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VOL. 102 NO. 48

DECEMBER 01, 2023 - DECEMBER 07, 2023

Post Pandemic **FOOD INSECURITY**

WORSENS FOR BLACK AMERICANS

Many North Tulsans Affected

John Neal, The Oklahoma Eagle



INSIDE

Poor Attendance Plagues Tulsa Public Schools (TPS)
John Neal, The Oklahoma Eagle, A3

Sprawling Superagency Tasked With Technology and Services Needs Overhaul, Report Finds
Paul Monies, Oklahoma Watch, A8

Fulton Street Books & Coffee Has Moved To Greenwood, And We're Here For It
Ross D. Johnson, The Oklahoma Eagle, A9

Lawton Inmate Dies After Private Prison Staff Refused Care, Lawsuit Claims
Whitney Bryen, Oklahoma Watch, A6

Fewer Than 1 in 4 High Schools on Track to Meet A.P. Minimum
Jennifer Palmer, Oklahoma Watch, A7

Last Week's Headlines
Just in case you missed it. A4

Leona Pearl Mitchell
Renowned Opera Singer. A4

Jobs & Classifieds
Discover career opportunities. A13

Faith In Tulsa
The Eagle Church Directory. A14



POOR ATTENDANCE PLAGUES TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

An alarming number of Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) students cannot learn because they are not regularly in class. **A3**

FEWER THAN 1 IN 4 HIGH SCHOOLS ON TRACK TO MEET A.P. MINIMUM

At Bixby High School students have at least 19 Advanced Placement courses available. **A7**



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Oklahoma ranks first in very low food security for children

Food Insecurity from A1

An end to government pandemic relief programs has worsened food insecurity and other measures of well-being for thousands of north Tulsans and millions of other Americans. Multiple reports reveal that the fallout is more significant for Black Americans. The end of a variety of temporary relief assistance programs is plunging poor adults and children back into poverty.

In an interview with *The Oklahoma Eagle*, Chris Bernard, president of Hunger Free Oklahoma, said food insecurity is having its sharpest increase since the 2008-2009 recession. Bernard cites several sources and reasons for the increase, including a recently released United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report, an end to a host of federal relief programs, and continued near-record levels of food prices to support his view.

The Tulsa Area United Way has also released a report noting that 50,000 Tulsa children are suffering from food insecurity. The report said, "Oklahoma ranks first in very low food security for children. No state in the nation has a greater share of children facing extreme food insecurity than Oklahoma." Children were the greatest beneficiaries of the temporary pandemic food assistance programs that ended. The greatest poverty decreases from these assistance programs "was among Black, non-Hispanic children," according to the Urban Institute.

USDA also reports a sharp spike in food insecurity

The federal Department of Agriculture circulated a food security survey for 2022. The report said there was a "statistically significant" or sharp spike in food insecurity over the previous year. The survey also reveals 17 million American households experienced food insecurity in 2022, or 12.8% of all households. USDA defines food insecurity as lacking "access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members."

The federal government offers three primary programs to address nutrition needs: SNAP for low-income households; WIC for needy women and children; and school lunch programs. In 2022, SNAP provided 41.2 million persons \$230 in weekly assistance, and WIC served 6.3 million women and children with \$48 per month on average. Various national school lunch programs also served 9.6 billion meals in 2022. All these programs continued to receive supplemental but waning pandemic assistance in 2022.

As evidence of the declining contributions from pandemic assistance, Hunger Free Oklahoma found that Oklahoma School Summer Nutrition programs served 20 million meals in 2021 while providing less than a million in 2022. This is a decline of 90%, Bernard emphasized in his interview with *The Oklahoma Eagle* that Oklahoma was one of six states showing the most significant increase in food insecurity in 2022, as disclosed in the USDA report.

Black and poor households fared far worse in the report survey than the statistical averages for the country. Food insecure Black households were nearly twice the national average at 22.4%, with 9.25% experiencing "very low food insecurity" in 2022. These "very low" households had "more severe reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns" due to a lack of money or other resources.

As the Tulsa Area United Way report for Tulsa, households with children have the greatest need. The USDA reports food insecurity in 2022 for Black households with children was 30%, and for those in poverty stood at approximately 40%.

Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program also at risk

SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps, is the most significant of the three federal programs to address nutritional needs. It has 42 million participants in 2023 and costs \$92 billion, providing low-income persons with monthly benefits for "groceries for household use."

During the pandemic, the federal government increased per person and household benefits, adjusting the SNAP formula and making emergency allotments that the Urban Institute estimates lifted millions out of poverty, at least temporarily.

Tens of thousands of households in Tulsa directly benefited from these SNAP emergency allotments. Before the pandemic in 2019, approximately 40,000 households in Tulsa County received SNAP benefits, averaging \$120 monthly per person. USDA records and state reports reflect that by 2022, boosts to the program had increased participants to 50,000 households in Tulsa County, and benefits increased to \$220 per person, at least \$100 more per month over pre-pandemic levels.

Almost a third of SNAP participants are Black, and one in four African American families benefit from the aid. Children are 50% of the beneficiaries among the Black population. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that the end of supplemental SNAP benefits in March 2023 caused benefits to plummet by \$90 per person on average nationwide. Black families will be disproportionately and adversely

Food Insecurity cont. A3





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Student Failure At Risk

An alarming number of Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) students cannot learn because they are not regularly in class, according to the 2023 Oklahoma School Report Card, released in mid-November.

Absenteeism from A1

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM following the COVID-19 pandemic is at record levels in Tulsa schools and nationwide. New research shows that post-pandemic poor school attendance contributes significantly to student failure. Absenteeism is particularly pronounced among minorities and the economically disadvantaged.

The interim TPS District Superintendent, Dr. Ebony Johnson, has pinpointed absenteeism as one of the key challenges facing Tulsa schools. In public speeches she has declared absenteeism in Tulsa schools a “crisis in itself.” This crisis occurs as TPS

struggles to reduce the number of schools receiving failing grades on the state’s School Report Card.

The Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) last month released its annual school testing report, including school attendance evaluations. The number of students in the Tulsa school district recording “good attendance” plummeted 23 percentage points since 2018-19 pre-pandemic levels, from 79 percent to 56 percent in 2022-23. This result reflects the finding that almost as many Tulsa students were “chronically absent” as were in good attendance. The OSDE defines chronically absent students as those missing more than 10 percent of scheduled school

days in a school year.

Absenteeism was highest among Black and economically disadvantaged students, groups that have considerable overlap. The 16 elementary schools in north Tulsa had widespread poor attendance, involving 30 to 40 percent of the students or more in 2022-23, as tabulated from the report by The Oklahoma Eagle staff. These northside elementary schools had less than 15 percent of their students “prepared for the next grade” per testing results and state testing standards.

In its report, the OSDE said “regular attendance is predictive of student and school success.” National studies point to post-pandemic absenteeism as a root cause of

lagging student achievement and test scores.

Scope of the problem

In some respects, Tulsa Public Schools absenteeism problem follows national trends. Post-pandemic chronic absenteeism affects one-fourth to one-third of all students nationwide. And while affluent schools and school districts are also in attendance decline, poverty-laden areas are much more affected. Overall, student test scores and grades in reading and math are below levels not recorded in decades. And the federal government has spent billions of dollars to reverse the trend, largely without success.

Absenteeism cont. A5

Food Insecurity from A2

affected throughout the country.

SNAP eligibility is limited by income to those earning within 130% of the federal poverty limit. Black household incomes are 60% less than that of whites in Tulsa, and the poverty level in north Tulsa is estimated to be over 30%. Consequently, many Black households in north Tulsa and elsewhere depend on SNAP benefits to fight hunger.

