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and Service of God**

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Two Historic Black-Owned Banks To Merger & Create The Nation’s Largest

By Peter Kerich

The Grio

Two of America’s oldest Black-owned banks are joining forces in a move that could strengthen access to capital in Black communities. If approved, the merger would create the largest Black-owned bank in the United States by assets.

South Carolina-based Optus Financial Corporation, the parent company of Optus Bank, and North Carolina-based M&F Bancorp, the parent company of Mechanics & Farmers Bank, have signed a definitive merger agreement. Together, they would form the largest Black-owned bank in the United States, with approximately \$1.27 billion in assets.

According to BizJournals, the proposed merger combines more than 220 years of Black banking history. Mechanics & Farmers Bank was founded in 1907 and is the oldest Black-owned bank in North Carolina. Optus Bank traces its roots back to 1921. The combined institution is expected to operate 10 branches



across North and South Carolina while continuing its focus on expanding access to homeownership, small business lending and financial services in historically underserved communities.

Black-owned banks have long played a critical role in helping families, entrepreneurs and neighborhoods gain access to financial opportunities that were often denied elsewhere. Leaders say the merger is

designed to strengthen that mission. Under the agreement, M&F Bancorp shareholders would receive cash for their shares in a transaction valued at more than \$105 million. James H. Sills III, the current president and CEO of M&F Bancorp, is expected to lead the combined company as CEO, while Paul Mitchell, chairman of Optus Financial, would remain board chairman.

The deal is expected to close in

the fourth quarter of 2026, pending shareholder and regulatory approval. The announcement sparked conversation across social media, with many celebrating what the merger could mean for Black economic empowerment. One user admitted they were surprised to learn about the institutions, writing, “Wait, we have our own banks!?” Another saw the Black-owned bank merger as a positive sign, commenting, “Uh oh, I think we’re starting to get it.” Others praised the timing. “Better late than never,” one commenter wrote, noting the banks had remained separate for decades.

Not everyone was fully convinced. Some questioned whether consolidation signals broader economic challenges, while others wondered if the Black-owned bank merger came from a position of financial strength. Even with those questions, the announcement has renewed conversations about the importance of supporting Black-owned financial institutions and building generational wealth within Black communities.



First Black Woman Driver In NASCAR

Zion Brown

IndyStar

Dystany Spurlock continues to be a disruptor. The 34-year-old made her fifth ARCA Menards Series start of the year at Indianapolis Raceway Park on Friday.

In March, Spurlock (whose first name is pronounced Destiny) became the first Black woman to compete in a NASCAR-sanctioned series when she raced in the ARCA Menards Series East at Hickory Motor Speedway in Hickory, North Carolina. After doing two races in the East series, Spurlock made it to the premier ARCA series in April, when she finished 10th at Kansas Speedway.

Less than a year after Spurlock raced in her second NHRA Pro Stock Motorcycle race at IRP, she returned to the track, but in a stock car this time.

“To be able to know that I raced over there on the drag strip and now I’m over here on the circle track,” Spurlock told IndyStar, “that means so much to me because I did not know that this would happen so fast within a year’s time.”

Most of Spurlock’s experience before this year came in motorcycle drag racing. She has also raced arena carts and drove in Skip Barber’s Formula 4 series in 2023.

Five years ago, Spurlock met Chris Harris, who went on to create the media company Foxxteca with Kellie Crawford in 2025. Crawford and Harris, who’s the president of the African American Automotive Association, have helped fund the start of Spurlock’s stock car career.

“If there was some way that they can be able to come in and support me in getting to this point in NASCAR, they always said they would do it,” Spurlock said of Crawford and Harris. “So the fact that they helped me debut in NHRA and now they helped me debut in the ARCA series is huge for me because I’ve been trying to get to this point for 16, 17 years.”

Last weekend, Spurlock’s No. 66 MBM Motorsports Toyota was sponsored by She Pivots. She Pivots is a media company founded by Emily Tisch Sussman, whose family owns half of the New York Giants and co-owns Gotham FC of the NWSL.

(See *NASCAR*, P. 2)

RECENT ESCAPES AND SECURITY LAPSES IN NORTH CAROLINA PRISONS

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Recent inmate escapes and security incidents across North Carolina have renewed attention on how correctional facilities track and respond to escapes.

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (DAC) and local sheriff’s offices track several types of escapes each year, including inmates leaving secure facilities, walking away from minimum-security work assignments, and failing to return from approved medical appointments. According to historical data compiled by the UNC School of Government, hundreds of inmates have escaped from North Carolina correctional facilities since 1947, but only a small number have remained unaccounted for: fewer than 10.

Most escapes recorded annually by the state involve minimum-custody offenders rather than traditional prison breakouts. Inmates at minimum-security facilities may work outside facility grounds on assignments such as road crews or maintenance projects, creating opportunities for “walk-offs” when an inmate leaves without authorization. Those incidents are generally resolved quickly, with many offenders captured within hours or days.

Escapes involving medium- or close-custody facilities, armed transportation, or other high-security situations are far less common and typically result in immediate law enforcement responses.

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction has implemented additional security measures aimed at reducing risks during inmate transportation. The department’s 2025 annual report documented the rollout of specialized body-worn camera equipment for correctional staff involved in transporting high-risk offenders.

Recent incidents have included both traditional escapes and larger security emergencies.

On June 3, inmates aged 33, and 21 escaped from the Vance County Detention Center while facing drug trafficking and firearm-related charges. Authorities said the two inmates ran through a hallway while un-handcuffed and left the facility with assistance from an outside person. A multi-agency search ended six days later when authorities located and arrested both men at a residence in Asheville, more than 200 miles from the detention center.

Vance County Sheriff’s officials said the escape was planned and that the inmates received outside assistance. Following the incident, questions were raised about conditions at the detention center after state inspection records identified issues including broken or missing locks, defective doors, holes in walls, and concerns with supervisor tracking procedures.

Another escape occurred July 24 at Forsyth Correctional Center in Winston-Salem. The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction said a 35-year-old inmate escaped the minimum-security facility that morning. Authorities located him later that afternoon at a residence on Indiana Avenue, a short distance from the correctional center. DAC officers and Winston-Salem police took him into custody, and he was transferred to Central Prison in Raleigh. Officials said he would face a felony escape charge.

In addition to escapes, North Carolina officials have responded to other correctional security incidents, including a June 29 takeover at the Bertie-Martin Regional Detention Center in Windsor. Authorities said inmates overpowered correctional staff and took control of parts of the facility, holding two detention guards hostage during a nine-hour standoff.

The incident prompted a response involving local law enforcement, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, and the FBI. Negotiators secured the release of the guards, and tactical teams later entered the facility and regained control. All 88 inmates housed at the facility were transferred to other correctional facilities following the incident.

Dr. Fauci Repeatedly Invokes Fifth Amendment In COVID-19 Hearing

CNN— Dr. Anthony Fauci, who led the US government response to the Covid-19 pandemic, invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, refusing to testify Wednesday just minutes into a Capitol Hill hearing that Republicans outwardly hoped would undermine the scientist and open him to claims of perjury.

Appearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee after being subpoenaed by Sen. Rand Paul, Fauci cited what he characterized as the Republican chairman’s “obvious obsession with calling for my prosecution” as his reason for refusing to speak.

But Republican Senators proceeded with the hearing anyway, peppering the scientist with inquiries about National Institutes of Health-funded research and the origins of Covid-19. Fauci mostly stared straight ahead, invoking his Fifth Amendment right over four dozen times within the first two hours. But at times, frustration appeared to flash across his face.

And in a particularly dramatic moment, Paul had Fauci’s attorney escorted out as the lawyer repeatedly



tried to interject and invoke Fauci’s Fifth Amendment rights.

In a written statement before that, the lawyer said that the circumstances surrounding Fauci’s appearance “regrettably made his continued cooperation (with Congress) impossible,” adding that Paul had a “public crusade” against his client.

Fauci’s move deprives his Republican critics of meaningful exchanges to relitigate the scientist’s alleged mishandling of the Covid-19 response and conspiracies about the origins of the virus. But they will likely point to his invocation of his

constitutional right as evidence he is unwilling to be transparent.

“Let the record record that the witness has refused to answer whether there’s a folder in front of him based on his Fifth Amendment right,” Paul said at one point.

Fauci, though, noted in his opening statement that GOP lawmakers had made clear they wanted to use the hearing to get him prosecuted, saying “the sole reason (Sen. Paul) is calling me before this committee is to get me to say something, anything, that could vindicate his repeated public pledges that I end up,

in his words, ‘behind bars.’”

Democrats on the committee, meanwhile, used their time to voice frustration that Paul subpoenaed Fauci rather than focusing on budget cuts to health care agencies.

“It is unfortunate that you have been put in the position that you are in today, and it must be enormously frustrating to know that this hearing is designed to entrap you,” Sen. Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire said to Fauci.

Fauci, the face of American infectious disease research dating back to the HIV/AIDs crisis, has appeared more than 250 times before Congress, and this is the first time that he’s invoked the Fifth Amendment.

The 85-year-old former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has previously appeared before lawmakers to deny, under oath, allegations brought by Paul of obscuring the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic and controversial infectious disease research.

Pressure from Paul and others led President Joe Biden to preemptively pardon Fauci during his last days in office, shielding Fauci from charges pertaining to any comments made in previous years.

Voting Rights Groups Launch 100- Day Countdown at Raleigh Event

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Voting rights organizations gathered outside the North Carolina Legislative Building Monday morning to mark 100 days until Election Day and call on state lawmakers to reject what advocates described as efforts to create additional barriers to voting.

The event, titled “100 Days Out: Voting Rights Groups to Launch Countdown to Election Day,” brought together representatives from Forward Justice, Common Cause North Carolina, the North Carolina Black Alliance, Democracy North Carolina, the North Carolina NAACP, North Carolina Asian Americans Together and other advocacy groups as the General Assembly returned from its July 4th break.

The organizations used the event to announce plans for voter education, registration assistance, mobilization efforts and rapid response programs across all 100 counties leading up to the November election.

Brittany Gloria Justice opened the event by saying the organizations were gathering to respond to what they viewed as a continued effort by lawmakers to restrict access to the ballot.

“Yesterday marked 100 days until



November 3rd,” Gloria Justice said. “100 days until our midterm elections, where North Carolinians will head to the polls and make their voices heard.”

She criticized recent legislative proposals, including House Bill 958, an elections bill that advocates say would create new challenges for voters and absentee ballots.

“The bills that we’ve seen coming from them recently, like House

Bill 958, have been more focused on silencing and shutting out voters than protecting our sacred and constitutional right to have a say in how we’re governed,” Justice said. “And we stand here today to say: not on our watch.”

Gloria Justice said the coalition would focus on ensuring voters have access to information and resources before Election Day.

Marcus Bass, executive director of

the North Carolina Black Alliance, said the event represented a commitment from voting rights organizations to continue voter education efforts as lawmakers consider election changes. Bass said his organization has been monitoring actions taken by lawmakers during the legislative session and argued that recent proposals could affect voters across political affiliations.

“We’ve been watching what is happening in this building behind me every single day,” Bass said. “As we’ve gone 1,000-plus days, about 100, as we’ve gone decades without healthcare access to education, now they are trying to continue to dismantle our right to vote.”

Bass specifically pointed to House Bill 958, which passed the state House earlier this year and is under consideration in the Senate. He argued the issue extends beyond partisan politics.

“They will make you believe that the Republicans and the Democrats are going back and forth around partisanship,” Bass said. “But the implications of House Bill 958 and the actions that are happening in this General Assembly are far greater than Democrat and Republican.”

Bass said independent voters, who

(See *100 DAY COUNTDOWN*, P. 2)

THE GUARDIAN - As he approaches the 45th anniversary of his incarceration in December, the Black radical writer and prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal is taking his claim that he has been subjected to arbitrary imprisonment for a crime that he did not commit to a new tribunal: the United Nations in Geneva.

On Tuesday Abu-Jamal, 72, lodged a petition with the UN's working group on arbitrary detention, a body within the Human Rights Council. It marks the latest attempt by the internationally renowned prisoner and prolific author of 15 books to seek relief, having exhausted all domestic channels through state and federal courts.

In a telephone interview with the Guardian from Mahanoy correctional institution in Pennsylvania, where he is being held on a life sentence with no chance of parole, he said the appeal to the UN was part of his personal and legal efforts to keep hope alive.

"Hope is an element of struggle, is it not?" he said. "As we used to say in the old days, 'A luta continua'."

The hope that this former Black Panther might one day walk free from Mahanoy is slim. He is serving a life sentence without any possibility of parole. In Pennsylvania, life without parole means just that: there is no accounting for rehabilitation, age or health, and any prisoner serving it will die behind bars no matter his or her circumstances.

Abu-Jamal was convicted in 1982 of a crime for which he has always

Continued from page 1

Tisch Sussman started the She Pivots podcast during the COVID-19 pandemic, when she ended her nearly two-decade career as a political strategist and had three children. The brand's focus is women like herself and Spurlock, who have undergone career and/or life "pivots."

Tisch Sussman and Spurlock met in March at a "Women in Sports" gathering at journalist Gloria Steinem's house. They were reconnected by film producer Crystal McCrary, leading to She Pivots sponsoring Spurlock's entry on Friday. Tisch Sussman felt like it was a "natural fit."

"As soon as I met Dystany, I knew that she had a kindred energy," Tisch Sussman said. "She has confidence, she has positivity. As soon as you meet her, she's magnetic, and you know that she's going to do great things and you want to be a part of it."

Spurlock, who will return to IRP for the NHRA U.S. Nationals in September, is the first athlete to receive sponsorship from She Pivots. Although Tisch Sussman knew nothing about motorsports before meeting Spurlock, she's helping her break barriers.

"A sport is only going to become better once we question the presumptions," Tisch Sussman said. "Why is she in straps that are not fit for a woman's body? She has to be in the room to be able to move it forward."

Spurlock, who also did the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series race at Dover Motor Speedway in May, hopes to upgrade to a full season in the ARCA Menards Series next year and around half of the truck races as well. She'll need adequate financial backing to do so, and Tisch Sussman didn't turn down the idea of continuing to sponsor Spurlock.

It's unknown whether Spurlock, who played safety and cornerback in high school football, will reach a full-time schedule in 2027, but her first season has been "surprisingly amazing," leading her to want to stay in the NASCAR-sanctioned series.

