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## The Story of Greenwood Will Survive Any Court Decision



**VIOLA FORD FLETCHER**  
1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor



**LESSIE BENNINGFIELD RANDLE**  
1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor



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(LEFT-TO-RIGHT) VIOLA FORD FLETCHER AND LESSIE BENNINGFIELD RANDLE, 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors. PHOTO MIKE CREEF / FOR THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

## Race Massacre

# The Story of Greenwood *Will Survive Any Court Decision*

Deon Osborne  
The Oklahoma Eagle

**During the 100th anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Viola Ford Fletcher's voice didn't crack while seated before the U.S. House of Representatives, describing the violence of the white mob in her childhood community of Greenwood, the Tulsa, Oklahoma district, known as Black Wall Street. "I still see Black men being shot, Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire," Fletcher told the U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee in May 19, 2021.**

Cont. A5



CALVIN MONIZ, newly elected Tulsa School Board member, District 2. PHOTO PROVIDED



SARAH SMITH, newly elected Tulsa School Board member, District 6. PHOTO PROVIDED

TPS Elections

# Two New Members Elected To Tulsa Public Schools Board

John Neal and Kimberly Marsh  
The Oklahoma Eagle

**On April 2, 2024, voters elected two members to the Tulsa Public Schools Board of Education for four-year terms and one for an unexpired year-long term left vacant by a board resignation.** Calvin Moniz won the District 2 seat vacated by Diamond Marshall. Sarah Smith was elected to a four-year term in District 6, and John Croisant won reelection to the District 5 seat. They will join four other board members whose posts were not up for election. They will serve on a seven-member board divided on critical issues over the last several years.

The newly constituted Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) Board faces many issues. Among the most divisive is a lawsuit between board members over the appropriate conduct of members under the Oklahoma Meetings Act. Another challenge is a pending State audit. It was demanded by board members Jennette Marshall (District 3) and E'lena Ashly (District 4). It is expected to shed light on the payment of hundreds of thousands of dollars and bonuses paid to top administrators without board approval.

Above all, TPS faces continued critical scrutiny and threats of sanctions from the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE), led by Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters. All three successful board candidates pledged during their campaigns to improve public education for Tulsa students. They voiced resistance to Walters and the OSBE's efforts to wrest control from the local board, marked by imposing new academic goals that heightened the challenge to maintaining the district's accreditation status.

**TPS DISTRICT 2**

Moniz easily outdistanced KanDee Washington in securing 65 percent of the votes to represent District 2 on the board. District 2 is the most diverse segment of the school district, stretching along I-244 from the south Greenwood District in the west to the Kendall-Whittier Neighborhood in the east. In recent years, this district has also experienced the highest turnover in representation, something Moniz has pledged to end by not resigning or seeking higher office.

During his campaign, Moniz touted his educational background, holding a master's degree in business (MBA) and a law degree from the University of Tulsa. He also burnished his civic involvement in several organizations and, on his campaign website, said that upon entering the corporate world, "he specializes in developing career pathways for students looking for their first job outside of school."

As a TPS school board candidate member, Moniz has campaigned on a promise to overcome board rancor, saying in a public

**TPS faces continued critical scrutiny and threats of sanctions from the Oklahoma State Board of Education (OSBE), led by Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters.**

forum, "What I have found in talking to members of the community is that education is only divisive because we are letting our leaders at the top make it divisive."

**TPS DISTRICT 5**

Croisant was re-elected with 77 percent of the votes to the TPS board seat in District 5. The seat was contested by Tulsa educator Teresa Pena. Croisant campaigned on his experience and district improvements made during his tenure. However, he also faced questions about his oversight of district management, including the embezzlement of school funds by former TPS administrator Devin Fletcher.

Tulsa Schools' south central District 5 lies east of the Arkansas River and north of I-44. Edison schools anchor the district. Croisant described himself on his campaign website as "a former teacher, a coach, a local businessman, a dedicated community volunteer, and most importantly, a parent."

Croisant closely aligned himself with TPS Board President Stacey Woolley, and former school superintendent Deborah Gist. He is a fierce advocate for current TPS Superintendent Ebony Johnson. Croisant also has expressed anger over bonuses paid to school administrators. Some of them were under his watch but bypassed the board. This issue remains unresolved.

**TPS DISTRICT 6**

Sarah Smith, a parent of four sons and a community volunteer, won the District 6 seat with 1,375 votes over Maria Seidler's 519. This was the race with the most contrasting viewpoints on TPS issues. While Smith campaigned on her goal of "keeping politics out of the classroom" and "building relationships with board colleagues," Seidler has sued multiple school districts, including the TPS board majority members, over various issues.

Yet, Smith is quick to criticize unspecified TPS officials for the "financial impropriety" that has occurred over recent years and pledges greater transparency and accountability. The

newly elected TPS board member wants more teachers in the classroom and improvement in their training and professional development. Smith replaces board member Jerry Griffin in District 6 who abruptly resigned prior to the election. District 6 lies in southeast Tulsa, with its midpoint at the intersection of I-44 and the Broken Arrow Expressway and contains Nathan Hale schools.

**The Mission to Retain Local Control**

The election changes to TPS School Board membership are widely considered more important than any in recent years for Tulsa parents, educators, and anyone who supports improved public education in the school district. Among the myriad challenges facing the new board, none loom larger than the accreditation threats by the OSBE and Superintendent Walters. The district's accreditation status has been under fire since Walters led the state board to impose "Board Orders" on academic achievement and other measures on TPS last year.

Subsequently, Walters led the OSBE to adopt new rules requiring stringent higher math and reading scores. If the district cannot meet the state goals in student tests in April, Walters is threatening that TPS will lose its accreditation and be taken over by the state. Tulsa voters who wanted to overcome a takeover and maintain local control were tasked with ensuring the school board comprises strong leaders.

**KIMBERLY MARSH** is a contributing writer at the Oklahoma Eagle. She is a native Oklahoman. Public education is one of her passions.

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

# Leona Pearl Mitchell: Historic Opera Singer

By KITTIE PITTMAN, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Mayoral Candidates Make Their Pitches



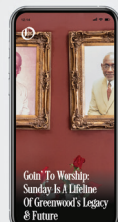
POLITICS: Focus On The Contenders for Tulsa Mayor



Lawmakers Seek Tougher Shoplifting, Domestic Abuse Penalties

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REGINA GOODWIN, St. Rep., District 73, during an interview outside of the Oklahoma State Capitol. PHOTO MIKE CREEF / FOR THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

## Race Massacre

# “The lack of action is the story in and of itself.”

From A2

**N**early three years later, on the warm spring afternoon of April 2, 2024, 109-year-old Tulsa massacre survivors Fletcher and Lessie Benningfield Randle, gazed up at the nine justices of the Oklahoma Supreme Court for the first time.

Fletcher and Randle are the last known living survivors of the government-sanctioned racial domestic terror attack after Fletcher’s younger brother, 102-year-old World War veteran Hughes Van Ellis, passed away in October 2023.

“Many have come before us who have knocked and banged on the courthouse doors only to be turned around or never let through the door,” Randle and Fletcher said in a joint statement to reporters ahead of the hearing.

In the hands of the chief justice, vice-chief-justice, and seven other associate justices’ lies the power to revive their historic case after Tulsa County District Judge Caroline Wall dismissed their claims in July 2023.

In a nation that has failed to apply equal justice and reparations to Black Americans and in a state that has denied responsibility for its role in perpetuating the destruction of an historic Black community, trust in the legal system remains low.

Yet, survivors of The Massacre have appeared at one court hearing after another, urging the world not to let Oklahoma bury their story. In a series of interviews with The Oklahoma Eagle, descendants, community leaders, and researchers expressed a determination to keep the story of Greenwood and their fight for justice alive.

“We’re talking about the most documented massacre in U.S. history.”

A native Tulsan, Dreisen Heath has dedicated much of her life to researching and consulting on the issue of reparations, both locally and nationally.

She was drawn to the work following a series of high-profile police killings, including the killing of unarmed Terence Crutcher in Tulsa in 2016. Researching how police brutality impacts Black communities led her to find a connecting thread between the harms from the 1921 attack on Greenwood and ongoing disparities today.

Despite Greenwood’s revival immediately after the destruction, attorneys for the survivors argue the impacts from the massacre, urban renewal, police brutality, and other issues reflect ongoing harms today.

In 2020, Heath published a Human Rights Watch report, which asserted the government is obligated by international law to provide reparations to massacre survivors and their families.

“Victims of gross violations of human rights, like the Tulsa Race Massacre, should receive full and effective reparations that are proportional to the gravity of the violation and the harm suffered,” the report stated.

During Tuesday’s hearing, several justices

“

**Many have come before us who have knocked and banged on the courthouse doors only to be turned around or never let through the door.**

**VIOLA FORD FLETCHER AND LESSIE BENNINGFIELD RANDLE, 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors**

expressed confusion about why Tulsa County dismissed the case without allowing it to proceed to discovery and trial.

When Oklahoma Solicitor General Garry Gaskins argued the survivors didn’t meet the qualifications to seek a remedy for their injuries, Justice Noma Gurich gave a scathing response.

“How can there be any question that these plaintiffs have not been especially injured? I mean, did the military attack other neighborhoods in 1921,” Justice Gurich asked.

The vocal response drew a positive surprise from members of the community and their supporters inside the courtroom. Still, it remains unclear whether that pushback will evolve into a complete revival of their case.

“The Oklahoma Supreme Court should allow the case to go to trial and further discovery. We’re talking about the most documented massacre in U. S. history,” Heath told The Oklahoma Eagle.

“So, not only did the state commission a task force to investigate the massacre. We also have the most photographic evidence from the massacre that was then used by some of the white perpetrators to further dehumanize the Greenwood community by selling remnants of the massacre and the destruction as postcards,” Heath added.

The state of Oklahoma has refused to take action on decades-old recommendations for reparations found in the 2001 state-commissioned report. Heath’s Human Rights Watch report drew attention in Tulsa, but city councilors hesitated to approve a local commission to study reparations proposals.

