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VOL. 104 NO. 07

February 14, 2025 - February 20, 2025

**\$1.00**

# BEYOND APOLOGY

## COMMISSION: A SHIFT FROM DEBATE TO ACTION

**COMMISSIONERS REQUEST EQUITABLE POLICY ADOPTION, FUNDING**

*Kimberly Marsh, A2*



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**GBC Free 3rd Annual Women's Summit Set for March 4 Virtual Venue**  
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**FEATURED**

### GBC Free 3rd Annual Women's Summit Set for March 4 Virtual Venue

Explore the impact of Artificial Intelligence

GBC, A3

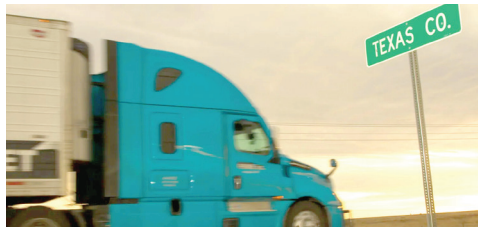


**FEATURED**

### Traffic Scheme Nets Texas County DA's Office Millions

\$2.1 million in fines over 6 years

Texas Citations, A7



Keith Mayes Sr., Vernon A.M.E. Pastor and BAC Commissioner, opens the Beyond Apology Commission news conference introducing a housing program recommendation on Feb. 17, 2025. L-R are Greg Taylor, Taylor West, Phil Armstrong, Greg Robinson and Councillor Vanessa Hall Harper.

PHOTO KIMBERLY MARSH, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

## Beyond Apology Commission: A Shift from Debate To Action

**Apology**  
Kimberly Marsh  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Tulsa's Black leaders have elevated their efforts to repair the harm caused by the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, calling upon city officials to use existing city funds designated for housing initiatives to respond to the damage done and help Tulsans restore generational wealth.

Cont. A3, Apology

## HUD Funding Delays Fuel Oklahoma Housing Concerns

**HUD**  
Heather Warlick  
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma's largest housing authority was among 400 public housing agencies whose 2024 Section 8 Housing Choice voucher programs were underfunded by a total of \$400 million by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency, which distributes federal subsidies to thousands of Oklahoma landlords who accept Section 8 vouchers, was short almost \$3 million.

HUD issued OHFA a \$2.4 million shortfall payment in November, leaving the agency short by more than a half-million.

OHFA Executive Director Deborah Jenkins said that so far, Oklahoma landlords and renters haven't seen delays in their rental assistance

payments, but the late HUD reimbursements, combined with Congressional budget battles, could leave housing authorities underfunded and in a predicament.

"Is there any concern right now?" Jenkins said. "Right now, my answer is no. Now, that is subject to change."

OHFA administers rent assistance to landlords across Oklahoma for more than 10,200 households in areas without a local

housing authority.

The Oklahoma City Housing Authority, which covered 4,154 households in 2024, confirmed it is also waiting for more than \$1 million from HUD, though OCHA did not apply for the first round of shortfall funding because it was not evident the agency would come up short until later in 2024.

Tulsa Housing Authority confirmed it received enough first-round shortfall funding

Cont. A8, HUD







Vanessa Hall Harper, Beyond Apology Commissioner and City Councilor, discussing the objectives and goals of the BAC during conference on Feb. 17, 2025. L-R are Commissioners Phil Armstrong and City Kristi Williams.

PHOTO KIMBERLY MARSH, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

## \$24.9 million allocated: Housing programs, descendant support & land trusts

FROM A2

### Apology

The Beyond Apology Commission (BAC) requested that the Tulsa city administration and City Council allocate \$24.9 million to housing programs and support for descendants and their families, as well as land trusts and other assistance to Black Tulsans who have been harmed by city actions or policies from 1921-2020. The BAC was created by former Mayor G. T. Bynum shortly before leaving office and is supported by Tulsa Mayor Monroe Nichols.

The BAC's argument for restorative actions has been strengthened by the recent U. S. Department of Justice's report on the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre that further legitimized Tulsans' claims by officially acknowledging a "coordinated, military-style attack" took place on Black Wall Street on June 1, 1921. The DOJ provided a federal validation of the systemic harm inflicted upon Tulsa's Black residents

“

**Justice delayed is justice denied.**

Vanessa Hall-Harper,  
Tulsa City Councilor

that opens new opportunities to engage government resources and solicit action. The Commissioners emphasized the need to establish perpetual sources of funding to address the estimated economic and housing losses in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

In his executive order creating the BAC, Bynum acknowledged harm beyond just survivors and descendants, including Black north Tulsans and the lasting impacts which are evident in the City's Equality Indicators Report. Continued racially based disparities persist between north Tulsa residents and those in other parts of the city across various economic and social outcomes.

The BAC was formed to address these systemic inequalities by advancing economic mobility, prosperity, and intergenerational wealth for survivors, their descendants, and north Tulsa residents. Housing is the fourth of seven priorities included in the Beyond Apology Report, but Mayor Nichols directed the Commission to start with housing resources to potentially use existing resources already earmarked for the overall city housing initiative. The request is designed to target programs that are already within the city's focus and jurisdiction.

During the news conference to announce the recommendations, Councilor Vanessa Hall-Harper said every Black community in this country that has suffered racial terror, racism, and oppression has the right to organize and petition for local reparations, and every legislator has the obligation to push for policies that direct resources to those harmed.

"That is what I am doing today. That is the commitment I made to my community, to push for local repair. This is why Beyond Apology is so important," Hall-Harper said. She noted that the efforts are community-led and community-driven for the 1921 Race Massacre survivors, their descendants and all Black residents of Tulsa who have been harmed by systemic racism, including redlining and the generational consequences of the massacre.

"Justice delayed is justice denied," she said. Following the invocation to the meeting, Vernon A.M.E. member Chief Egunwale Amusan shared his perspective.

"This moment is not just about policy," he said. "It's about people. It's about the survivors, the descendants and the north Tulsa community who have fought long for

Cont. A6, Apology

## Greenwood Business Center Free 3rd Annual Women's Summit Set for March 4 Virtual Venue

GBC

Kimberly Marsh  
The Oklahoma Eagle

The 3rd Annual Women's Summit, hosted by the Greenwood Business Center, will explore the impact that Artificial Intelligence, known as AI, can play in empowering women business owners. This year the free summit, entitled "Empowering Women in Business with AI," will be held virtually via Zoom on March 4 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Registration is now open at <https://app.glueup.com/event/3rd-annual-gbc-womens-summit-133470/>

AI helps businesses by enhancing decision-making, analyzing large sets of data, and identifying patterns that may also aid them in optimizing inventory, prices and markets. AI is also unlocking new possibilities for entrepreneurs, but studies show that women are slower to adopt AI than their male counterparts.

A 2024 survey conducted by Deloitte, the audit and consulting company, highlighted the gender gap in using AI. Only 33% of women reported using or experimenting with generative AI, compared to 44% of men. However, with increasing knowledge of the platforms, women in the U.S. and European countries are expected to close that gender gap within two years.

During the digital summit attendees will receive access to AI tools and knowledge, hear from expert panels and participate in breakout sessions. GBC Program Director Donna Jackson said the summit will showcase impactful insights from exceptional speakers, entrepreneurs, business leaders, and changemakers, all committed to fostering economic growth and community impact.

In addition, the GBC Summit will hold an awards

GBC 2025 INNOVATEHER Women's Summit Poster. ILLUSTRATION THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

ceremony to honor five women for their business and community work. Nominations of inspirational business women are being accepted now online on the event website (<https://app.glueup.com/event/3rd-annual-gbc-womens-summit-133470/>)

### Keynote Speakers

Cheryl Lawson is a social media and digital marketing strategist based in Tulsa. She helps businesses leverage the power of social media and digital marketing to tell their stories and provides guidance for navigating social media.

Keisha Mabry is a certified Grow With Google Digital Coach, adjunct lecturer, Aspen Ideas Scholar, TEDx speaker and author. She's delivered more than 150 keynote speeches for Fortune 500 companies and top brands like Spotify, Mastercard, Edward Jones, Square, Bayer, Facebook, YUM!, Ikea, SHRM, US Bank and Brit + Co.

