

# The Oklahoma Eagle

"WE MAKE AMERICA BETTER, WHEN WE AID OUR PEOPLE." - E. L. GOODWIN (PUBLISHER, 1936-1978)

SERVING GREATER TULSA SINCE 1921

LEGACY

**5,412**

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

NATION

**20 Inspirational Quotes to Start Black Students Strong in 2025**

Word In Black. **A17**

NATION

**6 Kwanzaa-Themed Books to Inspire Black Students**

Word In Black. **A17**

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January 3, 2025 - January 9, 2025

## The Year In Review, 2024: Moments of Triumph and Challenges Met

By The Oklahoma Eagle, 2024, A3



### Tulsa Artist Inspires Urban Greenspaces

**KIMBERLY MARSH**, The Oklahoma Eagle Tulsa artist Zadith Rodriguez is reimagining a greener Tulsa through her artwork, hoping to inspire future generations

while connecting to her South American roots. Rodriguez is a native of Peru.

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FEATURED

## St. Housing Assessment Shows Small Homes In Demand

The trending needs of smaller families

Housing, A8



FEATURED

## Proposed Rules Would Require Students to Prove Citizenship or Legal Immigration Status

A partisan solution, in search of a problem

Citizenship, A8

# The Oklahoma Eagle

"WE MAKE AMERICA BETTER, WHEN WE AID OUR PEOPLE." - E. L. GOODWIN (PUBLISHER, 1936-1978)

SERVING GREATER TULSA SINCE 1921

LEGACY

### 5,394

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

NATION

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By ANISSA DURHAM, WORD IN BLACK

NATION

### Give Our Children the Right to Read | B2

By ZENOBIA JUDO-WILLIAMS, WORD IN BLACK

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AUGUST 30, 2024 - SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

## TULSA ELECTIONS, AUG. 2024

\* \* \*

**Monroe Nichols and Karen Keith Advance in Mayoral Primary** | *Monroe Nichols edged ahead of Tulsa mayoral candidates Karen Keith and Brent VanNorman on August 27, earning more votes than each competitor, but falling short of the 50 percent plus one needed to secure victory. The forced runoff between Nichols and Keith will be settled by Tulsa County voters during the November 5 general election.*

By Kimberly Marsh and Sam Levrault, The Oklahoma Eagle, A1



PHOTO THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

The Oklahoma Eagle print edition frontpage, featuring Monroe Nichols, then candidate for the 2024 Tulsa, Okla. mayoral race. Nichols won the Nov. 5 general election, becoming Tulsa, Okla.'s first Black American mayor.

2024

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW, 2024: Moments of Triumph, and Challenges Met

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

The nature of challenges isn't new for Tulsa communities, which withstood threats of Covid-19, economic downturn, homelessness and an ever-shifting political landscape throughout the last two years. The pandemic's winter revealed more questions and challenges for parents, guardians and educators, as students returned, in person, to Tulsa schools. Hidden smiles, muffled speech, and the partial anonymity of coworkers were no longer the norm.

Cont. A5, 2024



# Zelia Page Breaux: Musician and Educator

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



**Z**elia Breaux, a renowned musician and educator, was born to Inman Edward and Zelia Ball Page in 1880 at Jefferson City, Missouri. Her father was principal of the Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City from 1888 to 1898. Zelia Page attained a bachelor's degree in music from Lincoln. On May 1, 1898, Inman Page became president of the Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University) in Langston and moved his family to Oklahoma Territory. He hired his daughter, Zelia, as a teacher of piano and instrumental music. She established and developed the music department. On December 6, 1905, she married Armogen Breaux. The couple had one son, Enimen, who became a vice president at Langston University.

The Oklahoma public schools were segregated in 1918 when she left Langston and accepted the position of supervisor of music for the African American schools in Oklahoma City.

As head of the music department at Douglass High School, she placed a music teacher in each African American grade school in the system. In addition, she organized the Oklahoma City Community Band, which was composed of many of her former Douglass students.

The Douglass High School band, which she organized in 1923 with twenty-six participants, became one of the most outstanding in the United States. Appearing all over the nation, the band influenced both local and national musicians such as Duke Ellington, Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Sherman Sneed, Edward and Charlie Christian, and Jimmy Rushing. In 1933 Breaux took the Douglass band to the Chicago World's Fair musical festivities, and they performed for a national radio broadcast while there. In 1915 she had bought a controlling interest in the Aldridge Theater on Northeast Second Street, and it became the main location for performances of high school operettas as well as prestigious

traveling shows.

During her tenure at Douglass High School Breaux organized a twenty-four-voice chorus, an eighteen-piece symphony orchestra, and several boys' and girls' glee clubs. In 1932 she organized May Day celebrations, during which the Douglass band would play as the children wrapped the Maypole. In 1936 she took the Douglass band, which had grown immensely since 1923, to the Texas Centennial celebration in Dallas. In 1937 she started the Black State Band Festival, which began with seven participating bands and grew to eighteen.

In 1939 Breaux received a master's degree in music education from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She retired from Douglass High School in 1948. Zelia Breaux died in Guthrie on October 31, 1956, at the age of seventy-six. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame in 1983 and the Oklahoma Bandmasters Association Hall of Fame on July 25, 1991.

**Zelia Breaux**, (18429, Elwyn Welch 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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2024

# THE FIGHT FOR, AND AGAINST, HISTORY EDUCATION

By year's end, masking was the exception, not the rule. Tulsans welcomed a new year with fewer concerns about the immediate impacts of Covid-19, with a sharper focus on the path forward for local and state governance, the economic, health and wellbeing of their communities, immigration and long-awaited justice for the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre survivors. The Oklahoma Eagle readers candidly shared their personal narratives, concerns and interests with Gary Lee, managing editor, John Neal, Kimberly Marsh and Dr. Jerry Goodwin, community journalists, Sam Levrault, photo journalist and Ross D. Johnson, editorial columnist. Our combined reporting throughout 2024 represents what mattered to Tulsans, then and now. We arrived at years-end, grateful for the opportunity to listen, engage with the community, report and serve.



From A3

What and how we as a community and curious Tulsans learn about our place in history, our heritage, culture, trials, how we evolve as a country and people, remained a contentious issue argued by Tulsans and the Oklahoma State Board of Education.

John Neal and Gary Lee reported (Jan. 2024) that College Board would launch the Advanced Placement African American Studies course in high schools nationally in the 2024/25 school year. After piloting the program at McLain High School of Science and Technology, North Tulsa, Okla., College Board would soon make available a curriculum that regards "African American history as world history," according to Darren Williams, McLain High School educator. "It's American history, and it has been excluded, written out, and left out," Williams offered.

"Resistance and resilience" were central themes within the curriculum, including "a range of methods African Americans have innovated to resist oppression and assert agency and authenticity - politically, economically, culturally, and artistically."

Kristi Williams, "a stalwart advocate for Black culture and heritage in Tulsa," also embraced sharing the history of Black Tulsans with children, parents and guardians. Williams' passion was realized after she launched Black History Saturdays (July 2024), serving as a role as a "modern-day north Tulsa griot - a village storyteller popular in

West Africa - sharing the narratives of Black Tulsa and Oklahoma before audiences in local forums," as reported by Lee.

Named a National Geographic Wayfarer and Explorer, Williams continues to forge a path for young Oklahomans. Wayfarer status is a rare honor, given annually to only 15 people from thousands of nominees.

Opposition to offering what is objectively viewed as a comprehensive approach to teaching history was championed by state officials and politically conservative Oklahomans who framed their position as protecting students from emotional trauma and falsely implied blame. In June 2024, John Neal reported that a federal court judge blocked enforcement of key provisions of an Oklahoma law that aimed to restrict educators from teaching America's sordid racial history. The legal battle centered around House Bill 1775, a law passed by the Oklahoma legislature in 2021, which restricts teachers from discussing race and gender.

Williams' perseverance, and Tulsa educators' commitments to education excellence, will continue to be a key aspect of our reporting throughout 2025.