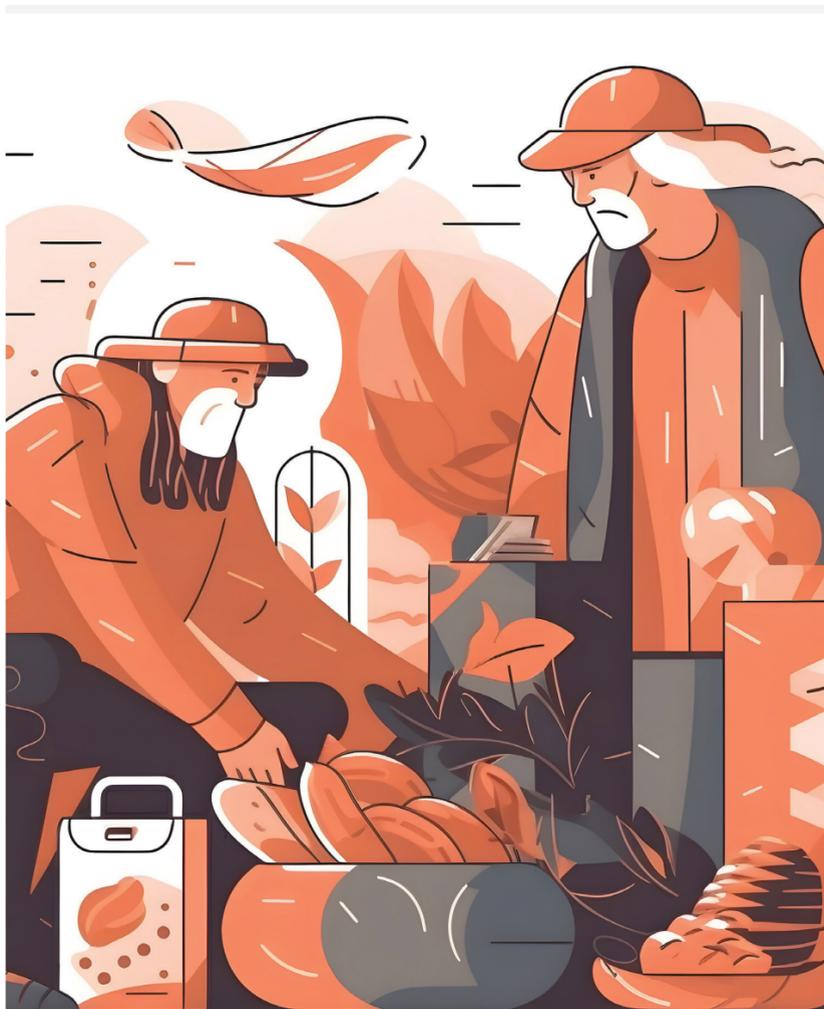
The USDA and other reports have shown that poor and Black Americans were disproportionately harmed by the pandemic and faced greater food insecurity. In its 2022 report, the USDA acknowledges SNAP’s failure to address the greatest need, reporting, “The prevalence of very low food insecurity among households participating in SNAP was 21.4%.”

Access to healthy food

The poor and minority communities are not constrained by food insecurity solely because of a lack of money or other resources. A host of studies and real-life inventories show supermarkets avoid areas where concentrations of people with low incomes and minorities live while convenience stores proliferate. So-called “supermarket redlining” is common, particularly in urban areas.

In their absence, convenience stores and low-priced fast-food facilities rush in to fill the void. While the average consumer spends \$70 on food weekly, minority and poor individuals have much less to spend. Consequently, food-scarce individuals and households spend precious dollars frequenting businesses that lack healthy food. For example, convenience stores comprise 44% of all SNAP transactions, according to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

The recently released City of Tulsa Neighborhoods Conditions Index reflects



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

that most north Tulsans reside in a “food desert.” A food desert generally means no full-service grocery store exists within one mile of their residence. Given the opportunity, SNAP participants will redeem more than 80% of their benefits in supermarkets or grocery stores, as confirmed by USDA data.

However, in 2021, the opening of the Oasis Fresh Market on North Peoria Avenue filled a huge gap in the north Tulsa food desert. It is the first grocery store in 12 years providing fresh food in north Tulsa. Tulsa City Councilor Vanessa Hall-Harper paved the way for the creation of a public-private partnership that made this possible. Oasis, which offers abundant fresh food and produce, is majority Black-owned and managed.

Bernard of Hunger Free Oklahoma referred to the Oasis store as an example of partnerships the organization has formed to fight hunger during and following the pandemic. He told *The Oklahoma Eagle* the Tulsa-based Hunger Free Oklahoma partners with Oasis “as a laboratory to test hunger relief concepts.”

Dark clouds ahead

Other pandemic programs have or are in the process of ending, such as the Child Tax Credit Program, some nutritional programs for schools, and the massive influx of funds to the states from the federal government. Congress has passed six major bills totaling \$5.3 trillion providing assistance to businesses, schools, governments, and individuals during the pandemic.

However, food inflation was 3.7% for the 12 months ending in September 2023, following an 11.4% rise over the previous twelve months - the highest increase since 1979. Housing costs, too, are at record levels.

Bernard told *The Oklahoma Eagle* that we are witnessing the “steepest increase in food insecurity in recent memory.” Bernard says he is worried.

Leona Pearl Mitchell: Renowned Opera Singer

By KITTY PITTMAN, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



Opera singer Leona Mitchell was born October 13, 1949, in Enid, Oklahoma, to Rev. Hulon and Pearl Olive Leatherman Mitchell. Tenth of fifteen children, Leona Mitchell began her musical journey by singing in her father's church choir. She received a scholarship from Oklahoma City University, in 1971 earning a bachelor's degree in music. Her alma mater later conferred upon her an honorary doctorate in music.

Mitchell debuted with the San Francisco Spring Opera Theater in 1972 and received an Opera America grant, which allowed her to study with Ernest St. John Metz in Los Angeles. On December

15, 1975, she made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Micaela in Bizet's Carmen, the same role she had sung at her debut. This marked the beginning of her many performances in opera houses all over the world, including Geneva, Paris, Madrid, and Sydney. Mitchell performed for eighteen consecutive seasons at the Metropolitan, a testament to her voice and professionalism.

Well known for her performances in operas by Puccini and Verdi, she also sang Bess in the London Records recording of the George Gershwin classic Porgy and Bess, with the Cleveland Orchestra. She has made television as well as film appearances. Her first solo operatic album was Presenting Leona

Mitchell with Kurt Herbert Adler: An Operatic Partnership, recorded in 1979.

Mitchell received numerous Oklahoma awards, including induction into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame in 2001 and the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2004. She was given an Outstanding Oklahoman citation in 1975 and was named "Ambassador of Enid" that same year. She was also honored by a joint session of the Oklahoma Legislature in 1985. She has performed for two presidents and at the inauguration of Charles Bradford Henry as governor of Oklahoma in 2003. She married Elmer Bush III and had one son, Elmer Bush IV. At the end of the twentieth century she resided in Houston, Texas.

THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma's history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

LEONA MITCHELL (2012.201.B0399.0254, photo by J. Miller, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

Featured Last Week



Revivalists Envision
Future For All-Black Towns



Q&A: Actress Jackera Davis,
'Beetlejuice: The Musical



Seeking 'A Path Forward,'
Future of State-Tribal Compacts

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Robert K. Goodwin

Publisher 1972-1980

Edward L. Goodwin, Jr.

Co-Publisher 1980-2014

Edward L. Goodwin, Sr.

