand the challenges you are facing,” Burdick responded, and “Let’s not put ourselves in a box that just cannot be done.”

## Board Members Praise Johnson

Johnson drew praise from the state school board members. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters welcomed Johnson to the meeting, praising her for “quickly transitioning to her new role and responsiveness to the State [education] agency.” Walters, an outspoken critic of Tulsa Public Schools, also praised Johnson for her “attitude and how forthright you have been with the board.” Walters said that he had a series of meetings with Johnson, and his views were similar to the feedback he had received from other board members.

These comments starkly contrasted with previous criticism of past Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Deborah Gist, who resigned last month under heavy pressure from Walters.

Walters led the OSBE to delay the accreditation of Tulsa schools in July, when annual accreditation is customarily renewed. This delay came over the objection of the state educational department’s professional staff. Walters threatened a state takeover of TPS in August calling the district “uniquely bad” before Gist stepped down from her position.

Johnson, who is African American and a 24-year TPS school veteran, was named interim superintendent last month. Tulsa Public Schools district is the state’s largest, with almost 34,000 students, predominately minority, and 77 schools.

Last month, Walters said he expected dramatic improvements in a matter of months. At the time, St. Rep. Regina Goodwin (D-73) told OSBE that timeline was unrealistic.

## Expectations addressed

State Superintendent Walters made clear to Johnson that he expected faster progress and better “metrics we can look at.” Walters said the plan lacked “numbers” and “data goals.”

Johnson pointed to specific goals and data in the district strategic plan and three annual tests performed by the school district in addition to state student testing. Johnson added that neither the state board nor the education department had provided specific metrics to TPS.

TPS Board President Stacey Woolley also defended the district, saying, “We are pushing for the max while trying to be realistic.” She told the OSBE, “We are the first in the state, and maybe the nation, to have the

superintendent’s evaluation based on student outcomes.” Walters replied, “We want to see these goals within the year.”

Walters had also posted the board agenda item to include possible action on TPS accreditation. The accreditation posting surprised Woolley and other Tulsa delegation members as accreditation for the state school districts is typically only reviewed annually.

While no action was taken at the meeting, TPS girded themselves by hiring Tulsa attorney J. Douglas Mann as “special counsel” before the state meeting. Johnson had recommended this action to the local board to provide advice based on his extensive educational expertise. Mann’s Legal Services Agreement requires the attorney to protect the “District in exercising their legal rights and meeting their legal obligations under state and federal law.”

The Board said they hired Mann “to maintain local control of all aspects of the District.”

Walters has consistently threatened a state takeover of the district. He alluded to it again in the OSBE meeting, concluding, “[TPS] failure won’t be an option. We will have success in Tulsa. We’ll do whatever it takes to get there.”

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# Pay increase is in addition to a 2.5 percent bump approved by Oklahoma County Commissioners

By MATT PATTERSON, NonDoc

COUNTY JAIL PAY RAISES from AI



GUARDS stand on the ground floor of the Oklahoma County Jail on Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2023. PHOTO TRE SAVAGE

**For years**, the Oklahoma County Jail has faced hurdles recruiting and retaining staff in what can be a challenging work environment. But frontline employees who work with detainees will be getting a bump in pay thanks to a 5 percent raise approved by the Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Authority today.

That pay increase is in addition to a 2.5 percent bump approved by Oklahoma County Commissioners, meaning most jail employees will see a 7.5 percent pay raise. The increase does not apply to administrative staff.

Jail CEO Brandi Garner spoke about current staffing levels at Monday’s meeting of the OCCJA, also known as the jail trust. Garner said the jail has 268 employees with 136 fully trained as detention officers. Garner said the jail started a new training academy Monday featuring 23 people, with about 30 more in the early hiring stages.

New jail trust CFO Chris Sherman said the aim was to get raises to the employees who are most difficult to retain.

“It’s for lieutenants and below,” Sherman told the trust, which took over management of the troubled facility from the Oklahoma County Sheriff’s Office in 2020. “Those are our boots on the ground. Those are the people we have to keep on staff. We have to do something for them, and we’re in a position right now with as many open positions as we’ve had over the years, this is absolutely something we can do.”

Oklahoma County District 3 Commissioner Myles Davidson, who serves on the jail trust, said the raise helps keep up with inflation.