"I've always been in these male-dominated spaces," Spurlock said. "So, for me to get to the point where I am now ... to me, it's my normal. To other people, it looks not normal because it's not a lot of us. But I've just always been an advocate for myself to do the things that I want to do, regardless of if it's traditional or not."

Continued from page 1

make up the largest registered voting group in North Carolina, could also be affected by election law changes, and criticized changes involving election administration and State Auditor Dave Boliek's role in reviewing election procedures.

Representatives from North Carolina Asian Americans Together also discussed efforts to provide language assistance and voter support services. A representative shared a story from the previous election involving a Korean-speaking voter who contacted the organization's voter protection hotline while attempting to request an absentee ballot.

The North Carolina NAACP also addressed the historical connection between voting access and civil rights. Irving L. Joyner, professor at the North Carolina Central University (NCCU) School of Law since 1982 said the organization's work is rooted in protecting voting rights that were historically restricted through state policies and laws.

"As the North Carolina NAACP, we stand forward to fight against that because we declare that we will not go back to the way that it used to be," Joyner said. "We will be aggressive in registering people, to make sure that they are in a position to vote, then re-registering or confirming the registration of those people who think that they are registered."

A representative from Democracy North Carolina said decisions involving polling locations and access points can influence voter participation, citing examples of polling location disputes involving students and young voters.

Other speakers referenced the U.S. Supreme Court's 2013 decision in Shelby County v. Holder, which invalidated a key portion of the Voting Rights Act that required certain jurisdictions to receive federal approval before changing voting laws, and made a point that voting rights organizations have since relied on litigation and advocacy to challenge election policies.

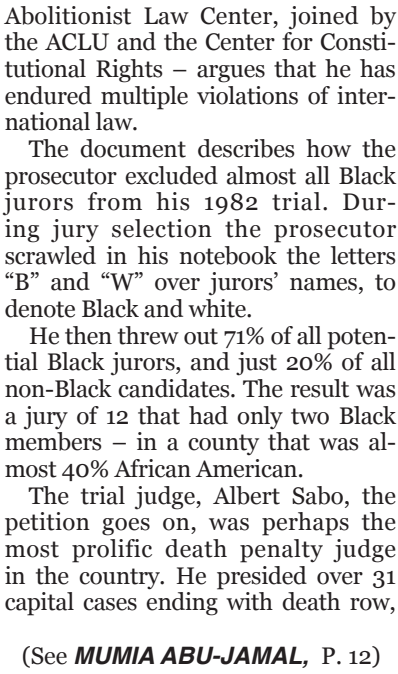
House Bill 958 remains under consideration in the General Assembly. The legislation would make several changes to election procedures, including limiting early voting periods, allowing any North Carolina resident to challenge another resident's ballot, and granting the state auditor authority to conduct random audits of county election results. The NC House passed House Bill 958 in a 66-47 party-line vote earlier this month.

protested his innocence – the first-degree murder of a police officer, Daniel Faulkner, in Philadelphia. Since then, he has become a lightning rod for both left and right.

For progressives, he is arguably the most celebrated political prisoner in America today. For the law and order crowd, led by the Fraternal Order of Police that has pushed relentlessly for his maximum punishment, he is nothing other than a cop killer.

Despite the long odds, Abu-Jamal is doing all he can to stay upbeat. “I’ve rarely, if ever, placed my hope in courts of law,” he said. “But I do trust in people, as people are the ones who build movements and make change.”

Tuesday’s newly lodged petition calls on the UN to take a stance over what it says are the many injustices against Abu-Jamal during his original trial and in the decades of unsuccessful appeals that have followed. His legal team – led by Bret Grothe of the



An illustration showing a clipboard with a 'DATA COLLECTION' form. The form has fields for 'RACE / ETHNICITY', 'GENDER', 'AGE', 'DISABILITY STATUS', and 'LANGUAGE', each with a corresponding icon and a checkbox. In the foreground, five stylized human figures of different colors (black, grey, white) are holding hands. To the right, a wire mesh trash can contains a discarded version of the 'DATA COLLECTION' form.

tigations.

Commissioner Kalpana Kotagal, the sole Democrat left on the EEOC since Trump moved to wrest control of the agency, voted against the proposal.

"Today, the commission discusses whether to turn back time to a period before the civil rights movement, kneecapping its ability to protect workers," Kotagal said.

Here's what to know about the reporting requirement and the proposal to end it:

Since 1966, the EEOC has required companies with at least 100 employees, or federal contractors with at least 50 workers, to submit a form called the EEO-1 each year.

The form, which has evolved over time, identifies 10 job categories from "Executive/Senior Level Officials and Managers" to "Laborers" and "Service Workers." It asks employers to report on the number of male and female workers in each job category, as well as the number of workers from different race and ethnicities: Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian, American Indian or Alaska Native and two or more races.

The data typically covers more than 50 million employees and 73,000 employers nationwide.

The EEOC launched during the Biden administration an interactive tool allowing the public to explore historical demographic metrics across industries and job categories. The most recent data is from 2023.

Under the Trump administration, the EEOC last collected EEO-1 data for the year 2024 but has not publicly disclosed it. Collection of the year 2025 would have begun this year.

The data shows white men dominating executive and senior manager roles at private companies, though women and minorities have made inroads, especially in the years following the #MeToo and Black Lives Matters movements.

Women remain underrepresented in the top ranks of companies. While they make up nearly half the workforce at the companies surveyed, women held just 34.5% of executive and senior manager roles in 2023. That was up from 29.2% a decade earlier.

White and Asian women made the fastest gains, and by 2023, were no longer underrepresented in senior roles compared to their numbers in the overall workforce. In contrast, Black and Hispanic women remained sharply underrepresented in executive and senior manager roles despite making modest gains.

Asian men have been proportionally represented in senior roles for years, while Black and Hispanic men remained underrepresented in 2023.

Of those demographic groups, only one was overrepresented in senior roles: white men, who made up a third of the overall workforce at the companies surveyed but held 52.7% of executive and senior man-

Lucas said the annual reporting requirements impose “hundreds of millions of dollars” on costs on employers, a burden she argued was unnecessary absent “any allegation, indication, or evidence of discrimination.”

The move was recommended by Project 2025, the conservative Heritage Foundation’s blueprint that has guided many of the Trump administration’s policies.

A group of former Democratic EEOC commissioners and legal counselors said there is little evidence that companies are routinely using employment data to engage in quotas or race-based hiring.

“This is simply inaccurate and unsupported speculation, at odds with the ways in which this data is actually collected, managed and used,” the former officials said in a statement.

Instead, the officials said, tracking such data encourages companies to proactively examine their hiring, promotion, benefits and other policies to ensure they are not unnecessarily erecting barriers.

Kotalag said the agency has used the data to determine whether a discrimination charge might be part of a deeper pattern at a company. She cited a recent investigation of California supermarket chain Val-larta Food Enterprises, in which the EEOC alleges the grocer failed or refused to recruit, hire or promote non-Hispanic individuals. In that case, EEO-1 data showed that “nearly 100 percent of its employees were Hispanic,” Kotalag said. “It’s a key tool in our toolbox.”

The agency has also issued special reports on demographic employment trends across certain industries or roles.

Kotalag highlighted a 2024 report on the tech sector, which showed that women had made virtually no gains between 2014 and 2022, and that workers under 40 years old had actually lost ground. The report also found tech company workers were more likely than others to file age- or pay discrimination charges, suggesting systemic barriers to women and older workers in the industry.

The report has been removed from the EEOC’s website.

By Judaea Ingram

Special To The Carolinian

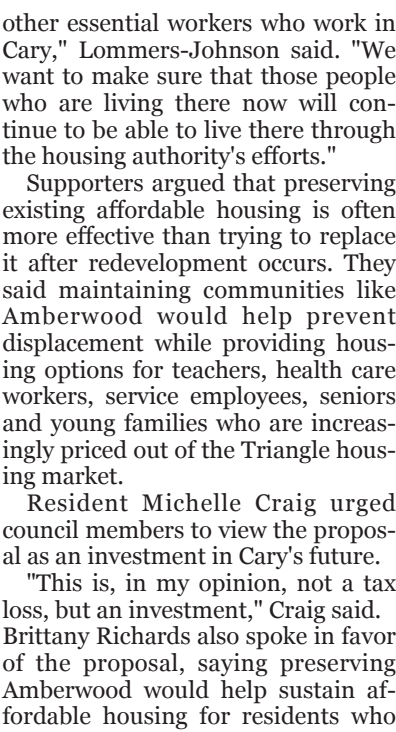
Dozens of residents packed the Cary Town Council chambers last Thursday night as elected officials considered a proposal that would have preserved the Amberwood Apartments as affordable housing. Throughout the often tense meeting, Mayor Harold Weinbrecht repeatedly asked audience members to remain quiet as supporters and opponents voiced passionate opinions before the council ultimately voted to reject the Raleigh Housing Authority's proposal.

The proposal centered on the Raleigh Housing Authority's effort to acquire the 340-unit apartment community and preserve it as affordable housing for current and future residents. Supporters viewed the plan as an opportunity to protect one of Cary's largest affordable housing communities, while opponents questioned how the acquisition could affect the surrounding neighborhood.

The debate highlighted the growing challenge of balancing rapid growth with affordable housing in Wake County, where rising home prices and rental costs have made it increasingly difficult for many working families to remain in the communities where they work.

Ashley Lommers-Johnson, chief executive officer of the Raleigh Housing Authority, said preserving Amberwood would help ensure that many of Cary's workforce could continue living in the town.

"The folks who live in these properties are people who work, who are teachers, child care workers and



already call the community home. Opponents, however, questioned whether the proposal would preserve the character of the neighborhood. Nancy Joyner-Kay, a Lochmere resident, said she supports mixed-income housing but argued that Amberwood's existing architectural and landscaping covenants have helped preserve the apartment community for decades. She questioned whether those protections would remain in place if the Raleigh Housing Authority assumed ownership.

Elena Morgan, who lives across from Amberwood, said she reviewed crime statistics near Raleigh Housing Authority properties in Raleigh and worried similar issues could follow the agency to Cary. She urged council members to "leave Amberwood alone."

Responding to those concerns, Jason Morrow, the housing authority's director of acquisitions and strategic partnerships, said the agency had "no reason to believe" Amberwood's

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Business & Finance

Why I Built A Hair Braiding Robot

By Fawzi Kehinde

PUNCH

A Nigerian-American engineer and Harvard graduate, Yinka Ogunbiyi, has explained why she built HaloBraid.

She described it as a response to the six hours of pain, 300 cost, and long-term physical damage that hairstylists absorb for a process 20 million Americans rely on every eight weeks.

Ogunbiyi is the developer of Halo-Braid, the world's first patent-pending braid-assist robot.

She has raised \$7m in seed funding for the device, drawing more than 7,000 salons to its waiting list, the US Mission in Nigeria disclosed in a post on X on Friday.

Her explanation, drawn from a pitch she delivered at the Harvard Innovation Challenge in 2025, re-surfaced and began trending online on Friday after the US Mission in Nigeria posted about her on X.

The funding round was led by Seven Seven Six, the venture capital firm founded by Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, with additional backing from AlleyCorp and Bling Capital.

Speaking on her journey, Ogunbiyi said the idea was rooted in a lifetime of wearing braids and a hairstyling industry that had not changed in 5,000 years.

"Imagine if every time you got your hair cut, it took six hours, cost



\$200 to \$300 and gave your hair-stylist arthritis at age 29.

"This is what it's like to get your hair braided. And I know this first-hand because I've worn braids all my life," she said.

She said the first time she braided her own hair, it took her four days, an ordeal she later learned was shared by millions of others.

"Hair braiding is now the most popular hairstyle for 20 million Americans who experience this miserable process every eight weeks. And yet braiding hasn't seen innovation since braiding was invented 5,000 years ago," she said.

Ogunbiyi holds a joint Master of Science and Master of Business Administration degree from the Harvard Engineering School and Harvard Business School.

She had previously worked on

connected smart home appliances and consumer electronics.

The idea for the company traces back to the COVID-19 pandemic, when she spent four days installing her own protective knotless braids and began exploring how technology could ease the process.

She partnered with co-founder David Afolabi to design an automated system built to work with stylists, not replace them.

"That's why we're building Halo-Braid, the first patent-pending hair braiding robot that saves time for stylists and their clients," she said.

"Stylists start the braid, Halo finishes it, and we reduce braiding time from hours to minutes, making braiding joyful, not painful, and allowing a stylist to grow their business without destroying their hands," she added.

Under the process, the hairstylist parts the scalp, sections the hair and creates the initial anchor knot by hand.

The HaloBraid unit is then attached to carry out the repetitive braiding sequence before the stylist removes it to finish, trim and seal the ends.

She said the device, which uses machine learning to match professional-quality braiding, had completed thousands of braids over the past year at five times the usual speed.

"Our devices have done thousands of braids and braided full hairstyles like mine for the past year, and we use machine learning to match professional quality but to do it five times faster," she said.

Addressing concerns that automation could dilute the cultural essence of heritage hairstyling, Ogunbiyi said nothing would be lost from the experience, since the technology only assists with the repetitive movements that consume the most time and place the greatest strain on the body.

According to industry data cited by the company, nearly 95 per cent of surveyed Black women said they would opt for protective styling more frequently if salon visits were less exhausting and time-consuming.

"So now we're excited to realise our mission of saving billions of hours spent braiding hair each year and transform an industry that hasn't changed in thousands of years," Ogunbiyi said.



Happy Retirement Amy!

For decades our community has traveled through the doors of Mechanics & Farmers Bank. We have opened accounts, secured loans and made business and personal transactions. Parents who had their first bank account with M&F have brought their college aged children in to open their first bank account. People new to business in Raleigh and legacy businesses alike have all entered the lobby of M&F Bank and been greeted with a smile. And the one thing that everyone noticed right away is the only white person working in the bank!

For 28 years Amy Claxton has been serving the Raleigh community at its "black bank." She has seen CEOs come and go, robbery attempts, businesses open and close and families expand. She has been here in Raleigh through its rapid growth and its turmoil. Amy has seen a lot in her years at M&F Bank, and if any of it bothered her you would never know it. You may not know what the world has for you on any particular day, but you can count on a smile from Amy Claxton if you walked into M&F Bank on Hargett Street.

