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MAYOR'S RACE: A FACEOFF BETWEEN TWO BRANDS OF DEMOCRATS

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Oklahoma Supreme Court takes up Indian eviction case

TRISTAN LOVELESS, NonDoc

The Oklahoma Supreme Court will hear the appeal of a Cherokee Nation citizen who argues state courts lacked the

civil jurisdiction to rule on her eviction in a case that could affect eviction proceedings throughout the eastern half of Oklahoma.

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The Oklahoma Supreme Court

The Oklahoma Supreme Court will hear the appeal of a Cherokee Nation citizen who argues state courts lacked the civil jurisdiction to rule on her eviction in a case that could affect eviction proceedings throughout the eastern half of Oklahoma.

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Suburban homes.
The Oklahoma Supreme Court will hear the appeal of a Cherokee Nation citizen who argues state courts lacked the civil jurisdiction to rule on her eviction in a case that could affect eviction proceedings throughout the eastern half of Oklahoma.
PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Indian Eviction Case

Oklahoma Supreme Court takes up Indian eviction case

From COVER

The Oklahoma Supreme Court will hear the appeal of a Cherokee Nation citizen who argues state courts lacked the civil jurisdiction to rule on her eviction in a case that could affect eviction proceedings throughout the eastern half of Oklahoma. The case — Paul-Lucas v. Paul-Craven — could become one of the first to address the unclear civil-law effects of the McGirt v. Oklahoma decision, which functionally upheld much of eastern Oklahoma as a series of Indian Country reservations.

While the McGirt decision held the state of Oklahoma lacks criminal jurisdiction over tribal citizens who commit crimes within reservation boundaries, it did not directly address civil jurisdiction. Many state officials have argued that McGirt only applied to matters of criminal jurisdiction, while some tribal governments have argued in court filings that their reservation status can affect various civil issues as well.

Jakob Lancaster, an attorney with Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma who represents the evicted tribal citizen, has asked the Oklahoma Supreme Court to find that the general rules for Indian Country jurisdiction are settled on the federal level and that state courts should simply apply those rules to the reservations in Oklahoma.

“We now know that most of the state is covered in Indian Country, and that doesn’t change any of the rules about jurisdiction in Indian Country. It just means all of them apply here,” Lancaster said in an interview. “They should have been applied here from the beginning, because it’s not as if these reservations appeared out of nowhere when McGirt was held. The fact is, the reservations have been here the whole time, and Oklahoma has been ignoring them.”

The case of Alicia Stroble pending before the state Supreme Court after oral arguments earlier this year involves Oklahoma’s tax jurisdiction, another type of civil jurisdiction. The already complicated

“

The fact is, the reservations have been here the whole time, and Oklahoma has been ignoring them.

Jakob Lancaster, an attorney with Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma

rules for civil jurisdiction in Indian Country have also been modified by legislation unique to Oklahoma, such as a famous rider supported by the late U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe that prevents tribal governments in Oklahoma from administering environmental regulations through the “treatment as a state” program without the state government’s consent.

According to court filings, the new eviction case stems from a family dispute over a property in Tulsa. Delilah Paul, a grandmother of the family, owned the property and allowed her granddaughter, Jasmine Paul-Craven, to live there.

Paul-Craven, a Cherokee Nation citizen, claims to have lived in the home located within the Cherokee Nation Reservation since 1989, and she claims that her grandmother promised her she would inherit it. While she never paid rent or had a written lease, Paul-Craven lived in the home for decades and spent more than \$40,000 improving the property, according to her court filings.

Her aunt, Delilah Paul-Lucas, filed a quit claim deed transferring the house from her mother to herself in December 2023. Paul died a few months later in March, and Paul-Lucas filed to evict Paul-Craven from the home in May.

After Tulsa County Special Judge Tammy Bruce ruled the state district court had jurisdiction to hear the case in August, Paul-Craven appealed the ruling. The Oklahoma Supreme Court retained the case Sept. 5, although a scheduling order had not been filed by the publication of this article.

Paul-Lucas’ attorney, Nathan Milner, said the appeal by Paul-Craven is an attempt to “evade, elude, and avoid (the) inevitable” outcome of the eviction case.

“Legal Aid (is) trying to make a bigger claim than what it really is,” Milner said in an interview.

Lancaster emphasized he preferred not comment on his cases before any appeal is complete, but he briefly responded to Milner’s criticism.

“The rules of jurisdiction regarding states and tribes are set at the federal level. It comes from Congress, it comes from the Supreme Court of the United States,” Lancaster said. “If they say — and they do say — that states can’t exercise jurisdiction over an Indian defendant when the cause of action arises on their own tribe’s reservation, then that’s it. That’s it, bottom line. It doesn’t matter how big or small the case is, the state does not have jurisdiction.”

Oklahoma Supreme Court’s Indian eviction caselaw

The Oklahoma Supreme Court has yet to rule on the question of whether a state court has jurisdiction to hear a forcible entry and detainer action, or an eviction, filed against a tribal citizen living on their tribe’s reservation. However, the court has ruled previously that state courts lack jurisdiction to hear eviction actions in “Indian County,” a term of art that refers to land held in trust by the U.S. federal government for tribes, “dependent Indian communities” or land within an Indian reservation.

Both of the prior cases before Oklahoma’s high civil court were decided decades prior to McGirt and before reservations in eastern Oklahoma regained legal recognition. In 1983, the court held in *Ahboah v. Housing Authority of Kiowa Tribe of Indians* that state courts lacked jurisdiction to hear an eviction case involving tribal citizens on allotments, which are individually owned parcels usually treated like land held in trust. In 1990, the court went further in *Housing Authority of the Seminole Nation v. Harjo* and ruled that state courts could not hear eviction cases involving Indians arising from “dependent Indian communities.”

Since prior to McGirt there was an erroneous belief — even among some tribal leaders — that Oklahoma did not have Indian reservations, the court appears never to have entertained an eviction case

McGirt v. Oklahoma

McGirt v. Oklahoma, 591 U.S. ___ (2020), was a landmark United States Supreme Court case which held that the domain reserved for the Muscogee Nation by Congress in the 19th century has never been disestablished and constitutes Indian country for the purposes of the Major Crimes Act, meaning that the State of Oklahoma has no right to prosecute American Indians for crimes allegedly committed therein.

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals applied the McGirt rationale to rule nine other Indigenous nations had not been disestablished. As a result, almost the entirety of the eastern half of what is now the State of Oklahoma remains Indian country, meaning that criminal prosecutions of Native Americans for offenses therein falls outside the jurisdiction of Oklahoma’s court system. In these cases, jurisdiction properly vests within the Indigenous judicial systems and the federal district courts under the Major Crimes Act

Cont. A5, Indian Eviction Case

Tenant Counsel

Collaborative Financing to Fuel Tenant Right-to-Counsel

HEATHER WARLICK
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahomans facing legal proceedings for a criminal complaint are guaranteed access to an attorney and offered free assistance if they cannot afford to pay for a lawyer.

In eviction court, no such guarantee is offered. Oklahoma tenants facing eviction most often arrive at their hearings without legal counsel, leaving them unarmed against landlords who bring attorneys up to 80% of the time.

With legal representation, tenants are far more likely to see a favorable result in eviction hearings. Research shows that in Oklahoma, tenants are 75% more likely to remain in their homes after an eviction filing when they are represented by an attorney.

Tenant advocates nationwide are pushing for tenant right-to-counsel laws. There are 17 cities and five states where free legal

representation is mandated in eviction cases.

Oklahoma does not have right-to-counsel laws in place, but tenant-rights advocate groups such as Legal Aid Services Oklahoma work to advance the potential for Oklahoma tenants to secure laws to guarantee free counsel in eviction cases.

An innovative Oklahoma investing collaborative designed to provide access to funding for social service nonprofits in the state announced recently it will provide financial backing to Legal Aid Services Oklahoma’s Tenant Right-to-Counsel program, potentially saving millions in taxpayer dollars while helping to keep Oklahomans in their homes.

Oklahoma Impact Investing Collaborative will provide a low-interest loan to Legal Aid Services Oklahoma to underwrite LASO’s statewide efforts to provide free legal representation and counsel to tenants facing eviction hearings, or before eviction cases are filed in court.

The \$2 million loan will pay for legal aid services for an estimated 1,800 Oklahomans, said LASO Executive Director Michael Figgins.

Figgins said LASO is running out of money to pay for legal services for Oklahomans facing eviction.

“The money that we’ve relied on is pretty much gone,” Figgins said.

LASO has received most of its funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. When HUD grants funds for eviction prevention in Oklahoma, the money is generally split among LASO, the Oklahoma City University School of Law Housing Eviction Legal Assistance Program and Shelterwell, a nonprofit group that gathers and analyzes eviction data and provides mediators in eviction court, Figgins said.

OIIC is a social impact investment collaborative that combines money from philanthropies to provide loans such as the

one LASO will receive.

OIIC is a subsidiary of MetaFund, a 501(c)3 community development financial institution, one of about 1,000 such institutions nationwide that combine money from private and public sector entities to invest in local communities to create economic opportunities.

MetaFund works with nine philanthropies to create funding streams for OIIC projects. OIIC also works with other nonprofits including Pivot and Remerger, which align with its focus areas, said OIIC president and co-founder, Ed Long.

Since its inception in February, 2020 OIIC has worked with 18 nonprofit agencies to provide more than \$10 million in funding.

