

The Oklahoma Eagle

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

SERVING GREATER TULSA SINCE 1921

LEGACY

5,408

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

NATION

A Political Toll: Black LGBTQ+ Students Face New Barriers

Word In Black. **A20**

NATION

What Illinois' Ticket Crackdown Means for Black Students

Word In Black. **A20**

SOCIAL

THE OK EAGLE.COM
#THE OK EAGLE
#OKEAGLEPAPER

\$1.00

VOL. 103 NO. 49

December 6, 2024 - December 12, 2024

WILL TRUMP BRING BLACKS INTO TOP JOBS?

MILTON COLEMAN
The Oklahoma Eagle

When Donald Trump spoke at the BOK Center in Tulsa four years ago, he made much ado about COVID-19 and a recent West Point graduation ceremony. He also bad-mouthed his presidential predecessor, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden, whose victory months later evicted Trump from the White House.

A3

Mary McLeod Bethune

African-Americans in the New Deal

THE BLACK CABINET
The Untold Story of African Americans and Politics During the Age of Roosevelt
By Jill Watts

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Problem of Negro Housing

Robert C. Weaver

THE NEGRO GHETTO. By Robert C. Weaver. 404 pp. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co. \$3.75.

FOR the Negro one of the most frustrating characteristics, of life in America is that the white-dominated schools, movies and radio induce him to adopt the goals of the "American dream," while the realities of segregation and discrimination demonstrate at every turn that the dream is labeled "for whites only."

Owasso's Children

ROSS D. JOHNSON
The Oklahoma Eagle

The Children of Oklahoma is a three-part series exploring Oklahoma's policies to protect the state's children in public

and community institutions. *Owasso's Children* follows "It Was What People Do," detailing allegations of abuse against a local pastor.

Cont. A5, **Owasso's Children**

Rent-To-Buy Company Has Big State Investment, Limited Customer Options
Oklahoma Watch. **A13**

New Mental Health Center Faces Huge Construction Cost Overrun
Oklahoma Watch. **A17**

'Systemic failure': Edmond residents sought help for Ross Norwood weeks before police shooting
NonDoc. **A15**

Tulsa-area school board incumbents largely reelected by default, some races contested
NonDoc. **A11**

Last Week's Headlines
Just in case you missed it. **A4**

Zelia Page Breaux
Iconic Musician & Educator. **A4**

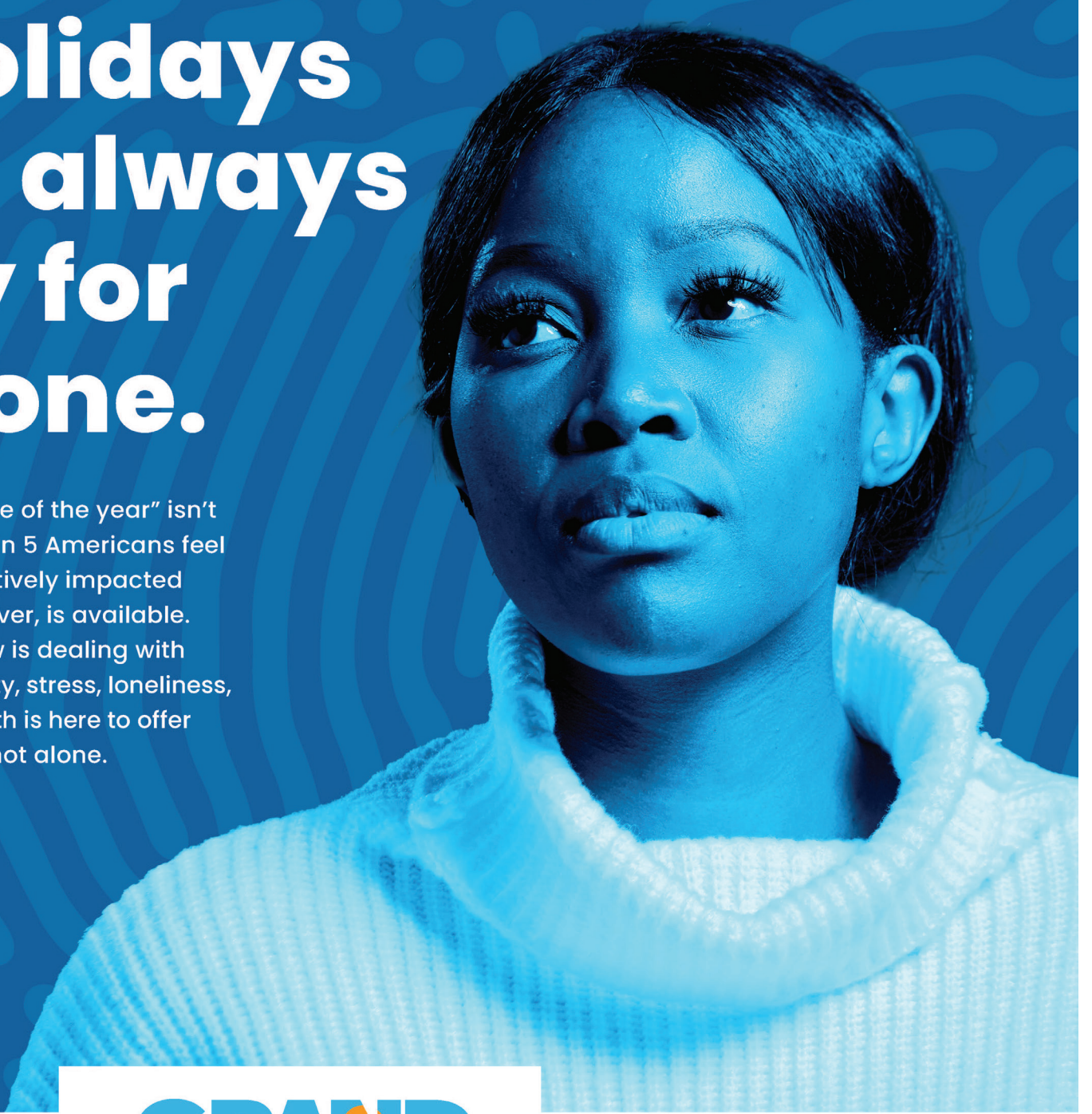
Jobs & Classifieds
Discover career opportunities. **A2**

Faith In Tulsa
The Eagle Church Directory. **A19**



The holidays aren't always happy for everyone.

"It's the most wonderful time of the year" isn't true for everyone. In fact, 3 in 5 Americans feel their mental health is negatively impacted by the holidays. Help, however, is available. If you or someone you know is dealing with depression, isolation, anxiety, stress, loneliness, or grief...GRAND Mental Health is here to offer hope and healing. You are not alone.



LEADING CHANGE. ADVANCING CARE.

grandmh.com/HelpIsHere • 24/7 CRISIS LINE: 800-722-3611



YOUR GOLDEN YEARS. YOUR WAY.

Explore resources from Oklahoma Human Services designed to help older adults live their life on their own terms, with the support they need to thrive.

LEARN MORE



OUR FUTURE. YOUR PLAN. YOUR STORY. YOUR TODAY.

CLASSIFIEDS

LARGE ABSOLUTE AUCTION

MILL CREEK MILLWORK

THURS. DEC. 12TH AT 9:00 AM

ITEMS LOCATED AT:
511 SE 89th ST. OKC, OK

INSPECTION: TUES. DEC. 10TH & WED. DEC. 11TH
FROM 8:00 AM TO 5:00 PM AND STARTING
AT 8:00 AM DAY OF AUCTION

AUCTION HELD AT: DAKIL AUCTIONEERS, INC.
200 NW 114TH ST, OKLA. CITY, OKLA.

(W. Side Service Rd of the Bdwy Ext. between 122nd & Hefner)

CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE AUCTION, BID LIVE ON-LINE AT WWW.DAKIL.COM

Large Selection of Doors, Windows, Trim, Wrought Iron Fence Panels, Huge Selection of Hardware, Cabinet Hardware, Drill Bits & Blades, Chainlink & Gates & Hardware; Skylights, Siding, Racks, Gondola Shelving, Mailbox Post, Barn Door Kits, Bathroom Accessories, Water Heater Components, Plumbing Supplies, Roof Cement & Coatings, Rope, Chain, Concrete Tools, Concrete and Much More. This is only a partial listing! See website for detailed listing & pictures. Buyers Premium will apply.

Dakil AUCTIONEERS
405-751-6179
www.dakil.com

ABSOLUTE AUCTION

OKC BITCOIN MINING

THURS. DEC. 5TH AT 10:00 AM

ITEMS LOCATED AT: 1601 S. PENN AVE, OKC &
AND 5200 SE 59TH ST, OKC

INSPECTION: WED. DEC. 4TH FROM 8AM TO 5PM
AND STARTING AT 8AM DAY OF AUCTION

AUCTION HELD AT: DAKIL AUCTIONEERS, INC.
200 NW 114TH ST, OKLA. CITY, OKLA.

CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE AUCTION, BID LIVE ON-LINE AT WWW.DAKIL.COM

3150 KVA Transformers contain NON-PCB Oil, Server Cabinets, Pallet Racking, 3" & 4" EMT Conduit & Fittings, Rolls of Commercial Vinyl Flooring, Breaker Boxes, Industrial Fans, Pallets of Bit Coin Mining Equipment, (30) 400amp Breakers. This is only a partial listing! Buyers premium will apply.

PLEASE SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILED LISTING & PICTURES

Dakil AUCTIONEERS
405-751-6179
www.dakil.com

5 WEEKS TO GO

HELP FUND THE NATIVE AMERICAN WARRIOR PROJECT

Help your county win up to \$25,000 for a local Veteran-serving organization.

To make your tax-deductible gift, please visit force50foundation.com or scan the QR Code.

To pay by check, make checks payable to Force 50 Foundation and mail to PO Box 722838 Norman, OK 73070.



CLASSIFIEDS

OKLAHOMA CLASSIFIED AD NETWORK

FOR MORE INFO CALL

1-888-815-2672

WANT TO BUY

OLD GUITARS WANTED! LARRY BRINGS CASH for vintage USA guitars, tube amps, banjos, mandolins, etc. Fender, Gibson, Martin, Gretsch, others. Call or text 918-288-2222. www.stringswest.com

AUCTION DEC 6

AUCTION DEC 6TH (RINGWOOD, MAJOR CO, OK): 344 +/- Acres of Irrigated & Livestock Land | Farm Buildings | Homesite | WigginsAuctioneers.com | 580.233.3066

ADVERTISE STATEWIDE

Put your message where it matters most - IN OKLAHOMA NEWSPAPERS. We can place your ad in 142 newspapers. For more information or to place an ad, contact Landon Cobb at (405) 499-0022 or toll-free in OK at 1-888-815-2672.

ABSOLUTE AUCTION

OKC BITCOIN MINING

THURS. DEC. 5TH AT 10:00 AM

ITEMS LOCATED AT: 1601 S. PENN AVE, OKC &
AND 5200 SE 59TH ST, OKC

INSPECTION: WED. DEC. 4TH FROM 8AM TO 5PM
AND STARTING AT 8AM DAY OF AUCTION

AUCTION HELD AT: DAKIL AUCTIONEERS, INC.
200 NW 114TH ST, OKLA. CITY, OKLA.

CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE AUCTION, BID LIVE ON-LINE AT WWW.DAKIL.COM

3150 KVA Transformers contain NON-PCB Oil, Server Cabinets, Pallet Racking, 3" & 4" EMT Conduit & Fittings, Rolls of Commercial Vinyl Flooring, Breaker Boxes, Industrial Fans, Pallets of Bit Coin Mining Equipment, (30) 400amp Breakers. This is only a partial listing! Buyers premium will apply.

PLEASE SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILED LISTING & PICTURES

Dakil AUCTIONEERS
405-751-6179
www.dakil.com

FEATURED

Owasso's Children: A three-part series exploring the state's policies to protect its children

Owasso's Children, A5



FEATURED

Rent-To-Buy Company Has Big State Investment, Limited Customer Options

Rent-to-Buy, A13



William McGinley
White House Counsel



Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior



John Ratcliffe
CIA Director



Susie Wiles
White House Chief of Staff



Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense



Todd Blanche
Deputy Attorney General



Brendan Carr
Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission



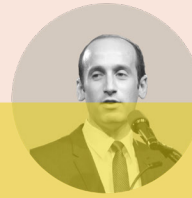
Doug Collins
Secretary of Veterans Affairs



Karoline Leavitt
Press Secretary



Michael Waltz
National Security Adviser



Stephen Miller
Dep. Chief of Staff for Policy and Homeland Security Adviser



Steven Cheung
Communications Director



Chris Wright
Secretary of Energy



Elise Stefanik
U.S. Ambassador to the UN



Kristi Noem
Homeland Security Secretary



Tom Homan
"Border Czar"



Tulsi Gabbard
Director of National Intelligence



Sergio Gor
Director of Presidential Personnel



Dan Scavino
Deputy Chief of Staff



Jay Clayton
U.S. Attorney for Southern District of New York



Lee Zeldin
EPA Administrator



Mike Huckabee
Ambassador to Israel



Matt Gaetz
U.S. Attorney General



William Owen Scharf
Asst., President and Staff Secretary



Dean John Sauer
U.S. Solicitor General



Elon Musk
Dep. of Government Efficiency



Marco Rubio
Secretary of State



Vivek Ramaswamy
Dept of Government Efficiency



Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary of Health and Human Services

Donald J. Trump, 47th United States of American President, early cabinet picks, awaiting appointment or confirmation early next year.

PHOTO THE REVOLUTION WILL BE DIGITAL

Trump Cabinet

Will Trump Bring Blacks Into Top Jobs?

