

LEGACY
5,371
Weeks, since the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and a denial of justice.

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By AZIAH SID, WORD IN BLACK

NATION
Black, Missing, and Invisible in Police Records |A17
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MARSHALL



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Student
Union

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DR. JENNETTIE MARSHALL, Tulsa Public School Board member, District 2. PHOTO PROVIDED

Marshall

Gary Lee
The Oklahoma Eagle

The slur that the white driver of a school bus made to the African American teenage rider was loud and clear. He called her a “Black B----.” Jennettie Marshall, then a 16-year-old junior at Bishop Kelley High School in south Tulsa, was riding the bus and overheard the insult. And she wasn’t having it. This is not right, she thought. Something has to be done.

Cont. A3

TPS

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THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE PRINT EDITION COVER ILLUSTRATION, August 25, 2023. ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Marshall

Caring for children, families, and education far beyond the call of duty

From A2

Marshall galvanized the small collective of African American students at the school and led them in a protest. She called the Tulsa news media to cover the event. School administrators responded by removing the driver from the bus route that carried those students. “What was important is that the school authorities were put on alert that there were some issues they needed to pay attention to.”

But something of more significant consequence happened that day. The episode launched Marshall on a mission to call out the wrongs in Tulsa Public Schools. Five decades later, Marshall is still on that mission.

Senior Member of School Board

Elected to the Tulsa School Board in 2016, Marshall is the longest serving member of the board - a panel of seven elected officials charged with overseeing the running of all 77 Tulsa Public Schools. She makes it her business to push for high standards in education and facilities for the schools in her district, which is composed of more than a dozen schools, including several institutions that have been vital for northsiders - McLain, Central High School, Burroughs, and Hawthorne Elementary among others. But Marshall’s dominion on the board is not limited to North Tulsa. She is the self-styled watchman for all TPS schools.

Marshall’s high profile, outspoken manner, and sometimes controversial positions on the school board have elevated her to be a significant figure in public education in the Tulsa school system - the largest school district in Oklahoma. Her blunt warnings and direct style during school board meetings often put her at odds with other school board members.

Elected to the Tulsa School Board in 2016, Marshall is the longest serving member of the board - a panel of seven elected officials charged with overseeing the running of all 77 Tulsa Public Schools.

However, in Tulsa’s Black community, which places a high premium on public education, Marshall is regarded as a champion of providing kids the best possible learning environment. Her deep roots in Tulsa’s Black community and close bonds with many advocates committed to improving conditions in north Tulsa have earned her a position as a community leader.

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, St. Rep. Regina Goodwin (District 73) summed up the sentiments of many in the community about Marshall.

“She has long been informed, engaged, and ethical,” Goodwin said. “She cares for children, families, and education far beyond the call of duty. She does her homework.”

Righting Wrongs At TPS

In recent months, Marshall has been more intent than ever to provide leadership to a school system facing challenges. Among other issues, the Oklahoma State Board of Education, under the leadership of Superintendent for Public Instruction Ryan Walters, continues to threaten a takeover of TPS; the results of a state audit of TPS are looming; students across Tulsa are struggling to improve performance. As part of her campaign to right the wrongs in TPS, Marshall has called out several glaring irregularities with the administration of the school district and the school board.

In 2022, when she noted something suspicious in transactions made by school board administrators, she requested a state audit of TPS finances. In July of that year, Gov. Kevin Stitt accused TPS of mismanaging public funds and instructed State Auditor Cindy Bird to conduct a special audit of TPS. In January 2024, when she and fellow Board Member Elena Ashley noted that the local school board had violated major procedures they were required to follow, they filed a lawsuit against the Tulsa Public School Board alleging

several severe infarctions, including that the panel’s appointment of Dr. Ebony Johnson from interim to permanent superintendent in December 2023. The suit questions the validity of procedures used to elevate Johnson from acting to permanent superintendent of schools. It also alleges that the Board frequently violated the Open Records Act.

Many of the findings of these – and other – investigations that Marshall has pushed for are due to be released soon and could cause upheaval in the leadership of both TPS and the school board.

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Marshall explained that she was compelled to file the lawsuit after watching the board repeatedly violate rules and regulations.

For example, in its December 2023 meeting, the Board voted to suspend the rule that it should employ a national search for the position of Superintendent. Instead, it elevated Johnson to the role.

“I’ve watched this board over and over violate the Open Meetings Act, particularly the executive session portion of that act. There’s a point when, if we don’t start to correct what we’re doing, how can we hold ourselves accountable? How can I hold parents accountable? How can I hold students accountable? Because accountability flows both ways. So, for me to file, it was a statement that enough is enough.”

Is Marshall At Odds With Johnson?

Citing the procedure used to promote Johnson as faulty and calling for a new national search puts Marshall at odds with the new superintendent. Both are hard-driven African American women in powerful, high-profile positions: Johnson is the first African American woman to be named permanent superintendent of schools. Marshall is the most senior elected representative on

Cont. A5

Frederick Douglass Moon: African American Educator

By WILLIAM D. WELGE, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



African American educator Frederick Moon was born on May 4, 1896, at Fallis, Oklahoma Territory. Son of Henry Clay and Pollie Twiggs Moon, Frederick Moon was educated in the segregated schools of Lincoln County, Oklahoma. Because there was no high school for African Americans near his home, he entered Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University) in the ninth grade, and he completed high school and two years of college there. In 1929 he earned a Bachelor of Science degree. He earned a Master of Arts degree at the University of Chicago in 1938. During his time at Langston he led an effort to develop a memorial to Inman Page, the college’s first president.

Moon began his teaching career in 1921 at Crescent, Oklahoma, and he helped the school gain accreditation. In 1929 the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers elected him as president. In

1931 he taught in and was principal of Wewoka Douglass High School, and he again assisted a school in gaining accreditation with the North Central Association. Moon married Leoshia Harris, of Oklahoma City, on August 28, 1935. In 1940 he moved to Oklahoma City and became principal of Douglass High School. He continued in that position until 1961. Considered the “dean” of African American education, he was elected to the Oklahoma City Board of Education in 1972 and served as its first African American president in 1974. He served at a time when federally mandated desegregation occurred within the Oklahoma City Public School System. During this period the school district carried out a program of busing students across town in order to bring racial equality to the schools.

Moon was also a civic leader in the community. He served as a director for the YMCA. He was

variously president of the Oklahoma City Urban League, the Langston Alumni Association, and the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, and he was a member of the National Education Association. He was vice president of the National Association of Secondary Principals and of the American Association of School Administrators and served on the mayor’s Human Relations Commission and the Urban Renewal Authority. The Oklahoma School of Religion at Langston awarded him an honorary doctorate in humanities. His publications included Organization and Administration of High School for Negroes in Oklahoma, A Fifth Freedom for the Negro, and Teacher Integration in the Border States. He resigned his position with the board of education due to declining health in December 1974. Frederick Moon died on December 16, 1975, in Oklahoma City.

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F. D. MOON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL BAND, 1958
(20699.02.197.1620.7, State Museum Collection, Currie Ballard Collection, OHS).

Featured Last Week



Women’s Business Summit Celebrates Successes



GBC Summit Awards Women Business Leaders



Breaking Camp: Lawmakers Take Aim at Homeless Encampments

The Oklahoma Eagle

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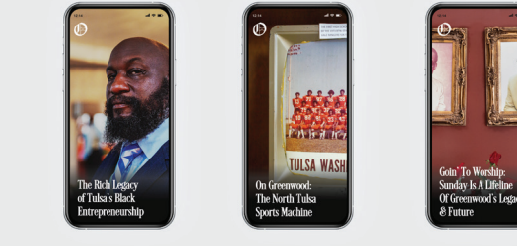
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Marshall

“I’m going to *analyze the information* and make an informed decision based on what I know”

From A3

the school board. Some members of Tulsa’s Black community are concerned that Marshall’s position might result in the toppling of Johnson.

In the interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Marshall said that she is not opposed to Johnson. She championed Johnson’s rise to the top of TPS. She objected to the Board’s procedure to select Johnson as permanent administrator. She is open to the possibility that, following a national search, Johnson might emerge as the best candidate for the position of TPS superintendent.

Yet, Marshall is aware that some community members feel she should treat Johnson more favorably because both are African American. “Some say ‘you threw a Black sister under the under the bus? No, I did not,” said Marshall

“But I don’t fall in or go along to get along. I’m not Rodney King. I’m going to analyze the information and make an informed decision based on what I know. And then that’s what I’m going to stand on.”

In explaining her position about Johnson, Marshall recalled a conversation between the two of them before she and school board member Ashley launched the lawsuit questioning the procedures used to elevate Johnson to permanent superintendent.

“I told her I can’t support you. Not now. Maybe later, but not now. People should know by now I’m very open. I’m very transparent. I did not allow her to attend that meeting, believing I would change my mind.

Marshall is equally prudent in evaluating Johnson’s performance in her first few months as TPS administrator.

“When we look at the leadership of the school system and the way that things are going now, the jury is still out,” she said. “I’m just waiting. There are happenings behind the scenes that I can’t speak on. I am praying for the leadership and the district to be as transparent as possible.”

Financial Issues at TPS

Marshall is more direct in her critique of the financial mismanagement at TPS. In recalling her decision to recommend a state audit in 2022,



DR. JENNETTIE MARSHALL, Tulsa Public School Board member, District 2. PHOTO PROVIDED

she said, “You didn’t have to be an accountant or a CPA or anything like that to see that something was not correct in significant transactions that were made. All I knew was that the wording and the verbiage were off. And when I would ask for specific information, I couldn’t get it. It was then I knew something was wrong with how the district was carrying itself regarding money. I may not have known precisely what it is. But I could point you to where you needed to look. And those are the areas where big issues (are) coming out of now.”

And how. Earlier this month, reports emerged that Devin Fletcher, former chief talent officer at TPS and a member of the cabinet of Deborah Gist, Johnson’s predecessor as superintendent at TPS, had embezzled more than \$600,000 from

Tulsa school funds. Fletcher has pled guilty. The investigation is ongoing.

The state auditors have looked closely at TPS’s financial transactions over several years to determine the extent of infractions. The auditor said the findings would be released soon. Marshall has high hopes for the findings.

“Number one, I believe that the department head is not going to operate based on what I call friendships and kinships. I think that they’re going to be thorough. I expect that there are things that still have yet to come out. And I believe that they’re going to make recommendations.”