The lack of action and the state’s denial of culpability represent a stark contrast from historical records.

“Gov. (James Brooks Ayers) Robertson declared martial law, and National Guard troops were deployed in Tulsa. Guardsmen assisted firemen in putting out fires, took African Americans out of the hands of vigilantes, and imprisoned all Black Tulsans not already interned. Over 6,000 people were held at the Convention Hall and the Fairgrounds, some for as long as eight days,” the Tulsa Historical Society recounts.

“Jim Crow, jealousy, white supremacy, and land lust all played roles in leading up to the destruction and loss of life on May 31 and June 1, 1921.”

These days, Heath travels across the country advising other communities seeking to move forward on justice and accountability for Black Americans. Dozens of local communities have moved forward on forming task forces, launching studies, advancing proposals, or contributing funding reparation plans in recent years, the most action on reparations since Union General William T. Sherman’s 1865 Special Field Orders No. 15., authorizing the redistribution of land to freed Blacks living in Confederate states.

On the federal level, Heath helped rally the votes needed to get H.R.40 onto the U.S. House floor for the first time in over 30 years. H.R. 40, first proposed by the late Rep. John Conyers,

would establish a national commission to study reparations for descendants of enslaved people.

More recently, Heath worked with Congresswoman Cori Bush, the first Black woman to represent Missouri in the U.S. House of Representatives, to file a \$14 trillion reparations bill last year.

Federal action on reparations remains at a snail’s pace as calls for justice grow louder.

“The lack of action is the story in and of itself. And there’s got to be more public pressure to get what we are owed,” Heath told The Oklahoma Eagle.

“This can be handled in the courts.”

Tuesday’s court hearing before the Oklahoma Supreme Court represents a legal crossroads for the Greenwood community and survivors of one of the worst instances of racial terror on U.S. soil. The court’s chief justice twice acknowledged confusion about why the case was dismissed without a trial, but that doesn’t necessarily indicate how the majority of justices will vote.

### A lawmaker weighs in on the case

There is no timeline for a decision, but that is not stopping St. Rep. Regina Goodwin (D-73) from taking action. As a descendant of survivors in the Republican super-majority-controlled Oklahoma Legislature, Goodwin is no stranger to being one voice among a mob of opposition.

Unapologetic in her determination, Goodwin filed legislation to provide a victim’s compensation fund for the community ravaged by the government-sanctioned massacre. While much of her proposals have faced steep odds among her ultra-conservative colleagues, Goodwin’s bill to expand scholarships for descendants of the massacre has gained traction.

One of the recommendations from the state’s 2001 “Race Riot” report called for reparations in the form of college scholarships. However, during an interim study at the Oklahoma State Capitol in October 2023, Goodwin brought in experts to explain how the state’s scholarship fund for descendants has failed to support more than a few students.

Rep. Kevin West (D-54), the Republican chair of the General Government Committee, listened quietly during the interim study.

Following the hearing, he was asked whether he would push his colleagues to revamp the scholarship program.

“I would be open to it,” he told The Black Wall Street Times.

At Tuesday’s hearing in front of the Oklahoma Supreme Court on April 2, Goodwin listened as attorneys for the city of Tulsa, Tulsa County, and the state of Oklahoma denied any role in the destruction of Greenwood or the ownership of land in the community today.

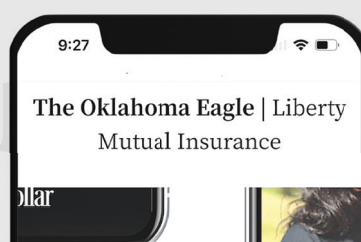
“It’s despicable that you would have senior citizens and having to drag them into court, only to then suggest that they’re not quite sure of the harm that was done, not quite sure of the homes that were burned and the lives that were lost, how that is injurious,” Rep. Goodwin told

Cont. A6

The Oklahoma Eagle

## Our Mission

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



## Race Massacre

# Taking another step towards accountability & restorative justice

From A5

The Oklahoma Eagle after the hearing.

"It is ridiculous in many ways, but it's also part and parcel of what we've been seeing for a century-plus. So those mouthpieces, that mindset is the same mindset that we had back in 1921," she added.

While the defendants continue to argue that the Oklahoma Legislature, not the courts, should decide reparations for Greenwood survivors, Goodwin rejects that argument.

"They know good and well this can be handled in the courts. It can be handled with this Supreme Court. It could've been handled with [Tulsa County] Judge Wall. So the bottom line is either folks are gonna do right, or they're not."

Moving forward, Goodwin has helped North Peoria Church of Christ secure a federal grant to study the cost of removing the portion of I-244 that cuts directly through Black Wall Street.

Constructed by the grandfather of Tulsa's current anti-reparations Mayor G.T. Bynum, a descendant of survivors, is overseeing an effort to reclaim land for the benefit of a community once known as the most wealthy Black neighborhood in the nation.

"The bottom line is we want justice to be served for the folks that deserve it," she said.

"Making sure this (harm to a people) will never happen again."

For years, Tulsa County District Judge Wall's slow-moving in the case raised fears that the court system of Oklahoma was waiting for survivors to die, to run out the clock on justice metaphorically.

In June 2023, Viola Ford Fletcher became the oldest living person to release a memoir titled

“

**The bottom line is we want justice to be served for the folks that deserve it.**

REGINA GOODWIN, St. Rep., D-73

"Don't Let Them Bury My Story."

Those fears became heightened after the passing of Fletcher's younger brother, Hughes Van Ellis, at 102 years old in October.

### A noted author's perspective

For journalist and author of "Built From the Fire" Victor Luckerson, the defense's arguments against bringing the case to trial reflect the same arguments used in 1921.

At one point, Oklahoma Solicitor General Gaskins argued that any National Guard members who attacked or killed Black residents of Greenwood were acting outside the scope of their employment and, therefore, the state shouldn't be held liable, the news organization NonDoc reported.

"That was actually the specific argument that was made to the Oklahoma Supreme Court in the 1920s," Luckerson told The Oklahoma Eagle.

For half a decade, Luckerson, formerly a journalist with Time Magazine and the New York Times, entrenched himself in Greenwood and members of the community as he researched his book.

Unlike other books on the massacre, Luckerson focused on each generation of Greenwood and the government structures that impacted them in the 1920s, '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, and beyond.

"If that's the legal standard, I think it's a bad one because it absolves these bad actors, who have governmental power, of any kind of responsibility. That was interesting to me. What I had assumed was a very archaic interpretation of the law was actually revised wholesale 100 years later," Luckerson said.

The state's argument against reparations drew parallels to arguments made directly after the

massacre, during a time when attorneys, judges, and city officials proudly signed their names on Ku Klux Klan rosters, according to documents housed at the University of Tulsa.

In 1923, the Klan controlled so much of the state that then-Governor John Calloway Walton declared martial law in an effort to drive out the KKK amid a flurry of lynchings. The Oklahoma Legislature, full of Klan members at the time, swiftly impeached him for his efforts to combat white supremacy, according to the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Since Justice for Greenwood attorney Damario Solomon-Simmons first filed the historic state public nuisance case for survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre in September 2020, Tulsa County District Judge Caroline Wall's perspective about the case has been shrouded in mystery.

Yet during oral arguments on April 2, Oklahoma Supreme Court justices made their thoughts known.

"When I went to high school, I knew about the Trail of Tears...but Greenwood was never mentioned," Justice Yvonne Kauger told the courtroom from the bench. "So, I think regardless of what happens you're all to be commended for making sure that will never happen again, that it will be in the history books."

Deon Osborne is an Oklahoma Eagle contributing writer who has covered the story of the survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre and their legal case for three years. He writes about the intersection of race, politics and justice.

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▶ **KEN LEMON** is national president for the National Association of Black Journalists. He is an Emmy Award-Winning reporter at WSOC-TV in Charlotte, N. C. PHOTO PROVIDED



▶▶ **EVA D. COLEMAN** is the Region III director for the National Association of Black Journalists. She is an award-winning TV producer and media educator based in Dallas, Texas. PHOTO PROVIDED



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▶▶ **GARY LEE** is the managing editor of The Oklahoma Eagle and former foreign correspondent for the Washington Post and Time. PHOTO PROVIDED



▶ **CATHERINE MCGLOIN** is a communication specialist with the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project at Northeastern University School of Law. PHOTO PROVIDED

## NABJ

# National Association of Black Journalists *Regional Conference* To Meet In Tulsa, April 12-13

**Dr. Jerry Goodwin**  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The National Association of Black Journalists Region III will host its annual conference in Tulsa, April 12-13. The theme of the event is “Press and Prosperity: NABJ Meets Black Wall Street.”

Hundreds of journalists from the region and the U.S. are expected to attend. A range of speeches and workshops - devoted to the high profile and pressing issues facing the journalism community today - are on the agenda.

The attendees will tour the Greenwood District and Black Wall Street area and participate in conference workshops. The Northeastern University School of Law’s Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project will host the opening session.

Catherine McGloin and Gina Nortonsmith, administrators of the project, will present their research on archives that journalists can use in their reporting of historical and contemporary racial injustices.

Additional workshop topics on the program are “A.I: Threat or Tool?” “Building and Sustaining Your Own Business,” “Journalism Jumpstart: College Strategies for a Thriving Media Center,” and “Newsfeed Navigator: Mastering Social Media as a Journalists.”

Several NABJ celebrities are slated to attend the two-day event, including NABJ National President Ken Lemon, Region III Director Eva Coleman, Hall of Fame Honoree Cheryl Smith, and a host of other national and local journalism professionals and scholars. Several special guests will also be on hand to discuss specialized subjects.

At the awards program on Saturday evening, Gary Lee,

managing editor of *The Oklahoma Eagle* and former *Washington Post’s* Moscow bureau chief, will be the guest speaker.