"I have been very blessed to be here and I have been treated very well," Claxton said in a brief interview with The Carolinian. Coming from northern Indiana, Amy spent her first few years in Raleigh raising her children. When she decided to return to work she took a cashier job at a grocery store and then a plot sales position at a cemetery. But when Amy decided to go work for M&F Bank, she found her home. For almost three decades the one who stood out the most was the one who fit in the best!

Enjoy your retirement! You will be missed.

Duke Energy Surpasses \$65M In N.C. Customer Assistance

PRNewswire— The Duke Energy Foundation is investing \$1 million in nonprofit organizations across North Carolina that help families, seniors and vulnerable residents access essentials such as food, housing, health care, utility assistance and other critical services. The grants will support front line organizations working to support community needs while helping them build the capacity to serve even more people.

Where the money goes: The \$1 million investment supports two complementary efforts: helping nonprofits build long-term capacity while expanding services for North Carolina's growing senior population.

•Capacity Building: \$500,000 will help strengthen 27 community organizations that deliver critical community services, including housing and utility assistance, food access, health care and more. Funding will help modernize technology, expand food distribution networks, improve case management systems, coordinate volunteers and enhance fundraising and service delivery capabilities.

•Senior Vibrancy: \$500,000 will support 22 community organizations serving older North Carolinians through home repairs, meal programs, transportation assistance, benefits navigation, emergency financial support and other services that help seniors live independently, safely and with dignity.

•Why it matters: "Duke Energy Foundation's work is rooted in a simple belief: when our customers and communities need support, we must show up in meaningful, practical ways," said Kendal Bowman, Duke Energy's North Carolina president. "We know families and seniors across our state are making careful decisions about household expenses, especially during summer when energy use can increase. These grants help trusted nonprofits meet people where they are – with food, housing support, home repairs, health resources and the local care that keeps communities strong."



502 Students Lose Spots At Howard University Over Tuition Payments

WASHINGTON (AP) — A'Zariah Miles' dream of attending Howard University was a few weeks from being realized. Then it all came crashing down.

Miles, 17, of Knoxville, Tennessee, is one of more than 500 incoming first-year students at Howard who learned this week that they have been unenrolled from the prestigious, historically Black Washington, D.C., university and no longer have spots for the upcoming fall semester that begins Aug. 17.

Many have taken to social media — some in tears — to share their stories. Some posts have gone viral.

After Miles learned she had been unenrolled, her mother, Kendra Miles, said the school's automated system would not allow the family to enroll in a payment plan because the amount that was owed made them ineligible to sign up.

"I've reached out since we got the email (Wednesday). I've emailed, literally, everybody," Kendra Miles said. "I emailed her adviser. He responded and said it wasn't a mistake and there was nothing they could do."

On Friday, Howard confirmed in an email that the school sent notifications to "502 first-time-in-college students whose accounts did not reflect the required enrollment and financial obligations by the previously communicated deadlines."

Starting in March, the unenrolled students began receiving specific



communications about enrollment requirements, payment expectations and deadlines via email and orientation sessions, the school said.

"The university recognizes that timing differences may have occurred between when financial aid was reflected and when charges were finalized," Howard said in the email. "Students who believe their account did not accurately reflect their financial standing at the deadline should contact the Bursar's Office. Each case will be reviewed individually to determine whether adjustments or reinstatement are appropriate."

Howard, one of about 100 historically Black colleges and universities in the United States, had an undergraduate enrollment last fall of about 11,000. The average annual tuition

for undergraduate students living on campus is about \$38,000. Housing costs are about \$13,600.

Robert Kelchen, a professor of higher education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, said colleges generally try to walk a fine line in making sure students can enroll, but also making sure students pay their bills.

Howard "either had students who owed a lot of money and they didn't think a lot of students would pay, or potentially, they have a really big incoming class and they can replace those students," Kelchen said.

Laverne Mickens coaches students and their families on how to apply for college scholarships. Mickens said that she answered more than 400 emails Wednesday and Thurs-

day from students and families impacted by the enrollment situation at Howard. She said most of them were strangers and they were "frantic and crying."

Students and parents are upset "People are devastated," said Mickens who runs The Scholarship College Mama LLC, which is not affiliated with Howard. "Parents are saying: 'Can you help us? Howard unenrolled us.'"

A'Zariah Miles, who plans to major in biology, chose Howard over other schools that accepted her. Now, she is worried that it is too deep into the summer to enroll elsewhere.

"Everybody's housing is booked, or I can't enroll because it's too late or I missed orientation," she said. "I've been trying to continue to have hope with Howard, but I don't really have that much time before school starts and I don't really want to have a gap year."

Like Miles and others, Saniah Collins learned Wednesday that she no longer was enrolled at Howard.

"My mom is part of a parent group chat," said Collins, 17, of Atlanta. "That day we learned that a lot of students were getting unenrolled."

Collins received an email from the school Wednesday afternoon that said a July 10 deadline to pay her tuition balance or make payment arrangements had passed and the school no longer could hold her place.

Global Drone Manufacturer Selects Fayetteville For First U.S. Flagship Manufacturing Facility

RALEIGH, N.C.—Governor Josh Stein announced Skyeton, Inc., a manufacturer of unmanned aerial systems (UAS), will create 162 new jobs in Cumberland County. The company will invest more than \$3.1 million in Fayetteville to establish its first flagship manufacturing operation in the United States.

"We're proud to welcome Skyeton to a state with such a proud military tradition and advanced manufacturing base," said Governor Josh Stein. "By combining our manufacturing workforce, the skillsets of our transitioning military personnel, a central East Coast location, and a strategic transportation infrastructure, North Carolina continues to rise to the top ranks as the best place to do business, especially in the aerospace and defense sectors."

Headquartered in Las Vegas, Skyeton, Inc. is the U.S. subsidiary of Skyeton Holdings, a global manufacturer of UAS for the defense and commercial sectors. Skyeton has more than 350,000 combat-proven flight hours of its long-endurance Raybird platform for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions. The company's expansion will use cutting-edge technologies to design, engineer, manufacture, test, distribute, and support its composite UAS from a 28,500-square-foot production facility.

"Expanding our manufacturing footprint in North Carolina is about more than opening a new facility. It's about strengthening America's



defense industrial base, creating high-quality American jobs, and delivering combat-proven capabilities closer to the warfighters we exist to serve," said Rigoberto (Quito) Sáez, CEO of Skyeton, Inc. "North Carolina is the perfect place to call home, and we're incredibly grateful for the warm reception and tremendous support we've received from the State of North Carolina, the Fayetteville Cumberland Economic Development Corporation, our congressional delegation, and our mission partners from the Department of War. Together, we're building the next generation of American unmanned systems and helping ensure our nation's and partner nations' warfighters, defenders, and first responders have the capabilities they need when it matters most."

"North Carolina is a hub for de-

fense innovation and advanced manufacturing," said N.C. Commerce Secretary Lee Lilley. "With investments in research, industry partnerships, and our world-class colleges and universities, we are creating an environment where innovative companies like Skyeton can support our national security, grow their business, and succeed."

Although wages will vary by position, the annual average salary for the new positions will be \$70,759, which exceeds Cumberland County's average of \$49,382. These new jobs could potentially create an annual payroll impact of more than \$1.4 million for the region.

A performance-based grant of \$500,000 from the One North Carolina Fund will help the company expand into North Carolina. The OneNC Fund provides financial as-

sistance to local governments to help attract economic investment and to create jobs. Companies receive no money upfront and must meet job creation and capital investment targets to qualify for payment. All OneNC grants require matching participation from local governments, and any award is contingent upon that condition being met.

"This win for Cumberland County and the entire state validates our reputation for attracting innovative companies," said N.C. Senator Val Applewhite. "The strength of our defense and manufacturing workforce will continue to drive economic growth and position our community to compete for more opportunities like this."

"Skyeton making its new home near the world's largest military installation is outstanding news," said N.C. Representative Frances Jackson. "Fayetteville and the surrounding region offer unparalleled access to the resources, talent, and supply chain networks that fast-growing companies need to thrive."

In addition to the North Carolina Department of Commerce and the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, other key partners in this project include the North Carolina General Assembly, the Rural Infrastructure Authority, North Carolina Community College System, Fayetteville Technical Community College, Cumberland County, the Fayetteville Cumberland County Economic Development Corporation, and the City of Fayetteville.



Parkside's Affordable Housing Apartments Opens

Raleigh — Just over a year after breaking ground, the vision for Parkside Apartments has become a reality, bringing 144 affordable homes to families in Raleigh.

"Parkside Apartments is exactly the kind of investment Raleigh needs: quality, affordable homes located close to jobs, transit, and opportunity," said Mayor Janet Cowell.

Located near the future Western Boulevard BRT, the community gives families access to jobs, schools, public transportation, and other important services. Residents also have access to a fitness center, playground, business center, community room, and other shared amenities.

The City used \$6 million from the 2020 Affordable Housing Bond to buy the site in 2023, and then signed a long-term lease with Blue Ridge Cascade to make the project possible. The City also partnered with Wake County, which invested \$5.7 million in the project.

Through the City's Affordable Housing Plan, Raleigh is expanding housing choices, supporting affordable housing development, and helping more residents find safe, stable, and affordable places to live.

Projects like Parkside Apartments are part of Raleigh's broader approach to addressing housing affordability.



THE GOLDEN YEARS

By Judykay Jefferson

LOVE AND SERVICE

This last week in July is Love Week at my church, Elevation. I LOVE, Love Week! There are community service events in person, online, in all our physical locations and in cities where we hold “pop-ups.” There are hundreds of events, thousands of volunteers and although it’s actually 8 or so days, the excitement begins months in advance.

Serving in the community is not something I have done a lot before I became a part of Elevation but for the last eight years, I’ve been all in. It has made my Christian walk come alive in my everyday life in a way nothing else has.

I don’t remember our large, black, United Methodist Church holding any community events, but it was the sixties and our community was focused on civil rights. I faithfully filled my UNICEF card annually and donated change to various organizations. In fact, shortly after moving to Mississippi, I dumped a handful of change in a collection box for something called the Citizens Council. A council of citizens sounded like a good idea to me. Imagine my surprise when I discovered what was under the sheet! I digress.

I don’t think anyone would disagree that America is changing. Politically we’re leaning away from the world’s tired and poor; the huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The current every-man-for-himself spirit has surely impacted community service as it has everything else, but there is good news.

Volunteerism in America is changing—but not fading. In fact, older adults remain one of the most reliable engines of service nationwide. Studies consistently show that African American seniors volunteer at high rates, often through faith communities, civic groups, and neighborhood organizations. And while younger generations are redefining how they connect to service, elders continue to anchor the tradition with consistency, compassion, and a deep sense of responsibility.

Demographically, older adults—especially those with strong religious ties—are among the most likely to volunteer. Pew Research data shows African Americans remain one of the most committed faith communities in the country, with high levels of prayer, attendance, and service engagement. This strong faith identity translates directly into civic action: seniors in Black communities often serve as the backbone of food ministries, tutoring programs, caregiving networks, and voterregistration efforts.

Despite generational shifts in religious affiliation, the Black Church remains a powerful force for community uplift. A 2024 national survey found that 71% of predominantly Black congregations name serving their local communities as a top priority, far higher than predominantly white churches. Black churches are more likely to provide elderly services, GED tutoring, prison outreach, and citizenship programs—and far more likely to view social justice as central to their mission.

This is not new. Black religious institutions have always been more than places of worship; they have been strategy rooms, cultural anchors, and

sanctuaries for truth-telling. Their civic leadership stretches back centuries—from abolitionist organizing to the Civil Rights Movement to today’s fights for housing, healthcare, and voting rights.

Even as younger generations express faith differently, research shows religious resilience among Black Millennials, who still see the church as a cultural and emotional home even when they participate in new ways. For seniors, this continuity is familiar: the church has always been where service meets spirituality.

For many African American elders, volunteerism is not just a civic duty—it is a spiritual calling.

In Christianity, service is rooted in teachings such as “faith without works is dead” and Christ’s command to care for “the least of these.” The Black Church has long interpreted volunteerism as an act of liberation, compassion, and communal responsibility. Service is seen as a way to honor God, uplift the community, and continue the legacy of ancestors who relied on collective care for survival.

In Islam, charity (sadaqah) and community service are core obligations. Many Black Muslim communities participate in food distribution, prison outreach, and youth mentorship as expressions of faith.

In African spiritual traditions, communal responsibility and mutual aid are foundational values. Service is understood as honoring ancestors, strengthening the village, and sustaining collective wellbeing.

Across traditions, the message is clear: volunteerism is sacred work.

Trends shift and younger generations redefine service, however African American seniors remain the steady hands guiding community uplift. Our leadership—rooted in faith, history, and lived experience—continues to shape the future of our neighborhoods.



SOME THINGS WE NEED TO KNOW

The death of Nolan Wells is a tragedy. This is, by all accounts, a young man who was a success story waiting to happen.

Had he died on the football field because of an illness or accident, it would have been no less tragic. Yet, when it appears that there may have been foul play, it becomes even more tragic to those who are awakened. We are living during a time when the color of someone's skin matters, especially to our justice system and to those whom we choose as the leaders of our country. A man who says and behaves in ways that unveil his dishonesty and racism was elected. People voted for him. Families voted for him. States voted for him. Even Black people and others who are called minorities in this country voted for him. White women voted for him, dismissing the court case in which he was found to have sexually abused a woman and dismissing the accusations of others. Because race matters in America, there are people who dismiss the worst actions and attitudes of this man.

What, you might ask, does this have to do with Nolan Wells and his death? In my opinion, it has everything to do with what may be under the cover of his death. When a young person goes somewhere with his friends and they come back without him, that is suspicious, no matter what color the group might be. But in a country where race matters, you are not a racist, nor are you outside of reality and truth, to suspect foul play when the justice system

claims not to see color, yet consistently we see that sentences are meted out differently when the color of one's skin is in the psyche of those who prosecute, our jurors, and our judges. We are beyond ignorant if we are not suspicious of the statement, "Foul play is not suspected."

Some simple questions don't take a lawyer to ask. It's reported that his companions had his telephone and his keys, saying that he didn't want to leave with them but wanted them to take those items back. If you have any knowledge of teenagers, they don't give up their phones easily. That's just not normal. To me, it is not unreasonable to think of foul play in the case of a tragedy such as this.