Publisher 1936-1972

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TULSA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



PHOTO ADOBE IAMGES

Chronic absenteeism in all Oklahoma schools increased from 14 percent in 2018-19 to 20 percent in 2022-23

Absenteeism from A3

Statewide, student test scores have also not returned to pre-pandemic levels. But while the statewide “good attendance” only slipped from 86 percent to 80 percent over the four years, the OSDE graded this result an “F” in 2022-23. However, the Tulsa school district students with “good attendance” fell dramatically from 79 percent to 56 percent. Among Black students in the school district, the chronic absenteeism percentage of students exceeded those with good attendance. In north Tulsa, good attendance fell by 23 percentage points to what is likely an all-time low.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Tulsa Public Schools came under extreme criticism from Republican state officials for extended school closures, particularly from Gov. Kevin Stitt. Stitt pushed for the reopening of schools and relaxing mask mandates. Then TPS Superintendent Deborah Gist, backed by the school board and local health officials, resisted the pressure, and TPS remained closed longer than any other school district in the state.

Post-pandemic studies have shown that while students with more prolonged school closures experienced the most academic disruption, COVID-related deaths were fewer in those locales. But the effect of protracted

56%
Tulsa school district students with “good attendance” fell dramatically from 79 percent to 56 percent

school closures, including poor test scores and absenteeism, has persisted well past the pandemic. The underlying causes for this phenomenon are only just beginning to emerge. Still, education experts say they include the upending of social relationships at school, a lack of tracking and addressing chronic absences, and the self-fulfilling expectation that faring poorly in school leads students to avoid school.

TPS academic struggles

Ryan Walters, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the state education board are putting heavy pressure on TPS to improve student academic performance and reduce the number of “failing” schools. In August, the OSBE renewed the district’s accreditation after Walters threatened a state takeover of the school district. Widespread Tulsa support for “local control” of the school system and the sudden resignation of Superintendent Gist stalled Walters’ efforts.

Yet, interim Superintendent Ebony Johnson must appear before the state board monthly to explain and defend the district’s plans and efforts to improve the “science of reading” teacher training, reduce the number of “failing schools,” and enhance internal financial controls. Johnson, who is African American and a 24-year TPS veteran, became

interim superintendent in September. The new superintendent now must lead the largest school district in the state while under strict scrutiny by Walters, along with the education board he leads and the agency he heads. At their monthly meetings, the board has threatened TPS’s accreditation by consistently posting it on their agenda as an action item.

The education department Walters oversees published the state’s School Report Card, which included detailed school absenteeism, academic achievement, and overall ratings. While TPS “good attendance” on the scorecard varied but declined from 15-25 percentage points, the state rate fell by much less from the lowest to highest grade levels. Many of the failing schools Walters has targeted are located in north Tulsa. While academic achievement in all TPS elementary schools in 2022-23 reflected a modest increase from 2018-19, it was against a strong headwind of the drop in student attendance.

At the last OSBE meeting, held in November, Dr. Johnson described chronic absenteeism as “a crisis in itself when we have so many students demonstrating a need for support, but they are not there to get that support.” Johnson pledged to the State board to “work more with families and our communities, as well as our schools, to support getting our students” back in school.

Almost 10 months after his death, No charges have been filed



THE LAWTON CORRECTIONAL AND REHABILITATION FACILITY is Oklahoma's only remaining private prison. PHOTO SOUTHWEST LEDGER

Lawton Inmate Dies from A1

After an X-ray revealed a life-threatening injury, nurses, a doctor and prison guards locked Justin Barrientos in a cell where he suffered for hours without care and lay dead for more than 90 minutes before anyone noticed.

FOLLOWING BARRIENTOS' January death, a Department of Corrections investigator Tommy Stranahan recommended manslaughter charges against Lawton Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility staff, according to a report provided to the Comanche County District Attorney. Stranahan also found evidence of misdemeanor violations of neglect, refusal of duties and obstructing an investigation, according to the report.

Almost 10 months after his death, no charges have been filed, spurring Barrientos' mother to seek justice in court.

Linda Gray is suing The GEO Group, the publicly traded company that operates Oklahoma's lone private prison, for the death of her son, according to a claim filed today in federal court. The federal lawsuit also names a prison doctor and nurse, correction officers, Express Mobile Diagnostics, which provides X-ray diagnostics to the prison, and a radiologist claiming inadequate medical care, cruel and unusual punishment, negligence and emotional distress.

"My son wasn't a throw-away," Gray said. "The way he died, the suffering and the isolation he went through, and the callousness of the people who were supposed to take care of him, all of that could have been prevented. I wouldn't want anyone else's son to suffer like my son suffered."

Barrientos, 31, was serving 15 years for robbery and possessing a firearm after being convicted of a felony, according to court records.

For nearly four days in January, Barrientos coughed, vomited, seized, passed out and defecated on himself in a cell without help from medical staff.

Barrientos swallowed a plastic spork earlier that week causing chest and stomach pain, according to the report. After receiving an X-ray at the prison, Barrientos was returned to the cell where he suffered for days and was refused care, the investigation revealed. Once, when Barrientos complained of stomach pain, a nurse told him to fill out a form requesting medical attention.

Prison staff knew Barrientos had severe mental illness that caused suicidal thoughts, and in an attempt to self-harm, he sometimes ingested things he shouldn't, according to Stranahan's report. One nurse recommended he be restricted to finger foods to avoid

giving him silverware. She told Stranahan the suggestion was denied.

Barrientos was finally taken to see a doctor on Jan. 31 after a nurse saw him swallow another spork and begin vomiting, according to the report. He was left in the cell for nearly an hour before being taken to the medical unit.

Barrientos received another X-ray, which revealed air in his abdomen, signaling a life-threatening puncture wound, according to the report. The X-ray technician, Joe Wiley, sent the images to off-site radiologist Dr. Michael Murphy, who marked them as normal. But Wiley quickly spotted an obvious and dangerous abnormality and did not wait for Murphy's diagnosis to alert the prison doctor.

Wiley showed the images to Dr. Michael Boger and told him Barrientos was not pretending to have stomach pain and his condition was serious, according to Stranahan's report. After observing Barrientos through a window, Boger determined he wasn't in enough pain to have a perforated intestine and that his stomach discomfort was the result of constipation, the investigation found. Boger told the investigator he never spoke to Barrientos or examined him.

According to the report, when Stranahan interviewed Boger in March, "Boger closed his eyes, slumped down in the chair, took a deep breath, and replied, 'I looked at him, and that's what I based my assessment on, is he looked so normal, unaffected by it, because I would expect somebody to just really be hurting.'"

Barrientos was given Tums antacids for his stomach pain and then moved to a medical cell where he was placed on suicide watch with constant supervision.

While under the watch of Officer Kenneth Smith, Barrientos fell several times, hitting his head at least once, according to the report. After one of the falls, the guard called for a nurse.

Video footage reviewed by Stranahan showed registered nurse Kristine Kushner and Smith's supervisor Sgt. Kalisa Blanchard arriving at the cell at 9:13 p.m. and staying for less than one minute. Smith told the investigator that Kushner said, "That's just Barrientos. That's what he does. He's ok."

The footage conflicted with Boger's and Kusner's assessments,

according to the report, which described Barrientos in extreme abdominal pain and a dramatically declining state of health.

At 9:14 p.m., Barrientos moved his leg, according to Stranahan's report. He never moved again.

Barrientos lay lifeless on the cell floor until 10:53 p.m. when another nurse found him dead, according to the report.

Barrientos, 31, died from an infection from the hole in his bowel, according to the lawsuit.

Nurse Erin Pena told the investigator that if Kusner had properly examined Barrientos, he would likely still be alive, according to the report. Other GEO nurses reported Kusner to the Oklahoma Board of Nursing for refusing to examine or check on Barrientos for several hours, the investigation found.