“[Consumer Price Index] is 6.3 percent, so not only are you keeping up with inflation, but you’re going above and beyond a little bit,” he said. “I know it’s very difficult — especially as we look at the highway patrol, OKC and Del City — everyone taking from our recruits and putting them onto their streets, and they’re paying \$70,000, and we’re wondering why we can’t keep people. It’s pretty obvious.”

Sue Ann Arnall told fellow trust members the pay bump was a good start, but not enough.

“Considering that we’ve had 7 to 8 percent inflation for the last two years, and I think it was six the year before, I appreciate giving this raise, but it’s still not keeping up with inflation,” she said. “And I know that none of the county employees are getting a raise equivalent to inflation, but we’re way behind. Eventually, I hope we can catch up.”

Sherman, who has been in his position for about five weeks, also identified at least one area where the trust is saving money when it comes to the day-to-day costs of running the jail.

“We were spending about \$4,000 a month on Styrofoam, and the only reason we were is because they weren’t bringing the trays back down from the floors,” Sherman told the trust. “We’re purchasing trays for three floors. We have the trays, but we’re not using them as of yet. But just in those ways we’ve already started to cut down on a product that we were using in areas where we don’t need to be

spending that kind of money.”

Sherman also told the trust the Oklahoma Department of Corrections has been late on recent payments to the jail trust for DOC detainees. Sherman said the amount of the DOC’s most recent late payment was about \$60,000. Trust chairman Joe Allbaugh, who used to lead the DOC, took exception with his former agency’s tardiness.

“As a result, we’re going to be \$60,000 in the hole, according to the numbers that I see,” he told fellow trust members. “I think we need to have a letter sent to DOC and remind them they’re not allowed to fund their organization on the backs of Oklahoma County taxpayers. It’s not right for agencies to poach other agencies and balance their budget while we’re in the hole.”

But officials with the Department of Corrections told NonDoc they “are not aware of any issues with payments to the Oklahoma County Jail.”

“We received the initial invoice on Sept. 5, 2023, and the requested adjusted invoice on Sept. 13,” said Kay Thompson, chief of communications for the state agency. “It was submitted to our accounts payable department on Sept. 19, and the payment should be issued any day. Per Oklahoma state statutes, state agencies have 45 days to pay invoices.”

**Detainee’s mother speaks**

Dina “Latrell” Kirven died at the Oklahoma County Jail on May 8 after being found unresponsive in a receiving area’s holding cell. Kirven arrived at the jail only hours earlier after being arrested on suspicion of unauthorized use of a motorized vehicle. Including Kirven, seven jail detainees have died so far this year

Kirven’s mother, Volare Scott, addressed the trust Monday.

“My son passed away 177 days ago in the county jail,” she said. “It’s basically neglect, because after he was put into a holding cell, no one checked on him and he died within 30 to 45 minutes. I’m just now finding out about a lot of things that are coming forward, and I just want to let you guys know that I travel from Atlanta. This time, I traveled over 14 hours, so that lets you know how serious I am about this.”

Scott said explaining what happened to her son has been difficult because she has so few answers herself.

“I’m having trouble sleeping, and I need to know exactly what happened,” she said. “I’ve been doing my own investigation as his mother, and I also have three other sons that are bothered by this. It’s hard to explain to them what happened because we don’t have answers. All I keep hearing is that we have to wait until we have the autopsy report. I’m not worried about the autopsy report at this time. I’m worried about the staff that was put into place to watch over these inmates who mysteriously keep passing on in the county (jail). We still need answers. I need to see for myself.”

Scott requested a tour of the jail from Garner, who was present for her remarks, and also a

meeting with Sheriff Tommie Johnson. It was not immediately clear if those requests will be granted.

Oklahoma County has faced a spate of lawsuits in recent months related to jail deaths. In August, a federal jury found in favor of the county in a lawsuit over the 2019 death of Daryl Clinton. That death happened prior to the trust taking over the day-to-day jail operations in July 2020.

**Oklahoma County Sheriff’s Office transportation MOU deferred**

The trust voted to defer renewal of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Oklahoma County Sheriff’s Office for transportation of detainees to and from the jail and the Oklahoma County Courthouse during its Monday meeting. That MOU could be voted on in November.

Johnson, who is also a member of the jail trust as sheriff, did not attend Monday’s meeting. The jail trust has been paying the sheriff’s department for transportation services since it took over the operation of the jail.