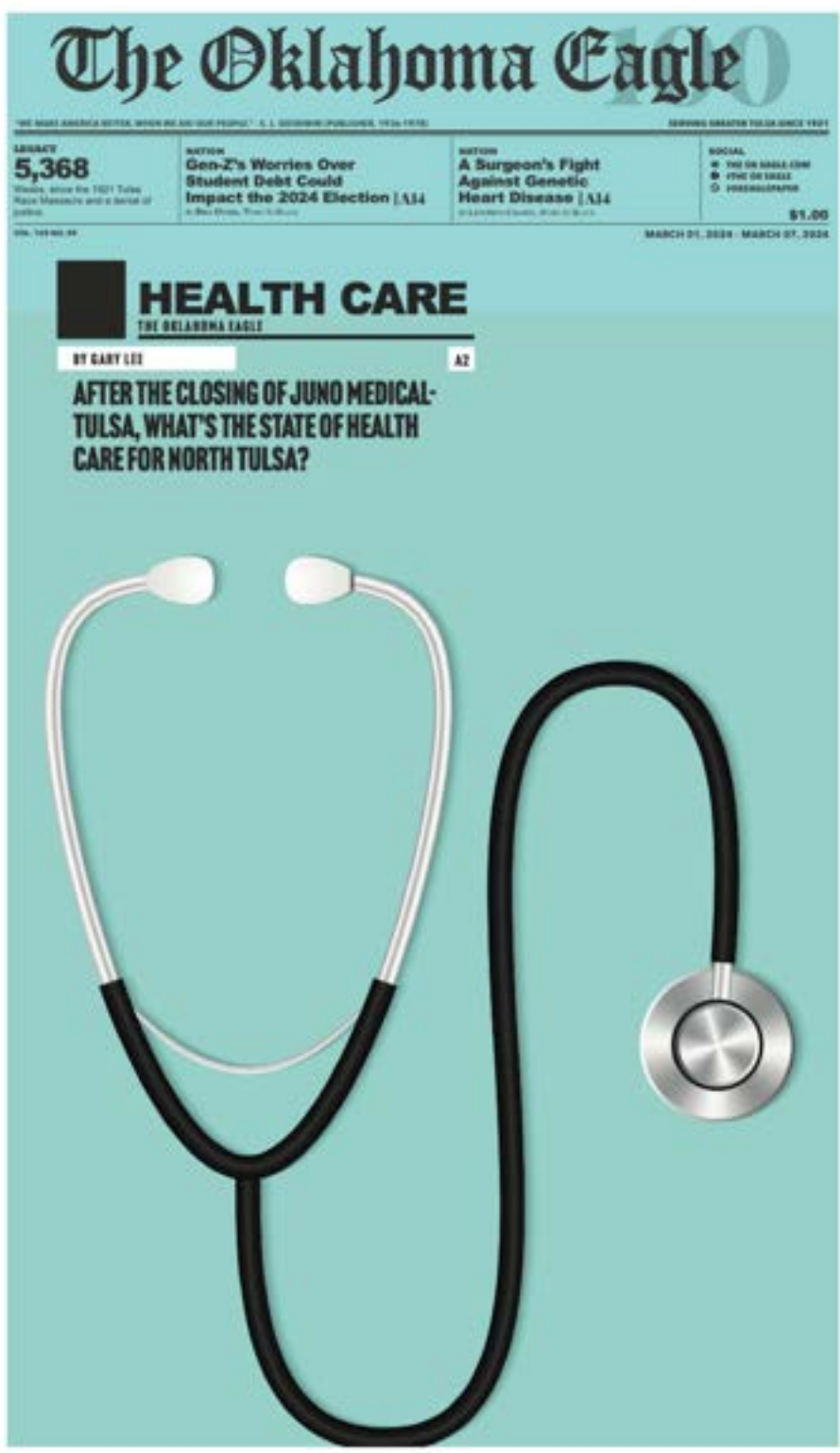
2024, The Oklahoma Eagle, Education Highlights

- Williams Named National Geographic Wayfinder
- AP African American Studies Course Set To Roll Out Nationwide
- Judge Rules Educators May Teach Racial History

Cont. A6, 2024



2024



From A5

## REVITALIZING NORTH TULSA

**John Neal's series on the City of Tulsa's revitalization efforts (Sept. 2024) explored more than the city's promise of affordable housing and business growth, it delved into the challenges faced by city officials (Sept. 2024) and the long-awaited renaissance planned by the Tulsa Development Authority to begin the development of seventy acres of largely vacant land in North Tulsa.**

- Nichols Elected Tulsa's First Black Mayor

Facing a rapidly changing geographic composition, North Tulsa rests at the center of reported obstacles. As the northside is undergoing shifting populations, demographic changes, and potential market difficulties, residents have candidly expressed concerns of potential gentrification and the availability of affordable housing.

The Kirkpatrick Heights-Greenwood initiative is one of the largest development endeavors launched in North Tulsa in decades. It could potentially transform the vitality of the Greenwood District and several adjacent neighborhoods.

Neal's interview with Jonathon Butler (Sept. 2024), Senior Vice President of Community Development in PartnerTulsa, captured how the executive intends to address concerns regarding gentrification, the availability of affordable housing and how the city will employ a more timely approach to development.

The phased approach to development, reported by Neal, highlighted a potential growth of 750-1,000 residential units, 400,000 square feet of retail space, and 120,000 square feet of office space. The parks, open, and community spaces will contribute to a "live and play" environment within the mixed-use district.

2024, The Oklahoma Eagle, Revitalizing Tulsa Highlights

- North Tulsa Neighborhood Revitalization Plan Is Underway
- North Tulsa Neighborhood Revitalization Plan Faces Challenges
- Senior Official Cites Progress On Master Plan Implementation



## WELLNESS, MATTERS

"What's the state of health care for North Tulsa?" was the central theme of Gary Lee's reporting of the closure of Juno Medical-Tulsa (March 2024).

"When the Juno clinic opened in June 2023, it promised to help North Tulsans address their health needs. By many accounts, the clinic met expectations. Patients reported easy access and manageable fees. Patient satisfaction clocked in at 95 percent, according to (Dr. Jabraan) Pasha – remarkable for any healthcare facility," according to Lee's reporting.

"The closure of Juno in Tulsa left its patients, including many with dire medical needs, in a lurch," said Susan Savage, CEO of Morton Comprehensive Health Services.

Ray Pearcy, a Tulsa-based writer, and former The Eagle editor, shared his Juno experience with Lee during an interview, who detailed how he (Pearcy) navigated a life-saving course of events that ultimately led to him receiving necessary emergency care.

Lee revealed that Tulsa agencies and reports have documented the dismal health circumstances and outcomes among the Black population in Tulsa. Juno stood, according to Lee and Tulsans, as a vanguard in the battle of health emergencies.

2024, The Oklahoma Eagle, Health and Wellness Highlights

- After the closing of Juno Medical-Tulsa, what's the state of health care for North Tulsa?

## CAMPAIGNS CAMPAIGNS CAMPAIGNS

**By year's end, masking was the The future of local and state political and civic representation anchored much of our reporting throughout the year. Gary Lee and Kimberly Marsh offered readers unparalleled analysis of state senate, mayoral and school board races leading up to, and after, the Nov. 5 general election. Hosting town halls, forums and in-depth interviews with candidates, readers were offered perspectives that only a community-centric publication could achieve.**

State Rep. Regina Goodwin (D-73) emerged as the clear choice of Tulsans to represent Oklahoma State Senate District 11. Goodwin, building upon the past success of her "Power of We" message, secured more than 83 percent of voters' support in the June 18 primary election. Uncontested in the general election, Goodwin's victory was an early 2024 campaign race.

Tulsa's mayoral race commanded both the attentions of Tulsans and The Oklahoma Eagle, as no clear winner emerged from Aug. 27 primary. Monroe Nichols edged ahead of

Tulsa mayoral candidates Karen Keith and Brent VanNorman, earning more votes than each competitor, but falling short of the 50 percent plus one needed to secure victory.

The Eagle reporting leading the Nov.5 general election runoff between Nichols and Keith objectively explored key distinctions and reader perceptions of the two Democratic Party candidates. An Oct. 22 debate, face-off, between the candidates grew tense at times, with the candidates voicing their views on issues ranging from the use of dark money in campaign advertising to how their leadership of the city would change Tulsa.

Our reporting, informed by the voices of Tulsans, revealed no clear winner as the general election appeared to slow its pace ahead of the general election.

Nichols, during an interview with The Eagle editorial board, expressed his optimism after the primary, sharing that he has "been out front on issues facing the community since the day I first got elected." The former education professional and co-founder of a cradle-to-career educational collective, Impact Tulsa, remained narrowly focused on the leading concerns of Tulsans, affordable housing, community safety, access to health care services and economic development.

Election night reporting, Nov. 5, captured what is objectively an historic victory for Tulsans and Nichols, who will now serve as the city's first African American Mayor.

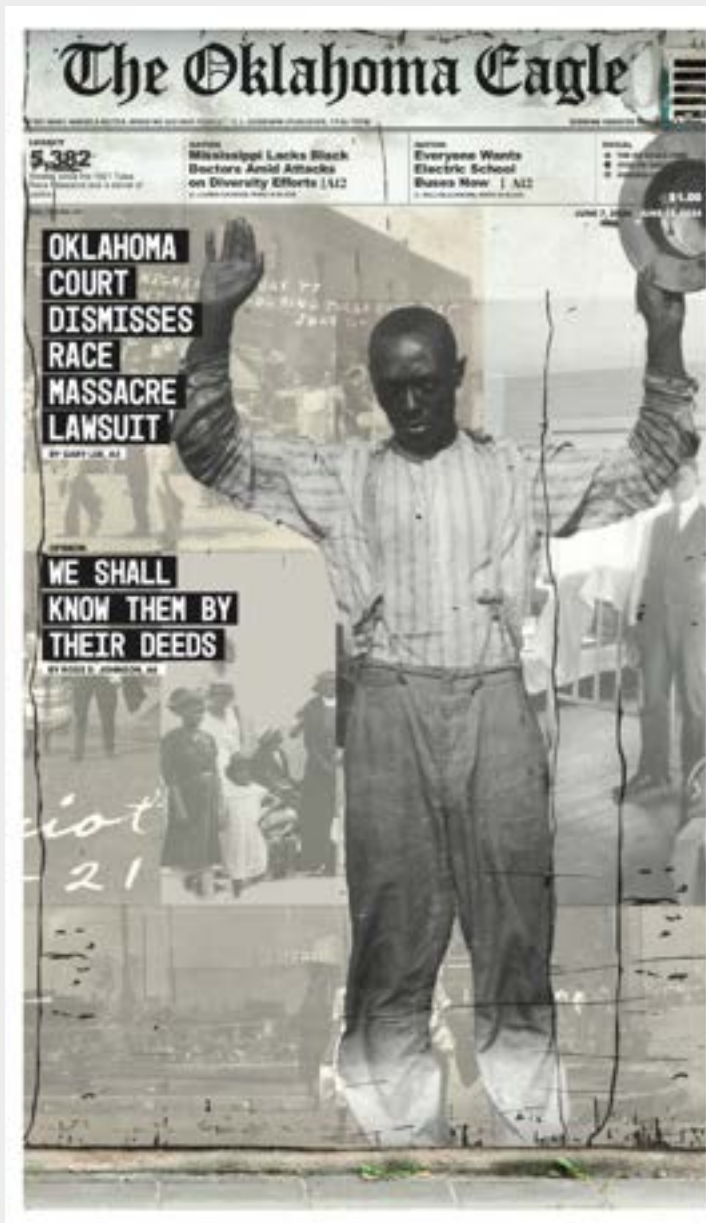
2024, The Oklahoma Eagle, Campaigns Highlights