The region includes the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

Local sponsors of the conference are Justice for Greenwood, Northeastern University (Boston) Law - Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project, Terence Crutcher Foundation, Tulsa Community College, Report for America, The Oklahoma Eagle, Leah Heals, and the NABJ-Tulsa chapter. Additional support was provided by the Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalists Pro Chapter.

For registration information and the conference schedule, see <https://nabjonline.org/event/nabjregion3tulsa/>. □

## Tenant Free Counsel

# Tenant Advocates Push for Right to Free Counsel

Heather Warlick  
Oklahoma Watch

Donnie Pompey, 32, found himself in Oklahoma County eviction court on March 11. He knew his rent was late; Pompey said he had a medical problem that caused him to fall a month behind.

Pompey showed up at the courthouse without a lawyer. In general, only about 10% of people facing eviction filings arm themselves with attorneys. Pompey was fortunate to find attorneys from Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, known as LASO, at the courthouse. The statewide nonprofit offers free access to attorneys for people facing eviction.

From the LASO attorney, Pompey learned that his eviction was unlawful; the landlord had posted a generic five-day notice to move out, and had tried to force him out by turning off his electricity and water, he said. On top of those blunders, the landlord misspelled his last name on the lawsuit.

Without the help of LASO, Pompey said, he wouldn't have known the filing was improperly served and the utility cuts were illegal.

"He probably would have gotten away with it, who knows?" Pompey said.

In addition to LASO, Housing Eviction Legal Program also provides free legal help in eviction cases. But in Oklahoma, there are no Right to Counsel laws, statutory guarantees of free legal representation for tenants in eviction cases.

A nationwide push toward ensuring tenants' rights to access legal services is emerging. The Right to Counsel in eviction cases has been adopted in four states and 17 municipalities. Oklahoma advocates defend Right to Counsel by referring to the Fifth Amendment, which protects people from being deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

Everyone has a right to counsel in eviction proceedings, said Robert Goldman, by nature of the court system. An Oklahoma City-based eviction attorney, Goldman has practiced housing law since 1977, and said 90% of his cases are for nonpayment of rent.

Nationally, the American Civil Liberties Union reported that one in five households is behind in its payments. A low minimum wage combined with affordable housing shortages in the state leaves many Oklahomans walking a thin line between housing stability and eviction.

New York, San Francisco, Denver and other places that have enacted Right to Counsel laws have reported favorable outcomes for tenants, with more tenants staying in their homes, cases being dismissed, and fewer evictions filed in the first place.

Research by Open Justice Oklahoma, a program of the Oklahoma Policy Institute, showed that when Tulsans have legal representation, they are 75% more likely to stay in their homes.

Pompey said he already has a new apartment lined up. The landlord will have to refile the eviction properly and meanwhile, allow Pompey access to his belongings. The landlord may not refile the eviction, knowing Pompey is planning to move out.

### A National Crisis Affects Oklahoma

To call evictions in America a crisis is an understatement, said attorney John Pollock, coordinator of National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel, or NCCRC. More than 3.6 million evictions are filed in a typical year, according to The Eviction Lab. In America, someone is served eviction papers every four minutes.

In 2016, Eviction Lab named Oklahoma City the 20th worst in the nation for its high number of evictions. Tulsa ranked 11th worst. Since 2016, eviction filings have climbed by about 27%, Eviction Lab data showed.

In Oklahoma, landlords filed more than 48,200 eviction cases in 2023. More than 17,860 were in Oklahoma County alone, according to Shelterwell, an Oklahoma advocacy group focused on housing rights for low-income tenants. The group collects eviction data, offers training to landlords and tenants, and pre-filing mediation services.

People served with evictions have few options for their day in court. They can find free legal representation such as Legal Aid, pay an attorney, represent themselves, or skip the hearing entirely, resulting in a loss by default.

Goldman noted that not all eviction filings result in families displaced from their housing. In some cases, arrangements are made between landlord and tenant to settle.

However, not knowing where to find free or affordable legal representation, a large portion of people being evicted miss their hearings altogether, losing by default.

"The fact is that roughly half of tenants, at least in most jurisdictions, don't even respond to the complaint or appear in court, because the system is so disempowering and confusing and overwhelming," Pollock said.



ATTORNEY ROBERT GOLDMAN stands amid plaintiffs and defendants at eviction court on March 26 at the Oklahoma County District Court, 320 Robert S. Kerr Ave. PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH

## In 2016, Eviction Lab named Oklahoma City the 20th worst in the nation for its high number of evictions. Tulsa ranked 11th worst. Since 2016, eviction filings have climbed by about 27%, Eviction Lab data showed.

### Balancing the Courtroom

Dilks prefers the phrase Expanding Tenant Representation over Right to Counsel. She said people are often averse to changing laws that affect peoples' rights.

"Think about it as just investing in a service that ensures our playing field is leveled, that our legal system is fair and equitable and acceptable and understandable," Dilks said.

Goldman said he thinks eviction court is already level for tenants and landlords and that plenty of safeguards are built into the system protecting tenants.

"When it comes down to nonpayment of rent, I don't see that there's a tremendous benefit of legal counsel to get in there, except for a possibility of making sure the cases are being filed properly," Goldman said.

However, Pompey's case shows attorneys are more likely than laypeople to find legal discrepancies in evictions that can include discrimination or other problems, that could favor tenants in court.

"When you interject representation for the tenant, it changes the whole dynamic and (judges) have to pay attention to the tenant," said Michael Figgins, executive director at Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma.

### Proactive Jurisdictions See Positive Outcomes

NCCRC tracks eviction outcomes across the nation. In New York City, the first to enact a Right to Counsel law in 2017, about 84% of tenants experiencing eviction have been able to remain in their homes. Eviction judgments dropped 41%.

San Francisco's No Eviction without Representation Act of 2018 resulted in two-thirds of tenants with legal representation staying in their homes after eviction filings, NCCRC reported.

Maryland, South Carolina, Washington and Connecticut along with cities Newark, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Boulder, Baltimore, Seattle, Louisville, Denver, Toledo, Minneapolis, Kansas City, New Orleans, and Detroit have enacted similar Right to Counsel laws.

The ACLU in 2022 issued No Eviction Without Representation, a report detailing the positive results for tenants in Right to Counsel jurisdictions. Cleveland's Right to Counsel program helped 93% of unrepresented tenants in eviction cases avoid a judgment against them.

Taxpayer cost savings that could result from Massachusetts' Right to Counsel laws amount to almost \$37 million annually, for a return of about \$2.40 for every dollar spent on Right to Counsel programs.

### Expanding Representation in Oklahoma

Tenants need proactive legislation to avoid the dangerous path toward homelessness that evictions can present, Dilks said.

LASO is working on a statewide pilot to expand Right to Counsel and their free assistance to tenants in areas in Tulsa and Oklahoma City where eviction rates are higher than average, Figgins said.

Figgins and the LASO team are focused on high-eviction zip codes 73111, 73120 and 73119; in Tulsa, 74136 and 74105.

"Sometimes you find things that are really bad," Figgins said, referring to the unlawful cases LASO attorneys assist tenants with. "I mean really bad examples of discrimination. Or tenants being forced to live in just uninhabitable situations."

### Paying for Expanded Protections

In Cleveland, Ohio, United Way partners with other philanthropic organizations and the city to fund tenant representation.

Federal funding streams, development grants and HUD funds can also be allocated to stem Oklahoma's growing problem of housing instability, Dilks said.

"We have a really robust (network of) philanthropic donors that are really interested in these issues, and I think that we love public-private partnerships in Oklahoma," Dilks said.

She said prioritizing families with school-age children addresses the chronic absenteeism of children in eviction situations and helps stabilize students.

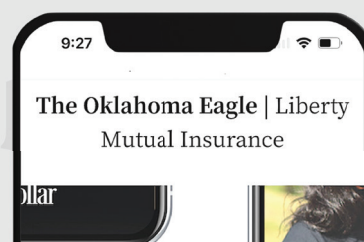
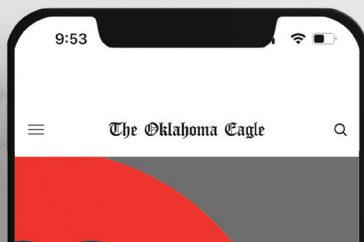
"I think there are ways you can overlap that geographic prioritization and a certain client prioritization that would really dramatically start to shift the landscape," Dilks said.

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

The Oklahoma Eagle

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DEANNA GREEN, 67, feeds her ballot into a machine at the Senior Citizen Center in Thomas on Nov. 8, 2022. PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Campaign Finance

# Campaign Finance Task Force Takes Aim at Outside Spending

Keaton Ross  
Oklahoma Watch

Politically active nonprofits allowed to spend unlimited amounts to sway Oklahoma voters should face greater scrutiny, a gubernatorial task force on election and campaign finance threats declared in its report issued this week.

Outside spending soared to nearly \$32 million in 2022, more than three times the \$10.5 million spent in the 2018 election cycle, Oklahoma Ethics Commission records show. In many races, independent expenditures far surpassed what candidates themselves spent. Federal and state law allows nonprofit groups to raise and spend unlimited amounts on political messaging, often without disclosing their donors, so long as they aren't coordinating with candidates.

Gov. Kevin Stitt was a frequent target of dark money advertisements leading up to the Nov. 8 general election, including one making an inaccurate claim that he commutes via helicopter from his north Edmond home to the state Capitol. During his February 2023 State of the State address, Stitt urged lawmakers to take up campaign finance reform and in November signed an executive order creating the Task Force on Campaign Finance and Election Threats.

The nine-member task force, which included former Republican party chairman A.J. Ferate and State Election Board Secretary Paul Ziriak, recommended a series of changes to require politically involved nonprofits to be based in Oklahoma and provide a phone number that is answered by a person located in Oklahoma for at least five hours per day. It also urged the Ethics

**Report proposes lifting contribution limits for candidate campaigns, which cap individual donations to campaigns at \$3,300 per election and contributions to political action committees at \$5,000, as a strategy to counter rising independent expenditure spending.**

Commission to ramp up enforcement of an existing residency requirement for treasurers of an independent expenditure entity.