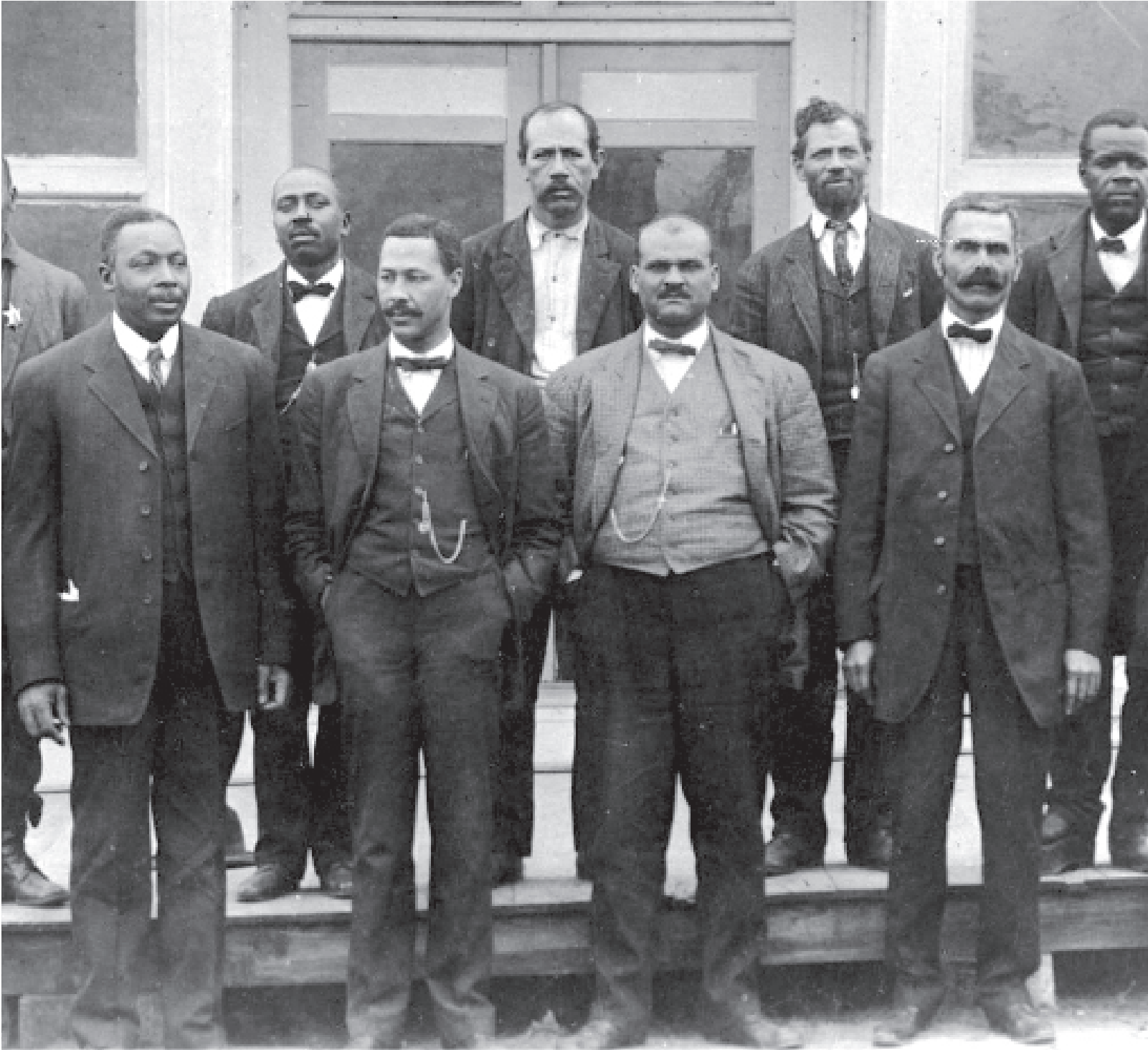
Oklahoma Evictions a Growing Problem

Cont. A11, Tenant Counsel

The Oklahoma Eagle

Boley: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

By LARRY O'DELL, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



Located halfway between Paden and Castle in Okfuskee County, Boley is the largest and most well known of the more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The town, established on land allotted to Creek freedman James Barnett's daughter Abigail, was named after J. B. Boley, a railroad official of the Fort Smith and Western Railway. Founded in 1903 and incorporated in 1905, Boley and the African Americans living in the area prospered for many years. The Boley Progress, a weekly newspaper, began in 1905. The paper and various advertising campaigns circulated through the South and lured many former slaves to the new town. At 1907 statehood Boley sheltered 824 individuals.

By 1911 Boley boasted more than four thousand citizens and many businesses, including two banks and three cotton gins. Booker T. Washington, founder of the National Negro Business League and the Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama, visited the town in 1905 and proclaimed it "the most enterprising and in many ways the most interesting of the Negro towns in the United States." The town supported two colleges: Creek-Seminole College and Methodist Episcopal College. Boley also had its own electrical generating plant, water system, and ice plant. The Masonic Grand Lodge completed a majestic Masonic Temple around 1912. At the time, it was said to be the tallest building between Okmulgee and Oklahoma City.

Like many rural towns, Boley suffered through hard times in the 1920s and 1930s, its population dropping to 1,154 in 1920 and 874 in 1930. By World War II the population stood at 942, and it declined to 573 in 1960 and to 423 in 1980. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, with a population of 1,126, the town was experiencing economic rejuvenation. The number of residents was 1,184 in 2010. Boley still hosts the nation's oldest African American community-based rodeo every Memorial Day weekend. The downtown business district is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 75001568) and has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. In April 2020 the census counted 1,087 residents.

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.

BOLEY TOWN COUNCIL (3377.D.2, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).

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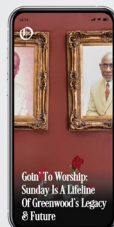
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Stitt quietly denies clemency, Emmanuel Littlejohn executed

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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Suburban home front window. The Oklahoma Supreme Court will hear the appeal of a Cherokee Nation citizen who argues state courts lacked the civil jurisdiction to rule on her eviction in a case that could affect eviction proceedings throughout the eastern half of Oklahoma.

Indian Eviction Case

For tenants & landlords, the question of jurisdiction remains unanswered

From A3

involving reservation land.

While both the Ahboah and Harjo cases were cited by Lancaster, Paul-Craven's attorney, the district court judge appeared ultimately persuaded by the argument of Milner, Paul-Lucas' attorney, that Oklahoma's more recent *Milne v. Hudson* decision from 2022 was controlling precedent.

The *Milne* case asked whether state courts had civil jurisdiction to issue protective orders when both parties were tribal citizens with conduct that occurred on a reservation. The Oklahoma Supreme Court determined that state courts do have concurrent jurisdiction with tribal courts to hear those cases. In reaching that conclusion, Justice Dana Kuehn said the court uses a two-part test "to determine whether state courts have jurisdiction where Indian interests are concerned."

"We must discover whether Congress has explicitly withdrawn state court jurisdiction, or whether the interest infringes on tribal self-government," Kuehn wrote in 2022.

Kuehn also said in a footnote that the court had "effectively" overruled both *Ahboah* and *Harjo* in the 1994 case *Lewis v. Sac and Fox of Oklahoma Housing*

Authority.

In the context of evictions, there is no federal statute prohibiting state court jurisdiction, so Milner argued that the district court should determine whether allowing the eviction would infringe on tribal self-government and that the tribe had the same interests as the state in adjudicating the eviction.

Court likely to examine 'direct effect' of evictions on tribes

The U.S. Supreme Court held in the 1981 case *Montana v. United States* that tribal governments generally lacked civil jurisdiction over non-Indians unless the non-Indian either entered "consensual relationships with the tribe or its members, through commercial dealing, contracts, leases, or other arrangements," or if the non-Indian's conduct "threatens or has some direct effect on the political integrity, the economic security, or the health or welfare of the tribe."

The Oklahoma Supreme Court adopted virtually the same test in its 1994 *Lewis* decision and recently reaffirmed it in the 2022 *Milne* decision, meaning future briefs in the Paul-Craven eviction case will likely focus on applying the *Montana* test to the question of evictions.

Most eviction cases involve a written

lease which could be interpreted as a "consensual relationship" with a tribal member that would trigger the first prong of the *Montana* test, but since there is no written lease between the familial parties, the focus of the appeal may hinge on the second prong: whether allowing state eviction proceedings harms the "political integrity," "economic security" or "health or welfare of the tribe."

In his briefs, Milner has argued that the state and tribal governments have overlapping interests in eviction cases and therefore it would not threaten or have an effect on the tribe. He said the same in an interview.

"(There is) not a defining boundary that excluded each jurisdiction," Milner said of the Cherokee Nation and Tulsa County. "They're overlapping."

Lancaster, meanwhile, has argued that the right to "tribal self government" would be harmed by allowing state jurisdiction. Both parties will likely file more detailed briefs on the issue in the coming months, and the Supreme Court could receive several requests to submit amicus briefs from tribes and other interested parties.

"In the last case where I tried to make this argument, there were apartment associations all over the state that just came out of the woodwork and started

wanting to give their two-cents on the issue," Lancaster said in an interview. "I don't even know how they found out about it."

Lancaster also briefly mentioned the potential effects of tribal courts collecting fees from eviction cases instead of district courts, hinting at how jurisdictional disputes affect government revenue.