Kat Shepherd is the Western Regional Director, CA, HI, NV, UT and AZ Chair and SCORE National Black American Committee. Aside from her work with SCORE, Kat is also the owner of The Ultimate Professional - Digital Marketing and serves as an instructor at the University of Riverside Extension.

The program emcee will be Betsy Lewallen, a real estate agent with HomeSmart Oklahoma. For more information, email [info@greenwoodwbc.com](mailto:info@greenwoodwbc.com) or call (539) 867-4127.



The Oklahoma Eagle

# Red Bird: An Historic Oklahoma All-Black Town

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



**R**ed Bird, located in Wagoner County five miles southeast of Coweta, is one of more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The Barber and Ruffin families settled in the Red Bird community before 1900, and other families soon followed. The settlement attained a post office in 1902, with A. A. White as the first postmaster. In 1889 E. L. Barber, one of the town's developers, organized the First Baptist Church, the largest church in Red Bird. He also became Red Bird's first justice of the peace and served as an early mayor. The Red Bird Investment Company recruited African

American families from all parts of the South to settle in the newly established town. More than six hundred people attended the grand opening at Red Bird, August 10, 1907. By 1920 Red Bird's population was 336.

In 1919 Professor J. F. Cathey, the principal of the school, planned Miller Washington High School, which flourished until 1959 when it closed for lack of students. The high school and Red Bird City Hall are both listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Sharp's Grocery/Masonic Hall and the Red Bird Drugstore, both constructed in 1910, are the two commercial properties listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks

Inventory. In 1938 I. W. Lane, a former mayor of Red Bird, successfully challenged a law, similar to the grandfather clause, that made it difficult for African Americans to register to vote in Wagoner County. Like many rural towns in Oklahoma, Red Bird faced devastation and population decline brought about by falling cotton prices and by the onset of the Great Depression. In 1930 the population was 218. It rose and fell over the decades, reaching a high of 411 in 1950 but dropping to 310 in 1960 and 199 in 1980. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the town was steadily rebuilding, although the population stood at only 137 in 2010.

**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.

**A scene in Red Bird** (2012.201.B1078.0824, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

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The Oklahoma Eagle | Founded in 1921 | Vol. CIV No. 07

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE is published weekly on Fridays by The Oklahoma Eagle, LLC, P.O. Box 3267, Tulsa, OK 74101. General office is 624 E. Archer St., Tulsa, OK 74120. Periodical Postage (WSPS 406-580) is paid at Tulsa, OK. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the above address. Delivery subscription rates: (Continental United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands). All subscriptions may include Premium Edition issues throughout the year.

**Mail Subscriber Rates:** Single copy \$1 | Yearly \$52 | 2 Years \$100

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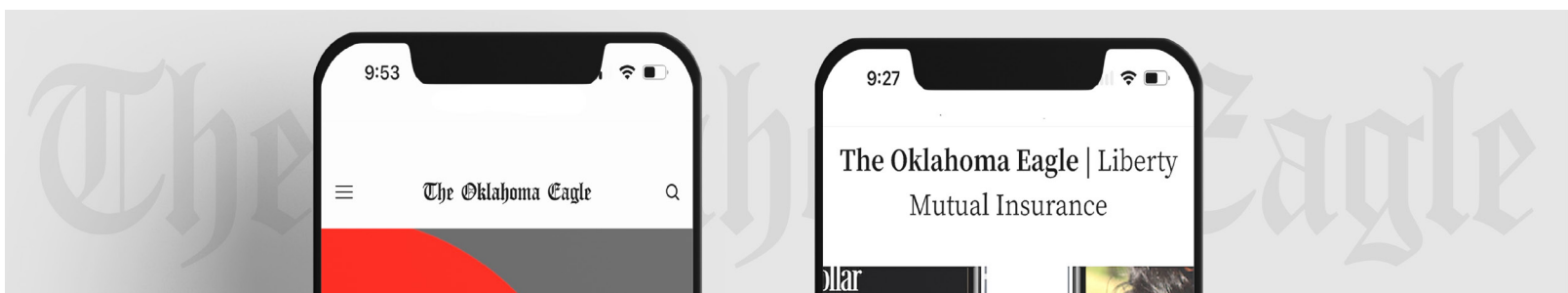
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# REPARATIONS: Local and national advocacy shifting public & government perspectives

FROM A3

## Apology

justice and the repair that they deserve. It's about honoring the past while foregoing a future where equity and opportunity are not just words but our reality.

### Shifting from Reparations Debate to Equitable Policy

"Few people in Tulsa can't now say what they could have said five to 10 years ago, which is, 'Wow, I didn't even know that happened. That just isn't the case anymore. People right now are like, 'Yeah, we've told you 1,000 times.' This is not new information. It's time for local officials to do their work.'"

- Commissioner Greg Robinson

Greg Robinson, a former candidate for Tulsa mayor and member of the Beyond Apology Commission, said the acknowledgement of harm has been sufficiently documented and now it is time to act. The recent commission work, as well as the Justice Department report, efforts of Justice for Greenwood and the Project Greenwood initiative, are shifting public and government perspectives on reparations.

"We are asking them to prioritize and to really gear funding toward Black home ownership, toward land restoration, toward anti-displacement measures, and to be very explicit about that," Robinson said in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle. "That is equitable policy. That's not reparations."

### Long-term, Ongoing Funds

Besides requesting housing funds, the BAC is also calling for a program to collect one-fifth of one percent of the annual general fund revenues. This would be similar to the City of Tulsa Economic Stabilization Reserve Fund, also known as the Rainy Day Fund. The reserve is projected to have a balance of approximately \$16.9 million set aside by the end of the fiscal year to stabilize the city's finances during economic downturns or unexpected revenue shortfalls, according to the fiscal year 2025 budget report. It was established to offset future general fund reductions resulting from negative economic events.

### City of Tulsa Dedicated Housing Funds

The City of Tulsa has already earmarked \$75 million from the 2023 voter-approved Improve Our Tulsa general obligation bonds and sales tax extension for housing programs to create more affordable housing units throughout the city in response to the current housing crisis. The request fits into that amount, giving officials the opportunity to incorporate the commissioners' requests into existing programs and include funding in the next 2025-26 fiscal year budget, which begins July 1. Mayor Nichols will present his budget to the Tulsa City Council by May 1. Councilors are given until June 30 to make amendments and vote to approve the upcoming budget.

Robinson said the Commission is riding the wave of support reflected in statements already made by the City Council, and from the former and current mayors.

"The reality is that we're working to get something done. And so looking at where both of



Mattece Mason, Beyond Apology Commissioner, discussing the objectives and goals of the BAC during conference on Feb. 17, 2025. L-R are Commissioners Greg Taylor, Taylor West, Phil Armstrong, Damali Wilson, Greg Robinson and City Councilor Vanessa Hall Harper.

PHOTO KIMBERLY MARSH, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE



Kristi Williams, Beyond Apology Commissioner, describes the commission's process for making recommendations to the mayor's office on Feb. 17, 2025. L-R are Commissioners Greg Taylor, Taylor West, Phil Armstrong, Damali Wilson, Greg Robinson, City Councilor Vanessa Hall Harper and Mattece Mason.

PHOTO KIMBERLY MARSH, THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

them have sort of signaled their interests, I think it is true that that has influenced how we put the recommendations out, when we put them out, and what's in them," Robinson said in an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle.

In addition to the housing recommendations and ongoing housing fund (listed later in this article), the BAC is also seeking several policies and ordinances that would booster the status of north Tulsa. The proposals are designed to engage residents and prioritize infrastructure upgrades in north Tulsa zip codes; land reclamation in north Tulsa, including the transfer of Tulsa Development Authority (TDA) properties in north Tulsa to an approved Community Land Trust or Community Development Corporation (CDC) for housing or neighborhood development; expand the Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity programs related to economic justice, including training programs, and to ensure fair property appraisals in north Tulsa. The recommendations also encourage

Black-led development.

It has long been argued that real estate in north Tulsa is undervalued, impacted by historic redlining and policy discrimination baked to appraisal formulas.

"Once you take into account all of the forces that have lowered and depressed (home) values for so long, you're just continuing to perpetuate appraisal numbers that just aren't—they're not true," Robinson said.