MILTON COLEMAN
The Oklahoma Eagle

When Donald Trump spoke at the BOK Center in Tulsa four years ago, he made much ado about COVID-19 and a recent West Point graduation ceremony. He also bad-mouthed his presidential predecessor, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden, whose victory months later evicted Trump from the White House.

Cont. A6, Trump Cabinet

The Oklahoma Eagle

Zelia Page Breaux: An Iconic Musician & Educator

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



Zelia 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.

The Oklahoma Eagle

Founded in 1921

- James O. Goodwin**
Publisher 1980-Present
- Robert K. Goodwin**
Publisher 1972-1980
- Edward L. Goodwin, Jr.**
Co-Publisher 1980-2014
- Edward L. Goodwin, Sr.**
Publisher 1936-1972
- Theodore B. Baughman**
Publisher 1921-1936

Business

- Jerry Goodwin**
Principal
- M. David Goodwin**
Principal
- Ross D. Johnson**
Principal
- David W. Cole**
General Council
- Marsh Media**
Advertising

News

- Gary Lee**
Managing Editor
- Ray Pearcey**
Sr. Contributor
- Russell LaCour**
Contributor
- Victor Luckerson**
Contributor
- John Neal**
Contributor

Photography

- Cory Young**
Photographer

Print

- Sam Levrault**
Production Director

Circulation

- Kirstein Lynn**
Subscription Manager

Digital

- Web**
TheOKEagle.com
- Facebook**
TheOKEagle
- Twitter**
OKEaglePaper

Contact

- Letters to the Editor**
editor@theokeagle.com

- Advertise**
advertise@theokeagle.com
- Circulation**
publishers@theokeagle.com
- Subscribe**
theokeagle.com/subscribe

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE
People. Narratives. News.
Get 52 weeks for only \$1 per week

Visit theokeagle.com/subscribe-advertise

The Oklahoma Eagle
www.theokeagle.com

The Oklahoma Eagle
Enjoy articles, events and featured content online

Online
WEB: www.theokeagle.com
FACEBOOK: #TheOKEagle
TWITTER: #OKEaglePaper

The Oklahoma Eagle | Founded in 1921 | Vol. CIII No. 49
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

Delivery
For questions about deliver, billing and our membership program, please contact us at +1 (918) 582-7124, ext. 241.

Submissions
Submitted content may be edited for space, clarity and for considerations of liability. All submissions become the sole property of The Oklahoma Eagle, which reserves the right to run all or part of any submissions due to timeliness or newsworthiness.

Letters to the Editor
Want to write a letter to be published in the paper and online? Email us online to submit.

Advertising
For print and online advertising information, go to theokeagle.com/media-kit/ or call . +1 (918) 582-7124.

The Newsroom
Know something important we should cover? Send an inquiry to theokeagle.com/subscribe.

OWASSO'S CHILDREN

From A1, **Owasso's Children**

This story is the final installment of The Oklahoma Eagle's "The Children of Oklahoma" three-part series. It follows "Their" and "It Was What People Do," - in-depth analyses of the state's commitment-in-action for the safety and care of Oklahoma's children. In "Their," The Oklahoma Eagle explored the perceived culture of hate experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ children, fostered by state officials and public figures. "It Was What People Do," detailed 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 final part of our "The Children of Oklahoma" series will explore how the state, school districts, and churches plan to enact measures of accountability and resolution.



Marvella Hern was the only child of Delbert Murphy and Bernett E. Hern, doted on by both her parents in the small Oklahoma town of Lahoma. The north-central Oklahoma farm town, located approximately 150 miles west of Owasso, Okla., was home to a population of less than 200 farmers and families in the 1930s. Founded in 1894 after the 1893 land run into the Cherokee Outlet, Lahoma took its name from the last three syllables of the word "Oklahoma." The Hern's tiny home was filled with a love for their daughter, often reflected in their encouragement and support of her academic achievement.

Cont. A8, **Owasso's Children**

ROSS D. JOHNSON
The Oklahoma Eagle



Portrait of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, president and founder of the Bethune-Cookman College, at Daytona Beach, Florida. Washington, D.C. District of Columbia Washington D.C. Washington D.C. United States, 1943.

PHOTO GORDON PARKS, UNITED STATES NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Trump Cabinet

For Trump, “opportunity zones” are a catch-all for Black key interests

From A3, **Trump Cabinet**

The June 20 event was supposed to have been the day before, but that may have made for bad optics: a re-elect-me rally for a candidate frequently portrayed as anti-Black, center-stage on Juneteenth National Independence Day in a city known nationwide for a White mob’s deadly attack on it as a model of enviable Black economic success.

That may or may not have been a reason why Trump tucked into his 101-minute remarks his decision to add John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park to the U.S. Park Service’s African American Civil Rights Network.

It was also well into his speech that he touted a special reason voters should give him a second term--“opportunity zones,” his pet project for rebuilding long-neglected urban centers by giving tax breaks to builders.

The Trumps, coincidentally, are a builder family. They built their financial fortune several decades ago with the help of a ‘Whites only’ rental policies in the dozens of apartment buildings it owned and operated in New York City. The Justice Department said that violated federal fair housing laws.

And the opportunity zones initiative was integral to Trump’s comprehensive tax-cut program that critics have said

provided opportunities for the richest Americans to become richer at the expense of a big increase in the federal budget deficit.

A Black HUD Secretary

A couple weekends ago, the President-elect announced his nominee for Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in his second administration: Scott Turner, a former two-term state legislator in Texas and nine-year professional football player who directed the opportunity zones project from the White House in Trump’s first administration.

If confirmed by the Senate, Turner would be the only Black member of the incoming cabinet. There also was only one Black person in Trump’s first cabinet, physician Ben Carson, and he, too, served as Secretary of HUD.

The department undoubtedly would not be were it not for a legendary “Black Cabinet” in President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administrations led by Mary McLeod Bethune, and including Robert C. Weaver, HUD’s first secretary and the first Black secretary in a White president’s cabinet when he took charge in 1966.

In the years since, nearly three dozen Black men and women have served in

Presidential cabinets, among them two as Attorney General, two more as Secretary of State, and the current Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin.

Four have been the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (Linda Thomas-Greenfield is the current one). And there have been two Black directors of the Office of Management and Budget, the post now held by Shalanda Young.

They were chosen by presidents of both parties. And the highest of all--often perhaps not viewed as a member of the cabinet, but in there not by choice but by Constitutional decree--is the Vice President of the United States, currently Kamala Harris.

Turner’s nomination to serve in a position whose prominence has been eclipsed by such appointments as those was especially curious to some. The Rev. Al Sharpton, president of the National Action Network, was one.

“I find it a little odd that this seems like the only cabinet position Trump seems to be comfortable with giving to a Black person...as if he thinks public housing is the only topic African Americans know anything about,” Sharpton said the day after Trump announced his selection of Turner.

During the campaign, two of the former President’s most prominent

Black Republican supporters, Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina and Rep. Byron Donalds of Florida, had proffered that “Trump would usher in a new era of economic opportunity for African Americans,” Sharpton said. “So where are the Secretaries of Commerce? And of the Treasury?”

“While I applaud the work at HUD and I applaud the President-elect for finally creating this one Black job, I would also say to him that if he truly meant anything he was saying during the campaign to Black Americans, this single selection is not nearly enough,” Sharpton said.

At the BOK rally, Trump was quite boastful about what he’d done for African Americans.

“I secured record and permanent funding for historically Black colleges and universities,” he said. “We slashed regulations and passed massive tax cuts to give Black workers a pay raise like they’ve never, ever gotten before and lift up Black business.”

The opportunity zones project was “doing incredibly” well, he said. “Countless jobs and \$100 billion of new investment, not government investment, have poured into 9,000 of our most distressed neighborhoods anywhere in the country, 9,000. Never happened

Cont. A7, **Trump Cabinet**



Robert C. Weaver Federal Building is a 10-story office building in Washington, D.C., owned by the federal government of the United States. Completed in 1968, it serves as the headquarters of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Trump Cabinet

McLeod and Weaver, pioneers of political influence and impact

From A6, **Trump Cabinet**

before!”
A New York Times investigation the year before assessed the results differently.

Trump had a penchant for portraying America’s cities “as wastelands, ravaged by crime and homelessness, infested by rats,” the Times reported, yet his administration’s “multibillion-dollar tax-break that is supposed to help low-income areas” had “fueled a wave of developments financed and built for the wealthiest Americans.

“Among the early beneficiaries of the incentive are billionaire financiers...and Mr. Trump’s family members and advisers.”

*

An Early Black Influencer

Twelve years after the Civil War, Mary McLeod Bethune, the 15th of 17 children of Sam and Patsy McLeod, was born in Sumter, S.C., 40 miles or so from Columbia, the state capital.

In the nation’s capital years later, she would be a pioneer Black insider and influencer, a role that Frederick Douglass had played years before.

Hers was a time when there was not yet a Congressional Black Caucus in the Capitol; not yet a Thurgood Marshall, Clarence Thomas or Katanji Brown Jackson across the street on the Supreme Court; and no Barack Obama a couple miles up Pennsylvania Avenue in the White House.

Bethune worked in Roosevelt’s 1932

“
Among the early beneficiaries of the incentive are billionaire financiers... and Mr. Trump’s family members and adviser.

New York Times, investigative report, 2023.

presidential campaign. He won in a landslide, and appointed her to a somewhat lofty government position.

“She was the first Black person ever to head a federal division and at the time was the highest-paid Black person to have worked for the U.S. government,” Noliwe Rooks, an African Studies professor at Brown University, writes in “A Passionate Mind in Relentless Pursuit: The Vision of Mary McLeod Bethune.”

“She was able to use her access to the highest reaches of government to advocate for and form a coalition of leaders comprised of Black employees of the federal government,” Rooks writes.

Robert Weaver

“There is also a real argument to be made that through her various roles in the Roosevelt administration, she had an impact in shifting the Black vote from one that had been reliably assumed by Republicans, given that Abraham Lincoln had been a Republican, to a bulwark for the Democratic Party.”

Robert Weaver was 27 years old and 34 years Bethune’s junior when he came into the Black Cabinet. The HUD secretary to be had been born in Washington, D.C., and was the paternal grandson of Robert Tanner Freeman, the first African American in the nation to graduate from dental school (Harvard, Class of 1869).

Weaver implemented Roosevelt’s New Deal federal housing initiative, crafted to help lower-income Black folks stuck in poor quality dwellings and struggling to

make financial ends meet, but kept out of government housing subsidy programs by local administrators and landlords.

In 1955, he got his first job in a White cabinet when Gov. W. Averell Harriman named him New York State Rent Commissioner, and he returned to Washington six years later to run the U.S. Housing and Home Financing Agency.

President John F. Kennedy, elected in 1960, had pushed to create HUD as a new cabinet department, but an alliance of Republicans and Southern Democrats in Congress stalled that effort.

Johnson, a Texas Democrat who became President after Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 and was elected in his own right in 1964, succeeded in getting the department approved in 1965.

Nowadays, amidst the back and forth over the resumes of Trump’s cabinet choices, Weaver’s ‘fitness’ for the office to which Johnson named him might well be up for vigorous debate. Some perhaps would argue that America’s first Black cabinet secretary and the department virtually tailor-made for him was a mid-20th century DEI deal.

Yet others might just as quickly describe Weaver as ‘overqualified’ for the job—‘twice as good,’ as the elders of his generation admonished many like him they had to be to get what previously were ‘Whites only’ jobs.

Like grandfather, like son, Weaver had followed in Freeman’s Ivy League footsteps, the New York Times noted in its obituary of

Cont. A10, **Trump Cabinet**

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is one of the executive departments of the U.S. federal government. It administers federal housing and urban development laws. It is headed by the secretary of housing and urban development, who reports directly to the president of the United States and is a member of the president’s Cabinet.



THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

People. Narratives. News.

Get 52 weeks for only \$1 per week

Visit theokeyagle.com/subscribe-advertise

The Oklahoma Eagle

www.theokeagle.com

The Oklahoma Eagle

A student of history, Hern developed a respect for Thomas Jefferson, the third U.S. president, statesman, and founder of the University of Virginia. The first female at Enid High to be elected president of the student body, Hern charted an academic course which she hoped would lead her to study at the Charlottesville, Virginia campus upon graduation.

“Women need not apply,” the university said in 1951, denying Hern an opportunity earned, an acknowledgement of her earnestness, a dream held at a distance for no greater rationale than her gender.

The small-town daughter of Oklahoma instead attended Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Okla. In 1951, she defeated her future husband, Birch Bayh, in a national “outstanding young orator” competition sponsored by the National Farm Bureau. She completed her degree in education at Indiana University in 1960.

Hern’s life, her childhood experiences of trials and accomplishments and the academic achievements of young women in general were often subjects of conversation with her husband, Bayh. He served as the U.S. senator from Indiana from 1963 - 81.

“My father thought it was just an injustice that my mother hadn’t gotten to attend Virginia,” Evan Bayh said. “He would say, ‘It ought to be based on merit and character. We ought to try to level the playing field in life.’”

Most young women seeking degree-specific programs at UVA suffered the same kind of discrimination that Marvella experienced. Mary-Cooke Branch Munford, an advocate of woman suffrage and interracial cooperation, lobbied the university to establish a co-ordinate women’s college in 1910. Munford’s effort, although endorsed by UVA faculty, would fail to pass the Virginia legislature in 1911.

The university would reluctantly evolve its gender discrimination policies throughout the decades that followed. It first established a co-ordinate women’s college 70 miles away from the main campus (Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia). Later it limited disciplines of study (Education and Nursing); and enrollment in the College of Arts & Sciences, until full coeducation in the fall of 1972.