Marshall Critical of TPS Board

In Marshall’s view, the leadership of the current school board,

including Board President Stacey Woolley and Vice President John Croisant, was too closely tied with the administration of former Superintendent Gist. She feels that their loyalty to the past regime has marred their ability to acknowledge the errors and mismanagement that took place during Gist’s tenure.

“If the board didn’t know what was happening, it was because they did not want to. Their history has been one of not knowing. And when they did find out what things happened, their history was to help cover it up.”

Against that background, Marshall feels the need for new members on the board with fresh perspectives is urgent. The school board election on April 2 presents an opportunity for the public to bring in new members who are not saddled with

the past. Three of seven seats on the board – for Districts Two, Five, and Six – will be decided in Tuesday’s election. Marshall is not endorsing any candidate. She urged voters to look closely at the candidates’ records and get out to vote.

Optimistic For the Future

As Marshall moves forward in her bid to set the course of Tulsa’s leadership on a better track, she is clear about what’s at stake: the education of a generation of Tulsa school kids.

She urged everyone in the community to be better informed and actively monitor and participate in school board forums.

“Parents – and everyone in the community -- need to be concerned about everything regarding the school system, whether it’s academics or whether it’s the district’s finances,” she said. “Everyone needs to get on the TPS website and watch what the Board is considering and voting on. They need to police this district. Whether they have a child in TPS or not, people in the community need to be engaged because the school district receives money from us all. The bottom line is that we cannot have outstanding academics unless your school board is the steward, and the governance team must be or should be over the finances,” said Marshall.

“Parents have to go deeper. They must ask how my child is doing academically. His or her behavior may be in check, but how are they performing academically? Then they should participate by volunteering at the school.”

Marshall is optimistic that with the community’s engagement and vigilance, TPS can steer positively through the storms it faces.

As she considers those storms , she recalls the lessons learned in her early activism days as a Tulsa school student.

“If we as a community bond and stay on top of it,” she said, “things will eventually get on the right course.”

GARY LEE term managing editor of The Oklahoma Eagle, attended Tulsa Public Schools and comes from a family of teachers. He believes that strong public schools are vital to Tulsa.



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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Open Records Lawsuit

Judge Revives Lawmakers’ Open Records Lawsuit

Keaton Ross
Oklahoma Watch

State Reps. Justin Humphrey, R-Lane and Kevin McDugle, R-Broken Arrow do in fact have standing to pursue an open records lawsuit against District Six District Attorney Jason Hicks, Stephens County District Judge Brent Russell decided last week.

The decision is a reversal from the court’s initial ruling on Feb. 16, where Russell determined that Humphrey and McDugle could not be listed as plaintiffs in the lawsuit because they retained Houston attorney Christina Vitale to request the records on their behalf. The plaintiffs faced a March 15 deadline to amend the lawsuit or have the case dismissed.

Upon further review, Russell determined there was a sufficient connection between the lawmakers and Vitale and the lawsuit may proceed with Humphrey and McDugle as plaintiffs. The ruling does not “insinuate the validity” of the lawmakers’ claims, Russell wrote in the brief filing issued on March 6.

In the initial lawsuit filed on Dec. 20, Humphrey and McDugle claimed Hicks willfully withheld communication records related to death row

The ruling does not “insinuate the validity” of the lawmakers’ claims.



STATE REP. JUSTIN HUMPHREY, R-LAN, presides over a meeting of the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee on Feb. 21, 2024.
PHOTO TED STREULI/OKLAHOMA WATCH

prisoner Richard Glossip’s April 2023 clemency hearing. Hicks denied the open records request, filed weeks after Glossip’s clemency hearing, asserting that the messages were made in a personal capacity and therefore shielded from the Oklahoma Open Records Act.

In an interview with Oklahoma Watch, Humphrey said the duo filed the lawsuit on the suspicion that district attorneys were improperly influencing Pardon and Parole Board members. Both lawmakers have been ardent supporters of Glossip, whose execution has been stayed pending the outcome of a U.S. Supreme Court decision.

On Feb. 28, a bill sponsored by McDugle to implement a death penalty moratorium cleared the House Criminal and Corrections Committee, which Humphrey chairs. House Bill 3138 has a March 14 deadline to clear the full House and move to the Senate, where David Bullard, R-Durant, has agreed to sponsor the bill.

KEATON ROSS is a Report for America corps member who covers democracy for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or Kross@Oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter at @_KeatonRoss.

OK Minimum Wage Increase

Has Oklahoma not seen an increase to its minimum wage since 2008?

Sue Bin Park
Oklahoma Watch

The most recent increase in minimum wage in Oklahoma was on Jul. 24, 2009 per the federal minimum wage increase, from \$6.55 to \$7.25. The state is one of 20 that adhere to the federal minimum wage, which has not seen an increase since 2009 and remains at \$7.25 as of March 2024.

A petition to put forth an initiative vote on a minimum wage increase was approved on March 4, 2024, by the Oklahoma Supreme Court as constitutional to circulate. If successful, the petition would place State Question 832 on the upcoming ballot to vote on raising Oklahoma’s minimum wage to \$15.00 by 2029.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES



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Winter Storm Lawsuits

Winter Storm Natural Gas Price Lawsuits Languish

Paul Monies
Oklahoma Watch

More than three years after a massive winter storm blasted Oklahoma and the central United States, utility customers have seen little progress in lawsuits filed against natural gas companies and traders over the huge spike in prices.

Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond last summer said his office would work with outside counsel to investigate possible market manipulation by natural gas traders. The attorney general established a tip line in December to gather information from people with knowledge of the natural gas trading environment during the storm.

At one point during the February 2021 winter storm, natural gas prices in Oklahoma’s trading hub exceeded more than \$1,200 per thousand cubic feet, the highest in history. At no other regional trading hub did natural gas spot prices get as high as they did in Oklahoma. Regional natural gas prices before the storm traded in the \$3 range.

Customers of Oklahoma’s largest natural gas and electrical utilities are now paying back billions of dollars in fuel costs, plus billions in interest payments, through winter storm charges on each monthly bill for more than 20 years.

About \$3 billion in Oklahoma ratepayer-backed bonds were sold in 2022 to pay for natural gas consumed during the storm. While storm-related utility bonds have been sold in other states, they typically go toward replacing infrastructure like power lines, pipelines or power plant repairs, not to pay for consumable items like fuel.

The attorney general’s office contracted with Oklahoma City law firm Foshee & Yaffe to investigate market manipulation related to the February 2021 winter storm. The firm beat two other law firms in the bid. Foshee & Yaffe’s

At one point during the February 2021 winter storm, natural gas prices in Oklahoma’s trading hub exceeded more than \$1,200 per thousand cubic feet, the highest in history.

contract pays them on a contingency fee basis, which means they only get paid if they win the case. The contract caps the contingency fee at \$50 million, excluding costs.

Scattered resolutions

There have been resolutions in scattered lawsuits related to the storm. Oklahoma Natural Gas sued one of its gas suppliers, NextEra Energy Marketing LLC, in April 2021 over \$6.9 million in disputed natural gas bills.

The utility, which spent more on natural gas during the storm than the entire previous year, claimed NextEra breached previous, fixed natural gas contracts and sold gas at higher prices during parts of the storm. NextEra, in turn, said weather-related issues led it to declare force majeure, a contract provision typically invoked when a supplier can’t deliver because of an act of God outside of its control. NextEra countersued to get ONG to pay its bill. The companies reached a settlement in early 2022 before going to trial.

Regulatory filings show ONG told the Oklahoma Corporation Commission the utility disputed \$28 million in invoiced charges for natural gas used during the storm, a drop in the bucket compared to its total outlay. ONG, along with sister natural gas utilities in Texas and Kansas, spent more than \$1.9 billion on natural gas during the February 2021 storm. The utility’s 900,000 Oklahoma customers were on the hook for almost \$1.3 billion of those natural gas charges.

In an email, ONG spokesman Chad Previch said the terms of the NextEra settlement were confidential. NextEra did not respond to requests for comment.

“The remaining amount we identified has not been settled,” Previch said. “If and when that amount is settled, those costs will be returned to our customers through the normal fuel cost portion of our bills, also called the

purchased-gas adjustment (PGA), not through securitization.”

With almost \$430 million in sales, NextEra was the top supplier of natural gas to Oklahoma utilities during the storm, according to data from the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. More than 95% of NextEra’s natural gas sales went to ONG.

By law, Oklahoma utilities can’t mark up the fuel they consume. Those costs are passed directly to customers in a part of the bill called the fuel-adjustment clause. In normal times, regulators audit fuel charges to make sure utilities aren’t collecting too much or too little from customers as fuel prices fluctuate depending on both the time of year and demand. But utilities have little incentive to hold fuel costs down in an emergency if the final bill goes straight to customers.

Minnesota customers benefit

Minnesota regulators disallowed almost \$60 million in natural gas costs for utilities in that state related to the February 2021 winter storm. They said Minnesota utilities didn’t plan properly for extreme cold and had an expectation that higher fuel costs would just get passed on to customers.

“One of the reasons the utilities failed to mitigate the extraordinary costs was that they lacked the incentive to do so,” said a March 2022 filing from the Minnesota attorney general’s office arguing for a reduction in fuel charges. “The pass-through mechanism by which the cost of gas is normally recovered results in less incentive for utilities to control the cost of natural gas than exists for utility expenses recovered through other mechanisms, such as base rates.”

Minnesota’s Citizens Utility Board, which represents consumers in that state’s utility regulation, noted the state stood alone when it

Cont. A10

OKC Homelessness

‘A gateway’: OKC betting Key to Home program can reduce homelessness

Matt Patterson
NonDoc

Sitting inside his new home for the first time, Mark Wood still feels a little overwhelmed, but he is breathing easier than he has in some time.

Wood spent the better part of the last 18 months on Oklahoma City streets following a cascade of calamities and bad luck that caused his life to careen into uncertainty.

To start things off, the transmission went out in Wood’s car, a problem he could not afford to fix. Not long after that, he lost his job of nearly 15 years when the company he worked for abruptly shut down without notice and left him without a paycheck. Eviction followed, and he found himself on the streets.

“It all happened over a few months,” he said. “I don’t think I ever saw it coming.”

Today, Wood is in a new home, one of the early participants in Key to Home, the latest strategy aimed at lifting 500 of the most chronically homeless people from OKC streets and into housing over two years.