"Your house could be the exact same on 15th (Street) and (South) Peoria as it is on 36th (Street) North and (North) Peoria, but when you're appraising, you're taking a collection of the values around, and that influences what your house is worth," he continued. "And because of past policy, north Tulsa zip codes are just systematically undervalued. When you think about how critical homeownership is to building wealth, that is an area that we've got to figure out."

With respect to land reclamation, Robinson said there is a potential for collaboration

with existing community projects including Greenwood-Kirkpatrick Heights, north of downtown, and the Phoenix District, where new housing is being built at 36th Street North and North Peoria.

### Commission Housing Recommendations

Below are some of the highlights of the BAC's proposals:

**Home/Land Ownership Benefit (Individual) – \$8M (32%):** Funds for acquisition, inspections, down payments, and closing costs for real estate purchases in Tulsa.

**Home Preservation/Improvement Benefit (Individual) – \$7.5M (30%):** Supports repairs, improvements, and modernization of Tulsa properties.

**Mortgage & Property Tax Assistance (Individual) – \$2M (8%):** Covers mortgage principal, interest, penalties, and delinquent property taxes.

**Home Ownership Readiness (Individual) – \$3M (12%):** Assists

with loan eligibility by addressing debt, credit scores, and financial literacy.

**North Tulsa Development (Organizational) – \$2M (8%):** Supports developers and contractors revitalizing north Tulsa's housing supply.

**Housing Program Reserve Trust (Organizational) – \$2M (8%):** Establishes a trust for long-term housing program benefits.

**Program Development & Management – \$400K (2%):** Funds technical assistance, administration, and program evaluation.

### Eligibility Tiers

**Survivor Tier – 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre survivors (excluding perpetrators).**

**Descendants, Defenders & Rebuilders Tier – Up to 4th-generation descendants of defenders, victims, or those who rebuilt Greenwood (1921-1925).**

**Greenwood/North Tulsa Resident (1926-1971) Tier – Black Oklahomans (and two generations of direct descendants) who lived in Greenwood/North Tulsa and faced housing discrimination, including redlining and urban renewal.**

**Greenwood/North Tulsa Resident (1972-2020) Tier – Black Oklahomans who lived in Greenwood/North Tulsa and experienced housing inequities, including loan denials, appraisal discrimination, and property devaluation.**

For a full list of housing recommendations and eligibility requirements, visit Beyond Apology Housing ([www.cityoftulsa.org/beyondcommission](http://www.cityoftulsa.org/beyondcommission))

Kimberly Marsh, who reported and wrote this story, is a senior contributor to The Oklahoma Eagle. She has devoted a big part of her career to chronicling the policies of Tulsa's city leaders.

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A big rig enters Texas County on Hwy. 54 on Feb. 8, 2025.

PHOTO BRENT FUCHS/OKLAHOMA WATCH

# Traffic Scheme Nets Texas County DA's Office Millions

**Texas Citations**  
J. C. Hallman  
*Oklahoma Watch*

On June 11, Florida-based trucker Tammy Votta set out to drive a heavy, pre-sealed load — 45,000 wobbly pounds — from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Hiawatha, Iowa, mostly along U.S. Highway 54. She stopped for the night in Stratford, Texas, had two cookies for dinner, and woke the next morning with no idea that her whole view of life in America was about to be shattered.

June 12 was a beautiful day, with no wind and clear sailing on U.S. 54. As she was passing through Goodwell, population 920, Votta said she was doing far less than the posted 45 mph because she was running heavy and U.S. 54 has some curves through town. Even beyond city limits, she said, she couldn't get her rig up to the posted 70 mph. She maxed out at 68.

Nevertheless, red lights appeared in her rearview mirror. Roadside inspection. Had to be. Votta had never committed a crime and had 21 years as a trucker with a spotless record. But cops could pull you over for a roadside inspection without cause. It was a pain, and Votta said she wasn't a fan but accepted it as part of the job.

That's when it got weird, and Votta became part of a system of fines that produced no court records but brought more than \$2 million to the district attorney's office.

Officer Karan Gray, badge No. 79, came on hot, like Votta was a suspected serial killer,

as the trucker described it. It didn't make any sense. The truck logs showed she wasn't speeding. Votta asked a few questions, and strangely, the officer told her not to worry; it was all going to be OK.

Gray returned from her cruiser with a slip of paper from the District 1 Drug Task Force, associated with the local district attorney's office. The ticket, if that's what it was, claimed Votta had been caught on radar doing 58 in a 45 mph zone. But the ticket was oddly primitive. There was no statute listed. No fine. No order to appear. Nothing even to sign. Gray told Votta to call the number listed there — there would be some costs, but then it would be like the whole thing never happened. To Votta, that just didn't seem right. Over the next couple of days, she did some digging, and it started to look like some laws were being broken, maybe a violation of the Hobbs Act of 1951, which prohibits the obstruction or delay of interstate commerce. That included extortion, which is exactly how this felt. Now Votta's back was up.

"This is America, last time I checked," she said.

She called the number and got an email instructing her to pay \$360, more than she would have paid for a ticket; the local fine for speeding 11-15 mph over the posted limit is \$160. An attached document threatened Votta with a warrant for a criminal misdemeanor if she didn't pay up.

No way, Votta thought.

"I will have no part in that. At all. Ever," she said. "Integrity comes at a price."

She tried the official channels. The Oklahoma Highway Patrol referred her to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, which referred her to the attorney general's office, which referred her to the FBI. The FBI called the local district attorney, which didn't make much sense because the DA was the one running the alleged racket.

In the end, the FBI said the matter had been referred to the U.S. Attorney's office for review.

## A Befuddling Practice

At first, attorney James Wirth of the Wirth Law Office in Tulsa, which handles many cases involving speeding tickets and moving violations, didn't see a lot in Votta's story that stuck out as suspicious. Sure, the ticket was strange — no court date, no statutory citation — but pretty clearly, it was a deferred prosecution agreement in which offenders are offered an opportunity to pay a higher fine to have an offense erased from their record.

But even that was strange for a few reasons.

First, deferred prosecution agreements are rare.

"Most of the time when we're talking about a deferred prosecution, it's in really unusual cases," Wirth said. "The statute allows for it, so

Cont. A8, Texas Citations





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

# Prevalence of “miscommunication” not understood by industry trade publication

FROM A7

## Texas Citations

it’s legitimate, but it’s not very common.”

Second, it was strange for a drug task force to be giving speeding tickets. Based out of local DA offices and smacking more than a little of vigilantism, drug task forces have been around for decades. In Oklahoma, they’re more common in rural areas than cities, though one will soon be forming in Tulsa. Wirth said task forces pull people over for sketchy reasons all the time, then manufacture probable cause to conduct searches and seize money. Could they write speeding tickets? Maybe. But it was just so small time.

“They don’t care about speeding,” Wirth said. “Speeding is just a means to pull people over. And then they want to find something else so they can do the search. It’s all for bigger stuff.”

“They’re not looking for \$350 tickets,” he said. “They don’t even waste their time writing that stuff.”

Last, Wirth said he didn’t see any motive behind the notice Votta received. It was all very odd, but it didn’t fit with the kind of police abuses the Wirth said his office sees regularly: vice squads using the images of innocent girls in prostitution ads to entrap men, traffic stops of minorities for forfeiture purposes, coercing minors into participating in dangerous drug stings.

Did the whole thing sound like a shakedown? Yes — Wirth agreed with that much. And, sure, Wirth said, it was a way to skirt the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, protecting against unlawful search and seizure. But without any evidence that the practice was widespread, it looked like Votta’s case was just a one-off.

### The District Attorney

In 2007, former Carter County drug task force investigator Kevin McIntire was indicted on an embezzlement charge following a drug

“**They don’t care about speeding... Speeding is just a means to pull people over. And then they want to find something else so they can do the search. It’s all for bigger stuff.**”

James Wirth, of the Wirth Law Office in Tulsa

### CONVICTIONS

**Kevin McIntire**  
Former Carter County drug task force investigator indicted on an embezzlement charge following a drug bust. McIntire pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of willful neglect of duty by a public official and was ordered to return \$2,600 and relinquish his police certification

bust. McIntire pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of willful neglect of duty by a public official and was ordered to return \$2,600 and relinquish his police certification.