The report proposes lifting contribution limits for candidate campaigns, which cap individual donations to campaigns at \$3,300 per election and contributions to political action committees at \$5,000, as a strategy to counter rising independent expenditure spending. The Ethics Commission could propose rules based on the report's recommendations, which would take effect at the end of the legislative session in which they were considered unless the Legislature or governor objects.

"Oklahoma does not have a mechanism to reverse the long line of Supreme Court precedent, nor can we simply ignore it," the report reads, referencing the high court's 2010 ruling in Citizens United vs. FEC. "But Oklahoma does have the ability to require more rigid reporting and accountability of the officers of the entity."

Established through a vote of the people in 1990, the Ethics Commission has broad enforcement ability but has struggled to secure adequate funding from the Legislature over the past several years. The agency is operating on a \$687,000 budget this fiscal year, nearly \$100,000 less than it was appropriated in Fiscal Year 2016.

Executive Director Lee Ann Bruce Boone requested \$1.6 million in new funding at the agency's budget request hearing in January, noting that fee assessments and late filings have increased as the commission's budget has declined.

"People just aren't understanding what's required," Bruce Boone said. "If we can put a focus on being proactive, we could really reduce those numbers and make a real difference for the people we serve."

The task force was complimentary of Oklahoma's election system, noting that statewide uniformity in voting procedures and regular post-election audits reduce the likelihood of fraud. It recommended incremental changes, including mandating post-election audits in statute and outlawing the return of overseas ballots via fax machine, as well as informational campaigns to combat misinformation.

"Election officials have seen false claims that algorithms determine election winners or that voting devices contain secret wireless connections," the task force report reads. "False claims such as these actually harm election integrity by undermining the public's confidence in elections."

Members also endorsed a ban on ranked choice voting in state and municipal elections, claiming the method could confuse voters and be costly to implement. A legislative proposal to outlaw the voting method has passed the House and is pending in the Senate General Government Committee.

The report urged caution on implementing open primaries, arguing the method often thwarts political party options and leads to two candidates with similar viewpoints appearing on a general election ballot. Oklahoma United, a voter advocacy group that supports open primaries, says it's working on a ballot initiative to bring the issue directly to voters but has not yet filed paperwork with the Secretary of State's office.

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

Corporation Commission Conversations

# Bill would allow some Corporation Commission conversations outside of public meetings

Michael McNutt  
NonDoc

If a division director of the Oklahoma Corporation Commission wants to talk to members on the three-person governing body about internal operations or a pressing item, a meeting has to be scheduled with each elected official individually. Meeting with more than one commissioner at the same time without posting a notice of a public meeting constitutes a violation of the state's Open Meeting Act.

A measure set for consideration Thursday in the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee would ease some restrictions that the three-member commission faces in trying to deal with agency matters without removing requirements that any discussions or action on pending rate increases or other proposals must take place in a public meeting.

House Bill 2367 by Rep. Tammy Townley (R-Ardmore) would allow the three members of the Corporation Commission to gather and have discussions — but not take formal votes — on certain matters. Currently, two of the members cannot discuss administrative actions or certain issues pending before the

commission without violating the Open Meeting Act.

"They run so inefficiently. They play what I like to call a game of juvenile telephone over there," Townley said. "They've got their aides, and the aides — one goes and talks to one commissioner, the other goes and talks to another commissioner. And the commissioners can't actually talk until they get into session."

While Townley said the Corporation Commission asked her to run the bill this year, she also has a family member with concerns about how the agency operates. Her uncle, Hamp Baker, served two terms as an elected corporation commissioner from 1974 to 1986.

"He thinks the way they do it now is very inefficient," Townley said.

Language added to the bill before it passed the House of Representatives states that corporation commissioners would still not be allowed to discuss pending "legislative" matters, which refer to rate cases and other proposals by regulated utilities, without complying with the Open Meeting Act.

But HB 2367 would partially exempt the commission from the Open Meeting Act so that at least two commissioners could discuss administrative, operational and procedural matters — provided the discussions do not

Cont. A10

## Corporation Commission Conversations

# HB 2367: “Opens the door joint briefings, without taking action.”

From A9

address appropriation of commission funds and no official action is taken.

### Such matters would be limited to:

- Scheduling of agenda items to be set before the Corporation Commission for an emergency, regular or special meeting;
- Prioritizing cases pending before the Corporation Commission;
- Identifying legislative changes, proposed or passed, and their effects on the Corporation Commission;
- Discussing public and media statements;
- Discussing staffing needs;
- Receiving information updates from Corporation Commission staff on agency business, as long as such updates do not pertain to pending rate proceedings of the commission;
- Conducting regular staff meetings where discussions of the day-to-day management of the Corporation Commission occurs, as long as such updates do not pertain to pending rate proceedings of the commission;
- Interviewing potential employees for the position of director of administration and division directors; and
- Assessing performance reviews and duties of the director of administration and division directors.

According to HB 2367, corporation commissioners would also be able to attend and participate in conferences, trainings, education, press and social events where the topic is the Corporation Commission, even if a quorum is present, provided that no official action is taken and any discussion of the business of the Corporation Commission is incidental to the event.

In Oklahoma, the three commissioners are elected statewide to six-year terms, meaning one seat is up for consideration every election year.

### Oklahoma Press Association has been working on HB 2367

Carried by Sen. Dave Rader (R-Tulsa) in the Senate, Townley’s measure would require the Corporation Commission to post on its website information on what was discussed during the conversations or events allowed in the bill. Commissioners would have to post the information within five business days after the meeting or event. If commissioners decide to take formal action on a topic that was discussed, then they must provide at least 48 hours notice before considering such an item at a public meeting.

Commission Chairman Todd Hiatt said during a Feb. 20 special meeting to discuss HB 2367 that he has worked with the Oklahoma Press Association the past five years to deal with difficulties faced by



FROM LEFT, OKLAHOMA CORPORATION COMMISSION MEMBERS Todd Hiatt, Kim David and Bob Anthony discuss House Bill 2367 during a special meeting Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2024. PHOTO MICHAEL MCNUTT

a three-member commission that needs to discuss matters and still comply with the Open Meeting Act.

“We all understand the Open Meeting Act and the importance of the Open Meeting Act, but it creates with a three-member board a situation (...) that’s just untenable much of the time,” he said.

Currently, Hiatt said leaders within the agency must schedule meetings with each commissioner individually.

“This bill would open the door to allow for a joint briefing provided the commissioners are not (...) taking any action,” he said.

Mark Thomas, executive director of the OPA, told NonDoc on March 18 that the legislation is an attempt to deal specifically with the inefficiencies of the three-member Corporation Commission. HB 2367 deals strictly with the Corporation Commission and not any other three-member entity, such as the Oklahoma Workers’ Compensation Commission, Oklahoma Tax Commission or boards of county commissioners. HB 2367 amends language in Title 17, which deals with the Corporation Commission, and it does not involve Title 25, Chapter 8, Sections 301 to 314, which defines the Open Meeting Act.

“Eventually, other three-person boards are going to want something like that, and you want to find something that works, that’s transparent,” Thomas said.

OPA has not taken a position on HB 2367 because Thomas said it remains a work in progress. Still, he said he appreciates the effort to deal with the awkwardness of a three-member body trying to take care of matters in a timely manner while still complying with the Open Meeting Act.

An opinion by then-Attorney General Scott Pruitt in 2012 created some uncertainty on how corporation commissioners could operate as a three-member board and still comply with the Open Meeting Act, Thomas said. It basically said two of the commissioners could not talk on matters that are discreet proposals that are going to come before the Corporation Commission for a vote.

“What that means, kind of in the opposite, is they could talk about things that were not discreet proposals that weren’t going to come to them before a vote, as far as they knew,” he said.

The issue came up again in 2017 when then-Gov. Mary Fallin formed the Second Century Commission Task Force to find ways to improve efficiency at the agency. In the task force’s report, recommendations included either expanding the Corporation Commission should to a five-person board or relaxing some of the rules of the Open Meeting Act for the Corporation Commission.

“The other option of switching to a five-member board sounds better to people, but at that point, two commissioners could talk to each other as long as there weren’t three in the room together, and there would be no transparency,” Thomas said.

During the Feb. 20 special meeting, Hiatt and Corporation Commissioner Kim David voted to support the measure, provided it allowed limited exceptions that were approved by the OPA. Corporation Commissioner Bob Anthony said he would not participate in the vote.

Hiatt said if the Oklahoma Press Association determined it could not support HB 2367, “that would cause me to withdraw my support and (I)

would announce so publicly.”

David said HB 2367 would make the commissioners more efficient, noting that currently if a commissioner wants to talk with a legislator about pending legislation, the commissioner has to schedule to meet individually with lawmakers.

“You know, we’re in a little different situation than say county commissioners who have a dedicated district that they oversee,” she said. “We are three commissioners that are overseeing the same district, which is statewide.”

Hiatt said after the meeting that HB 2367 would make the Corporation Commission more efficient and allow the commissioners to properly administer the agency without having to go through the process of posting public meetings whenever at least two commissioners met. Those discussions, he said, would deal mostly with agency operations and procedures.

“My intent is that these are not the issues that would impact the consumers,” he said. “Obviously, no action could be taken, but that would have to be disclosed so the public would have access to it, and maybe even more readily than they would (now) because a lot of times, you know, the public’s at work, they don’t hear what we say here. But in this case, they could just go to the website and see what discussions have occurred.”

### ‘If this is a bad idea, it goes away in two years’

Since the Corporation Commission’s Feb. 20 special hearing to discuss HB 2367, Anthony has come out against the measure in a recent commentary.

“It is yet another lash across the eyes of those legitimately attempting to peek behind the curtain and find

out exactly how and why consumers have received such short shrift at the commission in recent years while the insiders and special interests seem to get their way time and time again,” he wrote.

