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HEALTH CARE

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

BY GARY LEE

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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

The state of health care

Gary Lee
The Oklahoma Eagle

One evening in early February, Ray Pearcey, a Tulsa-based writer, was feeling chest pains so severe that they sent him into despair. He visited a health clinic in North Tulsa, but they turned him away, saying all their staff were busy. By eight pm, as his symptoms worsened, Pearcey tried one last resort: Juno Medical-Tulsa, a North Tulsa health clinic that opened six months earlier on Greenwood Avenue in the historic Black Wall Street District. *Cont. A3*

The state of health care

Health care issues in the Black community have *plagued Tulsans for decades*

From A2

Within fifteen minutes, a Juno staff member checked his vitals, performed an EKG, and determined that he was experiencing a major heart attack. Fifteen minutes later, Pearcy had checked into the Oklahoma Heart Institute, where doctors performed major heart surgery. It was the first time that Pearcy had faced significant heart challenges. But as a Black American in his 70s, Pearcy falls within a vulnerable group of people who suffer from heart issues.

“Thanks to Juno, I’m still alive,” Pearcy told The Oklahoma Eagle in an interview. He is a former Eagle editor. He had hoped that Juno would be around forever to rescue other North Tulsans.

Dashed Hopes for Juno

But Pearcy’s hope was not to be.

On Monday, February 19, a couple of weeks after Pearcy’s last visit, Juno closed its doors permanently. Patients who arrived for scheduled appointments at 21 North Greenwood Avenue on that day learned about the sudden closure from a note on the front door.

Earlier that morning, the Juno staff in Tulsa received a message from their headquarters in New York that they were closing the business immediately.

In a posting on Meta (also known as Facebook), the social media platform, Dr. Jabraan Pasha, Juno Tulsa’s executive director, said, “The information we were given was Juno Headquarters lost support from a major national investor, which significantly impacted the company’s financials. As a result, he added, the company was suddenly closing its two newest clinics in Atlanta and Tulsa.

“The decision was no reflection of the care we have been providing to the Tulsa community,” Pasha added. “We were growing steadily and positively impacting the lives of many Tulsans. The Oklahoma Eagle has reached out to the Juno administration in New York, but we have received no response at the time of publication.

Akili Hinson, the entrepreneur and physician, founded the Juno brand with a noble intent: to offer affordable, quality, family-focused healthcare in distressed neighborhoods. In 2022, the company announced that it had received \$12 million in start-up funds. Backers have included Serena Ventures, NEXT Ventures, and Atento Capital. The name of the supporter who has pulled out has not been revealed.

The out-of-the-blue closure of Juno in Tulsa has left its patients, including many with dire medical needs, in a lurch. Susan Savage, CEO of Morton Comprehensive Health Services, told The Eagle that she had reached out to Pasha, the executive at Juno, offering to provide whatever help their patients need. Juno staff have sent messages of regret to its patients, suggesting alternative care facilities in Tulsa, including Morton.

More broadly, the question surfaces as to why health care is so difficult for vast segments of the North Tulsa community?

The set of healthcare issues in the Black community has plagued Tulas for decades. Several official Tulsa agencies and reports have documented the dismal health circumstances and outcomes among the Black population in Tulsa.

The Tulsa Equality Indicators, an analysis of the status of conditions in the city commissioned annually by the city, have regularly reported the disparities. The most recent Equality Indicators pinpointed the most pressing health issues affecting Black Tulsans: infant mortality, premature retirement death, cardiovascular disease, and a lack of health insurance disproportionately affecting Black Tulsans. The recently released City of Tulsa Neighborhood Conditions and Index also corroborates poor underlying circumstances in North Tulsa, in particular, that affect health outcomes. The Oklahoma Eagle has reported on food insecurity, reduced post-pandemic assistance programs, concentrations of poverty, and a lack of health insurance among African Americans in Tulsa that contribute to poor health outcomes.

The lack of health insurance among many Black Tulsans is a big part of the problem. Oklahoma’s SoonerCare (Medicaid) has been a primary healthcare insurance provider for people experiencing poverty, disproportionately minorities, since Oklahoma voters mandated the program in 2021. In 2023, Oklahoma and other states were required to recertify eligibility after a relaxation of participation during the pandemic. Over 300,000 participants lost health insurance, according to reports by the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. This included over 8,000 African Americans and thousands of children in Tulsa County from information provided to the Eagle

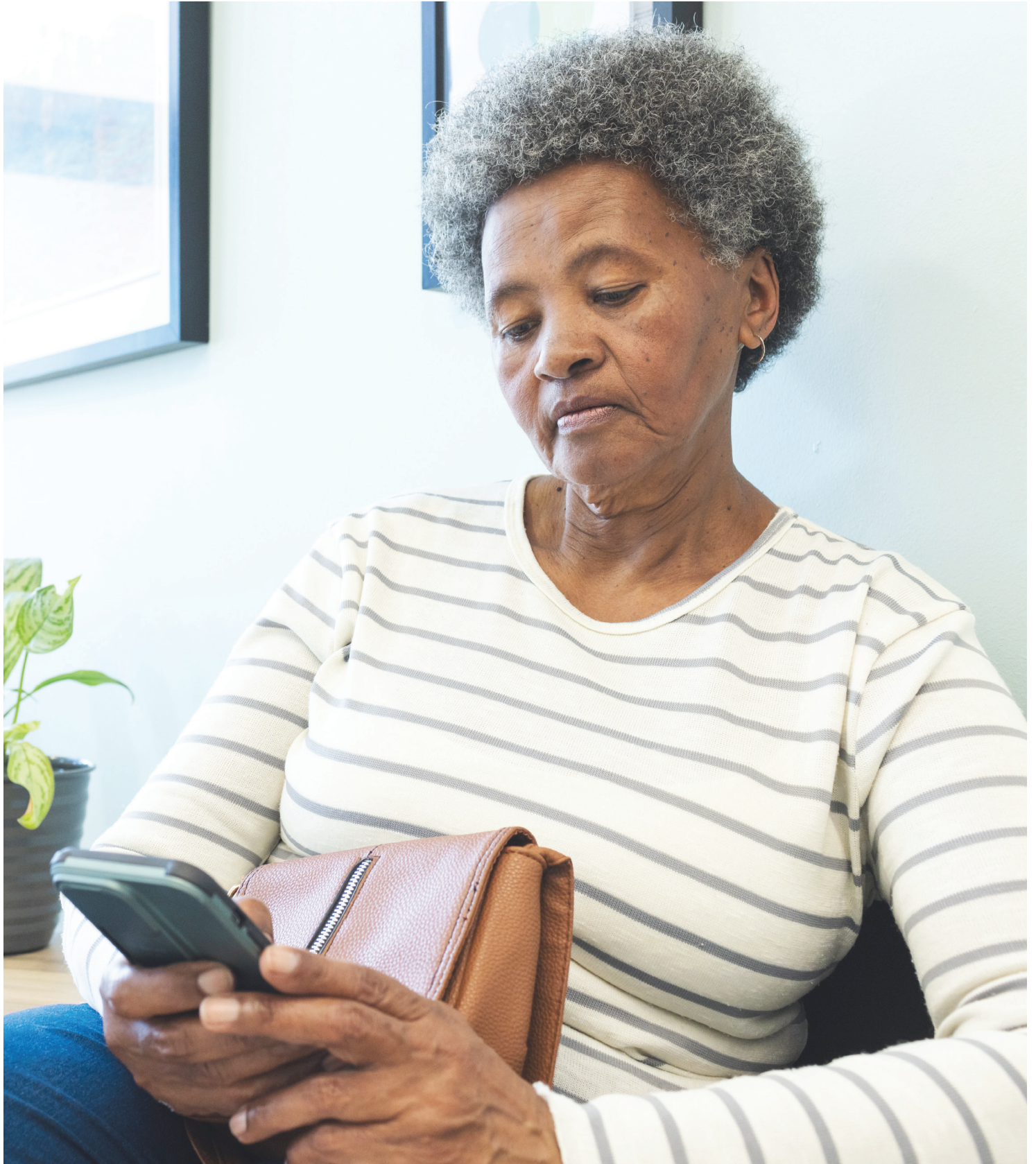


PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

“The decision was no reflection of the care we have been providing to the Tulsa community.”

DR. JABRAAN PASHA, Juno Medical-Tulsa’s executive director

by the agency. While specific numbers are not available for North Tulsa, where nearly 30,000 African Americans reside, thousands lost health insurance in the past year.

The health challenges facing Blacks are by no means unique to Tulsa.