“Without a full complement of eight trustees, I’m a little nervous about moving forward with this,” Allbaugh told fellow trust members. “This is a big item. It’s almost three-quarters of a million dollars.”

Arnall instead moved that the trust not sign any further MOUs with the sheriff for the transportation of detainees and terminate its existing MOU.

“My reading of the (trust) indenture is that the trust does not have responsibility for transportation between the jail and the courthouse,” she said. “We also don’t have responsibility for the holding facilities at the courthouse.”

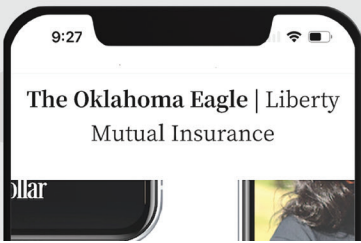
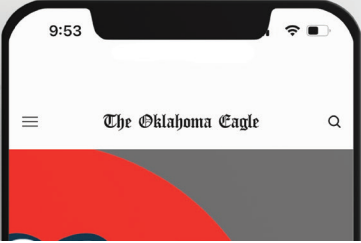
Arnall said if that’s the case, it doesn’t make sense for the trust to take over something not included in the jail trust indenture.

“In my reading of the memorandum of the understanding, contrary to the indenture, we’re taking responsibility and, in fact, we’re paying for it,” she said. “I don’t understand why — when we’ve been excepted from this responsibility — we would be taking it on.”

Allbaugh said Arnall’s motion was superseded by the motion to table the MOU. Arnall told trust members that Johnson, given his position as sheriff, should not vote on the MOU if it is brought back up in November.

“I agree with the communication, but I actually think he has a conflict and should not vote on this matter,” she said.

MATT PATTERSON has spent 20 years in Oklahoma journalism covering a variety of topics for The Oklahoman, The Edmond Sun and Lawton Constitution. He joined NonDoc in 2019. Email story tips and ideas to matt@nondoc.com.





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(918) 425-6613

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

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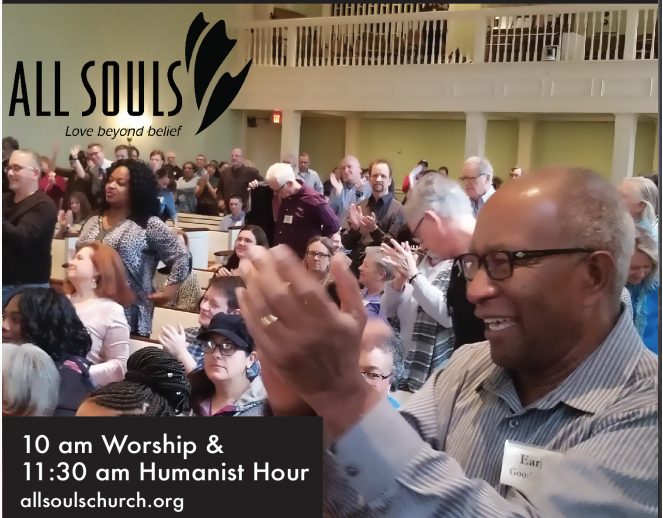
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BLACK PARENTS AND A  
4-DAY SCHOOL WEEK

Nationwide, about 90% of four-day school weeks are made up of rural, white populations. Here’s what Black families should know about the model. **A15**



Breast Cancer  
in Black  
Women:  
Why Early  
Screening  
Matters



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

By GWEN MCKINNEY, WORD IN BLACK

Black women have the highest risk of breast cancer of any ethnic group, are diagnosed later, die quicker, and suffer the most virulent forms.

The sinister 3-D contraption pinched and compressed my breast between two cold, plastic paddles. Part torture chamber, part lifesaver, this diagnostic mammography would deliver the dreaded message: Ductal Carcinoma In Situ (DCIS).

It was early-stage DCIS contained in my right breast and classified as “Stage 0.” Nonetheless, an ant farm of intrepid “precancerous” cells had invaded my body. The extermination required three surgeries, a short course of radiation, and huge doses of self-learning about the disease. When I marked my first cancer-free-versary (January 2023), I remained on a mission to share with Black women the need for breast cancer vigilance. The seeds of my journey were planted months before diagnosis when the communications strategist in me was inspired to roll out a campaign entitled Black Breast Cancer Vigilance – 365-24/7.