"Evictions are really so high volume that I think it could really generate a lot of fees for tribal courts," Lancaster said. "Those fees could be used to expand the tribal courts. I know there's been some talk of opening up satellite courthouses in Tulsa County and this is the kind of thing — I think — which could make that possible."

Missing from the district court briefs was a strong analysis of the potential tribal interests in the case. Tribal governments may have an interest in protecting their citizens' right to live within their own tribe's reservation. Similarly, allowing state governments to evict tribal citizens from houses on reservations — potentially forcing them to seek off-reservation housing — could affect the tribe's "political integrity," especially for tribes where voting is linked to reservation residence.

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FEATURED

**Funding chasm
puts new Oklahoma
County Jail in peril**

Jail in Peril, A12



FEATURED

**Justice Department
will launch civil rights
review into 1921 Tulsa
Race Massacre**

Race Massacre, A8



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Two Brands of Democrats

Mayor's Race: *A Faceoff Between Two Brands of Democrats*

GARY LEE & KIMBERLY MARSH
The Oklahoma Eagle

The contest for the City of Tulsa Mayor's seat is now in full swing. It may be nonpartisan, but it is becoming increasingly contentious within the Democratic Party. Two Democrats vie for the seat, which will be decided in the general election on Nov. 5. On that date, more than 200,000 Tulsa voters are also expected to hit the polls to vote for the U. S. President.

Cont. A7, **Two Brands of Democrats**



FROM LEFT **Monroe Nichols and Karen Keith**, Okla. St. Rep. (D-72), and Tulsa County Commissioner, Tulsa Mayoral candidates on the ballot for the general election on November 5, 2024.

ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

Two Brands of Democrats

For Tulsans, candidates differ in approach of appeal and outreach

From A6

One of the two mayoral candidates will essentially become the CEO of local issues, economic and housing development, remedying racial disparities, and improving equality indicators. For now, they are in a political sandbox. Who will be the first to take off the proverbial “gloves?” Or are their gloves already off?

The purpose of a nonpartisan race for mayor was to de-emphasize the role as a bully pulpit for either Democrats or Republicans and to create a form of government in which the political leader of Tulsa worked closely with the City Council to achieve goals. After becoming mayor in 1988, Rodger Randle led the effort to change Tulsa’s charter to create a mayor-council form of government.

The campaign was successful, where four previous attempts in 35 years to make this change had failed. The change abolished the commission form of government and created a nine-member city council. The council aided authorities’ boards and commissions to set policy and trusts.

Flash forward to 2024, where in one Democratic corner is Tulsa County Commissioner Karen Keith, a former television anchor/producer turned politician. In 2002, she went to work for Mayor Bill LaFortune as communications director.

In the other Democratic corner is St. Rep. Monroe Nichols (D-72), who entered politics as a young University of Tulsa graduate to work in then-Mayor Kathy Taylor’s administration. There, he learned about city government.

On the surface, the two candidates have a lot in common. They both have government experience and some knowledge of the inner workings of the City of Tulsa system, budgeting, public works, police and fire, zoning, permitting, and city planning.

Both have been voted into public positions, and voters saw fit to retain them for at least one additional term.

Both are committed to and passionate about working with Tulsans to make changes.

And yet, the approach that Keith and Nichols take to Tulsans, including their bids to reach voters, is different.

A Duel Of Words

Behind the scenes and in public appearances, both Keith and Nichols are sharpening attacks against one another.

For her part, Keith is doubling down on her criticism of Nichols’ record. She says he has bounced between jobs and, although he has been in government for years, has little to show for it.

“If you look at his background in nine years, he’s had eight jobs, and in his legislative record, he’s missed 30% of meetings, those kinds of

“

I’ve not heard the commissioner talk about what she would do as mayor in terms of anything beyond a commercial. I’ve seen it.

St. Rep. Monroe Nichols, (D-72),
Tulsa mayoral candidate

If you look at his background in nine years, he’s had eight jobs, and in his legislative record, he’s missed 30% of meetings, those kinds of things.

Karen Keith, Tulsa County
Commissioner

things. And then what do we have to show for it? He’s passed two bills, one of which I truly appreciate, that was the rape kit bill that he authored, so but in eight years, two bills we all know our legislators have done a lot more than that.”

Nichols has criticized Keith’s lack of a transparent platform for what she would achieve as mayor.

“I’ve not heard the commissioner talk about what she would do as mayor in terms of anything beyond a commercial. I’ve seen it. And so, when I think about the commercials that I’ve seen, I think about, you know, her solutions, homelessness as defined by the commercial. So, I think what I have observed from her over the last years is someone who doesn’t necessarily have a North Star but someone who definitely wants to wants a job.

I believe getting elected mayor for me is step one on a journey to do things I’ve been talking about for the last 14 months. Getting elected mayor for Karen is crossing the finish line on a career just by getting elected. And what happens over the next three years?”

Keith is apparently hoping that an appeal to Republican voters will help her best Nichols and win the election.

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle in September, Keith said she had shaken up her campaign team. She acknowledged that Republican strategists Campaign Advocacy Management Professionals (CAMP) founded by Fount Holland and Matthew Parker, chief operating officer, Fount Holland and Matthew Tk advised her campaign. Parker is a partner at CAMP, Oklahoma’s premier Republican political consulting and advertising firm.

“Certainly, my track record with working with the Republican administration speaks miles because I know I work across party lines,” Keith said.

Keith also said that she had balanced her strategy team by adding another Democrat to the campaign.

In a clear pitch to right-of-center voters, Keith has said that she would welcome Brent VanNorman, the conservative businessman whose bid for mayor was unsuccessful, to join her team should she become mayor. Keith said there would “absolutely” be a role for VanNorman to play in her leadership team.

She added that Nichols would also be welcomed on her team.

In an interview, Nichols said he would “never” agree to join Keith’s team if she becomes mayor.

“I would not work for Karen Keith because I don’t trust Karen Keith to do the job,” he said.

Nichols: Steering Away From Extremes

In his search for broad support, Nichols is downplaying party affiliations. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of addressing significant challenges in Tulsa and achieving

results.

“I think it’s less about who we are voting for president and how that might differ from me and a whole bunch of people in Tulsa,” Nichols told The Oklahoma Eagle.

“I think it’s really about whether you are somebody who can get the job done.” He added, “Another material difference between the commissioner and me has been my willingness to go to just about anywhere. I don’t just go to democratic spaces to talk about this campaign. I’ve gone to some pretty conservative spaces, too, and when I’ve gone in there, I’ve not presented myself as anything other than who I am. There have been times when I’ve been asked to some conservative spaces and addressed tough issues. The question always is, can you get there? And there are very few people who have watched the race closely who have any questions about what my priorities are.”

Nichols explained that his prescriptions for tackling issues in Tulsa have clear goals, and residents of the city will be able to chart his progress. For instance, his plan to end homelessness in the city would take place over six years.

Keith Is Running On Her Record

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle – and other debates and public appearances, Keith underlined her record as a country commissioner working with leaders of Tulsa and other surrounding communities to improve infrastructure and city services. It’s a record of concrete achievements, she says, which contrasts sharply with Nichols’ career.

Vision 2025 is an example that she raises often to illustrate how she collaborated with others to achieve concrete results.

Starting in 2003, the sweeping plan of Vision 2025 called for a capital tax dedicated to upgrade buildings and other aspects of the infrastructure in Tulsa and the surrounding suburbs. “I was certainly not a lead on Vision 2025, but I was on the team,” she recalls.

“We went out and spoke to every Rotary Club Kiwanis, neighborhood association and passed it. And it’s been transformative. Our downtown was dead 20 years ago. You have the same story if you also look at Jenks, Owasso, and Broken Arrow. We lifted the whole county. We invested in ourselves, and it paid off. I’m proud to have been a piece of that.”

GARY LEE is the managing editor and a key contributor for The Oklahoma Eagle, a stout advocate for the African American community and those that champion equity.

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



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Race Massacre

Justice Department will launch civil rights review into **1921 Tulsa Race Massacre**

SEAN MURPHY
Associated Press

The Justice Department announced Monday it plans to launch a review of the **1921 Tulsa Race Massacre**, an attack by a white mob on a thriving Black district that is considered one of the worst single acts of violence against Black people in U.S. history.

Cont. A9, Race Massacre



KRISTEN CLARKE

Kristen Clarke is an American attorney who has served as the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division at the United States Department of Justice since May 2021.

Clarke previously served as president of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. She also managed the Civil Rights Bureau of the New York State Attorney General's Office under Eric Schneiderman. In 2019, Clarke successfully represented Taylor Dumpson, the first African American woman student body president of American University, in her landmark case against white supremacists.

The Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice enforces federal statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, sex, disability, religion, and national origin.

The division was established on December 9, 1957, by order of Attorney General William P. Rogers, after the Civil Rights Act of 1957 created the head office of Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights (AAG-CR; appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate). In 2021, Kristen Clarke became the first woman confirmed to the position.

Race Massacre

For survivors and descendants, the answers may be few, and accountability, out of reach

From A8

The review was launched under a federal cold-case initiative that has led to prosecutions of some Civil Rights Era cases, although Assistant U.S. Attorney General Kristen Clarke said they have “no expectation” there is anyone living who could be prosecuted as a result of the inquiry. Still, the announcement of a first-ever federal probe into the massacre was embraced by descendants of survivors who have long criticized city and state leaders for not doing more to compensate those affected by the attack.

Clarke said the agency plans to issue a public report detailing its findings by the end of the year.