The Oklahoma Health Care Authority also recognizes these disparate healthcare outcomes across the state. In 1994, the Authority created a particular office “to improve the outcomes of people of racial and ethnic minority groups that are underserved due to poor access to health care resources.”

The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) has documented a massive disparity in a wide range of diseases that afflict and shorten the lives of the African American population. The CDC cites a “growing body of research which shows that centuries of racism in this country has had a profound and negative effect” on the health of African Americans and other people of color. The CDC lists among diseases more likely to occur in the Black population: diabetes, hypertension, obesity, asthma, and heart disease. These and other disorders shorten Black life expectancy by at least several years compared to white counterparts.

When the Juno clinic opened in June 2023, it promised to help North Tulsans address their health needs. And, by many accounts, the clinic met expectations. Patients reported easy access and manageable fees. Patient satisfaction clocked in at 95 percent, according to Pasha – remarkable for any healthcare facility.

Other healthcare facilities in North Tulsa also offer a gamut of services to the community. They include Morton Comprehensive Health Services, Crossover Health Services at 36th, Westview Medical Center, and OU Health Physicians

Wayman Tisdale Clinic. (See box below for detailed info)

Morton as an option for North Tulsans Morton, whose headquarters is in the middle of North Tulsa, at 1334 North Lansing, is a viable option for North Tulsans.

Morton offers a wide range of services, including:

- Primary Care: Routine check-ups, management of chronic conditions, vaccinations, and preventive care.
- Dental Care: Dental exams, cleanings, fillings, extractions, and other dental procedures.
- Behavioral Health Services: Counseling, therapy, and psychiatric services.
- Women’s Health: Gynecological exams, prenatal care, family planning, and reproductive health services.
- Pediatrics: Well-child check-ups, vaccinations, and pediatric care.
- Specialty Care: Depending on availability and partnerships, dermatology, cardiology, and others may be offered.
- Pharmacy Services: Dispensing of medications, medication management, and counseling.
- Laboratory Services: Blood tests, urinalysis, and other diagnostic tests.
- Radiology Services: X-rays, ultrasounds, and other imaging services.

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Savage identified the top ailments that Morton treats: diabetes, obesity, COPD, heart disease, and related hypertension and high cholesterol.

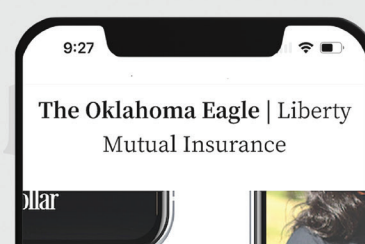
But she also emphasized that Morton views itself as an entire service facility for all a patient’s needs. “In addition to treating the medical

Cont. A6

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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



James Edward Stewart: Civil Rights Advocate

By HANNAH D. ATKINS, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



A leader in the Oklahoma City, state, and national Civil Rights movement, James Edward Stewart worked very closely with Roscoe Dunjee, editor and publisher of the Black Dispatch, a weekly Oklahoma City newspaper. The son of Zena Thomas Stewart and Mary Magdeline Fegalee Stewart, James Edward was born on September 6, 1912, in Plano, Texas. He had one half-brother, Alfred, and two half-sisters, Ella and Johnnie. The family moved to Oklahoma in 1916. Stewart's father died in 1920, leaving James to assist in supporting the family. Stewart attended Orchard Park Elementary School and later Douglass High School. There he and noted author Ralph Ellison both played in the band and became close friends.

In 1928 Jimmy Stewart and his mother moved to Wichita, Kansas. He enrolled in the tenth grade at Wichita High School East, and he transferred the next year to Wichita High School North. In September 1931 he entered the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University). After attending only one year, he moved to Oklahoma City. Stewart married Mae Belle Hayes in 1932 and parented a son. The couple were divorced in 1934. Stewart later married Mae Lois Layne on May 12, 1942, and to this union were

born two children.

In Oklahoma City Stewart found work at various hotels and clubs as waiter and custodian. After connecting with publisher Roscoe Dunjee, he began writing a weekly column, "Jimmy Says," for the Black Dispatch. Because he was acquainted with a top official at Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, Stewart gained employment as a janitor in June 1937; in September 1940 he was named manager of the company's eastside office Northeast Fourth Street. During World War II he volunteered for the U.S. Marines in 1943 and was assigned to the Fifty-first Defense Battalion. He achieved the rank of steward first class and was discharged honorably in December 1945. In 1976 he was appointed vice president of Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, and he served in that capacity until his retirement in September 1977.

Very active in the Civil Rights movement, Stewart served as president of the Oklahoma City branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as of the state chapter. He served on the NAACP national board for eight three-year terms. Through his work with Dunjee and the Black Dispatch, his outreach extended across the state and nation. In July 1982 Stewart was elected chairman of the Oklahoma City

Urban Renewal Authority. In 1984 Gov. George Nigh appointed him to the State Narcotics and Controlled Drug Commission. He was president of Oklahomans for Progress, which was dedicated to the elimination of inequities based on race.

Jimmy Stewart's record of public service brought him many awards. In 1975 he received the Service to Mankind award from the Sertoma Club of Oklahoma City and in 1976 accepted the Golden Plate award from the NAACP. In 1980 a section of Northeast Fourth Street was named James E. Stewart Industrial Park. He was inducted into the Afro-American Hall of Fame by the Ntu Art Association (located at the Kirkpatrick Center in Oklahoma City) and in 1986 into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. In 1994 Stewart was given the Pathmaker Award by the Oklahoma County Historical Society. The Oklahoma Parks and Recreation Department named a golf course for him at Northeast Tenth Street and Martin Luther King, Jr., Avenue. In 1997 he was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame.

A loyal and active member of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, James E. Stewart died on April 13, 1997, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

JIMMY STEWART, Ralph Ellison, and Herbert Ellison (23157.104, Jimmy Stewart Collection, OHS).

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Featured Last Week



Following the passing of Nex Benedict, serious questions linger



State Schools Face New Student Test Standards: TPS 'Not There Yet'



School Board Candidates Are Seeking Your Vote: Crucial Election

The Oklahoma Eagle

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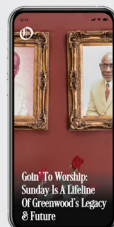
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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

TPS

Tulsa Public Schools *reckoning is imminent* Hundreds of Targeted Students Must Test Better in April

John Neal
The Oklahoma Eagle

Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Ebony Johnson is pulling out all the stops to improve the academic achievement scores of Tulsa students in the state testing that is scheduled to take place in April. In February, the Oklahoma State Board of Education formally adopted new rules setting minimum standards for student test performance. The board's apparent objective is to sanction the TPS school district if it fails.

Johnson told both OSBE and Tulsa Public Schools Board of Education in late February and March meetings that based on internal testing measures student test scores have been "mostly flat" over the last few months. Her current forecast is that at least 700 Tulsa students must improve their scores to "Basic or above" in English Language Arts (reading) tests to comply with State "board orders" issued in November.

Following OSBE's meeting last month, Superintendent Johnson said TPS was "not there yet," and she could not give the local district board additional encouragement on student progress. She reported that internal testing of economically disadvantaged students in grades 3-5, from fall to winter, had increased less than a percentage point and fell well short of expectations.

"I'm just going to call that out and say that gave us pause," Johnson told the TPS board, referring to the state-mandated testing goals.

At a TPS board meeting on March 4, 2024, Johnson requested spending an additional \$1.5 million "to ensure TPS is receiving every available resource as it prepares for state testing in the spring." The board approved the request. The funding will allow the deployment of up to 125 "advanced" certified teachers with premium overtime pay to instruct or help others

Following OSBE's meeting last month, Superintendent Johnson said TPS was "not there yet," and she could not give the local district board additional encouragement on student progress

teach English Language Arts. Fifty percent of students in grades 3 through 8 and 11 must test basic or above in the Oklahoma State Testing Program (OSTP) beginning April 15, or TPS will receive an "academic deficiency" under the new state rule.

In separate interviews with The Oklahoma Eagle, David Blatt, director of Research and Strategic Impact for Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, and Darryl Bright, founder of Citizens United for a Better Education System (CUBES), said they consider the rule flawed and the Oklahoma state board's expectations unreasonable. In their view, Tulsa Public Schools faces impossible odds to avoid further disciplinary action, including the possibility of state takeover of the local school district.

TPS efforts

And yet, TPS Superintendent Johnson has deployed a wide array of programs and efforts to meet student testing mandates and other requirements imposed uniquely on Tulsa schools in November. Johnson recently told the local board that the district is focusing on the grades that will be tested in April and that "the work has never been more urgent."