- Mayoral Candidates Say Yes To ACTION Tulsa
- Monroe Nichols and Karen Keith Advance in Mayoral Primary
- Monroe Nichols and Karen Keith Will Face Off in Mayoral Race
- Mayor's Race: A Faceoff Between Two Brands of Democrats
- Mayoral Candidates Face Off In Debate

Cont. A7, 2024







ILLUSTRATIONS: THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

LEFT The Oklahoma Eagle print edition cover for the Oklahoma's Children series, October 25, 2024. RIGHT The Oklahoma Eagle print edition cover story, Oklahoma Court Dismisses Race Massacre Lawsuit, by Gary Lee, reporting on the court's decision to dismiss the civil case pursued by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors.

## 2024

From A6

### OKLAHOMA'S CHILDREN

Ross D. Johnson's "The Children of Oklahoma" four-part series explored how the state, school districts and churches plan to enact measures of accountability and resolution following the death of Nex Benedict, an Owasso High School student, and documented incidents of violence and abuse.

Benedict, then 16-years-old, died one day after being beaten by other students in the school's bathroom, briefly hospitalized and released, now posthumously serves as another stark reminder of how the weight of hateful rhetoric, political policies, and failed leadership impact the lives of young Oklahomans whose sin against the state is innocently 'being themselves.'

The Oklahoma Eagle explored the perceived culture of hate experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ children, fostered by state officials and public figures.

Months following the reporting of Benedicts' death, The Oklahoma Eagle and Johnson published "It Was What People Do," detailing the plight of Harmony Bailey Oates, the daughter of local church pastor Bertheophilus Maurice 'Judge' Bailey, alleged to have committed decades-long sexual abuse of his daughter. The Oklahoma Eagle also explored the state's background check statutes and church policies for reporting and ensuring the safety of church members.

The third part of our series, "Owasso's Children," detailed the U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Office's investigation of Owasso Public Schools failures to ensure Title IX protections. The final article of the series delved into how the state, school districts and churches plan to enact measures of accountability and resolution.

2024, The Oklahoma Eagle, The Children of Oklahoma Highlights

- Their
- It Was What People Do
- Owasso's Children
- Is There Hope For Oklahoma's Children

### The Oklahoma Eagle serves a print subscriber base throughout six Northeastern Oklahoma counties, statewide and in 36 U.S. states and territories and abroad.

Proudly, we are the 10th oldest Black-owned newspaper in the United States still publishing today.

### MOMENTS OF CELEBRATION, ART & ENTERTAINMENT

Sam Levrault, contributor, The Oklahoma Eagle, celebrated the publication of their first story, New Community Mural Spotlights North Tulsans, highlighting the transformation of the Elgin underpass into an intersection for art and community.

Levrault, leaning upon their award-winning talent, authored a Tulsa creative-focused story about the "Pathway to Hope Public Art Trail" in The Oklahoma Art in Public Places program, in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. The goal of the public works was to honor the history of the Historical Greenwood District with installations starting this summer. Each of the six large scale artworks are now in high traffic areas around Interstate 244 as it runs through Greenwood.

The Eagle readers embraced Levrault's framing of each creative's contribution and broadly shared their interest in the story across most popular social media channels. Levrault's future contributions will continue to highlight the beauty and diversity of Tulsa creatives' work and talent.

#### Everyone has an opinion

In the current social and political climate of Oklahoma, the mantle for morality appeared to only accommodate city officials and residents who believed that a single faith must govern our lives. So grounded in this belief Ryan Walters, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Education, mandated that public school classrooms shelve a bible.

"Look, I believe that if you're teaching American history, the Bible absolutely has to be included. And we cannot allow left-wing activists to sit here and say we don't like Christianity,"

The Oklahoma Eagle opinion columnist offered readers a series of perspectives regarding the state's history of faith, noting what measures Oklahoma, since its founding, embraced an alignment of Christian tenets and a regard for the humanity of Black Americans.

We Shall Know Them by Their Deeds and The Myth of The Christian State offered readers unique perspectives of history and faith.

### NO REST FOR THE WEARY: THE 1921 TULSA RACE MASSACRE SURVIVORS CASE

Gary Lee, managing editor, reported on the long pursuit of justice (July 2024) by the two last-known survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, and the decisive blow dealt on June 12, when the Oklahoma Supreme Court affirmed a lower court's dismissal of their lawsuit seeking reparations.

The justices of the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that the plaintiffs' grievances, including any lingering economic and social impact of the massacre, were legitimate but "do not fall within the scope of our state's public nuisance statute."

The Oklahoma Eagle has and continues to serve as a news-based record for the plight of Massacre survivors, descendants and Tulsans who live in the century-long shadow of the historic event. Lee, the editorial team and contributors offered readers and Massacre survivors a voice, a lens through which history may be viewed by generations to come.

2023-24, The Oklahoma Eagle, The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Highlights

- Tulsans Have Not Forgotten The Massacre Victims In Oaklawn Cemetery
- Will Justice Prevail For Race Massacre Survivors?
- Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor Hughes Van Ellis Passes
- 2001 Tulsa Race "Riot" (Massacre) Commission Report Update: From Rhetoric To Remedy
- Oklahoma Court Dismisses Race Massacre Lawsuit







PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Housing

# State Housing Assessment Shows Small Homes In Demand

HEATHER WARLICK  
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma has a housing problem. Faltering local economies and development disagreements are stalling needed housing development in rural areas, while zoning and building codes prevent much-needed small housing statewide.

As a result, 41% of Oklahomans are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing expenses. Oklahoma ranks 10th in poverty, with a median household income in the 12th percentile.

The new Oklahoma 2024 Housing Needs Assessment shows the state's greatest need is for the types of homes that are hardest for builders to accomplish: small and affordable.

The state recently diverted hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars toward builder loans to lessen the housing problem, but several municipal-level housing rules stand between homebuilders and progress.

### Fewer Bedrooms Necessary

The Oklahoma 2024 Housing Needs

Assessment was released in the fall after two years in development. A product of University of Oklahoma students and faculty, the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency commissioned the assessment for \$925,000 as a deep dive into the state's existing housing, household incomes and size, and housing needs.

The assessment shows that in rural and urban areas alike, small dwellings such as studio and one-bedroom homes are the most needed type of housing across all income groups.

"Across the nation, an aging population and a decline in births means fewer large units will be needed for families and more units will be needed for single-person and non-family households," an executive summary for the Housing Needs Assessment states.

Small homes and low-income homes are the most difficult to build, said Lance Windel, owner of LW Development. He specializes in affordable and low-income housing and innovative building techniques he said allow him to maximize efficiency for cost savings.

When building small, the most expensive

elements remain the same: a developed plot of land, a kitchen, bathrooms, a roof and permits.

"Bigger builders, they prefer bigger houses because there's cheap square footage in the living rooms and bedrooms," Windel said. "The plumber doesn't care that you put in really nice granite countertops or not, right? His cost is about the same. That's the problem."

Zoning laws further complicate the process of building studios and one-bedrooms. When residential areas are zoned mostly for single-family homes of a certain lot size, there is little space for multifamily options, tiny homes and other alternative housing.

Oklahoma Watch reported in April on Oklahoma's exclusionary zoning laws; residential land is disproportionately skewed toward single-family zoning, particularly in Norman, Oklahoma City and Tulsa. In Norman, 98% of residential land is zoned for single-family homes; in Oklahoma City, 96% and in Tulsa, 81% of residential land is zoned exclusively for single-family dwellings.

"Woodward or Duncan, or even the smaller towns like Madill, they all have some

zoning and planning requirements," Windel said.

Shawn Schaefer suggested easing restrictions, allowing for more accessory dwelling units like granny flats and garage apartments. Schaefer is an associate professor of urban design for the Gibbs College of Architecture at University of Oklahoma and a lead content expert for the Housing Assessment.

"And then also, could we go with smaller lot sizes, less frontages, so that we could maybe do some lot splits on some of these?" he said. "I think neighborhoods would be more willing to accept that sort of thing than introducing more high density apartment complexes in their neighborhoods or near their neighborhoods."

Allowing more tiny homes and other types of manufactured housing could also help, Schaefer said.