Sen. Bayh authored Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1965, a landmark federal civil rights law in the United States that was enacted as part (Title IX) of the Education Amendments of 1972. The statute prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or any other education program that receives funding from the federal government. Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 possessed an explicit prohibition against gender discrimination in higher education, an update to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned several forms of discrimination in employment, but did not address discrimination in education.

Title IX protections provided little to no guard against the sexual advancements by predacious educators, taunts by peers, threats of violence, physical attacks by students and failed reporting at Owasso High School officials (Owasso, Okla.) during the last several years, according to a U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) investigation report published on Wednesday, Nov. 13.

OCR’s findings were explicit, highlighting that the Owasso school district “violated the operative Title

IX regulations” by: (1) failing to respond to notices that students, including Student A [The student’s name was redacted. An assumed reference to Nex Benedict], were subjected to sexual harassment; (2) not adopting a grievance process that contains the basic requirements; and (3) not fulfilling the District’s Title IX recordkeeping obligations.

The accountable

Owasso Public Schools parents appear to maintain an active trust of school officials, educators and staff.

Concerns about school curriculum, academic performance, environment and child safety possess equal weight and significance, no one greater than the other, as parents understand that a highly functional institution employs policies and people committed to their child’s future success.

Their active trust is realized through inquiries about the academic performance and safety of sons and daughters.

The Owasso Public Schools district’s superintendent was the champion of the interests of parents and guardians.

The superintendent’s role was to ensure an environment of free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

OPS consists of 13 schools, including ten elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school—Owasso High School (the High School). In the 2023–2024 school year, the District enrolled 9,802 students, including 2,986 students at the High School.

If a parent or guardian inquired about which OPS officials were responsible for fielding complaints and advancing investigations into alleged sexual harassment or assault, a prompt and explicit response was expected.

The school district, according to OCR’s Resolution Letter, “has two dedicated staff members who are responsible for coordinating the District’s obligations under Title IX: the Title IX Coordinator and the Title IX Investigator.”

The identities of those OPS Title IX dedicated resources were not explicitly offered in the Resolution Letter, however, their administrative roles were specified.

Owasso informed OCR that its Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning served as the Title IX Coordinator and its Director of Human Resources (HR Director) as the Title IX Investigator.

Lacking “confidence” in his ability to properly determine “whether a matter implicates Title IX,” the Coordinator (Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning) informed OCR that he relies upon consultation with an “outside attorney.”

OCR’s investigation revealed no specific expertise of the “outside attorney.” Nor did it indicate whether the noted legal consultation was limited to a single attorney, if the advice given was subject to additional scrutiny, or if the legal professional(s) served the district in other related capacities.

The Title IX Coordinator indicated that he “perceived” the outside attorney “as an expert when issues arise that may constitute sex discrimination, including sexual harassment.”

OPS Title IX officials, according to OCR, and interview responses, were not consistently clear about their assigned roles of protection and policy enforcement. The HR Director, contrary to provided data responses and interviews with the OPS Superintendent, “maintained” that she is not the Title IX Investigator, and further, that the role does not exist in the OPS District, although she “served in that capacity in one of the District’s two Title IX investigations.”

A broader uncertainty about Title IX roles was revealed through interviews with multiple district staff members, who shared that they could not identify the Title IX Coordinator, although they participated in annual Title IX training from the district.

What is clear is that the OPS district maintains two governing policies, Policy 1.22

(grievance procedures) and 1.45 (“Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation”). The policies explicitly define and prohibit sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliatory actions. Should school districts find themselves challenged by the defined scope of sexual harassment, Policy 1.22 further notes that it “may occur between persons of the same gender or sex.”

The Investigations

Kelley Robinson, president of the Washington-DC based Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) civil rights organization, petitioned to begin an investigation “on the circumstances leading to the death of Nex Benedict,” on February 8, 2024.

The Oklahoma Eagle, in response to a summary report issued by the Oklahoma Medical Examiner, published an analysis describing the circumstances of Benedict’s death as “the person for whom so much love was shared, endured years of bullying, torment, public ridicule, state-backed efforts to restrict their narratives from being shared, fear mongering, and a general culture of hate.” The Eagle’s reporting, beyond news analysis, offered readers insight into the Oklahoma 2Spirit communities, explored the unanswered questions surrounding Benedict’s death, and the state’s challenging socio-political culture.

OCR’s investigation surfaced concerns about how OPS responded to the circumstances surrounding Benedict and the district’s Title IX general practices. For parents and guardians of OPS district students, as well as HRC, the revelations were far less surprising, but more a validation of suspected failed practices.

OPS policies and procedures, according to OCR’s report, failed “to contain the basic requirements of a grievance process for complaints of sexual harassment as required under the 2020 Title IX regulations.”

The identity of the OPS district school, students, staff and faculty noted in the OCR investigation report were appropriately redacted, given the age of students and due process afforded to those accused of wrongdoing.

“This incident does not reach the threshold required to constitute a Title IX violation,” read OPS’s formal Title IX determination on June 6, 2024. Specifying a lack of witnesses to corroborate the allegations of harassment by Student H (male) against Student I (male), OPS’s decision only offered the student’s parents a right to appeal its decision.

“Fag,” “faggot,” and “little bitch,” as alleged by

Owasso’s Children

LIFE BEFORE TITLE IX

The landmark federal civil rights law that prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or any other education program that receives funding from the federal government.

From A5, **Owasso’s Children**



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Cont. A9, **Owasso’s Children**

Owasso's Children

“

THIS INCIDENT DOES NOT REACH THE THRESHOLD REQUIRED TO CONSTITUTE A TITLE IX VIOLATION

From A8, **Owasso's Children**

Student H, and attested to by Student H's mother, were a routine litany of verbal assaults throughout the course of the school year.

The Superintendent, during the OCR investigation, characterized the alleged conduct of Student I as a “bantering statement”, reducing the matter to a he-said/she-said allegation.

Student H, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, was initially moved to another class, following the out-of-school suspension of Student I, a decision made by the school's Assistant Principal (Assistant Principal A).

Any rapport established between Student I and the class educator, classmates, or adopted instruction pace for the course, shifted. The decision by Principal A to remove Student H from their class may have been perceived as constructive, but the impact of such decisions may also possess a compounding affect, whereas both the accuser and accused must be subject to corrective action.

Voicing her concerns before the OPS school board, and during a least one discussion shared with the Superintendent, Student H's mother was a vocal champion of her son's sense of safety and wellbeing. A central point of her frustrations was that uprooting Student H from class did not serve as an end to their family's trial, describing the act as “victim shaming.”

The District's final Title IX determination was not simply limited to the scope of alleged harassment and justification of the Assistant Principal's suspension order. District officials also assumed a posture of assessing the emotional impact of the alleged incidents to Student H and their mother.

“Student H was less affected by the alleged conduct than his mother,” asserted the District's final Title IX determination.

Offering no objective evidence to qualify the assertion, or independent support services for Student H or their family to properly assess the full impact of the alleged incidents, the District regarded a mother's plight for a just outcome as sufficient justification to center her as the most aggrieved.

The intent of the District, by shifting the focus towards Student H's mother, was not made clear in the final determination, although doing so now broadens the narrative and effectively draws attention away from the fear described by the reporting student, the uncertainty of potential retaliation and the sense of social isolation.

Reported sexual harassment bullying was not uncommon within the Owasso Public School district, as revealed in 60 reported incidents during the 2021–22, 2022–23,

and 2023–24 school years. During this period reports varied in application, however, the sexual nature of each was consistent, included:

- Grooming of a high school student (Student O) by a teacher (Teacher D);
- Verbal sexual harassment of an elementary school student (Student F) by a classmate (referencing an act of sodomy);
- Verbal sexual harassment and the physical assault of an elementary student at school and on the bus (Student E);
- Verbal sexual harassment and the physical assault of an elementary student (Student D) that led to the student missing school and altering their daily routine to avoid further bullying;

Of the 60 reported incidents through the District's “Stop Bullying” platform, 24 were identified conduct that “could constitute sexual harassment,” according to OCR.

Although the Owasso Public Schools “Stop Bullying” website landing page defines what constitutes bullying, and provides guidance for reporting incidences, no information is immediately available that clearly offers parents/guardians insight into the investigative process, factors considered by Title IX staff or when they should expect a decision from district officials (Superintendent).

While the mechanism for reporting bullying is available, parents/guardians must rely upon Title IX staff for timely and substantive engagement, accurate record-keeping, information sharing and fostering a culture of accountability.

The District's frequent breaks in process, lack of clarity of staff roles, and poor transparency were consistent themes throughout the OCR investigation report. OPS staff, when engaged by the Department of Education, seldom provided the full spectrum of documentation, from initial report to Title IX artifacts. Instead, staff often admitted possessing a partial memory of events, some available documentation, and/or no record of fully insightful discussions with parents/guardians.

A persistent lack of recall by the District's Title IX Coordinator was a common response to OCR inquiries about the 24 reported incidents. When asked if reports filed after assuming his role, on July 1, 2022, were assessed for potential Title IX issues, the Coordinator could not recall “any of the reports or whether those steps were taken.”

When asked by OCR to provide all documents related to bullying reports noted earlier (Students D, Student E and Student F), OPS advised that no documentation was available for the report related to Student F.



OPS diligence for Student D and Student E was limited to a building level investigation, employing no formal Title IX approach. The District acknowledged that it documented its inability to substantiate the allegations of Student D, and that no supportive measures were advanced. For parents/guardians of Student D the District's records show no indication that the process for filing a Title IX complaint were explained, thus the alternate course to address their child's allegations, if not known, was untapped.

For Student E, the District did substantiate their allegation, finding that “Bullying or Harassment was verified,” however, sexual harassment was not formally determined. Although the student found to have harassed Student E was suspended, received counseling, a student contract and a change in class schedule, the District's records reflect the same failure to inform their parents/guardians about the Title IX complaint process.

Beyond the incidents detailed by OCR, a daily fear of sexual harassment and assault was candidly shared by Alice Hartzke, 13, an Owasso 8th Grade Center student.

“I just try to ignore them... I do as much as I can to try to stop them. I tell them to just leave them alone,” Hartzke said during an interview with 2 News Oklahoma in September 2024, months after the Nex Benedict suicide.

Frustrated by the District's response to his complaints, Adam, April's dad, reached out to 2 News Oklahoma twice this year, in hope of shedding light on a culture that torments young children of Owasso.

“They have people telling their clique the suicide squad because, according to these kids, that's exactly what my daughter and her friends need to do,” said Adam,

The school's response to April was similar to OPS Superintendent's characterization of reported verbal harassment incidents documented by OCR, dismissive. “Then

they call your daughter into the office and tell her they can't control what the students in that building say and that she would be better off ignoring it,” said Adam.

The Hartzke family, and those identified in the OCR report, sought more than the suspension of offending students or media attention.

Parents and guardians of Oklahoma's children, and Owasso Public Schools students, invest a profound trust in staff and administration, to create a safe environment for learning. When that trust is broken, by repeated failures to protect against sexual harassment and violent assaults, they must live with the daily uncertainty of returning home.

Suspension is only one step in the process of accountability.

OPS administrators and staff are further accountable to students, who innocently pursue their education, discover identity and build lasting relationships that help shape their futures.

The Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights investigation report reveals what may objectively be described as systemic OPS failures. Accountability, and most significantly, corrective actions, are a concern that fully occupies the minds and hearts of parents, guardians and students throughout the District.

OCR has proposed, and the District has entered into, a Voluntary Resolution Agreement, to address policy and personnel failures, and will be the subject of diligent reporting in the next part of The Oklahoma Eagle's “The Children of Oklahoma” series.

Ross D. Johnson. Is Impassioned by the written and visual narratives of Black communities. A lifetime East Coaster driving beneath the Oklahoma sky.



Trump Cabinet

“Urban” was the new “Black” in public discourse

From A7, **Trump Cabinet**

Weaver in 1997.

“When Dr. Weaver joined the Kennedy Administration, whose Harvard connections extended to the occupant of the Oval Office, he held more Harvard degrees—three, including a doctorate in economics—than anyone else in the administration’s upper ranks.”

*

Weaver’s target constituency as a secretary in Johnson’s cabinet was more or less the same constituency he had three decades earlier as a member of Roosevelt’s Black Cabinet.

Even more so than before, it seemed, Black people were concentrated in cities to which they’d migrated in mass for better jobs and better lives in better housing.

“Urban” was the new “Black” in public discourse, as well as public policy. A house, especially if close to a good job, was not just a home. It also could be a way to begin building family wealth. HUD was there to help.

Many mortgage lenders and local housing administrators all too often decided who to help based not on paycheck stubs, credit scores and the like. Color of skin was made a more determining factor than it was supposed to be.

On April 11, 1968, one week to the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered in Memphis, President Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act into law.

Five years later, Donald Trump made his debut on the front page of the New York

Times. The Justice Department had sued him, his father and the Trump Management Corporation for violating that law in the massive apartment complexes it built, owned and operated in Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island.

“The government contended that Trump Management had refused to rent or negotiate rentals ‘because of race and color.’ It also charged that the company had required different rental terms and conditions because of race and that it had misrepresented to Blacks that apartments were not available,” the Times reported.

The future President’s “response to the lawsuit can be seen as presaging his handling of subsequent challenges, in business and in politics,” the Times reported during Trump’s campaign in 2016.

“He turned the lawsuit into a protracted battle, complete with angry denials, character assassination, charges that the government was trying to force him to rent to ‘welfare recipients’ and a \$100 million countersuit accusing the Justice Department of defamation.

“When it was over, Mr. Trump declared victory, emphasizing that the consent decree he ultimately signed did not include an admission of guilt.”

*

Turner was the White House point person for opportunity zones, working hand in hand with then HUD Secretary Carson.