Here are a few of the efforts Johnson has launched:

- Changes in district and school administrative staff, and movement of teachers and district office professionals to poor-performing schools.
- Special student and teacher digital training modules, augmented with high dosage tutoring programs for students and Science of Learning training for teachers and administrators.
- Realigning district goals and testing to match State Board mandates better.

- Development of Individual Achievement Plans for students.
- Professional Learning Academy for teachers.
- Family outreach programs.

Among the obstacles TPS faces are the following:

- Chronic student absenteeism exceeds 40 percent of all students.
- Large numbers and continued influx of English language learners.
- Teachers with emergency certificates, novice teachers, and teachers with absences.
- Enrollment of newcomers, 80-100 a week, who typically test poorly.
- A high percentage of economically disadvantaged whose conditions of poverty are highly correlated with poor academic achievement.

Blatt told the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) and The Oklahoma Eagle that basing accreditation standards on student assessment data "is myopic, harmful and misguided." He formally challenged the new rule in person and in written commentary in February on behalf of the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. The Oklahoma Eagle conducted its interview with Blatt on March 7.

In his testimony, Blatt asserted the success of a school cannot be measured on reliance on any single type of indicator. Even the state grade card uses multiple measurements. Blatt also told The Oklahoma Eagle the rule was "not rooted" in any science-based information but rather a "round number they [OSDE] think people will swallow." He added, "Ryan Walters is pushing us back into a trap that distorts the education system."



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

The state of health care

Innovative healthcare solutions long overdue

From A3

condition, we also work to get them directed again, and they have to decide they want to do this but to be part of their health care. We are what's called a patient-centered medical home. What that means is when you come in for services, you're going to be asked if you register as a patient, not only what is your immediate issue but what are your goals for your health care?"

Morton operates six clinics, including branches in East and West Tulsa and a location in downtown Tulsa, servicing Tulsa's homeless population. The center, recognizing the transport challenges many Tulsans face, also offers a transport service for patients.

While Morton is engaged in outreach programs throughout North Tulsa and elsewhere in the city, Savage acknowledged some misperceptions about the facility linger in North Tulsa. Kevyn Bagby, Morton's Director of Community Outreach, has received feedback from across North Tulsa. Savage says, "What she hears constantly is Oh, Morton, you take insurance? Oh, we didn't think of you. We thought you only saw uninsured people or didn't take any insurance. Oh, Morton, you're a free clinic? Oh, you don't have the quality providers that somebody else does. So some of that comes from misinformation from his maybe

North Tulsa Health Care Organizations

Organization	Address	Telephone No.	Hours of operation	Website
Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma	2450 N. Harvard Avenue	(918) 949-4873	Daily: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	www.cceok.org
Crossover Health Services	940 E. 36th Street N.	(918) 398-9460	Daily: 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.	www.crossoverhealthservices.org
Morton Comprehensive Health Services	1334 N. Lansing Avenue	(918) 587-2171	Daily: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Thursday (Extended hours): 5:30 p.m. - 7 p.m. Saturday: 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.	www.mortonhealth.org
Tulsa County Health Department North Regional Health and Wellness Center	5635 Martin Luther King Boulevard	(918) 582-9355	Daily: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.	www.tulsa-health.org
University of Oklahoma Wayman Tisdale Specialty Clinic	591 E. 36th Street	(918) 619-8700	Daily: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.	www.ouhealth.com
Warren Clinic North Peoria	1216 E. Apache Street	(918) 340-5930	Daily: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.	www.saintfrancis.com/location/warren-clinic-north-peoria
Westview Medical Clinic	3606 Martin Luther King Blvd.	(918) 425-1960	Daily: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.	www.westviewmedicalcenter.com

The information provided above, regarding North Tulsa, Oklahoma Health Care organizations and facilities, was sourced from available public data and organization web domains. Readers are encouraged to contact the noted organizations and facilities to confirm addresses, operating hours and web domains.

historic attitudes? I don't know."

Getting out in North Tulsa and providing detailed information about Morton's offers is a big part of Savage's agenda. "We spend a lot of time trying to say what we do so that people know they have choices," Savage told the Eagle.

Will Juno return?

A month after undergoing heart surgery, Pearcey is on the road to recovery. Despite Juno's closing, Pasha said the former Juno staff say they are committed to helping North Tulsans address their healthcare needs.

"The desire and need for innovative and community-focused healthcare on Greenwood is more apparent than ever," said a statement on social media signed by Pasha and Dr. Leah Upton, a Tulsa-based physician who had helped run the clinic.

"Our team is exploring all options to reopen. We remain optimistic a solution that's best for our community will be reached."

GARY LEE is a native Tulsan who was born in Moton Hospital in north Tulsa (the forerunner to Morton) and received all of his early healthcare there. He believes that access to good healthcare should be a fundamental right for all Tulsans.

TPS

Tulsans stand as a civic vanguard against dismantling DEI and racist curriculum

From A5

An Oklahoma Appleseed analysis found 62 Oklahoma school districts that would be subject to academic deficiencies based on 2023 student test scores. The average low-performing district had 78% of its students being economically disadvantaged. These districts included TPS, which has a nearly identical number of low-income, poverty-level students.

Blatt contends Walters' threats to "shake up the status quo" with district penalties will not help struggling schools succeed. Instead, as Blatt told The Oklahoma Eagle, "State education leaders should focus on supporting districts and act to make serious investments in education."

Darryl Bright, education advocate

North Tulsa's Darryl Bright had a similar perspective. "Ryan Walters is no clown. He knows exactly what he is doing."

As founder of CUBES, Bright has chronicled Tulsa Public School's education system for over three decades. He and fellow CUBES members developed a 300-page tract setting forth reforms for TPS based on the "African-American Child's Academic Experience."

Bright lauds Superintendent Johnson for her efforts, particularly after Walters said following

The average low-performing Oklahoma school district noted that 78% of its students were economically disadvantaged.

Oklahoma Appleseed analysis



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Johnson's first presentation to the State Board, "TPS's efforts had not been good enough." He sees Walters' effort as part of a broader right-wing ideologue attack on public education. Bright cites motives to get rid of the "woke" culture, dismantle Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs, and move the racist PragerU curriculum to the mainstream.

More specifically, Bright criticizes standards imposed on TPS to accomplish in "three to four months, which require three to four years." Bright believes Walters' "undemocratic" goals include ultimately taking over the Tulsa local school district, similar to what happened in Houston. He cites Walters' and the State Board's need for more resolve to tackle the state's poor

ratings.

In conclusion, he said: "What is he (Walters) doing to address these? Where have they been? They have no vision."

JOHN NEAL, the author, is a former resident of Sand Springs. He is well versed in urban renewal, its uses and abuse, as a former city manager in Oklahoma and departmental consultant for the city of El Paso, Texas. In 2008, he was that city's planning director when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.

Oklahoma Evictions

Oklahoma Evicted: Thousands of Civil Filings Linger in Records Forever

Heather Warlick
Oklahoma Watch

Cory Johnson waited for his turn on the February 14 evictions docket at the Oklahoma County Courthouse. His 11-year-old daughter, Hazyl, tried to get comfortable on a hard wooden bench, resting her head on his shoulder, his arm, his lap. Johnson had to pick up Hazyl from school and bring her to court because she felt sick.

From health problems to car problems, utility cut-offs and other emergencies, sometimes rent money just isn't there, Johnson said.

"Things happen, you know, where other things come up," he said.

His was one of 83 cases on the day's docket.

In Oklahoma, more than 48,200 eviction cases like Johnson's were filed in 2023, 17,868 of which were in Oklahoma County, Shelterwell data shows.

In a typical year, landlords file 3.6 million eviction cases in the United States, according to The Eviction Lab at Princeton University. That means that every four minutes, someone is served with an eviction notice in the United States, according to The Network for Public Health Law.

Evictions hurt the country's poorest citizens by adding obstacles to finding new housing, especially during the current nationwide affordable housing crisis. Housing instability can lead to homelessness and can affect people's prospects for education, employment, health and family stability.

In Oklahoma, most eviction records remain publicly available indefinitely unless they are sealed or expunged by a judge. Even eviction filings that were dismissed in favor of the tenant, filed mistakenly or wrongfully, or were discriminatory, remain available to the public; most are easily retrieved via the internet.

Johnson said he was late on rent several times, but he always got it paid, plus late fees. His landlord finally lost patience. This wasn't Johnson's first eviction. He said he's even been homeless at times, staying in shelters with his two children.

"If an eviction's still on your record, you know, it's very hard to find places to move," Johnson said.

He said he wishes evictions could be removed from his record.