### Housing for Speculation

The assessment also revealed a rising need for workforce housing, particularly in rural

Cont. A9, Housing

## Citizenship

# Proposed Rules Would Require Students to Prove Citizenship or Legal Immigration Status

HEATHER WARLICK  
Oklahoma Watch

Children would have to show proof of U.S. citizenship or legal immigration status to enroll in a public school under new rules proposed by the Oklahoma Department of Education, a practice that could run afoul of federal law and deter children who are undocumented or from mixed-status families from attending school.

The agency's proposal states that students without documentation would not be prohibited from enrolling. Supreme Court precedent requires public schools to enroll children living within their districts, whether they are in the country legally or not.

But federal law also bars schools from asking about a student's citizenship or immigration status to confirm they live in the district as it can have a chilling effect on student enrollment, according to guidance from the U.S. Department

“

**None of the needs they claim to be concerned about in any way depend on knowing the number of students who are undocumented.**

David Blatt, director of research and strategic impact for Oklahoma Appleseed

of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. Neither can schools discourage students from enrolling if they don't have a birth certificate or if they have a foreign birth certificate.

According to the proposal, accepted documents include a U.S. birth certificate, U.S. passport, driver's license, state identification card, naturalization/citizen certificate, consular report of birth abroad, or permanent resident card.

Under the draft rules, published Monday, school districts would be required to report the number of students who couldn't prove citizenship or legal immigration status, excluding personally identifiable information, to the Oklahoma Department of Education.

The Department of Education stated the purpose of the rule change was to assess statewide and local educational needs, including for English as a Second Language teachers and tutors, transportation needs and anticipated funding.

David Blatt, director of research and strategic impact for Oklahoma Appleseed, a legal advocacy group, said the state can and does assess those needs without asking students about their immigration status.

"None of the needs they claim to be concerned about in any way depend on knowing the number of students who are undocumented," Blatt said. "If you want to determine how many students need English language services, then figure that out, but it's not a citizenship question."

Even if schools permit undocumented children to enroll, asking about immigration status is likely unconstitutional because it dissuades immigrant families from enrolling or sending children to school, according to the American Immigration Council.

Cecilia Robinson-Woods, superintendent of Millwood Public Schools, said she hadn't seen the proposed rule, but challenged how such a policy would be legal. Asking students about their status could discourage them from

Cont. A9, Citizenship



## Housing

# Trending needs of smaller families

From A8

areas. Workforce housing refers to homes priced for households earning 80% to 120% of the area median income.

When lobbying for legislation to create the Oklahoma Housing Stability Program last year, rural lawmakers pointed to the lack of available workforce housing as a deterrent to companies that might otherwise bring economic development to faltering communities, Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City, said.

Population declines in rural areas have led to aging housing in need of updating and replacement, but the assessment showed little and slow movement toward development in many of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

Oklahoma and Tulsa counties accounted for 90% of building permits during the past decade, the assessment showed in its trend analysis. Cleveland County comes in third. Some counties go years with few permit applications; for example, Beaver County has only recorded nine new building permits since 2010.

"You don't get a lot of new builders coming in some of these areas to build housing, or landlords may not be upgrading units, or homeowners even may not be able to keep up with maintenance and things," Schaefer said.

It's even difficult to find skilled workers to build homes in many rural areas, Windel said.

### Cart Before the Horse

Before the Housing Needs Assessment was published, the Oklahoma Legislature passed the Oklahoma Housing Stability Act, which created the new Housing



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Stability Program administered by the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency.

The Oklahoma Housing Stability Act is the state's largest investment into housing of its kind, with \$215 million of taxpayer money directed toward adding more affordable housing in the state, particularly in rural areas.

Windel was among the first homebuilders approved for both a

Homebuilder Loan and Increased Housing Loan. He said he plans to build homes for resale in Kingfisher and rentals in Ardmore through the program.

The program is a good first attempt at using state tax dollars to help ease the strain on Oklahoma housing, Windel said, but OHFA didn't factor in the costs associated with developing plats and infrastructure in rural

areas when designing the Housing Stability Program parameters.

The cost of building skyrockets when those costs are funneled to builders. Windel said he has been put off by the costs of developing his own sites in some areas with especially strict infrastructure standards.

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

## Citizenship

# A partisan solution, in search of a problem

From A8

attending school or deter parents from being involved in their child's education, such as attending IEP meetings, she said.

"We can't break the law based on a directive," she said.

In August, Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters announced a plan to ask school administrators to calculate the cost of illegal immigration in their districts. Several district leaders said publicly they would refuse a directive to ask students about their immigration status.

Last week, the department told Oklahoma Watch the only public record related to that effort is Walters' Oct. 29 letter to Vice President Kamala Harris demanding nearly \$475 million to reimburse Oklahoma for the cost of illegal immigration on the state's schools. Dan Isett, a spokesman for the department, said guidance to districts is in

process.

Asked to explain the purpose of the proposed rule change, Isett said Walters "is committed to crafting aggressive policies to protect Oklahomans from unfunded mandates."

The department published the proposed rule change along with a slew of others on Tuesday. Public comment is open through Jan. 17 and can be submitted to the department by email or in person. A public hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m. on Jan. 17 at the department, 2500 N. Lincoln Boulevard in Oklahoma City.

The Board of Education and the Legislature must approve proposed agency rules.

Jennifer Palmer has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2016 and covers education. Contact her at (405) 761-0093 or jpalmer@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter @jpalmerOKC.



PHOTO WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Students walked the halls of Monroe Elementary School in Oklahoma City on the morning of Aug. 11, 2022, the first day of school.



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## The Oklahoma Eagle

### LEGAL NOTICE

Published in The Oklahoma Eagle:  
January 3, 10, 17, 24, 2025

NOTICE TO BIDDERS  
SEALED BIDS FOR  
PROJECT NO. 145500

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to an order by the Mayor of the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma, sealed bids will be received at the Timberlake Construction Office, 11349 East 60th Place, Tulsa, OK 74146 until 2:00 p.m. on the 4th day of February 2025 for furnishing all tools, materials, and labor and performing the work necessary to be done in the construction of the following:

PROJECT NO. 145500 - Tulsa Animal Services

A MANDATORY Pre-Bid Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 16th, 2025, at 10:00 AM at the Tulsa Animal Services site located at 5995 East 36th Street North, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 74115 to familiarize themselves with the project site conditions and their scope of work for the following bid packages, Demolition, Earthwork, and Utilities. The meeting location is at the southwest corner of the site.

The Pre-Bid is NON-MANDATORY for all other scopes.

NOTE: All utility contractors MUST be approved IDP contractors with non-expired registrations to bid and perform the associated scope of work on this project.

Timberlake Construction, Inc. will accept bids on behalf of the City of Tulsa for the following bid packages along with ALL associated alternates.

- Bid Package #2A
- Bid Package #3A Demolition
- Building Concrete
- Bid Package #4A Masonry
- Bid Package #5A Structural Steel Fabrication and Erection
- Bid Package #6A Millwork and Finish Carpentry
- Bid Package #6B Rough Carpentry
- Bid Package #7A Roofing and Wall Panels
- Bid Package #7B Waterproofing and Joint Sealants
- Bid Package #7C EIFS
- Bid Package #8A Doors, Frames, and Hardware (Material Only)
- Bid Package #8B Overhead Coiling Doors
- Bid Package #8C Storefront, Glass, and Glazing
- Bid Package #9A Framing, Drywall, and Ceilings
- Bid Package #9B Flooring
- Bid Package #9C Painting
- Bid Package #10A Specialties
- Bid Package #10B Signage
- Bid Package #10C Flagpoles
- Bid Package #10D Fixed Sunscreens
- Bid Package #11A Residential Appliances
- Bid Package #12A Window Shades
- Bid Package #12B Site Furnishes
- Bid Package #13A Tensioned Fabric Structures
- Bid Package #21A Fire Suppression
- Bid Package #22A Plumbing
- Bid Package #23A Mechanical HVAC and Controls
- Bid Package #26A Electrical
- Bid Package #31A Earthwork
- Bid Package #32A Site Concrete and Paving
- Bid Package #32B Chain Link Fences and Gates
- Bid Package #32C Landscape and Sprinklers
- Bid Package #33A Utilities

Drawings, specifications, and contract documents for the construction of said public improvements may be obtained from the Timberlake Construction website, iSqFt, Southwest Construction News, major plan rooms, or by email request from [estimating@timberlakeconstruction.com](mailto:estimating@timberlakeconstruction.com).

Contract requirements shall include compliance as required by law pertaining to the practice of non-discrimination in employment.

The overall aspirational Small Business Enterprise utilization goal for this project is ten (10) percent.

Attention is called to Resolution No. 18145 of August 23, 1988, requiring bidders to commit to the goal of employing on the project at least fifty percent bona fide residents of the City of Tulsa and/or MSA in each employment classification.

Attention is called to Resolution 7404 of November 8, 2006, requiring bidders, their subcontractors, and their lower-tier subcontractors to hire only citizens of the United States.

The City of Tulsa itself is exempt from the payment of any sales or use taxes. A Certified or Cashier's Check or Bidders Surety Bond, in the sum of 5% of the bid amount is only for bids over \$50,000, as per statutory requirements, and will be required from each bidder to be retained as liquidated damages in the event the successful bidder fails, neglects, or refuses to enter into said contract for the construction of said public improvements for said project and furnish the necessary bonds within thirty days from and after the date the award is made.