In 2016, after a years-long probation period, McIntire took over as agent in charge of the District 1 Drug Task Force. District 1 comprises four panhandle counties whose populations total a little more than 31,000 people. The unit’s Facebook page includes recent posts about seizures of thousands of fentanyl pills, pounds of meth and cocaine, and a handgun. Documents indicate that in 18 years, the task force had seized hundreds of pounds of drugs with a street value of \$117 million.

The District 1 Drug Task Force, composed of five agents, was the unit cited at the top of Votta’s ticket.

McIntire recalled what happened with Votta’s case. Votta had contacted Landline, the official publication of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association — a trucker magazine. McIntire spoke with Mark Schremmer, the senior editor of Landline, which had begun an investigation after Votta made contact and told her story.

McIntire described Votta’s case as a miscommunication from beginning to end. The problem started with the exchange between Votta and Officer Gray. There was blame to go around, but McIntire acknowledged the failure to tell Votta that she could choose between a deferred prosecution agreement and an ordinary ticket.

“Ms. Votta didn’t understand that she had the option of a court date,” McIntire said. “She thought it was like, ‘If you don’t do this DPA, we’re going to throw you in jail.’”

It nearly came to that. More miscommunication after the district attorney decided to drop the case — after Landline and the FBI got involved — resulted in a warrant being issued for Votta’s arrest. McIntire caught it, and asked District Attorney George “Buddy” Leach III, appointed by Governor Kevin

Stitt in 2021, to dismiss the case two days later. McIntire wrote a letter of apology to Votta.

“That led to discussions of every step of what we’re doing,” McIntire said. “We made some changes based on that deal.”

For his part, Landline editor Shremmer refused to speak on the record about why the magazine did not continue its investigation after Votta’s warrant was dismissed.

However, he admitted that their investigation had not uncovered how many deferred prosecution tickets were being given out.

“We didn’t realize it was as prevalent as it is,” Shremmer said.

### A Lot of Money

Even before he was hired in 2016, McIntire said, the exact role of the District 1 Drug Task Force had begun to evolve. At first, the mission shifted from direct drug trafficking crimes to things such as burglaries that were suspected of being drug-driven crimes. Now, practically speaking, the role of the drug task force was whatever District Attorney Leach said it was.

“I’ve always said my job is whatever the boss tells me my job is,” McIntire said. “So when he calls and says, ‘Hey I need you to go and do whatever,’ that’s what I’m going to do.”

The task force could always make traffic stops of the sort that concerned attorney Wirth. But part of the evolution of mission was the addition — before McIntire and Leach came along, when James “Mike” Boring was the district attorney — of what was described as either the commercial driver program or the public safety emphasis program, though neither designation was official. In short, the public safety emphasis program was an attempt to use deferred prosecutions to prevent serious accidents involving big rig trucks. Deferred prosecutions of truckers, McIntire said, had succeeded in reducing

Cont. A10, Texas Citations

### Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association

The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association is the international trade association representing the interests of independent owner-operators and professional drivers on all issues that affect truckers. More than 150,000 members of OOIDA are men and women in all 50 states and Canada who collectively own and/or operate more than 240,000 individual heavy-duty trucks and small truck fleets.

# Funding Shortfall: Housing waiting list stalled

FROM A2

## HUD

for its more than 5,700 voucher recipients to complete the year without tapping THA reserves.

Rent hikes that were steeper than HUD algorithms predicted for 2024 are blamed as the primary cause of the end-of-year funding gaps.

To cover the deficit, OHFA spent reserves normally used for programs such as down payment assistance and first-time homebuyer mortgages, Jenkins said.

Jenkins said the delayed payment of \$565,000 to OHFA is a significant amount, but the agency pays landlords about \$7 million per month for Section 8 rental assistance.

Housing officials at OCHA said they were forced to stop issuing new vouchers when openings became available when they realized late in 2024 that they would come up short of funding. OCHA is authorized for 5001 vouchers but only has funding to support 83% of those through January.

“We had stopped pulling people off the waiting list because we could tell we were going to go into shortfall,” said OCHA Assistant Director of Operations Matt Mills.

A memo from HUD clarified how the department plans to pay the 400 housing agencies for the second round of shortfall funding: Unspent money from 900 public housing authorities is being tapped to offset

the shortages.

During its late-January threat of funding freezes that would have affected many Oklahoma social service programs, the Trump administration stated that rental assistance programs would not be impacted.

During its Jan. 29 meeting, the OHFA board of directors authorized Jenkins to use up to \$1 million from agency reserves to bridge the funding shortfall.

Jenkins said that if the agency doesn’t receive the shortfall funding soon, she doesn’t know how OHFA will react.

“That’s a question that’s on the table,” Jenkins said.

Further complicating the situation, Congress has until March 14 to enact a fiscal year 2025 spending agreement or the federal government will be forced into a partial shutdown.

Appropriators hoped to reach a spending agreement by the beginning of February, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, but the deal was sidelined after the Trump administration issued an executive order and subsequent memo on Jan. 27 ordering a freeze on funding for thousands of federal programs.

That memo was rescinded, but not before it caused mass uncertainty among agencies and individuals that rely on federally funded

programs such as Section 8.

If there is a government shutdown, Jenkins said March payments to landlords won’t be affected because they’ll already have been made.

It’s payments for April that Jenkins said could become a problem if housing authorities don’t receive their shortfall funding and a budget agreement isn’t reached.

Richard Marshall, director of housing choice vouchers at OCHA shares Jenkins’ concern.

“The possible impact on OCHA programs due to shortfall funding and proposed cuts by Congress could be devastating,” Marshall said.

Without appropriate funding, OCHA won’t be able to approve families on the Section 8 waitlist for Housing Choice Vouchers, Marshall said. That waitlist is already approaching four years.

Jenkins emphasized that she is certain the HUD funding will show up any day, but there is a level of uncertainty with what priorities new HUD Secretary Scott Turner will pursue.

“We’re going to take the Trump administration at its word that it does not impact the rental programs,” Jenkins said. “But you know, there are some grave concerns about what’s going on at the federal level.”

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





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

# Oklahoma Legislators to Consider Eviction Reform Bills

*Four bills are poised to help tenants facing eviction*

## Eviction Reform

Heather Warlick  
*Oklahoma Watch*

Evictions in Oklahoma may be on the decline and several lawmakers are focusing on legislation to further lower the number of eviction cases filed in the state.

According to Legal Services Corporation eviction tracking, approximately 48,070 eviction cases were filed in 2024, a drop of 200 cases from 2023.

Several state lawmakers this legislative session are promoting bills designed to further reduce evictions in Oklahoma.

“In both chambers, it appears there is interest,” said Rep. Daniel Pae, D-Lawton. “I do generally believe that there’s broad agreement we need to modify statutes when it comes to the Landlord Tenant Act and housing issues in general.”

### Legal Services for Eviction Defense

House Bill 2014, authored by Pae, would amend existing law to allow

the Oklahoma attorney general to allocate money from the existing Legal Services Revolving Fund to provide legal representation for people in eviction cases who can’t afford an attorney. The money would go to legal services organizations that represent Oklahomans facing eviction, such as Legal Aid Services Oklahoma.

Pae said the amendment would codify Attorney General Gentner Drummond’s July opinion that allocating municipal money to a nonprofit to fund eviction prevention services is constitutional in Oklahoma.

The bill is part of a nationwide movement for a tenant’s right to counsel, free representation in an eviction proceeding if they can’t afford an attorney on their own.

When tenants have legal counsel during eviction hearings, they are more likely to avoid a judgment against them. Housing attorneys can identify illegal eviction filings, discriminatory cases, or mistakes made by landlords

in the eviction filing process that can help tenants stay in their homes.

### Bills to Ban Retaliation

A handful of anti-retaliation bills confirm bicameral interest in eviction laws.

In addition to his Legal Services Revolving Fund amendment, Pae filed HB 2015 in his continuing effort to pass legislation protecting tenants from landlord retaliation.

Oklahoma is one of only six states without anti-retaliation laws prohibiting landlords from evicting tenants or withholding services after tenants take specific actions, such as reporting unlivable housing conditions to code enforcement or the health department.

Without laws preventing retaliation, tenants have little recourse against bad-actor landlords.

“We do not want to be on the list of the six states that don’t have anti-

retaliation laws; that’s not a good list to be on,” said Rep. Mark Tedford, R-Tulsa.