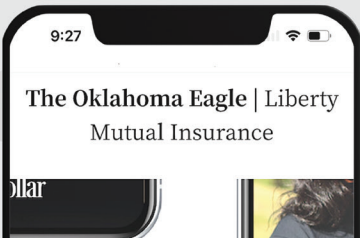
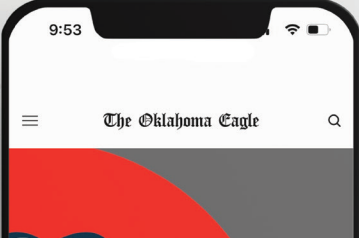
The Call to Action:

- 1. Get your annual mammogram.
- 2. If there’s a family history or breast abnormalities, don’t wait until the recommended age of 40 for your first screening, and
- 3. Above all, use your instincts, voice, and power to be your own breast advocate in the medical system.

Rewind to October, “pink ribbon month,” when I reached out to marketing maven Ricki Fairley. Little did I know in the fall of 2021, she would connect to my own lifeline. As a storyteller, I was captivated by the unyielding drive of the founder and CEO of TOUCH Black Breast Cancer Alliance. With her high-energy rhythm and pitch-perfect voice, I was convinced that every Black woman needed to hear from her. Sometime between the production of our podcast and Facebook Live event, it dawned on me that I — the showrunner and creator — had skipped mammography screenings in 2019 and 2020! How could I call for Black women’s vigilance when I wasn’t practicing what I preached? Fueled by guilt and inspiration, I confronted a battery of tests that placed me in an ever-growing sorority of survivors — or, in the parlance of Ricki Fairley — “Breasties.” Breast cancer, more than any other life-threatening disease, has attracted a massive constituency of patients, survivors, and advocates whose unmuffled voices in the public square have swelled the ranks of research, treatments, and awareness. Life expectancy has been extended, the ranks of women breast health professionals have grown, and survivors’ stories are not shrouded in secrets and shame. But there’s still a gaping hole that, according to Fairley, renders Black breast cancer a different disease. The first thing you learn as a patient is that all breast cancers are not created equal. With disease stages from 0 to 4, there are a dozen types and subtypes.

Black women have the highest risk of breast cancer of any ethnic group: struck younger, diagnosed later, die quicker, and suffer the most virulent forms. Black women under 35 experience twice the rate of white women, with 39% higher recurrence and 71% higher risk of death. Rewind to 2010. Fairley, then a successful marketing executive, was in the throes of a huge campaign launch. She managed to squeeze in her annual physical, unaware a peanut-sized lump under her left nipple would shift her life’s trajectory. Always juggling a dozen balls at once, Fairley was forced to slow down to absorb the full dimensions of her diagnosis: Stage 3A Triple Negative Breast Cancer (TNBC). Particularly invasive, TNBC strikes premenopausal Black women at three times the rate of their white counterparts. They suffer a high frequency of metastasis (spreading to other organs) and a low overall survival rate. For Fairley, the disease had moved to her lymph nodes and eventually her chest. The mother of two daughters was given a two-year prognosis and urged to put her affairs in order. Last September, Fairley marked her 12th cancer-free-versary. Fairley, who was treated with a regimen of experimental drugs, has become a leading patient advocate in the breast cancer community. She says her work is a “God job.” TOUCH — a collaboration with Black women patients and survivors, caregivers, advocacy organizations, health professionals, policy leaders, researchers, and pharmaceutical companies — is pushing policies, people, and institutions to become more responsive to the unique and often unmet needs of Black women. Fairley says staggering stats and wide disparities won’t change without a concerted effort to use science to understand the physiology of Black women and the uneven playing field in access, education, treatment, and research. Clinical trials are not a silver bullet, but they do provide a pathway to address and eliminate the disparities among Black women. Yet, we represent a mere 3% of the current breast cancer clinical trial participants. TOUCH, understanding our “earned distrust” in medical research, is an influential partner with public policy and outreach organizations seeking diversity and inclusion in clinical trials. One of those groups is Black Data Matter (#BDM), an initiative aiming to give Black patients a seat at the table to catalyze change in the medical system that often fails us. Therapies and drugs currently available for breast cancer have not been effectively tested on Black women. Ours must be a journey of hope and faith, but also, action. Participation in clinical research opens opportunities to benefit from future breast cancer breakthroughs.