Two years after Trump left office, JPI, a major home building company with headquarters in California and Texas, both states where Turner has lived and worked, announced that it had hired him as its chief visionary officer, or “CVO” in corporate-speak.

Turner would be “responsible for creating and implementing a comprehensive strategic vision to drive the company’s growth and expansion” and “establishing and maintaining strong relationships with local, state and federal entities,” the company said.

Late last year, Tokyo-based Sumitomo Forestry America acquired JPI, which it described as “the #1 fastest-growing developer and #2 fastest-growing builder in the U.S....providing a broad spectrum of multifamily housing choices spanning affordable, workforce, and market-rate residences.”

Project 2025

Project 2025, the veritable conservative



Swearing in of Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Robert C. Weaver in the Fish Room of the White House, 1966. Lyndon Johnson at right. PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

agenda for a new administration, recommends a new role for the HUD secretary, including “oversight of foreign ownership of real estate in both rental and ownership markets of single-family and multifamily housing with trillions worth of real estate secured across HUD’s portfolio.’”

One of the more impactful threats to the economic resurgence and expanded housing opportunities that Trump argues are products of the opportunity zones is his own pledge to deport millions of immigrants.

“In the long run, immigrants are the solution to the housing crisis. Without immigrants you can’t increase the supply of housing,” University of Pennsylvania immigration studies professor Exequiel Hernandez told the New York Times.

Mass deportations “could actually backfire and make the housing crisis worse,” the Times reported in October. “Foreign-born workers make up a quarter of the construction labor force, and they are especially concentrated in trades like plastering, hanging drywall and roofing.

“Across many booming housing markets, particularly in the South, the recent flow of migrants has helped residential builders meet demand for both skilled trades and relatively unskilled laborers, industry groups say and job markets suggest.”

The Federal Transition Project, as

Project 2025 also is termed, calls for an immediate “redelegation” of HUD’s authority to “a cadre of political appointees, and a “broad reversal” of “corrosive ideologies across the department’s programs.”

It would be “reform, reinvention and renewal” by way of an “action plan across people and policy” that “transfers Department functions to separate federal agencies, states and localities,” writes its author, Ben Carson, the HUD secretary in Trump’s first administration.

“HUD’s new political leadership team will need to reexamine the federal government’s role in housing markets across the nation and consider whether it is time for a “reform, reinvention and renewal” that transfers “department functions to separate federal agencies, states and localities,” Carson asserted.

A priority for the next secretary, should be to “reverse HUD’s mission creep over nearly a century of program implementation dating from the Department’s New Deal forebears.”

Chief among those forebears, of course, was Robert Weaver, HUD’s founding secretary, who began it all when he joined Mary McLeod Bethune and the others in that Black Cabinet, 90 years ago.

Milton Coleman, formerly Deputy Managing Editor at The Washington Post, is a contributor to The Oklahoma Eagle.

“**HUD’s new political leadership team will need to reexamine the federal government’s role in housing markets across the nation.**”

Ben Carson, HUD secretary in Trump’s first administration



THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE People. Narratives. News.

Get 52 weeks for only \$1 per week

Visit theokeagle.com/subscribe-advertise

The Oklahoma Eagle

www.theokeagle.com



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

School Board

Tulsa-area school board incumbents largely reelected by default, some races contested

TRISTAN LOVELESS
NonDoc

The majority of Tulsa County's school board elections concluded Wednesday with only one candidate filing for office, and one school board seat had no candidates file. While board elections in the county saw few challenges, two of the seven seats on Tulsa Public Schools board are up in 2025, and both drew multiple candidates.

Additionally, one Tulsa Tech board seat and one Broken Arrow Public Schools board seat drew challengers. In Collinsville, no candidates filed to run for an open school board seat, meaning existing board members will appoint someone to fill the vacancy in 2025.

Calvin Moniz, who won a special election last year, announced his reelection campaign for TPS District 2 last month with a press release.

"It has been a privilege to serve the families of District 2 and work alongside Superintendent Dr. Ebony Johnson, whose leadership has fostered meaningful dialogue between the board and our community," Moniz said. "Together, we have made progress, but there is more to do to ensure that every student in Tulsa Public Schools, regardless of their background, receives the education they deserve."

Moniz drew a challenge from Khadija Goz, 39, a delegate to the 2024 Democratic National Convention and an active volunteer for the Tulsa County Democratic Party. She is also an organist and the music director for Church of the Madelene Roman Catholic Church.

Moniz and Goz will bypass the Feb. 11 election date and advance directly to the April Fools Day election since only two candidates filed for the office.

Jennette Marshall, who has served on Tulsa's school board representing District

3 since 2016, did not file for reelection next year. Marshall generated controversy when she joined a suit alongside fellow board member E'Lena Ashley against the rest of the board in December 2023. Four candidates — Dorie Simmons, 50, Kyra Carby, 39, Brandi Joseph, 49, and Eartha McAlester, 46 — filed to run for Marshall's open board seat. With more than two candidates filing, the primary election will occur Feb. 11. If no candidate reaches a majority in February, the top two candidates will advance to an April runoff.

Simmons works as a real estate agent for McGrawRealtors. According to her LinkedIn, Carby is a Muscogee educator and community organizer. She has worked as the community engagement manager for Tulsa's Gathering Place and the Guthrie Green. She serves as the City of Tulsa's community genealogy grant coordinator, a position in charge of administering a federal grant to fund genealogical research related to the Tulsa Race Massacre.

Joseph appears to have little online presence. McAlester has worked as a teacher and paraprofessional in schools around Tulsa.

In the Union Public Schools District 5 race, incumbent Steve Nguyen automatically won election to a full five-year term after he was appointed to replace Ken Kinnear in June. UPS includes parts of Tulsa and Broken Arrow, but it is a separate district from Tulsa Public Schools and Broken Arrow Public Schools.

Rick Kibbe, Todd Blackburn file for Tulsa Tech Board, Armstrong unopposed

Two members of the seven-member board of education for Tulsa Tech are also up for reelection in 2025, with District 2's incumbent Rick Kibbe, 66, facing a challenge from Todd Blackburn, 51.

Kibbe was Catoosa Public Schools'

Cont. A12, School Board

SAM Levrault Media

MY LOVE LANGUAGE is MUSIC

SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA
DIGITAL CONTENT CREATOR AND STORYTELLER, BELIEVES THAT ALL ANIMALS DESERVE THE LOVE AND CARE THAT WE'RE ALL CAPABLE OF SHARING. LEVRAULT IS THE PROUD SPONSOR OF THE "LOVE LANGUAGE" CAMPAIGN.

SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA
DIGITAL CONTENT CREATOR & STORYTELLER
W: LEVSAM.COM
E: SAM@LEVSAM.COM

School Board

Broken Arrow, D-5, contested

From A11

superintendent from 2007 to 2017. He lost a 2016 Republican primary campaign to represent Oklahoma House District 8 to Rep. Tom Gann (R-Inola). According to the Tulsa World, Kibbe started his teaching career in 1980, entered the administrative side in 1988 and got his first superintendent gig in 1996. In addition to serving on the board, he was the interim superintendent for Anderson School, a dependent school district in Sand Springs, for the 2022-2023 school year.

Blackburn is the CEO and president of Techsico, a Tulsa-based technology company. He also lost an Oklahoma House campaign running as a Republican. In 2018, he campaigned for House District 77 and lost the general election to Rep. John Waldron (D-Tulsa).

In District 1, Ray Owens was elected earlier this year, but he resigned Sept. 23. In November, Phil Armstrong was appointed to replace Owens. He won the rest of Owens' term by default Wednesday, as no candidate filed to run against him.

Other county school board candidates largely unopposed, Collinsville sees no filers

In Tulsa County, Berryhill, Bixby, Broken Arrow, Collinsville, Glenpool, Jenks, Keystone, Liberty, Owasso, Sand Springs, Skiatook and Sperry Public Schools were scheduled to hold school board elections next year, but at the conclusion of candidate filing Wednesday evening, only one seat outside of TPS drew a challenger, and no candidate filed to run for the open Collinsville board seat.

When no candidate files for an open school board race, Oklahoma statutes authorize the board to appoint someone living anywhere in the school district for the duration of the term. Members of the Collinsville Public Schools Board of Education will appoint someone for the five-year board term next year.

In the only contested school board race outside of TPS, Broken Arrow Public Schools District 5 incumbent Jerry Denton, 59, drew two challengers as he seeks another five-year term. Bruce Allen Lamont, 46, and Kate Williams, 40, both filed for the seat, setting the BAPS primary for Feb. 11. Lamont appears to be an IT director at a trucking company, while Williams was an



Broken Arrow High School, serves students in grades 10-12 through a number of academic and extracurricular course offerings. Known as the largest high school in the state, the BAHS campus consists of instructional classrooms; high-tech science labs; fine arts spaces; athletic complexes; a state-of-the-art media center; an engaging student union; and a spirit store for students, staff and community members.

adjunct English professor at the University of Tulsa who currently owns a ghostwriting company.

Candidates filing for other Tulsa County school board elections who ran unopposed are:

- In Berryhill's Office 5, Dusty Hutchinson, 39, filed to run unopposed for the five-year term. Incumbent Patty Lawson did not file for reelection;
- In Bixby's Office 5, Pablo Aguirre, 40, filed to run unopposed for the five-year term. Incumbent Tristy Fryer

did not file for reelection;

- In Glenpool's Office 5, Amber Lieser filed to run unopposed for another five-year term;
- In Glenpool's Office 2, Michael Rhine filed unopposed to finish the two-year term he was appointed to in February;
- In Jenks' Office 5, board president Chuck Forbes filed to run unopposed for another five-year term;
- In Keystone's Office 2, board president Clayton Biggerstaff filed to run unopposed for

another three-year term;

- In Liberty's Office 5, Brent Hickerson, 43, filed to run unopposed for a five-year term;
- In Owasso's Office 5, board president Frosty Turpen filed to run unopposed for another five-year term;
- In Sand Springs' Office 5, Alesha Spoon, 38, filed to run unopposed for a five-year term. Incumbent Jackie Wagnon, who has served on the board since 2011, did not file for reelection;
- In Skiatook's Office 5, Aleen

Joy McLain, 54, filed to run unopposed for another five-year term; and

- In Sperry's Office 5, Johnny Holmes, 45, filed to run unopposed for another five-year term.

Owasso, Sand Springs city council candidates file

Voters in Owasso's Ward 5 will fill an open City Council election after incumbent Doug Bonebrake declined to file for reelection. Chad Balthrop, 52, and Brandon Shreffler, 43, both filed to replace him. In Owasso's Ward 1, Cody Walter, 31, won election by default. He was appointed to the seat earlier this year.

Balthrop, a pastor and chairman-elect of the Owasso Chamber of Commerce, announced his campaign in a Facebook video Sunday. Shreffler is a Navy veteran who unsuccessfully ran for Ward 4 of the Owasso Public Schools Board in April.

In Owasso, the council races are non-partisan, a runoff is required if no candidate receives a majority, and candidates are required to reside in the district they represent.

In Sand Springs, neither incumbent Cody Worrell (Ward 1) nor Matthew Barnett (Ward 2) drew a challenger, so they were elected by default.

Sand Springs city councilors are non-partisan. For those elections, a runoff is required if no candidate receives a majority, candidates are required to reside in the district they represent and they must be at least 25-years old at the time of filing.

Neither Owasso's nor Sand Springs' city charters contain freeholder requirements deterring potential candidates.

Tristan Loveless is a NonDoc Media reporter covering legal matters and other civic issues in the Tulsa area. A citizen of the Cherokee Nation who grew up in Turley and Skiatook, he graduated from the University of Tulsa College of Law in 2023. Before that, he taught for the Tulsa Debate League in Tulsa Public Schools.

MY LOVE LANGUAGE is TRICKS

SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA, A TULSA-BASED DIGITAL CONTENT CREATOR AND STORYTELLER, BELIEVES THAT ALL ANIMALS DESERVE THE LOVE AND CARE THAT WE'RE ALL CAPABLE OF SHARING. LEVRAULT IS THE PROUD SPONSOR OF THE "LOVE LANGUAGE" CAMPAIGN.

SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA
DIGITAL CONTENT CREATOR & STORYTELLER
W: LEVSAM.COM
E: SAM@LEVSAM.COM



SAM
Levrault
Media



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Rent-to-Buy

Rent-To-Buy Company Has Big State Investment, Limited Customer Options

PAUL MONIES
Oklahoma Watch

Michelle Houston was in a bind. After six months of living in cramped quarters with her parents, she needed to quickly find a home for her five children, husband and three dogs, but didn't qualify for a mortgage and had trouble renting after previous eviction notices.

Then she heard about Berry-Rock Homes. They would let her pick out a home in Midwest City, buy it on her behalf, let her pay rent and give her an option to buy. She had her mother put down a nonrefundable option fee of \$11,550, money she described as a pre-inheritance from her parents. Along the way, Houston thought she could build up enough in monthly payments to buy the home herself after two years.

More than a year later, Houston and her husband, Cornelius, spend almost all their monthly income on housing. They've spent hundreds on repairs, had their gas service shut off for nonpayment and been taken to eviction court because they got behind on the monthly payments.

"We love our house," Houston said. "We want to be able to keep our house. But I think we're still on a path of failure here."

Berry-Rock Homes is one of several lease-option companies filling a gap between landlords and regular mortgage lenders. But there's a twist: One of its biggest investors is the state of Oklahoma, which put in \$8 million in 2022. As lawmakers push affordable housing programs to the forefront, the state also benefits from what critics call predatory lending.