The bidder to whom a contract is awarded will be required to furnish public liability and workmen's compensation insurance, acceptable to the Tulsa Public Facilities Authority, in conformity with the requirements of the proposed contract documents.

All bids will be publicly opened, recorded, and considered by the Bid Committee of said City at a meeting of said Committee to be held in the Timberlake Construction Office, 11349 East 60th Place, Tulsa, OK 74146 until 2:00 p.m. the 4th day Of February 2025. A link is provided in the documents for remote participation in the bid opening.

Late bids will be returned unopened to the submitting entity. We reserve the right to request a Subcontractor's Qualification Statement (A305) from the bidders. All proposals must remain irrevocable for 45 days after submission, meaning the bidder cannot withdraw or alter their bid during this period. The owner (City of Tulsa) reserves the right to waive informalities and accept or reject any or all bids received.

This information sets clear expectations for bidders regarding the submission process, documentation requirements, and conditions for bid evaluation.

Dated at Tulsa, Oklahoma, this 6th day of January 2025.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

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# THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE CHURCH DIRECTORY

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Tulsa, OK 74106 - (918) 835-1525

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Pastor Bukky and Wonmi Alabi

For Further Information call (918) 835-1525.  
"Have Faith In God." Mark 11:22

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1559 E Reading St. Tulsa OK  
(918) 584-3206

**Minister R.J. Smith**

Sunday school - 9:30am  
Sunday Worship - 10:45am  
Monday Worship - 6:00pm  
Wednesday Bible Study - 5:00pm

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Elder Julius W. Bland  
Sr. Pastor  
918-810-3882

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### Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

Rudisill Regional Library  
1520 N Hartford Ave.  
Tulsa OK 74106  
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Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons

Sunday Worship: 1pm  
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Sunday TV  
Worship  
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KTUL Channel 8

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(918) 834-4747



Pastor Ruthie L. Howard

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11:00 a.m.

Bible Study & Prayer Wednesday 7:00 p.m.  
For Transportation (918) 402-6027

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Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr.  
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Worship 11 a.m.

Bible Study  
Wednesday  
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### Gethsemane Baptist Church

727 East 56th St. North  
(918) 425-6613

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School  
9:00 a.m.

Church Services  
11:00 a.m.

### 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

### NORTH PEORIA CHURCH OF CHRIST

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F: 918-587-0642  
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

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Worship Service  
10:00 am

Wednesday Bible Study  
6:00 pm



Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

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19364 S. S. Mingo Road.  
Bixby, 74008  
Phone: (918) 366-8870

Rev. Robert Givens

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419 N Elgin Tulsa, Oklahoma

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918-584-0510  
Fax:  
918-584-1958

Prayer Line:  
918-584-PRAY

Sunday School  
9:30 a.m.

Morning  
Worship 10:45

Wednesday  
Bible Study  
Room and 7:00



Rev. Sharyn Cosby-Willis

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PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Death Sentences

# As Oklahoma Executions Continue, New Death Sentences Grow Rare

**KEATON ROSS**  
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma's death row is dwindling with each execution.

No state court has imposed a death sentence since May 13, 2022, when a Tulsa County judge followed a jury's recommendation and sentenced David Ware to death for the murder of Tulsa Police Sgt. Craig Johnson.

Since then, the state has executed 10 men at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, the latest being convicted child murderer Kevin Underwood on Dec. 19. Three death row prisoners have exhausted their appeals and could be put to death in 2025 in 90-day intervals, as requested by Attorney General Gentner Drummond to accommodate corrections staff.

The nearly 1,000-day stretch without a new death sentence is Oklahoma's longest since at least 1974, according to data compiled by the Death Penalty Information Center, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that does not take a position on the death penalty but describes itself as critical of how it's administered.

Robin Maher, the organization's executive director, said Oklahoma's reduced use of capital punishment mirrors national trends. Twenty-one people received a death sentence in the U.S. in 2023, down considerably from 43 in 2018 and 79 in 2013.

"I think most Americans have concluded that the death penalty doesn't, in fact, keep them any safer," Maher said. "The promise of the death penalty for many years was that it would have a deterrent effect on violent crime, but no study has been able to substantiate that effect. There's also been an increased awareness of the errors in the death penalty system."

Maher said the defense attorneys have also become more aware of the effect severe mental illness can have on criminal behavior. Oklahoma courts stayed the executions of two Oklahoma prisoners set to be put to death in 2024, James Ryder and Wade Lay, after psychologists determined they were incompetent to be executed.

"That's one reason you're seeing juries return sentences other than death and another reason why you're seeing prosecutors reluctant to seek a death sentence for someone who is severely ill,"

she said.

State law allows prosecutors to seek the death penalty for first-degree murder if the crime meets one of several aggravating circumstances, including if the defendant killed a law enforcement officer or the crime was especially heinous or cruel. But several other factors weigh on prosecutors deciding whether or not to seek a death sentence.

Capital cases are about three times more expensive to prosecute than those seeking a sentence of life without parole, according to the Oklahoma Death Penalty Review Commission report issued in March 2017, and all jurors must agree that they are willing to sentence the defendant to death. The appeals process in capital cases typically lasts more than a decade, straining all involved parties.

"This process is extremely lengthy and arduous on both parties," Cleveland County District Attorney Greg Mashburn wrote in an opinion article detailing his use of capital punishment, noting that the defense and prosecution must subsequently present evidence to the Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals after a death sentence is handed down.

Don Heath, chair of the Oklahoma Coalition to End the Death Penalty, said

he can't speak for why prosecutors have become more reluctant to seek capital punishment. But the Edmond minister believes that the overall decline is a positive sign for those opposed to the death penalty.

"I think we're finally, blessedly getting away from the legacy of Bob Macy," Heath said.

Macy, a former Oklahoma County district attorney, successfully sought death sentences for 54 people. Three of those convictions were overturned on appeal.

A handful of cases in which prosecutors are seeking the death penalty are pending. In Pottawatomie County, Frank Byers faces execution for allegedly murdering his wife, Makayla Meave, in September 2023. A trial date has not been set.

In Cleveland County, Chace Cook faces death for allegedly murdering and sexually assaulting 18-year-old Madeline Bills in April 2023. The trial is scheduled for October.

**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).





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Mental Health

# DOJ report threatens lawsuit for Oklahoma, OKC mental health system ‘deficiencies’

TRES SAVAGE, BENNETT BRINKMAN  
NonDoc

The City of Oklahoma City and its police department “engage in a pattern or practice of conduct that discriminates against people with behavioral health disabilities when providing emergency response services” in violation of federal law, the U.S. Department of Justice said in a 45-page report released today.

“Oklahoma unnecessarily institutionalizes , or puts at serious risk of unnecessary institutionalization, adults with behavioral health disabilities in the Oklahoma County area, in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act,” the report states. “Together, the deficiencies in Oklahoma County’s behavioral health service system and Oklahoma City’s emergency response system lead to an unnecessary cycle of hospitalization and law enforcement contact.”

The DOJ report concludes by suggesting the federal agency could file litigation against the state and city if steps are not taken to ameliorate local emergency response processes and behavioral health care services.

“We find that Oklahoma fails to provide services to adults with behavioral health disabilities in the Oklahoma County area in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. Due to insufficient community-based services, Oklahoma relies unnecessarily on psychiatric hospitals and residential care and nursing facilities to serve adults with behavioral health disabilities who could be appropriately served in their own homes and communities,” the report states. “We further find and have reasonable cause to believe that Oklahoma City and OKCPD

“

**Oklahoma unnecessarily institutionalizes , or puts at serious risk of unnecessary institutionalization, adults with behavioral health disabilities in the Oklahoma County area,** in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

U.S. Department of Justice Report

engage in a pattern or practice of conduct that deprives people with behavioral health disabilities of their rights under federal law, by failing to make reasonable modifications to and denying them an equal opportunity to benefit from the emergency response system. Oklahoma City and OKCPD’s unlawful practices harm community members and undermine public safety.

“We are required to advise you that if we cannot reach a resolution, the United States may take appropriate action, including bringing a lawsuit, to ensure compliance with the ADA.”

**Drummond: DOJ report ‘an attempt to bully Oklahoma’**

Stemming from an investigation announced in November 2022, the DOJ report comes amid increasing turmoil about how the state of Oklahoma and municipalities in Oklahoma County handle people dealing with mental illness who are accused of criminal activity. State leaders are in the process of settling a class-action lawsuit to address unconstitutional delays in mental health competency restoration services for pre-trial detainees, and they also face a massive funding shortfall that is delaying completion of the new Donahue mental health hospital in OKC.

At the municipal level, the City of OKC has faced a pair of federal lawsuits related to the 2020 fatal police shootings of 15-year-old Stavian Rodriguez and 60-year-old Bennie Edwards, an unhoused man with a history of mental illness who was shot in the back by an Oklahoma City Police Department sergeant while running away from officers in a parking lot. In Edmond, city leaders have faced questions over how at least seven 911 calls related to the mental health of Ross

Norwood spurred no intervention for weeks until he lit his porch on fire and was shot by police.

More recently, an OKCPD sergeant was charged with aggravated assault and battery for body-slaming 71-year-old Lich Vu during an argument over a traffic citation. While Oklahoma County District Attorney Vicki Behenna charged the officer who inflicted facial and spinal fractures upon Vu, Attorney General Gentner Drummond took over and dismissed the case last week while saying Vu should have “kept his hands to himself” instead of tapping the officer on his chest during their disagreement. Drummond’s decision was lauded by the OKC Fraternal Order of Police lodge but widely criticized by some members of the public, including both Republican and Democratic legislators.