Tedford said HB 1083 is written to protect both tenant and landlord, while previous anti-retaliation bills had too few landlord protections.

“It’s a balance to forge here, where if something is too pro-tenant, then it could potentially have the effect of reducing the incentive for landlords to invest back in the state and build more housing stock,” Tedford said.

House Bill 1083 would create a new law prohibiting retaliation by landlords within a set of parameters and protect landlords against false claims of retaliation by tenants. The bill prescribes civil penalties for both types of actions.

Tedford said the high eviction rate in Oklahoma during the post-COVID years was in part due to a housing shortage that was caused by an influx

*Cont. A10, Eviction Reform*





PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Alternative eviction court recommended

FROM A9

### Eviction Reform

of residents from outside the state.

Without emergency rent assistance that kept landlords afloat during pandemic years, Tedford said, landlords are less likely to be patient, particularly during a spike in housing demand.

Sen. Mary Boren, D-Norman, filed SB 149, a similar anti-retaliation bill without the landlord-friendly language of Tedford's. Boren said she intends to reduce retaliatory evictions and with an eye for reducing homelessness, which sometimes results from evictions.

In her bill, Boren suggests an alternative court system for evictions in which mediators help parties reach agreements. She said that could involve community wrap-around services, such as rent and utility assistance and help finding a job.

Boren said she is open to collaborating with Tedford on anti-retaliation legislation.

### Extending the Eviction Timeline

For the second year, Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City, filed legislation that would give tenants more time to prepare for an eviction hearing.

Kirt's bill, SB 128, lengthens the time between when a tenant is served a court summons and their eviction hearing from five days to 10.

"We have one of the shortest timelines in the country, and it skews heavily toward speed and encourages eviction," Kirt said.

Nearly half of tenants dealing with evictions lose their court cases because they don't show up. Tenants who do make it to court often come with children in tow.

Kirt said her bill would benefit tenants by giving them time to schedule time off work, find childcare, access legal assistance and arrange transportation.

"Exploitative landlords take advantage," Kirt said.

Kirt said that while most landlords already operate ethically, lawmakers can increase housing stability by enacting legislation that protects tenants from exploitative landlords.

"We need to fix the system to a more balanced, fair process to make sure the law encourages responsible tenants and landlords," Kirt said.

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

## More than \$2.1 million in fines over six years

FROM A8

### Texas Citations

accidents in Texas County without affecting truckers' driving records.

Statistics supplied by the district attorney's office revealed the program's scope. From 2019 to 2024, agents of the District 1 Drug Task Force conducted 6,934 traffic stops, the vast majority in Texas County. Those included approximately 6,000 deferred prosecutions, with an average fine of \$360.

That's more than \$2.1 million in six years — most of it during Leach's tenure as DA.

Votta's case came to an end when a local judge dismissed it. But her complaint was always broader than just one case. Votta argued that federal anti-masking laws, which prohibited deferred prosecutions to hide the convictions of commercial driver's license holders, made all of those tickets illegal.

"Something is very, very wrong here," Votta said.

The Landline investigation looked into it enough to realize that it was a murky area of jurisprudence.

"There were differing interpretations of the law," Schremmer said.

Wirth agreed. Even if the total amount of money paled beside amounts seized in

other districts, the numbers in District 1 made it seem like a systematic money-making machine. But was it illegal? Anti-masking laws specify that paying a fee or court cost amounted to a conviction that could not be masked or deferred. But was a payment to a district attorney — the document that threatened Votta with criminal misdemeanor specified that she should send \$360 directly to the DA — a court cost?

That was the argument from District 1. "The anti-masking statutes are all referencing citations that have been entered into the court," McIntire said. "And so, in Oklahoma, until it hits the court, the district attorney holds the discretion just like he would in any other criminal matter."

Or, put more simply, a well-masked violation does not violate anti-masking laws. That is, it is a bribe, and a crime, for a driver to offer a local police officer money to make a speeding ticket go away. But it does not violate anti-masking statutes — it does not amount to extortion — if law enforcement offers a driver a fee to make the same ticket disappear.

Or maybe it does. A written statement supplied by the National Traffic Law Center, which has published the "Masking Quick Reference Guide" and provides training and resources nationwide to raise awareness of anti-masking laws, offered specifics on the origin of the law.

"Anti-masking provisions have been a part of federal law since 1999 when they were included in the Motor Carrier Safety

Improvement Act," the NTLC statement said.

The law says the state must not mask, defer imposition of judgment, or allow an individual to enter into a diversion program that would prevent a commercial driver's license holder's conviction for any violation other than parking, vehicle weight, or vehicle defects.

Ironically, anti-masking provisions are meant to prevent injuries and fatalities involving large trucks and buses.

As to what's legal and what isn't, the NTLC statement put it simply.

"It is not uncommon for jurisdictions to use deferred prosecution as part of plea agreements for non-CDL traffic violations," the statement read. "However, offering deferred prosecution for CDL holders violates federal anti-masking regulations. While some jurisdictions may be unaware of these requirements, others may prioritize revenue generation through fines and plea deals, leading to non-compliance."

Jurisdictions that repeatedly fail to follow federal guidelines can lose federal funding.

But did any of this, as Votta believed, amount to a violation of the Hobbs Act? Probably not. Proving extortion would require specific evidence of unlawful coercive practices beyond standard legal enforcement mechanisms and would need to be investigated by the FBI.

That's exactly what had happened, Votta said, at least to the extent of the FBI having referred the matter to the U.S. Attorney. But Kayla McCleer and Adam

Snider, public affairs specialists for the Oklahoma City office of the FBI and the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Oklahoma respectively, would neither confirm nor deny that an investigation was underway.

Two days after Oklahoma Watch visited Guymon to interview McIntire and retrieve official documents related to the warrant for Votta's arrest, the district attorney chose — after internal discussions, according to McIntire — to end the public safety emphasis program.

Leach refused to comment for this story.

What remains unclear is how widespread the practice of deferred prosecutions for truckers might be in Oklahoma or beyond. McIntire was unaware of deferred prosecutions being used anywhere else in the state.

"I just know that that's been our stance," McIntire said. "I'm not aware of any other district that has that going."

That hints at the heart of the problem. Without someone like Votta raising a stink and calling on authorities and the press, it would be nearly impossible to uncover the practice when the whole point is that nothing is filed in court.

"If it's happening," Landline editor Schremmer said, "it's not being publicized."

J. C. Hallman is a Tulsa-based contributor to Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at jchallman@gmail.com.



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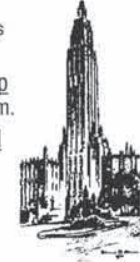
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Civil Rights Data, A13



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Healing The World, A15



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

### The Unequal Weight of a Drug Test

At trauma centers, youth of color are more likely to be tested for substances. With overdoses rising, why aren't all kids tested equitably?

**Drug Test**  
Anissa Durham  
*Word In Black*

**W**hen a teenager arrives at a trauma center after a car crash or sports-related injury, the immediate priority is to save their life. The doctors stabilize them, run tests, and prepare a treatment plan.

But somewhere in the flurry of activity, a decision is made — one that has less to do with their medical condition, and more to do with who they are.

New research shows Black, American Indian, Hispanic, uninsured, and female adolescents are more likely to be screened for drug and alcohol use at pediatric trauma centers across the country than their white peers.

With drug overdoses being the third leading cause of death in adolescents in 2022 surpassing car accidents and gun violence, some say the disproportionate screening of minority youths isn't necessarily the problem.

#### Why Screenings Are Inequitable

Trauma center staff might decide to do a blood screen of a teen because they need to make sure any medications they

administer don't conflict with drugs or alcohol. No patient consent is needed. And there are no specific guidelines providers are required to follow when deciding whether to screen adolescent trauma patients.

Health care providers who decide to screen a pediatric patient for substance and alcohol use, take blood and urine samples to test for any range of cannabis, opiates, amphetamines, methamphetamines, MDMA, and alcohol. Dr. Jordan Rook, a general surgery resident at University of California, Los Angeles says the tests commonly exclude synthetic opioids, which currently drive the surge in drug overdose deaths.