As of early March, the Key to Home program has assisted 88 formerly unhoused people to find four walls and a roof to call their own. Wood is one of them, and the feeling of being able to have a shot at a fresh start is all he ever wanted.

“When I come in and shut the door, there is peace of mind,” Wood said. “I can sleep. I can get rest for the first time in a while.”

Wood was one of millions of Americans who are at high risk for potential homelessness. Just 44 percent of those surveyed by Bankrate could afford to pay for a \$1,000 emergency. A 2019 survey by Prosperity Now found that 40 percent of Americans are just one missed paycheck away from losing their home.

And with pandemic aid now squarely in the rearview mirror, homelessness across the United States is picking up, with a 12 percent increase in the country’s homeless population over 2022. About 653,000 people were homeless last year in the United States, an increase of about 70,000 from 2022.

Key to Home aims to cut OKC homelessness by 70 percent

Key to Home’s goals are simple: Get people into housing, stabilize their lives, and help them solve problems that drew their path to the streets in the first place. Those efforts can encompass career training, job placement, and mental health and substance abuse resources. Each participant is assigned a caseworker for one year.

The program’s execution is straightforward. Outreach teams visit encampments and begin helping those living there with basic needs like acquiring an ID. This general outreach effort also includes referrals to agencies that can assist them. Beyond encampments, outreach teams also target hot spots where panhandling often occurs.

The final part of the process involves clearing the encampment after everyone living there has been assisted. If others gather in an area that has been cleared, they are visited by outreach teams to connect them with resources.

Lindsey Cates, who was tasked with implementing the city’s strategies on homelessness before taking a new job as director of community programs for the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, said one of the Key to Home program’s advantages is speed.

“We believe it is faster, and the people that have been housed in this pilot over the last year have been housed in three to six weeks directly from the encampment,” Cates said.

The results have drawn praise.

“It’s going very well,” OKC city manager Craig Freeman said. “When you look at the goal, which is to house the most chronically homeless and provide them with wraparound services that can help them get where they want to be, it’s very achievable and something that I know a lot of people are working very hard on. So far, the results have been good.”

Freeman said cities like Oklahoma City have had to adapt to meet the challenges of both affordable housing and the unhoused population.

“I think people have become more broadly accepting of efforts to address homelessness and shift to strategies that reflect that, and we have seen those efforts here through our city leadership from Aubrey McDermid and Clutch Consulting,” Freeman said. “The community has come together, and I think the strategy has shown that it can work when people come together in that way.”

‘Don’t make promises you can’t keep’

While the Key to Home program is simple enough, that doesn’t make execution easy. Much of the program’s success or failure with potential clients stems from that first-blush contact between outreach teams and people



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

With pandemic aid now squarely in the rearview mirror, homelessness across the United States is picking up, with a 12 percent increase in the country’s homeless population over 2022. About 653,000 people were homeless last year in the United States, an increase of about 70,000 from 2022.

living in an encampment.

On an early September morning, Jennifer Beach and Sam Dyer made their way to southwest Oklahoma City to an encampment not far from Will Rogers World Airport.

Beach serves as lead outreach specialist for the Homeless Alliance, which has become one of the city’s most vital organizations combatting homelessness. What began as a group of small volunteers has grown into an organization that serves about 75,000 meals each year while providing the city’s unhoused population with a winter and day shelter.

The Homeless Alliance also operates programs like the Curbside Chronicle, a “street newspaper” sold by those either experiencing homelessness or at risk for it across the city. Combined with its flower shop, Curbside offers a way for participants to develop money management and social skills while also providing a source of income.

The encampment Beach and Dyer visited that steamy September morning would likely never be seen by those passing by. But a break in the curb and a crude dirt path led to an abandoned camper and a small group of people a few hundred yards off the road.

Hidden by trees, a few tents provided housing for a couple and their adult son who deals with a seizure disorder. The family fell on hard times amid the COVID-19 pandemic when both parents lost their jobs.

Beach and Dyer’s faces were familiar to the family. They had helped the woman’s sister with housing previously, and their two-person team spent two hours talking to those at the encampment a week or so before this September visit. Conversations ensued about obtaining photo identification, one of the most important pieces when reassembling someone’s housing puzzle.

“It’s a gateway to everything,” Dyer said. “It’s hard for them to get it a lot of the time. But you have to have an ID to get food stamps, and you have to have an ID to scrap metal, which is something they have to do sometimes to make money. You can’t do any of that without an ID.”

While IDs are a hot commodity, so is trust, and that’s what Beach and Dyer spend a lot of time building on visits like this. Sometimes that trust comes easily, like it has with the family whose son has seizures. But more often than not, the progress is measured in small steps.

“One of the things that we run into is people that are reluctant to talk to us,” Beach said. “A lot of the time, people will think that outreach is bringing out food to people or supplies. That’s something that a lot of ministries do, but our goal is to try to get them into services and work toward documents and housing. We do bring some things with us to hand out as initial

engagement pieces, but that’s not typically our primary focus.”

While the family they encountered that morning in September was open to a conversation, others living in the camper were less willing to engage. Eventually, the visit was punctuated with some shouting between one of the men in the camper and the father. When those moments happen, Beach and Dyer try to quell the stress as quickly as possible. That day, Dyer approached one of the men in the camper with an offer of water and a question about whether there’s anything else he needs. Within a minute or two, the incident was over.

“Sometimes those situations do happen, and that it happened today is kind of surprising to me because of the tightness of this camp,” Dyer said. “They all know each other and have worked together, but it happens sometimes. But you have to de-escalate in those situations, and if you can’t, it’s best to leave the area.”

In all, the visit lasted about 20 minutes. Beach and Dyer gave the family snacks, toiletries and dog food for the half-dozen newly born puppies frolicking around the camp. The engagement was brief but positive, with at least one more layer of trust built between the outreach team and the family.

“In this line of work, you don’t make promises that you can’t keep. So, that means a lot of the times these folks don’t trust people, because they’ve been burned before with people saying they will help but not following through,” Beach said.

OKC finds a guide in Houston housing program

Among American cities, Houston has gained recognition and seen results after adopting a housing-first model to address homelessness. Over the last decade, more than 25,000 unhoused people have been moved into places to live. Since 2011, Houston has cut its homeless population by 63 percent, according to the New York Times. San Diego has also adopted the strategy, moving about 11,000 people into homes since 2017.

In 2021, Dallas City Council members approved a \$72 million plan to place 2,700 people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing.

But while the effort may be there, money often is not. For OKC’s Key to Home pilot program, the spending breakdown includes \$6.9 million for rental subsidies, \$2 million for stabilization services such as case managers, \$1 million for moving kits and landlord incentives, and \$1.3 million for management and administration.

The cost to house someone in the Key to

Cont. A9

OKC Housing Insecurity



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

AS OKC GROWS,
RISING COSTS CREATE
HOUSING INSECURITY

A new program aims to spur developments, but a myriad of factors continue to drive homelessness statewide.

Matt Patterson
NonDoc

Jessica Ramirez spends her days caring for her 1-year-old son and working as a cashier, hoping to keep a roof over her head and her son fed and in diapers.

The money she makes is never enough. To make matters worse, the mobile home that Ramirez rents is falling apart, and her landlord has become another obstacle in a life full of them.

Ramirez moved to Oklahoma from California aiming for a fresh start, but little has worked out as planned. After her husband became incarcerated, Ramirez was on her own.

She told her landlord about what happened with her husband. Her husband's name was removed from the lease, leaving her solely responsible for the rent. Ramirez had been given a sheet explaining the situation she was in and what her rights were at a local domestic violence shelter.

"He laughed," Ramirez said of her landlord. "He didn't take any of it seriously."

Now, the mobile home is falling apart. The drains back up and mold grows in the living room and bathroom. The mobile home has several holes that she has fixed with Flex Seal.

"He came pounding on my door one day saying he was going to take us to court for unpaid rent and that he was going to evict us," Ramirez said.

Ramirez had just recently started her cashier job and had yet to receive her first paycheck.

"It's scary, because I don't know where we would go if we got evicted," she said. "Where would we sleep?"

Ramirez is far from alone in facing housing insecurity. Oklahoma County saw 17,868 evictions filed in 2023. There were 8,602 judgments resulting in eviction, according to data from Shelterwell.

During her time of turmoil, Ramirez has received help for her rent from Catholic Charities and Upward Transitions.

"I think one of the biggest problems is that in Oklahoma there aren't as many programs available for people as there were in California, which has a lot more programs that can help with rent," she said. "But even if you look at the help that's out there, if people don't know about it, they can't get help."

OKC 'getting ready to experience' big-league challenges

Oklahoma City is a big-league city with a big-league basketball team and a soon-to-be brand new \$900 million big-league arena funded primarily by taxpayers.

But the OKC metro also faces complicated big-league problems regarding affordable housing that are causing more people to become unhoused all around the country.

From 2000 to 2018, Oklahoma County was ranked No. 20 nationally in evictions with a rate of 6.19 percent over that period.

Things were even worse in Tulsa County, which checked in at No. 11 on the list with a 7.7 percent eviction rate over the nearly two-decade

period tracked by Eviction Lab. (The onset of the pandemic two years later only made matters worse.)

In 2000, the median rent in Oklahoma County was \$483 a month. By 2010, the monthly median rent jumped to \$731 per month. By 2018, it stood at \$851 per month.

Those looking to buy an affordable home are also facing an inventory crunch, as median home prices in Oklahoma County have been on an upward trend for more than a decade.

Speaking at an OKC Ward 2 town hall hosted by Councilman James Cooper on housing in November, Gary Jones, Oklahoma City Metro Association of Realtors government affairs director, delivered some hard truths in his address at a packed Tower Theatre.

"The reason that housing is so important is not because we need to live in one, but there is an actual framework that dictates how and what happens within housing," Jones said. "And, unfortunately, because of the unprecedented growth that we're experiencing in Oklahoma City, we're getting ready to experience what San Francisco experienced, what Washington, D.C., experienced, what New York City experienced. I know somebody here says, 'We don't experience that in Oklahoma City.' Well, you know what, they didn't experience it either until they got the growth that they did."

Jones said it has long been time for the state to do more to create affordable housing before the issue becomes an even bigger crisis. Last year, the Oklahoma Legislature listened and created the state's new Housing Stability Program, which is aimed at providing development funding for affordable single and multi-unit family housing. The statewide program is now taking applications from builders, who can receive zero-interest loans to develop projects and increase the state's housing supply. The loans must be repaid within two years to avoid interest charges.