When one of my sons was in the first grade, he became friends with a little boy in his class who was white. He was invited to his home, and he went. Of course, I met his parents. Later, we invited their son to visit us. The invitation was turned down. His mother told me she couldn't allow her son to visit us because we lived in a Black neighborhood. She said this as though I was supposed to understand her reasoning and agree. Of course, I didn't, and I told her so. I had the same assurance that her home was not safe for my son as she had, in her disbelief, that ours wasn't safe for hers. She was shocked because, in her world, skin color mattered. I wasn't shocked because I live in the USA and had worked in a school system where these attitudes toward children and our community prevailed.

One of my co-workers once told me that he believed in integration, as long as our students came to his class, but he would never allow his own children to come to Southeast Raleigh. He worked with a lot of children of color with that attitude, and parents were expected to trust him and his evaluations. He wanted to accuse me of seeing too much through the eyes of race. I asked him first how he didn't see what was in his own eyes. Then I said, "If I don't, who will?" I have three sons, and I have had to especially talk with my sons about race and racial matters. I have attempted to teach them what is underneath the attitudes of some people when it comes to racism. I say "attempted-" because sometimes what they thought was racism wasn't, and sometimes it was, and they missed it.

It is often our job to protect our children emotionally and physically from what the world wants to grow in them. But I also think we have to teach them the good through what they see us model. If we think living in an integrated neighborhood is better and somehow makes us better, there's a message there. Once, two children came to Southeast Raleigh and proudly said it was their first time coming to "the ghetto." I'm like, "Southeast Raleigh?" Another little girl didn't want to visit her grandmother because she said she was ashamed to be around Black folks. Who taught her that? And what must they think of themselves when they look in the mirror each day?

What does all this have to do with Nolan Wells? I don't know for sure. But I'm concerned that his big heart got in the way of his sense of danger as he was palling around with those who may have perceived themselves to be better than he was. His father said he didn't want to go. We must teach our children that the inside voice that says, "No," must become our outside voice, loud and clear.

Some of the Facebook posts from people who want to believe that we are bringing race into this issue just don't understand our journey here. As a great psychiatrist once said, "Black people who suspect racism are the least paranoid people in this country. Those who don't are at the extreme high end of denial." I don't know what happened here. I wasn't there. But I feel in my bones that foul play was involved.

This young man has gone on to his real inheritance, and I have lived long enough to see that God turns tragedy into triumph. I thank God for Colin Kaepernick, Bryson Allen, Tyler Perry, those who have been blessed with wealth and are willing to step up and speak out, and the Black investigators and lawyers who say, "Here I am. Send me."

I can also say with assurance that, as the mother of three Black sons, I know the pain of these parents because we never know when a tragedy of this ilk will come in the form of a telephone call.



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07/24/2026	Baxter	Cefazolin in Dextrose Injection Drugs
07/24/2026	Long Grove Pharmaceuticals	Particulate matter (cardboard) found in the solution. Baxter International Inc. Cyclophosphamide for Injection Drugs
07/22/2026	Sunny Pharmtech, Inc.	Presence of particulate matter identified as steel Sprig & Sprout; Fresh and Ready Spicy Breakfast Burritos
07/22/2026	Fresh & Ready Foods LLC	Food & Beverages Undeclared soy allergen due to inadvertent inclusion of sausage in products labeled as vegetarian
07/21/2026	Midwest Poultry Services, L.P.	Pumpkin Tree Peter Rabbit Organics Banana & Strawberry Fruit Puree Pouches, 4 oz. (113 g) Food & Beverages
07/20/2026	PT Organics Limited	Potential presence of soft plastic in the finished product. Rising Pharma Holdings Inc. Cetrizine Hydrochloride Tablets USP 5 mg Drugs
07/19/2026	Zen Principle	Potential cross contamination with Ranitidine Unique Pharmaceutical Laboratories Moringa Leaf Powder Capsules
07/18/2026	CV, JB, Mark and more	Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness Possible Cyclospora Contamination
07/06/2026	GreenWise	Organic IQF Frozen Blueberries 10 oz Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness
07/02/2026	Pedigree	Possible E. Coli Contamination Frutas y Hortalizas del Sur S.A. High Protein Chopped Chicken & Duck Flavor Wet Dog Food
07/01/2026	Mars Petcare US, Inc.	Animal & Veterinary, Pet Food, Food & Beverages, Pet Food
06/26/2026	Oribe	Potential foreign plastic contamination
06/26/2026	Oribe Serene Scalp Densifying Shampoo (8.5 oz and 33.8 oz)	Cosmetics
06/26/2026	Bakr	May be contaminated with Pluralibacter gergoviae bacteria
06/26/2026	Brown Butter Chocolate Chunk Ready to Bake Cookie Dough	Food & Beverages, Allergens
06/26/2026	May Contain Undeclared Soy	Food & Beverages, Allergens
06/26/2026	Bear Stewart LLC	May Contain Undeclared Peanuts
06/26/2026	TN	May Contain Undeclared Peanuts
06/26/2026	Vitamins 100% Organic Moringa Capsules and Powder	Food & Beverages, Allergens
06/26/2026	Food & Beverages, Foodborne Illness	Possible Salmonella Contamination
06/26/2026	Total Nutrition Inc.	Food & Beverages, Allergens
06/26/2026	High Valley Orchard	Chocolate Covered Raisins
06/26/2026	Food & Beverages, Allergens	May Contain Undeclared Peanuts
06/26/2026	Lehi Valley Trading Company	Food & Beverages
06/26/2026	Morningstar Farms	Possible plastic pieces in the food
06/26/2026	Morningstar Farms	Food & Beverages
06/26/2026	Up & Up	Up & Up Fragrance Free Baby Wipes – 20, 72, 216, 800, and 1200 count, Up & Up Fresh
06/26/2026	Up & Up	Cucumber Scented Baby Wipes – 72, 216, and 800 count
06/26/2026	Cosmetics	May be contaminated with Burkholderia cepacia and Burkholderia gladioli.
06/26/2026	Target	Food & Beverages, Allergens
06/26/2026	Pearl Milling Company	Undeclared Soy and Milk
06/26/2026	Pearl Milling Company	Ballester Hermanos
06/26/2026	Gas-X	Gas-X Extra Strength Softgels 120 and 72ct
06/26/2026	Drugs	Potential chemical contamination
06/26/2026	Haleon	

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Dr. Marie Debnam, MD is an Internist in Raleigh. Dr. Debnam specializes in Internal Medicine, and has 34 years of experience. Dr. Debnam graduated from Meharry Medical College and is affiliated with Wake Med Hospital.

Food Is Medicine: A New Approach to Improving Health Through Nutrition

Chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and cancer continue to place a heavy burden on the United States healthcare system. These conditions affect millions of Americans and account for the majority of healthcare spending. Although medical treatment has advanced significantly, many chronic illnesses are closely linked to poor nutrition and limited access to healthy foods. This has led healthcare professionals and policymakers to promote the **Food Is Medicine** (FIM) approach, which recognizes nutritious food as an essential part of disease prevention and treatment rather than simply a source of calories.

A healthy diet plays a vital role in maintaining overall wellness and reducing the risk of chronic disease. However, many individuals experience food insecurity, meaning they do not have consistent access to affordable, nutritious foods. Financial hardship, unemployment, health problems, and limited community resources often prevent families from purchasing healthy meals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity increased dramatically as many households faced job losses, higher living costs, and disruptions in the food supply. These challenges contributed not only to poor physical health but also to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and stress.

The United States has several federal programs designed to reduce hunger, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program, school breakfast and lunch programs, and community meal services. These programs help millions of Americans access food and improve nutrition. However, they generally focus on providing food rather than selecting foods that are specifically designed to prevent or manage chronic diseases. While they are effective in reducing hunger, they often do not provide individualized nutrition support for people with medical conditions.

The Food Is Medicine Initiative works differently. It builds on traditional food assistance by integrating nutrition directly into healthcare. Instead of offering general food support, these programs provide foods selected to meet the medical needs of patients. Healthcare providers may prescribe specific meals or healthy foods as part of a patient's treatment plan, recognizing that proper nutrition can improve health outcomes alongside medical care.

Three major Food Is Medicine interventions include:
—Medically Tailored Meals (MTMs): Fully prepared meals designed by registered dietitians for individuals with serious chronic illnesses who may be unable to cook.
—Medically Tailored Groceries

(MTGs): Grocery packages containing nutritious ingredients for individuals who can prepare meals at home.

—Produce Prescription Programs: Vouchers or debit cards that allow patients to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at grocery stores or farmers' markets.

Research has shown encouraging

results from Food Is Medicine initiatives. Participants often experience improved food security, healthier eating habits, and greater consumption of fruits and vegetables. Individuals with conditions such as type 2 diabetes have demonstrated improvements in blood sugar control, while many participants report reduced stress and a higher quality



Two Seniors from the Covenant Senior Living facility visited Rocky Mount's Community Garden on Wednesday morning. They pull ripened cucumbers and zucchini to take back to their neighbors at Covenant.



RAISING THEM RIGHT—Richard Joyner of Conetoe Family Life Center is helping to usher in the next generation of food secure communities. Joyner believes that this next generation will put family and community first.

Physicians and Lawyers to Convene Historic Joint Annual Conference in Wilmington, NC

GREENSBORO, N.C. — The Old North State Medical Society (ONSMS), North Carolina's oldest physician organization, founded in 1887, will host its 135th Joint Annual Scientific Meeting in partnership with the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers (NCABL), Friday, August 14 through Sunday, August 16, 2026, at Hotel Ballast, 301 North Water Street, Wilmington, NC 28401, on the Cape Fear riverfront at Hotel Ballast. The conference opens Friday afternoon, August 14, continues with a full-day medical program beginning at 7:00 AM on Saturday, August 15, and concludes with the Joint Prayer Breakfast from 8:00 to 9:30 AM on Sunday, August 16.

Under the theme “Bridging Justice & Health: Collaborative Leadership in an Era of Uncertainty,” the gathering unites two professions that serve the same communities from different shores. A bridge only stands when both sides are

anchored — medicine on one bank, justice on the other — and for three days in Wilmington, physicians and attorneys will build that span together.

An Exciting Medical Program Across Three Domains

The medical program is organized around three domains, each addressing a pillar of the health of North Carolina's communities:

- Health Equity — confronting health disparities head-on and advancing care that reaches every community, from the coast to the mountains.
- Healthcare Workforce Readiness Pipeline — cultivating the next generation of physicians and health professionals, from early exposure through residency, so the workforce reflects the communities it serves.
- Technology and Innovation — examining how clinical trials, emerging technologies, and data can be harnessed to deliver affordable, trustworthy, and equitable

care. Physicians attending the conference can earn 8.25 continuing medical education (CME) credits across the scientific program.

The conference features two of the nation's most influential public voices. Dr. Eddie Glaude, distinguished scholar, author, and commentator, will deliver the Saturday luncheon keynote. The Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II, President and Senior Lecturer of Repairers of the Breach and architect of the Moral Monday Movement, will deliver the message at the Sunday Joint Prayer Breakfast.

Dr. Cedric M. Bright, ONSMS President stated, “We believe that access to healthcare is a right that empowers individuals to live their best lives. Timely justice protects our communities from undue harm. This conference puts both professions in the same room because our patients and our communities deserve the very best in access and

treatment and protection from predatory justice practices. They have the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Zenobia Edwards, EdD, Executive Director of ONSMS stated, “This historic convening is another stride in our relentless pursuit of health equity for every North Carolinian. Medicine and justice have always served the same communities through different lenses. Together in Wilmington, we will bring the most important issues facing our communities into focus through education, innovation, and collaboration.”

Registration Full conference registration is open now at onsms.org. For those who can join for the heart of the scientific program, a Saturday Only registration is available for \$225. Tickets to the Sunday Joint Prayer Breakfast featuring Rev. Dr. Barber may be purchased separately for \$45.



Trump Admin Demands Hospitals Share Emergency Room Records

KFF—A tiny federal agency tasked with protecting the public from injuries caused by lawn mowers and coffeemakers is demanding that some of the nation’s biggest health systems turn over detailed, personally identifiable medical records of all patients who seek help at their emergency rooms.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission, responsible for tracking and issuing recalls of dangerous products sold in the U.S., began discreetly pressuring hospital executives this year to share personally identifiable health data with a private contractor. But hospital lawyers and other industry experts have questioned the agency’s authority to collect, its ability to safeguard such a swath of sensitive information, and whether it has followed the legal process to overhaul its surveillance system.

After KFF Health News asked the CPSC about the new system, the agency announced the program on July 21. Left unmentioned, however, is the alarm it has raised among hospital executives, as well as the nature and extent of the agency’s data demands.

In a stark departure from its product-focused mission, the agency’s goal is to obtain millions of Americans’ medical records from emergency room visits for most injuries, from a broken bone to a childhood vaccine reaction or even a suicide attempt, according to documents and emails obtained by KFF Health News, as well as interviews with five people involved or familiar with the discussions.

A CPSC official also insisted in the emails that the institutions provide all ER patients’ identifiable information — such as names, addresses, diagnoses, and other personal details — to the contractor, Konza Health,



for analysis. In correspondence with hospital executives, Konza representatives described participation as “mandatory” or “required.”

As a condition of viewing the correspondence, KFF Health News agreed not to republish some of the emails it obtained.

The CPSC wants at least 100 hospitals to start sending detailed medical records by the end of this year, according to an internal memo.

“The whole thing is troubling,” said Sharona Hoffman, a professor of health law at Case Western Reserve University who noted that giving a private entity access to a sweeping collection of data will introduce risks to patient privacy. “If this company really is collecting identifiable information, that is worrisome for patients.”

The new project was launched amid upheaval at the traditionally independent agency, which is without a governing board since President Donald Trump fired the CPSC’s three Democratic board members.

Nearly 1 in 5 career staffers left the CPSC in the first 16 months of the new administration, according to a KFF Health News analysis of federal workforce data.

The initiative also comes as the Trump administration has sought unprecedented access to millions of Americans’ medical records, with the Office of Personnel Management requesting federal workers’ sensitive health information and Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. using a private organization to collect more medical records for his studies on vaccines and autism.

Steve Roney, CPSC spokesperson, said in an emailed statement on July 10 that the CPSC is “modernizing” its surveillance system. Asked whether the CPSC will file complaints against hospitals that do not participate, he said only that while the previous system “operated as a voluntary program, the ability of hospitals to opt out limited the sample size and usefulness of the data.”

Roney also acknowledged that the agency had not yet notified the public, as “required by law.”

Federal law requires the agency to provide notice and a public comment period before requesting information from 10 or more entities, a step it has not taken despite plans for 100 hospitals to join the surveillance system. KFF Health News independently confirmed with over a dozen hospitals that they had been approached.