Property records show an LLC formed by Nick Berry, one of the founders of Berry-Rock, bought the Houstons' Midwest City home in May 2023 for \$165,000. Houston and her husband signed rental and lease-option documents in June 2023. She shared copies of the documents with Oklahoma Watch.

Houston said she never met Berry in person and the documents were electronically signed over a series of emails. The option to purchase said the Houstons put down an \$11,550 nonrefundable option fee and had the right to buy the home for \$163,350 by June 2025. The Houstons receive a monthly option credit fee of \$165 for each month they pay the rent on time. Rent was \$1,900 per month for the four-bedroom, two-bath house near Midwest City High School.

The Houstons' Midwest City home is

owned by a limited liability company that has the same name as the address. It's one of more than 600 similarly named LLCs named after single-family homes in Oklahoma registered by either Berry or Cameron Rock, the founders of Berry-Rock Homes.

Investment Came Through Land Office

The state made its investment in Berry-Rock through the Commissioners of the Land Office, which manages a \$2.7 billion fund in state land, oil and gas leases and commercial properties for the benefit of public education. The five-person commission comprises some of the state's top elected officials, including the governor, lieutenant governor, auditor and superintendent of public instruction. It distributed \$145.1 million to schools, colleges and universities in fiscal year 2024.

The Land Office invested \$8 million in Berry-Rock OK LP in 2022. It gets a steady 11% return each year on the investment. But some lawmakers have questioned whether the investment was structured more like a loan. In a legislative hearing in June 2023, they peppered Land Office officials with questions about the investment.

"Have we invested in a capital real estate company?" asked Sen. Michael

Brooks, D-Oklahoma City. "That 11% has got to be guaranteed and have we now just made a loan, not an investment?"

Land Office officials said their legal analysis showed Berry-Rock qualified as an investment in securities and the agency has an ownership stake in the partnership.

"So Berry-Rock was an existing entity," Bennett Abbott, the agency's general counsel, told lawmakers. "But the vehicle we invested in was a new entity."

The Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency, which issued a broader report on the Land Office last year, said it could not obtain financial statements about the agency's Berry-Rock investment.

An investment manager who examined the partnership agreement for Oklahoma Watch said it looked like a blind pool. As such, it would be hard to verify much about the investment, including how much money was invested in total, how it was invested or what fees were incurred. The state's contract with Berry-Rock makes the Land Office a limited partner in the investment.

"The partners desire to form the limited partnership for the purpose of investing in real estate operations," the partnership agreement states. It does not

Cont. A14, Rent-to-Buy



PHOTO PAUL MONIES/OKLAHOMA WATCH

The Oklahoma Commissioners of the Land Office invested \$8 million in 2022 in Berry-Rock, a rent-to-buy company. Shown is one of their homes in Midwest City on Nov. 14, 2024.

Rent-to-Buy

For tenants, lease-option contracts may require unforeseen expenses that exceed income

From A13

list any details about what type of real estate would qualify.

Berry-Rock Portfolio

The Land Office pays Oklahoma City-based Buchanan Capital Management LLC \$28,000 per year to manage the Berry-Rock investment. Separately, the agency pays \$12,600 for an annual net asset valuation of its Berry-Rock investment. The latest valuation, for fiscal year 2023, estimates the fair value of the investment between \$7.4 million and \$7.8 million. It said Berry-Rock's portfolio consisted of 696 single-family homes in Oklahoma and Missouri.

Berry-Rock spent \$11.8 million to add 53 new properties in the second quarter of 2024, according to an investment update provided to the Land Office at the end of July. It sold 30 properties valued at \$6.2 million during the same time period. Berry-Rock operates a single-family home portfolio valued at \$145.5 million.

In an interview, Berry said Berry-Rock doesn't do any direct consumer marketing, preferring to get clients via referrals from real estate brokers or loan officers. The company buys houses valued at between \$100,000 and \$1 million on behalf of customers. Many of its customers are salespeople or real estate agents who don't have predictable incomes that would satisfy the requirements for a traditional mortgage, he said.

"It's not like we're going out and advertising, trying to find suckers with yard signs or something goofy," Berry said. "We are literally working through a referral network of licensed Realtors and agents that they themselves could get in trouble if they're referring folks to something that's not proper."

Berry-Rock recently qualified for a local incentive from Oklahoma City to build a \$23 million office building at NE 5 and Walnut. The company teamed up with Prism Bank for a 60,000-square-foot building. The project qualified for a tax-increment financing district incentive worth \$3.14 million.

Berry said the money for the new office building is separate from the investment pool partnership for Berry-Rock Homes.

“We very rarely come out ahead or break even when we get a property back,” Berry said. “We didn’t pick them out, and we are buying them at market rates. We absolutely work with folks on payment plans if they get behind. We want them to be successful.”

Nick Berry, co-founder, Berry-Rock Homes

Federal Agency Studies Alternative Housing Contracts

Lease-option contracts and contract-for-deed sales have been around for generations. Before federal fair housing laws were enacted in the 1960s, they were frequent options for Black families who had been turned away from banks because of restrictive mortgage lending and redlining, the discriminatory practice of denying loans to minority groups.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau issued a report in August on contract-for-deed sales and their effects on the housing market. It said they can perpetuate substandard housing stock, inflate home prices and translate into less access to mainstream mortgage credit.

"Because forfeiture provisions allow lenders to reclaim the home and retain the borrower's payments and the value of any repairs, sellers or investors can profit from borrowers' inability to sustain homeownership under contracts for deed," the report said.

Berry said there are bad actors in the contract-for-deed and lease-option sectors, but Berry-Rock isn't one of them. He said the last thing the company wants is to take back a house from a tenant with an option to buy. More than 80% of Berry-Rock's customers are able to buy their homes during an option period, he said.

"We very rarely come out ahead or break even when we get a property back," Berry said. "We didn't pick them out, and we are buying them at market rates. We absolutely work with folks on payment plans if they get behind. We want them to be successful."

In recent years, Oklahoma lawmakers have focused on incentives for homebuilders to build affordable homes in cities and rural areas. The \$215 million Oklahoma Housing Stability Program included \$100 million for no-interest loans to homebuilders investing in affordable housing. The program provided \$63 million to build affordable apartments and home rentals, as well as down payment and closing-cost assistance. But legislation to enhance protections for renters stalled in the 2024 session.

'Set Up For Failure'

Houston said she assumed Berry Rock would offer her credit counseling or personal financial classes to be able to work toward buying the home. But none of that was forthcoming.

"I feel like from the get-go, we were set up for failure," Houston said.

By October 2023, Berry-Rock had filed an eviction notice in small claims court in Oklahoma County that showed the Houstons owed \$4,005 in back rent. Houston said she lost her job, and her husband's salary alone wasn't enough to cover the rent or other expenses.

"Before we went to the eviction court, we were trying to, in good faith, get back onto a good pattern with them, pay late fees off, and to hopefully get to a point to where we were a payment ahead so that we weren't falling behind every month," Houston said. "So financially, that's what we were trying to be smart about."

The Houstons also had to deal with high water bills stemming from leaky toilets. Under the contract, they were on the hook for repairs. That pushed them further behind, Houston said.

"In their agreement, it says that can't come out of the rental payments either," Houston said. "We are responsible for all damages and repairs, even if it's just maintenance issues. So we ended up having to get the money together to buy new toilets and have somebody come out here and install these toilets for us because me and my husband, we're not plumbers. We don't know how to do that."

Houston said she feels guilty for putting her family in what now looks like a no-win situation.

"I feel like something's really off here, and I don't know what, I can't put my thumb on it," Houston said. "I just know that I feel like the victim over here that was dumb enough to fall for this. They have targeted poor families that have the dream of owning a home and don't want to continue to have to pay these high rent prices."

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

MY LOVE LANGUAGE is ICE CREAM

SAM Levrault Media

SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA, A TULSA-BASED DIGITAL CONTENT CREATOR AND STORYTELLER, BELIEVES THAT ALL ANIMALS DESERVE THE LOVE AND CARE THAT WE'RE ALL CAPABLE OF SHARING. LEVRAULT IS THE PROUD SPONSOR OF THE "LOVE LANGUAGE" CAMPAIGN.

SAM LEVRAULT MEDIA
DIGITAL CONTENT CREATOR & STORYTELLER
W: LEVSAM.COM
E: SAM@LEVSAM.COM

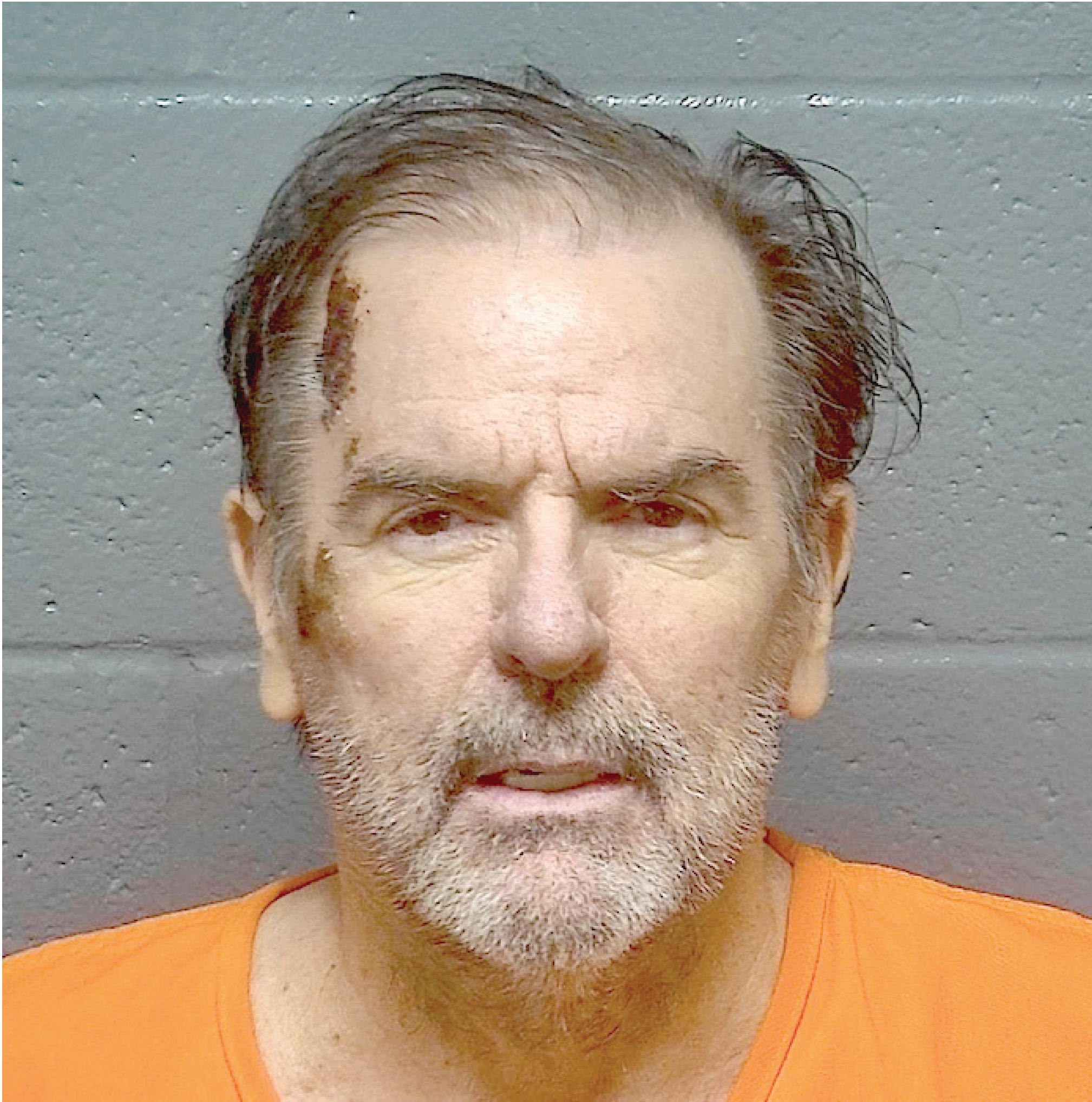


PHOTO NONDOC

Edmond resident Ross Norwood was booked into the Oklahoma County Jail shortly after midnight Wednesday, Sept. 4, 2024. In an episode of psychosis, Norwood lit his house on and was shot by a responding Edmond Police Department officer.

Systemic Failure

‘Systemic failure’: Edmond residents sought help for Ross Norwood weeks before police shooting

BLAKE DOUGLAS
NonDoc

In the days leading up to a fateful encounter with local law enforcement, Edmond resident Ross Norwood methodically tore the carpet out of his home and piled it on his porch. Late on Sept. 3, he lit the stack ablaze in the midst of a psychotic episode that had been percolating for days, prefaced by hundreds of disturbing social media posts and erratic behavior that frightened his neighbors and spurred calls for help. Shortly before midnight, Edmond Police Department Sgt. Nathan Fountain responded to the fiery scene and shot the incoherent Norwood, believing the grill lighters used to start the porch blaze were knives.

For at least two weeks before the non-fatal shooting — which occurred at least 30 seconds before Fountain remembered to turn on his body-worn camera — neighbors raised repeated red flags regarding Norwood’s mental health, calling 911 to request multiple welfare checks and some sort of intervention. Two residents were so concerned they contacted an elected official. Edmond police, including multiple officers who responded to the arson call, knew Norwood by name and knew of his mental health challenges. When Norwood attempted to break into someone’s home days before being shot, neighbors hoped it would give EPD cause to take him into custody and connect him with the help he needed.

With no intervention achieved, however, the situation grew worse until Norwood started the fire, put his neighbors in danger and got shot by Fountain in the process. Now, Norwood faces first-degree

Why did no police camera capture the shooting? Why were citizens’ prior calls for intervention ultimately ineffective?