Scarlet Letter E

When someone is evicted in Oklahoma, the case file is a public record and remains viewable to the public, a stigma many organizations call The Scarlet Letter E.

Evictions can create or contribute to a host of problems including poverty, generational trauma, job instability, family separation and legal issues, Shelterwell said on its website.

"Eviction has been linked to worse physical and mental health outcomes in certain regions," said Jacob Haas, a senior research specialist at Eviction Lab. "So when you talk about the Scarlet Letter E of eviction, kind of following a family around, it really does happen in a lot of cases. It really does make housing much



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

harder to find for certain families."

The Scarlet Letter E is a nationwide problem that does discriminate. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, households of color are more likely than white households to have an eviction filed against them. Black women are at the highest risk, with one in every five evicted during her lifetime.

Families with children and low incomes are also disproportionately affected by evictions, the coalition reported.

In 2016, The Eviction Lab named Oklahoma City as the 20th worst

in the country for its high number of evictions. Since then, eviction numbers have climbed by about 27%, the group's data showed. Tulsa ranked worse for evictions than Oklahoma City at number 11.

Reasons to Evict

Many evictions are filed because renters simply didn't pay their rent for months. Some evictions occur because renters broke their lease agreements by having a pet or an unapproved roommate, said Richard Klinge, director of the pro bono Housing Eviction Legal Assistance Program at Oklahoma

City University School of Law.

Lawyers from Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma confirmed that a renter can be as little as one month late on rent for an eviction to be filed.

If a tenant doesn't pay for their housing, even for short periods, it puts landlords in a financial bind, said Oklahoma City Property Manager Ed Keeler. That is especially true for landlords who remain patient for months before filing evictions.

Some people are evicted because they withheld rent, with the belief that until the landlord fixed problems in their rental, they weren't legally required to pay. A process for

withholding rent exists, but most renters don't follow the proper steps, Klinge said.

As written, he said, the Oklahoma Residential Landlord and Tenant Act condones the landlords' failures to make repairs and to provide fit and habitable residential premises.

"After handling almost 2,200 cases in the last five years, I am convinced that until the duty to pay rent and the duty to repair are made dependent and not independent duties, tenants will continue to be exploited by landlords under the (law) as it exists today," Klinge said.

Some evictions are accidental filings, such as when a landlord files against the wrong tenant, said Teresa Webster, Statewide Director of Litigation for Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, Inc., an organization that provides free legal services to people facing evictions.

And some evictions are discriminatory, Webster said, which can result in federal discrimination cases.

One such case Webster handled in a rural Oklahoma court involved a landlord who evicted a tenant because she had a pet, a violation of the rental agreement. The tenant had health issues causing problems with balancing, and the dog, a pit bull, was strong enough for her to lean on for support. Since the woman had a disability and the dog was a registered service animal, the eviction amounted to discrimination, Webster said.

However, many landlords evict rarely or never, Haas said.

"Year after year, it's a small concentration of buildings and landlords that really disproportionately drive eviction activity within an area," he said.

Off Their Records

A sealed record is removed from the public's access and restrictions are placed regarding who can access the eviction record. An expunged record is completely erased as if it never happened.

These tenant protections can be passed either through the legislative process or through executive orders and policies.

In some states, eviction records can be expunged or sealed from the records of the tenants who were evicted. Recognizing the enormity of the eviction problem, at least nine states and the District of Columbia have enacted sealing or expungement protections for tenants, the Coalition wrote in its Eviction Record Sealing and Expungement Toolkit.

Oklahoma is not one of those states

California and Colorado, in contrast, allow automatic sealing of eviction filings as soon as a lawsuit has been filed. Other states, such as Indiana and Minnesota, allow a tenant to apply to have their record sealed or expunged after a judge's decision has been delivered. Some cities, such as Philadelphia, have enacted their own rules that enable tenants to seek expungement or sealing of their records, under strict guidelines.

"In some of those areas, like

Cont. A8

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Oklahoma Evictions

Oklahoma courts are *reluctant to seal or expunge eviction records*



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A7

Philadelphia for example, that have taken eviction seriously as an issue, we have seen sustained lower eviction filing rates relative to what we were seeing prior to the pandemic,” Haas said.

Oklahoma and Open Records

Oklahoma courts are reluctant to seal or expunge eviction records, favoring the public’s right to know against a tenant’s ability to move on from their financial problems.

“Eviction records, like the vast majority of court records, are subject to the Open Records Act,” wrote Renée Troxell, trial court administrator of the Oklahoma County District Court, in an email to Oklahoma Watch. “As such, no judge from any Oklahoma county can seal the entire case.”

If a renter wants to have an eviction partially sealed, they face a heavy burden of proof to show why their request for sealing outweighs the public’s right to know what is happening in courts, Troxell said.

Maintaining transparency in our nation’s courts is an important cornerstone of American democracy. But the problem of evictions has created a compelling reason to examine Oklahoma policies and the prospects of sealing some eviction records, which some lawmakers are working toward implementing.

For the 2024 Oklahoma legislative session, Rep. Amanda Swope, D-Tulsa, introduced House Bill 2121, which would allow sealing eviction filings from public view beginning three years after the judgment has been entered.

Other lawmakers have proposed lengthening the amount of time between being served an eviction notice and attending a court hearing and new rules meant to forbid retaliation-motivated evictions.

“I think we really do need, in Oklahoma, maybe some compulsory laws that provide for automatic sealing (of eviction records) under certain circumstances,” Webster said.

H.B. 2121 Would allow sealing eviction filings from public view beginning three years after the judgment has been entered.

Introduced by Rep. Amanda Swope,
D-Tulsa

Some Criminal Charges Easier to Shake

Evictions are civil cases, usually handled in small claims courts. The official term used in civil court for an eviction is forcible entry and detainer. Compared to the relative ease of expunging certain criminal cases, evictions may seem unduly difficult to move past.

In Oklahoma, it’s possible to expunge many criminal records that put the public at significant safety risk.

Misdemeanor charges of DUI and Actual Physical Control of a vehicle while under the influence of an illegal substance can be expunged permanently if a judge’s requirements are met.

According to the Mothers Against Drunk Driving Oklahoma Offices, in October, 2023, 317 DUI cases were heard in Oklahoma County Criminal Court. Of those, 40% resulted in deferred or delayed sentences. According to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigations, in these deferred or delayed sentences, when the person has never been convicted of a felony and no other misdemeanor or felony charges are pending against the person, after one year since the charge was dismissed or reduced, the record can be expunged.

It’s not clear how many of those cases were expunged because, by their nature, they disappear from public records and expungement data is not recorded.

Suggestions for Renters’ Rights

After eviction moratoriums ended following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Biden administration introduced, on Jan. 25, 2023, a Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights. The Blueprint includes suggestions to reduce the high number of evictions and ease the negative effects that can stem from evictions when they occur.

The Blueprint’s fifth principle, Eviction Prevention, Diversion, and Relief, offers sealing eviction records under certain circumstances as

one of several components that could minimize the long-term effects evictions can have on evicted families’ well-being, such as problems being approved for housing, finding jobs and the potential of becoming homeless.

Judges in some rural Oklahoma counties use their discretion more liberally in sealing evictions than judges in Oklahoma and Tulsa Counties. In these counties, Webster has been successful in helping some renters get their evictions sealed. Usually, those were erroneous evictions, accidental filings and discriminatory filings by landlords, Webster said.

“Even in cases where the court does not want to fully seal the record, under the Open Records Act, the court has discretion to partially seal the record,” Webster said.

If a record is partially sealed, identifying information about the tenant would potentially be redacted, though the filing and judgment would still exist in searchable court records.

“This ensures that the public can have access to the portions of the record that the court deems are important for the public to view, while protecting the interest of the party who seeks to have the record sealed,” Webster said.

Keeler said in some cases, an eviction should remain on a tenant’s record, such as when a tenant causes significant property damage. In other cases, it should not haunt a person’s record forever.

“Sometimes things happen that make paying rent hard,” Keeler said, while waiting in the courthouse to attend a hearing for an eviction he filed against a tenant. “I think there are times when an eviction should stay on your record, and times when it could be sealed.”

HEATHER WARLICK is a reporter covering evictions, housing and homelessness. Contact her at (405) 226-1915 or hwarlick@oklahomawatch.org.

Teacher Vacancies

Did an Oklahoma survey record the largest number of teacher vacancies in the 2022-23 school year since it began collecting records?

Sue Bin Park
Oklahoma Watch

There were 1,019 teaching vacancies in Oklahoma schools during the 2022-23 academic year, the highest number reported since the Oklahoma State School Boards Association began conducting its annual survey nine years prior.