This isn't the first time Boger has been accused of refusing to care for a patient. Another inmate at the Lawton prison, Alford Bradley, died in 2021 after Boger withheld treatment for a hernia because Bradley did not appear to be in pain, according to the lawsuit. Boger had his privileges as an emergency room physician revoked before being hired by Geo Group, the lawsuit claims.

"Why is it that under those circumstances neither the doctor or nurses felt moved to even physically examine him?" Gray's attorney Paul DeMuro said during a phone interview. "The only thing that makes sense is that because he struggled with serious mental illness, they treated him differently and that's consistent with how people with mental illness are treated in the state's criminal justice system from beginning to end."

DeMuro also represents clients in a class action lawsuit alleging that state mental health officials are violating the rights of people who have been found incompetent to stand trial but have been left languishing in jails while they await treatment.

Before entering the Lawton Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility, Barrientos was found incompetent to stand trial, according to court records. He was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and severe substance use disorder, his competency results showed. Gray said her son wanted to be a minister and planned to attend bible college until his mental health

got in the way.

The lack of mental health treatment in prison resulted in Barrientos' need for emergency medical care beyond the capabilities of prison staff. But prison operators are on the hook for inmate medical costs, which, according to the lawsuit, led to the reluctance of staff to call for advanced care.

"At the heart of this lawsuit is whether the state of Oklahoma should be outsourcing constitutional obligation to care for people and inmates in their custody," DeMuro said. "When you have an entity that's driven by profits first, as opposed to driven by the obligation to provide care for people, then you're going to have results like this."

Florida-based Geo Group reported \$2.3 billion in revenue last year, according to the company's earnings report.

In an emailed statement, Geo Group Spokesman Christopher Ferreira said, "We offer our condolences to Mr. Barrientos' family and remain committed to ensuring the health and safety of all those in our care. GEO will have no further comment while this litigation is pending."

The tough-on-crime movement of the 1990s led to the need for more inmate housing nationwide and in Oklahoma. Private prisons answered the call. As recently as five years ago, about 1 in 3 male inmates statewide were housed in privately operated prisons, which are often criticized for prioritizing profits over inmate health and safety.

A recent decline in Oklahoma's inmate population prompted officials to bring inmates back under state control. The Department of Corrections took over the Davis Correctional Facility in Holdenville last month and is positioned to do the same with the Lawton Facility as soon as next year.

WHITNEY BRYEN is an investigative reporter at Oklahoma Watch covering vulnerable populations. Her recent investigations focus on mental health and substance abuse, criminal justice, domestic violence and nursing homes. Contact her at (405) 201-6057 or wbryen@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter @SoonerReporter.

Advance Placement from A1

At Bixby High School Students Have at least 19 Advanced Placement Courses Available, *Including Four Physics Options, Three Art Classes, And A Slate Of Others.*

Those A.P. classes can boost students' grade-point average above a coveted 4.0 because in some districts, such as Bixby, the classes are worth five or even six points. Students can also earn college credit by scoring well on the final exam.

Bixby, a suburban high school with 2,000 students, is nine miles from Liberty High School in Mounds, with a student count of 152. At Liberty, no A.P. classes are being taught. Principal Trina Evans said the school offers a few, but didn't have any students sign up.

To meet a new state law requiring a minimum of four A.P. classes, Evans said they'll try to offer A.P. biology and history in person, and a handful of other courses through an online platform.

"I understand the desire and the wish for our students to have these opportunities, but what's challenging about it, in a school our size ... offering four A.P. classes might not be what our student population needs," Evans said.

By the 2024-25 school year, all of Oklahoma's 471 public high schools will be required to offer at least four A.P. courses.

Only a quarter of high schools met that bar last school year, according to an Oklahoma Watch analysis of data from the College Board, which runs A.P.

Half didn't have any A.P. classes at all.

Schools with the most courses are in urban and suburban schools. Schools with few or no A.P. offerings are more likely to be in rural communities.

Those inequitable opportunities are what Rep. Rhonda Baker, R-Yukon, wanted to address with the law, which she proposed. It passed in 2020, giving school leaders several years to scale up A.P. offerings. Baker, a former A.P. teacher, said she knows rural districts often struggle to hire enough A.P. teachers, but encourages them to use online programs to help fill those gaps.

"Just because you live in a rural community, it should not eliminate you from having access to really great courses, especially if you want to take them," Baker said.

A.P. was created in the 1950s to provide an academic challenge to a small, elite group of high school students; the program expanded significantly starting in the 2000s to close achievement gaps and improve college readiness. Now, the courses reach more than 2.6 million high school students nationwide.

The courses are more rigorous than a typical high school class and on par with college-level work. But the most crucial difference is the end-of-course exam. Students who score 3 or higher (on a scale of 1 to 5) can receive college credit for the class, depending on the college or university they attend.

To meet the new state requirement,

schools can offer A.P. in a traditional classroom setting, partner with a nearby school district or technology center, or offer courses through an online provider.

Horizon, an online learning platform under the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board, offered 11 A.P. courses last year, according to College Board data. It added three this year and will continue to expand next year, said Lisa Daniels, director of Horizons. Most are free for Oklahoma schools and include the coursework and teacher.

"It's a struggle for rural schools to find teachers," Daniels said. "Or they may only have one student (taking an A.P. class). That's something we can handle."

Staffing is the biggest issue at the 275-student Morris High School, which has one A.P. class this year taught by the school's only A.P. certified teacher, said Superintendent Chris Karch. Sixteen students this year enrolled in the A.P. World History class.

"We don't have the staff for more," Karch said.

Morris, 45 miles south of Tulsa in eastern Oklahoma, will use an online platform to meet the minimum next year. Even so, students may need in-person support from a teacher, Karch said.

Some rural school leaders said they offer A.P. courses but students don't take them. That's because many prefer concurrent enrollment, where earning college credit doesn't hinge on a single high-stakes test and instead is based on performance throughout the course.

State funding covers the cost of tuition for high school juniors and seniors taking concurrent classes, up to a certain number of hours, and some districts cover the fees.

"Students here can take college classes for free and know if they pass that class, they're going to get college credit," said Doug Tolson, principal of Alex High School, 45 miles south of Oklahoma City.

In Tolson's 30 years at the district, very few students have chosen to take A.P. classes, he said.

Baker, the state representative, said the most important part is ensuring students in all schools at least have the choice.

"I don't want the argument to be, 'Look, our kids are behind, we shouldn't worry about advanced placement,'" Baker said. "If a child is willing to put the effort in and the work to be able to be successful at something like this, we've got to be able to give them the opportunity."

JENNIFER PALMER has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2016 and covers education. Contact her at (405) 761-0093 or jpalm@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter @jpalmOKC.

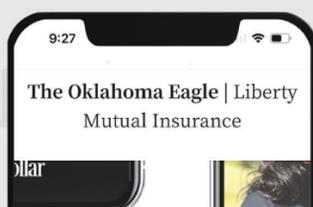


THE HALLS ARE QUIET AT HARDING PREPARATORY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL in Oklahoma City on May 11, 2021, as students take advanced placement tests. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

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A Promise Partially Fulfilled

Oklahoma's superagency that handles information technology, budgeting, employee management and state office buildings has little budget transparency of its own and needs to do a better job of responding to agencies it provides services, a legislative oversight report concluded.

Sprawling Superagency from A1

The Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency said its examination of the Office of Management and Enterprise Services found the agency's annual appropriations have tripled in the past five years, reaching \$164 million in fiscal year 2024. During the same time, the agency's fee revenue, which comes from other state agencies, rose to \$52.4 million, an increase of 285%. The office presented its report to lawmakers at a hearing on Wednesday.