Are Oklahoma’s mental health resources readily available to the public? In a community with above average public safety funding, why was legitimate and repeated public concern over a mentally ill man’s welfare unable to avoid the violent scene that unfolded Sept. 3?

arson and assault charges — as well as a subsequently filed stalking charge — and his story has become yet another example of central Oklahoma’s failing mental health intervention system under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice.

“It really is a systemic failure. This kind of thing is happening far too often where we see people in crisis, or people who are mentally ill, and either law enforcement or the community don’t really know where to go or how to handle it,” said Oklahoma County chief public defender Brigitte Biffle. “And then, this situation obviously arises, where, had it been taken care of early, maybe this whole thing could have been avoided.”

Fountain, the officer who fired the single shot as Norwood approached him flailing lighters, has been cleared of wrongdoing by Oklahoma County District Attorney Vicki Behenna, who declared she would defer all police use-of-force cases to a grand jury, even though Oklahoma law allows a DA to make their own charging decisions. While Behenna’s press release called Norwood’s shooting “non-life threatening” and noted that grand juries are secretive by law, it did not include reference to his mental health crisis.

“Grand jurors viewed 15 evidentiary exhibits and hear from one detective who testified about he interviews conducted during the investigation,” the release stated. “Grand jurors did not believe a use-of-force expert would help in their deliberations. After reviewing the testimony and the exhibits, the [grand] jury recommended a no bill against the Edmond officer involved.”

Nonetheless, the case of Ross Norwood raises a number of questions that likely would have drawn more scrutiny had he not survived the gunshot to his chest: Why did

no police camera capture the shooting? Why were citizens’ prior calls for intervention ultimately ineffective? Are Oklahoma’s mental health resources readily available to the public? In a community with above average public safety funding, why was legitimate and repeated public concern over a mentally ill man’s welfare unable to avoid the violent scene that unfolded Sept. 3?

‘I wouldn’t call it a solution’

Seven calls for emergency services related to Norwood’s address were logged between July 8 and the Sept. 3 shooting, according to EPD’s investigatory report.

Police were contacted after Norwood attempted to force his way into a nearby home Aug. 29, and records of 911 calls provided to NonDoc show a welfare check was requested Aug. 17. Two more welfare checks were requested Aug. 26. A day before that, on Aug. 25, another caller contacted 911 to report “creepy, off-the-wall” comments Norwood made to neighborhood children.

Norwood’s history of mental health struggles and EPD’s familiarity with him stretch back much further than those critical weeks. In 2015, Norwood was investigated by the U.S. Secret Service after making threatening posts about former President Barack Obama.

“OBAMA AND HIS GUN RUNNERS OR COPS ON THE TAKE ARE [dead on arrival],” Norwood’s post read. A secret service agent visited Norwood’s residence to speak with him about the post, according to the EPD report.

There were two separate instances of Norwood swerving his vehicle at pedestrians over the same timeframe. In 2015, Norwood

The Oklahoma Eagle

Norwood's mental health challenges pre-date shooting



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Systemic Failure

From A15

encountered a patrolling police officer in his neighborhood — Sgt. William Wright, who was one of the officers that responded to Norwood's residence the night of the shooting. During that incident, Wright approached to speak with Norwood, who ran back to his car and sped off, "narrowly missing" Wright and his patrol car. In 2016, Norwood veered at a person checking her mail when she raised her arms and asked why he was driving so fast through the neighborhood. He received reckless driving citations both times.

According to the EPD report, Norwood's sisters told police a 2014 incident had him "freaked out" and potentially compounded his mental health struggles. At the time, Norwood was dating a neighbor named Bonnie Wolf, who died in her sleep in Norwood's bed March 23, 2014. When police searched Norwood's home this Sept. 4 after the fire and shooting, they found a newspaper clipping of Wolf's obituary taped to his bedroom wardrobe.

Wolf's death scarred Norwood, his sisters told EPD. In psychotic episodes, Norwood began to believe Wolf had not died, but had "shapeshifted" into the body of another woman somewhere in the neighborhood. During the Sept. 3 incident, witnesses told EPD that Norwood was "talking about Bonnie" while in psychosis — an episodic mental state where an individual loses contact with reality. In the police report, Norwood's sisters said he "really loved" Wolf. During the psychotic episode that culminated in Norwood setting his house on fire, he apparently stayed awake for more than 24 hours, tweeting hundreds of times and referencing Wolf in the process.

As Norwood's mental health issues worsened over the years, his family and friends have distanced themselves, leaving him increasingly isolated whenever he entered a severe episode. In the EPD report, Norwood's sisters said his son was "estranged from Ross for 10-15 years, as far as they knew." After the shooting, one of Norwood's sisters contacted his son, but he had not responded by the time of their interview with EPD. At least one of the sisters, who previously lived in Oklahoma City, said she moved away around 2012 because she was "scared" by comments Norwood made to her. Norwood's sisters said he "refused" to voluntarily receive mental health treatment, despite a family history of severe mental health struggles. Norwood's grandfather

“

If I'm having a mental breakdown, I'm hoping that my family is going to be there for me," Goodwin said. "Unfortunately, [Norwood's] were not around during his time of crisis."

Thomas Goodwin, community member who lived in the area, near Ross Norwood

died by suicide, his sisters told EPD, and his older brother had a heart attack "right after a mental health episode where he was in his front yard taking his clothes off."

Grant Leatherwood, a resident of Norwood's neighborhood, said the community felt powerless to handle Norwood's episodes outside of calling the police. He said no one felt comfortable discussing Norwood's mental health issues with him directly or encouraging him to seek help. That left neighbors unsure what recourse they had beyond calling 911.

"I think that was really just the extent of what we, as neighbors, thought we could do," Leatherwood said. "I wouldn't call it a solution, but it's just the only thing we knew that we could do legally, given the relationship we all had with him."

Edmond Police Chief J.D. Younger has been vocal about law enforcement's existing, but limited, role in handling mental health crises. As a panelist at the Healthy Minds Policy Initiative's "State of Mental Health" event Oct. 23, Younger said police are not best equipped to address citizens' mental health crises.

"If you call your carpenter to fix your plumbing job, what tools are they going to bring?" Younger said during the panel. "They may be able to fix your plumbing issue, but it's not going to be the way that it should be fixed. (...) You can call us, and we're going to respond, and we're going to help within our capacity, but that's not our education."

Thomas Goodwin, who also lives in the area, echoed Leatherwood's appraisal. He said he understood police officers may not be able to "kick the door in" and force someone with mental health issues to seek treatment, but he believed calling the police about Norwood's erratic behavior was the only action available to him. The tragedy that unfolded, he said, took place in part because of Norwood's distance from remaining loved ones who could have intervened had they known the situation.

"If I'm having a mental breakdown, I'm hoping that my family is going to be there for me," Goodwin said. "Unfortunately, [Norwood's] were not around during his time of crisis."

Clay Curtis, a criminal defense attorney representing Norwood in his arson and assault case, said Norwood is still in the Oklahoma County Jail and has not been receiving the mental health treatment necessary to restore his competency and address his illness.

"First and foremost, this is a tragedy

I believe should have been avoided," Curtis said. "I hope that the Edmond Police Department uses this as a learning experience, because I think it shows what not to do. Mr. Norwood was clearly in crisis, and frankly, the police made matters worse. Sadly, in my opinion, no one is getting adequate mental health care in the Oklahoma County Jail."

Younger defended EPD's response to the Norwood call, given that one 911 caller said Norwood may have had a knife.

"I think we have to look at the night in question and what we responded to there," Younger told NonDoc. "While, definitely, mental health appears to be an aspect of that, we can't forget that the call was not only a fire, but an active arson with a suspect on scene reported by the neighbor to be potentially armed with a knife. (...) Unfortunately, while we may be aware of the possibility of a mental health consumer being involved in that, that doesn't allow us to respond with a less-diligent posture than what's been reported to us."

'Folks just don't know those resources exist'

To some extent, options exist to address public mental health concerns without the potentially dangerous step of involving law enforcement. However, they can be difficult for the general public to navigate, especially in a situation with someone like Norwood, whose psychotic episodes often left him incoherent. In some cases when people need professional intervention for a mental health crisis, observers can be unaware of whom to call or can receive feedback out of line with how resources are promoted.

NorthCare, a mental health services provider, has two locations in Edmond and operates a "mobile crisis and outreach team" dispatched from calls to 988, the mental health line launched nationally in 2021 but operated at a state level through third-party contracts.

Goodwin said he was not aware 988 existed — which is common among most Americans, recent research indicates. The lack of widespread awareness can lead to increased police involvement in mental health situations and dangerous interactions, as in Norwood's case. One study released in July reported only 23 percent of people knew about 988, which debuted as the free nationwide mental health crisis number in 2022. Two other polls published this year suggest the number could be as low as 15 or

Cont. A17, Systemic Failure

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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

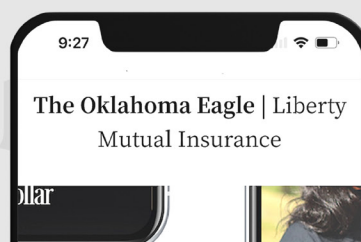




PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Systemic Failure

988 Most Effective if The Person ‘Agrees to Receive Help.’

From A16

18 percent. Tony Stelter, chief of statewide crisis services at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, said awareness remains one of the biggest impediments to successful crisis response. “[988] hasn’t been around for 60 years like 911 has, so I think it will take time. I think

we’re constantly working on getting that information out,” Stelter said. “We’re working on it, but I would say sometimes, yeah, folks just don’t know those resources exist.”

City of Edmond spokesman Bill Begley said the city’s 911 operators are empowered to transfer calls to 988 “if/when it is determined that a law enforcement response is not needed.” No one interviewed for this

article could confirm whether Edmond police reached out to 988, NorthCare or other mental health service providers concerning the multiple August welfare checks requested for Norwood.

Biffle said 988 has limitations in crisis situations, though, particularly if the person in crisis is experiencing severe psychosis, is incoherent or is otherwise uncooperative. The 988 website notes the number is most effective if the person “agrees to receive help.”

“In those cases where we’re dealing with someone with severe mental illness or severe issues, you can’t really have that type of conversation, or maybe, you know, they’re in active psychosis, and so they’re not going to understand what you’re saying,” Biffle said. “We just need more in those situations.”

Biffle said the limited number of behavioral health specialists contracted for 988 service are equipped to handle some situations but “are not able to handle all situations.”

“It’s so important for everyone to receive training in what to do in all the situations in order to be able to adequately handle them. Otherwise, you have someone responding who doesn’t know how to handle the situation,” Biffle said. “I think when an individual is in active psychosis, it requires someone who knows how to handle that situation. An individual who is trained to be able to know what to do, how to approach communicating with the person, and how to deescalate the situation.”

In theory, a robust mental health line in Oklahoma would also be able to help concerned community members request assistance from Programs of Assertive Community Treatment, or PACT teams. These teams are made up of mental health professionals, law enforcement officers and other social workers trained to provide consistent and intensive psychiatric care, including crisis intervention services. Referrals to PACT teams are made by behavioral health professionals, Stelter said.

In Oklahoma, PACT teams are underutilized and serve less than half of adults that could benefit from their services, according to a review by Health Minds Policy Initiative. Many counties have no PACT teams, while some existing teams are asked to serve multiple counties. In Oklahoma, the Healthy Minds study found that 11 PACT teams statewide serve around 750 to 800 people a year, versus the estimated 81,000 Oklahomans living with serious mental illnesses.

For extreme or repeated instances of severe mental illness, legal processes exist for law enforcement to take direct action. Under Oklahoma law, Title 43a, Section

5-207, officers “shall” place individuals into protective custody if they meet certain criteria.

“Any peace officer who reasonably believes that a person is a person requiring treatment as defined in Section 1-103 of this title shall take the person into protective custody. The officer shall make every reasonable effort to take the person into custody in the least conspicuous manner,” the statute reads.

The process is commonly known as seeking an “emergency order of detention,” and members of the public can sign affidavits supporting an officer’s decision to detain individuals based on belief that they are a threat to themselves or others. Mental health detention beyond 120 hours requires a district court order.

While Younger said he lacked direct knowledge of every contact EPD had with Ross Norwood, he said he saw nothing in internal reports that caused him “to believe that [Norwood] was not exposed to resources that could have assisted.”

But Norwood’s attorney said that, to his knowledge, police had not connected Norwood with NorthCare or other mental health resources prior to the shooting.

“Obviously, Mr. Norwood was in crisis,” Curtis said.

This week, an ODMHSAS employee’s examination of Norwood in the Oklahoma County Jail resulted in a report deeming him mentally “incompetent” to stand trial. As approved by Curtis, an assistant district attorney and a judge, the agreement means Norwood will be transferred to ODMHSAS custody for the administration of competency restoration services, delays in the provision of which are the subject of a federal class action lawsuit against the state currently being settled.

What police did, did not do during the shooting

At 11:48 p.m. on Sept. 3, Edmond dispatch received a 911 call from Thomas Goodwin reporting the fire on Norwood’s front porch. Goodwin told dispatch he thought police had been trying to pick up Norwood “for about a week” prior to the incident.

For the first several minutes of the 911 audio, Goodwin can be heard rushing to houses in the area to warn neighbors of the fire. At one point, he passed Norwood in the road, and reported that Norwood swung at him. Goodwin told the 911 operator he was unsure if Norwood was holding a knife. Goodwin attempted to reassure Norwood through his psychosis.