Low salaries and poor working conditions have contributed to teacher shortages nationwide, although some states are faring worse than others. Oklahoma’s student-teacher ratio ranked 38 out of 50, according

to Scholaroo, which analyzed 2022-23 data.

To combat teacher shortages, schools are issuing emergency teaching certificates, which require a bachelor’s degree but no formal teaching experience or training. Oklahoma issued 4,676 certifications in 2023-24, breaking the previous year’s record of 4,574 certifications.

A 2023 state initiative offered sign-on bonuses of as much as \$50,000 to new and retired teachers with completed certifications. Candidates were required to commit to teaching in Oklahoma for five years to receive the full bonus. □



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Foster Family Shortage

Oklahoma's Foster Family Shortage Forces Children From Their Communities

Whitney Bryen
Oklahoma Watch

Kaitlin Davis recently drove four hours round trip from Lawton to Guthrie to check on a 6-year-old girl who was recovering from the flu and visit with her foster parents about how to ease her into upcoming visits with her dad.

A week earlier, Davis drove more than three hours round trip to visit a 12-year-old boy who is receiving treatment at Integris Mental Health in Spencer.

And two days before that, Davis drove nine hours to and from Idabel to discuss college plans with an unusually hygienic teenager who had just turned 17. They celebrated his birthday with Braum's ice cream sundaes and a new pack of deodorant.

As a child welfare worker, Davis is responsible for 15 children who were removed from their homes in Comanche County because of abuse or neglect and placed in the care of families across the state. Only three of the children under her watch remained in Comanche County where Davis lives, which means she spends most of her workdays on the road checking on the other 12.

Without enough foster families to support the more than 5,100 children in Oklahoma's child welfare system, many children are moved hours from their homes, increasing the strain on youth, foster parents, case workers and families trying to regain custody.

One-third of Oklahoma children in foster care were moved to homes or group facilities at least two counties away, according to January data provided by the Department of Human Services.

Long-distance placements make it more difficult for youths in foster care to see their

Without enough foster families to support the more than 5,100 children in Oklahoma's child welfare system, many children are moved hours from their homes, increasing the strain on youth, foster parents, case workers and families trying to regain custody.

siblings and hinder parents who are working to reunite with their children. Caseworkers responsible for up to 17 children spend hours, sometimes an entire workday, driving across the state to check on a single child. Foster families, especially in rural communities, face more time in the car driving children to and from appointments with medical or behavioral health specialists.

In some counties, children in need of foster care outpace families willing to take them in, forcing child welfare workers to seek help elsewhere. In Beckham County, 37 children were in need of safe housing, according to the January data. Only 26 beds were available.

In Tulsa County, there were 47 more children in need of temporary housing than available placements, the data showed.

Even if a space is available nearby, state-approved families are not obligated to accept children. Teenagers, siblings and youth with disabilities or severe trauma are the hardest to house, said Sherry Skinner, director of business operations for Child Welfare Services.

Skinner said the number of children in foster care is the state's lowest on record. But the need for foster homes is as dire as ever.

"We're not at the same crisis level we were when we had 14,000 kids," Skinner said. "But clearly it's not perfect or we wouldn't have separated siblings or kids placed out of county."

Sherri Wing Marsico oversees 70 volunteers who acted as advocates for children from Cleveland, McClain and Garvin Counties placed in foster care. The Court Appointed Special Advocates are paired with a child or siblings and required to visit them in person at least once per month.

A state map hangs on the wall in Marisco's office with push pins noting where each of the 134 children was placed. More than half were placed outside of the three-county region they're from and where the volunteers still live.

One red pin is on the eastern border near the Arkansas state line, three hours from Marisco's Norman office. Another is two hours north, near Ponca City. Small clusters are in Lawton and Tulsa. Two and a half hours southeast is another pin in a small town near Durant.

Last year, Marisco's volunteers drove more than 31,000 miles to visit children across the state.

Challenges Abound for Foster Parents

Public defender Kelley Feldhake oversees all child welfare cases in Tulsa. She's also a foster mom.

Feldhake took in a 17-year-old client who was living in a Tulsa group home. After two months, the teenager moved to a group home in Lawton where she could receive regular counseling and other support.

It was the first time the girl had been three hours from home and from her best friend, Jackson, Feldhake said.

"She has just not been the same since moving to Lawton and not getting to see Jackson," Feldhake said. "She does not have a relationship with her parents and he was her stability factor. When she was here, I think there was something in her head that was like, 'I can get him if I need to,' but that was gone."

Two months later, the teenager ran away from the facility, hopped a Greyhound bus to Tulsa and went straight to Jackson's house.

Before Feldhake took in two Tulsa brothers in May, state workers struggled to find them a home. Child welfare workers asked a former foster family in Hulbert to take them and the 5- and 12-year-old were moved to a farm more than an hour and a half away from their mother.

"As soon as these kids are placed far away where visitation is decreased or is non-existent,

Cont. A11



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Detainees, Subpar Care

Subpar Care Led to Cleveland County *Detainee's Death*, Federal Lawsuit Claims

Keaton Ross
Oklahoma Watch

Cleveland County Detention Center staff recklessly disregarded Shannon Hanchett's constitutional rights and contributed to her in-custody death amid a mental health crisis, a federal lawsuit filed on Jan. 25 claimed.

The Cleveland County Sheriff's Office, Turn Key Health Clinics and three medical professionals who cared for Shannon Hanchett in the days leading up to her death are named as defendants in the lawsuit, which seeks relief and punitive damages over \$75,000. Tulsa civil rights attorney Daniel Smolen filed the lawsuit on behalf of Daniel Hanchett, Shannon Hanchett's widower, in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma.

Shannon Hanchett, a mother of two who was 38 at the time of her death, ran a bakery in downtown Norman and was affectionately known as the Cookie Queen. A Norman police officer arrested her at an AT&T store on Nov. 26, 2022, on a complaint of misdemeanor obstruction and false reporting.

The officer stated in the arrest report that Hanchett suffered from a mental health disorder. During booking, Shannon Hanchett told jail staff she suffered from bipolar disorder and lupus but refused to answer further questions.

Shannon Hanchett's physical and mental

health deteriorated rapidly after being booked into the jail, the lawsuit claims, noting that medical staff did not evaluate her for more than 72 hours after arriving at the jail and did not administer any psychotropic medications. She was observed on multiple occasions lying naked on her cell floor in a catatonic state.

While medical staff reported that Hanchett displayed suicidal ideation and was severely dehydrated, jailers routinely missed 15-minute sight checks required under state law.

"It was abundantly clear that Ms. Hanchett was suffering from a condition that could not be, and was not being, adequately treated in a correctional setting," the lawsuit reads.

On Dec. 7, licensed professional nurse Natasha Kariuki took Hanchett's vital signs and recorded blood pressure of 88/52, meeting the medical definition of hypotension. The lawsuit alleges Kariuki's failure to report the low blood pressure to a higher-level provider constitutes negligence and deliberate indifference.

Several hours later, jail staff found Hanchett unresponsive on the floor of her jail cell. Resuscitation efforts were unsuccessful and she was pronounced dead about 1 a.m. on Dec. 8, 2022. She was scheduled for a mental health assessment eight hours later.

A state medical examiner's autopsy report determined Shannon Hanchett died

of heart failure with significant contributing factors of psychosis with auditory and visual hallucinations and severe dehydration. The lawsuit claims Turn Key Health Clinics' contract with the sheriff's office disincentivized staff from seeking more urgent care.

"Turn Key was responsible to pay just \$40,000 per year for over-the-counter prescriptions and pharmaceuticals and \$50,000 for off-site medical services," the lawsuit reads. "These financial incentives create risks to the health and safety of inmates like Ms. Hanchett who have complex and serious medical and mental health needs."

Representing the Cleveland County Sheriff's Office, attorney Jessica Dark wrote that the plaintiffs failed to show evidence of a pattern of failures. She stated courts have frequently rejected efforts to hold government officials liable based only on allegations of single or infrequent prior incidents.

"A complaint alleging negligence in diagnosing or treating a medical condition does not become a valid constitutional claim of medical mistreatment simply because the victim is an inmate," Dark wrote in the motion to dismiss the filing submitted on Feb. 26.

Through their attorney, Meiliani C. Kaaihue, Kariuki and licensed professional counselor Diana Myles-Henderson claim they provided a level of care consistent

with Hanchett's symptoms, which included contacting Griffin Memorial Hospital personnel for a mental health assessment. They stated she was observed at least 10 times by five different medical providers during her jail stay.