Federal public health authorities cannot legally mandate that private health data be reported. But CPSC officials have suggested publicly and privately that if hospitals decline to share data with the new surveillance system, they could be subject to strict penalties from a data-sharing regulation known as “information blocking.”

Yet some hospital executives say they are reluctant to share patients’ sensitive data because they’re con-

(See *ER RECORDS*, P. 7)

Millions Of Family Caregivers Manage Complex Diets For Their Older Relatives

Minakshi Raj
University of Illinois

My first science experiment was in sixth grade for our county’s science fair. Over three months, I tested how my grandfather’s blood sugar responded to green leafy vegetables versus brown rice at dinnertime. My mom would prepare traditional South Indian meals, including those foods, and my dad would supervise as I measured and administered insulin and recorded my grandfather’s blood sugar levels.

It was the first time I observed how much thought, care and uncertainty there can be in supporting the nutritional needs of a relative with a complex health condition.

Today, as a health services researcher studying how family caregivers manage food and nutrition

as part of taking care of older family members, I know that helping an older relative eat well doesn’t just support their health. It can also bring them joy, boost their energy, prompt nostalgia or offer fun opportunities to experiment with new flavors.

But addressing nutrition for older adults, who may have multiple chronic conditions, can be complex. Many of the caregivers I interview for my research don’t recognize how much time, energy and effort they dedicate to their nutrition-related responsibilities until we have a focused conversation about it.

Too often, caregivers are left to manage these substantial responsibilities alone, with limited resources and information about nutrition.

Over 60 million caregivers in the U.S. support a relative, friend or neighbor with daily activities, such

as dressing and transportation, and with complex aspects of daily life, such as navigating finances and communicating with clinicians. An estimated 1 in 4 family caregivers of older adults help with nutrition and dietary modifications, my colleagues and I find.

Nutrition needs change with age. Older adults generally need fewer calories but require more protein, fiber and other nutrients to maintain muscle, bone and overall health. And the shrinking number and size of taste buds and reduced saliva production can affect which foods people enjoy or are able to eat.

More than 7 in 10 older adults have more than one chronic condition, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, dementia or osteoporosis. Some conditions are risk factors for developing others – for instance, having Type 2 diabetes

raises the likelihood of cardiovascular disease, and both are risk factors for dementia.

Optimal nutrition is critical for managing these diseases – and often for reducing the risk of developing them. Family caregivers are often responsible for every aspect of providing nutrition support, from planning meals to grocery shopping, to making sure their relative eats those meals.

But different health conditions require different approaches to dietary changes, and those changes can be even more nuanced when someone has multiple conditions. For example, someone with Type 2 diabetes can benefit from eating fewer foods with refined carbohydrates, such as cookies, candies and sodas, and more foods high in fiber, protein and fats to stabilize

(See *COMPLEX DIETS*, P. 7)



The TikTok Benadryl Challenge Isn’t Going Away – Officials Are Trying To Stop This Deadly Trend

By Andrew Yockey
University of Illinois

A dangerous social media trend that started in 2020 has persisted into 2026, with heartbreaking consequences.

In May and June 2026, four American teens died participating in the “Benadryl Challenge.” This trend encourages adolescents and young adults to consume excessive amounts of diphenhydramine – the active ingredient in Benadryl – to induce hallucinations.

One study has estimated that this challenge may have been responsible for as many 131 deaths in the U.S. between 2020 and 2024.

As with all online trends, the Benadryl Challenge is not limited by geographical borders. Though it originated in the U.S., public health officials in Canada have been warning parents and clinicians about the same trend since it began.

I research the powerful effects of social media on health behaviors such as substance use, sexual health and nutrition. The speed at which online trends like the Benadryl Challenge spread presents a new challenge for public health.

Diphenhydramine is marketed under various brand names and is available over the counter as a treatment for allergies in numerous countries. The drug works by blocking a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine, which can help calm the body’s response to allergens.

Although therapeutic doses are generally safe, taking too much can result in severe anticholinergic toxicity. Symptoms of this condition include delirium, seizures, an abnormal heart rhythm, hyperthermia, coma and death.

Many young people may underestimate the drug’s potential risks because it’s inexpensive and available at nearly any pharmacy or retail store. Plus, teens are highly susceptible to peer pressure and fear of missing out, so they may not appropriately weigh the risks with social media users and influencers encouraging experimentation with this drug.

‘Over-the-counter’ doesn’t mean ‘safe’
The Benadryl Challenge highlights a broader public health challenge: the perception that medications available without a prescription are harmless. Even adults tend to consider diphenhydramine to be a “safe” household medicine.

But poison control centers and emergency departments have been responding to an increasing number of reports about intentional misuse of this and other over-the-counter medications among young people since 2020, with social media contributing to the rapid spread of dangerous behaviors.

In response, public health agencies have increasingly recognized that preventing medication-related harms requires both educating consumers and engaging with the digital environments where risky behaviors emerge.

In 2020, when videos of this trend first emerged on TikTok, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a warning about the Benadryl Challenge, emphasizing the risks of high-dose diphenhydramine use among adolescents. The agency urged parents, caregivers and healthcare professionals to discuss medication safety with young people.

The FDA also contacted TikTok and encouraged the platform to remove videos promoting the challenge and to remain vigilant against similar content.

More broadly, governments have begun holding social media companies accountable for failing to protect children from harmful online content. For example, the European Union’s Digital Services Act and the United Kingdom’s Online Safety Act establish regulatory frameworks for penalizing platforms that fail to address risks to minors.

Still, responses to the Benadryl Challenge outside the U.S. have largely consisted of public awareness efforts rather than formal regulatory action specifically targeting this trend.

The name “Benadryl” can also create confusion internationally. In the U.S., Benadryl allergy products contain diphenhydramine, the medication involved in the challenge. But products sold under the same brand name abroad contain different active ingredients.

In Canada, public health messaging has focused on raising awareness among adolescents and their caregivers after 2026 reports that the challenge resurfaced among youth. In May, a First Nation community in Ontario issued an alert warning families about the dangers of intentionally consuming high doses of diphenhydramine, following reports of youth participation in the trend.

The evolving response to the Benadryl Challenge aligns with the World Health Organization’s call for proactive public health communication. Rather than responding to harmful online trends after they’ve gone viral, public health efforts are increasingly focused on early education, timely risk communication and rapid dissemination of accurate information.

This includes improving medication safety education, strengthening digital health literacy and helping young people critically evaluate health-related content they encounter online. School-based medication safety programs, such as Generation Rx, may help reduce susceptibility to future medication-related social media challenges.

Caregivers, schools, healthcare providers, poison control centers, public health agencies and technology companies all have a role in identifying emerging risks and communicating accurate information quickly.

Helping young people recognize dangerous online content and understand the consequences of participating in these trends may be one of the most practical ways to reduce harm before the next viral challenge emerges.

Your 5 Senses at 50+

AARP— The good news for your senses at 50-plus: Your body’s web of sensory nerves still flashes news to your brain at speeds up to 268 miles per hour.

The reality check for your senses at 50-plus: Some of your senses may start needing a boost, be it hot sauce or glasses.

Your eyes are looking good. More than 90 percent of people in their late 50s are untouched by cataracts or other serious eye issues. Especially if you live north of the Mason-Dixon Line. A recent study found that for every one degree higher in latitude you live, your chance of having cataract surgery is decreased by 1 percent. Indeed, odds for this surgery are 20 percent lower in Portland, Ore., than in Miami, probably due to the difference in UV-light exposure — one more reason sunglasses aren’t just for playing cool.

You might get more floaters. Surprise: Those little squiggles moving about aren’t on the surface of your eye — they’re inside. Age-related changes could cause an increase in floaters in your 50s and beyond. It’s usually

(See *SENSES AT 50+*, P. 8)

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COMPLEX DIETS

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their blood sugar.

If that person also has kidney disease, they might need to restrict their consumption of foods that are high in potassium, such as potatoes and tomatoes, as well as foods that are high in phosphorus, such as nuts, to avoid straining the kidneys.

On top of that, caregivers may also have to navigate their family member’s dietary requirements or preferences, such as being vegan or having food sensitivities. And they may also have to translate dietary guidelines, which are often rooted in Western and American cuisines, to traditional, culturally relevant cuisines that their older relative prefers.

Caregivers often don’t have the knowledge to help them with their nutrition responsibilities, such as making sure the food they provide includes the necessary amounts of macronutrients – proteins, carbohydrates and fats that the body needs. Many are also unsure of how nutrition affects their relative’s health condition and lack training on meal planning, budgeting and cooking for themselves and for a relative with chronic health conditions.

Different types of caregiving relationships can also bring about unique challenges. For example, our research shows adult children caring for a parent may struggle with convincing their parents to change their diet. Caregivers supporting someone with memory loss may worry about whether their relative has eaten enough, or may spend hours preparing a meal that is enjoyed one day but goes untouched the next.

Enlisting a registered dietitian

These concerns reflect the fundamental role food plays in daily life as well as in caregiving and family dynamics.

Working with a professional can help. A registered dietitian nutritionist can talk caregivers through their family’s specific concerns and preferences about managing an older relative’s nutritional needs. Dietitians can also help families make sure that any dietary modifications safely align with their relative’s health conditions, as well as with their medications and other therapies.

Dietitians are a valuable resource, but they tend to be underused in healthcare. That may be because people are not aware of the type of support they can offer, or because restrictions on insurance coverage mean that working with them isn’t always covered.

Since 2025, Medicare has allowed registered dietitians to train family caregivers on how to manage special diets for conditions such as diabetes or chronic kidney disease, even if the patient isn’t in the room.

How kitchen strategies can help

Other help is also available. Online resources, such as those offered by the American Diabetes Association, can provide ideas for recipes as well as information about nutrition and management of specific health conditions. For caregivers who need to make dietary modifications to traditional, non-Western cuisines, resources such as Oldways, a nonprofit food and nutrition education organization, can provide global culinary examples that meet specific nutritional needs.

A few targeted kitchen strategies, such as meal planning, can go a long way toward helping caregivers navigate food decisions and the nutrition needs of older relatives. You can start by thinking through what types of foods to include – or to skip – in order to to meet your relative’s health needs. For example, they might need high fiber to slow digestion and prevent blood sugar spikes in diabetes. Or they might need to add dairy to meals for good bone health.

Creating a list of meals for the week based on food groups – such as grains, protein sources, vegetables, fruits and dairy – can help ensure these items are part of each meal. It also enables you to shop with a specific list on hand, which can reduce food waste or spoilage. Meal planning is also something you can do together with your older relative.

One common dietary change for older adults is reducing how much sodium they consume. Packaged and prepared foods are often high in salt because it enhances flavor. To maximize flavor in low-salt foods prepared at home, try experimenting with different spices and herbs. If your relative seems to really enjoy a particular blend, you could even create your own mix to use in a variety of dishes.

Small steps like these can help caregivers continue providing this help and might even bring new foods and flavors into the home.

ER RECORDS

Continued from page 6

cerned about a different violation — that of federal privacy law.

AI Takes Over

Dozens of ERs across the country already participate in the CPSC’s voluntary National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, or NEISS, through which trained hospital workers report injuries involving consumer products, almost always stripped of patients’ identifiable information. The system helps the CPSC identify products, such as baby loungers, toys, and household appliances, with a pattern of injuring consumers.

The new injury surveillance program goes much further.

At a toy industry trade event in February, acting CPSC Chairman Peter Feldman said the agency is “investing in AI-enabled workflows that improve the quality and quantity of injury surveillance data, while also building up digital infrastructure to handle a massive new volume of electronic health records.”

Konza Health, a Kansas-based organization that runs the state’s health data exchange, will automatically pull and analyze medical records of all patient visits from ERs nationwide. Konza won a five-year contract worth up to \$15.9 million with the CPSC last fall.

In email correspondence with hospital technology officials, Konza Health President and CEO Laura McCrary also has described ERs’ participation as “required,” stipulating that they share patients’ records with identifying information.

McCrary told KFF Health News by email that the company is not using AI to process the records it receives, saying instead that Konza will use “advanced analytic parsing and filtering capabilities.” Roney, the CPSC spokesperson, did not answer questions about the use of AI.

For years, agency officials have discussed moving away from human contractors and automating NEISS to save time and money.

But without workers on-site, hospital staffers may no longer receive training to determine what clinical information is important to include for the CPSC. In short, the changes could dilute the quality of the product safety data the agency collects.

“They want to suck in as much data as possible, but I’m not sure how thoughtful they’re being about what is collected and what is actually needed by the agency,” said former CPSC chair Alexander Hoehn-Saric, one of the Democratic appointees Trump fired last year.

Pressure on Hospitals

CPSC Chief Data Officer Elizabeth Puchek, who joined the agency late last year after engineering U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ data system, has told hospitals in emails that they must seek an exemption from the program if they decline to share patients’ emergency room records with Konza.

The CPSC’s targeted outreach has included some of the nation’s largest urban and rural health systems, as well as small, publicly owned hospitals.

Staff members at Mary Greeley Medical Center in Ames, Iowa, said that Konza and federal officials told them their participation in the new program was mandatory. The hospital, which has long participated in NEISS, signed a new contract in April to share its ER records with Konza.

Yet the hospital is reevaluating its participation after being notified that the funds it received to participate in NEISS were “no longer available,” spokesperson Steve Sullivan said.

Several hospital executives, lawyers, and others have raised doubts about the CPSC’s claimed authority.

Harborview Medical Center spokesperson Susan Gregg said the Seattle hospital’s emergency room has “voluntarily submitted de-identified data for many years, but we are not obligated to report this information.”

In Boston, Mass General Brigham has declined to participate in the new program, with spokesperson Kelly Mitchell saying that “to protect patient privacy, we are unable to provide these medical records.”

Henry Ford Health in Detroit; St. Luke’s in Boise, Idaho; and Sanford Health based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota — which together handle over a million ER visits a year — are among the health systems that have been approached but not yet entered into an agreement with Konza, according to representatives. Several of the nation’s busiest hospital systems targeted for the program — including the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, Yale New Haven Hospital in Connecticut, Nationwide Children’s Hospital and the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, and Baylor Scott & White Health in Texas — declined to answer questions about whether they’re participating.

Hoehn-Saric, the agency’s former chairman, said he was surprised that the CPSC would insist that hospitals provide identifiable records from all emergency room visits.