Rook spearheaded the research to identify where providers are going wrong when screening injured pediatric

Cont. A14, Drug Test

## Ringling the Alarm for Civil Rights Data in Schools

### Civil Rights Data

Quintessa Williams  
*Word In Black*

As advocates worry that critical data is on the chopping block, Catherine E. Lhamon, former assistant secretary for the Office for Civil Rights, tells us why it matters and how we can fight for it.

In 1968, at the height of the civil rights movement, the U.S. Department of Education launched a groundbreaking initiative: the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). Designed to track disparities in

Cont. A14, Civil Rights Data



# Stigmatization of substance use is common within health care settings



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

FROM A13

## Drug Test

patients. After analyzing data from more than 85,000 adolescent patients, Rook and his fellow researchers found that nearly 25% of youth from marginalized communities were screened for alcohol use and about 22% were screened for drug use.

“That’s where some of my concerns with the guidelines come into place. It’s kind of left up to the providers to determine how they want to do the screening,” he says. “Do they have a system where all patients get an interview-based screen? Or do all patients get a biochemical screen, or do they leave it up to the providers to make that decision?”

To get a better idea of which adolescents are being screened, Rook analyzed data using

not think of children when they think of the opioid epidemic,” Kelley-Quon, who works at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and the University of Southern California, says. “People aren’t used to thinking about that when they think about pediatric health.”

And, she says, it’s very challenging to find support for adolescents who are uninsured or on Medicaid.

## The Burden and Danger of Stigma

Since interview-based and biochemical screenings are left to the discretion of providers, intervention and prevention care usually is, too. The American College of Surgeons released best practices guidelines in 2022, to help providers in trauma centers screen for mental health disorders and substance use, and follow up with intervention. But it’s still only a recommendation.

“

**It’s kind of left up to the providers to determine how they want to do the screening.**

Dr. Jordan Rook, a general surgery resident at University of California, Los Angeles

a method to control for reasonable factors that would influence a provider’s decision to do a biochemical screen.

“What was left over were these inequitable patterns of screening,” he says. “That’s where I become concerned that providers are selecting patients they deem to be higher risk for substance use disorders and active intoxication.”

Dr. Lorraine Kelley-Quon, senior author of the report and an associate professor of clinical surgery, says while on one hand adolescents of color are more likely to be screened for substance and alcohol use, not enough adolescents from other demographics are being screened.

“I’m in the prescription opioid and substance use space, I can tell you people do

The stigmatization of substance use is common within health care settings, and Rook worries this could keep injured adolescents who may be struggling with substance or alcohol use disorder from seeking treatment. A positive drug or alcohol test result could make it easier for providers to blame a young patient for what happened to them.

“Our job is to take care of the patient, no matter how they got there, and provide them with the best care possible,” Rook says. “There’s a push these days to make trauma care more humanistic and remove these stigmatizing biases.”

The issue extends beyond the hospital, too. Adolescents from marginalized communities are already over-policed and are more likely to be screened for substance and alcohol

Cont. A15, Drug Test

# Removing critical information from federal agencies

FROM A13

## Civil Rights Data

educational access, the CRDC has since become a cornerstone of efforts to ensure equity in America’s schools.

Without the CRDC, schools would lose a critical tool for identifying and addressing disparities. Federal enforcement of civil rights would be hampered, and advocates would struggle to hold institutions accountable. And as the Trump administration moves to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs across the federal government, advocates worry this vital tool could be next on the chopping block.

“I think about it every day,” says Catherine E. Lhamon, who served as the DOE’s assistant secretary for civil rights under both the Obama and Biden administrations and is a former chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. “I always worry about the direction a new administration may take regarding civil rights,” Lhamon says.

Trump’s flurry of executive orders includes removing critical information from federal agencies — such as documents related to DEI, public health data resources concerning LGBTQ+ communities, Spanish language content, and the U.S. Constitution webpage. But Lhamon says data on race and equity is needed now more than ever.

“In the first Trump administration, the Office of Civil Rights deleted important data about student access to high-rigor courses in schools and narrowed the scope of the data collection,” Lhamon tells us. “When we returned, it was important to reinstate those data indicators because I know how we use them.”

## The Data Reflects Student Experiences

The CRDC has long been a lifeline for exposing inequities in education. “It’s not only a statutory obligation to collect this data — it reflects a kid’s experience,” Lhamon says. “It would be a travesty to diminish or discontinue that important collection.”

For example, the January 2025 CRDC report from the 2021-22 collection revealed that while Black students make up 15% of K-12 enrollment, they account for just 12% of students enrolled in



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

calculus courses.

“Right now, we know that fewer than 50% of the nation’s high schools offer calculus,” Lhamon says. “We should all be aghast at that data point alone. However, when we find out that if you’re Black, you are least likely to be in a school that offers calculus, then we are more aghast,” she says.

The same report found that Black students are overrepresented in special education programs and disciplinary actions, comprising 33% of school-related arrests and 20% of corporal punishment cases.

“Constricting that data point or other ones about what kids have access to at their schools, what it is to be in their schools, that’s very damaging because it means we can’t make comparisons across time. It means we can’t worry about the kids who are in class right now and what’s happening to them,” she adds.

Lhamon also recounted an investigation

where data revealed that a particular school district had an “alarmingly low number of students with disabilities” enrolled in “gifted and talented” advanced academic programs. This insight, she says, “led to corrective actions ensuring equitable access to advanced courses for all students.”

## Will the Trump Administration Stop Collecting Data?

The absence of CRDC data would not only hinder federal enforcement of civil rights, but also limit the ability of schools to implement interventions or hold them accountable.

“The Office of Civil Rights is required by statute to collect the data,” Lhamon says. “It’s been collected generally every two years since 1968, so if they were instructed not to do that moving forward, it would be a violation of law.”

Lhamon says the Trump administration

could end up following the law and collecting the data but refuse to release it entirely.

“Not making the data public would be really hard because then educators doing research wouldn’t have access to it,” she says. “Researchers working on reports wouldn’t have access to it. Journalists wouldn’t have access to it. And parents and advocates wouldn’t have access to it to be able to call on their school communities to improve practices.”

Lhamon also pointed out that the new administration could constrain the data by collecting less or collecting it from fewer communities.

“This would hurt data knowledge and damage civil rights enforcement and our national understanding of opportunity in schools,” she says. “It would be really harmful to discontinue that transparency.”

Advocating for the Continuation of the CRDC

In light of potential threats to the CRDC, Lhamon says its preservation is not just important — it’s urgent. She offers a three-point roadmap for those who want to fight for its survival:

Use the data that already exists: Dive into the CRDC’s findings, identify the gaps and inequities in your local schools, and push for change. The numbers tell a story, but it’s up to communities to demand action.

Make your voice heard at the Department of Education: Respond to requests for public input, share how the CRDC has shaped your understanding of educational inequities, and remind officials why this data matters.

Take the message public: Use community forums, social media, and partnerships with advocacy groups to amplify the importance of the CRDC.

## A Critical Tool for Everyone

Under the Biden-Harris administration, making the CRDC data accessible and user-friendly became a priority — a move Lhamon calls essential for ensuring equity in schools. She hopes the Office for Civil Rights will continue this work because the data is a “critical tool for everyone.”

The data should “be a starting point for someone’s mom or community members, and of course, the schools,” she says. “Everyone should have the right to use this data to ask themselves whether schools are, in fact, offering equal opportunity to all students.”



## Interventions and referrals: Recommended policy changes by experts

FROM A14

### Drug Test

use. A positive test, Rook says, could lead to an arrest and conviction, contributing to the overcriminalization these communities already face, as medical records can be subpoenaed in criminal investigations, like if a patient was driving under the influence.

Kelley-Quon says things need to change at the policy level as well.

To make things more equitable, she says, providers should screen all adolescents who come into a trauma center for drug and alcohol use. Doctors should also provide young people who are struggling with substance use disorders with interventions and referrals.

“When a child comes in after an injury, this is a moment in their life where you could change the trajectory of their decisions,” Kelley-Quon says. “If you’re not screening for substance use and referring people, you’re missing that moment to make a lifesaving intervention.”

Anissa Durham is the health data journalist for Word In Black. She reports on healthcare inequities and mental health in the Black community.



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

## Fierce Love: A Bold Path That Can Heal the World

### Healing The World

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis  
*Word In Black*

**With the current assault on democracy and human rights, it's more important than ever to embrace and spread love and joy.**

Got Joy?