“We acknowledge descendants of the survivors, and the victims continue to bear the trauma of this act of racial terrorism,” Clarke said during her remarks in Washington.

Damario Solomon-Simmons, an attorney for the last known survivors of the massacre, 110-year-old Viola Fletcher and 109-year-old Lessie Benningfield Randle, described Clarke’s announcement as a “joyous occasion.”

“It is about time,” said Solomon-Simmons, flanked by descendants of massacre survivors. “It only took 103 years, but this is a joyous occasion, a momentous day, an amazing opportunity for us to make sure that what happened

here in Tulsa is understood for what it was — the largest crime scene in the history of this country.”

As many as 300 Black people were killed; more than 1,200 homes, businesses, schools and churches were destroyed; and thousands were forced into internment camps overseen by the National Guard when a white mob, including some deputized by authorities, looted and burned the Greenwood District, also known as Black Wall Street.

The Oklahoma Supreme Court in June dismissed a lawsuit by survivors, dampening the hope of advocates for racial justice that the city would make financial amends for the attack.

The nine-member court upheld the decision made by a district court judge in Tulsa last year, ruling that the plaintiff’s grievances about the destruction of the Greenwood district, although legitimate, did not fall within the scope of the state’s public nuisance statute.

After the state Supreme Court turned away the lawsuit, Solomon-Simmons asked the U.S. Department of Justice to open an investigation into the massacre under the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act.

Although investigations under the Act have led to successful prosecutions of Civil Rights Era cases, the DOJ acknowledged in a report to Congress last year that there are significant legal

Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act

Passed in 2008, the act authorized the federal government to reopen racially-based cold cases, especially from the civil rights era, for further investigation and prosecution. The act was later reauthorized in 2016, to address “violations of criminal rights... resulting in death. The legislation was named for Till because his case is a famous example of a racial killing for which no one was successfully tried.



1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors
Viola Ford Fletcher, 110 (top), Lessie Benningfield Randle, 109 (bottom)

barriers to cases before 1968.

“Even with our best efforts, investigations into historic cases are exceptionally difficult, and rarely will justice be reached inside of a courtroom,” the agency noted in the report.

Since the Act was approved in 2008, the DOJ has opened for review 137 cases, involving 160 known victims. The agency has fully investigated and resolved 125 of those cases through prosecution, referral or closure.

The report also notes the Act has led to two successful federal prosecutions and three successful state prosecutions. Both federal prosecutions involved separate murders of Black men in Mississippi by members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1960s.

The first federally assisted state prosecution under the initiative was against Klansmen who bombed a Birmingham, Alabama, church in 1963, killing four young girls. That prosecution in the early 2000s led to convictions and life sentences for two men involved in the bombing.

Murphy is the statehouse reporter for The Associated Press in Oklahoma City. He has covered Oklahoma news and politics since 1996.



PHOTO ADORÉ IMAGES

Body-worn camera used by law enforcement, prison and correctional facilities staff. Since deployment of body cameras, serious incident and rape complaints dropped by 40 and 60 percent respectively at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary and Howard McLeod Correctional Center during a pilot program.

Body-Worn Cameras

Oklahoma Bets on Body-Worn Cameras to Improve Prison Conditions

KEATON ROSS
Oklahoma Watch

Cynthia Butler's anger evolved into activism after Amanda Lane died at the Mabel Bassett Correctional Center in February 2022.

The state medical examiner concluded that Lane, a 38-year-old prisoner serving a life sentence for first-degree murder, used a drawstring from a pair of shorts to hang herself in the early morning hours of Feb. 28, 2022.

But Butler, who served 13 years at Mabel Bassett before a federal judge overturned her conviction in 2000, said she started receiving reports from women at the prison that Lane was assaulted with no staff intervention before her death. Those claims were not addressed in the medical examiner's report, though the investigator noted lacerations on Lane's lower back and under her right eyelid.

Unsatisfied with the information she was receiving from the state, Butler started advocating for a transparency initiative that most police departments have adopted: Requiring corrections officers to wear body-worn cameras while on duty.

"If the prisons had body cameras on their officers, there wouldn't be any speculation on what happened," Butler said. "I know things can be misconstrued, and inmates aren't given the benefit of the doubt. But I've seen a lot of things I wish I had never seen."

Butler's petition to require the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to implement body cameras garnered more than 3,000 supporters on Change.org. Less than three years later, the agency is all in on the idea, spending more than \$1 million to deploy 1,069 devices across more than a dozen state prisons.

“

If the prisons had body cameras on their officers, there wouldn't be any speculation on what happened... I know things can be misconstrued, and inmates aren't given the benefit of the doubt. But I've seen a lot of things I wish I had never seen.

Cynthia Butler, former inmate who served 13 years at Mabel Bassett

Correctional officers at state-run prisons began wearing cameras on Oct. 1. Staff at the Lawton Correctional Facility, the state's largest and only privately operated prison, will not use the body cameras, though the state plans to take control of that prison, which is run by The GEO Group, next year.

The body camera rollout comes as the agency grapples with violence and allegations of staff misconduct at several prisons. In May, two prisoners died and dozens were injured after an operational error allowed a large fight to break out at the Lawton Correctional Facility, and the state is fighting a lawsuit from seven state prisoners who allege they were kept in small shower stalls at the Great Plains Correctional Facility in Hinton for days without access to necessities.

On July 31, 2022, a prisoner at the then-privately operated Davis Correctional Facility fatally stabbed 61-year-old correctional officer Alan Hershberger with a homemade weapon. He was the first correctional officer killed on duty in more than two decades. The state overtook operations of the prison in October 2023 and renamed it after Allen Gamble, a correctional sergeant who was stabbed and killed by a prisoner in 2000.

Shad Hagan, a criminal justice reform advocate who worked as a case manager at the Dick Conner Correctional Center in Hominy, said he's optimistic the body cameras will improve safety and accountability for staff and prisoners. While stationary cameras cover the prison, Hagan said blind spots and a lack of audio can make it difficult to piece together incidents.

"You may see an officer go up to somebody, but you have no idea what is being said back and forth," Hagan said. "You can't see what's going on close up. It's just a lot of hearing on the CCTV footage to discern what's happening

there."

How the Cameras Work

The cameras, purchased from Arizona-based Axon, promise to provide clear audio of incidents and a failsafe option when officers don't hit record.

The cameras begin recording audio when the officer hits record, including up to 60 seconds before the officer engages the device, corrections department spokesperson Kay Thompson said.

If an officer fails to activate the camera during an incident, video footage from the camera will be available during an 18-hour window, though the footage will not include audio. She said supervisor approval is necessary to delete or alter footage.

The agency's body-worn camera policy lists several qualifying events when the cameras should be activated, including assaults, responding to an emergency call for assistance and interacting with agitated individuals. The cameras flash red while recording and green when powered on but not actively recording.

Body camera usage is unauthorized in several situations, including during unclothed searches, and officers may remove the cameras before using the restroom.

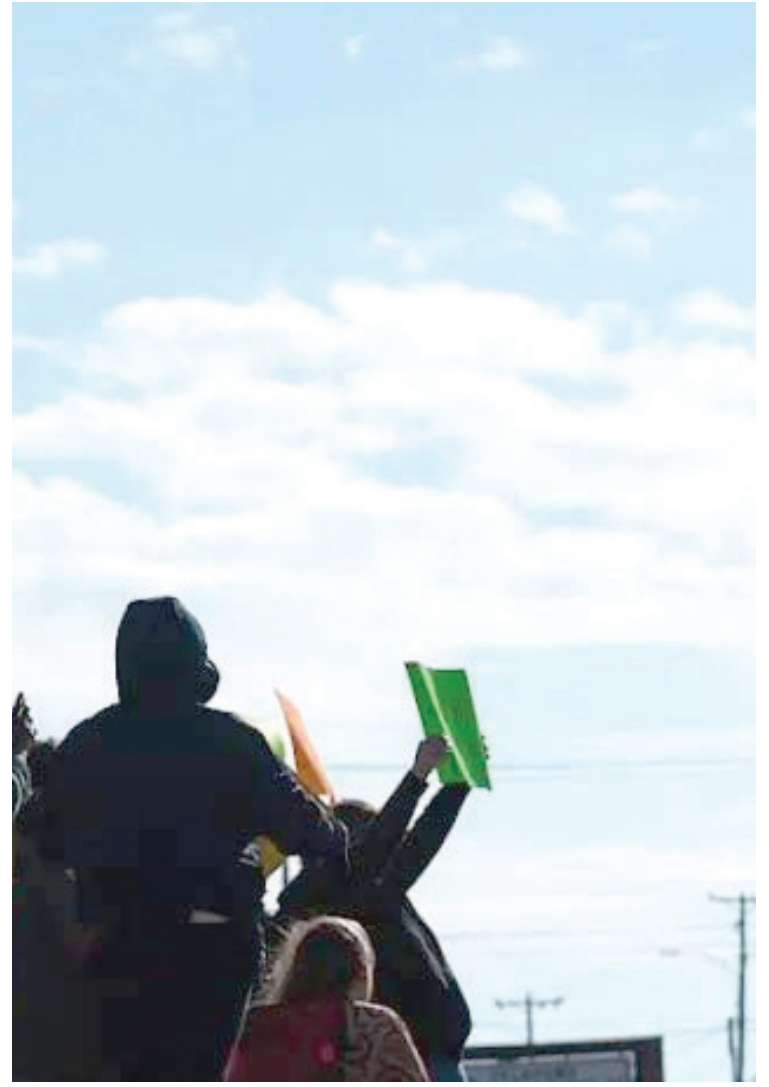
Long-Term Effectiveness Studied

Body cameras exploded in policing in between 2010 and 2015, as federal grants and public pressure for transparency motivated agencies to deploy the devices. Federal data shows 62% of local police departments used body-worn cameras in 2020.