“This idea that they can simply demand patient information from a hospital and that the hospital would provide it — I really don’t understand the basis for that,” he said.

The Five Worst Habits For Your Heart

AARP— There’s good news and bad news when it comes to your risk of developing heart disease, the leading killer in the U.S. Let’s start with the bad. Several factors can raise your risk for getting heart disease — a term used to describe a range of conditions that affect the heart and blood vessels. Some you can’t control, like family history, access to good-for-you foods and safe, affordable housing.

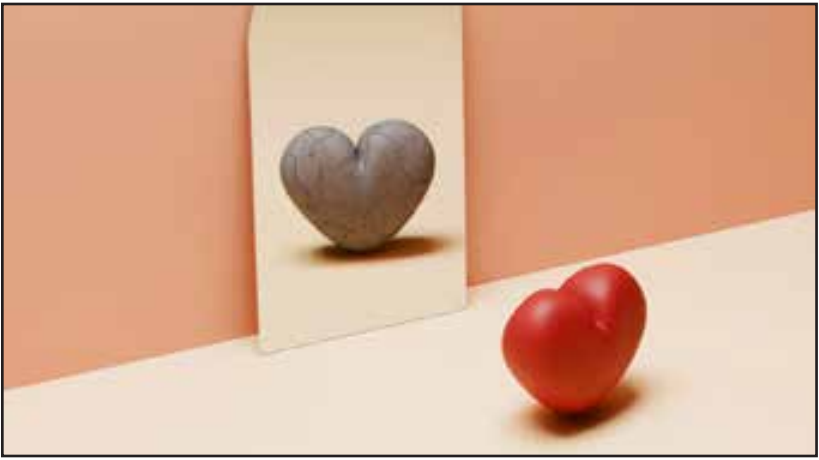
That said, there’s a lot you can do to help prevent heart disease and, in certain cases, reverse it. Some of these actions, however difficult to achieve, are obvious: Get active, eat better, lose weight and stop smoking. “Lifestyle changes are difficult for everyone,” says Dr. Sabra Lewsey, a cardiologist and assistant professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins Medicine. “But they are profoundly important and can make lifesaving gains in your health.”

Others are more surprising.

Here are 10 habits to avoid to improve your heart health.

1. Not getting enough physical activity

Not moving enough, especially on a regular basis, is risky for your health. Studies have shown a strong association between inactivity and cognitive decline, and an increased risk of death. Fortunately, almost any sort of activity that raises your heart rate is a good place to start. It’s important to move your body and elevate your heart rate for at least 150 minutes every week. You should throw in



twice-weekly strength training sessions too, according to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“You don’t have to go from doing nothing to running marathons,” says Dr. Quentin Youmans, assistant professor of medicine at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. “In fact, the biggest leap in benefit comes from doing nothing to doing something. Just start by dedicating yourself to doing some activity every day to get your body moving.”

2. Drinking too much alcohol

“Not everyone recognizes the connection between heart health and alcohol,” Youmans says. Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure, cause irregular heartbeats “and even have a direct toxic effect on the heart.” Overimbibing “can lead to heart

failure or a weakening of the heart,” says Dr. Amber Johnson, a cardiologist and assistant professor of medicine at University of Chicago Medicine.

How much is too much? The World Health Organization declared in 2023 that no amount of alcohol is safe.

For those who do drink alcohol, the recommended limits in the U.S. are one drink a day for women and two for men.

3. Skipping on sleep

Not getting seven (or eight or nine) hours of good sleep a night will slowly, but quite reliably, damage your health, including your heart. “Poor-quality sleep or untreated sleep apnea can lead to high blood pressure and affect heart health,” Lewsey cautions. Lack of sleep has also been associated with

diabetes and weight gain, which negatively affect heart health too.

Sleep apnea can “cause abnormal heart rhythms,” Johnson says.

4. Eating foods bad for your heart

A diet full of processed foods, saturated fat, sodium and sugar can contribute to heart disease. Instead, opt for a heart-healthy diet of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, nuts and whole grains.

In a scientific statement published in the journal Circulation, an American Heart Association (AHA) committee ranked the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet at the top of the list of heart-healthy diets. This diet, designed to treat or prevent high blood pressure, is low in salt, added sugar, alcohol and processed foods, and rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains and legumes.

5. Living a lonely life

It’s so important to have friends and family to lean on. Unfortunately, that kind of support is not as common as you may think.

In 2023, 1 in 3 adults ages 50 to 80 reported feeling isolated in the past year, according to the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging. More than 1 in 3 older adults (37 percent) reported feeling a lack of companionship. These circumstances can be terrible for your health, including your heart. A 2023 advisory from the U.S. surgeon general explains that social isolation and loneliness are associated with a 29 percent increase in the risk of heart disease and a 32 percent increase in the risk of stroke.

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Community

COMTO North Carolina 2026 Welcomes Its New Board

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Raleigh, NC - Transportation leaders, public agency officials, private industry partners, and emerging professionals gathered on Hillsborough Street last Thursday, July 23, for the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) North Carolina 2026 Summer Social. The evening combined networking, community investment, and a pivotal milestone for the chapter's leadership: the official swearing-in of the incoming Executive Board of Directors.

The evening opened with recognition for the chapter's steady growth and community-focused initiatives. Attendees celebrated the foundational efforts of immediate past leaders, notably Ebony Benton, whose instrumental leadership helped establish and build the North Carolina chapter into a premier transportation network. A major highlight of the gathering was the announcement of COMTO North Carolina's upcoming educational investments. Thanks to the generosity of corporate sponsors and industry partners, the

chapter announced it will award five \$1,000 scholarships in November 2026.

In addition to scholarship funding, COMTO NC's ongoing initiatives include:

- Workforce Development Programs: Connecting students and

young professionals across the state to career paths in transportation.

- Technical Tours & Site Visits: Providing behind-the-scenes access to major infrastructure projects, ports, ferries, transit systems, and aviation facilities.



- Lunch & Learns: Hosting continuous professional development sessions for members statewide.

The centerpiece of the evening was the formal oath of office for the incoming COMTO NC Executive Board of Directors. Tammy Hall-Roberts, Chair of the Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority (RDU) and the first female chair in RDU's history, served as the official swearing-in officer. Before administering the oath, Hall-Roberts highlighted the dynamic transformations currently underway across the state's transit networks, including RDU's active \$4 billion building program, "It is truly an honor to lead an organization where we have right about \$4 billion in building going on," said Tammy Hall-Roberts. "I get it right now, it may be a little painful as you navigate through all the changes, but just think of what this airport will mean in terms of 20 years down the road, we will certainly be a leader in the aviation industry." Following her remarks, Hall-Roberts led the incoming officers through their solemn oath to execute their duties, uphold COMTO's mission, and champion an efficient, multimodal transportation system

that serves all North Carolinians.

The event brought together a broad cross-section of the industry from summer interns and state DOT representatives to private engineering partners, municipal transit leaders, and aviation executives. Closing out the program, chapter leader Troy Creasy NCDOT Branch Manager emphasized the critical role transportation plays in maintaining North Carolina's standing as one of the fastest-growing states in the nation and a top state for business. Creasy noted, "Delivering the future transportation network that we need is really going

to come from the folks that are in this room being together and unified through COMTO," during his closing remarks. "North Carolina continues to be a top state for business, and transportation is the biggest reason why we are able to grow at the rate we do."

Members left with a challenge to continue expanding the chapter's reach by inviting new partners, students, and colleagues to future site visits, lunch and learns, and professional development opportunities across Charlotte, Raleigh, and beyond.

Dr. Stefanie Etienne Inspires Future Health and Science Leaders at Camp Scrub Life



On July 17, Dr. Stefanie Etienne volunteered as a Healthcare Hero presenter for Camp Scrub Life: A Camp for Future Health & Science Leaders at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. The residential camp brought together seventh through ninth grade students from across North Carolina who share an interest in health, science, and future careers in medicine.

During the session, Dr. Etienne and her co-presenter engaged campers in an interactive discussion about pathways into medicine and the broader healthcare workforce. Students participated in introductions, shared what drew them to Camp Scrub Life, and responded to a live poll about whether they were considering becoming physicians. The presentation also included a review of multiple health professions, encouraging students to compare what different healthcare roles have in common—such as responsibility for patients, integrity, honesty, caring, empathy, and knowledge. We also discussed how they differ in training requirements, cost, scope of responsibility, compensation, and day-to-day work.

The discussion then moved into why physicians choose medicine, why family medicine can be a meaningful and impactful specialty, and the wide range of career options available to medical doctors. Campers learned about differences between specialists and generalists, outpatient and inpatient care research, public health, industry, insurance medicine, and other administrative or non-clinical pathways.

Dr. Etienne also shared reflections on her own career journey and invited students to think deeply about their personal learning styles, comfort with delayed gratification and strategies for managing stress and recognizing personal limits.

Dr. Etienne's participation reflected the spirit of mentorship and representation that helps young students envision themselves in medicine and health science careers. The presentation was very well received and left campers energized, curious, and encouraged as they continue exploring their futures as health and science leaders.



GIVING BACK THROUGH A BACKPACK—Hundreds of families gathered in Durham on Saturday for Trey Murphy's annual Backpack Giveaway, where students received free backpacks filled with school supplies to help them prepare for the upcoming school year. The Community event also connected families with local organizations offering health, education and support services, highlighting a shared commitment to helping students start the school year ready to succeed. *Mathias Bishop Photo*

SENSES AT 50+

Continued from page 6

not a problem unless they come with other symptoms, such as flashes of light. Get regular eye exams so your eye doc can keep track of this and other eye-health indicators. Rates of macular degeneration and glaucoma double between ages 45 and 55.

You don't notice the blister on your foot. After 50, many people begin to experience a reduced sensitivity to pain or may be better able to tolerate it.

It's a great time to explore new, interesting foods. If you've always avoided, say, Indian food because you couldn't handle the spice, now may be the time to rethink this. Your tongue's number of taste-sensing cells will begin to diminish in your late 50s. Salty and sweet tastes are the first to decline, along with overall flavor intensity, which may cause you to use more salt and sugar in your cooking. Plus, brush, floss and see your dentist regularly; gum disease can leave a bad taste in your mouth that changes the taste of food.

... and strong aromas don't bother you as much. Your nose's nerve endings intercept odors and send them to the brain for processing. These sensors wear out over time; exposure to strong chemical fumes and insults such as sinus infections also have an effect.

You may want to turn up the lights ... At midlife the eye's lens stiffens and the muscle fibers that control the lens's shape weaken. You may need more light for reading because your pupils don't open as wide.

... or use a hearing aid. One in 5 people in their 50s have trouble hearing sounds below a quiet whisper. Loud sounds knock out tiny hair cells inside your ears that send sound signals to your brain. Today's hearing aids are nearly invisible; if you've tried them and they no longer work for you, talk with your physician about a cochlear implant, which can restore hearing.

You may stumble more often. Balance issues in your 50s may be caused by hearing loss. "Balance gets thrown off when you can't hear your footsteps," says Frank Lin, M.D., associate professor of otolaryngology at Johns Hopkins University. Ask your doctor if it's time for a hearing test.

NC Gang Prevention Task Force Convenes to Address Youth Violence

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

The North Carolina Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force convened in Raleigh Tuesday morning with law enforcement, public safety officials, and community leaders as the state grapples with a recent surge in youth-related violence and "teen takeover" incidents in the capital city.

The meeting, held at the Governor's Crime Commission and streamed online, was led by co-chairs Leslie Cooley Dismukes, secretary of the Department of Adult Correction, and Siarra Scott, director of the N.C. Office of Violence Prevention, who are overseeing the work of the 20-member task force established by Gov. Josh Stein through an executive order in August 2025.

The task force was created to reduce the presence and impact of gang activity across North Carolina, with a particular emphasis on preventing youth involvement. Its formation comes amid growing concern over juvenile crime and organized youth activity, underscored in recent weeks by the July 4 "teen takeovers" in Raleigh's Brier Creek and Glenwood South areas. Those incidents led to multiple arrests, including a 15-year-old from Durham County and a teen from Goldsboro who was charged as an adult in connection with a shooting on Capital Boulevard.

In response, the Raleigh City Council has moved toward implementing a curfew for minors, with Mayor Janet Cowell stating, "This entire Council is backing you and the police department on a curfew," in support of Police Chief Rico Boyce.

Against that backdrop, task force members emphasized that enforcement alone would not address the underlying drivers of gang involvement. During workgroup updates, speakers repeatedly pointed to



systemic issues such as poverty, housing instability, and lack of access to resources as foundational concerns.

"If someone doesn't have food when they go home, they don't have housing, they don't have medical care, they're not going to be like, 'Listen, I really don't want to be in a gang,'" Siarra Scott, co-chair and Director of NC Office of Violence Prevention said.

Members also discussed the need for a broader understanding of trauma in shaping prevention strategies.

"Trauma absolutely is being held at gunpoint, but it's also that you grew up with unstable housing... you've changed your school district four times... or you haven't been in school because you haven't been established," she said. The force stressed that recognizing these varied experiences is essential to designing effective interventions.

A recurring theme throughout the meeting was the inconsistency and fragility of funding for violence prevention programs. While officials acknowledged that grants can help launch initiatives, they warned

against short-term thinking.

"What we don't want to do is start a program that is good for the first year, and it gets completely unfunded afterwards," Prevention Chairman Kevin Blackburn said. "We want to make sure that we're not setting ourselves up... to have a task force again in two years to do the same thing."

The task force also discussed existing efforts, such as the Healthy Opportunities Pilot, which allows Medicaid funds to be used for non-medical needs. Officials noted that the program has demonstrated measurable outcomes, including "reduction in healthcare costs of about \$164 per month for people in Medicare." Still, they acknowledged that it does not specifically target gang activity.

Similarly, local reentry councils operating in 26 counties were praised for providing individualized support, though members pointed to "unequal coverage" and the challenge of scaling programs across all 100 counties.

Data-sharing gaps between agencies emerged as another critical issue. Participants described how information from the juvenile justice system

often fails to transfer effectively to adult correction systems, disrupting progress. In response, the intervention workgroup proposed several recommendations, including the creation of a statewide office of gang prevention and intervention.

The envisioned office would act as a centralized hub for information, programming, and coordination, with regional case coordinators extending services into both urban and rural areas: "If we had a hub... that is going to be the catalyst for information, for programming, for awareness," Blackburn said.