GWEN MCKINNEY is campaign director and creator of Unerased | Black Women Speak and president of McKinney & Associates, the first Black woman-owned communications firm in the nation’s capital dedicated to progressive public policy. Unerased is a unique blend of advocacy, narrative development, and content creation, shaping the stories and truths of Black women and the causes they embrace.





# Should Black Parents Worry About a 4-Day School Week?

By MAYA POTTIGER, WORD IN BLACK

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers, educators, and parents have been playing catch up. The recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report showed devastating declines in math and reading achievement levels. On top of that, schools nationwide continue to struggle with chronic absenteeism and staffing shortages.

So Paul Thompson, an associate professor of economics at Oregon State University, finds it odd that schools have started shifting to a four-day model as an effort to recruit and retain key personnel. It also goes against the other lesson we learned from the pandemic: numerous families rely on schools for valuable resources.

“There’s these big equity concerns about shifting the burden of what schools have traditionally done for students and parents and communities — providing child care, food provision, physical activity, all of those things — and are shifting away from the school district onto families and communities on that additional day,” Thompson says. “What the implications of that are is extremely important, as well.”

Currently, it’s a small sample of schools concentrated in a handful of states — or about 7% of districts, mostly in Oregon, Missouri, Colorado, Texas, and New Mexico.

As researchers study the impacts of these shortened school weeks, they’re asking key questions: Who is mostly being impacted by this? And what are the impacts?

## Mostly White, Rural Students — For Now

Four-day school weeks currently exist in mostly rural white communities. But as the concept gains popularity, states with large Indigenous student bodies are also adopting the practice.

Across the country, 90% of districts using a four-day model are rural, and they have an average of 454 total students enrolled in the district, according to an MIT study. Looking at districts with the five-day model, only half are rural, and the average enrollment is 3,735 students.

“But, as this continues to grow, and as teacher shortages affect schools from across the spectrum of different types of districts, we may see this model continue to expand into urban areas,” Thompson says.

Colorado’s 27J School District, with nearly 23,000 students, is now the largest district using a four-day model — and preliminary results aren’t good, with a study reporting home prices and student achievement both declined. And Independence School District in Missouri, which also adopted it, serves more than 14,000 students.

However, RAND study participants cautioned that while the four-day model worked in their rural communities, it wouldn’t be as accepted in places like “big cities” where key factors would be different, like higher numbers of working parents and higher childcare costs.

And these homogenous districts have made it difficult to study the impacts on a range of racially or socioeconomically diverse students. Instead, the research has mostly focused on the average impact.

The MIT study offers a window into this, finding districts with the four-day model have “significantly smaller portions” of Black and Asian students and a significantly higher portion of free or reduced-price lunch-eligible student population than five-day districts.

“We’re still a little off from really understanding what the true equity concerns are here,” Thompson says. “That’s a big thing that’s currently missing. We know how it affects the average student, but what about these more at-risk students, either academically or financially?”

As more districts around the country consider switching, William Rodick, Ph.D., the P-12 practice lead at the Education Trust, says he hopes they’re thinking about lessons learned in the pandemic.

NAEP results continue to show concern in general student progress in math and reading, but especially for Black and Latino students, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds. These students, in particular, rely on schools to provide food, devices, and high-speed internet.

If they need those supports on those other four days, Rodick says, they’re also going to need them on the fifth.

“These are students who rely on school supports and additional educational services, students that really need to build strong relationships with teachers,” Rodick says. “So taking an additional day of contact, we can imagine that’s going to have negative consequences on certain student groups.”

## Not Promising for Student Achievement

Generally, research — and experience — shows that when students spend less time in front of teachers, it has a negative impact on achievement.

When Oregon schools made the switch, students lost three to four hours of classroom time, and that “translated almost directly to the negative

effects that we saw on student achievement” to students in third through eighth grade, Thompson says.

“If you look nationally, you see these similar impacts,” Thompson says.

In districts with four-day school weeks, those with low levels in classroom time are the places where researchers see big negative impacts on achievement. But, in schools that are maintaining instructional time close to a five-day school week model, there isn’t much difference on achievement levels.

This outlines two potential policy recommendations, Thompson says. When switching to a four-day week, schools should focus on maintaining instructional time, either through lengthening the school day, or offering remedial or experiential learning opportunities on the off-day.

And, beyond educational impacts, there are other negative effects on students. A four-day school week impacts nutrition for students who rely on school for breakfast and lunch. And, after Colorado districts switched, juvenile crime increased.