But in prisons and jails, where staff aren't armed and work in a more controlled environment, officials are still warming up to

Cont. A11, Body-Worn Cameras

Since deployment of body cameras, serious incident & rape complaints dropped by 40 and 60 percent respectively



Families of Oklahoma inmates who gathered outside of the Department of Corrections Oklahoma City headquarters on Dec. 11, 2020, to protest prison conditions, waved and cheered as cars drove by and honked.

PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Body-Worn Cameras

From A10

the idea that the devices might be worth the cost, said corrections expert Bryce Peterson with the nonprofit research organization CNA.

While body cameras can complement surveillance footage and ease investigations, storing the video is expensive. There's also limited research on the effectiveness of body-worn cameras over an extended period.

"We have one study that was done in a relatively small- to medium-sized jail," Peterson said. "And those were very promising results. But will that translate to a prison setting? We don't know the answer to that."

That study, conducted by Peterson and several other researchers at the Loudoun Adult Detention Center in Leesburg, Virginia, from November 2020 to October 2021, found that use-of-force incidents and prisoner injuries declined when officers wore body cameras. Researchers also theorized that savings from fewer prisoner injuries could offset the cost of storing footage and maintaining the equipment.

Oklahoma corrections officials said serious incident reports declined by

“

There is certainly some hope that if you implement body cameras and make sure staff are turning them on at all times, you will see a reduction in the amount of contraband in facilities.

Bryce Peterson, corrections expert

40%, and Prison Rape Elimination Act complaints dropped 60% after body cameras were deployed at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary and Howard McLeod Correctional Center during a pilot program.

There's also promise that the cameras could help Oklahoma crack down on contraband cell phone usage that has fueled extortion schemes at several prisons. While not the primary purpose of the cameras, Peterson said the technology is advancing to where future models might include signal detectors to alert staff when there's a cell phone being used nearby.

Peterson said staff might also be deterred from bringing in contraband with surveillance ramped up.

"There is certainly some hope that if you implement body cameras and make sure staff are turning them on at all times, you will see a reduction in the amount of contraband in facilities," Peterson said. "And if they do it, you can have good evidence. I saw footage from Ohio of a staff member smuggling in drugs and a cell phone into a prison, and they caught him right on his body camera."

Despite the early success, some question the program's long-term

effectiveness if prison staffing shortages persist. The Department of Corrections added 11 correctional officers from June to August, according to information presented to the Board of Corrections on Sept. 25, but remains nearly 300 people short of its budgeted allotment.

"They're not magic cameras," said Bobby Cleveland, a former state lawmaker and executive director of the Oklahoma Corrections Professionals group. "They're not going to replace officers."

Butler, the prisoner advocate who pushed for body-worn cameras statewide, acknowledged that the devices won't be a fix-all for issues facing prison staff and the incarcerated. But she's hopeful the positive results seen in the pilot program will carry over to prisons statewide.

"It'll stop a lot of crimes that are being committed in there," Butler said. "It'll make people be held more accountable for their actions. That's what can be done with these cameras."

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

The Oklahoma State Penitentiary

Nicknamed "Big Mac", is a prison of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections located in McAlester, Oklahoma, on 1,556 acres (6.30 km²). Opened in 1908 with 50 inmates in makeshift facilities, today the prison holds more than 750 male offenders, the vast majority of which are maximum-security inmates. They also hold many death row prisoners.

Tenant Counsel

Among total evictions, minors represent 40 percent

From A3

In Oklahoma, 48,278 eviction cases were filed by landlords in 2023. Of those, about half resulted in tenants being displaced from their homes. Many more tenants were likely evicted informally. Informal eviction occurs when tenants move out of their homes after receiving warnings or threats from their landlord without a claim ever being filed in court.

Evictions aren't just a landlord and tenant problem, said Amy Coldren, executive director of Shelterwell. Ripple effects from eviction threats affect all Oklahomans.

Minors represent 40% of people affected by eviction and are at risk for long-lasting physical and emotional fallout as a consequence.

Coldren said evictions increase the likelihood that a tenant will lose their job by 22%. Evictions cause school absenteeism. They increase a tenant's mortality rate, placing an increased burden on our healthcare system. Evictions weaken neighborhoods and communities, increase family separation, and place an enormous burden on taxpayers.

Research from LASO's Stout Report shows the number of evictions filed in Oklahoma

each year is on the rise but with legal help, about 95% of people who received free legal help achieved their goals, whether that amounted to staying in their homes or a different outcome.

The report was released after LASO performed a right-to-counsel pilot program from June, 2023 to June, 2024 in several Oklahoma City and Tulsa zip codes with the high eviction filings.

Stout estimated that Oklahoma County and Tulsa County realized economic benefits of \$6.3 million from the right-to-counsel program between August 1, 2022 and June 5, 2024.

The positive results of the right-to-counsel pilot and an urgency for relief for Oklahomans facing evictions convinced the team at OIIC to take a deeper interest in funding Right-to-Counsel efforts, Long said.

Figgins said that many evictions can be prevented with early intervention from a qualified attorney.

Landlord errors are overlooked by county courts that handle as many as 387 cases in a day, especially when tenants face evictions alone.

LASO attorneys often find mistakes, Figgins said.

For example, certain laws apply to people

who receive housing vouchers, known as Section 8, that don't apply to people renting from private landlords who do not receive Section 8 subsidies.

"One of the first things a housing attorney like those at LASO does when examining a case is to determine what type of rental contract is at hand," Figgins said.

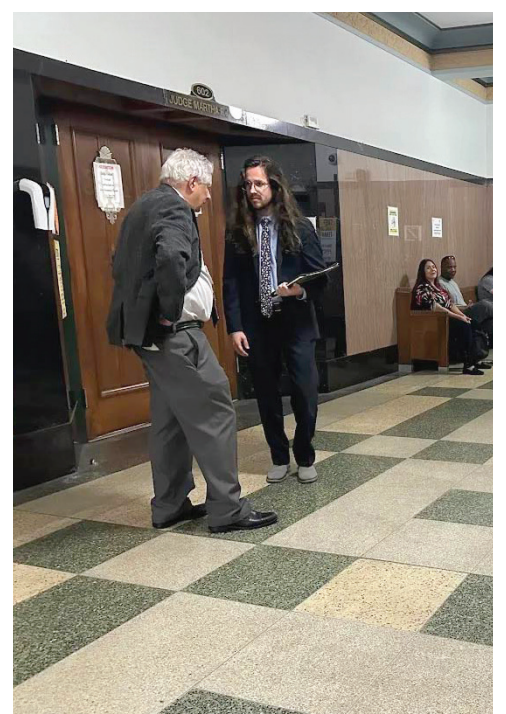
If a landlord fails to serve eviction notices properly or evicts for illegal reasons or discrimination, attorneys are likely to catch those case-breaking flaws and help tenants keep their homes if that is their goal, Figgins said.

Ultimately, Long said, he hopes that the OIIC financing will encourage Oklahoma City and Tulsa to fund right-to-counsel programs.

Long said OIIC used recent media reports on evictions to illustrate to investors the need in Oklahoma for tenants to have access to legal assistance in court.

"We were able to use a lot of it when we went to our investors and said, 'Hey, this is, this is a no-brainer,'" Long said. "Reporting on evictions is driving money, it's driving interest."

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



Legal Aid Services Oklahoma Attorney Justin Neal speaks with Attorney Robert Goldman who represents landlords in eviction cases on Sept. 18, 2024 at the Oklahoma County District Courthouse.

PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH



PHOTO TRES SAVAGE

Although voters in Oklahoma County already approved \$260 million in bonds for the construction of a new jail to replace the current, dilapidated one, the actual cost is expected to be much higher.

Jail In Peril

Permanent sales tax being considered by commissioners to support jail operations

From A12

Its direct supervision model will require more staff, and costs for everyday things — ranging from lettuce to toilet paper — have gone up in recent years.

When the county built the current jail, some of its operating cost was expected to be offset by housing federal detainees. But with the DOJ began monitoring the jail for two decades, those funds dried up.

“We currently don’t have enough money to appropriately operate the current jail,” Blumert said. “So, in a new facility, you’re still going to have the issue with not having enough operational money.”

That’s one reason the commissioners are considering a permanent sales tax to support jail operations, something dozens of other Oklahoma counties already have.

“I don’t know what the number is, whether it’s tied to a quarter-cent, a half-cent or a full cent, [but] I think the jail needs more ongoing operational funding,” Blumert said. “I mean, if we want to provide a higher level of medical care and more programming and more support to detainees, we’re going to need more funding.”

Maughan said inflation will make the new jail cost more to operate.

“My concern is that costs have gone up so much,” Maughan said. “It’s not the same as it was when we went to voters two and a half years ago. We’re looking at a drastically different operation

model. Food has gone up. Medical has gone up. I’m concerned about the construction costs being so different, but also the operational costs are going to be different, and the county is really feeling the pinch like the rest of the country.”

Davidson said those increased costs are one reason why a permanent sales tax to fund jail operations might be part of the approach in the long term.