However, they acknowledged the challenge of establishing and sustaining such an entity, noting that "a statewide office—that's the challenge," particularly when it comes to funding and long-term consistency.

Other recommendations included mandatory gang awareness training for school personnel, expansion of school justice partnerships across all districts, and the development of second-chance career pathways through community colleges. These initiatives aim to address early warning signs and provide alternatives for youth at risk of gang involvement.

The group also emphasized the importance of "credible messenger" programs—interventions led by individuals with lived experience—but cautioned that without structure, such efforts can falter. Establishing a statewide framework, members said, would ensure consistency and measurable outcomes while maintaining flexibility in how programs are delivered.

Throughout the meeting, officials stressed that gang activity is not confined to any one region or demographic. Members reiterated that all 100 counties in North Carolina face some level of gang-related challenges and that solutions must account for the distinct needs of both rural and urban communities.

North Carolinians Honor Fallen Soldier During Dignified Transfer at RDU Airport

RALEIGH, N.C. — A busy terminal at Raleigh-Durham International Airport fell silent this week as hundreds of travelers paused to honor the return of a fallen North Carolina soldier.

Many stood shoulder to shoulder along the airport's terminal windows, placing their hands over their hearts as the flag-draped casket of Army Sgt. Michael Swinton was carried across the tarmac during a dignified transfer on July 21. The solemn moment, captured on video and shared widely across social media, quickly became a symbol of unity and gratitude as strangers stopped their travels to pay tribute to a service member who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Swinton, 30, of Fayetteville, was killed on July 19 at Erbil Air Base in Iraq while participating in a controlled detonation of a downed Iranian attack drone. He served as an air defense operator assigned to the 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade at Fort Bragg.

Military officials announced that Swinton will be posthumously promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant and awarded the Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, and Combat Action Badge in recognition of his courage and service.

The emotional scene at RDU highlighted North Carolina's long-standing connection to the military



community. Home to Fort Bragg, one of the nation's largest military installations, the state has thousands of active-duty service members, veterans, and military families who understand the weight of a fallen soldier's final journey home.

As Swinton's casket arrived, travelers who had never met him stood in silence together, creating a powerful display of respect that transcended the usual pace of airport travel. For several moments, conversations stopped, and attention turned toward the tarmac as the military honored one of its own.

The White House later shared video of the tribute on social media, writing, "Beautiful moment: Hundreds of Americans at Raleigh-

Durham International Airport stood in silence to honor a fallen service member as they returned home. A grateful nation remembers. God bless our troops."

The post prompted an outpouring of support from people across the country, many expressing gratitude for Swinton's sacrifice and offering prayers for his family. While the responses reflected patriotism and sorrow, the images themselves told the story of a community united in remembrance.

The United Service Organizations (USO) confirmed that its Raleigh-Durham Airport Center Honors Support Team assisted with the dignified transfer. Although the organization initially declined to identify the fall-

en service member out of respect for military notification procedures, it emphasized its commitment to supporting families during some of their most difficult moments.

"When a service member makes their final journey home, our staff and volunteers are prepared to provide compassionate support to families and work alongside our military partners to help ensure a dignified transfer and the respectful honoring of our nation's fallen," the USO said in a statement.

The organization works closely with military officials to ease logistical burdens for grieving families by providing a welcoming space, guidance, and support throughout the transfer process.

Swinton leaves behind his wife, Mia, and their two young children, a 6-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter.

His death comes as Americans continue to mourn several U.S. service members who recently lost their lives during military operations in the Middle East. For many North Carolinians, however, the loss feels especially personal because one of their own has returned home.

The quiet tribute at Raleigh-Durham International Airport served as a reminder that even in the busiest public places, moments of shared respect can bring strangers together.

Church

Triangle Faith Leaders Turn Sanctuaries Into Shelters

WUNC - When Clark Rinehart was a local church pastor, he realized two things.

One: Churches own a lot of real estate. Two: Past Wednesday night and Sunday programming, a lot of that space went largely unused.

"We have been facing a nationwide housing shortage for about two decades now that's become more and more acute," he said. "I saw an opportunity with my engineering background (and) my experience with the local church to bring that unique position together and help churches really think about stewarding their assets in the future."

In 2021, Rinehart started the Steeple Collective, a design-strategy and consulting nonprofit that helps urban churches creatively use their space. And he isn't alone in seeing the potential.

A growing housing gap

Nationwide, faith congregations are exploring ways to offer affordable housing on their property. The movement calls itself "Yes in God's Backyard," or YIGBY

YIGBY is a spin on the Not in My Backyard (NIMBY), a term for community members who oppose new developments, especially mixed-income or affordable housing in their area. On the other side of NIMBYism sits the pro-housing YIMBY, or Yes in My Backyard, advocates.

The Triangle is no stranger to NIMBYs, YIGBYS or conversations surrounding affordable housing. Since 2020, unsheltered homelessness has more than doubled in Wake County alone, according to a Wake County survey. With no place to call home, more people are experiencing "homelessness in plain sight," accord-

ing to the county, prompting a growing concern.

With a predicted household growth rate of 5% from 2024 to 2029, North Carolina faces a five-year housing inventory gap of 764,478 units, according to an analysis performed by Bowen National Research.

By 2029, Wake County is expected to have a total housing gap of 110,689 units – the second largest gap by county in the state behind Mecklenburg County.

While state initiatives, like Wake County's Continuum of Care, partner with nonprofits to end homelessness, faith communities in the Triangle are also stepping in.

Rinehart, who is also running for Raleigh City Council, says the movement isn't about proselytizing; it's about activating church assets creatively. That's why he said he works mostly

as a volunteer and advocate, rarely charging people for his services.

"I believe that we need every partner at the table in order to curb this housing crisis," he said.

YIGBY in the Triangle

Raleigh's Edenton Street United Methodist Church is exploring options for its downtown parking lot, including potential mixed-income housing. Just down the road, Milner Memorial Presbyterian Church turned into affordable housing for older adults after services ended in 2019.

Last year, Cary's Greenwood Forest Baptist Church received zoning approval for an affordable housing development on its property. The mixed-use development, called The Timothy Ash Carr Center, will address community needs through affordable housing, childcare, and community gathering space.

Senior Pastor Rev. Lauren Hayes said how people interface with church is changing. In 2019, faced with an incomplete building campaign and a smaller congregation, Hayes said church staff began to have internal meetings about what to do with their "gift of space."

"We've been sitting on a piece of property that is too large for our congregation," she said. "Church buildings are not used 24/7, and we really wanted to make sure that we were using the building to its best potential."

After assessing community needs and the feasibility of the project, church staff pitched the project to their congregation before solidifying a partnership with affordable housing developer DHIC. The project now has a projected finish date of 2028, with demolition beginning in the first quarter of 2027.

Greenwood is tearing down half of their building, their preschool building and an old sanctuary space. In that space, DHIC will build a four-story building containing 51 units of affordable housing. The bottom floor will have a full-day childcare center in partnership with the YMCA.

Housing support nonprofit The Caring Place will also have offices in The Carr Center, along with 11



two-bedroom apartments for unhoused working families. Adjacent to the property, the town of Cary has also purchased land to build affordable townhomes, so people have an opportunity for actual home ownership.

Loss and legacy

The Carr Center is named after Timothy Ash Carr, a member of the church heavily involved in the Center's development. The church sainted him after he unexpectedly passed away in 2024. Carr and his story have encouraged Hayes throughout the project.

"I always hear him because he would say God has called us to do this, and even when we don't know what the next step is, it's going to happen one way or another," she said.

Legacy is an important part of the YIGBY conversation. Both Rinehart and Hayes said they think the movement will continue growing in different ways as churches assess community needs.

But first, Rinehart said, many congregations need to have hard conversations about their future, though he thinks many are reluctant to do so.

"They're very hopeful people, and I think that's a beautiful thing, to be hopeful that you know the divine God might show up and change the trajectory," he said. "We've been losing

numbers for years. We've been getting older."

Not every church has the opportunity for a mixed-use facility or new development, Rinehart said. But churches could meet other needs too, he said, from transportation to small business incubation.

Outside of serving their communities, conversations surrounding the use of church buildings are also becoming a necessity for the organizations themselves, Hayes said.

"As the greatest generation dies and the baby boomers die, and their wealth dies with them, newer generations don't have enough money to sustain large church buildings either," she said.

The book "Gone for Good?" by editor Mark Elsdon sticks out for Hayes. It's about the coming wave of church property transitions. In a presentation about the Timothy Ash Carr Center, she cited the following quote from the book:

"After the wave (of decline) has receded, will church property have further contributed to injustice and the widening of the gap between rich and poor?" Elsdon writes.

"Or will we have put our creativity and energy into new uses that leave communities more connected, more just and with new programs and support that bring light and life into people's lives?"

"Original 8" Winston-Salem Firefighter Who Helped Integrate the Department Dies at 104

Retired Sergeant Robert Grier, one of Winston-Salem Fire Department's first Black firefighters, has died at the age of 104.

Grier was born and raised in Forsyth County. He attended North Carolina A&T State University and served in the Army during World War II. In 1951, he became one of the "Original 8," a group of Black firefighters who integrated the Winston-Salem Fire Department more than a decade before racial segregation was outlawed in the U.S.

Battalion Chief Desmond Teal calls himself Grier's honorary grandson. He says he and his colleagues refer to the "Original 8" as the godfathers who paved the way.

"It's almost like planting that shade tree that you will never get to sit under and get shade, but you know that others coming behind you will get that shade from that tree," says Teal. "Their biggest fear was letting the community down, letting the ones coming behind them down. So they said they could not and would not fail us."

Grier retired after 30 years with the fire department. On Thursday, a funeral service will be held at 12:30 p.m. at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Winston-Salem.



NOTICE OF AMENDMENT

WAKE COUNTY HOME-ARP ALLOCATION PLAN AMENDMENT

10-DAY PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Wake County Housing Affordability and Community Revitalization Department proposes to amend the Wake County HOME-ARP Allocation Plan.

The HOME-ARP Allocation Plan is a strategic planning document required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for Wake County to receive HOME-ARP grant funding. The Plan outlines how HOME-ARP funds will be used to address the housing and service needs of qualifying populations, including individuals and families experiencing homelessness, those at risk of homelessness, and other vulnerable populations. It also establishes the County's strategy for allocating HOME-ARP funds to eligible activities, including affordable housing development, tenant-based rental assistance, supportive services, and non-congregate shelter.

HUD has notified Wake County of an additional HOME-ARP allocation of \$5,293, increasing the County's total HOME-ARP award from \$3,511,550 to \$3,516,843.

As part of this amendment, Wake County also proposes to reprogram \$2,511,550 from non-congregate shelter to \$1,000,000 in supportive services and \$1,511,550 to affordable housing development. In addition, the \$5,293 in new HOME-ARP funds will be allocated to Affordable Rental Housing Development, bringing the total allocation for that activity to \$2,516,843 to expand the supply of permanent affordable housing for HOME-ARP qualifying populations.

A draft of the amended HOME-ARP Allocation Plan will be available for a 10-day public comment period, from August 3, 2026 to August 12, 2026. Wake County will review and consider all feedback received before submitting the final plan to HUD. The proposed amendment will be presented to the Wake County Board of Commissioners for consideration and approval on August 17, 2026.

The plan can be found online at <https://shorturl.at/RZAnF> and copies are accessible at the following locations: Wake County Housing (336 Fayetteville Street, Suite 440, Raleigh, NC 27602), Municipal Town Halls, Wake County Regional Centers, Homeless Service Centers, and other Wake County Housing or Human Services locations.

For more information or to submit a comment, please contact the Housing Department at (919) 856-5689 or via email housing.info@wake.gov. Accommodations for disabled or non-English speaking residents will be made available upon request. Speech or hearing-impaired persons may contact 1-800-735-2962 (TT) or 1-800-735-8262 (voice).

Practical Biblical Principles

SOUL COMPETENCY
READ: HEBREWS 8:10-11
By: John L. Caldwell, Pastor
New Jerusalem Baptist Cathedral

There are court cases where the jury is tasked with deciding whether the defendant was competent enough to stand trial. In some cases, the defendant has been proving to be competent but is faking it.

The above event reminds me of our Baptist beliefs- Soul Competency. "Soul Competency" is the belief that God created us with a capacity to know Him personally and to respond to Him directly. It is the belief that religious faith is a personal matter between the worshiper and God, and that we are capable of dealing with God for ourselves, without interference from any human source.

This idea is so fundamental, that E. Y. Mullins a most respected scholar of the past, called soul competency an "axiom of religion," i.e., a self-evident, a universally recognized truth.

While all of this should be self-evident, to many this obviously is not true. There are those who say, "We cannot cry directly to God He is too holy." There are some who would say, "we cannot confess our sin directly to God, but to a priest only." Some will say, "we cannot interpret scripture for ourselves. The church must do that for us. The church," they say, is to the scriptures what the Supreme Court is to the Constitution. It is the duly authorized interpreter of scripture.

One religious sect said of their church, "When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan, it is God's plan. When they point the way, there is no other way, there is no other way which is safe.

The Mormon church warns: "God will do nothing, regarding His work except through His own duly appointed prophets... They will give us the Lord's word in no uncertain terms as God makes it known... let us follow them and avoid being led astray."

In many Baptist churches it is a fact that some people carry their bibles more than reading them. Outsiders would wonder if the bible carrying group a "crop" (show) for Christianity as apposed to showing forth proof of Soul Competency. There are Christians who have been in church long enough to have studied and read the Bible through more than once.

Bible study classes really should be focused upon supplementing or upgrading what a Christian should already know what is in the Bible.

Yes, there is a learning curve whereas the bible is a blank to those who opens the book for the first time. The worst mistake a Christian can make is to try and study and comprehend the Bible without seeking the help of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15).

How many of you will allow another person to do your thinking for you? To determine God's will for your life? Under these circumstances many individuals would be easily used and abused. The attempt to deprive anyone of their religious right is tyranny and sinful.

Our belief in soul competency should hinge on three things: the creation of God, the incarnation of Christ, and the invitation of the Holy Spirit. We believe that God is a person of intelligence, power, and love. And we believe that man is the special creation of God, made in His image.

What does it mean to say man is

made in the image of God? It means man has intelligence, conscience, and a soul. We are rational, moral, and spiritual.

Man has intelligence. Animals act primarily by instinct. Man can think and reason objectively. Try teaching geometry to an elephant or astronomy to an eagle, or theology to a dog. They can never learn it. But the most primitive savage from the darkest jungle can learn all three.