“Our research has shown differences in how much students are eating breakfast, sugary beverages, drug use, things like that,” Thompson says. “So there’s implications that go beyond the traditional academic impacts that most educational interventions have.”

## Fewer Days Mean Longer Days

Despite changes to the weekly schedule, the amount of months students are in the classroom is generally the same, Thompson says. Instead of attending for 170 or 180 days, students are now in class for about 150 days.

Days in a four-day school week are often extended to make up time missed from skipping the fifth day of instruction. The 30-60 added minutes

are “generally insufficient,” Thompson says, but teachers seem to appreciate it.

In the surveys he’s done, Thompson reports teachers say the added time allows them to go more in-depth than they otherwise would have been able to in a single class period. It’s not known yet if these cuts are leading to any changes in lesson plans, like omitting topics or cutting projects. But, overall, the curriculum is staying the same, and “the goal is that teachers just become more efficient in their teaching,” Thompson says.

However, even though four-day school week students, on average, had 49 more minutes per day of instructional time, they lost 58 hours of instructional time per school year compared to a traditional five-day week, according to a 2021 RAND report.

And in high school, especially in the rural areas where these switches are taking place, students were missing a lot of class time on Fridays for extracurriculars, like a long bus ride to a sporting event. So time was tacked on to the first four days of the week to recapture some of the otherwise lost time.

“That seems to be pretty effective at mitigating any decline in achievement,” Thompson says, “but when you make this a district-wide switch, it’s those elementary and middle school students that suffer in terms of their achievement.”

## Parents Need to Stay Informed — and Involved

When a district is considering a switch to a four-day school week, Rodick says his biggest concern is community involvement.

“So many of the consequences of this decision are going to be felt by community members,” Rodick says.

Especially after the pandemic, Rodick says family engagement is an “incredible tool” to bring students back to schools. But, of course, it matters how much that information is spreading in the community, and which community members it is and isn’t reaching.

So, Thompson says, as four-day school weeks are “more on the national conscience,” especially if parents are in states where it’s growing, it’s important to get informed. Whether through reading the research, looking at the infographics, or even attending a virtual conference on the subject, “be aware of what it means for your school to switch to a four-day school week.”

Parents should raise the issue with their school boards, asking about the implications for student learning, how to get services to at-risk students during the off-day, and what the child care options are.

“School officials may not have thought about all these things,” Thompson says. “They may be thinking, ‘We need to make this change so we can hire teachers,’ and you want to at least have them thinking about all these other things that could be impacted by this change.”

MAYA POTTIGER is a data journalist for Word in Black. She was previously a data journalist for the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism at the University of Maryland, where she earned both her BA and Master of Journalism. Her work has been featured in publications across the country.

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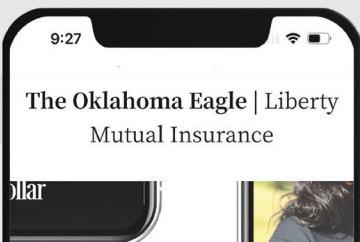
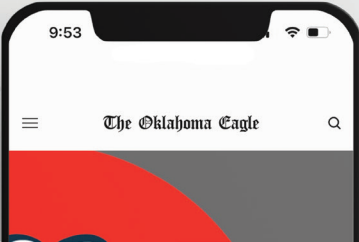
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# Seventh Anniversary Memorial Terence Crutcher Foundation Gala, Sept. 16, 2023

By DR. JERRY GOODWIN, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

The Terence Crutcher Foundation Seventh Anniversary Memorial Gala recognized community leaders and raised money to support the programming and activities of the foundation during the year. Seven hundred people attended the sold-out fundraising event at the Cox Convention Center on Sept. 16. The turnout was more than double that of previous years. The dinner event is held annually to honor the memory of Crutcher.

Terence Crutcher, who was unarmed and not a threat to law enforcement, was shot and killed by a former Tulsa police officer on Sept. 16, 2016. Dr. Tiffany Crutcher, Terence’s sister, formed a foundation in the aftermath of her brother’s death. The mission of the foundation is to promote “just and liberated communities free from racial violence and harm.”