"Affordable housing does not mean that you're poor," he said. "Affordable housing means that the income you make does not allow you to buy or to rent in the market that you live in. And people need to understand that."

Cooper has been hearing concerns about rent and housing affordability from people in his ward for years. With about 1,400 people in Oklahoma City experiencing homelessness on any given night — and about 500 of them sleeping outside — the OKC City Council has taken some recent steps toward addressing the issue.

Last year, the OKC City Council voted to make \$55 million available to the Oklahoma City Housing Authority to renovate and build affordable housing. All told, about \$400 million from public and private funds that were part of the 2020 MAPS 4 package will also be used to add 1,500 housing units in the years to come. In February, the City of OKC received a \$7.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide homes for those who are unhoused.

Cont. A11

THE BIG PICTURE

In 2000, the median rent in Oklahoma County was \$483 a month. By 2010, the monthly median rent jumped to \$731 per month. By 2018, it stood at \$851 per month.

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OKC Homelessness

A long road back
for many Oklahomans.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A8

Home program is about \$24,000, which includes calculation of outreach employee salaries, rental payments and the move-in kits that include basic household supplies and furniture.

To find housing opportunities for those in need, landlords often must be negotiated with, and sometimes they are paid hold fees to keep units available for those entering the Key to Home program.

"Dallas put \$70 million on the table, and then over a couple of years the [U.S. Housing and Urban Development agency] awarded them another \$23 million," Cates said. "So, to me, the hope is we can leverage those public and private dollars and we can get more federal funds. We know that federal funds always come with limitations, and so that's where the community itself can step up and say these dollars can help in a different way. That's the blend of public and private that we're going to need."

"It's a slow road getting back when you're 50-plus"

While outreach specialists were just breaking ground with the family at the airport-adjacent encampment in September, Mark Wood has a roof and a new foundation thanks to OKC's Key to Home program.

His troubles aren't behind him, however. He wonders who will hire a formerly unhoused man to do anything, especially one who is 53 years old.

"It's a slow road getting back when you are 50-plus," Wood said. "It's easy to lose a home, but I keep maintaining my hope, and I try to be positive. It's easier to laugh than to cry."

Among his biggest concerns is the two-year gap in his employment history.

"When I go to apply, they see that, and the conversation takes a different turn," Wood said. "When you tell them you were homeless on the streets, sometimes people just write you off. They see you as someone who leaves trash on the street."

Wood has had other people's trash thrown at him. In one case, someone hurled a 44-ounce fountain drink from a passing car.

"It just coated me, and it was cold outside," recalled Wood, who lived on the streets for two winters. "Who does a thing like that? There are times like that that are just humiliating. People look down on you before they know anything about your story."

There are wins to celebrate, and he said his sanity is one of them. Wood spent a lot of his time on the streets on guard against everything, including the police.

"It's more exhausting than you can imagine," Wood said of being homeless. "No matter where you go, someone will tell you to leave. I was homeless for about a month, and a cop told me to disappear. And of course, I did. I didn't want to end up in jail. A lot of people wonder why some homeless people have dogs. It's partly for companionship, but it's also because a dog will alert when someone is trying to steal your stuff or gets near where you're sleeping. It's just never ending. That's why it feels so good to have my own place now that's secure and warm."

While there are moments of self-doubt, Wood is trying to look forward. Every time he shuts his front door, a feeling of calm settles over him. While doors may seem like simple objects that most people take for granted, his door comes with some symbolism.

"What I've appreciated so much is, everyone who has helped me has been so sincere about it," Wood said. "I could tell from the minute I started talking to them, they weren't casting judgment and looking down on me. The hardest part of all of this has been starting over with nothing, but I feel more optimistic than I have in the past."

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Winter Storm Lawsuits

Oklahoma utilities have little incentive to pursue lawsuits after bonds sold

From A7

came to challenging utilities about higher fuel costs from the storm.

“Indeed, Minnesota’s Commission took a much stronger stance than utility regulators in other states, including Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas, where CenterPoint (Minnesota’s largest natural gas utility) was permitted to recover the full amount of its storm-related extraordinary costs (plus ‘carrying costs’),” the Citizens Utility Board said in a press release.

Oklahoma Corporation Commissioner Bob Anthony has been the lone voice of dissent on the three-member Corporation Commission for how his fellow regulators handled the extreme natural gas costs during the winter storm. Natural gas producers and traders got paid, the utilities took billions of dollars in natural gas costs off their corporate balance sheets and maintained their top credit ratings even as interest rates began rising, he said.

“The only people who are not happy are the AARP and all the rest of the individual consumers and ratepayers,” Anthony said.

Anthony called the ONG settlement with NextEra inconsequential. Under the bonds, the utility’s consumers are paying both financing costs along with the natural gas costs for the disputed billing amounts still under review.

“It was peanuts,” Anthony said. “But both corporate entities had a business reason not to pursue it. NextEra is a huge company; they do lots of business with people. They don’t want their reputation to have a dark cloud on it. (ONG parent company) ONE Gas wanted to sell bonds. You can’t get a triple-A rating if the product you’re selling is under litigation. They had to shut that thing down.”

A smaller regulated utility, Arkansas Oklahoma Gas Corp., won an \$18 million judgment against global energy company BP over winter storm costs. The utility, which has 58,000 customers in eastern Oklahoma and Arkansas, said BP failed to provide the full amount of gas it had under contract during the storm. It sued for \$34 million in damages in federal court.

U.S. District Judge P.K. Holmes III didn’t buy BP’s argument that it curtailed the gas delivery to the utility under the contract’s force majeure clause. He said BP made a business decision not to secure the full amount of gas beforehand and hoped to make up the difference on the spot market.

“But when that day finally arrived, BP lost its gamble and breached the contract,” Holmes wrote in his May 2023 opinion. He later directed BP to pay \$1.5 million in attorney fees and court costs. BP did not appeal.

Arkansas Oklahoma Gas did not have enough natural gas costs from the February 2021 winter storm to merit issuing ratepayer-backed bonds. Instead, the utility got approval to recover \$18 million in fuel costs from the storm from its Oklahoma customers over 15 years under a utility accounting method called a regulatory asset. That amount has been reduced by \$3.5 million for its Oklahoma customers because of the utility’s win in court against BP.

Clawback mechanism

Oklahoma’s winter storm bonds include clawback provisions that benefit ratepayers if resolutions are reached in lawsuits or investigations about possible natural gas price manipulation. But Anthony said utilities had little incentive to pursue those lawsuits after the bonds were sold.

Previch, with ONG, said the NextEra settlement wasn’t subject to clawback under the ratepayer-backed bonds because it came before the bonds were sold. That means the settlement, at most \$7 million, wasn’t included in ONG’s \$1.3 billion bond issuance for extraordinary costs from the February 2021 winter storm.

In approving the ratepayer-backed bond deals, the Corporation Commission included a provision saying all natural gas purchases by the utilities were prudent, a regulatory term that presumes they used their expertise at the time to incur only reasonable costs. The utilities were under an emergency commission order during the storm to preserve life, keep the power on and keep natural gas flowing to heat homes. ONG said just 500 of its 900,000 natural gas customers in Oklahoma lost service during the storm.

The two other commissioners, Chairman Todd Hiatt and Vice Chair Kim David, said the attorney general or the federal government are the proper authorities to investigate natural gas prices. Hiatt has said the securitization of fuel costs from the winter storm was the best of several bad options. It minimized the effect on monthly bills and allowed the utilities to keep good credit ratings, meaning it was cheaper for them to borrow for capital-intensive projects like generating plant upgrades, pipelines or other infrastructure.

In its most recent annual investigations report, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission only once mentioned natural gas



PHOTO: ADOBE IMAGES

In approving the ratepayer-backed bond deals, the Corporation Commission included a provision saying all natural gas purchases by the utilities were prudent, a regulatory term that presumes they used their expertise at the time to incur only reasonable costs.

market manipulation from the February 2021 winter storm. The commission looked into allegations a gas marketing company curtailed supplies, citing force majeure, and sold gas to a different customer at elevated prices. It did not name the company and closed the investigation.

“Enforcement staff found that the marketing company’s decision to sell gas to the different customer appeared to have been made during a small window of time when the marketing company believed its curtailments would be less substantial,” the federal commission said in the report issued in November. “Enforcement staff also did not find evidence that the marketing company actively sought out buyers to sell gas to at an elevated price. To the contrary, the purchaser unilaterally reached out to the marketing company requesting gas.”

Kansas, Texas lawsuits

Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach in December refiled a federal court case against Macquarie Energy LLC that was first filed in state court. Kobach’s office claims Macquarie overpaid for natural gas by manipulating a daily spot price on the local trading hub and reselling the gas at inflated prices to Kansas utility consumers during the winter storm. That inflated daily price allowed the company to benefit from future average prices set on the local trading hub, Kobach’s office said.

“Macquarie’s market power on the Southern Star pipeline afforded it the opportunity to extract uneconomic profits using fixed-price trades, such as the trade, to influence benchmark prices higher, in favor of its market position,” the Kansas attorney general said in its petition.

Macquarie denied similar allegations in the previous federal case in Kansas but has not yet answered the latest petition. A federal judge in Kansas is considering consolidating Kobach’s lawsuit with several consumer lawsuits in Kansas over natural gas prices during the February 2021 winter storm.

Macquarie Energy is among the five largest natural gas traders in the U.S. market. Macquarie sold \$154 million in natural gas to Oklahoma electric and natural gas utilities during the winter storm, according to sales data from the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. Documents obtained under the Oklahoma Open Records Act show Macquarie was the other seller, along with NextEra, that Oklahoma Natural Gas disputed \$28 million in natural gas sales during the winter storm.

In Texas, an energy market analyst who used to work for Enron Corp. has recruited thousands of consumers to an ambitious lawsuit claiming price manipulation during the February 2021 winter storm. Circles X founder Erik Simpson started Texans Helping Texans to pursue what’s called a multi-district claim in Texas.

In the lawsuit, Simpson said natural gas producers and traders manipulated the Texas

natural gas market by curtailing production and putting gas into storage in the days leading up to the winter storm. His lawsuit said producers and traders routed their gas to the lightly state-regulated intrastate pipeline systems of Texas, as opposed to the more heavily federally regulated interstate pipeline systems that send natural gas out of state.