On Friday, Drummond released a statement criticizing the DOJ report minutes before the federal agency had even posted it online.

“While I strongly support reform of the mental health system, I am wary of yet another top-down approach in this 11th-hour report by the Biden administration’s Department of Justice,” Drummond said. “We will closely review the findings, but the DOJ report appears to be an attempt to bully Oklahoma into compliance with ever-changing and undefined targets. Such federal overreach has been part and parcel with this White House.”

Drummond has pushed the state of Oklahoma to approve a consent decree and settle the federal class-action lawsuit regarding mental health competency restoration services for pre-trial detainees. A consent decree formalizes an agreement for

Cont. A14, Mental Health





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Mental Health

From A13

a government to improve services or address deficiencies over a period of time.

In its press release announcing the Oklahoma and OKC report, the DOJ noted that it had opened 12 “pattern and practice investigations into law enforcement agencies” since 2021. As a result of those investigations and reports, the DOJ said it has “successfully concluded agreements and portions of consent decrees” with five law enforcement agencies across the United States:

- The Yonkers Police Department (New York);
  - The Suffolk County Police Department (New York);
  - The Albuquerque Police Department (New Mexico);
  - The Portland Police Bureau (Oregon); and
  - The Seattle Police Department (Washington).
- Kristy Yager, OKC’s director of public information, said city officials were “reviewing the findings” of the report.

“The report was not shared with the city prior to its release and the process to analyze and consider its contents will take time,” Yager said. “The city remains focused on providing the best services to its residents now and into the future.”

### DOJ report details 988 failures, service shortfalls

As an example of the deficiencies in Oklahoma City’s behavioral health system, investigators with the DOJ’s Civil Rights Division told the story of “Serena,” who was 27 years old when she died of a drug overdose.

“The lack of services in Oklahoma County meant that she often had to wait a long time to get an appointment with a community provider, and the services she did receive were not intensive enough to help her live successfully in the community,” investigators wrote. “In the two years leading up to her death, Serena had at least five psychiatric inpatient stays. When in crisis, she regularly sought out crisis services but was typically turned away without any treatment to help stabilize her symptoms.”

According to the report, Serena “had regular contact with OKCPD” and spent “much of the last year and a half of her life in jail.”

“**The lack of services in Oklahoma County meant that she (Serena) often had to wait a long time to get an appointment with a community provider, and the services she did receive were not intensive enough to help her live successfully in the community.**”

U.S. Department of Justice Report

“She ultimately died by overdose after not receiving behavioral health care that would have helped her live successfully in the community and avoid unnecessary encounters with the police,” the report states.

The report also examines an open secret among Oklahoma behavioral health professionals and law enforcement organizations: that police officers are routinely dispatched to calls about people experiencing mental health crises owing to “insufficient” availability of alternatives, such as mental health crisis or PACT teams. The report tells the story of “Rachel,” who noted the inefficacy of Oklahoma’s 988 mental health line as an alternative to 911.

“The insufficiency of mobile crisis also leads to avoidable interactions with the police, who may be called to respond if a mobile crisis team is not available,” the report states. “Rachel tried to call 988 for her brother when he was having a behavioral health crisis, but she was only given the option of a police response and was told that a non-police response was not available. Eventually her brother’s situation escalated so someone else called the police, who arrested him and took him to jail.”

DOJ investigators wrote that “OKCPD itself reports that 988 frequently transfers calls to the 911 center that are not appropriate for a police response.”

“A big problem with that whole situation was that I was relying on 988 to help and it was not helpful,” Rachel is quoted as telling the DOJ. “If anything, it was harmful — on top of them not helping, it wasted time and allowed someone else to call 911 in the meantime.”

When mobile crisis teams do respond, investigators wrote, they are more focused on whether someone needs hospitalization instead of connecting them with ongoing services in the community “as the state’s mobile crisis services are intended to do.”

“Facilitating access to facility-based treatment takes less time than resolving the crisis where it occurs, but it undermines the efficacy of the mobile crisis team and leads to avoidable hospitalization,” the DOJ report states. “As a result, people in crisis sometimes receive almost no help from mobile crisis.”

As a result, investigators noted that many people experiencing mental health disorders end up in the troubled Oklahoma County Jail, which has seen a slate of deaths in recent years as the city and county fight over where to build its replacement.

“The lack of community-based services also contributes to high rates of behavioral health-related calls to 911. In 2023, OKCPD logged at least 18,614 behavioral health calls for police response,” the report states. “Many of the crises leading to those calls could have been prevented with access to appropriate community-based behavioral health services. And for many adults with behavioral health disabilities in Oklahoma County, the county jail has become the default behavioral health provider.”

Investigators wrote of a woman named Michelle, who requested mobile crisis response for her daughter, Ariel, three times.

“On each occasion, the mobile crisis team either called the police or determined that Ariel did not meet criteria for facility-based treatment. But the mobile crisis team provided no additional assistance once they determined she was not appropriate for inpatient care and did not connect her to ongoing services,” the DOJ report states. “Once, after Michelle and Ariel waited for more than two hours for a team to arrive, the mobile crisis team did nothing except call the police. Although Ariel continues to need crisis support, her mother has not used 988 since, saying ‘I can call the police myself.’”

Like Drummond, Gov. Kevin Stitt and Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner Allie Friesen released statements Friday dismissive of the DOJ’s findings.

“This is another Biden administration overreach on their way out the door,” Stitt said. “Allie Friesen and her team are working hard to reform our mental health system, but they can’t do that if they’re burdened with heavy handed, out of touch mandates from the federal government.”

In her statement, Friesen made an aggressive claim that contradicts the report: “Oklahoma continues to lead the way in mental health care, guided by evidence-based practices and national standards.”

“While tragic stories exist, as in any health system, the DOJ focuses on a select few cases to overshadow what it acknowledges are the state’s laudable efforts to build out its crisis system in recent years,” Friesen said. “We disagree with the report’s adverse findings as well as the DOJ’s subjective recommendations on how we should run our mental health system. As the report itself notes, the DOJ’s recommended remedial measures are consistent with the priority areas the state already identified in the comprehensive 60-page action plan we previously provided to DOJ.”

Cont. A15, Mental Health

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## Mental Health

# Availability & increased communications, leading recommendations

From A14

### DOJ report outlines recommendations to avoid litigation

DOJ investigators concluded their report with a list of “remedial measures” that include:

- Increasing the availability of community-based services — such as Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) teams, permanent supported housing, case management, peer support services and Individual Placement and Support — to ease the burden and cost of hospitalization and institutionalization;
- Increasing proactive outreach to connect people to mental health services that allow them to avoid prolonged hospitalization;
- Strengthening connections between institutions and community services to allow more people discharged from hospitals to remain in constant contact with community-based programs and decrease rates of readmission;
- Developing “behavioral health mobile response teams” that can respond to situations where police are not needed;

- Ensuring clear policies for 911 operators to know what response is most appropriate for a particular call;
- Ensuring OKCPD officers know how to respond to people with behavioral health disabilities;
- Increasing capacity of the 988 mental health hotline and its communication with the 911 center; and
- Increasing communication between the Oklahoma City, OKCPD and the state to share information and data with service providers.

**Tres Savage (William W. Savage III)** has served as editor in chief of NonDoc since the publication launched in 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and worked in health care for six years before returning to the media industry. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor and serves on the board of the Oklahoma Media Center.

**Bennett Brinkman** became NonDoc's production editor in September 2024 after spending the previous two years as NonDoc's education reporter. He completed a reporting internship for the organization in Summer 2022 and holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma. He is originally from Edmond.



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# Artist Review

KIMBERLY MARSH, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

## TULSA ARTIST INSPIRES *Urban Greenspaces Through Mosaic*

Tulsa artist Zadith Rodriguez is reimagining a greener Tulsa through her artwork, hoping to inspire future generations while connecting to her South American roots. Rodriguez is a native of Peru.

She started with an artwork called Green North Tulsa, a collage of downtown greenspaces, community gardens, and living rooftops featuring abundant growing plants. She uses the canvas to piece together tiny bits of shiny paper repurposed from local magazines into a mosaic, reflective of our city. This medium brings the city alive through vibrant colors and intricate design. If you look closely, you might find the bow of a cruise ship or the wing of an airplane integrated as a vertical panel for a local structure.

Rodriguez, 29, has lived in Tulsa nearly all her life but returned to Peru in 2024 to examine her roots. She connected to nature in a new way and brought back to Tulsa a desire to emphasize the importance of natural, environmentally friendly, community spaces that foster connection and regeneration.

In Green North Tulsa, Rodriguez wanted to bring the art to life through a three-dimensional effect using the texture of paper. She sketched it out and began to add to it using a collection of different colors, tree parts, and shapes from magazines, such as Tulsa People, to create the designs of brick-and-mortar.

"I like to create movement. When you look at it, your eyes are kind of shifting."

### *An Artist's Journey of Self-Discovery and Regeneration*

Rodriguez was seven years old when she arrived in Tulsa with her mother, leaving their home in Tarapoto, in the northern part of the Peruvian jungle, she said.

"I'm Peruvian, but I'm not sure what that means. So coming here (to Tulsa) is kind of just like essentially a culture shock, and it's been a little bit difficult for me to acclimate to this environment. Even at 29 years old."