Some of the increased spending came in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed an older technology infrastructure that wasn't built for thousands of state employees working from home. But the LOFT report said a lack of long-term planning on statewide technology needs and an increased reliance on contractors and outside consultants also pushed spending higher.

Lawmakers created the agency more than a decade ago to streamline IT purchases and increase efficiency in state spending on common administrative services. But that promise has only partially been fulfilled, the legislative report found. It explored more than 20 policy recommendations for the Legislature, including splitting out OMES' statewide finance division into a separate agency to increase accountability.

"OMES is a huge agency with a huge budget," said Sen. Chuck Hall, R-Perry, who also chairs a special Senate oversight committee on OMES. "They are handling a lot of services on behalf of the state of Oklahoma and its citizens. We can always be a better service provider, and the LOFT report reflects that there are shortcomings and gaps."

The report found agencies have little recourse when the Office of Management and Enterprise Services increases its fees for services and have little flexibility to control

164m

USD

Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES), annual appropriations, as of fiscal year 2024.

their own costs for shared services. For example, OMES told more than two dozen state agencies they will have rent increases of up to 20% this year. That was to catch up from years of deferred maintenance, but it applied to agencies regardless of how old their buildings were.

Jerry Moore, OMES' deputy director and chief transformation officer, said the agency continues to evaluate those anticipated rent increases. But there's an estimated \$280 million in deferred maintenance expenses to buildings owned by the state, he said. Insurance and utility expenses have gone up too.

The report highlighted late payments by OMES to its vendors. The state auditor issued a report in 2020 with those same concerns, but OMES hasn't improved much since then. Authors of the legislative report pulled a random sample of invoices and found 62% went beyond the 45-day legal limit.

Senate Floor Leader Greg McCortney, R-Ada, said he was at a loss to explain to his constituents that a state agency couldn't perform a basic function like paying its bills on time.

"How in the world can I defend the continuation of what we're doing here?" McCortney said.

In response, OMES officials said some of those late payments were because it was having problems collecting fees owed by agencies using the services.

"We are stuck paying these technology bills at these agencies, and they may have some disagreement about how it didn't go to their satisfaction when they signed the statement of work," said John Suter, OMES' executive director and the state's chief operating officer. "That's frustrating to me."

The report said OMES spending from federal pandemic relief had left the agency exposed to ongoing operating costs from what were described as one-time purchases at the time. It highlighted \$100 million that

went for a backup data center in Texas. Much of those costs went to cloud-based systems that now require an extra \$18.6 million in annual costs.

The state also paid the same vendor, NTT Data, \$8.6 million per year for desktop support services. But service times were so bad OMES canceled the contract this year and took the services back in-house. Lawmakers gave the agency an extra \$15.8 million in appropriations to resume those functions.

"Both the new cybersecurity enhancements and the data centers were purchased with CARES money that covered the recurring revenue for the first few years but didn't account for how those recurring charges would be covered afterwards," the report said.

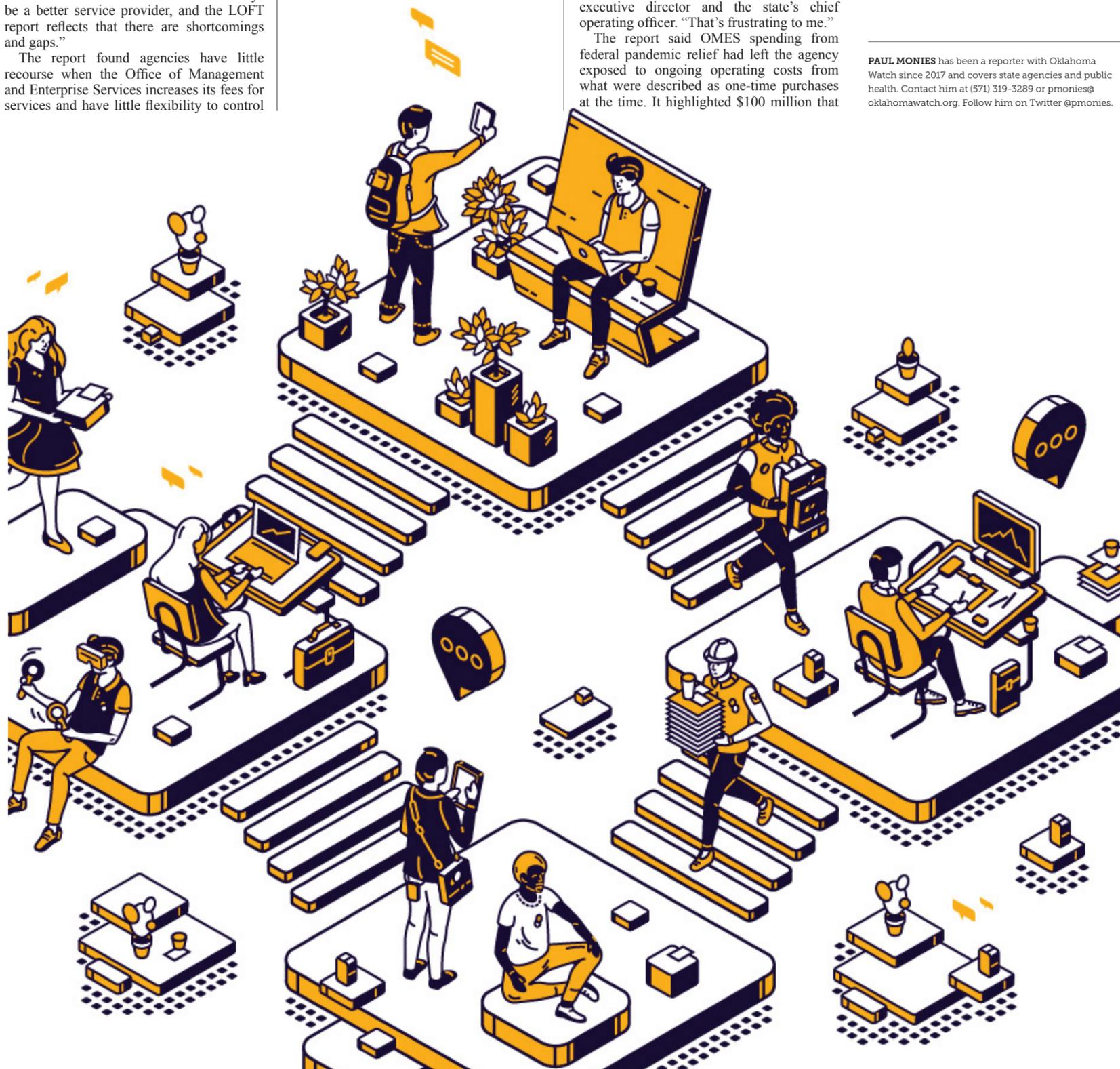
Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City, said the LOFT report validates concerns many had for years about consolidation.

"Ultimately, it's the responsibility of the majority in the Legislature to provide long-term strategic planning so that LOFT's recommendations are enacted and provide adequate resources to ensure citizens get the services they need," Kirt said in a news release.

In an interview after the hearing, Suter said his agency was agnostic on how the Legislature wants to provide funding for information technology and he was open to other ideas on agency structure.

"If people need to report to different people, if we need to be funded in different ways, either in all appropriations or in some hybrid model like we exist now, that's OK," Suter said. "It gives us a lot of flexibility once the Legislature looks at all the options."

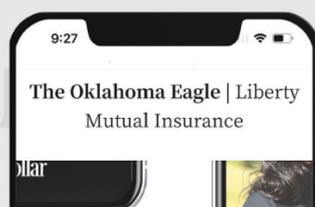
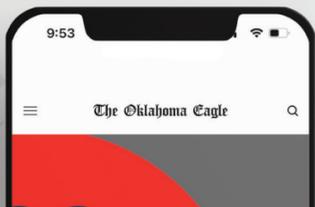
PAUL MONIES has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2017 and covers state agencies and public health. Contact him at (571) 319-3289 or pmonies@oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter @pmonies.