At the gala, a civil rights leader, educator, minister, political strategist, state legislator, and a venture capitalist were among the 2023 honorees. Honorees included Tiffany Loftin, former national director for Youth and College at the NAACP; Jayme Broome, co-founder of Latimer-Cooksey Arts and Cultural Foundation and Solid Foundation Preparatory Arts Academy; Rev. Desean “Sean” Jarrett, senior pastor of New Jerusalem; Jay Jordan, former CEO of the Alliance for Safety and Justice; St. Rep. Regina Goodwin, Dist. 73; and Brentom Todd, community outreach manager for Atento Capital. Pastor Carlton Pearson received the “Bad Dude Award.”

The law enforcement officers that were involved with the shooting of Terence Crutcher described him as “a bad dude,” even though he did not present an excuse for law enforcement to have shot and killed him. The foundation gave recognition to individuals who are changemakers in the Tulsa community and beyond the state.

More than two dozen local and area nonprofits received a donation from the foundation. The charities were the following: 100 Black Men of Tulsa, Avanzando Juntos, Be Well CDC, Carabelle’s Legacy Inc., Community Light Foundation, Da’Shade Room Eyewear, Fulton Street Books and Coffee, Growing Together, Just the Beginning, Launched for Change Inc., Negro Spiritual 121 Club, NewLife Training Center Inc., Poor People’s Campaign Oklahoma, Sisters Who Follow The Yam in Tulsa, Solid Foundation, Stored Goodness Inc., The Juice Radio Show, The Tech Village, Theatre North, Tri-City Collective, Tullahassee (Okla.) Wildcats Foundation, Underground Tree Studios, Uplifting Bridge Builders Foundation, Urban Coders Guild, Vernon Feeding, WHOW Organization, and Youth at Heart. The 27 organizations were credited with contributing to a better quality of life for all in Tulsa and in the state.

Entertainment was provided by Young and Free, including Iamdes, Krisheena Saurez, Written Quincey, and Steph Simon; Majeste Pearson; and The BB King Experience starring Claudette King, daughter of B. B. King, and Tito Jackson, formerly of The Jacksons and Jackson 5.

Prior to the gala program, the foundation held a Day of Service and resource fair at North Pointe Business Park.

In addition to being a prominent voice for civil and human rights, the foundation is a principal voice for leading an initiative for economic development and revitalization in north Tulsa. The nonprofit purchased North Pointe in December 2022. The foundation is seeking support for renovations for the complex for small businesses and nonprofits to be located.

Visit [terencecrutcherfoundation.org](https://www.terencecrutcherfoundation.org) for more information on the fundraising campaign for the North Pointe Building Fund.

The mission of the foundation is to promote “just and liberated communities free from racial violence and harm.”



ABOVE TOP **DR. TIFFANY CRUTCHER**, executive director of the Terence Crutcher Foundation, leads a board of directors of 10 members. This year’s Seventh Anniversary Memorial Terence Crutcher Gala gave special recognition to a variety of community leaders and highlighted several non-profits who were beneficiaries of the foundation’s giving. PHOTO **CHRISTOPHER CREESE**

ABOVE MIDDLE **APRIL RYAN**, White House correspondent, was the mistress of ceremonies for the Seventh Anniversary Memorial Terence Crutcher Foundation Gala, Sept. 16. She has served covering the White House for more than 25 years, dating back to President Bill Clinton. PHOTO **CHRISTOPHER CREESE**

ABOVE BOTTOM **MAJESTE PEARSON** was one of the entertainers during the Seventh Anniversary Memorial Terence Crutcher Foundation Gala. She also received the Bad Dude Award on behalf of her father, Bishop Carlton Pearson. PHOTO **CHRISTOPHER CREESE**

LEFT TOP **GREG ROBINSON II AND SHEYDA BROWN**, Terence Crutcher Foundation Board Member and Deputy Director respectively, provide an overview of the work of the foundation in the community. PHOTO **CHRISTOPHER CREESE**

LEFT MIDDLE **THE SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY MEMORIAL TERENCE CRUTCHER FOUNDATION GALA ENTERTAINMENT**, BB King Experience, featured Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Tito Jackson, formerly of The Jacksons and the Jackson 5, and Claudette King, daughter of B. B. King, a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Blues Hall of Fame inductee. PHOTO **CHRISTOPHER CREESE**

LEFT BOTTOM **TONA BOYD**, associate director-counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, offered special remarks at the Seventh Anniversary Memorial Terence Crutcher Foundation Gala. PHOTO **CHRISTOPHER CREESE**