Cont. A18, Systemic Failure

Construction Cost Overrun

State’s New Mental Health Center Faces Huge Construction Cost Overrun



PHOTO RYAN MAGNANI FOR OSU

Officials held a ceremonial groundbreaking in Oklahoma City in March 2024 to celebrate the state’s new Donahue Behavioral Health Center. From left are Oklahoma City Mayor David Holt; then-Sen. Roger Thompson; Mental Health Commissioner Allie Friesen; Cullen Sweeney; U.S. Congresswoman Stephanie Bice; and Kyle Wray, OSU senior vice president of system affairs.

PAUL MONIES
Oklahoma Watch

The state’s new behavioral health center for central Oklahoma faces a massive cost overrun because the project’s initial estimate didn’t include furniture and equipment and bathrooms must be redesigned from hallways to individual rooms.

The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services requested an additional \$125 million to finish the Donahue Behavioral Health Center in Oklahoma City. The initial cost estimate was \$150 million.

Lawmakers and other state officials broke ground on the Donahue Center in March and

expected the facility to be finished by 2026. That opening may now have to be pushed back to 2028, said Sen. Chuck Hall, R-Perry, the chairman of the Senate’s Appropriations Committee.

Hall said multiple factors, including inflation, went into the higher costs. When lawmakers vetted the project in 2022, they anticipated making \$50 million on the sale of the land at the aging Griffin Memorial Hospital in Norman. That has now dropped to \$10 million due to soft demand and possible building remediation costs.

Former leaders at the agency did not include costs for furniture, fixtures and equipment in the initial project estimates

to the Legislature, Hall said. Mental Health Commissioner Allie Friesen took over in January.

Hall said the original design had bathrooms in hallways, not in individual rooms. He said the agency’s new leaders worried the facility might not be able to get certified if bathrooms weren’t in patient rooms.

“The current commissioner is reporting to us that certification of the building might be in question,” Hall said. “There are safety concerns and additional costs associated with having to take a client from their room to a hallway and back to their room and not be intrusive to the patient.”

Agencies had to submit their budget requests for the upcoming fiscal year by Oct. 1. Agency requests are on the House’s budget transparency portal.

“A few months ago, we engaged a construction manager to review cost estimates and provide a more accurate price per square foot,” Mental Health spokeswoman Kelsey Davis said in an email on Tuesday. “Their analysis identified additional costs previously excluded from the initial estimates. This updated information has been submitted to legislators, and we await their guidance on the next steps.”

Hall said Friesen alerted lawmakers of a possible shortfall in May. Discussions continued throughout the summer, and the agency provided its latest estimates in September.

“They’re in a bad place, too,” Hall said. “They really can’t do any engineering for any of these changes until the Legislature decides what the plans are related to filling the funding gap.”

The Legislature committed \$87 million in federal pandemic relief funds for the Donahue project in 2022. The rest of the

funding was to come from the sale of the land at Griffin.

The 200,000-square-foot Donahue Center replaces Griffin, which dates to the 1890s and is the state’s largest behavioral health hospital. The Donahue campus, at Interstate 44 and West Reno Avenue in Oklahoma City, was expected to have beds to treat 275 adults and 55 adolescents. That bed count may be reduced slightly because of the need to have bathrooms in patient rooms, Hall said.

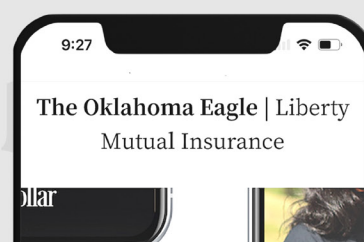
Speaker-Elect Kyle Hilbert, R-Bristow, said discussions about the shortfall are ongoing.

“Increasing mental health capacity in our state has been a priority for the House, and we are working diligently with the Senate and the Department of Mental to understand what is needed in order to do that,” Hilbert said in a written statement. “We’ve publicly discussed a known funding gap for this project, and we are working to find ways to meet our state’s mental health capacity needs within the constraints of the funding we have.”

With the delay in opening Donahue, Hall said he expects the Department of Mental Health to continue using Griffin in Norman. He said that private treatment beds on a temporary, contract basis might also be needed.

“We want to bring these beds online as soon as possible,” Hall said of the Donahue project. “We want to be responsive to the need, but I can’t unilaterally make a decision to fill a funding gap without running it through the legislative process.”

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



Systemic Failure

“We don’t want you to die. I know it’s tough right now...”

From A17

“They’re coming Ross, just stay calm,” Goodwin said at one point. An irate Norwood could be heard in the background ranting incoherently.

Goodwin, who was carrying his handgun during the 911 call, told NonDoc he nearly shot Norwood himself. Norwood was approaching him and his wife, Goodwin said, but he was able to force the man to back up with verbal commands.

During his interview with EPD, Fountain stated he almost did not respond to the call. He was driving home since his shift ended at midnight, and as dispatch provided information about the fire, Fountain said he had a “weird feeling.” He then turned to head toward the address, but he apparently did not turn on his lights or body camera. No body camera footage exists of the shooting, only the immediate aftermath. While police were en route, another officer asked if the address was that of Ross Norwood, which dispatch confirmed.

Younger said officers are expected to activate their cameras if they anticipate any enforcement action could take place during a call. The body cameras constantly record on a 30-second buffer, Younger said, meaning once an officer activates his or her camera, the clip also includes the prior 30 seconds of footage without audio.

Patrol vehicle dash cameras are automatically activated if the cruiser’s lights come on, Younger said. In early body camera footage of the incident, Fountain’s patrol car can be seen with its lights deactivated, and the EPD investigatory report states there were no video files on the camera’s SD card when it was retrieved.

“The layman’s explanation would be, if you think you’re doing ‘cop stuff,’ go ahead and turn [the body camera] on if you can, if it’s feasible to do it,” Younger said. “If he didn’t turn his lights on, [the vehicle’s dash camera] probably wouldn’t have activated. Well, it wouldn’t have activated, unless you manually activate it (...) Again, those are set up on an automated deal when lights come on.”

Fountain, a 23-year EPD veteran, was involved in another non-fatal shooting in 2009 when a suspect Fountain had handcuffed during a traffic stop stole his patrol vehicle. Fountain and another officer opened fire, hitting the suspect in the hand.

Fountain knew who Norwood was, according to the September EPD report, and he was familiar with Norwood’s mental health issues. When he arrived on scene, Fountain first saw embers from the porch fire rising into the air. The blaze illuminated the street, where Norwood was still meandering and flailing his arms violently.

Fountain parked his vehicle near Norwood’s mailbox, he told EPD investigators. When he exited his patrol car, a Chevy Tahoe, Norwood was passing on the other side, partially obscuring him from view. At that point,

“**The layman’s explanation would be, if you think you’re doing ‘cop stuff,’ go ahead and turn [the body camera] on if you can, if it’s feasible to do it... If he didn’t turn his lights on, [the vehicle’s dash camera] probably wouldn’t have activated**

J.D. Younger, Edmond Police Chief.



Blake Douglas is a staff reporter who leads NonDoc’s Edmond Civic Reporting Project. Blake graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 2022 and completed an internship with NonDoc in 2019. A Tulsa native, Blake previously reported in Tulsa; Hilton Head Island, South Carolina; and Charlotte, North Carolina.

Fountain said he saw Norwood carrying two “black, long objects” but could not identify them.

In his own report, Sgt. William Wright stated that while Norwood was experiencing psychosis, he screamed at officers for being “from the government” while thrusting his hands aggressively. From his angle, Wright stated he could tell one of the objects Norwood held was a grill lighter, but he still could not identify the other. Norwood “charged” at Fountain while thrusting the objects around at waist height, Wright said. Fountain fired one shot, striking Norwood in the chest.

The earliest footage from the scene began at 11:54 p.m. from Wright’s body camera, which showed the wounded Norwood still trying to keep officers away from him by slashing with the lighters. At that point, Wright said Fountain realized the objects were not knives.

Police then began restraining Norwood, who can be seen in EPD footage bleeding heavily through his blue hoodie. As Norwood screeched and resisted, an officer said, “Ross, we’re trying to help you bud, OK?”

During the struggle, Norwood moaned and repeatedly shouted, “I’m dead, I’m dead.” As officers reached for the lighters, he eventually repeated, “I’ll give it to you.”

“You’re not dead, Ross. Calm down, buddy,” one of the officers replied.

The three officers restraining Norwood consoled him over the next several minutes, instructing him to breathe and promising him that medical care was on the way. As police spoke with him, Norwood fluctuated from calm to irate, at one point shouting, “Please kill me, you motherfuckers,” then thanking the officers almost immediately afterward.

“We don’t want you to die. I know it’s tough right now, but just keep doing your best for me, OK?” one officer said. “You’re being super tough for me, and I appreciate that, Ross.”

After Norwood was restrained, Fountain stepped away from the scene to move his vehicle. He was later approached by one of his supervisors.

“I fired the shot. I shot him,” Fountain said, unprompted. “It looked like he had two knives in his hands coming at me. He had two frickin’ lighters in his hands, long lighters.”

Fountain later told a supervisor that he almost did not respond to the call.

“I almost went home,” a despondent Fountain said. “Then I saw I was the closest. (...) Didn’t even have my camera — I didn’t get it on, I think hopefully [Wright] did.”



THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE People. Narratives. News.

Get 52 weeks for only \$1 per week

Visit theokeagle.com/subscribe-advertise

The Oklahoma Eagle

www.theokeagle.com

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE CHURCH DIRECTORY



The Oklahoma Eagle publishes news and announcements for churches currently listed in The Oklahoma Eagle's Church Directory. For information, please call our office at (918) 582-7124

Church Of The Living God

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

Minister RJ Smith

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

CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

1962 N. Sheridan Rd.
(918) 834-4747

Pastor Ruthie I. Howard

Sunday School 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

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

Words of Wisdom Ministries FC

Temporarily meeting at the Courtyard Marriot 3340 S 79th E Ave Tulsa OK
(918) 230-3022

Pastors Wesley & Alfie Gray would like to invite you to come and experience the Word of God in action this Sunday! God has a word for you, He Guarantee's it!! You'll be glad you did!!!

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

List your church in one of the largest church directories in Oklahoma.

Participation in the directory allows free church announcements/church news.

Post events and celebrations. Priority over non-listed churches for news.

List Your Church Today!

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

Participate in *The Oklahoma Eagle's* weekly church directory. List in one of the largest church directories in Oklahoma.

- Participation in the Church Directory allows free Church announcements and Church news. Post your church events and celebrations.
- Priority over non-listed churches for news.



GTOMi
Gospel Tabernacle Outreach Ministries, Inc.
Traveling Outreach Ministries

609 E. Zion Street
Tulsa, Oklahoma
Elder Julius W. Bland
Sr., Pastor
918-810-3882

ALL ARE WELCOME

MOHAWK FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.

Sunday Morning Worship 11 a.m.

Bible Study Wednesday 7 p.m.



Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr.
Pastor

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.

Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

Rudisill Regional Library
1520 N Hartford Ave.
Tulsa OK 74106
(918) 409-4899

Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons

Sunday Worship: 1pm
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p - 8p

"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

123 E. 59th St. North
Ph: (918) 425-2077

Pastor Rick Bruner

Sabbath School (Saturday) 9:30-10:45 a.m.

Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal Wednesday 6:00 p.m.

"The Seventh Day Is Still God's Sabbath"

Northside Christ Gospel Church

3101 N. M.L King Jr. Blvd.
Tulsa OK
(918) 625-2374

Sunday School - 10 am

Sunday Morning Worship - 10:45

Sunday Evening Prayer - 7 pm
Sunday Worship - 7:30 pm
Wednesday Prayer - 7:30 pm
Wednesday worship - 8pm

Rev. John W. Anderson

VERNON AME CHURCH

307-311 N. Greenwood Ave.
P: 918-587-1428
F: 918-587-0642
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

Sunday Church School 8:30 am

Worship Service 10:00 am

Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm

Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH NORTH TULSA

THE CHURCH WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS US



Pastor Anthony L. & Mrs. Kelly Scott

Sunday School - 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship - 11:00 a.m.

Find us on Facebook

1414 N. Greenwood Ave.
Tulsa, OK 74103
918-582-5129
www.fbcnt.org

WATCH You ON Tube

"Teaching Minds Changing Hearts Touching the World"

Place your church directory with us today! Advertising your church in *The Oklahoma Eagle* will get you results! Call (918) 582-7124

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

Participation in the Directory allows free church announcements and church news. Post events and celebrations. Priority over non-listed churches for news.

BOSTON AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1301 S. Boston
(918) 583-5181
Rev. David Wiggs
Senior Minister

Sunday Worship 8:30 and 11:00 a.m.

Sunday School 9:40 a.m.

Sunday TV Worship 11:00 a.m.

KTUL Channel 8

TIMOTHY BAPTIST CHURCH

821 E. 46th St. N. • 425-8021
REV. TWAN T. JONES

Sunday School 9:45 a.m.

Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

"We've come this far by faith"

NORTH PEORIA CHURCH OF CHRIST

2247 N. Peoria
Tulsa, Okla. 74106
(918) 425-1071

Warren Blakney, Minister

Sunday Bible School.....9:00 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.

There's no place, like this place, anywhere near this place.

Pettie Chapel CME



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

Rev. Robert Givens

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.

Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

Church In Power

732 E. 31st North
Tulsa, OK 74106 - (918) 835-1525

Service times: 9am Sundays, 7pm Wed, and Special Supernatural Breakthrough Services every last Friday and Saturday of every month at 7pm and Sunday at 9am

Wednesday Bible Study - 6:30 p.m.
Church Ministries: Children's Church, CIP Praise Dancers, and CIP Praise Tem.



Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

For Further Information call (918) 835-1525.

"Have Faith In God." Mark 11:22

List Your Church Today!

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

Participate in *The Oklahoma Eagle's* weekly church directory. List in one of the largest church directories in Oklahoma.