Anthony said he considers HB 2367 as an attempt “to slam the lid and nail shut the coffin that the Corporation Commission has attempted to build” regarding what he insists is a “very costly coverup” regarding 2021 Winter Storm Uri profiteering and bailouts at the expense of Oklahoma ratepayers.

Anthony, who has been a commissioner for 35 years and is the longest-serving elected statewide official in Oklahoma history, said that during his first decade in office, commissioners met daily, Monday through Friday, in posted, open, regular public meetings with recorded votes. Even 10 years ago, the commission still averaged more than three posted, open, regular public meetings each week. But last year, he said, the commission averaged less than one public meeting per week, at which commissioners conducted business and voted on orders.

“Personally, I believe the activities, meetings and records of the Oklahoma Corporation Commission and its individual commissioners deserve more, not less, scrutiny by the public, the news media, the state auditor, the Legislature, and anyone else,” he wrote in his commentary.

### Term limits are forcing Anthony to retire at the end of this year.

The House Energy and Resources Committee voted 13-0 on Feb. 28 to advance HB 2367. It received lukewarm support in the House, passing 54-32 on March 14, the last day it could meet a legislative deadline to remain alive this session.

HB 2367 would take effect Nov. 1. The version set for consideration Thursday in the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee includes a sunset provision that would expire July 1, 2026.

Townley praised Thomas for that idea.

“Let’s see if we can make it work, and if it doesn’t work, well, we tried,” she said.

Thomas agreed. “You have the 2025 session to tinker with it, the 2026 session to tinker with it or it goes away,” Thomas said. “It’s not automatically renewed. It ends unless the Legislature reauthorizes. If this is a bad idea, it goes away in two years.”

MICHAEL MCNUTT became NonDoc’s managing editor in January 2023. He has been a journalist for nearly 40 years, working at The Oklahoman for 30 years, heading up its Enid bureau and serving as night city editor, assistant news editor and State Capitol reporter. An inductee of the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame, he served as communications director for former Gov. Mary Fallin and then for the Office of Juvenile Affairs. Send tips and story ideas to mcnuttm@nondoc.com.



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OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE. PHOTO PROVIDED

## Budget Policy Halfway Point

# Legislature Focuses on *Budget, Policy at Halfway Point*

Paul Monies  
Oklahoma Watch

### What a difference a year makes.

Hundreds of bills have survived the Oklahoma Legislature's first big policy deadline, new Republican leaders have been chosen, and the House and Senate are starting budget negotiations in the weeks leading up to candidate filing for this year's election.

That's in stark contrast to a monthslong stalemate over how to provide public funds for private schools that bogged down last year's session to the point where a special session was ultimately needed to finish work.

The Senate voted this week to send its opening negotiating position on the budget to the House, part of a new transparency initiative touted by Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat, R-Oklahoma City. The \$11.6 billion appropriation resolution passed by a vote of 41-3. Almost \$331 million of that is to make up for the loss of revenue from the elimination of the state's portion of the sales tax on groceries. Treat said that will be the only major tax cut contemplated by the Senate this year.

"It just underscores that we said what we meant and we executed beautifully on what we intended to do," Treat told reporters on Tuesday. "We passed a budget that makes sure we keep our commitment to public schools, to infrastructure and healthcare. Obviously, it's a first step. This is what we authorized our (appropriations) team to go negotiate, and we'll have some back and forth."

Even Senate Democrats who voted against the budget resolution credited the new process for giving their caucus more of a voice. They said their no votes came over policy differences and what they saw as a need to invest more in critical public services. Gov. Kevin Stitt's executive budget proposed in February left most agencies with flat budgets.

"Unfortunately, agencies were artificially constrained in telling us what they really needed," Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City said before Monday's vote on the Senate budget resolution. "We did see that the executive branch

“

**Unfortunately, agencies were artificially constrained in telling us what they really needed.**

SEN. JULIA KIRT,  
D-Oklahoma City

limited what those agencies could request, so we saw a lot of flat budgets. I was challenged seeing some of the health and human services needs we have in this state, the increased costs, the increased needs of people in poverty and people with mental health conditions."

Republicans in the House and the governor keep pushing for additional tax cuts beyond the elimination of the state sales tax on groceries. So far, the Senate has remained firm.

"We cannot do everything they sent us and balance the budget," Treat said of several other House proposals for income tax cuts headed to the Senate.

Republicans, who hold supermajorities in the House and the Senate, took care of some internal business in recent weeks as they selected the next generation of leaders. Both Treat and House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, are term-limited. Candidate filing for state, county and federal offices will be April 3-5.

Majority Floor Leader Sen. Greg McCortney, R-Ada, won a GOP caucus election to become pro tempore-designate in the Senate. Rep. Kyle Hilbert, R-Bristow, the current House speaker pro tempore, won an election among fellow Republicans to become House speaker-designate. The formal votes to install them will come after the November election.

### Hundreds of Bills Remain

The Legislature's first major deadline signaled the death knell for hundreds of bills as they failed to make it out of their chamber of origin. After a short spring break, lawmakers will resume committee work on Monday to contemplate bills from the other chamber.

Several bills advanced that would make changes to the Oklahoma Energy Discrimination Elimination Act, which allows the state treasurer to restrict investments with financial firms perceived to be hostile to the oil and gas industry. Among them are House Bill 3541, by Rep Mark Lepak, R-Claremore. It would expand the law to cover agricultural, mining and timber industries. It passed the House by a vote of 78-15.

The House also advanced another Lepak

bill, HB 1617, which was carried over from the 2023 session. It is based on a model bill offered by the American Legislative Exchange Council. HB 1617 would restrict the independence of pension plan trustees by having them use shareholder proxy advisory firms that promise not to back policies involving environmental or social initiatives.

The Senate passed SB 1536, by Sen. Dave Rader, R-Tulsa. It would have the attorney general mediate disputes between the state treasurer and pension plan administrators over exemptions taken in the Energy Discrimination Elimination Act. It stemmed from a dispute last year between Treasurer Todd Russ and the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System. Another bill, SB 1510, by Sen. Chuck Hall, R-Perry, would exempt cities and counties from the law. It passed the Senate by a vote of 42-1.

The House and Senate sent bills to the other side making changes to the regulation of medical marijuana or stepping up enforcement. Among them are HB 3361, by Rep. T.J. Marti, R-Broken Arrow, which would limit medical marijuana to only prepackaged items of 3 ounces or less. It passed the House by a vote of 57-23 and has an effective date of July 1, 2025.

**HB 3458**, by Rep. Anthony Moore, R-Clinton, would allow the Oklahoma Tax Commission to share additional information with the attorney general's office, district attorneys and the Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority to combat money laundering related to illicit marijuana.

**SB 1939** would increase the late fees for medical marijuana business license renewals to \$500 per day. The bill, by Sen. Lonnie Paxton, R-Tuttle, is still a work in progress and addresses the transfer of business licenses. It was requested by the attorney general's office, the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs and OMMA. Similarly, SB 1635 would require business owners to submit a new affidavit saying they are in compliance with local zoning, building codes and safety

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A FRANCIS ENERGY EV CHARGING STATION is located near the intersection of Northwest 23rd Street and North Pennsylvania Avenue in Oklahoma City. PHOTO MICHAEL MCNUTT

## High-speed EV

# High-speed EV charging stations to reduce 'range anxiety' on Oklahoma interstates

Michael McNutt  
NonDoc

Electric vehicle motorists driving on Oklahoma interstates will have more options in the next year or so to power up their rides.

The Oklahoma Transportation Commission today awarded \$8.8 million of federal funds to be matched with money from private firms that they will use to build 13 high-speed charging stations along three interstates in Oklahoma.

The federal funds come from the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program, funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. It's a \$5 billion program to encourage electric vehicle charging stations across the country.

"This first round of NEVI takes a big step towards reducing range anxiety for the folks that are driving electric vehicles," Oklahoma Department of Transportation executive director Tim Gatz said. "I don't think any of us would tell you that the electric vehicle ownership in Oklahoma is evolving at a rate that, you know, is really exceeding our ability to manage it. So, we've got some time still. But at the same time, I'll tell you that this is desperately needed infrastructure."

Jared Schwennesen, multi-modal division engineer for ODOT, said Oklahoma is allocated \$66 million in NEVI funds over the next five years to create an EV-charging network across the state.

The high-speed 150-kilowatt chargers have the ability to charge a vehicle fully in about 45 minutes, Schwennesen said. They will be an improvement over the 110-volt trickle chargers that took as long as two days to fully charge a vehicle and the 240-volt chargers that take between four to eight hours to fully charge an EV.

"To help that range anxiety, you can get a charge and not be waiting for four to 12 hours," Schwennesen said.

Gatz said the high-speed chargers should be ready for motorists sometimes in the next 12 to 18 months, depending on supply-chain issues.

"The interstate system is what we're focused on now, because that's our primary alternative fuel corridors," Gatz said. "But we'll get further and further off the interstate with future phases."

ODOT issued a request for proposals to solicit bids for the construction, maintenance and operation of the EV charging units, Schwennesen said.

"This was competitively bid based on qualifications and locations to build out the interstates," he said.

### Love's to build 8 high-speed EV charging stations

Love's Travel Stops and Country Stores received eight of the 13 grants, totaling \$5.1 million. In return, Love's is spending about \$5.65 million on the units. Francis Energy will receive about \$1.9 million and put up \$476,883, while Tesla will receive about \$1.78 million in federal funds and provide about \$1.26 million.

"There is no better way for us to implement a program like this than to engage the private sector," Gatz said. "It's going to take the retail outlets to be a part of this rather than government trying to solve this problem, because what we're really after is long-term performance and long-term commitments."

Each of the high-speed charging stations approved Monday will be built along either Interstates 35, 40 or 44. Federal funds total \$8.8 million, and private investment will be about \$7.4 million for a total of \$16.2 million of investment.