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Fulton Street Books & Coffee Has Moved To Greenwood, And We're Here For It

Ross D. Johnson, The Oklahoma Eagle
Fulton Street Books & Coffee from A1

SHOULD ANYONE PERCEIVE FULTON STREET BOOKS & COFFEE'S RECENT GRAND OPENING, AT 21 N. GREENWOOD AVE. (NEXT TO GREENWOOD RISING), AS MERELY A CHANGE OF LOCATION TO THE HISTORIC DISTRICT, THAT WOULD COMPLETELY MISS THE POINT OF THE EVENT... A BLAME FOR THE HEAD, NOT THE HEART.

Onikah Asamoá-Caesar has embraced, throughout the last several years, the full spirit of entrepreneurship, realized by the success of Fulton Street Books & Coffee.

The once West Latimer Street-based haven for Black literature, celebrations of culture and perfectly crafted signature coffees, drew patrons from communities far beyond the doors of its dual-purpose retail front in the Brady Heights District (The Heights).

The quaint mid-block location was a local gathering place for many who lived between the northern and southern district border streets of West Marshall Street and West Fairview Street. Fulton, in The Heights, opened early enough for the morning coffee run, and closed a few hours beyond the evening rush hour.

In Greenwood, Fulton accommodates the same demand with an additional day for patrons, now open Monday through Saturday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A year-round host for local organizations, Fulton has thoughtfully provided a space for reading hours, book launches, spoken word events and private gatherings. The new Greenwood location, like The Heights, will be a favored venue for creatives and audiences.

We, of course, without the slightest hint of objectivity, were fully committed to Fulton's cruffins, one of many pastries that we still believe are baked in the late Sojourner Truth's kitchen, cooled upon the window sill of Harriet Tubman, while Maya Angelou softly reads poetry to them, a Wakandan high priestess blesses them and Michelle Obama personally supervises their delivery to the shop... Just sayin'

Hyperbole? No. No, it is not.

Asamoá-Caesar is well aware of the art and discipline required to build a brand that meets the needs and exceeds the expectations of patrons. Fulton reflects such insight as visitors, after entering, scan the room for a place to sit and share a moment with friends, meet with colleagues or simply embrace some "me time."

The 21 N. Greenwood Ave. location is-what-it-was and more.

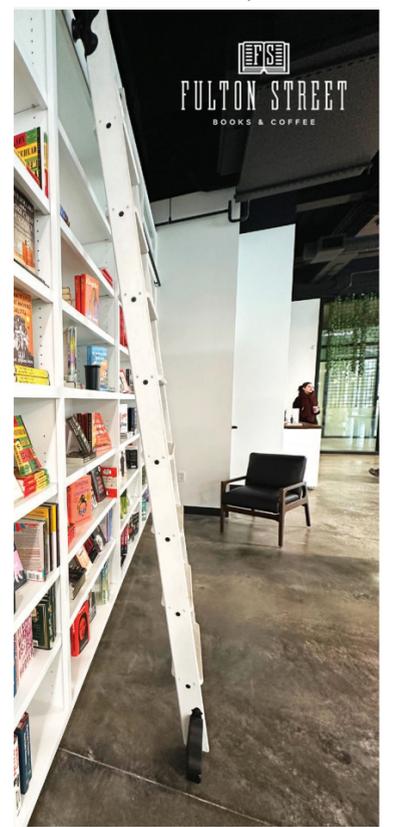
The "more," honestly isn't simply its inviting street-facing interior, the ideal selection and placement of branded items, an open ceiling that gives the effect of broader space, and closer proximity to Greenwood.

The "more" is the obvious attention to detail, the 'intentional' use of space, a broadened selection of new dining favorites, and the opportunity to become a part of an entrepreneur's evolving story.

A grand opening, in a general sense, is often perceived as a new beginning or expansion. This event, Fulton's grand opening, is leap forward, creating more space to experiment, create, gather, fellowship, and look across the expansive storefront to 'see folk.'

Asamoá-Caesar, we're certain, will find patrons seated in front of books and coffees, browsing shelves and tables, sharing new stories and old, thankful for the opportunity to share the dream and vision of a phenomenal entrepreneur.... Because this is what we do. This is Greenwood.

PHOTOS ROSS D. JOHNSON, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



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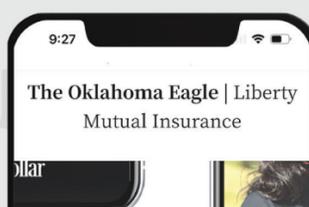
Great Plains Journalism Award

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MAKING TEACHING SUSTAINABLE FOR MORE BLACK MEN LIKE ME

Only 2% of teachers are Black men. Teach For America recruiter Cedric Jones is on a mission to change that. **A12**

This Is What It's Like to Survive Cancer

CANCER IS ONE OF THE LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH in the U.S. But, survival is possible. Black women tell what it means to survive. Roughly 600,000 Americans die of cancer each year. **BLACK PEOPLE ARE AT AN INCREASED RISK OF DEATH FROM DIFFERENT FORMS OF CANCER DUE TO STRUCTURAL RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION.** But this isn't a story about the tragedy of cancer. This is a story about the survivorship that so many experience. Between 2019-2022, more than 18 million Americans survived cancer. Some factors that increase cancer survival include access to health insurance, patient attitudes, and a support team, according to the American Cancer Society. Those who have personally dealt with cancer know that the treatments are painful, and keeping hope alive can be difficult. But surviving cancer is possible. Word In Black spoke with three Black women about what it means to be a cancer survivor and what they've learned from fighting for their lives. **HERE ARE THEIR STORIES.**

Anissa Durham, Word In Black



COURTESY OF THE GOOD BRIGADE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Madeline Long, 60, Maryland, Executive Director

I'VE BEEN IN THE BREAST CANCER SPACE SINCE 1999. IN 2011, MY MOTHER, MY AUNT, AND MYSELF WERE ALL DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER. WITH THE DIAGNOSIS, I DIDN'T SEE IT AS A DEATH SENTENCE.

I was stage 1, so I was on tamoxifen. My mother didn't handle her diagnosis very well. So, I couldn't really be a survivor. I had to be a caregiver first. I wasn't able to really show up in my own life because my mother and I were diagnosed two months apart. It was easier with my aunt because she was very proactive. And, she was recently diagnosed again with breast cancer. I've had two scares since my diagnosis. I ended up having a hysterectomy and an oophorectomy. But I realized I had not really been a survivor until I had to go through that situation. I'm a patient navigator, I have my own organization, and I'm always with breast cancer survivors. I'm learning how to show up for me because as a survivor, I have to show up for me. I became an ambassador for the American Cancer Society. I'm constantly telling women not to miss their mammograms. I'm always in caregiving mode. I had to learn to be able to balance it — where I'm not always caregiving at the expense of myself. I took Tamoxifen for seven years. Once I stopped, I felt like that's when my remission started. I would tell Black women, you got to live a healthier lifestyle. What does your stress level look like? What does your tribe look like? Who are you rolling with? Surround yourself with people who will speak life into you. You don't want to be with people who all they do is speak negatively. Black women don't have to die from breast cancer.

Erin Nickson, 37, Georgia, Senior corporate relations manager

I WAS DIAGNOSED IN 2011 WITH STAGE 1 BREAST CANCER. I WAS GOING IN FOR MY ANNUAL EXAM, AT THE URGING OF MY MOTHER. I WAS 24, AND IT WAS DURING BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH. I WASN'T THINKING ABOUT BREAST CANCER BECAUSE I WAS SO YOUNG.