- Participation in the Church Directory allows free Church announcements and Church news. Post your church events and celebrations.
- Priority over non-listed churches for news.

Two service styles to meet your spiritual & community-building needs.
2952 S. Peoria Ave. Tulsa, OK | allsoulschurch.org



10 am Worship & 11:30 am Humanist Hour
allsoulschurch.org



Mount Zion Baptist Church

419 N Elgin Tulsa, Oklahoma

Office: 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 Noon and 7:00



In The Spirit Christian Church

"Come And Experience The Spirit"

1020 South Garnett
Tulsa, Okla., 74128
Phone: (918) 836-6823
Fax: (918) 836-6833



Rev. Sharyn Cosby-Willis

Eclectic Praise, Extraordinary Worship, And Spirited Preaching.
Wednesday Services 10:00 a.m. Spirit Seniors 5:30 p.m. Support Groups 6:30 p.m. Community Dinner 7:00 p.m. Bible Study
Sunday Worship Church School 9:45 a.m. Worship 11:00 a.m.

Ministries: Administration, Children's Church, Children's Choir, Spirited Kids, Guest Services, Intercessors, Men's Fellowship, Outreach and much more...



SMILING HEARTS

The NICK BLAKELY Foundation

Our vision is to turn every potential tragedy of Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) into a story of survival.

www.nickblakelyfoundation.org

FEATURED

What Illinois' Ticket Crackdown Means for Black Students

School-based fines continue to hinder Black K-12 kids, disproportionately
Ticket Crackdown, A20



FEATURED

Word In Black's Anissa Durham Awarded Prestigious Health Journalism Fellowship

Durham: How medical mistrust has impacted Black folks waiting for an organ transplant
Anissa Durham, A22



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

A Political Toll: Black LGBTQ+ Students Face New Barriers

LGBTQ+ Students

QUINTESSA WILLIAMS, Word In Black

From reinforcing biases to jeopardizing safe, inclusive school spaces, the latest round of misinformation and policy proposals could have lasting implications for Black K-12 kids.

During his third run for the White House, Donald Trump made hostility toward LGBTQ+ rights an integral part of his campaign.

He vowed to roll back federal anti-discrimination policies based on sexual orientation and gender and promised to exclude gay and transgender people from civil rights protections. Trump also repeated false claims that public K-12 schools are facilitating gender transitions without parental consent: "Your kid goes to school and comes home a few days later with an operation."

Now that he's heading back to the Oval Office, school-age LGBTQ+ youth are flooding crisis hotlines, fearful about what Trump 2.0 means for them and their safety—including Black LGBTQ+ kids, who are uniquely more vulnerable to Trump-inspired threats, bullying, and

violence than their white peers.

"The misinformation and rhetoric emboldens other students, teachers, and administrators to view Black LGBTQ+ students as a problem and treat them as such," Corryn Freeman, executive director of Future Coalition, a nonprofit that supports young progressive leaders of color, tells Word In Black.

The promises of Trump and his allies, she says, "[stifles] their experience in schools [and] is an infringement on the rights of young people."

Data also speaks to this reality. A recent study determined that laws that strip away protections for LGBTQ+ young people led to increased suicide attempts among transgender and nonbinary youth by as much as 72%. At the same time, The Trevor Project

Cont. A21, LGBTQ+ Students

“

The misinformation and rhetoric emboldens other students, teachers, and administrators to view Black LGBTQ+ students as a problem and treat them as such.

Corryn Freeman, executive director, Future Coalition

Ticket Crackdown

What Illinois' Ticket Crackdown Means for Black Students

QUINTESSA WILLIAMS
Word In Black

School-based fines continue to hinder Black K-12 kids, disproportionately shaping their sense of safety, trust, and future academic success

When a 16-year-old high school student in Illinois was suspected of damaging a fence, school authorities had options for how to deal with the situation, ranging from in-school detention to suspending the student from class.

Cont. A21, Ticket Crackdown

LGBTQ+ Students

Finding solutions through community



PHOTO MIKMIKE/GETTY IMAGES
Young Black girl walking at the LGBTQI pride event and waving a rainbow flag.

From A20

— the leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ+ young people — reported a nearly 700% increase in crisis-level calls and other means of contact since the election.

LGBTQ+ youth of color made up a third of those callers, according to the organization.

The National Impact on Black Student Achievement

Political misinformed rhetoric can have a direct impact on Black LGBTQ+ students' academic success. The Trevor Project survey notes that 90% of LGBTQ+ young people said their well-being was negatively impacted due to recent politics. This impact can make schools a hostile environment, exacerbating already serious issues among queer students of color, including absenteeism and disengagement.

Those students “often stop participating in

support Black LGBTQ+ students. Freeman highlighted several organizations making a difference:

- The Trevor Project: Provides suicide prevention and crisis intervention services for LGBTQ+ youth.
- GLSEN: Focuses on creating safe and inclusive schools for LGBTQ+ students.
- The LGBTQ+ Students of Color Resource Guide: Offers tailored resources to address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students of color.
- Lucky Lightyear Foundation: Provides community support for gender-expansive and LGBTQ+ youth.

Freeman also stressed the importance of finding community: “What you need most now is a community of trusted friends, family, and allies. Do your best to find people who will advocate for you and make space for you to exist in your fullness.”

“

What you need most now is a community of trusted friends, family, and allies?

Corryn Freeman, executive director, Future Coalition

activities to proactively prevent themselves from becoming targets of bullying and further marginalization,” Freeman says. Hostile political rhetoric and misinformation, she says, “has the potential to greatly stifle the growth of Black queer and gender non-conforming students.”

Even before Trump’s campaign, data from the Trevor Project illustrated this vulnerability. It found that 63% of Black LGBTQ+ youth reported symptoms of depression, with even higher rates among Black transgender and nonbinary youth.

“These mental health challenges, exacerbated by hostile school environments,” Freeman explains, can lead to “exhaustion and hinder students’ ability to thrive academically.”

Where Can Black LGBTQ+ Students Turn To?

Political misinformation has far-reaching consequences for Black LGBTQ+ students, impacting their mental health, academic achievement, and sense of belonging. Despite the challenges, resources exist to

Bigger Steps Toward Change

Ultimately, education policymakers and school officials can counteract misinformation, Freeman says, by “intentionally creating safe spaces for conversations where factual information is presented on what it means to live at the intersection of being Black and queer.”

Educators and administrators “also play a critical role,” Freeman says. “Teachers and school leaders need to create very clear rules of engagement around what is tolerated in classrooms and what isn’t. These rules must consider the unique experiences of Black LGBTQ+ students.”

By fostering inclusive environments, countering misinformation, and providing critical resources, schools can help these students thrive. As Freeman concluded, “This is not just about creating a better educational environment—it’s about affirming the humanity of every student.”

Ticket Crackdown

Law enforcement involvement disproportionately applied

From A20

However, according to ProPublica, instead of issuing a suspension or detaining him after class, they sent him to the school’s resource officer. That officer, in turn, gave the student a ticket—ordering him to pay a \$200 fine for the property damage. There was just one problem: the Illinois attorney general had ruled it illegal to ticket students, but only told one district. As a result, officers statewide continued to ticket kids with costly fines — especially Black students.

The incident in Township High School District 211 is just one example of school-based ticketing, a controversial tool schools use to control student behavior. However, critics say it disproportionately targets Black students, increases absenteeism, and presents another entry point into the school-to-prison pipeline. And now the practice is under even more scrutiny: along with the Illinois attorney general’s determination that these policies violate state law, another student in Rockford, Illinois, has filed a formal civil rights complaint with the Department of Education.

Too often, “the important distinction between matters of regular school discipline that should be addressed at the school level and matters of school safety that might warrant law enforcement involvement has been blurred,” according to the complaint. Data shows far more Black students are ticketed than white



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

students, the complaint says, evidence the practice “is not only unjust, it is also discriminatory.”

School ticketing became commonplace in the late 1990s and early 2000s when schools began working more closely with police to handle student misbehavior. Instead of teachers or principals dealing with a student who skipped class or got in a fight, students started getting actual tickets from school resource officers.

While SROs hand out tickets for major

offenses, they also ticket students for minor violations, such as talking back to authority figures or being late to class. For some violations, the fines can reach as high as \$750.

The 16-year-old accused of damaging the fence appealed the suspension at a hearing, where another student was found responsible for the damage. His mother told ProPublica that police interference in her son’s case was unjustified and that those who paid fines should get a refund.

“I would hope that if they know they were doing it illegally, they would wipe all the tickets out,” she told the news website. “That is what they should do. If anyone had to pay fines, they should be reimbursed.”

In July 2024, the Attorney General’s office concluded that Township High School District 211 in Palatine improperly directed police to fine students for behavior better addressed by school administrators. These fines, critics say, is another educational inequity that funnels Black students into the criminal justice system.

National Overlap Between Schools and Law Enforcement

School-based ticketing is a growing concern nationwide, and its data has consistently shown the alarming impacts of such policies. While it’s unknown exactly how many schools or districts use the practice, it’s a particularly acute problem in Illinois.

According to the Illinois Department of Education, Black students make up just 17% of the state’s public school population but account for 42% of ticketed incidents. In the 2021-22 school year, Illinois’s Black and Hispanic students received about 68% of the tickets issued at school, even though they make up about 33% of district enrollment.

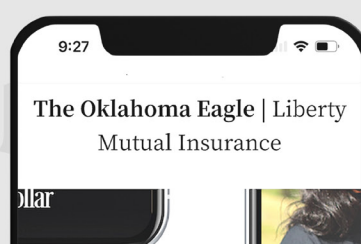
White students made up 42% of district enrollment but only received 24% of tickets.

Cont. A22, Ticket Crackdown

The Oklahoma Eagle

Our Mission

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



The Oklahoma Eagle

Anissa Durham

Word In Black's Anissa Durham Awarded Prestigious Health Journalism Fellowship

WORD IN BLACK STAFF

Word In Black health data reporter Anissa Durham has been selected as one of five journalists to receive the 2025 U.S. Health System Reporting Fellowship, awarded by the Association of Health Care Journalists. The fellowship, now in its 15th year and supported by The Commonwealth Fund, provides mentorship and resources to journalists pursuing ambitious projects that examine health care systems and equity in the United States.

Durham's yearlong project will tackle a deeply entrenched issue: how medical mistrust, fear, and misinformation in Black communities impact organ donation and transplantation.

Durham's work comes at a time when discussions about health equity often lack the context of how systemic barriers intersect with cultural and historical mistrust. Black patients are significantly less likely to register as organ donors or receive life-saving transplants, often due to a combination of mistrust and structural bias within the medical system.

"Medical mistrust didn't spring up overnight," Durham says. "It's rooted in generations of systemic inequities, from the exploitation of Black bodies in medical research to the ongoing disparities in access to quality health care."

With this fellowship, Durham joins a cohort of reporters dedicated to illuminating critical

Our health data reporter, Anissa Durham, will report in 2025 how medical mistrust has impacted Black folks waiting for an organ transplant.



Anissa Durham poses for a portrait at Balboa Park in San Diego, CA on June 26, 2024.

PHOTO ADRIANA HELDIZ

issues in health care. Her previous reporting includes a collaboration with the STAT News team to produce "Ozempic Tales." In this three-part series, Anissa reported on how Black folks feel about diet culture, medications used for weight loss, and body image.

Her latest reporting project promises to bring much-needed attention to the voices of patients and families often left out of the conversation.

As Durham puts it, "This work isn't just about telling stories — it's about changing them."

Stay tuned for updates on her reporting as it unfolds over the next year.

Word In Black was founded on June 7, 2021. In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, 10 of the nation's legendary Black publishers — including AFRO News, The Atlanta Voice, Dallas Weekly, Houston Defender, Michigan Chronicle, New York Amsterdam News, Sacramento Observer, Seattle Medium, St. Louis American, and Washington Informer — came together to launch a news collaborative unlike any other in the industry.

Word In Black promises to confront inequities, elevate solutions, and amplify the Black experience by reporting, collecting, and sharing stories about people and communities nationwide. We believe that by joining forces and providing a platform to examine these experiences in one place, we can shape how the country understands and addresses systemic issues of race, justice, and equity. It is through collective understanding that we bring about collective impact.

Ticket Crackdown

Consequences extend well-beyond financial hardship



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A21

A 2024 report from McArthur Justice Center found that in Rockford Public Schools, another school district in Illinois, Black students received 54.7% of tickets even though they make up 31% of the student population.

These policies introduce new barriers such as financial hardship and additional legal consequences if families are unable to pay — which deepens existing inequities for Black students who already face systemic barriers to academic success.

The Hidden Costs of Education

The consequences of ticketing go beyond financial hardship. Ticketed students often have problems with absenteeism, as court appearances and fines disrupt their education. Black students, in particular, are drawn into a legal system for infractions that would never be considered serious enough to be heard in juvenile court.

At the same time, research indicates that Black students who miss school due to disciplinary actions are linked to lower standardized test and GPA scores, reduced academic performance, and higher dropout rates for Black students.

A Legal Turning Point Presents Hope for the Future

The Illinois Attorney General's ruling against District 211 has sparked hope for broader reforms. While the decision applies specifically to this district, advocates believe it sets a precedent for challenging similar policies across the state and the nation.

Illinois state Rep. La Shawn Ford, a Democrat from Chicago who has championed education equity, told ProPublica that he plans to reintroduce a bill in 2025 to prohibit all the state's schools from involving police in minor disciplinary matters.

"We don't want police doing schools' work," Ford said.



THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE

People. Narratives. News.

Get 52 weeks for only \$1 per week

Visit theokeagle.com/subscribe-advertise

The Oklahoma Eagle

www.theokeagle.com