I know — you’re thinking, “What?”

I can’t even begin to put to paper the horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach as we watch the assault on our democracy and on the world, an assault launched by our sitting president and his leadership team. Yes, it is Project 2025, and yes, it is more than that.

It is outrageous, and I hope each one of us will do what we can — where we can and whenever we can — to comfort those who hurt and to wrap our arms around the vulnerable. And put this number on speed dial! Call Congress and share what you are feeling, witnessing, and hoping at 202-224-3121.

In a talk with one of my colleagues today, Rev. Natalie Renee Perkins, I was reminded of the ways the simple things in our lives can provide us with sustenance and joy even in these hot mess times. Walking her dog — Treble Clef Perkins — in the cold and slushy wetness, breathing deeply and filling her lungs with cold air, and a little rain on her nose made her feel joyful to be alive on the planet. The journey of life matters, she said, not just the destination, and she has made a beautiful life for herself.

Hearing her joy — a spontaneous sharing in a quick phone call — I found myself recounting my own joy. Listening to music to put myself to sleep last night, delighting in the jazz and show tunes that made me want to make a living on Broadway (no, I did not get to do that); excitement at getting back to my husband today after a few days apart; the memory of our romping around with grandchildren last weekend. I am furious about the state of our union. And yet, my communities, my friendships, my beloveds, and my work bring me so much joy. We need that joy, love, to make it through. We could feel guilty about the joy, or we could welcome it when it comes and hold onto the taste and texture of it. We can curate the ways it shows up so we can access it more often.

In my book, “Fierce Love,” I wrote a chapter on joy. Chapter eight in this book of nine spiritual practices of fierce love is “Find Joy Purposefully. It is the Water of Life.” I was inspired by the poet Rumi, who wrote, “When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.”

I write: “The world can be a hard place, and our problems can feel daunting. It’s often impossible to laugh or smile with so much horror in the news. But identifying and amplifying things that give you joy will sustain you during the times you’re weighed



PHOTO REV. DR. JACQUI LEWIS

down by life’s injustices — those aimed at you or at others. Joy is fuel for fierce love.”

Rev. Natalie’s staff meets on Thursdays to look over the week. What is feeding you, they ask? What are you hungry for? I love that audit, that scan of emotional content. I wonder if you and I could do a daily scan. What gave me joy today? If the answer is nothing, that’s just what it is. But if there is something there — by being mindful of it, we appreciate it and know how to source joy more fully next time.

I was at dinner this week with a friend. I like this restaurant because it is close to our WeWork office and because the food is delicious. There was a special — three scallops on roasted potatoes with a little something green and a sweet chili sauce. Oh. My. GOODNESS! Every taste made me

thank God for scallops and for chefs and for taste buds and for a friend who loves me enough to listen to me ooh and aah like a child with a lollipop. The conversation was joy, the connection was joy, the longevity of our friendship — the things we know about each other — was joy, and did I mention the scallops were simply divine?

What is it for you, love? Biting into a grape and following that with a piece of sharp cheddar cheese? Watching your children play? Playing with your adult friends on the dance floor? Is it sitting in a bathtub soaking, or walking in the cold and loving how your body moves. Is it doing work on any number of the tough issues we are facing and feeling the satisfaction of making a difference?

Don’t get stuck on happiness versus joy. Feel into what I mean by joy. That feeling

of freedom, of bounce-back, of contentment, of wonder. Joy is a reservoir of goodness that makes you rock back and forth and hug yourself. It makes you tilt your head back in a full-throated laugh of just hum. Sometimes it’s just peace way deep down in your belly. Mother Teresa said joy is strength.

Whatever is your joy...get some. Pay attention to the source and visit it often; you need it, and you deserve it! Why? Because you are awesome and wonderful, made in the image of the Holy. That’s why!

Jacqui’s “Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World” is available wherever you buy books.





Reggie Ivey is the executive director for Northside Neighbors, a new non-profit dedicated to assisting north Tulsa with priorities in education, housing, wellness, and economic vitality

PHOTO PROVIDED

## Ivey To Lead New Non-Profit

*Northside Neighbors Will Address North Tulsa Priorities*

### Northside Neighbors

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Reggie Ivey has been selected to lead Northside Neighbors, a new non-profit organization. The mission of the new entity is to lead community-wide efforts in education, housing, wellness, and economic vitality.

As executive director, Ivey will direct the organization in the following areas: (1) to develop affordable, high-quality mixed-income housing, (2) to support exceptional schools that prioritize student success inside and outside the classroom, and (3) to cultivate a thriving commercial core that sustains the neighborhood's economic vitality.

"I am honored to lead Northside Neighbors and continue my commitment to fostering healthier, more equitable communities in north Tulsa," said Ivey. "I look forward to collaborating with residents and partners to uplift the legacy and support the vision of the people who have long called north Tulsa home."

Ivey brings over 30 years of public health leadership experience, including nearly three decades with the Tulsa Health Department. His tenure at THD was marked by significant contributions, such as spearheading the creation of the North Regional Health and Wellness Center and establishing the Office of Health Equity.

A tireless advocate for addressing health disparities at THD, particularly between north and south Tulsa, he emphasized the importance of tackling the social determinants of health to bridge this gap.

Ivey holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and communication from Northeastern State University and a master's degree in human relations with an emphasis on organizational development from the University of Oklahoma. He has furthered his education through postgraduate studies in organizational leadership. He was a Fellow at the National Public Health Leadership Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel

Hill. His leadership and dedication have earned him recognition, including the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Award from Northeastern State University and the North Tulsa Visionary Leadership Award from the North Tulsa Community Coalition.

Northside Neighbors, launched by the George Kaiser Family Foundation's

InvestNorth initiative, began as an effort to understand north Tulsa's opportunities and challenges through resident input. It has evolved into a nonprofit with a community board of directors. It is dedicated to creating thriving neighborhoods in partnership with the community.

The Northside Neighbors board of directors are Jonathan Butler, senior vice president of Community Development at Partner Tulsa; Rob Kaiser, principal at McLain High School; Brandon Oldham, program officer at the George Kaiser Family Foundation; Rue Ramsey, vice president of Workforce and Talent Strategies at the

Cont. A17, Northside Neighbors

## Phillips Theological Seminary Hosts Black History Month Events



(LEFT) Rev. Chelsea Brooke Yarborough, PhD, is associate director of Leadership Programming at the Association of Theological Schools. She is a former assistant professor of African American Preaching, Sacred Rhetoric, and Black Practical Theology at Phillips Theological Seminary. (RIGHT) Rev. F. Douglas Powe Jr., PhD, is president of Phillips Theological Seminary.

PHOTOS PROVIDED

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Phillips Theological Seminary has announced its weekly Black History Month program, featuring religious scholars.

The program will honor and celebrate the history, scholarship, and continuing legacy of African-descended peoples, their cultures and traditions.

**Feb. 18, 11:15 a.m.** – Rev. Chelsea Brooke Yarborough, PhD, is associate director of Leadership Programming at the Association of Theological Schools and is a former assistant professor of African American Preaching, Sacred Rhetoric, and Black Practical Theology at Phillips Theological Seminary.

**Feb. 20, 6 p.m.** – The 4th Annual Black Histories in Native (American) Lands Lecture will be hosted by Kyle T. Mays, PhD. **Feb. 25, 11:15 a.m.** – Rev. F. Douglas Powe Jr., PhD, is president of Phillips Theological Seminary

**Feb. 25, 6:30 p.m.** – Rev. Melanie Jones Quarles will conduct a community lecture. She is an assistant professor of ethics, theology, and culture and director of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership at Union Presbyterian Seminary. Earlier in February, Phillips Seminary featured the following scholar-preachers:

**Feb. 4** – Rev. Melanie Jones Quarles, PhD, is an assistant professor of ethics, theology, and culture and director of the Katie Geneva

Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership at Union Presbyterian Seminary.

**Feb. 11** – Rev. Herbert R. Marbury, PhD, is an associate professor of the Hebrew Bible and Black Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University.

To see the video recordings, visit the Black Church Traditions and African American Worship Series on Phillips Theological Seminary's YouTube page.

The programs, sponsored by Black Church Traditions and African American Faith-Life committee, are free and open to the public and will be held at Phillips Theological Seminary, 901 N. Mingo Rd.