“That’s going to be one of the challenges we face — making sure that when this jail is built, we can run it the way it’s supposed to be run without some of the problems with long-term maintenance we’ve seen with the current jail,” Davidson said.

In his view, Davidson said one of the most critical aspects of the entire process must be avoiding the same mistakes that were made three decades ago with the current facility that was over budget and has been plagued with problems since even before it opened.

“We are exploring any and all avenues available to the commissioners in order to not repeat the mistakes of the past,” Davidson said.

Bana: ‘We don’t need that big of a jail’

Midwest City City Councilwoman Sara Bana is one of many people unsurprised to see the new jail project in rough straits.

Bana, who announced she is running for Blumert’s seat via Facebook on Sept. 10, has been a longtime critic of both how the county manages the current jail and its plans for a new one through

her work with the People’s Council for Justice Reform. Based on data she has seen from the National Institute of Corrections, Bana said the cost estimated for the planned jail would cost from \$600 million to \$800 million.

“The Board of County Commissioners, at the jail trust meetings, they were calling us uneducated fools,” Bana said. “(Former Commissioner Kevin) Calvey was still there, and they weren’t taking us seriously. We were telling them it was going to cost more than what they were saying it would. To me, it’s just not truthful that they’re trying to spin this as they didn’t have any understanding of what the numbers to build such a facility would be. Either that, or they were scheming and scamming the taxpayers of Oklahoma County again. They proposed a \$260 million bond knowing it wouldn’t be enough, or they hoped it would be low enough to get a ‘Yes’ vote, and then they would go through the backdoor to get the rest of the additional revenue.”

Bana also believes the current plan to build a jail with at least 1,800 beds — and possibly as many as 2,400 — is excessive. She said only those who are a threat to others should be in jail.

“We don’t need a facility that large,” Bana said. “If they wanted to be proactive on justice reform and public safety, we have the capacity to reduce the jail population to 600 to 800 [people]. The individuals that need to be housed there are violent offenders. The county jail has no business contracting with municipalities for petty offenses simply

because municipalities want to contract with them.”

Bail reform could also help reduce the jail population, she said.

“We have the capacity to use ankle monitors to release people until they access due process,” Bana said. “That would eliminate some unnecessary population. Ending cash bail would also help reduce the jail population, but that would have to come from a legislative effort. The bottom line is these conversations could be happening, but they’re not.”

Bana believes the new jail will require sales tax revenue to fund both its construction and operation, and she has grave concerns about the county government’s ability to put it to the best use.

“I’m a person who truly believes in the role of government as far as building roads and bridges and other infrastructure and all of the other things government can do to provide health and public safety, but I don’t think the government has been good stewards of taxpayer dollars, and I think that has created a level of distrust,” Bana said. “So given that, I don’t think I could support a sales tax, because I don’t trust the people who have the reins now to be responsible with the money.”

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



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There's Still Joy in End-of-Life Care



PHOTO GETTY IMAGES

In a 2021 report, Black family caregivers represent 14% of the estimated 48 million unpaid family caregivers in the U.S., with Black women making up a little more than half of this group, according to the American Society on Aging.

End-of-Life Care

Most people in their 20s aren't thinking about caregiving. But for these Black women, they share how they cared for a loved one or strangers.

Navigating Grief, Embracing Joy

ANISSA DURHAM
Word In Black

Caregiving is an act of love and sacrifice. But for young Black women, it's often summed up as just being "a good daughter."

More than 100 million Americans provide care to a child, parent, or relative. And about half provide care to a spouse, elderly parent or relative, or special needs child, according to a report by Guardian. But for Black folks, the burden of doing so is often heavier.

Due to disparities in education, housing, and nutrition, and less access to health insurance, — along with the "weathering" that accompanies racism-related stress — Black Americans experience higher risk and rates of chronic disease. Which means, Black folks may get sick sooner than their counterparts and make younger generations, often women, more likely to become caregivers.

In a 2021 report, Black family caregivers represent 14% of the estimated 48 million unpaid family caregivers in the U.S., with Black women making up a little more than half of this group, according to the American Society on Aging.

Overall, women are two times more likely than men to say they've left the workforce to keep up with caregiving responsibilities. And nearly 50% of caregivers are either Millennials or Gen Z, according to the Guardian report.

But it's not just about who is providing the care. The mental, physical, and financial toll it takes depends on the type of caregiver. Those who care for a special needs child report higher rates of fair or poor health compared to adults who care for a sick or elderly adult. However, adults who care for a sick or elderly adult report higher rates of fair or poor mental health compared to other caregivers.

While the data provides a snapshot of what caregiver's experience, statistics only tell part of the story. We spoke to four young Black women to understand the lived caregiving experience. Some have cared for a loved one others are professional caregivers.

We wanted to know, how do they manage their responsibilities? How do they navigate their grief? What joys have they experienced while caregiving? And what is their best piece of advice?

Here are their stories in their own words, edited for brevity and clarity.

Cont. A18, End-of-Life Care

Freedom Schools

Can Freedom Schools Fill Educational Gaps for Black Students?

The resurgence is a direct response to restrictive educational policies on Black History in America's public schools.

QUINTESSA WILLIAMS
Word In Black

In the mid-1960s, when the Supreme Court ordered the integration of public schools, states in the Deep South were incensed. Not only did they refuse to comply, but they also banned Black schools from teaching American history between 1860 and 1875—the years between the start of the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction.

In 2022, when Southern red states followed Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis's restrictions on teaching Black history in classrooms, Black communities in the Sunshine State and beyond found a solution by bringing back Freedom Schools.

Resurrected in response to DeSantis' Stop WOKE Act and similar measures from conservative state legislatures, Freedom Schools have reemerged as a critical means of ensuring that a new generation of Black children learn their history in a way the state can't erase.

"We cannot let anyone keep us from teaching Black history," says Hazel Gillis, president of the Jacksonville, Florida, branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. "That's why we're so adamant that we've got to start now."

Freedom School Roots Run Deep

Freedom Schools have a deep-rooted history dating back to the Civil Rights Movement. Initially established during the 1964 Freedom Summer in Mississippi, these schools were created by civil rights organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in response to the state's segregated and poorly funded public school system.

Their goal was to educate Black students about their history and Constitutional rights, empowering them to challenge systemic racism in America. The schools offered a curriculum beyond the traditional subjects, including civic engagement, Black history,

Cont. A18, Freedom Schools

Jessica McGlory

Jessica McGlory is the Founder and CEO of Guaranteed, a hybrid healthcare company modernizing of end-of-life care. Under Jessica's leadership, Guaranteed has raised \$9MM to date and its backers include BrandProject, Cake Ventures, Lakehouse Ventures, Precursor Ventures, and Springbank Ventures. Previously, Jessica was an early stage operator working in growth for some of the fastest growing startups in the US.



PHOTO JESSICA MCGLORY

Jessica McGlory, New York City, 33, CEO of Guaranteed. In a 2021 report, Black family caregivers represent 14% of the estimated 48 million unpaid family caregivers in the U.S., with Black women making up a little more than half of this group, according to the American Society on Aging.

End-of-Life Care

For Black caregivers, access and diverse support models are key

From A17

'Medical racism is real.'

Alyse Dunn, Manhattan, 38, founder and CEO of CareCopilot

My sibling and I cared for both of our aging parents for eight years. I was a caregiver from age 26 to 34. Our dad was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in the early 2000s, and it got to where he needed more help. He was on hospice for the last six months of his life. Then our mom got diagnosed with Alzheimer's shortly before our father passed away. Dad died in 2014, and mom died in 2020.

A lot of people who find themselves in this situation, when you know this is something you have to do, it's like a part of your brain shuts off and you just go straight into execution mode. You don't spend a lot of time or emotional energy thinking about how you feel or how you can protect yourself during it. I need to execute and that's what I did.

It wasn't until my mom passed away that I was able to really process a lot of my feelings around what happened. There was a lot of anger and frustration along the way. I wasn't thinking that critically for those eight years. It was just get up, go to work, make sure I didn't get fired, make sure mom or dad got what they needed, rinse and repeat.

I tried in-person support groups for a while at the New York Presbyterian Hospital. I ended up not attending for very long, because it was pretty off demographically for me. It was like an old money neighborhood, not very racially diverse. To be frank, I was going to these caregiver support group meetings, and it was me plus a lot of older white people who are taking care of their spouses. It was pretty isolating for me.



Jessica Guthrie and her mother Constance. In a 2021 report, Black family caregivers represent 14% of the estimated 48 million unpaid family caregivers in the U.S. PHOTO JESSICA GUTHRIE

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It was just get up, go to work, make sure I didn't get fired, make sure mom or dad got what they needed, rinse and repeat.

Alyse Dunn, Manhattan, 38, founder and CEO of CareCopilot

Now, I work with caregivers and my situation is not unique. One thing I found is that Black and Brown individuals, due to medical racism, we do tend to need more help in life. Unfortunately, a lot of people in our community just don't have as many healthy years as some of our less diverse counterparts.

In those eight years, my sister and I never really found anything or anyone that made our experience of caregiving any easier. So, I left a great job I loved as a senior software engineer at Venmo to start my company, Care CoPilot.

One piece of advice I would give to anyone is not to underestimate how much this costs. Do not overestimate how much health insurance will pay for. Speak with an accountant or a financial advisor ... to start getting the lay of the land. It's just so painstakingly expensive.