Circles X developed software to decipher public metering data about natural gas flows in Texas on pipelines. The lawsuit said that data backs up its allegations of price manipulation.

“To achieve their goal, defendants began using critical notices, OFOs (operational flow orders) and force majeure declarations to reduce pipeline deliveries to customers with contracts, allowing defendants to sell that natural gas on the spot market for higher prices, and re-routing natural gas from the interstate pipelines to intrastate pipelines where there is little regulatory oversight, which enabled defendants to manipulate the natural gas supply and direct it to the market where they could get the highest prices,” the Circles X lawsuit said.

The lawsuit faces several hurdles, including objections from at least two utilities that disputes between a utility and customers on natural gas costs should be at the state’s regulator, the Texas Railroad Commission, and not with the courts. The scores of natural gas companies and their subsidiaries named in the lawsuit have denied wrongdoing in court filings.

“Claims for unlawful competitive activity and market manipulation are subject to well-developed, rigorous legal standards that cannot be avoided by casting those claims as state law tort claims,” said a February court filing by the defendants in Harris County, Texas.

Circles X said it also has data about Oklahoma natural gas flows on intrastate and interstate pipelines during the February 2021 winter storm. It sent brief letters and emails about that data to both Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond and Corporation Commissioner Bob Anthony.

Meanwhile, CPS Energy, a municipal utility in Texas that serves 1.3 million electricity and natural gas customers in the San Antonio area, filed more than a dozen lawsuits against natural gas companies in the months following the February 2021 winter storm. The utility has secured several settlements, but it successfully fought requests by local media to disclose the settlement amounts.

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CONSTRUCTION PROGRESSES on the Fairground Flats apartment complex being built on North May Avenue near the State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City on Wednesday, May 17, 2023. PHOTO JOE TOMLINSON

OKC Housing Insecurity

The lack of a clear, long-term, coherent strategy

From A9

Some of the OKC’s programs are already bearing fruit. The city purchased an old Motel 6 east of Bricktown that will be converted into 75 studio apartments. The city’s Key to Home program is also well underway, housing about 90 of the most chronically homeless people in the city over the last year.

OKC Ward 6 Councilwoman JoBeth Hamon believes those programs are a step in the right direction but are unlikely to fully resolve the need for more affordable housing in the city.

“I think one of the things we’ve seen is the lack of a clear, long-term, coherent strategy,” she said. “What we’ve seen in the past is kind of uneven response to the problem of both homelessness and affordable housing, and what that’s led to are challenges for those who are either middle- or lower-income.”

As of 2024, Oklahoma City checks in as the 20th-largest city in the United States and ranks sixth nationally in growth, a fact that has become a regular talking point from OKC Mayor David Holt. OKC grew by about 102,000 people from 2010 to 2020, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. The growth continues at about 1 to 2 percent a year.

As a result, Cooper still worries the city may remain behind in the long game, even with some new housing efforts underway. Cooper sees an opportunity with urban infill, which involves developing small parcels of land in urban areas that have either been vacant lots or have held uninhabitable homes. Urban infill stands as an alternative to suburban sprawl, although OKC’s housing demand likely requires an “and” not an “or” approach moving forward.

“There is an opportunity with urban infill around the city,” Cooper said. “This is land that can be used to build affordable housing units for people, and they don’t have to be massive, complicated developments spread out all over the city. Utilizing space in that way makes more sense than continuously creating more sprawl.”

Cooper said the latter has been the city’s long-term direction.

“I’m 41, and as a government, the City of OKC for all of those 41 years has helped induce developers to gobble up farmland along the peripheral parts of the city so they could develop the land into these residential one- and two-story homes that, in a lot of parts of the city, are unaffordable,” Cooper said.

Cooper said at the same time that was happening, nothing was being done to encourage infill across the core of the city.

“Now we have to do that. We have no choice,” Cooper said. “We have to invest in the next bond at least 10 times the \$10 million we did in the last bond, and I’m telling you that would be barely scraping by, in my opinion, (at) \$100 million. We have to figure out how we incentivize our urbanist development community to build infill developments that are one- and two-bedroom, less than 1,000 square feet for people that need that.”

Cooper said about 19,400 Oklahoma City residents in need of housing units fit that bill, but he said there are only about 3,600 housing units available at any given time.

“That’s not capitalism,” Cooper said. “Capitalism is supply and demand, and right now the free market has been corrupted, and instead of meeting the demand with the supply, we let people play Pac-Man with farmland. What if you’re a teacher making \$40,000 a year, where are you buying a house?”

Still, a variety of factors have combined to make even urban in-fill developments difficult. After growing between 0.4 percent and 4.8 percent a year from 2016 through



2020, building material prices climbed about 15 percent a year in both 2021 and 2022.

As a result, the capital outlay now required to build a duplex on a small lot often necessitates rent beyond the definition of “affordable” and far beyond the parameters of Section 8 housing vouchers, which help low-income individuals with rent.

The conundrum caused state leaders to create the subsidization programs for new housing construction last year. But as those efforts take aim at the “workforce housing” supply side of the problem, other market factors — such as stagnant wages, overall inflation and limited access to mental health and other support services — have left more people with a tenuous grasp on their housing security.

Housing instability fuels other problems

A community’s lack of affordable housing puts more people at risk of becoming unhoused, and for many the margins are thin. A lost job, a broken car, a sick loved one: Even a small crisis can touch off the dominoes that lead to eviction and potential homelessness.

Nationally, more than 650,000 people faced homelessness in 2023. The rising cost of housing stands as a major challenge for those already homeless and for those trying to remain housed.

National Alliance to End Homelessness CEO Anna Oliva told USA Today the road from being housed to becoming homeless is getting shorter in many areas.

“That move from a housed situation to an unhoused situation is happening

more quickly, and it’s more direct,” Oliva said. “More folks are reporting, as they’re showing up in the homeless services system, that they’re coming directly from a lease.”

In Oklahoma City, Community Cares Partners executive director Ginny Bass Carl is a homeowner and a landlord. As the designee to grant community organizations hundreds of millions of federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program dollars, CCP and its grantees helped those in danger of being evicted because of job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bass Carl, speaking at the November town hall hosted by Cooper, said evictions create more problems down the road.

“Evictions hit hard,” Bass Carl said. “You have homelessness, wage and job loss, falling behind in school, health problems, workforce challenges, court-system strain, property turnover, economic insecurity, trauma, increased taxpayer costs, and it all disproportionately impacts minorities and families with young children.”

Bass Carl said one of the contributing factors to Oklahoma County’s high eviction rate has been the relative ease with which landlords can have a tenant evicted compared with other areas of the country.

“In only five days, for only \$45, you can evict without proof of property ownership, without proving a lease violation,” she said. “This eviction process is fast, it’s confusing, and [many] tenants don’t even show up to court. More than 70 percent of evictions happen because tenants are not in court. The scales of justice are not evenly balanced in eviction court. Landlords are represented by attorneys about 66 percent of the time. For tenants, it’s about 10 percent. Having

representation can make all the difference on whether or not you’re evicted.”

Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma attempts to provide legal resources to those facing eviction through its Right to Counsel Eviction Program. In Oklahoma City, the program is currently limited to a handful of zip codes in OKC that have some of the highest eviction rates in the city.

Speaking at a December media event to promote the program, LASO executive director Michael Figgins said the program is meant to demonstrate its viability for expansion to other hard-hit areas of the city.

“That’s about all we can handle with the resources we have right now,” he said. “We’re trying to show what Legal Aid can do in this limited model and what Legal Aid can do if it were expanded to the entire city. So everybody in those ZIP codes, if they’re having an issue with a landlord, they’re eligible for legal assistance.”

Stopping people from being evicted in the first place is one of many tools that could ease homelessness in the city.

“We have a winning strategy, and the winning strategy is early intervention,” Figgins said.

To that end, ERAP proponents and many social service leaders have said it costs less to provide rental subsidies than it does to provide services and support people after they become unhoused.

“If we can keep people in their homes, they’re not becoming homeless, they’re not going to have housing instability issues,” Figgins said. “They will stay where they are and their kids will stay in the same school. What you need is a right to counsel, somebody to step in, protect and preserve your existing housing or the house that you want. And in any eviction, Legal Aid lawyers will look at things like proper notice and fines.”

Bass Carl also cited early intervention as a route to housing stability because the problems that can come from an eviction don’t end when that person finds their next home.

“What is needed is a prevention mindset that shifts from using evictions as late notices to framing evictions as a last resort,” she said. “An eviction filing on your record follows you forever and is a key reason a landlord will not rent to you. Disproportionate harm and long-term trauma are not favorable outcomes for anyone.”

Sen. Julia Kirt (D-OKC) is pushing Senate Bill 1575, which would extend the window for setting an eviction trial to 10 business days and extend the timeline for notice of a trial to a week.

“Giving tenants a little more time to figure out their next step, whether it is coming up with their rent money or another place to live, can help reduce homelessness, and that’s better for families and taxpayers and our economy,” Kirt said in a statement announcing the filing of her bill.

Despite Kirt’s efforts and attention paid to narrow eviction windows in the 2023 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall about housing issues, SB 1575 failed to receive a hearing on the Senate floor by last week’s deadline.

On heels of major investment, Legislature ponders more action

While rising housing costs in Oklahoma City are becoming a challenge for many residents who don’t have large incomes, rural Oklahoma has not been spared either.

Comanche County had an eviction rate of 8.1 percent over the period tracked by Eviction Lab. Woodward County saw 4.7 percent of evictions granted by courts per 100 filings. The rate for Mayes County in northeast Oklahoma was 4.8 percent.

OKC Housing Insecurity

“There’s a housing shortage, period.”

From 11

State Sen. Julie Daniels (R-Bartlesville) introduced SB 1244 to extend from only metro areas to all counties a sales tax exemption on personal property purchased by nonprofit organizations primarily serving homeless persons. She said Bartlesville has two facilities serving the homeless.

“Homelessness now is an issue statewide, and so anybody who has a facility that provides services for them ought to have access to the sales tax exemption,” Daniels said.

However, SB 1244 also failed to advance from the Senate floor by last week’s deadline.