"Simply, Plaintiff disagrees with the care and treatment that was provided to Ms. Hanchett alleging such was inadequate and negligent," the motion to dismiss filing reads. "However, as outlined by the multitudinous authorities above, these claims are not actionable."

U.S. District Judge Scott L. Palk is presiding over the case. A hearing date on the matter is pending. In March 2023, Cleveland County commissioners voted to increase medical and mental health staff at the jail following the December 2022 deaths of Shannon Hanchett and Noble grandmother Kathryn Milano, both of whom were awaiting mental health evaluations. After the vote, county Commissioner Rod Cleveland said the move was in response to the jail's growing population, not the in-custody deaths.

KEATON ROSS covers democracy and criminal justice for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or Kross@Oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter at [@KeatonRoss](https://twitter.com/KeatonRoss).



PHOTOS ADOBE IMAGES

Foster Family Shortage

New foster families are needed in every county

From A9

the parents' progress takes a nosedive," Feldhake said. "The parents need to see their kids and be reminded, 'this is why I'm working so hard for this.' And the kids definitely are more traumatized when they cannot maintain that bond. That contact with their parents is healing for these kids."

The boys' case worker offered to drive their mother to Hulbert to see them but she refused. In her mind, this was the person who had taken her kids from her and she didn't want to spend three hours in a car with them, Feldhake said. Their mother refused the offers and said she would find her own transportation. But she never did. Her rights were terminated.

The 5-year-old had a severe speech impediment but there were no services near Hulbert to help him, Feldhake said. When the brothers came to live with her, Feldhake said she couldn't understand him and had to ask his brother to translate.

Foster Family Turnover is High

New foster families are needed in every county, Skinner said. But even more important than recruiting new families is supporting and

Within a year of being approved, nearly 40% of Oklahoma's foster families close their homes to children in need of care.

retaining those who are already approved.

Extensive background checks, home inspections and parenting classes are part of the months-long process the state Department of Human Services requires before families are approved to take in children.

Within a year of being approved, nearly 40% of Oklahoma's foster families close their homes to children in need of care. Only 8% of families are still caring for foster kids, or willing to do so, after five years.

Some families close their homes because they had children of their own or adopted a child they were fostering, Skinner said. For an increasing number of families, caring for a child who was taken from their home was harder than they expected, prompting families to reconsider, she said.

Programs supporting parents at risk of losing their children are shrinking the population of youth in foster care, Skinner said. But those programs support the department's easier cases, leaving foster families to care for children with the highest needs.

"It's like parenting on steroids," Feldhake said. "It's absolutely difficult and hard."

The imbalance of foster families willing or able to care for the state's most vulnerable children means keeping youths in their

communities is becoming more arduous.

For Davis, who has two young children of her own, that means missing more dinners and bedtime stories. But Davis said she's willing to make the sacrifices needed to ensure the safety of all of the children who rely on her, not just her own.

"I spend a lot of time and focus on this job," Davis said. "I have a 3- and 8-year-old who would love it if I quit my job a long time ago. But you don't do this job for the money and I'm all in."

Ed. Notes: Go here to learn about becoming a foster parent. This story was done in collaboration with StateImpact reporter Hannah France.

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.

Court Fines and Fees Reform

Stitt Endorses *Court Fines and Fees Reform*

Keaton Ross
Oklahoma Watch

Legislative efforts to reduce financial burdens on criminal defendants seem to have momentum at the State Capitol.

In his State of State Address last Monday, Gov. Kevin Stitt urged lawmakers to limit court fines, fees and court costs to "only what is needed for restitution." The plea came as the governor lauded Oklahoma's success in reducing its prison population and improving its recidivism rate since he took office.

One proposal up for consideration this session, House Bill 3131 by Danny Williams, R-Seminole, would eliminate millions of dollars in executive agency fees levied on criminal defendants to support agencies like the Department of Public Safety and Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training.

State funding, a much more reliable revenue stream, would instead be used to supplement these agencies. Eliminating executive agency fees would have an annual fiscal impact of just over \$3 million, the Administrative Office of the Courts estimated last April.

Williams sponsored a similar bill last

session that is also eligible to be reconsidered this year. That measure cleared the House with just one no vote but stalled in the Senate.

Justice reform advocates have long criticized Oklahoma's court funding system as being inefficient and overly dependent on collections from low-income residents. Court fines and fees accounted for 66 to 90% of district court funding between 2007 and 2019, a Tulsa World analysis found. Failure to pay warrants and arrests can create a vicious cycle that is hard to rebound from, reform advocates argue.

Lawmakers have chipped away at the issue

in recent years. House Bill 2259 by Rep. Danny Sterling, R-Tecumseh and Sen. Brent Howard, R-Altus, requires judges to notify defendants of their financial obligations at the time of plea or sentencing and allow them to present evidence that they are indigent. Looking to decrease their reliance on collections, the Legislature boosted funding to district courts by 13% in Fiscal Year 2024.

I'll be keeping an eye on how proposals fare in committees in the coming weeks. Bills face a Feb. 29 deadline to advance out of committee from their chamber of origin. □

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Tuesday, March 19, 2024

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Contact Person: OMES PM: Druey Hall - druey.hall@omes.ok.gov

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By: Druey Hall
Project Manager, Construction & Properties Department

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

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MLK'S INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE:
A HIDDEN LEGACY A15

Gen-Z's Worries Over Student Debt Could Impact the 2024 Election



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Gen-Z Student Debt

Young Voters

who are mostly left out of President Biden's loan forgiveness efforts, want reform to help new borrowers.

A Generation Forgotten

Bria Overs
Word In Black

During the 2020 presidential campaign, Joe Biden promised sweeping action on student debt. His plan to cancel at least \$10,000 of loans for anyone making less than \$125,000 a year was popular with younger Americans. But it never came to pass: in 2023, the Supreme Court struck down Biden's executive order that would have made good on the campaign promise.

The decision from the highest court forced the administration to take a different approach. To date, Biden has canceled over \$138 billion in student debt for 3.9 million borrowers and announced a new path to achieving sweeping forgiveness last September.

These moves help many Millennials and some Gen-Xers who have been in repayment on their loans for 10 to 25 years. But unlike his original executive order, Biden's more narrow action on student debt has thus far left out Gen-Z entirely. Now, this year's presidential election could be swayed by young voters who are not only worried about their student debt but also lack optimism about their financial futures, job prospects, and the economy.

Born in and after 1997, the oldest Gen-

Zer is turning 27 this year. This generation includes 41 million potential voters — with 5.7 million Black young adults among them — who graduated from college within the last six years.

As of August 2023, 34% of adults between 18 and 29 have student loan debt, according to the Education Data Initiative. Student loan borrowers under 25 owe \$14,560 on average, and borrowers between 25 and 34 owe around \$32,950. An estimated 40% of Black graduates have student loan debt, averaging \$52,000.

In a December 2023 Morning Consult and Bloomberg poll, nearly 60% of Gen-Z voters said they somewhat or strongly supported Biden's efforts to cancel student loan debt. Yet, most still feel he isn't doing enough to address student loans.

"We're really only focusing on who has student debt now," says Mykail James, the finance educator behind The Bougie Budgeter. "But a lot of the younger folks that aren't in college right now or are preparing to go to college are in this place where they don't know what the landscape is."

According to James, who, at 28, is a very young millennial, Gen-Z wants to know: "What reform is actually happening for student loans before students apply or while they're in school?"

Cont. A15

Genetic Heart Disease

Breaking the Cycle: A Surgeon's Fight Against Genetic Heart Disease

Dr. William Cooper recounts a recent scare he had with heart disease and emphasizes the importance of genetic testing

Lentheus Chaney
Word In Black

William Cooper calls Atlanta home, a city located a two-hour flight away from Kansas City, where he contracts as a heart surgeon.

Cooper, a proud Kansas City Chiefs fan, displayed the team's logo on his jacket during our Zoom interview, just a week after the Chiefs' Super Bowl win.

Super Bowl Sunday, a day filled with excitement, included an unexpected visit to the emergency room for Cooper after he experienced chest pain.

Without hesitation, Cooper called a colleague and headed to the hospital. In the end, his tests came back negative for a

Cont. A15

Gen-Z Student Debt

Will they show up at the polls?



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A14

Month after month, the federal jobs reports indicate the country has a stable and growing economy. However, DeNora Getachew, CEO of the non-profit youth civic engagement organization DoSomething, says young people don't quite feel they are "living in a time where the opportunity for economic mobility and prosperity is as great as it was before."