For Black caregivers, because of medical racism and other issues, a lot of people in our community need help earlier. I was in my late 20s taking care of mom and dad, when all my white friends' parents were taking care of them.

Any time my sister and I took our parents to the doctor or the emergency room, we made it very clear we were college-educated professionals who were going to ask tough questions. We were going to be popping in and making surprise visits.

We were also fortunate that both of our parents happened to be retired physicians. It's a little bit of an ick to flaunt that and everyone does not have that privilege. But if you have any of that, now is the time to use it to make sure your loved ones get the best care possible, because medical racism is real.

My dad, unfortunately, spent the last few

years of his life in a lot of discomfort and pain. Watching my parents go out the way they did, it made me so so grateful for those little things. It's really instilled in me a spirit of not playing it safe when it comes to life. I'm not playing it safe. I'm playing to win.

Give yourself some grace.'

Jessica McGlory, New York City, 33, CEO of Guaranteed

I was a primary caregiver for my dad five years ago. I was at a family reunion in Chicago, and when I touched down in New York City, I got a phone call from my sister, saying dad had a heart attack and he was in critical condition.

So, I rushed back to Chicago. When I was about to get on another flight, I got another call from my sister saying they had to bring him back again. So, she didn't know if he was going to be there when I landed. Fortunately, he did survive that. But he stayed in the hospital for almost two weeks.

It was truly one of the most overwhelming experiences I've ever had. One day, a doctor came and spoke to my family and said he needed to go into hospice care. That is how I learned my dad was dying. He had a double heart attack in August of 2019. He died Sept. 5, 2019. I was 28 years old.

I can genuinely say I did not take care of my mental health. Every day was so surreal. I was not only designated as his caregiver, but he also decided to make me his health care proxy. I'm the youngest of my siblings. And I will never know why he picked me. It dawned on me that I was in my 20s. I saw the entire situation flash before my eyes. It was pressure

Cont. A19, End-of-Life Care

Freedom Schools

To fill the gaps of public education

From A17

and critical thinking.

Today, the necessity of these schools has resurfaced with urgency.

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), founded in 1915 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, whose mission is to promote, preserve, interpret, and disseminate information about African American life, history, and culture, has responded by establishing six new Freedom School branches in Florida alone. Additionally, Freedom Schools have expanded beyond the state, with new branches emerging in cities including Dallas, Indianapolis, and Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.

David Wilkins, president of ASALH's Manasota Branch in Florida, says the decision to relaunch Freedom Schools was a direct answer to the Stop WOKE Act and similar legislation in states like Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

"We knew it would definitely impact the teaching of our history," he says. "Our history has never been taught fully and accurately... which is a direct affront. We didn't do this to create a separate school...but because it was needed."

Filling Educational Gaps for Black Students

One of the primary purposes of Freedom Schools, from past to present, is to fill the gaps left when public schools are restricted in what they can teach Black students.

In Florida, for example, only 11 of more than 60 school districts have Black history teaching plans included in their curriculum guides. Moreover, the state's new social studies standards introduced the idea that enslaved people learned skills that could benefit them personally — a narrative widely criticized for downplaying the brutality of slavery and distorting its historical



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

significance.

The Children's Defense Fund, which launched its summer Freedom School program in 1995, released a report in 2023 that found that 84% of Black students in the program felt more academically engaged and confident in themselves based on the Black history curriculum. The CDF also found that nearly 85% of participants either improved or maintained their reading levels — highlighting these programs' importance in bridging educational gaps.

Sara King, a 16-year-old ASALH Freedom School student in Minnesota, said some of her favorite topics so far include details on the reality of the transatlantic slave trade.

"There's so much that just isn't included in textbooks," King told The Guardian. "When teachers discuss the transatlantic slave trade in class, they sometimes don't use the word 'slavery. They won't blatantly say 'the brutal history of slavery.' They'll go over 'our

country participated in this,' and then they'll skip over to the next part."

Dr. R. LeRoy Gundy, ASALH's James Weldon Johnson Black History Freedom School director, says Freedom Schools are essential to filling the void restrictive laws create in inclusive education.

"Our freedom schools are both educational and liberation," he says. "It is important that we remind young people of their culture...to help them find a path moving forward."

The Long-Term National Impact

The resurgence of Freedom Schools could have significant long-term impacts on Black K-12 students nationwide. A Southern Poverty Law Center report reveals that less than 10% of high school seniors can correctly answer questions about the Civil War's causes, and only 8% of high school students can identify slavery as the primary cause of

the Civil War.

Jacqueline Hubbard, president of St Petersburg ASALH branch, told The Guardian: "Now is the time for us to step forward and open up schools that will teach our kids the information that they need to be successful in America."

The Road Ahead: A National Movement for Black History

The resurgence of Freedom Schools is a powerful countermeasure to the growing trend of Black history censorship in public education. These schools are not just filling gaps—they are actively pushing back against the erasure of Black narratives in American history.

As Gillis, the Jacksonville ASALH chapter president, says, "We will teach Black history regardless...we will teach it even if it's outside the public school system."

End-of-Life Care

The shared journeys of Black caregivers who are committed to finding joy

From A18

filled and heavy.

I didn't really have the support system in place. Since I was the first of my closest friends to have a parent die, none of my friends knew what to do. So, their solution was to not talk about it. My best friends were local, and none of them asked where the funeral was or showed up.

About four months later, one of my best friends called me and he said 'I wasn't there for you, I'm sorry.' I needed to hear it. I did need that apology. If he had not done that, I would have never spoken to him much again.

I genuinely believe that if this person is your friend or loved one, you should be able to know them well enough to say something. I don't like to let people off the hook. It is far more often that the person feels uncomfortable. So instead, the solution becomes I won't do anything. And there is no one who can convince me that's the solution - to do absolutely nothing. It doesn't even make sense.

I wish people would be more willing to talk about death and dying. The burden of not being able to talk about it is so great on the people who are working through it. We could think of it more towards a path of celebration of life, versus this grim end that none of us want to have.

It took me two years to talk about my dad's death. And the fact that I really didn't have to, tells you how much people did not want to talk about it. Sometimes I feel absolutely fine and other times it's like a ton of bricks. It never really goes away.

I learned that there are a lot of different reactions to death and dying. If you judge how people react, you're not able to fully understand grief. You have to allow others to grieve how they need to. This has helped me to not have resentment.

'I'm a sucker for the small things.'

Alexa Martinez, Orange County, CA, 34, home health aide and caregiver

I have been in the health care world, specifically geriatric care, since I was 19. I fell in love with it. I love sitting down with them and hearing stories about their upbringing and being able to time travel.

It can be stressful if you don't have certain tools implemented in your routine. Self-care is so important. Whether it's going to the spa ... or some type of activity, I enjoy dancing. Balancing it all is really an art form. In the past, there were times I was working 80 hours a week, and the burnout can be serious.

This type of profession, you can't do this type of work without patience. I've had clients who were a little on the aggressive end. Due to their ailment, they may not remember as

I didn't know that my feelings of loneliness, insomnia, and feeling like no one understands - it was all grief...

Grief for who I was. Grief for my mom and how she was changing. Grief for our relationship as mother daughter.

Jessica Guthrie, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 36, caregiver, advocate, and educator

Alzheimer's Association

The Alzheimer's Association is the world's largest nonprofit funder of Alzheimer's research and the nonprofit with the highest impact worldwide. It has chapters in communities across the nation, with its home office located in Chicago and a public policy office in Washington, D.C.



Alyse Dunn, Manhattan, 38, founder and CEO of CareCopilot. In a 2021 report, Black family caregivers represent 14% of the estimated 48 million unpaid family caregivers in the U.S., with Black women making up a little more than half of this group, according to the American Society on Aging.

much. But I'm a sucker for the small things, just a smile or word of encouragement can make a difference in someone's life.

Coming into work like this you gotta have a love or passion for it. You're responsible for people, you want to make sure you are reliable. They're counting on you. Sometimes everybody is just trying to find a job, I get that, but you have to be a people person.

Compassion has brought me so far and given me so many blessings in life. You have to be human to do something like this, it has to come from the heart. You can't really do it and think about the paycheck at the end of the week. It's so much bigger than that.

'Caregivers are actively losing someone every single day.'

Jessica Guthrie, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 36, caregiver, advocate, and educator

I am the full-time caregiver of my mother, Constance, who was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease in 2014. I was 26. As an only child and daughter of a single mother, I became her full-time caregiver. At the time I was living in Dallas, and she was in Virginia, so I started out as a long-distance caregiver. I moved back home to care for her and work from home in 2019.

I am a young person early in my career trying to figure out who I want to be, and now I'm hit with how do I help my mother through this? How do I protect her dignity? How do I ensure that she is safe? This is all the stuff that's going through my head ... my peers at 26 were not talking about caring for a parent.

So as a young Black solo caregiver navigating a lot of this by myself, I didn't know the resources and levers to pull. When I first started this journey, I did not give myself the space to feel sad. I hit the ground running. I didn't know that my feelings of loneliness, insomnia, and feeling like no one understands - it was all grief.

I've been carrying around a lot of grief from the very beginning. Grief for who I was. Grief for my mom and how she was changing. Grief for our relationship as mother daughter. I've been fortunate to care for my mom for the last 10 years and see her through every evolution of Alzheimer's disease. She's now in the later stage, she's fully bed-bound, fully incontinent. She depends on me for every sip of water, and every bite of food.

And while she's at the end, my mother is still here.