A third bill, SB 1761 by Sen. Dave Rader (R-Tulsa) did advance off the Senate floor, but by the narrow margin of a 25-23 vote. Rader’s bill would create a “Rent Guarantee Program” within the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, which would allow households at or below 60 percent of area median income to receive private or public assistance of up to \$2,000 in an effort to help them make rent and remain housed. Individual landlords could receive up

to \$5,000 from the program to cover unpaid rent, eviction costs and property damage.

While Rader said he filed his bill to give landlords extra incentive to rent to folks returning to society from incarceration, its application could apply to a much broader set of renter circumstances.

“If that helps us have more places available, then we’re going to do a better job of not seeing guys come back into the [Department of Corrections],” he said.

The fate of Rader’s bill in the House remains unclear, but House Majority Leader Tammy West (R-Bethany) is sponsoring the proposal in that chamber. If SB 1761 is ultimately approved, it would mark the second time in as many years that lawmakers took action on housing issues.

Last year, the Legislature created and appropriated funds to the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency to administer a Housing Stability Program, which aims to spur housing construction in both rural and urban areas. Currently, applications made within 48 counties are being prioritized.

Much of the \$215 million allotted for the new OHFA effort is divided into a pair of programs:

\$100.7 million for the Oklahoma Homebuilder Program to fund the construction of new single-family homes, and \$63.55 million to fund construction of single and multifamily rental homes. Funded with \$40 million, a third component also offers down payment and closing cost assistance for homebuyers who make less than \$150,000 a year.

“There’s a housing shortage, period. It’s every place I look, and I’m from rural Oklahoma,” House Appropriations and Budget Chairman Kevin Wallace (R-Wellston) said in May. “Every time a new teacher comes in, there’s never a place they can live. There’s never any open housing.”

Just after the turn of the year, Gov. Kevin Stitt signed off on emergency rules that allowed people to begin applying for the program Jan. 29. Permanent rules are now in the works, and the first round of applications from homebuilders closed March 7. Those applications are scheduled for review by the OHFA Board of Trustees on May 15, and another application period is running through May 16.

But for many, the need for housing will come

to a head before that program fully ramps up with homes being built. Jessica Ramirez is one of those people. Far removed from the legislative shuffle and discussion of urban infill, Ramirez has moments of doubt.

“I sometimes think about going back to California,” she said. “It can be overwhelming to think about what’s going to happen next, or what is the next thing I’ll need that I can’t afford.”

She wants everyone to know her life isn’t that far removed from theirs.

“A lot of people don’t understand that it can happen to just about anyone, especially people who live from check to check and don’t have a way to put money aside,” Ramirez said. “It’s not just people who are lazy and don’t want to work. It just takes one or two things to knock your life off track.”

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



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To Kill A Mockingbird Coming to Tulsa



ABOUT THE ACTRESS

Jacqueline Williams is a multi-award winner whose Broadway credits include Horton Foote’s Pulitzer winner and Tony-nominated The Young Man from Atlanta (Clara) starring Rip Torn and Shirley Knight.

Kimberly Marsh
The Oklahoma Eagle

Veteran Chicago Actress Jacqueline Williams, a native of Mississippi, is no stranger to the perils of racism in the South. In her role as Calpurnia in the Broadway stage play To Kill A Mockingbird, she says she didn’t need much research. It was more about the connection to her fellow actors, especially Richard Thomas (who starred in The Waltons television series) in the role of Atticus Finch.

Tulsa is the second stop on the U.S. National tour of the Broadway stage play based on Harper Lee’s novel “To Kill a Mockingbird.” Brought to Tulsa’s Performing Arts Center by Celebrity Attractions, the Broadway play was created by Aaron Sorkin of several award-winning television shows, including The West Wing, The Newsroom, and Sports Night, and screenwriter for cinema on The Social Network, A Few Good Men, Charlie Wilson’s War, and Moneyball.

Sorkin’s adaptation of Harper Lee’s 1960 classic novel profoundly explores the relationship between two main characters, Atticus Finch and the family housekeeper Calpurnia, while still broadly following the novel’s narrative. Sorkin’s Calpurnia is a more central character to the story, giving voice to her perspective and criticism of Atticus’ approach to the legal defense of Tom Robinson, who has been wrongly accused of rape. She challenges Atticus in ways not explored in the book, forcing him to confront his white privilege and limitations as he takes the arm of justice in a racist society.

In the national tour, Atticus’ daughter Scout is no longer the protagonist who in the book tells the story through the eyes of a child watching as her father tries the case in a conflicted community in the South. Instead, the story is narrated through her, along with brother Jem and their friend Dill. The play jumps into the trial almost immediately.

Williams brings a richness to the role through her decades of professional acting, coaching both Scout and Atticus as mother and friend in difficult life lessons. The play gives Calpurnia a clear voice challenging Atticus’ inclinations to empathize with a white father, Bob Ewell, who is ultimately revealed as his own daughter’s rapist and found a scapegoat as Tom Robinson’s accuser. Calpurnia’s strength shows as a positive role model for Scout and counsel and friend to Atticus as they raise the children together after the death of their wife and mother and confront racism in their town.

“People who come to experience this live event will finally find the Calpurnia that has more voice than they have previously experienced through the book or in the film,” Williams said. “By taking this live journey with us, folks will get an idea of Cal’s place and presence in this family line. It’s very long and very deep. In her relationship with Atticus, there’s trust and honesty between them that allows them to disagree, and go toe to toe at times, and there’s a lot of playfulness between them as well. There are many things that Calpurnia schools Atticus that he can’t possibly know, even being as liberal as he is... things from the black perspective.”

As far as the message and the lessons the audience may take away from this stage adaptation, Williams said she prefers to leave that to each individual based on their walk in life and the need to receive answers.

“In a nutshell, you experience and learn about childhood wonder. Hopefully, people will get in touch, be reminded of that child within themselves, of discovery, and be emotionally free in a way to receive new information, and definitely connect with the fact that we still have a huge problem with racism. It is still happening,” said said. “And to also take away that there is hope. We can conquer this. We have to want to, and we have to do.”

Being part of a community that is struggling to heal from the deep scars of racism and the brutality of the 1921 Race Massacre, Tulsans may relate to the themes in a way that may bring up issues, emotions, and trauma within them.

Williams said that the play resonates with the audience everywhere it goes. The 1960s book exploring the state of the justice system and racism in the 1930s still has relevant and vital themes for discussion. There has been very little progress since the Civil Rights era. In some ways, nationally, America has taken steps backward, with racism encouraged and people acting on racist feelings being encouraged. Harper Lee could never have anticipated how an international pandemic and isolation would lead to more enlightenment on race and social issues.

“We still have a lot of work to do, and in many ways, some things are even worse today. In the past, in the North, racism was hidden..it was underneath. And in some ways, I always felt that it’s actually more dangerous than in the South, where it was made very clear where a brown person stood in any given white person’s eyes. But when things are hidden, that’s something else.”

The play opens March 26 and extends through March 31 at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, 101 E. 3rd St. Tickets are available for purchase online at Tulsapac.com, at the box office at 110 E. 2nd St. or by calling 918-596-7111. More information is also available at celebrityattractions.com.