Surviving Cancer cont. A12



PHOTO COURTESY OF MADLINE LONG



PHOTO COURTESY MICHELLE SPARROW-WALKER



PHOTO GETTY/CALIP

Surviving Cancer from A11

My mother's mother passed away from breast cancer many decades prior. I still didn't think that at my age, I should be concerned with it. I don't know if it was the initial shock, or being naïve, I was just like what's the next step — let's get this done.

I was so optimistic. I don't believe it hit me as much as it did my parents and my siblings. The perspective that there's life not only after a cancer diagnosis but also during a cancer diagnosis helped me just tough through it.

I had surgeries and did 12 weeks of chemotherapy. Then I went into remission six to seven months after the initial diagnosis. It feels like being a Black woman who has survived cancer is a special badge of honor.

For Black women who are currently battling cancer, don't stop. Don't take no for an answer until you are at peace with the direction that your care is going. Have an ally or another advocate there who can push for you when you are too exhausted physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally.

Young Black women need to be super diligent about understanding their family medical history. We know that cancers are best treated when they are caught earlier. Forget everything else you've heard; you've got to start earlier.

Michelle Sparrow-Walker, 60, Maryland, IT Consulting Services

After three years of getting mammograms, I felt something, but I kept being told it was just that my breasts were dense. Then, in the third year, in December of 2016, I had a biopsy done.

They determined that I had Stage 3 breast cancer in my left breast. And it spread to 12 lymph nodes in my left arm. I went through chemotherapy from February through April of 2017. Then, I had surgery in May of 2017 to remove the cancer, and in September I had radiation.

I didn't realize how many Black women that I knew had breast cancer. I felt blessed — it could have been worse. However, I knew I wasn't alone because there are so many women who have gone through it. But when I heard the word cancer, it just stopped my heart. You don't ever foresee that for yourself until it happens.

I didn't want to feel depressed or like a victim. I try to keep a positive attitude and keep moving — so people could see I wasn't gonna let cancer stop me. Your attitude is half the battle. I had a good support system with family and friends. The most important thing is to stay positive — because if you think things are going to be bad, it's kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Expect that God is gonna take care of it for you. My faith became very strong during that period. I've learned to lean a lot more on it.

Making Teaching Sustainable for More Black Men Like Me

Only 2% of teachers are Black men. Teach For America recruiter Cedric Jones is on a mission to change that.

Cedric Jones Word In Black

I remember sitting in a small classroom in Barrows Hall at U.C. Berkeley when I learned of my acceptance into Teach For America, a national education nonprofit that supports public school systems by sourcing talent to lead as anti-racist educators within the classroom.

Then — as is the case today — only about 2% of teachers nationally are Black men. I was both charged to make an impact and also curious if there was infrastructure to nurture my presence as I entered TFA as one of 22 black educators in the 2014 Bay Area cohort — about 11 of the entire Bay Area class of new TFA teachers that year.

While I felt excited at the prospect of joining TFA as a teacher, a corps member as we're known — and following in the footsteps of my grandfather, a school teacher in Mississippi — I also became increasingly nervous about my finances, my preparation, and my overall ability to enter and sustain myself within this field. I saw from a young age the impact my grandfather had on his students, and I knew wholeheartedly I wanted to continue his legacy. But I also knew it was critical for me, as a Black male educator, to feel seen and supported in this work.

Nearly a decade later, it's clear that my time in the classroom was one of the most profound professional experiences I could have chosen. Now, as the Director of Southern California Recruitment & Retention at TFA Los Angeles, I often reflect on what drew me to the classroom and what about the recruitment process engaged me — and I use those learnings to help me recruit more teachers that reflect the students we serve in L.A. and across the country.

Building Relationships

I met my recruiter, Raquel Lucente, for the first time at a Black Community event on campus. Seeing folks I looked up to engaging with her authentically

and seeing her meet with folks for coffee on my way to classes, it was clear her focus was on creating relationships and going into the spaces where Black students felt most comfortable. While career fairs, resume workshops, and club meetings can be a fine way to meet prospective teachers, I've observed that recruiting Black folks into the field requires a more genuine connection, transparency, and support that feels equitable.

Following in Raquel's footsteps, so much of my time in my current role is dedicated to hosting both one-on-one sessions with Black folks who are interested in joining TFA, as well as those who have already applied. I also hold space for weekly office hours, where folks can pop in to receive specific support or simply process what an offer from TFA might look like for them uniquely.

Addressing Financial Barriers

When candidates are offered admission to the corps, I always like to address the challenges and barriers to joining TFA head-on. Finances, an area of concern for many, including myself, come up often. Many Black applicants are financially supporting family members or are burdened by student loan debt. In fact, the average student loan debt is more than \$37,000, almost the same as the average starting teacher salary. Given the racial wealth gap, Black applicants, as a whole, want to make sure they can sustain themselves and avoid entering — or reentering — a cycle of poverty.

Though, as an organization, we've been able to provide more than \$12 million annually in transitional support grants, as well as emergency and need-based financial aid, the average entry-level salary of teachers can still leave recent college graduates anxious about their future.

In many states, credentialing exams for subject matter and basic skills competency exacerbate the financial barriers to entering the profession. I'm proud of the efforts TFA has made to address these concerns in the short term

through grants, as well as our work to advocate for legislation that improves teacher pay, reduces educator student loan debt, and investigates innovative ways to make teacher housing more affordable.

Listening and Integrating the Community

Nationwide, actively listening to the needs of our Black applicants has resulted in salary negotiations with our school districts and charter management organizations, clustering corps members at sites with strong retention of Black teachers, and placing folks where pro-Black programming is on-site.

In 2022, I launched our School Partner Pipeline initiative, which supports instructional aides and paraprofessionals who already have a bachelor's degree and work in one of our partner schools to earn their teaching credentials. These folks, who often come from the community, are then able to continue as classroom teachers in a setting where they already have deep relationships with students and their families.

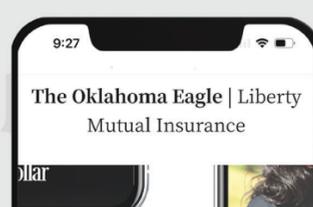
By taking an individualized approach to recruiting Black educators, I'm positioned to invest in those ready to inspire — and educate — our youth. I've seen firsthand how crucial it is for those closest to the communities we serve to be at the forefront of educational change and accountability.

The country's schools, classrooms, and students need more Black educators. To make that possible, Black perspectives must inform the evolution of the teaching profession to make it a more inclusive and sustainable career path for us. I'm proud to have not only followed in my grandfather's footsteps, but also built upon his legacy by working with TFA and our school partners to create a pathway for more Black educators to thrive.

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Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm
Wednesday worship - 8pm
Rev. John W. Anderson

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F: 918-587-0642
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net
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Worship Service 10:00 am
Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm
Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner
"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

Pettie Chapel CME

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"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

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SMILING HEARTS

The NICK BLAKELY Foundation

Our vision is to turn every potential tragedy of Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) into a story of survival.

www.nickblakelyfoundation.org



We hear you. And we're here to help.



All through 2023, we listened—to our clients, teammates and the many communities we serve. And truly hearing what they would like the power to do helped us strengthen our partnerships—and welcome new ones along the way. From couples just starting out to entrepreneurs looking to launch a business, together we accomplished a lot. We can't wait to see what 2024 has in store.

Bill Lissau
President, Bank of America Tulsa

Learn more at bankofamerica.com/tulsa



PHOTO PROVIDED

PSO partners with Food On The Move to support its Urban Farm

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Public Service Company of Oklahoma and the American Electric Power Foundation donated to Food On The Move last month. PSO, the foundation, and its Feed Communities Initiative recognized FOTM for its efforts in the community to eradicate food insecurity in Tulsa.