In the beginning, I didn't say very much. I kept it all to myself. I bottled it up. No one was talking about grief. It wasn't until my mom started needing more help that I actively sought out and shared with other people. This allowed people to show up for me and to support me.

I've gotten good at knowing when my energy is being depleted and I'm heading towards burnout. I've got strong strategies for my own well-being: fitness, meal prep, meditation, and prayer, so that I never feel completely overwhelmed and paralyzed.

I can say misconceptions about me, is people think I just have it together. They think you don't need help or support or someone to show up for you. Especially with Alzheimer's, being a long-haul disease, people run in the opposite direction. I was lonely. I am lonely. People don't come around, unless you specifically ask for it. People stop calling. People stop checking in.

Most caregivers are drowning and need someone to toss out a life raft. My greatest struggles, honestly, have been about navigating the health care system, being believed and trusted, and listened to the first time. I have to defend and make a case for why my mom might need something, like liquid medication over pill form.

I am always in advocacy and defense mode, especially as a young Black solo caregiver, because to them I don't know what I'm talking about. In reality, I'm the expert in my mom, no one else is.

It is an active choice to choose joy. I am intentional about seeing joy even in the mundane things. When you think your mother's dying, every moment feels so precious. I put her in hospice in 2022 and its 2024, my mom is still here.

I look at every day as magic time. What brings me joy is watching my mom light up when she hears my voice. What brings me joy is getting my mom out of bed and washing and braiding her hair. What brings me joy is being able to sit next to my mom and feed her a full meal. That 70 minutes of concerted time between the two of us, it's a gift to be so close.

Imagine if we supported and saw caregivers as active grievers. Caregivers are actively losing someone every single day. You are constantly grieving. I need people to show up for me as an active griever. Showing up doesn't have to be complicated.

What I really care about is that friends don't abandon the caregiver. What hurts the most is when invites stop, or people assume that I can't come. You don't get to take my agency away, that's not fair.

My advice to young Black caregivers is to take a deep breath. A diagnosis and starting this journey does not mean that the end is tomorrow. The second piece of advice is to speak up. You might not know what you need. It's OK to be loud. Because being loud opens the doors for people to show up for you when you least expect it.

You don't need to be a superwoman. There is no trophy. There is no award for being an outstanding caregiver. So, that means delegate. Care isn't meant to be done alone. Care is a community effort.

Too often, Black women don't even identify as caregiver, because you're just being a good daughter. I want people to own the title of caregiver. When you own the title, you open yourself up to resources and support. White people know how to take advantage of resources. So, don't shy away from the title of caregiver and take advantage of what's around you to best care for your person.

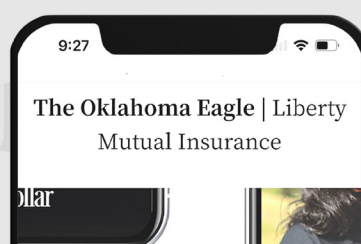


Alexa Martinez, Orange County, CA, 34, home health aide and caregiver

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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



Events

The Alpha Chi Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated is sponsoring a run/walk at Lacy Park, 2134 N. Madison Pl., on Oct. 26..

PHOTO PROVIDED

AKAs Host Breast Cancer Awareness 'Color Run/Walk', Oct. 26

DR. JERRY GOODWIN
The Oklahoma Eagle

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The Alpha Chi Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated is hosting a run/walk, "Color Run/Walk," at Lacy Park, 2134 N. Madison Pl., on Oct. 26, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. Organizers for the event said it will be a fun-filled day that the entire family can enjoy. Facepainting, coloring sheets and crayons, and goodie bags will be some of the fun activities to be offered. Snow cones, popcorn, and cotton candy will be served for the family.

A 360-degree photo booth will be available to capture one's attendance at the event. According to the U. S. Food and Drug Administration, one in eight women will get breast cancer during their lifetime. Each year, more than 40,000 women die from breast cancer. The goal during the month is to increase awareness of the disease and stress the importance of mammograms as the best tool to screen for breast cancer, the second most common type of cancer among women. Proceeds from the run/walk will be donated to Soulful Survivors, Inc. For more information, contact (918) 729-2616 or sororvanessa@gmail.com or visit Alpha Chi Omega Chapter Breast Cancer Awareness Color Run on Eventbrite.

Chase Bank Presents Financial Health Check-Up Programs, Oct. 24 And Oct. 26



Chase Bank is providing no-cost workshops on individual and family financial planning on Oct. 24 and Oct. 26.

PHOTO PROVIDED

DR. JERRY GOODWIN
The Oklahoma Eagle

Chase Bank is sponsoring two financial health check-up programs across the city during October. The first one is "Valuable Money Lessons To Teach Your Kids" on Oct. 24, and the second program is "Credit Power Hour" on Oct. 26. The programs are affiliated with Chase Money SkillsSM. The first program is scheduled for Oct. 24 at Reed Park Community Center, 4233 S. Yukon Ave., from 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. Attendees will receive tips and participate in activities to help kids, kindergarten to fifth grade, learn how to establish good financial habits for their entire lives. Space is limited. You are asked to RSVP by Oct. 23. For more information, visit <https://events.chase.com/300044485>. The second program is planned for Oct. 26 at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa, Conference Center, 700 N. Greenwood Ave., 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. Attendees will receive tips and strategies to improve credit scores and boost financial health. Space is limited. Please RSVP by Oct. 25. For registration, see <https://events.chase.com/300047076>.

Black Wall Street Market Celebrating The Fall Season With Festival, Oct. 19



Black Wall Street Market, 5616 N. Osage Dr., is celebrating its fourth annual Community Pride Garden School Harvest Feast Festival, Oct. 19 from 3 p.m. – 9 p.m.

PHOTO PROVIDED

DR. JERRY GOODWIN
The Oklahoma Eagle

Black Wall Street Market is inviting the community to attend its fourth annual Harvest Feast Festival at its location, 5616 N. Osage Dr., on Oct. 19, 3 p.m. – 9 p.m. The event will be offering a variety of activities, including entertainment – live music, spoken word, and drum circle – food, arts and crafts, bouncy house, games, horseback riding, gardening tips, pumpkin painting, and speakers. Several organizations participating and supporting the event are Accelerate North Tulsa, Covenant Family Academy, Langston University, MET Cares, Overcome Counseling, Yella House, and countless volunteers. Attendees are invited to bring chairs to the outdoor event. Donations are welcomed to support the free event. For more information, contact (918) 770-6020 or (918) 812-0840.

Oct. 4 - 26

The Original Black Wall Street Merchant Marketplace is open in the Greenwood Business District, 122 N. Greenwood Ave., on Saturdays from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. In addition to vendors, live music, line dancing classes, yoga classes, sound body and soul meditation and sound bath sessions, and free health care screenings will be offered. For more information, visit www.theoriginalbwsmarketplace.com or send an email to hello@tulsacountyliving.com.

Oct. 4 - 19

Cheyenne-Roger Mills County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, 101 S. L. L. Males Ave., will be hosting "Voices and Votes: Democracy in America" exhibition. From the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street, the exhibition explores the complex history of the nation, including The Revolution, Civil Rights, Suffrage, Elections, Protests, and the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens. The project is touring the state. For more information, visit www.okhumanities.org or call (580) 497-3318.

Oct. 5

The United Nigeria Association of Tulsa is hosting the Nigerian Independence and Cultural Celebration at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 6 p.m. – 12 a.m. Authentic food, music, and dance will be offered. The dress code will be traditional or casual. An admission fee will be required. For more information, call (918) 706-6626 or (918) 813-2608.

Oct. 6

Holy Family Catholic Church is hosting its Parish Picnic at Camp Loughridge, 4900 W. Oak Leaf Dr., Tulsa, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. Hayrides, pie contests, 50/50 raffle, and other activities and games will be offered. Hot dogs with chili and potato salad will be for lunch. Attendees are encouraged to bring side dishes. Let the organizers know if you are bringing a side dish. For more information, visit <https://www.tulsacathedral.com/picnic>.

Oct. 10

Bamboo Financial Partners is sponsoring the Second Annual Women's Fall Event "Pumpkin Spice and Financial Advice" at Bello Ballroom, 105 S. 9th St., 6 p.m. Get ready for an evening of fun, fall vibes, and financial empowerment. To RSVP, visit [Bamboo Financial Partners registration](https://www.bamboofinancialpartners.com/registration).

Oct. 12

Phoenix Development Council will be installing a Blazing Wings of Dreams structure. Also, a block party will be held with food trucks, music, and other activities for families. Ten-dollar food vouchers will be provided to the first 75 people. The event will occur at 36th St. N. and the Osage Trail, 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. For more information, visit <https://www.phoenixdistricttulsa.org/art>.

Oct. 14 - 15

Metropolitan Baptist Church, 1228 W. Apache St., is hosting "Harvest Time Revival 14," 7 p.m. The program will feature Dr. Marcus D. Cosby, senior pastor of Wheeler Ave. Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, and musical artists Terri McConnell and Marlee Reeves. Pastor Dr. Ray A. Owens is hosting. For more information, call (918) 425-5402 or info@metropolitanbc.org.

Oct. 18

Langston University 19th annual President's Scholarship Gala will be held at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 1700 NE 63rd St., in Oklahoma City. The guest entertainer will be Johnny Gill. For more information, visit <https://langston.edu/gala>.

Oct. 19

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 focus of the program features percussion instruments. For more information, visit <https://www.tulsasymphony.org/flint>.