### The locations of the charging units are:

- Love's, I-40 Exit 287, Webbers Falls;
- Love's, I-40 Exit 140, 800 S. Morgan Road, OKC;
- Love's, I-40 Exit 200, Seminole;
- Love's, I-44 Exit 5, Randlett;
- Love's, I-35 Exit 186, Perry;
- Love's, I-40 Exit 221, Okemah;
- Love's, I-35 Exit 157, Guthrie;
- Love's, I-40 Exit 166, Choctaw;
- Francis Energy, I-35 Exit 1, Thackerville;
- Francis Energy, I-40 Exit 308, Sallisaw;
- Tesla, I-44 Exit 240, Catoosa;
- Tesla, I-40 Exit 240B, Henryetta; and
- Tesla, I-44 Exit 125B, 1700 Belle Isle Blvd., OKC.

Stations mark 'the first phase' of charging corridors

The federal money will pay for construction and five years of operation and maintenance expenses of the EV charging units, Schwennesen said. NEVI requires 97 percent uptime of each charger during the five years of operations and maintenance to ensure reliability.

"ODOT is not going to own, maintain or operate any of these," he said. "So it's truly private and federal funds."

The goal of the NEVI program is to establish a network of 500,000 EV chargers by 2030 along federally designated alternative fuel corridors, he said. Federal guidelines say the high-speed EV charging stations should be on sites that provide convenient, reliable and affordable access for motorists, preferably at locations where drivers can do other things while their vehicles are charging.

Alternative fuel corridors, or AFCs, will be built out and compliant when there are four separate 150-kilowatt chargers within one mile of the exit at least every 50 miles along the corridor, Schwennesen said.

"These 13 awards (...) will complete the build-out of the AFCs of I-35, I-40 and I-44," he said. "This is the first phase of the AFC corridor build-out."

Charge Ahead Partnership, a coalition of businesses and organizations working to expand access to the nation's electric vehicle charging marketplace, complimented ODOT for prioritizing placement of chargers at locations where drivers have plenty to do while waiting for their vehicles to charge.

"ODOT clearly took federal guidance seriously by awarding these grants to entities with the amenities and facilities that travelers have come to expect," Charge Ahead Partnership executive director Jay Smith said in a statement. "Drivers want 24-hour access to well-lit, safe and accessible amenities when they stop to charge up. Clean restrooms, plenty of food and beverage options and attendants that can help with charging are a must. Spots like Love's have this, and we applaud the commission for judiciously awarding these funds to locations that will serve EV drivers for years to come."

(Editor's Note: Charge Ahead Partnership is a charitable sponsor of the Sustainable Journalism Foundation.) □

## Budget Policy Halfway Point

# Hundreds of bills languish in subcommittees

From All

regulations upon renewal of a business license.

Lawmakers continue to tweak the state's Open Records Act and the Open Meeting Act, the state's main government transparency laws. HB 3779, by Rep. Collin Duel, R-Guthrie, would require requesters to notify an agency or public official 10 days in advance if they plan to sue over a denial under the Open Records Act. HB 2730, a bill from last year's session, made it out of the House this year. The bill, by Rep. Annie Menz, D-Norman, would require notification of delays in providing records if they can't be produced within 10 business days.

Duel's HB 3780 would clean up some references to videoconferencing put into the Open Meeting Act during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. HB 3937, by Rep. Melissa Provenzano, D-Tulsa, would clarify how public bodies provide meeting notices

and agenda.

HB 2367, by Rep. Tammy Townley, R-Ada, spurred discussions on what would constitute a public meeting for the three-member Oklahoma Corporation Commission. The bill would allow corporation commissioners to discuss certain topics outside of a public meeting as long as those discussions are posted within five days on the agency's website. The legislation is intended to enhance efficiency at the Corporation Commission, but longtime Commissioner Bob Anthony opposes it. Before approving the bill, by a vote of 54-32, the House added a sunset provision on July 1, 2026.

### Other Bills to Watch:

• HB 3959, by House Majority Floor Leader Jon Echols, R-Oklahoma City, would create an incentive for professional sports teams. The proposal, capped at \$10 million, would function like the state's longtime Quality Jobs program that gives

employers a quarterly rebate in exchange for creating jobs. The bill would apply to teams from the top five professional sports: football, basketball, baseball, hockey and soccer. It passed the House by a vote of 72-22.

• HB 3966 by Echols. This would direct the University of Oklahoma to establish the School of American Civic Thought and Leadership. Echols said the governor requested this bill. It is modeled after the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University. Since that initiative started in 2017, similar schools have been established at flagship public universities in Texas, Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina and Ohio.

• HB 4148, by Rep. Suzanne Schreiber, D-Tulsa, and Rep. Mark Lepak, R-Claremore, would require health-care providers or third-party debt collectors to tell the court they made the patient aware of the costs of care before a debt-collection lawsuit can proceed. The

House advanced it off the floor by a vote of 86-0.

• SB 1430, by Hall, would break out the Central Purchasing division from the Office of Management and Enterprise Services into a separate agency and make the state purchasing director an appointee of the governor, with confirmation by the Senate. It passed the Senate by a vote of 42-3.

• SB 1218 by Sen. David Bullard, R-Durant. It would prohibit licensed dealers from refusing to sell a firearm to anyone age 18 or older unless they are otherwise prohibited under state law. It passed the Senate, 33-6.

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



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Sunday School 9:40 a.m.  
Sunday TV Worship 11:00 a.m.  
KTUL Channel 8

**TIMOTHY BAPTIST CHURCH**  
821 E. 46th St. N. • 425-8021  
**REV. TWAN T. JONES**  
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.  
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.  
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**NORTH PEORIA CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
2247 N. Peoria Tulsa, Okla. 74106 (918) 425-1071  
Warren Blakney, Minister  
Sunday Bible School.....9:00 a.m.  
Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.  
Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.  
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**Pettie Chapel CME**  
  
19364 S. S. Mingo Road. Bixby, 74008  
Phone: (918) 366-8870  
**Rev. Robert Givens**  
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.  
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.  
"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

**Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa**  
Rudisill Regional Library 1520 N Hartford Ave. Tulsa OK 74106 (918) 409-4899  
Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons  
Sunday Worship: 1pm  
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p  
"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

**SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH**  
123 E. 59th St. North Ph: (918) 425-2077  
Pastor Rick Bruner  
Sabbath School (Saturday) 9:30-10:45 a.m.  
Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.  
Choir Rehearsal Wednesday 6:00 p.m.  
"The Seventh Day Is Still God's Sabbath"

**Northside Christ Gospel Church**  
3101 N. M.L King Jr. Blvd. Tulsa OK (918) 625-2374  
Sunday School - 10 am  
Sunday Morning Worship - 10:45  
Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm  
Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm  
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm  
Wednesday worship - 8pm  
Rev. John W. Anderson

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Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm  
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Minister R.J. Smith  
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Temporarily meeting at the Courtyard Marriot 3340 S 79th E Ave Tulsa OK (918) 230-3022  
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WHY THE 'PROTECT BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS ACT' NEEDS TO PASS NOW : A16

# FAFSA Fiasco Could Keep Black Kids Out of College This Fall



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## FAFSA

Because a disproportionate number of them need federal money to pay for college, Black students might opt out of higher education.

## Disproportionate Impacts

Joseph Williams  
Word In Black

It's been one thing after another with the new-but-not-necessarily-improved Free Application for Federal Student Aid, a form that helps students pay for college.

First, the long-anticipated rollout of the redesigned online application was delayed for three months because it just wasn't ready. Then, when it finally did appear, a variety of bugs and glitches, including some that could reduce the amount of federal tuition aid, kept students and their families from completing it. Now, Chronicle of Higher Education reports that schools are receiving FAFSA applications with incorrect tax information from families.

None of this is good news for Black students, some 80% of whom depend on FAFSA to help pay for ballooning college costs.

According to the nonprofit National College Attainment Network, roughly 34% of all eligible high school seniors have submitted FAFSA applications through March 22, an overall decline of nearly 29% since last year. But the problem is most acute, according to NCAN data, among low-income schools and schools with high concentrations of minority students. There,

the percentage decline in 2024 FAFSA applications is slightly more than 35%.

Besides worsening an already-bad time crunch for colleges and students who needed the financial information weeks ago, the FAFSA fiasco could keep Black students — an outsized number of whom rely on federal aid — out of college classrooms this fall.

"Because Black students are disproportionately FAFSA filers, this has a huge impact on their ability to make a decision about both where, and if, they go to college," says Bryan Cook, director of higher education policy at the Urban Institute Center on Education Data and Policy.

Cook worries that some frustrated Black students, worried that they can't pay for college without federal assistance, may downgrade their college choice or give up on college completely. Either option, he says, would have negative, long-term effects on their earning power in the job marketplace.

The FAFSA process, which colleges use to calculate their share of financial aid for a student, is already months behind schedule, Cook says. Unless the problems get resolved quickly, he says, "Black students are going to have to make some really tough decisions about whether or not they continue to stay in this process."

The unequal impact on Black college-

Cont. A16

## Teachers

## Why Are Teachers So Unhappy?

A new survey finds teachers at high-poverty (read Black) schools are dealing with far more than assigning lessons and grade papers.

Joseph Williams  
Word In Black

Four years after a global pandemic completely disrupted their profession, a new survey of the nation's public school teachers found disturbingly high, across-the-board percentages of them who are stressed out or upset about nearly every aspect of their career, from work-life balance to institutional support and low pay.