In making the announcement, PSO President and COO Leigh Anne Strahler said this time of the year is “when we all pause to appreciate our good fortune and share it with others.”

“We see the generosity of our customers constantly, and we salute that kindness. It reflects the best of our community. The Feeding Communities Initiative is our effort to be a part of that and make a difference every day.”

Food On The Move, founded by musician Taylor Hanson, is dedicated to transforming food deserts and the legacy issues created by living without food security. PSO’s partnership with FOTM has included donation of a container garden, currently being used to grow produce year-round for the monthly Community Food and Resource

Festivals, and an AEP Foundation grant of \$100,000 for the nonprofit group’s Urban Farm, which will produce 180,000 pounds of fresh produce a year.

“We appreciate the dedication of PSO and the AEP Foundation to food and housing issues,” said Kevin Harper, president and CEO of Food On The Move. “Food On The Move is focused on ending food insecurity one community at a time, and partners such as PSO and AEP Foundation are the key to making that vision a success.”

PSO is the electric utility company serving 573,000 customer accounts in 232 communities in eastern and southwestern Oklahoma. The AEP Foundation is funded by American Electric Power and its operating subsidiaries. The foundation supports a variety of community initiatives, including the arts, cultural heritage, education, health care, housing, hunger, music, and championing social and racial justice.

For more information, visit www.PSOoklahoma.com and foodonthemoveok.com.



PHOTO ROSS D. JOHNSON, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Fulton Street Books and Coffee to host grand opening, Dec. 1

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Fulton Street Books and Coffee is opening in a new location at 21 N. Greenwood Ave. on Black Wall Street.

The bookstore and coffee house is hosting a grand opening celebration on Dec. 1 at 11 a.m. Other programs planned for the day include the following: “Ask Atento Anything” that will be a question-and-answer session with investment firm Atento Capital, 4 p.m. – 5 p.m.; First Friday reception, 5 p.m. – 7 p.m.; and attendees will be encouraged to participate in the Tulsa Arts District First Friday Art Crawl after the store opening ceremonies.

The First Friday Art Crawl will be recognizing 16 years of promoting and publicizing local artists. Individuals are encouraged to visit and explore the museums, galleries, and studios in the Arts District and the Greenwood area. Many of the businesses and organizations are offering free or reduced admissions, late-night shopping, and much more.

For more information, call (918) 561-6600 or info@fultonstreet918.com.

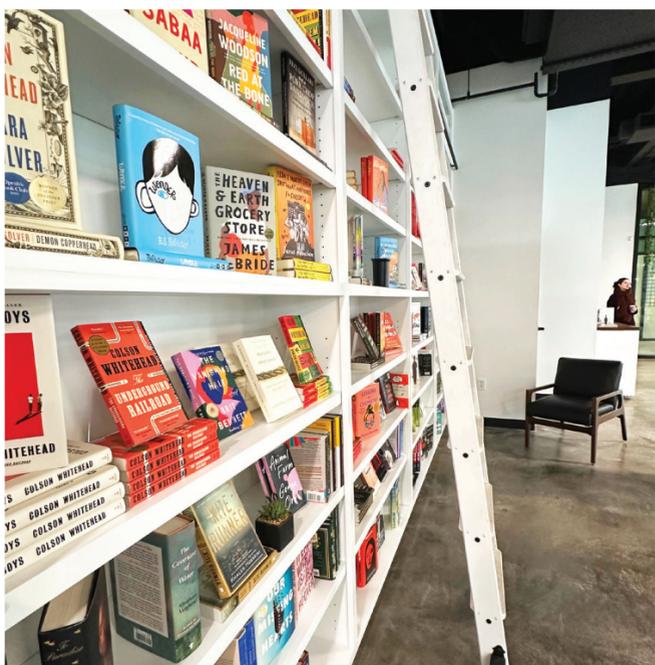


PHOTO ROSS D. JOHNSON, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Local authors to be showcased at City-County Library affair

Dr. Jerry Goodwin The Oklahoma Eagle

Tulsa City-County Library is hosting the fourth annual Local Author Conference on Dec. 9 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Central Library, 400 Civic Center. Immediately following the conference, a book fair will be held until 2 p.m.

Published authors who would like to sell and autograph copies of their books at the conference are encouraged to complete an application. The application is at <https://www.tulsalibrary.org/authorconference>.

The public is invited to meet published authors. Additionally, the program will offer sessions covering writing and publishing, including characterization, editing, and more. The speakers for the sessions are Kelly Stone Gamble and Emily Dial-Driver. A keynote address will be delivered by author J. C. Hallman.

Refreshments will be provided. For more information, contact Central Library Adult Services at (918) 549-7323 or cas@tulsalibrary.org.

FOURTH ANNUAL
LOCAL AUTHOR
CONFERENCE
AND BOOK FAIR

9 A.M. – NOON
NOON – 2 P.M.
FRIDAY
CREATIVITY CENTER
1100 DENVER AVENUE

Interested author or do you aspire to be one? Join us for a creative, engaging sessions. At noon, we'll conclude the day with a Local Author Book Fair in Aaronson Auditorium.

Interested author interested in selling your books during the book fair? Complete a quick and easy application at www.tulsalibrary.org/authorconference.

ALL AGES
918.549.READ
www.tulsalibrary.org
Free and Open
to the Public

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Events

2023

DEC 1

Ribbon Cutting for Fulton Street Books and Coffee, 21 N. Greenwood Ave., on Dec. 7 at 11 a.m. Other events scheduled are “Ask Atento Anything” from 4 p.m. – 5 p.m. and First Friday Mixer from 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. Individuals will be encouraged to join the Tulsa Arts District First Friday Art Crawl after the festivities.

DEC 7

American Red Cross to host Disaster Preparation class at Greenwood Women’s Business Center, 102 N. Greenwood Ave., Suite 201 (Second floor) on Dec. 7 at 11 a.m. For more information, contact (539) 867-4127 or info@greenwoodwb.com.

DEC 8 & 9

National Association of Black Journalists – Tulsa Chapter Salute to Excellence Awards Gala (Dec. 8) and Professional and Community Workshops (Dec. 9), Tulsa Community College – Center for Creativity, 910 S. Boston Ave. For more information, contact nabjtlsasgala23@gmail.com.

DEC 9

Fourth Annual Local Author Conference and Book Fair at the Tulsa City County Library, 400 Civic Center, in the Pochontas Greadington Learning and Creativity Center on Dec. 9 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. A book fair will follow from 12 p.m. – 2 p.m. For more information, contact (918) 549-7323 or cas@tulsalibrary.org.

DEC 9

Greenwood Chamber of Commerce Third Annual World Class Winter Gala, Doubletree Hotel by Hilton – Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. on Dec. 9 at 5 p.m. For more information, visit <https://historictulsagreenwoodchamber.com/>

DEC 10

Troy J. Petit Sr. Book Signing for “Little King Learns... Hugs of Love” will be held on Dec. 10 at 1 p.m. at North Peoria Church of Christ Multipurpose Building, 2217 N. Peoria Ave. For purchasing a book, donations will be made to local charities - \$2/book sold will be donated to NPCOC Food Pantry and \$1/book sale will go to the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma. For more information, visit www.thetroybox.com.

2024

FEB 17, 18 & 24

Theatre North’s “Topdog/Underdog” performance at Tulsa Performing Arts Center, 110 E. 2nd St. For ticket information, call (918) 596-7111.

APR 12-13

National Association of Black Journalists Region III conference, Tulsa, Okla. Eleven states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, will be represented. For more information, contact Eva Coleman, Region III director, at evacolemannabj@gmail.com.