She returned to Peru to find out more about her heritage and connect with her homeland.

"I needed to find a balance within myself to see what that is, how I can identify myself, who I am. And, I came back just knowing I have a lot of American traditions in the way that I go and move about my life. So I exist now as an American Peruvian woman. I feel confident in allowing myself to be grounded here, whereas before, I felt like I was almost floating, not really knowing where my roots are."

Rodriguez said she now believes that natural environments call out to and honor our ancestors by returning our attention to the earth and connections to each other.

"So that is essentially what I was really wanting to implement in those community spaces as well, is just bringing people together. Oftentimes, when you go to the supermarket, you're just doing your own thing. You're not having conversations of like, 'Hey, check this out...I'm gonna pick this tomato. Or what do you think about this?' We're not communicating with each other. So community spaces, I think, are very important living in Tulsa."

The artwork also points to ways humans can create more environmentally friendly spaces using regenerative designs that give back to the space through heat or cooling as well as beauty and that feeling of peace found in nature.

### *An Artist's Beginning*

Rodriguez started creating mosaics when she was a junior in high school. Pleased with the outcome, she knew it was unique in the market, so continued to experiment with the medium.

"I got into printmaking when I was in college at TCC (Tulsa Community College), and I really enjoyed it. What I love about my art, what I love for myself is working with my hands. I love being put into a meditation state, or kind of where I feel like I'm in my essence. And printmaking and mosaic collage building just really helps me with that. It makes me feel at peace with myself when all the things are happening in the world."

Rodriguez's work will be exhibited at the Painted Moth Gallery, 427 S. Boston Ave., on Jan. 15. A collection of her work can be found at <https://www.fokal.us/artists/zadith-rodriguez>, and she can be contacted by email at [zadithsartistry@gmail.com](mailto:zadithsartistry@gmail.com). □



PHOTO COURTESY OF ZADITH RODRIGUEZ



FEATURED

## 6 Kwanzaa-Themed Books to Inspire Black Students

These titles embrace Black culture

Kwanzaa, A17



FEATURED

## 3 Ways to Combat Chronic Absenteeism

Students can't learn if they aren't in class. Parents, teachers, and schools working together can get kids back there.

Absenteeism, A19



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

### Black Students

## 20 Inspirational Quotes, to Start Black Students Strong in 2025

QUINTESSA WILLIAMS  
Word In Black

**T**hese powerful words from Black educators, leaders, and changemakers will uplift and inspire Black students as they pursue academic excellence this new year.

2024 was a challenging year for Black students, teachers, and language. Some school districts banned books, others restricted how classrooms discussed Black history, and others tried to curb Black kids from using cultural slang. Outside of the classroom, many young Black people were and still are discouraged by the return of President-elect Donald Trump, —a candidate who openly used racist language in his defeat of Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to lead a major party's presidential ticket.

It has all shown that words still matter. But the start of a new year brings a clean slate, a fresh opportunity to use words for inspiration and goal-setting. For Black students, messages of encouragement and wisdom — especially from educators and leaders who share their cultural heritage — can foster an empowering

sense of identity and pride.

As we welcome 2025, here are some inspirational quotes that aim to uplift and start Black students off strong:

- “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” — Malcolm X, activist and educator.
- “When you control a man’s thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions.” — Dr. Carter G. Woodson, scholar, historian and the father of Black History Month.
- “Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.” — Booker T. Washington, educator and founder of Tuskegee Institute

Cont. A18, Black Students

### Kwanzaa

## 6 Kwanzaa-Themed Books to Inspire Black Students

QUINTESSA WILLIAMS  
Word In Black

*As the hustle and bustle of Christmas winds down, millions of Black families lean into another special time of year: Kwanzaa. Celebrated for seven days, from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1, Kwanzaa is a weeklong cultural homecoming that shines a light on heritage, shared values, and a fresh start for the year ahead.*

Each day focuses on one of the Seven Principles, known as the Nguzo Saba, which include unity, self-determination, purpose, creativity, and collective work and responsibility. Engaging with

Cont. A18, Kwanzaa



## Black Students

# Advice centered within an ideal sense of self, history, knowledge and endurance



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A17

- “Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.” — Langston Hughes, poet and educator.
- “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education.” — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights leader.
- “You are your best thing.” — Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize-winning author and educator.
- “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.” — Angela Davis, civil rights activist and educator.
- “We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated.” — Maya Angelou,

- “To bring about change, you must not be afraid to take the first step. We will fail when we fail to try.” — civil rights activist Rosa Parks.
- “Freedom is never given; it is won.” — A. Philip Randolph, labor leader and civil rights activist.
- “Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom.” — scientist and educator George Washington Carver.
- “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring in a folding chair.” — Rep. Shirley Chisholm, a New York Democrat and the first Black woman to run for president.
- “Children are not things to be molded, but are people to be unfolded.” — Jess Lair, educator and philosopher.
- “History has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life

“

**If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring in a folding chair.**

U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisholm, a New York Democrat and the first Black woman to run for president.

author and educator

- “Knowledge is the pathway from slavery to freedom.” — Frederick Douglass, abolitionist and educator.
- “Learning to stand in somebody else’s shoes, to see through their eyes, that’s how peace begins.” — former President Barack Obama.
- “I did what my conscience told me to do, and you can’t fail if you do that.” — Anita Hill, attorney and educator.

of its own.” — former First Lady Michelle Obama.

- “The whole world opened to me when I learned to read.” — Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of Bethune-Cookman University.
- “I believe a child going without an education is a crime.” — Vice President Kamala Harris.
- “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” — South African President Nelson Mandela.

## Kwanzaa

# Kwanzaa, inspiration for kids and children of all ages

From A17

Kwanzaa-themed literature during this period can deepen students’ understanding of these principles, fostering a stronger sense of identity and community. Here are six Kwanzaa-themed books, categorized by K-12 level, that can inspire and uplift Black students during the holidays.

### For Elementary School Students:

1. “My First Kwanzaa” by Karen Katz  
This engaging picture book introduces young readers to the seven days of Kwanzaa, explaining each principle with vibrant illustrations and simple words. This read is an excellent starting point for students to learn about the holiday’s significance and traditions.

2. “Li’l Rabbit’s Kwanzaa” by Donna L. Washington

Inspired by African folklore, this story follows Li’l Rabbit, who wants to make Kwanzaa special for his sick grandmother. His journey highlights the importance of community and collective effort, especially for Black students — a principle that embodies the true spirit of Kwanzaa.

### For Middle School Students:

1. The Seven Days of Kwanzaa by Angela Shelf Medearis

This guidebook introduces readers to the history of Kwanzaa and includes recipes for African-inspired dishes, instructions for craft projects, and summaries of the seven principles of Kwanzaa. The content and activities make it an excellent resource for middle school students looking to deepen their understanding of cultural heritage and traditions.

2. Celebrating Kwanzaa: Short Stories by Goble Smith

This collection offers engaging narratives that highlight the principles



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

and traditions of Kwanzaa, such as unity, self-determination, and collective work. Through relatable characters and events, the stories provide both entertainment and education for Black middle schoolers.

### For High School Students:

1. Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community, and Culture by Maulana Karenga

Written by the founder of Kwanzaa, this book delves into the holiday’s origins, principles, and cultural significance, offering an in-depth perspective for mature readers. This read is perfect for high schoolers looking for a deeper understanding of the significance of an underrated holiday.

2. Roots & Rituals: A Family Journey Celebrating Kwanzaa by Dr. Leslie K. Grier

This interactive workbook offers K-12 students ages 12-18 a comprehensive history and guide to celebrating Kwanzaa. The book features daily activities that emphasize the holiday’s core principles, making it the perfect collaborative activity for students and families to explore together.

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## Absenteeism

# 3 Ways to Combat Chronic Absenteeism

Aziah Siid  
Word In Black

It's been nearly five years since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education in America, putting schools on lockdown, and normalizing remote learning. But while schools have long since reopened for in-person learning, millions of students aren't consistently showing up for class.

According to the Return 2 Learn tracker that follows the issue more than one in four public K-12 students missed at least 10%, or about 18 days, of the 2023 school year, a sign that chronic absenteeism continues to surge since the pandemic. That's compared to just 15% of chronic absenteeism in 2018. The increases have occurred in both big urban and small rural districts, as well as across income and race.

Experts say a combination of factors — from anxiety to the stress of making up lost classwork to the threat of being punished for being absent — is keeping students away from school, and out of the classroom. But kids can't learn if they aren't in school. For students who may be behind in reading or math — and who attend under resourced schools — not being in class isn't helping them catch up.

As concerns grow, school districts and school leaders have tried a range of solutions to draw students back to the classroom and get attendance rates up. Here are three suggestions on ways parents, teachers, and school communities can reverse chronic absenteeism.

### 1. Strengthen Communication

It's a communication method as old as schools themselves: teachers or school administrators reaching out to an absent student's parents. Instead of putting a note in a student's backpack, experts suggest using technology.

Scott Fassbach, chief research officer in education consulting at the research firm EAB, told Chalkbeat educators can use simple texts to parents like, "How can we help make it easier for them to join class again?" They can also ask what barriers their child faces getting to school and why.

Professionals also suggested schools can minimize or drop truism punishments: threats of detention, suspension, or involving law enforcement. Black students (and, in some cases, their families) are already statistically punished at higher rates than their white peers.