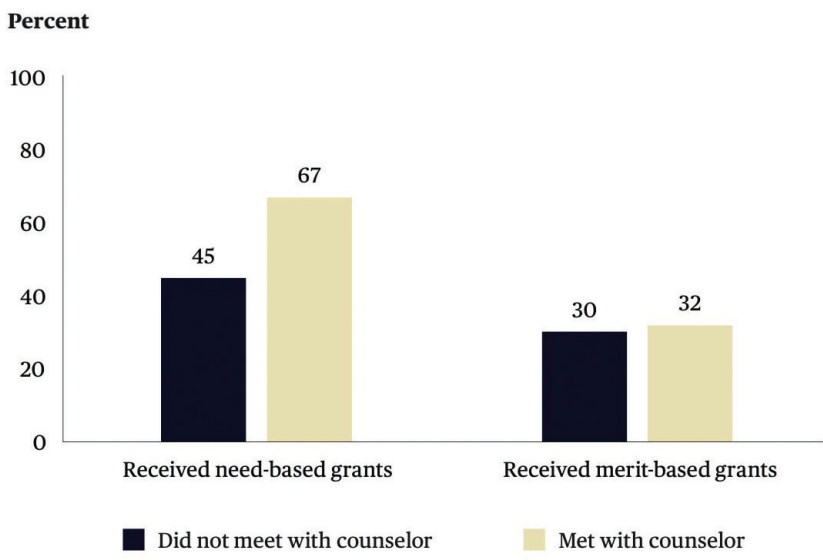
But the Pew Research Center survey also found even higher levels of frustration among teachers working in high-poverty schools, which tend to have large percentages of Black and Latino students.

Besides dealing with poverty, chronic absenteeism, and mental health issues in the classroom, those teachers say they also must manage disengaged parents, student disruptions that sometimes become

Cont. A16

FAFSA

# \$2 Billion In Aid At Risk



**GRANT EARNING AND COUNSELOR MEETINGS:** Among fall 2009 ninth-graders who enrolled in college by 2016-17, percentage who received need-based and merit-based college grants in their first year, by whether they met with a high school counselor about financial aid in 2012-13. SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS AT IES DATA POINT. SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, HIGH SCHOOL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF 2009 (HLS:09) 2013 UPDATE, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TRANSCRIPT STUDY, AND STUDENT FINANCIAL AID RECORDS

From A15

bound seniors is the latest headache for the federal Ed Department’s FAFSA reboot, which stumbled out of the gate late last year.

Instead of the FAFSA application being open Oct. 1, enough time for students and colleges to prepare for the fall 2024 semester, the form didn’t launch until Dec. 31, setting off a scramble. The subsequent series of errors and submission problems didn’t help; at last count, only around 20% of applications have been processed, resulting in a nationwide backlog of some 6 million applications.

Even though the Ed Department delayed the rollout to fix problems it knew about, a technicality it overlooked could end up costing students almost \$2 billion in aid. And that’s before the cascade of issues that have surfaced in recent months.

Cook says those numbers are exacerbated by the fact that low-income, high-minority schools have fewer guidance counselors who can help guide students through the process. That can be important, experts say, because heads of low-income minority households tend to have lower rates of college degree attainment.

“We know that Black and Hispanic students disproportionately attend high-poverty schools, where their ratio of guidance counselors to students is double what that what they are in more wealthy schools,” he says. “So the combination of Black students disproportionately filing FAFSAs and disproportionately having less access to guidance counselor’s means that this issue with the rollout of the new FAFSA is having a much harder impact on black students.”

Indeed, studies have found that Black students are 1.2 times more likely than white students to attend a school with a law-enforcement officer but without a guidance counselor. The counselors can be critical to completing the FAFSA.

And every bit of financing helps: According

to a study by College Board, for the 2022-23 academic year, average tuition and fees for a public four-year school averaged \$10,940 for in-state students and \$28,240 for out-of-state students, according to the latest data from College Board. Private nonprofit four-year schools amassed a much higher \$39,400 average. Add room and board, books, and other expenses to the mix, and that bill goes up several thousand dollars more.

Given those hurdles, Cook worries that Black student enrollment in college — already on the decline in part because of skyrocketing tuition and the Supreme Court dismantling of affirmative action in school admission decisions — is about to take another hit because of the FAFSA snafu.

Students depend on the financial aid form to get “a better sense of what schools they can afford,” he says. That matters, he says, because a degree from a more selective college tends to bring higher wages after graduation.

Without knowing how much federal aid they’ll get for tuition, “high school students may decide to now go to maybe a regional, public school that’s more affordable, or even a community college that they can afford,” Cook says. “Or — worst case scenario — opting out of pursuing a college education this year, altogether. And we know any sorts of delay for low income students could ultimately mean they choose not to go on to college.”

Fortunately, Cook says, many colleges are doing what they can to help, pushing back deadlines and trying to work with students. But the ripple effects of the FAFSA revamp, Cook says, spotlights the bigger, thornier problem of college affordability.

“I think it just underscores how much of a reliance students have on federal financial aid,” he says. Unfortunately, “there is no silver bullet.”

“My biggest fear,” Cook says, “is that we may have already lost some students.” □

‘Protect Black Women and Girls Act’

# Why the ‘Protect Black Women and Girls Act’ Needs to Pass Now



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Lanai Wells, The AFRO  
Word In Black

The Protect Black Women and Girls Act was introduced into Congress on Feb. 14 by Representative Robin Kelly from Illinois’s Second Congressional District. This piece of legislation is currently being co-sponsored by 30 other representatives including Representative Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), Representative Jasmine Crockett (D-Texas) and Representative Lucy McBath (D-Ga.).

This act would establish a task force to examine the “conditions and experiences of Black women and girls in education.” For several decades, members from the Black community have protested that there should be more attention and consideration put forward for the unfortunate circumstances of Black men and women throughout America within our communities, in our educational opportunities, and our economic plights. It has been unfortunate to see that this bill has only a two percent prognosis of being enacted into law. This bill should have much more media attention than it currently has and should receive more support within our communities.

This bill will essentially allow lawmakers and our law enforcement agencies to be held accountable for paying attention to harm within our communities. This task force will be essential in identifying and assessing the efficacy of policies and programs of federal, state, and local governments. The disparities that Black girls experience are at a high rate in school expulsions and not receiving equal educational opportunities that other ethnic groups receive. According to Traffick911, a Texas-based nonprofit that provides resources to survivors of trafficking, the arrests being made for young Black women are at 53 percent for prostitution cases. Additionally, as of February 2024, 52 percent of young Black women and girls are being human-trafficked. Young Black women in our communities are not being given the resources that they need to choose

a better life for themselves and their children, which will ultimately lead them to feeling like they have to do whatever it takes to survive. It is the responsibility of our government to make resources and education available to underserved communities in an effort to prevent our young women from going down the wrong paths.

These representatives are requesting one member from many different agencies including The Department of Health and Human Services, The Department of Justice, and The Department of Education to be a part of this task force along with an officer of a defender organization and two representatives that have experience working on culturally sensitive issues that are unique to the needs of Black women and girls.

A few of the beneficial offerings of this bill are listed here:

- The implementation of community led educational and support programs for African-American girls in kindergarten through grade 12.
- The creation of economic development programs including pre-apprenticeship programs and programs that will give priority to Black women owned businesses.
- The development of studies for the health of Black women including mental health, maternal health, gender and culturally responsive domestic violence relationships.

This act is essentially a bill that will help to identify several disparities that we as Black women face in our society. This act will create essential community-based response centers and groups to readily assist Black women of all age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and educational backgrounds. I would highly recommend that everyone read this introduced bill for themselves and review the many benefits that this bill will offer to Black women and girls throughout the United States. □

Teachers

# Experts say the profession is at an inflection point

From A15

abusive, and school administrators who they believe don’t really support them, according to the survey. And, like their colleagues in more affluent districts, they wouldn’t recommend the job to anyone.

“Teachers are really not happy with their jobs,” says Luona Lin, a Pew research associate focusing on social and demographic research. “Seventy-seven percent say they frequently find their job to be stressful. Sixty-eight percent say it’s overwhelming. And it’s also quite interesting to see the extent to which poverty, chronic absenteeism and mental health stand out, as the major problems teachers say that other schools are facing.”

“The vast majority of teachers say that the overall state of public education has gotten worse,” she says. “We also asked them to look to the future, how it will be in the five years from now. And a narrow majority say that they expect the state of education to be worse.”

The Pew report shined yet another unsettling spotlight on the state of teaching, a workforce of 3 million charged with educating the nation’s children. Experts say the profession is at an inflection point, one that could shape the course of public education arguably for the next generation and beyond.

Even before the pandemic, educators reported increasing levels of burnout, stemming from long hours, relatively low pay, and the escalating academic, social, and psychological needs of students. Though it’s not unusual to hear them talk of the profession as a calling and not a job, rising disillusionment, and workload have led a growing number of teachers to call it quits.

The Extra Burden on Black Teachers

Things are even worse in high-poverty schools — long considered a euphemism for majority Black or Latino schools located in minority urban communities with high concentrations of poverty. Typically under-resourced and underserved, Black teachers in those schools tend to carry an extra burden, serving as counselors, role models, and substitute parents for Black children who may come from dysfunctional or impoverished households.

According to the Pew Report, the Pew survey is based on questionnaires distributed to 2,531 K-12 teachers from Oct. 17-Nov. 14, 2023. Teachers were asked their opinions on a range of topics, including job satisfaction, classroom challenges, workload management, problems their students face, and what they think about the state of public education.

A Slew of Pressing Problems

The top issue among teachers in all districts was rising levels of poverty among students, with roughly 60% of teachers in both urban and rural schools identifying it as a significant problem, according to the survey. Next was absenteeism, defined as students missing a substantial number of days, particularly in high school; 61% of high school teachers said it affected their view of their job, according to the survey.

The third universal problem teachers identified was student anxiety and depression was significantly high: the survey found 69% of high school teachers and 57% of middle school teachers say this is a major problem among their students.

“Most teachers say that the impact of the pandemic, on students behavior, academic performance, and emotional well-being has

been negative,” Lin says.

While those issues cut across school socioeconomic levels, teachers in high-poverty schools identified more acute problems that drag down their job satisfaction and hinder students’ ability to learn.

Seventy-three percent of teachers in high-poverty schools say the academic performance and behavior of most students at their school are fair or poor, while 64% say students’ behavior at their school is fair or poor, according to the survey. The numbers around absenteeism are similar: “Majorities of teachers in high- and medium-poverty schools say chronic absenteeism is a major problem where they teach (66% and 58%, respectively),” according to the survey.