And the restarting of payments on student loans after a three-year pause has not helped this generation feel more secure or ready for life after college. In a December survey, DoSomething members reported feeling worried about their financial situation or obligations. Those feelings applied to over a quarter of 18 to 21-year-olds, 35% of 22 to 25-year-olds, and 40% of those over 25.

The ability to find a good job is tied directly to feeling good about what's in their wallets or bank accounts. Yet, only 15% of respondents were confident they could attain well-paid work with benefits and reasonable hours in a place they could afford to live.

"People said that life in 2023 was the same as or worse economically than it was for them

in previous years," Getachew says. "That's because of student loan debt. That's because we spent much of 2023 waiting for a recession to come."

As for whether or not this group will show up at the polls this fall, Getachew wants to fight back against the long-standing narrative that young people don't vote. She notes this was already disproved in the 2022 midterms when youth voter turnout was 23% — lower than the 2018 midterms but higher than in 2014.

Biden's approval rating has slowly declined since February 2021 and is now down to 38%, according to Gallup. But at least half of Gen Z would vote for Joe Biden today, according to an Axios-Generation Lab survey of voters under 35.

"I think what we'll start seeing is younger folks calling for more politicians to keep their word," James says. "It feels like they're putting a band-aid on something that needs a whole reconstructive surgery. And that's why I'm calling for more of a full reformation of the entire system for all of our student loans. Not just the folks who have it now, but for those coming after." □

Genetic Heart Disease

Inspired by the loss of his mother from pancreatic cancer, at the age of 46, leaving behind 8 children

From A14

cardiac event, and the pain he experienced was most likely the result of overexertion from an earlier workout.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, chest pain is more common in athletes aged 35 and older than in those who live a less active lifestyle.

However, Cooper knows that genetic factors contribute to the likelihood of developing heart disease regardless of age, which is why, after losing two siblings to heart disease, he shares his family's medical history with his children and encourages them to get tested.

What inspired your decision to pursue a career as a cardiothoracic surgeon?

That story has been unfolding for me all my life, from the time I was born. I was always a little precocious and sort of grasped things very quickly. I took a really keen interest in the biological sciences. But the thing that really tipped me over was that my mom died when I was 14. She was only 46 with eight kids, and she died of pancreatic cancer.

At 14, not having a mother around was very impactful for me, and I was angry. I was like, man, God, why did you do this? But I turned it into wanting to conquer and cure cancer.

There was no doubt in my mind at that point that I was going to be a doctor. And I was not going to be deterred in that endeavor. But the reality is, when I got to medical school, I just couldn't fathom seeing more and more people die of cancer like my mother.

While attending medical school, I made a connection with some cardiovascular surgeons who were very good with students. They motivated me and gave me the confidence that I could do this.

Unfortunately, years later, my sister and brother died of heart attacks.

How has the personal tragedy of losing family members to the same illness you work to treat affected your experience as a surgeon?

So, our families are a microcosm of society in many respects, and none more than when it comes to our genetic makeup. And so, it gave me perspective. It really allows me to honestly speak to people differently about the whole idea of cardiovascular disease because it has struck home.

And I'm glad you asked me this question because I think so many of us really don't think about it until the leaf falls in our backyard. Then we have to rake it up. You know, leaves are falling in our neighbor's yard. Not my problem. But guess what? When it comes to heart disease and physical ailments, they are going to fall into your backyard one day.

It influences the way that I go about my business and approach not only my personal health but also how I counsel.

So as strange as it may seem, my family's tragedy, quite frankly, I hope, has turned into a life of knowledge for someone else. I got really, really interested in the whole idea of genetics in the heart as it relates to heart disease. In my

career, I believe that the most powerful risk factor is family history.

I've seen absolutely normal people with a strong family history of heart disease come to me with heart attacks, needing heart surgery, having had stents, and all those other things. So, it really got me thinking about the idea of genetics and family history as it relates to cardiovascular disease.

How have you communicated your family's history of cardiovascular issues and your own medical experiences to your children?

So, there's another little piece of this story that needs to be told first. In 2003, I was deployed to Iraq for the Army Reserve. I came back from that deployment, and over the course of the next two, three, or four years, I developed PTSD. It manifested itself through these overwhelming intrusive thoughts of dying early and young. And one of the therapies for me became journaling and writing stuff down.

That culminated in me writing a book titled "Heart Attack: Truth, Tragedy and Triumph." The first chapter of that book is about the family history. And I go into the deaths of my mom, my younger sister, my sister and brother Vicki and Alvin, who died of heart problems, my sister Janice, who died of cancer, and my oldest brother Alex, who died of HIV/AIDS.

That was therapeutic for me because the thing that created so much fear for me was the idea of leaving my kids prematurely. When I started to write this stuff down, I was writing the story so that they would know about it.

The conversation doesn't hurt. It may be painful to think about, but that only lasts for a second. Because then the reality sets in that they're still here, you're still here, and you're here to have this conversation. That's the beauty of it.

I am not going to allow my kids to go through their lives or have a problem with their hearts without knowing that they are at risk. So, we're going to get checked. That's how we communicate. We have to be very, very open and honest with our kids and loved ones about those things that could matter, not just to us but also to them.

Considering the instances of death you face in your professional capacity, what methods do you utilize to lessen their mental impact?

In the last 10 to 15 years, I've become a much more spiritual person. Spirituality and getting in touch with a deeper sense of self have been very helpful in that regard. And so, to avoid taking on that energy, I channel my energy into doing all I can to be a positive benefit to everybody that I meet when it comes to health and wellness.

I get myself out of the books, the academic rhetoric, and the statistics and just start talking to people. I start talking to people, trying to meet them where they are. I understand that they don't have the same knowledge that I do, but I also let them know that the knowledge they do have is very powerful, and they don't have to just rely on any one person's opinion or advice when it comes to their health. □



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

King

MLK's International Influence: A Hidden Legacy

compassion and nonviolence to his theories and action in the international community," said Marcus King, director of George Washington University's Elliott School's international affairs master's program.

Exposure to Global Issues

King was the moderator of a 2019 forum on MLK where Dr. Robert M. Franklin, a former president of Morehouse, former head of Emory University's Candler School of Theology, and professor of theology and social justice at both institutions, spoke.

Franklin shared that MLK was exposed to international happenings in part by "an extensive roster of speakers who visited Morehouse's chapel, including Eleanor Roosevelt and Howard University's first African American president Mordecai Wyatt Johnson," wrote Tatyana Hopkins for GW Today

Moreover, the mentorship of Dr. Benjamin Mays and Dr. Howard Thurman, influenced a young MLK to see himself as a citizen of the world.

Decades before MLK encountered Mahatma Gandhi, Thurman experienced his own life-changing meeting with the international figure, further strengthening his words to MLK about the importance of seeing issues from a global perspective.

International Travel

MLK's first taste of international travel took place in 1957, just months after the Dec. 1956

end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

According to Franklin, MLK's visit to Ghana, Liberia and Senegal happened amid an emerging number of countries in Africa and Asia freeing themselves from the shackles of colonization and becoming newly freed nations.

For MLK, this fostered an intellectual, spiritual and moral kinship between global movements of oppressed people and nations fighting for freedom and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

"[Dr. King] recognized the strong parallel between resistance to European colonialism in Africa and the struggle against racism in the United States," Dr. Franklin said.

MLK's Africa connection alone is way more extensive than he's usually given credit for. But he didn't end his global tour in the motherland.

Additionally, MLK visited Europe and South America before going on a month-long trip to India in 1959.

"Gandhi was long gone, as he had been assassinated in 1948, but many in the world were beginning to regard young King as the new and emerging symbol of international nonviolence, persistence and social change," added Franklin.

Few know of MLK's international travels and his influence and inspiration that was and is felt well beyond his home country.

Global Impact

Streets and boulevards named after King can be found all over the world, from Niger to Australia, Brazil to Germany. There is a park named

for him in Paris, a church in Debrecen, Hungary, a school in Yaounde, Cameroon, and even a bridge in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

This global reach is due in part to the media's coverage of the work MLK did in the U.S. But its also because MLK consciously connected the U.S. struggle for domestic equality for Black people with international concerns. MLK is legend in South Africa, as he was an outspoken critic of South Africa's apartheid regime. MLK was also a harsh critic of European colonialism in Africa, South America and Asia. MLK also supported land reforms for those living in poverty in Latin America, and saw poverty as an international human rights issue.

It can be argued that MLK and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement inspired the 1965 adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the first international human rights treaty since the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

MLK's international reach extended via the many global leaders he inspired, with South Africa's Nelson Mandela being just one of them. But just as important, yet even more rarely discussed is the impact Africa had on MLK. □

Bria Overs
Word In Black

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) is mostly known for his role in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement; a movement for which he lived, fought, and died. However, the impact of MLK's message and mission extended — and continues to extend — far beyond these American shores.