The Oklahoma Eagle

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

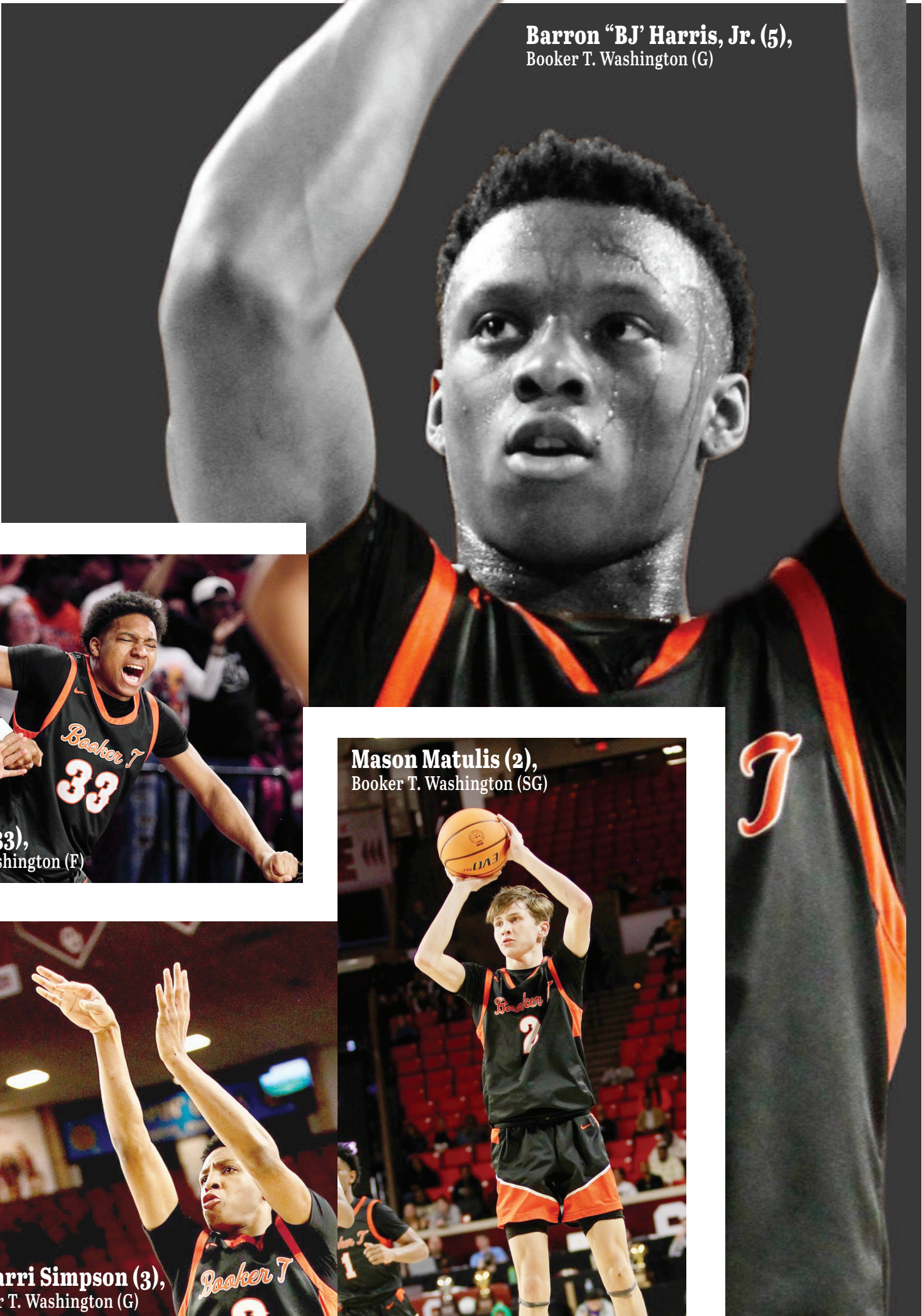


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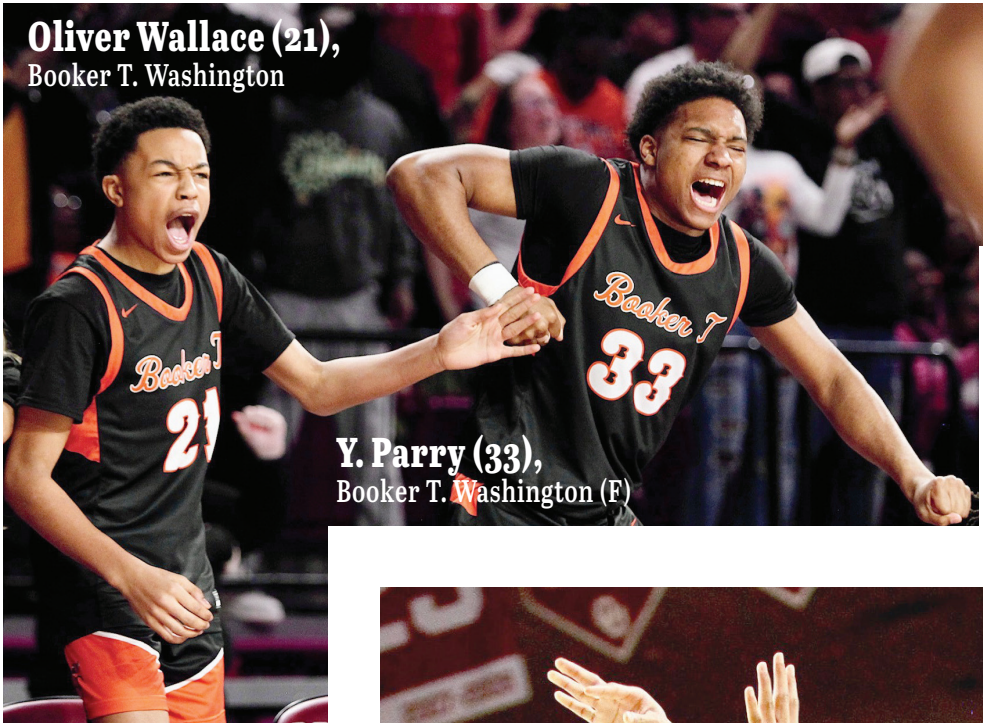
By Cory Young

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CITY

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Barron "BJ" Harris, Jr. (5),
Booker T. Washington (G)



Oliver Wallace (21),
Booker T. Washington

Y. Parry (33),
Booker T. Washington (F)



Mason Matulis (2),
Booker T. Washington (SG)



Jamarri Simpson (3),
Booker T. Washington (G)



L.J. Scott (4),
Booker T. Washington (G)

Mason Matulis (2),
Booker T. Washington (SG)

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON'S LJ SCOTT (left) helps teammate Mason Matulis stand, after the Hornets' 69-66 loss to Midwest City in the 5A state championship in Norman on Saturday March 9, 2024. PHOTO CORY YOUNG/FOREVER YOUNG PHOTOS/THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



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Monday Worship - 6:00pm
Wednesday Bible Study - 5:00pm

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BLACK, MISSING, AND INVISIBLE
IN POLICE RECORDS / A17

CHICAGO'S FIRST WOMAN BISHOP SHARES
HER JOURNEY ON 'FAITHFULLY SPEAKING' / A18

Majority-Black School Districts *Must Prepare for End of COVID Relief Funds*



PHOTO WORD IN BLACK

COVID Funds

With pandemic relief funds ending, *districts have to figure out how to pay for mental health and academic student supports.*

Funding *set to expire*

Aziah Siid
Word In Black

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed a \$190 billion spending bill that helped school districts pay for sudden, costly expenses, including shutting down and reopening schools. Administrators in districts, particularly majority-Black districts, used some of the money to pay for things that enhanced students' education: tutoring, extended summer learning, afterschool programs, paying staff, and more.

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, however, is set to expire this fall. As school officials are scrambling to spend some \$50 million in unused funds, Congress is cracking down on how the money is and was spent.

Yet as Black students continue to lag behind their white peers in math and reading — and face serious mental health issues, including a disturbing increase in suicide rates among Black girls — some experts say governments must find a way to replace those funds.

"States really need to step up and make sure that these services that are necessary to create the safe and supportive schools that our students need are either maintained or

supplemented," Eric Duncan, director of pupil policy at Education Trust, tells Word In Black

In 2021, as schools remained closed and online learning took hold, the federal government approved and distributed multiple waves of funds totaling \$190 million to districts during the shutdown and reopening of schools. As the pandemic eased and schools reopened, districts have used the funds at their discretion, including addressing the needs of struggling students.

Ensuring Funds Are Spent Correctly

When Republicans took control of Congress after the 2022 midterm elections, however, they took notice of how ESSER funds were being spent. Audits of ESSER funds "have shown a high potential for waste, fraud, and abuse in these funds as they were intended to support students," according to a press release from the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability.

At a January hearing, Rep. Eric Burlison, a Missouri Republican and committee member, said ESSER funds were often misused and spent to support "woke" left-wing political ideologies.

"While there were some schools that spent the money appropriately, There were far too many that used it for nonsense like DEI

Cont. A18

Black, Missing, and Invisible

Black, Missing, and Invisible in Police Records

From misclassifying the missing as "located" and homicide cases as "non-criminal," poor police data makes it tough to solve the issue.

Trina Reynolds-Tyler, Invisible Institute, and Sarah Conway, City Bureau
Word In Black

On June 7, 2018, two weeks after her daughter Shantieya Smith walked out her front door, Latonya Moore remembers sitting on her porch when a neighbor's son came with a message: "My mom says you need to come down." Moore took off, walking less than two blocks down her tree-lined street to see people gathering around a bungalow with police crime scene tape on its front fence.

A bad odor emanated from its dilapidated garage.

As Moore made her way into the crowd, she heard someone say that a body was found — a woman with red hair. Somebody

Cont. A18

COVID Funds

Chronically underfunded



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A17

programs, critical race theory, gender ideology, & other woke programming.” Congress has a responsibility to question how the schools are paying taxpayer dollars and how they are being effective in spending those dollars.”

Virginia Gentles, director of the Education Freedom Center at the Independent Women’s Forum, said schools that spent the money to address gaps in education wasted the money on issues that had already existed for quite some time — and didn’t get much bang for the buck.

“A common excuse for declining student performance, which began years before the COVID-era closures, is that schools are chronically underfunded,” she said “Yet, scores have plummeted to historic lows, despite the 190 billion federal elementary and secondary school emergency relief,” Gentles wrote.

But Duncan says he has seen cases in which school districts showed up for their students with laptops, and immersive afterschool programs. Still, it is the responsibility of

school districts to allocate funds to schools that need it most.

“Maybe districts could have done more to provide more mental health professionals and buildings, create what we call Safe Schools, which are more positive and affirming climates for students, have more counselors in school, less police, things like that,” Duncan says.

Ultimately, Duncan says, how districts spent their ESSER funds underscored a big problem.

“The spotlight is on how we have not educated our students. We should have been for years and years,” Duncan says. “Whether it’s early literacy, making sure that we don’t have 80% of black fourth-graders not reading on grade level. The test scores with math and reading being as low as they’ve been in 30-some years. Students are having huge mental health issues, and chronic absenteeism — not feeling comfortable or safe going to school.”

“The issue is about the system’s failing our students and the people that we’re trying to serve,” he says. “This is getting attention now.”

Chicago’s First Woman Bishop

Chicago’s First Woman Bishop Shares Her Journey on ‘Faithfully Speaking’



REV. PAULA E. CLARK, is the first woman and the first Black person to serve as the presiding prelate in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago.

PHOTO WORD IN BLACK

Rev. Dorothy S. Boulware
Word In Black

Bishop Paula Clark talks turning faith into action, about hospitality and service, and a bit about Queen Bey.

The Right Rev. Paula E. Clark is the first woman and the first Black person to serve as the presiding prelate in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, having been elected in December 2020, and installed in September 2022.

Bishop Clark is also the inaugural guest to speak about her faith on the first episode of Word in Black’s new series, “Faithfully Speaking.” There can never be too many ways to spread good news. And it is imperative people know the outstanding presence the collective faith community has beyond houses of worship.

On our Religion and Social Justice beat, we’ve covered stories about people of faith showing up to demand justice for innocents in Gaza, protesting the conversion of libraries into detention centers in Texas, and demanding

the attention of a political system that often overlooks the “least of these.” These actions are efforts to bridge the racial wealth gap and provide access to food and healthcare.

People of faith are often called hypocrites because they portray a less-than-gracious example of their love mandate. Bishop Clark and I discussed this and the frustration it generates when offering hospitality to the community. We also discussed making hospitality a priority far ahead of the necessities of ministry and endurance. We agreed it is our calling to allow God to bless the world through us.

You’ll hear the Bishop’s “call” experience and a tad about Beyoncé, but I don’t want to give too much away.

Stay tuned for much faith talk going forward, and let us know where your interests lie. Let us know who puts verses from holy texts into action. Help us highlight a best practice so others can adapt it to their ministry. We’re going to tell as many stories as possible in as many ways as possible to as many people as possible. Always.

Black, Missing, and Invisible

Inaccurate data, inconsistent reporting, create challenges

From A17



A TEDDY BEAR lays on a tossed sofa in the ally a few doors down were Shantley Smith’s body was found in 2019.

PHOTO SEBASTIAN HIDALGO FOR CITY BUREAU

began to scream, “Nay Nay,” her daughter’s nickname.

Gasping for air, Moore collapsed onto the sidewalk in grief. “They ended up having to call the paramedics because I had an anxiety attack,” Moore remembers. “I couldn’t breathe.”