While 68% of all teachers say they have experienced verbal abuse from their students, such as being yelled at or verbally threatened, only about 1 in 5 say it happens at least a few times a month. In high-poverty districts, however, 67% of teachers say it’s a daily occurrence.

And while substantial majorities of high school teachers overall believe students’ parents aren’t engaged with their child’s attendance, don’t hold them accountable for misbehavior, or don’t help them with homework, those percentages jump north of 80% in high-poverty schools.

JOSEPH WILLIAMS, a veteran journalist, political analyst, and essayist, has been published in a wide range of publications, including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Politico, The Boston Globe, The Atlantic, and US News & World Report. A California native, Williams is a graduate of the University Of Richmond and a former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He lives and works in metro Washington, D.C.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES





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**CLASSIFIEDS**

OKLAHOMA ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE LAWS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

NOTICE OF INTENT TO APPLY FOR AN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE LICENSE

In accordance with Title 37, Section 522 and Title 37A Section 2-141 Memories of Japan Inc., 2409 West Kenosha Street, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma (name & address of individual, partners, limited partnership, corporation, or limited liability company) an/a Corporation (individual, partnership, limited partnership, corporation, limited liability company) hereby publishes notice of it (his, her, it, their) intention to apply within sixty days from this date to the Oklahoma Alcoholic Beverage Laws Enforcement Commission for a Beer and Wine License under authority of and in compliance with the said Act: That it (he, she, it or they) Intend (s), if granted such a license to operate as a Beer and Wine establishment with business premises located at 2409 West Kenosha Street. (full street address or legal description) in Broken Arrow (City), Tulsa (County), Oklahoma, under the business name of Memories of Japan Inc.

Dated this 20th day of March 2024

Signature of applicant (s): If partnership, all partners must sign. If corporation, an officer of the corporation must sign. If limited liability company, a manager must sign.

Liwen Dong President  
County of Tulsa,  
State of Oklahoma.

Before me, the undersigned notary public, personally appeared:  
Liwen Doug to me known to be the person (s) described in and who executed the foregoing application and acknowledged that he executed the same as his free act and deed.

L. P. Davis 03-10-2025  
(Notary Public) (My commission expires)

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(LEFT) OSAGE NATION PRINCIPAL CHIEF GEOFFREY M. STANDING BEAR will accept the Greenwood Cultural Center Legacy Award on April 18. PHOTO PROVIDED (CENTER) THE OSAGE SINGERS will perform the Oscar-nominated for Best Original Song, "Wahzhazhe" (A Song for My People), from the "Killers of the Flower Moon" soundtrack at the Greenwood Cultural Center Legacy Award program honoring the Osage Nation on April 18. PHOTO PROVIDED (RIGHT) EMMY AND GOLDEN GLOBE WINNER AND ACTRESS ALFRE WOODARD is the honorary dinner chair for the Greenwood Cultural Center Legacy Award Dinner on April 18. PHOTO PROVIDED

## Greenwood Cultural Center Set To Recognize Osage Nation

Dr. Jerry Goodwin  
The Oklahoma Eagle

*Osage Singers To Perform Oscar-nominated Song From 'Killers Of The Flower Moon'*

The Greenwood Cultural Center will celebrate the Osage Nation at its annual Legacy Award dinner on April 18. Chief Geoffrey M. Standing Bear will accept the honor on behalf of the sovereign nation. The Osage Singers will present the Academy Award-nominated Best Original Song "Wahzhazhe" during the award program.

The Osage Nation, a Native American community that primarily resides in the states of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri, will be recognized for its history and heritage. The self-governing nation was recently highlighted in the popular and venerated "Killers of the Flower Moon" film.

The movie describes the first big case of the then federal Bureau of Investigations. Today, it is known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). One of the richest tribes, the Osage people were the beneficiaries of royalties from oil reserves on its land in the early 20th century.

Because of greed, others participated in the "Osage Reign of Terror" to murder tribal members and acquire their rights to the oil leases.

The predecessor of the FBI was able to solve the murders and end the crimes against the Osages.

The critically acclaimed crime drama film, co-written and directed by Martin Scorsese, acknowledges the history of a community that overcame adversity to support its people today.

Honorary Dinner Chair and actress Alfre Woodard will present the Legacy Award to Standing Bear on behalf of the Osage Nation.

The Dinner Committee is Michelle Burdex, Hannibal B. Johnson, Frances Jordan-Rakestraw, and Nicole Pair.

The program will begin with a reception at 6:30 p.m. and dinner at 7 p.m. at GCC, 322 N. Greenwood Ave.

The Greenwood Cultural Center is a 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to preserve and promote the proud history and future of the African American community and the Historic Greenwood District.

For more information, contact GCC at (918) 596-1025 or to purchase tickets, visit its Eventbrite page.

## Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Chapter Plans Annual Scholarship



THE ALPHA XI SIGMA ALUMNAE CHAPTER OF SIGMA GAMMA RHO SORORITY is announcing the annual scholarship fundraiser for July 27. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin  
The Oklahoma Eagle

*Alpha Xi Sigma Alumnae Chapter Event To Support Anita Harrison Scholarship Fund*

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority and its Alpha Xi Sigma Alumnae Chapter are hosting the annual Anita Harrison Scholarship Fund on July 27.

The "RHOyal Bowl" will be held at Andy B's Bowling Alley, 8711 S. Lewis Ave. The event is a fundraiser in honor of Harrison. She was a distinguished charter member of the local chapter, which was founded in 1944.

Harrison was the first African American woman to earn a master's degree from the University of Tulsa in 1952.

The scholarship recognizes and rewards

the outstanding achievement of two deserving high school seniors attending Tulsa Public Schools.

According to Jennifer Parrish, a spokesperson for the sorority, the bowling day is "filled with camaraderie and (a) shared commitment to education. The event not only raises funds to support these bright minds but also celebrates the legacy of a remarkable woman who broke barriers and paved the way for countless others to pursue higher education."

"RHOyal Bowl serves as a shining example of (the sorority's) unwavering dedication to making a positive impact," said Parrish.

Participating in the announcement of the event are (front row, l-r) Cassandra Kemp, Wyvonne Marshall, Ann Shannon, Dr. Kayla Gardner Harding, Marcene Mackey, Catina Batts, Barbara Eikner Thompson, LaJuana Jones, and Melanie Rathod; (second row, l-r) Alnetta Morris, Courtney Walker, Chae Morrison, Sherrie Wallace, Kaleb Logan, Aisha Bereal, Camenae Patrick, Maya Blount, and Heather Franklin; and (third row, l-r) Nikki Warren, Ade Bakare, Christa Humphrey, Dr. Susanne Thompson, Mary P. Walker, and Dr. Jessie Montana Cain.

Sharon Dabney is Basileus (President) of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority - Alpha Xi Sigma Alumnae Chapter.

For more information, see [www.sgrhotulsaalumnae.com](http://www.sgrhotulsaalumnae.com).

## Simmons receives award for \$4 million in real estate sales in 2023

Dr. Jerry Goodwin  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Local realtor Dorie Simmons has been recognized as a leading real estate agent. In 2023, she received an award for \$4 million in sales. She says her success "is not about transactions. It's about relationships, trust, and helping people plant roots where they feel they belong."

In light of the recent announcements about the changes in commissions to agents, Simmons says the home seller determines the amount of commission he/she is willing to offer the buyer's broker for the realtor's services.

"Everything in home ownership is negotiable...from the buyer's and the seller's sides," said Simmons.

Registered with Tulsa Remote,

which is an incentive program to encourage people to move to Tulsa, Simmons said for those looking for homes that she can help buyers to manage their expectations.

She says the first step is to "set the expectations for the type of home (one or a family wants to purchase) and (determine) the individual's or family's budget."

She can represent buyers and sellers.

"Nothing feels better than knowing I'm helping someone find their place in this world, in my home state," said Simmons.

Simmons has a master's degree in business administration from Oklahoma City University and a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Tulsa.

For more information, contact Simmons at [dorie@mcgrawrealtors.com](mailto:dorie@mcgrawrealtors.com).

## Events

### April 2024

#### 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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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.

#### Apr. 27

Sisserou's Restaurant celebrates its 10th anniversary with an event at Guthrie Green, 111 Reconciliation Way. The "Caribbean Carnival on The Green" is scheduled for 5 p.m. - 10 p.m. The event will be "bringing all the island vibes with authentic live music, art, dancing, shimmering costumes, and the finest Caribbean refreshments. Dive into the vibrant cultures of the West Indies" according to the organizers. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to A Pocket Full of Hope. For more information, contact (918) 576-6800.

#### Apr. 29-30

Phillips Theological Seminary, 901 N. Mingo Rd., will be hosting "Halim Flowers - Something New, Black Birds (2121)" exhibition on April 29 at 5:30 p.m. Flowers' art features paintings exclusively created for this event. It is a collection of 21 original paintings inspired by the painter's research of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. On April 30 at 6:30 p.m., a reception will be held at Greenwood Rising followed by a discussion with Flowers. The exhibit will be available for the public to see through July 14 at Phillips. For more information, see Art Exhibitions at Phillips Theological Seminary or call (918) 610-8303.

#### May 4

Tulsa Symphony is hosting the Flint Family Foundation Concert Series. It is a series of concerts around town, including St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, 4045 N. Cincinnati Ave., at 11 a.m. The concert series is related to music from recognizable movies. The movie-themed selections for the "Winds" instrument performances will be from "Colors of the Wind" ("Pocahontas"), "How Far I'll Go" ("Moana"), "Neverland" ("The Story of Peter Pan" in poetry and music (with narration)), "Peter and the Wolf" (with narration), and "Under the Sea" ("The Little Mermaid"). For more information, visit <https://www.tulsasympphony.org/flint/>



DORIE SIMMONS is an award-winning realtor with McGraw Realtors. She also is an approved realtor with Tulsa Remote. PHOTO PROVIDED