"[Dr. King] applied an ethical framework of



REV. MAREO D. JOHNSON has been elected as president of the United Nations Association of Eastern Oklahoma. PHOTO PROVIDED

Johnson Named President, United Nations Association Of Eastern Oklahoma

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

The United Nations Association of Eastern Oklahoma (UNAEO) announces the selection of Rev. Mareo D. Johnson as president of the board of directors. According to a press release, UNAEO says this is a “historic milestone in its leadership.” Johnson is the first Black to be elected to the role.

Johnson is the founder and pastor of Seeking The Kingdom Ministries Inc. and founder and executive director of the Black Lives Matter Tulsa Chapter. His dedicated efforts in social justice and advocacy have been recognized. He has over six years of committed service to UNAEO, including roles as chair of Social Justice and Advocacy committees.

Johnson “has demonstrated his unwavering commitment to the organization’s goals and values,” according to the press release.

In addition to his work with UNAEO, Johnson has played a significant role in various community organizations. He is a mayoral appointee to the Sales Tax Overview Committee and an advisory board member for the BMX Foundation. He formerly served as chair of the Legal Redress committee for the NAACP Tulsa Branch #6143, chair of the Workforce committee for the North Tulsa Economic Development Initiative (NTEDI), and a member of the Young People of the Next Generation (YPNG), who assist students and parents with completing financial aid applications. He has been an advocate for criminal justice reform, economic development, quality education, and enhanced police-community relations in the community.

Johnson, a Victory College graduate who also studied psychology/social psychology at Tulsa Community College, has been a voice of change and inspiration, both locally and globally. His contributions have been recognized in “Tell Me Who You Are,” a racial literacy book used by thousands of teachers in the U.S. and globally. He has been recognized in many other publications.

In his new role, Johnson says he is enthusiastic about uniting the Eastern Oklahoma community in pursuit of the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals. His approach emphasizes the importance of local work with global impact, and he is committed to fostering inclusivity and impactful change.

The United Nations Association of Eastern Oklahoma is a world peace and international security organization in Tulsa. It plays a pivotal role in educating and mobilizing support for the United Nations’ principles and programs. It sponsors local high schools and collegiate Model UN programs. UNAEO is one of the 193 members that tackles subjects such as nuclear proliferation, economic development, and human rights. In 1968, UNAEO became an official member of the United Nations Association of the United States of America.

Ball Selected To National Program



JASMINE RENAE BALL has been appointed as one of eight Certified Financial Planners (CFP®) across the country to serve on the CFP Board Ambassador Program. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Certified Financial Planner (CFP) Board recently announced the appointment of eight CFP® professionals to its CFP Board Ambassador Program. Jasmine Renae Ball will be representing Oklahoma as a new Ambassador. She and the others serve as an excellent source of financial planning knowledge for the media, the public, and individuals aspiring to become CFP® professionals.

“Our new Ambassadors share CFP Board’s commitment to CFP® certification and actively work to increase awareness about the value of financial planning,” said CFP Board CEO

Kevin R. Keller. “We are excited to welcome these dedicated volunteers to the CFP Board Ambassador Program.”

The Ambassadors are selected because of their commitment to their respective communities in the areas of volunteerism and communications with the public about the importance of financial planning.

The CFP Board Ambassador Program promotes the importance of the CFP® certification that offers its professionals with the tools to provide qualified, competent, and ethical counsel for individuals and their families. The Board Ambassadors will be encouraged to share their expertise by speaking at events and to the media, writing articles for LetsMakeAPlan.org, and using social media to reach larger audiences.

Ball is a financial planner and the founder of Bamboo Financial Partners in Tulsa, where she works with clients across the United States. As of 2023, Ball is the only Black woman serving as a CFP® professional in the state. In addition to her CFP®, she holds CRC and ABFP™ accreditations.

With over 12 years in financial services, Ball began as an assistant and progressed to an advisor, assistant manager and now founder. Drawing from a unique background in education, psychology, and social work, she adopts a holistic approach to financial planning. She chose to open her firm in Tulsa as a tribute to the Black Wall Street legacy. Her firm honors the area’s rich history of Black entrepreneurs.

She has been featured in The Oklahoma Eagle, Journal Record, Silicon Review, Nerd Wallet and more. She often uses her platform to promote both financial education and giving back to the community.

Ball is originally from northern California and began her financial career while completing her two bachelor’s degrees in education and psychology at Macalester College. She also holds a master’s degree in social work from the University of Southern California.

For more information, contact jasmine@bamboofinancialpartners.com or (918) 324-2625.

Tulsa Style Swing-Out Plans Events For Members



TULSA STYLE SWING-OUT has events and activities for its members every month. New members are welcomed. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Tulsa Style Swing-Out has planned a variety of programs for its members with an opportunity for new members to join. All programs are held at Moose Lodge #862, 11106 E. 7th St. Members of the Tulsa Style Swing-Out are (back row, l-r) Taneaia Norton, Charles King, and Dedric McBride, and (front row, l-f) Delila Demry, Runako Whittaker, Lisa Muse, Ursula Black Jones, Ericka Butler, Clayton Wilson, Pam Butler, Sonya Bryant, Vanessa Randle, Sandra Roberson, and Clifton Tarver.

Events

March Women’s History Month

Mar. 9

Tulsa Health Department is conducting Community Listening Session at Zarrow Regional Library, 2224 W. 51st St., on March 9 at 12 p.m. Registration is required. To register, visit tulsa-health.org/strategicplan.

Mar. 12

Screening of Carol Anderson’s “I, Too” at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 5 p.m. A question-and-answer session will occur after film moderated by Onika Asamoah-Caesar. The event is sponsored by the Black Wall Street Times. For more information, see Black Wall Street Times social media pages.

Mar. 13

2024 Greenwood Women’s Business Center InnovateHER Women’s Summit at the Doubletree Warren Place, 6110 S. Yale Ave. The program is sponsored by the Greenwood Women’s Business Center, 102 N. Greenwood Ave., Suite 201, 10 a.m. -3 p.m. For more information, contact info@greenwoodwbc.com or gbcwomensummit.com.

Mar. 23

Artist Helen Juliet Atkins is hosting a free community tile making workshop at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., at 1 p.m. The tiles will be featured in the Pathway to Hope Resilience Artwork (Underpass artwork on Boston Ave.). She is hosting the project with support from the Oklahoma Arts Council Art in Public Places and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. For more information, contact Michelle Burdex at mburdex@greenwoodculturalcenter.com or (918) 596-1020.

Mar. 25

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is hosting its monthly support group for family members, significant others, and friends of people with mental health conditions at St. Augustine Catholic Church, Education Center, 1720 E. Apache St., 6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. The meetings are held on the fourth Monday of each month. For more information, call (918) 587-2965 or contact staugustineparishtulsaok@yahoo.com.

Mar. 27

Women’s History Month – “And So I Stayed” will be shown at Tulsa Community College at its Van Trease Performing Arts Center for Education (PACE), 103000 E. 81st St., on March 27 from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. The film is an award-winning documentary by Natalie Patillo and Daniel A. Nelson about survivors of abuse fighting for their lives and spending years behind bars. This is the story of how the legal system gets domestic violence wrong, according to a press release about the film. The program is sponsored by the T. Oscar Chappelle Family and the TCC Foundation. For more information, contact ramona.curtis@tulsacc.edu.

Mar. 30

Queendom will be held at the Historic Big 10 Ballroom, 1624 E. Apache St., 8 p.m. - 10 p.m. The program will feature poets, musicians, singers, dancers, comics, and more. According to the organizer, the “showcase will leave you inspired, entertained, and empowered. (It is) the ultimate ‘Girl Power’ moment!” The event is sponsored by J’Parle’ Artist Group Inc. For ticket information or more information, see www.jagtulsa.org.

Apr. 4-7

World Stage Theatre Company presents “Choir Boy,” directed by Justin Daniel in the Liddy Doenges Theatre, 110 E. 2nd St. For ticket information, visit www.tulsapac.com or (918) 596-7111.

Apr. 6

North Tulsa Economic Development Initiative (NTEDI) Fundraiser at Pine Premier Child Care, 518 E. Pine St., beginning at 11 a.m. Lunch, featuring smoked turkey legs, hot links, and hot dogs with chips will be available for purchase. The proceeds will benefit NTEDI student book scholarships. To place a drop-off meal order, call (918) 813-8546 or (918) 850-3875. For more information, contact ntedi.north@gmail.com