For more information, contact (918) 610-8303.

## Events

### Feb. 7 - Mar. 6

"And Then Margaret Curtis" an exhibition at Alexandre Hogue Gallery in Jerri Jones Lecture Hall in Phillips Hall, Room 211, 2930 E. 5th St. An artist talk is scheduled for Feb. 6 at 5 p.m. – 6 p.m. Following the artist talk will be a reception, 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. The gallery hours are Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. The programs and exhibit are free and open to the public. For more information, call (918) 631-2739.

### Feb. 14

Greenwood Rising, 23 N. Greenwood Ave., is hosting "Freedom Fridays." Oklahoma residents will receive free admission and can visit between Jan. 31 and March 7. The free admission is courtesy of a donation from Tulsa Teachers Credit Union. For more information, contact (539) 867-3173.

### Feb. 15

Education for Scholars Inc. invites you to its Martin Luther King Beacon of Hope fundraiser event. Pulitzer Prize-nominated author Clifton Taulbert will be the guest speaker. Proceeds will benefit North Tulsa Youth and Family Resilience Project. For more information, see [Education for Scholar Inc.](https://educationforscholars.org/events) and <https://educationforscholars.org/events>.

### Feb. 17

2025 Contracting Accelerator Four-Week Training Course will provide individuals and their businesses with information covering the topic of contracting. The facilitator will be Kathy E. Porter with Porter Brown Associates. The virtual program is sponsored by at the Greenwood Women's Business Center, 102 N. Greenwood Ave., 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. Additional date is Feb. 24. To register, send an email to [info@greenwoodwbc.org](mailto:info@greenwoodwbc.org). For more information, call (539) 867-4127 or see [www.greenwoodwbc.org](http://www.greenwoodwbc.org).

### Feb. 19

The Women's March on Washington Co-Founder Tamika D. Mallory will host a lecture and book signing at All Souls Unitarian Church, 2952 S. Peoria Ave., beginning at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Magic City Books at (918) 602-4452 or visit [tamikadmallory.com](http://tamikadmallory.com).





(LEFT) Mayor Monroe Nichols, the keynote speaker at the MLK Jr. Commemoration Society Prayer Service program, visits with (l-r) Denise Henry, Tulsa Tech instructor; Sandra Golden, Muskogee Creek Councilor; and Tim Good Voice, evangelist with Montesoma Baptist Church, at the MLK Jr. Commemoration Society Prayer Service at Boston Avenue Methodist Church on Jan. 19. (CENTER) Tulsa County Sheriff Vic Regalado (l) and Pleas Thompson (r), president of the Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society, congratulate Tayshawn Thompson as the MLK Dream Out Loud Student Award recipient. The program was held at Tulsa Technology Center Peoria Campus on Jan. 15



## MLK Jr. Commemoration Society Recognizes Local 46th Anniversary With Prayer Service

DR. JERRY GOODWIN  
The Oklahoma Eagle

Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society held its 46th anniversary of the local observance of the famed civil rights leader's birthdate, Jan. 13-20. This year's theme was "Tulsa: The Dream in Motion." Many programs were sponsored to invite many community members to attend.

The annual prayer service was held at Boston Avenue Baptist Church on Jan. 19. Rev. Scott Gordon, pastor of Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Sapulpa, was the master of ceremonies.

The program opened with the singing of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" by Cordaro Booker of the Booker School of Music. He offered two additional musical selections during the program. Welcome remarks were given by Rev. Dr. Samuel T. Powers, pastor of Boston Avenue Methodist Church.

The opening prayer was delivered by Evangelist Tim Good Voice with Montesoma Baptist Church. The occasion and recognitions were presented by Pleas

Thompson, president of the MLK Jr. Commemoration Society.

This year's MLK Dream Out Loud Student Award was given to Tayshawn Thompson. He is a senior at Broken Arrow High School and is concurrently enrolled in a criminal justice program at Tulsa Tech. Dwayne Gardner, director of the Tulsa Tech Peoria Campus, presented the award to him.

Dr. Ebony Johnson, superintendent of Tulsa Public Schools, was recognized with the 2025 Keeping the Dream Alive Award. Carol A. Singleton, an MLK Jr. Commemoration Society board member, introduced her.

Following Johnson's remarks, Collin Waters, recipient of the "I Have a Dream" Speech Oratorical Speech Contest, was introduced by Angela Burnett, an MLK Jr. board member. He delivered the entire speech at the program.

Next on the program was the keynote speaker, Mayor Monroe Nichols IV of the City of Tulsa. Rev. Gordon introduced him.

After closing remarks, Rev. Gordon concluded the program with a prayer.

For more information, visit <https://www.mlktulsa.com/> or call (918) 492-9495.



(ABOVE) Tayshawn Thompson (second from left) is the recipient of the MLK Dream Out Loud Student Award. He is pictured with (l-r) Dwayne Gardner, director of Tulsa Tech Peoria campus; Denise Henry, Tulsa Tech instructor; and Pleas Thompson, president of the MLK Jr. Commemoration Society. The program was held at Tulsa Technology Center Peoria Campus on Jan. 15.

## Bringing together residents & partners

FROM A16

### Northside Neighbors

Tulsa Regional Chamber; and Brittany Swain, director at Educare Hawthorne School.

For more information about Northside Neighbors and its initiatives, visit [www.northsideneighbors.com](http://www.northsideneighbors.com).

### Northside Neighbors

Northside Neighbors is transforming north Tulsa through community-led efforts in education, housing, wellness, and economic vitality. This nonprofit brings together residents and partners to foster prosperity and thriving neighborhoods, ensuring that every neighborhood becomes worthy of those who call it home. For more information, visit <https://www.gkff.org/program/northside-neighbors>

### InvestNorth

InvestNorth is a collaborative neighborhood initiative founded by George Kaiser Family Foundation to drive transformational opportunities for families and children in historically Black, north Tulsa neighborhoods. Working alongside residents and neighborhood-based organizations, InvestNorth is expanding pathways to prosperity while uplifting the community and honoring the legacy of its heritage. More information is available at <https://www.investnorthtulsa.org/>.

## Events

### Feb. 20

Access to Capital - U. S. Black Chambers, Inc. introduces a "New Way to Borrow" webinar, 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. (EST). The live-streamed event is a USBC chamber development and entrepreneurial training and development program. The forum will provide information about loans designed for small businesses with local communities in mind. For more information, visit [Access to Capital - USBC Introduces a New Way to Borrow](https://www.usbc.org/Access-to-Capital-USBC-Introduces-a-New-Way-to-Borrow).

### Feb. 20

Chase Money Skills is hosting a "Small Business: Power of Capital" workshop at Chase Bank, 6140 S. Lewis Ave., 12 p.m. - 1 p.m. The free program will provide practical insights on funding, financial planning, and leveraging capital to fuel your business growth. Small Business Consultant Carla Thomas will be the presenter. RSVP by Feb. 19. For more information, visit events. [chase.com/300056386](https://chase.com/300056386).

### Feb. 20

Greenwood Rising, 23 N. Greenwood Ave., is hosting author Hannibal Johnson and his newly released book, "10 Ways We Can Advance Social Justice Without Destroying Each Other," 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. The program is free to the public. For more information, call (539) 867-3173 or [contact@greenwoodrising.org](mailto:contact@greenwoodrising.org).

### Feb. 20

"Welcome Back: The Remix of Langston University School of Business" will be the theme for the LU vs. Texas Wesleyan basketball game, which begins at 6 p.m. Before the game, the School of Business will host a reception in Moore Hall, Room 213, 4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. For more information, visit <https://langstonsports.com/>.

### Feb. 21 - 23

St. Monica Catholic Church and the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma are hosting "The Church in Black and White: Creating the Beloved Catholic Community." The program includes the following: Feb. 21, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. - Meet and Greet at St. Monica Catholic Church, 633 E. Marshall Pl.; Feb. 22, 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. - Workshop at Rudisill Regional Library, 1502 N. Harford Ave.; and Feb. 23, 10 a.m. - Unity Mass at St. Monica. A continental breakfast and lunch will be offered during the workshop. For more information and registration, visit conference registration or contact Fr. Celestine Obidegwu at [oke1970@yahoo.com](mailto:oke1970@yahoo.com).

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