### 2. Work Together

The most successful approach to combating absenteeism in some districts has been the personal touch: old-school door-knocking campaigns. Thousands of volunteers —

### The Return to Learn Tracker

The goal of the tracker is to provide up-to-date data on how US school districts responded to the pandemic and are being affected by it.

This tracker captures data on chronic absenteeism for over 14,700 school districts and charter schools nationwide and will be updated as more state data becomes available. We hope these data will help school communities as they face ongoing decisions, provide the basic knowledge necessary for shaping policy across states, and allow other researchers to more accurately study COVID-19's impacts on schools.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

teachers, superintendents, student leaders, and others — go to the homes of missing students to talk to them or their families in person.

In Alabama, local prosecutors are pitching in, placing phone calls to families to stress the need for making sure their children are in school.

But one district is offering incentives, too: Parents of children who live in public housing whose children had perfect attendance for the month are entered in a lottery for help with household expenses.

### 3. Create Environments Students Want to Be In

Studies show that, post-pandemic, more students are struggling academically, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially. Many

students say they feel a disconnection from their classmates and teachers, not just their school. EAB, the education research center, found that about 40% of students reported feeling less connected to peers or adults in their school since before the pandemic.

That has led some districts to collaborate with educators and mental health professionals to identify and support students with unmet health needs, helping them re-engage with school. It's a win-win: doing so improves student health and helps increase school attendance.

Chronic absenteeism can also result from complex physical issues or family problems, so school-based health centers and wellness centers can play a crucial part in addressing lack of attendance from students.



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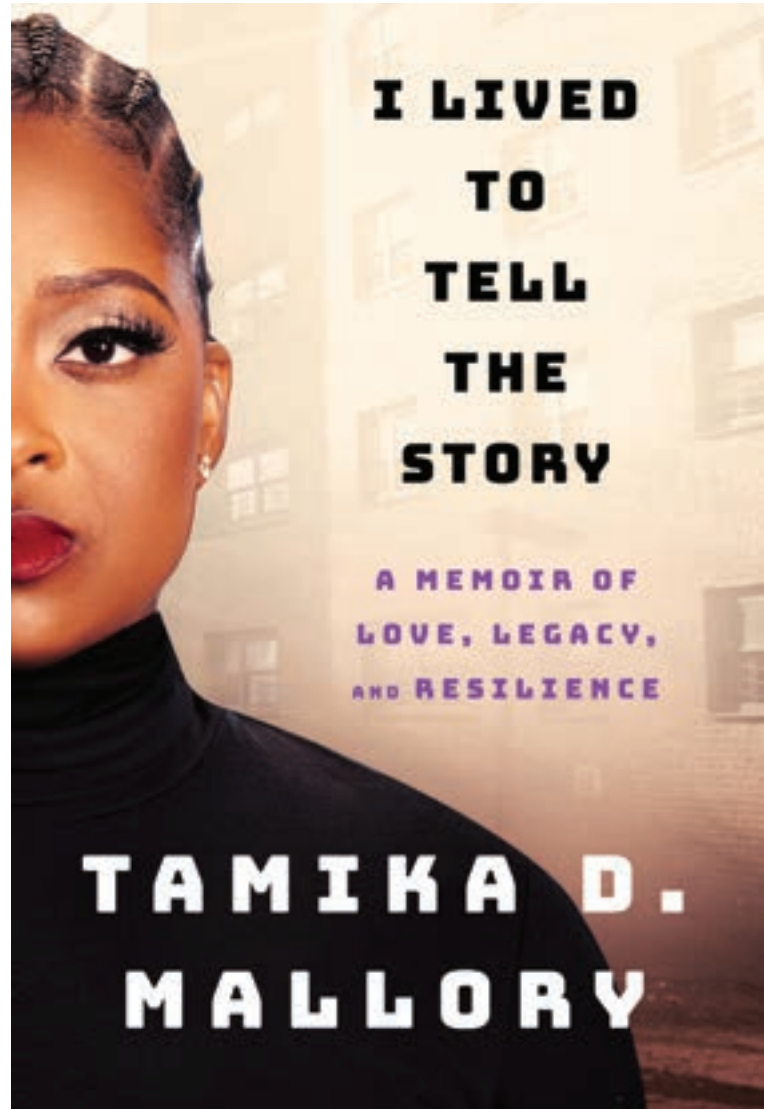
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(LEFT) Tamika D. Mallory is co-founder of the Women's March on Washington and the youngest to serve as executive director of the National Action Network. PHOTO KETH MAJOR; (RIGHT) "I Lived to Tell the Story: A Memoir of Love, Legacy, and Resilience," book cover, is a follow-up publication after her book, "State of Emergency," which was written in response to the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. PHOTO PROVIDED

## Co-Founder of the Women's March on Washington To Participate In Book Signing, Feb. 19

*Tamika D. Mallory  
Has Published  
A Memoir On  
Love, Legacy, And  
Resilience*

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Tamika D. Mallory, a noted civil rights activist and author of the newly released "I Lived to Tell the Story: A Memoir of Love, Legacy, and Resilience," will appear in Tulsa for a book signing on Feb. 19.

Mallory will participate in a forum and personal book signing at All Souls Unitarian Church, 2952 S. Peoria Ave. beginning at 7 p.m.

She is co-founder of the Women's March on Washington and Until Freedom, and the youngest executive director of the National Action Network. The National Urban League identifies Until Freedom as an intersectional social justice organization that addresses

systemic racial injustice.

A native of Bronx, New York, Mallory previously published a national bestseller, "State of Emergency" (1921) - a commentary on the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.

A member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., she is recognized as an activist and advocate of gun control, feminism, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

In her book, "I Lived to Tell the Story," Mallory shares her battles against physical and political violence and personal and professional crises. These are battles that "she'd (fought) all her life...(against) forces

intent on keeping her silent," according to the publisher's comments on the author.

She uses the book to discuss several critical moments in her life. They include teen pregnancies, abortion, the loss of her son's father to gun violence, mom guilt, education, imposter syndrome, the pleasures and pain of leading the Women's March on Washington, the face of America's 2020 Summer of Protest, and false claims of antisemitism.

The book is currently available at Magic City Books (221 E. Archer, Tulsa)

For more information, visit [tamikadmallory.com](http://tamikadmallory.com).

## Oklahoma City MLK Alliance Announces Events



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Oklahoma City MLK Alliance will be hosting the indoor events Jan. 18-20, but it is rescheduling the outdoor events, including the opening program and parade, for Feb. 1.

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Oklahoma City MLK Alliance will be hosting a series of events in recognition of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday, Jan. 20.

The outdoor events are being rescheduled for Feb. 1 because of weather concerns. The indoor programs will continue as scheduled.

Outdoor programs include the annual opening program at the Clara Luper Freedom Center, 2609 N. MLK Ave., and the Silent March. The other outdoor program is the annual parade, which will begin on Feb. 1 at 2 p.m., traveling from NW 5th Street and North Walker Avenue to Reno Avenue.

The indoor programs planned are a health fair, gospel extravaganza, church services, an ecumenical dinner program, a prayer breakfast, and a job fair.

For a complete list of the other indoor scheduled programs, see <https://okcmlkalliance.org/events>

"We are excited and welcome the entire community to join us for all the programs taking place. Check out our website for event details, a schedule of events, and to volunteer," said a spokesperson for the event.

For more information, contact William Jones, at (405) 219-4147, [admin@okcmlkalliance.org](mailto:admin@okcmlkalliance.org), or visit <https://okcmlkalliance.org/>



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PHOTO PROVIDED

Nadia Salomon is the author of the children's book, "A Voice of Hope: The Myrle Evers-Williams Story." In addition to signing copies of her book, she will be offering advice to attendees on how to begin writing a book and getting it published

## Former Journalist And Award-Winning Author To Give Guest Lecture At TCC, Jan. 18

**DR. JERRY GOODWIN**  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Tulsa Community College's college newspaper, TCC Connection ([www.tccconnection.com](http://www.tccconnection.com)), the Society of Professional Journalists Student Chapter, and the National Association of Black Journalists – Tulsa Chapter welcomed noted author Nadia Salomon to the campus for a free lecture and signing of her latest award-winning children's book.

Salomon presented her book, "A Voice of Hope: The

Myrle Evers Story," on Jan. 18 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Center for Creativity at the Metro Campus, 910 S. Boston Ave.

The event was an official program of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society.

Salomon ([www.nadiasalomon.com](http://www.nadiasalomon.com)) is a recipient of numerous awards for other books, including "Goodnight Ganesha" and "A Rakhi for Rakesh." As a former journalist, joined other local journalists to discuss the steps of publishing a book. She and other authors will have their books available for purchase and personal signings.

She writes on themes of South Asian and Caribbean culture, STEM, nonfiction, and humor. Salomon is an award-winning journalist and holds a journalism degree from Emerson College. When not participating in her own goodnight rituals or spinning silly yarns, she works closely with SCBWI, 12x12 Challenge, Kids Comics Unite, and Storyteller Academy.

For more information on the program, contact [rebecca.mjimerson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rebecca.mjimerson@sbcglobal.net) or (918) 734-1223 or [jerry.goodwin@tulsacc.edu](mailto:jerry.goodwin@tulsacc.edu) or (918) 595-7086 or visit <https://www.mlktulsa.com/news>



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