A few days later, at a medical examiner’s office near Douglass Park, Moore was shown one of Smith’s tattoos on a screen: her nephew’s name written in cursive on her bicep. The remains were too badly decomposed — weighing only 57 pounds — for Moore to view the body itself. The medical examiner would eventually rule Smith’s death a “homicide by unspecified means.”

As Moore grieved the loss of her daughter, police reports show that a detective on the case requested Smith’s missing person case be closed with a “non-criminal” classification, and his supervisor approved.

Between 2000 and 2021, the Chicago Police Department claims that just over 343,000 (99.8%) of missing person cases were “closed non-criminal,” meaning the person was “likely found” and the case was “not criminal in nature.” In fact, police data from this time period identifies less than 300 missing person cases that were reclassified as a crime and only 10 of these as homicides.

This does not include Smith’s case, because police labeled her case “non-criminal,” then opened a separate police investigation into her death, which is not linked to her original case in CPD’s missing persons data.

“If you’re trying to understand how many of the missing person cases within your city are homicides, obviously you should keep accurate records about that,” says Matthew Wolfe, a journalist and doctoral candidate in sociology at New York University, where he studies police missing persons data across the country.

Inaccurate data makes it difficult for police or public officials to fully understand and effectively tackle the missing persons problem in Chicago, according to Wolfe, Thomas

Hargrove, and Tracy Siska, all researchers who specialize in police data.

City Bureau and the Invisible Institute identified an additional 11 cases that were miscategorized as “closed non-criminal” in the missing persons data despite being likely homicides — more than doubling the number of official homicides in missing persons police data. In some of these hidden cases, a person was later charged or convicted of a crime related to the missing person’s death, or it was determined that the missing person faced a violent death as a result of strangulation, shooting or stabbing.

Reporters found these cases by searching for murder charges and news stories and cross-referencing the names of the missing; it’s unclear how many missing person cases that never resulted in murder charges or media coverage were miscategorized in this manner. In Chicago, police arrest somebody in just 24% of all homicide cases (though the agency is under fire for claiming to “clear” 48% of homicide cases in 2021, according to a CBS Chicago report).

While in some cases this may be due to clerical error, City Bureau and the Invisible Institute also identified four cases where police actually wrote, in their own words, that the missing person was returned home safely, even though they were not.

In the case of 61-year-old Linzene Franklin, who was reported missing in 2011, a detective claimed in a 2014 Chicago police report that she had returned home without incident. In reality, Franklin had died of a heart attack at a North Side bus stop in 2013 and was buried as an unidentified person. Her body remained in a South Side Roman Catholic cemetery for nine years before Cook County deputies connected the two cases and alerted Franklin’s family. Franklin’s daughter told Cook County deputies she hadn’t seen her mother since 2011.

These cases lead to important and unanswered questions: How many people in the city of Chicago remain missing, despite officers concluding that the person had “returned home”?

The Cook County team closed Franklin’s case in 2022 after matching her DNA with a family member. Commander Jason Moran, who leads the team, confirmed in an interview with City Bureau and the Invisible Institute that the Chicago Police Department had prematurely closed the case.

After 16-year-old Desiree Robinson ran away from her grandparents’ home in late November 2016, detectives reported in a police investigative document several weeks later, “the missing has been located. No indication the missing was a victim/offender.” However, her grandfather Dennis Treadwell says Robinson never returned to his home, nor was he contacted by police about her whereabouts prior to her murder. On Christmas Eve that same year, a man murdered Robinson, who had been the victim of sex trafficking on backpage.com, after she refused to perform a sex act for free in a garage in Markham, Illinois, while her sex trafficker slept outside in a parked car, according to a Chicago Sun-Times report.

A police spokesperson says in a September statement, “The Chicago Police Department takes these cases seriously in hopes that the missing individuals are able to return home to their loved ones safely. Each missing persons case is thoroughly investigated based on the evidence available. We will continue to investigate all open missing person cases as we work to locate those who are missing.”

These cases lead to important and unanswered questions: How many people in the city of Chicago remain missing, despite officers concluding that the person had “returned home”? How many are victims of violent crimes, with their bodies never found or identified by the very department tasked with protecting and serving them? And while this investigation focuses on missing persons who were killed, how many more cases included terrible crimes that left the victim alive and traumatized?



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CHARITY BARTON is the author of a new book and is host of "Only in Your Dreams" podcast. She encourages all her listeners to tap into their imaginations and believes "the life you want is 'Only in Your Dreams.'" PHOTO PROVIDED

Charity Barton, local author, releases book and announces podcast

Barton is a TEDx speaker, storyteller, and motivational speaker

Charity Barton, author, TEDx Talk presenter, and podcast host, has written a new book, "We Did That! – A Black History Children's Activity Book."

The children's book "offers continual learning activities encouraging readers to have conversations about history, empowerment, love, identity, and pride," said Barton.

According to Barton, the book is for kindergarteners to 12th graders, college and graduate students, parents, solo travelers, history enthusiasts, and educators.

In the book are puzzle pages, coloring activities, stories with comprehension questions, and competitive challenges. Readers are encouraged to explore pivotal moments in Black history while actively participating in the stories.

"We Did THAT!" offers something for everyone eager to dive into Black history in an exciting and educational manner," said Barton.

Laurel Cox, a schoolteacher at Carver Middel School, said, "I am excited to share this book with my students because it is a fun and engaging way for them to learn more about Black history and achievement. "We Did That!" is the perfect opportunity to start conversations with students about important historical figures and moments that they will continue to carry on with their friends and families."

For more information, see www.cboriginal.com or email, charity@cboriginal.com.

Podcast

Barton has launched a podcast, "Only In Your Dreams." She describes her podcast as "Challenging the typical advice given to those seeking to live their dream life, 'Only in Your Dreams' podcast encourages all listeners to tap into your imagination, listen to your desires and start dreaming again." She believes "the life you want is Only In Your Dreams."

Her upcoming podcast on March 22 will interview Melanie Evans, a certified speech-language pathology and auditory assistant, and a mindset and abundance coach. Evans is the founder of Legacy Culturally Responsive Therapy Services. The topic will be how to get your mind prepared for big dreaming. The podcast is located at <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/onlyinyourdreams>.

Other recent podcasts are March 1 – "Turning Detours into Destinations" and Feb. 25 – "The What ifs, Could bes, and Why nots."

Barton is a graduate of Oklahoma State University with a master's degree in mass communication/media studies, the University of Tulsa with a bachelor's degree in communication and media studies, and Booker T. Washington High School. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

For more information, see cboriginal.com.

Oklahoma Arts Council sponsors public art for Greenwood District



ARTISTS JOEL DANIEL PHILLIPS AND ALEXANDER TAMAHN have proposed the portraits of J. B. Stratford, Edward McCabe, Mable B. Little, and O. W. Gurley to be portrayed on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard on the walls of the underpass of Interstate 244 leading into the Greenwood District. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Oklahoma Arts Council is sponsoring a series of public artworks to be featured in the Greenwood District area. The project is named the Pathway to Hope Public Art Trail.

The program will highlight six artworks in a variety of mediums installed on the underpasses of Interstate 244. The locations for the artwork are notable points of connection between north Tulsa and the surrounding areas, including Black Wall Street near downtown.

According to the Arts Council, each artist has identified a theme related to the location of the art and its relationship to the people and history of Greenwood.

Final approval of the art designs was received by an oversight committee. In finalizing the art content, the artists are required to engage with the community as a part of the research process. An event will be planned to introduce the final works once they are completed.

The project is administered by the Council's Art in Public Places program. It is in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. The finished art will be added to the Northeast Oklahoma region on the Oklahoma Art in Public Places' website.

For more information, contact Michelle Burdex, programs director of the Greenwood Cultural Center, at mburdex@greenwoodculturalcenter.com.

TU College Of Law Hosts Hall Of Fame Dinner



UNIVERSITY OF TULSA COLLEGE OF LAW installs new inductees into Hall of Fame. PHOTO BY LABORIS

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

The University of Tulsa College of Law held its 22nd annual induction of its Hall of Fame members at Southern Hills Country Club earlier this month. The members included individuals who have distinguished themselves in their professions.

The 2024 honorees pictured with TU President Brad Carson (second from left) and Law School Dean Oren Griffin (right) are Gov. Bill Anoatubby of the Chickasaw Nation, Wendy Drummond of Drummond Law, and John W. Franklin, who accepted on behalf of his grandfather, B. C. Franklin.

Anoatubby received the Lifetime Achievement

in Law Award. He has served as governor of the Chickasaw Nation since 1987. As the chief executive officer of one of the nation's largest tribes, Anoatubby has increased the employment levels of its tribal government from 250 employees in 1987 to 14,000 today. Today, the indigenous nation operates more than 100 diversified businesses and invests much of its revenue into funding more than 200 programs and services.

Drummond is the recipient of the Benjamin P. Abney Cor Legis Award. A 2007 graduate, she specializes in employment, entertainment law, HR, and executive compensation. Additionally, as CEO of Premier Wireless, she has become a leader in developing best practices in the dynamic tech and wireless industries. She is the awardee of the Madam President Award from the

Tulsa League of Women Voters.

Buck Colbert "B. C." Franklin is posthumously recognized for his contributions to the legal field with the W. Thomas Coffman Community Service Award. He moved to Tulsa months prior to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. With his law partners, P. A. Chappelle and I. H. Spears, he established a practice on Greenwood. After the massacre, he represented countless survivors and the insurance claims of homeowners and business owners who were victimized by the massacre. A regular columnist for The Oklahoma Eagle, Franklin was the first Black to serve on a District Court bench and argue many cases before the Oklahoma State Supreme Court.

The College of Law sponsors the B. C. Franklin Clinic and the annual B. C. Franklin Memorial Civil Rights Lecture.

Events

March Women's History Month

Mar. 23

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 VanTrease 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

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.

Apr. 18

Greenwood Cultural Center hosts its Legacy Award Dinner at the GCC, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 6:30 p.m., reception; 7 p.m., dinner. The program will honor Geoffrey M. Standing Bear, principal chief of the Osage Nation, and the Osage Nation. Alfre Woodard will serve as the honorary chair. For more information, call (918) 596-1020 or visit www.greenwoodculturalcenter.com.

Apr. 26

100 Black Men of Tulsa Annual Gala – 30th Anniversary is planned for the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 7 p.m. For more information or tickets, see Eventbrite.

West Indies" according to the organizers. For more information, contact (918) 576-6800.