More than that, man has a conscience. He has the voice of God within. He has an inborn sense of right and wrong. A dog can bite you or a bull can gore you and feel no remorse.

But man is different.

Man is spiritual. God has planted eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). There is in us a sense of something above us, an awareness of God.

Soul Competency is also based on the revelation of God. God has come to us in Christ. This implies a kinship between God and man. The incarnation is the great historical expression of competency. It implies that God can communicate and man can receive revelations. Why else would God reveal Himself to us if we did not have the capacity to respond?

From the previous basis truths flows three other great truths: They are: We are competent to deal directly with God in all matters of religion; We are competent to decide for our selves in all matters of conscience; We are competent to discern God's will for ourselves in matters of the church.

The scripture reminds us that all people, from the least to the greatest, are now on equal footing before the Lord.

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Classifieds

DURHAM COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA DURHAM COUNTY NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of GWENDOLYN JEAN JUSTICE PERRY, deceased, late of the County of Durham, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said deceased to present them to the undersigned on or before October 30, 2026 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned. William J. Hopkins, Executor of the Estate of Gwendolyn Jean Justice Perry
P.O. Box 3814
Chester, Virginia 23831
7/30, 8/6, 8/13 and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000696-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 9th day of June, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of CHARITY NAOMI JONES, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 30th day of July, 2026.
Wilma Carolyn Jones, Executor
662 Wallace Fork Rd.

Roanoke Rapids, NC 27870
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000898-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 21st day of July, 2026, as ADMINISTRATOR CTA of the Estate of ELLEN WILKINS RAY, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 30th day of July, 2026.
Chris Ray, Administrator of the Estate of Ellen W. Ray
1400 Hunters Ridge Road
Canton, NC 28716
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
All persons, firms and corporations having claims against RONALD STEPHEN WATKINS, deceased, of Durham County, are hereby notified to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 28th day of October 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 30th day of July, 2026.
Tonya L. Minor Watkins
Administrator of the Estate of Ronald Stephen Watkins
c/o M. Bryan King
Haitchcock, Barfield, Hulse & King, PLLC
Attorneys for Estate
Post Office Drawer 7
Goldsboro, NC 27533
(919) 735-6420
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000801-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 10th day of July, 2026, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of WINIFRED D. NORTON, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will

please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 30th day of July, 2026.
Mitsi Utley Norton, Executor
3102 Carpenter Road
Durham, NC 27703
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000099-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 20th day of April, 2026, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of DIANNE ELIZABETH TIMBLIN, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 30th day of July, 2026.
James Graham Lewis, Administrator
4 Linkside Ct.
Durham, NC 27703
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000885-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 21st day of July, 2026, as EXECUTRIX of the Estate of FRANK DAVID ALMENDAREZ, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 30th day of July, 2026.
Twila Slater, Executrix
c/o Richard F. Prentis, Jr.
4 Consultant Pl.

Durham, NC 27707
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000683-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 13th day of April, 2026, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of CHRISTY NICOLE REEVES, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Pearl Bishop Reeves, Administrator
613 Holyle St.

Durham, NC 27703
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000878-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 16th day of July, 2026, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of LUCY B. MCNEAL, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Angela C. McNeal, Administrator
105 Kinglewood Drive
Durham, NC 27703

7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000876-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 16th day of July, 2026, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of ALICE RUTH GARRETT, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify

all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Dianne Ruth Garrett, Executor
3809 Ashley Cir.

Wilmington, NC 28403
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF DURHAM

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 17th day of July, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of SUSAN BETH SPITZER, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them

to the undersigned on or before the 24th day of October 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
MADELINE SELTMAN, EXECUTOR
ESTATE OF SUSAN BETH SPITZER
c/o Jennifer Dalman, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC
240 Leigh Farm Rd, Ste 100
Durham, North Carolina 27707
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000859-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 14th day of July, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of EDITH G. WRIGHT, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Shirley Rhodens-Anderson, Executor
1 Christopher Court
Durham, NC 27704

7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000849-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 13th day of July, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of MILO AGNES MCSHANE, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Brian M. McShane, Executor
1298 Lakeview Dr.
Rochester Hills, MI 48306
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS File No.: 26E000478-310

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of LINDA KING WATKINS, deceased, of 111 Hidden Springs Drive, Durham, NC 27703, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate on or before October 23, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Nicole Kubinsky, Administrator of the Linda King Watkins
c/o N. Vail Gardner, Esq.
Vail Gardner Law, PLLC
732 9th Street #621
Durham, NC 27705

7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS File No.: 26E000719-310

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of KENNETH ADAMS, deceased, of 280 South Mangum Street, Suite 130, Durham

County, Durham, NC 27701, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate on or before October 24, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Jeffrey L. Austin, Administrator of the Estate of Kenneth Adams
c/o Law Office of Jeffrey L. Austin, PLLC
500 Westover Dr. #32043
Sanford, NC 27330
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 25E000357-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 19th day of March, 2025, as Administrator of the Estate of MARIA TERESA TZOUMAS, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Ignacio Tzoumas, Administrator
116 Millbrae Ln.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000813-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 13th day of July, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of VIRGINIA BATTS CHORLEY, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Kevin Scott Chorley, Executor
c/o Richard F. Prentis, Jr.

4 Consultant Pl.
Durham, NC 27707
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Executor for the Estate of the late CATHERINE M. REYNOLDS of Durham County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to present them, in writing, to the undersigned at c/o Anne J. Randall, Kohut, Adams & Randall, P.A., P.O. Box 269, Wilmington, North Carolina 28402, on or before the 16th day of October 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate settlement with the undersigned.

This the 16th day of July, 2026.
Elizabeth Christina Reynolds, Executor of the Estate of Catherine M. Reynolds
Anne J. Randall
Kohut, Adams & Randall, P.A.
513 Market Street
Wilmington, NC 28401
PO Box 269
Wilmington, NC 28402

7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000288-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 11th day of March, 2026, as Administrator of the Estate of CAROLYN MCCOY, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 16th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 16th day of July, 2026.

Ronald McCoy, Administrator
518 Cecil St.
Durham, NC 27707
7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000799-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 2nd day of July, 2026, as Administrator of the Estate of WILMER L. JOHNSON, JR., Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 16th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 16th day of July, 2026.
Ni-Keya Sharee Wright
Administrator
1309 Shiley Dr.
Durham, NC 27704
7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS ALL PERSONS, firms, and corporations having claims against JACQUELINE LEE CROSS, deceased, of Durham County, N.C., are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before October 16, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery.

Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 16th of July, 2026. Miosha Lavette Cross, Administrator of the Estate of Jacqueline Lee Cross, c/o Amanda Honea, Attorney, 1255 Crescent Green, Suite 200, Cary, NC 27518.

7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS File No.: 26E000718-310

Having qualified as Executrix of the Estate of William Ronald White, deceased, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate of William Ronald White to present them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to said Estate, please make immediate payment.

This, the 9th day of July, 2026.
Charles B. White, Executor
c/o John W. Perry
Attorney for the Estate of William Ronald White
Post Office Drawer 2051
Durham, North Carolina 27702
Telephone: (919) 683-8685
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000752-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 30th day of June, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of LINDA LOUISE STONE, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 9th day of July, 2026.
Leonard William Cheatham III, Executor
c/o Law Office of Anne Page Watson
3200 Croasdaile Drive Ste 403
Durham, NC 27705

7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000751-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 30th day of June, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of MILDRED HAMBRIGHT TILLEY A/K/A MILLIE HAMBRIGHT TILLEY, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 9th day of July, 2026.

Byran Tyson Ballard, Executor
c/o Law Office of Anne Page Watson
3200 Croasdaile Drive Ste 403
Durham, NC 27705
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as the Personal Representative of the Estate of MARILYN ADAMS DIEFENDERFER a/k/a MARILYN LOUISE DIEFENDERFER, late of Durham County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate, Sonya S. Linton, Magnolia Legal, 3001 Academy Rd., Sute 120, Durham, NC 27707, on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

Tracy Lyn Diefenderfer
Personal Representative
File #: 26E000717-310
Attorney for Estate:
Sonya S. Linton
Magnolia Legal

3001 Academy Rd., Sute 120
Durham, NC 27707
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS File No.: 26E000509-310

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of HAROLD ROBERTS, deceased, of 280 South Mangum Street, Durham County, Durham, NC 27701, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate on or before October 10, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned. This the 9th day of July, 2026.

Jeffrey L. Austin
Public Administrator of the Estate of Harold Roberts
Law Office of Jeffrey L. Austin, PLLC
500 Westover Dr. #32043
Sanford, NC 27330
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS File No.: 26E000330-310

Having qualified as Executrix of the Estate of Gussie Thompson, deceased, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate of Gussie Thompson to present them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to said Estate, please make immediate payment.

This, the 9th day of July, 2026.
Alice Goldston Farrar, Executor
c/o John W. Perry
Attorney for the Estate of Gussie Thompson
Post Office Drawer 2051
Durham, North Carolina 27702
Telephone: (919) 683-8685
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division Before the Clerk File No.: 26E000753-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 29th day of June, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of NANCYE MITCHAM COBB, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 9th day of July, 2026.
Andrea Melenda Cobb, Executor
c/o Bagwell Holt Smith P.A.
111 Cloister Court, Suite 200
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026



NASH COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
NASH COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CV002374-630
EDITH ELIZABETH BULLOCK, Plaintiff, v. MICHAEL ANTHONY BULLOCK, Defendant.
TO: MICHAEL ANTHONY BULLOCK
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action.
The nature of the relief being sought is an Absolute Divorce. Plaintiff seeks a Judgment of Absolute Divorce based upon the parties having lived separate and apart for more than one year pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 50-6. Plaintiff also requests to resume the use of her maiden name, Bailey, and for such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.
You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than forty (40) days after the first publication of this Notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Edith Bailey Bullock, Plaintiff
6572 Pine Street
Bailey, NC 27807
7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026

ORANGE COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
ORANGE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25E000730-670
Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of BETTY COLEMAN WILLOUGHBY, deceased, late of Orange County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 30th day of July, 2026.
Roger Dale Page, Executor
4313 Page Road
Morrisville, NC 27560
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
ORANGE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 26E000248-670
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 2nd day of July, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of FRANCES HELMS LOWDER, Deceased, of Orange County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 16th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 16th day of July, 2026.
Lori L. Hoopes, Executor
c/o Averett Family Law
101 Conner Drive, Suite 402
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA,
ORANGE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Having qualified as the Personal Representative of the Estate of JOHN PETER STRECK, late of Durham County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate, Margaret Davis, Magnolia Legal, 3001 Academy Rd., Sute 120, Durham, NC 27707, on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
Jessica Streck Ortolano
Personal Representative
File #: 26E000747-310
Attorney for Estate:
Margaret Davis
Magnolia Legal
3001 Academy Rd., Sute 120
Durham, NC 27707
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026

WAKE COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 26E002170-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 15th day of July, 2026, as ADMINISTRATOR CTA of the Estate of ANNE GRAY FUTRELL, Deceased, of Wake County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 30th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 30th day of July, 2026.
Claude K. Futrell, II, Administrator
CTA
c/o Marion Law Office, PLLC
2741 University Drive
Durham, NC 27707
7/30, 8/6, 8/13, and 8/20/2026
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF WAKE In the General Court of Justice, District Court Division, File 26CV008358-910 [EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION] JUDY OBANDO MORENO, Plaintiff v. JUAN VARGAS PEREZ, Defendant. TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief sought is Equitable Distribution and Post Separation Support. A hearing date of 9/11/26 has been scheduled. You are required to make defense with the Wake County Clerk of Court no later than 00/00/26. Upon your failure to do so, Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought. This, the 30th day of July, 2026. Judy Moreno, PO Box 58058, Raleigh, NC 27658.
7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 26E000775-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 11th day of June, 2026, as Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM MICHAEL REESE, SR., Deceased, of Wake County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 23rd day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Deborah Williams-Reese, Administrator
c/o Monks Law Firm, Steve Monks, attorney
Monks Law Firm
6613 Speight Circle
Raleigh, NC 27616
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of MELVIN RESPERS deceased in Wake County, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to present them, duly verified, to the undersigned at 133 Kalmath Dr., Garner, NC 27529 on or before the 23rd day of October 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate settlement with the undersigned.
This is the 23rd. day of July 2026.
Shondell Respers, Administrator
133 Kalmath Dr., Garner, NC 27529
File # 25E002777-910
7/23, 7/30, 8/6, and 8/13/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Having qualified as Personal Representative of the Estate of LINDA GAIL FISH, deceased, late of WAKE County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned at: 300 PINEHURST AVENUE, SOUTHERN PINES, NORTH CAROLINA 28387, on or before the 21st day of OCTOBER, 2026 or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and Corporations indebted to the said estate will please

make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 23rd day of July, 2026.
STEPHANIE FISH JENKINS
PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE
FOR THE ESTATE OF
LINDA GAIL FISH
JAMES H. JENKINS
Thigpen and Jenkins, L.L.P.
Attorney for Estate
300 Pinehurst Avenue
Southern Pines, North Carolina 28387
PUBLICATION DATES:
JULY 23, 30, AUGUST 6, & 13, 2026
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
SHE'DASIA DURHAM & CEDRIC WILLIAMS
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE
DISTRICT COURT DIVISION
FILE NO: 26-JA-000029-060
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF BEAUFORT
IN RE: N.A.W., minor child.
TO: SHE'DASIA DURHAM & CEDRIC WILLIAMS, mother and father of a African American Male child born on or about Febuary 10, 2026, in Orange County, North Carolina.
TAKE NOTICE that a Juvenile Summons and Petition has been filed for the above-described juvenile, who is alleged to be neglected.
You must prepare and file with the Clerk of Superior Court of Beaufort County a written answer to the petition within 30 (THIRTY) days of the first date of publication of this summons, the 23rd day of July 2026. You must also serve a copy of the answer on the petitioner or its attorney.
The Beaufort County Department of Social Services has alleged that the above named juvenile is in need of protective services. The Court will conduct a hearing to determine whether the juvenile is in need of protective services. Notice of the date and time and location of the hearing will be mailed to you by the petitioner after you file an answer.
If you fail to file an answer, the relief sought will be granted. The petitioner will apply to the court for the relief demanded in the petition.
You have a right to be represented by counsel. If you want a lawyer and cannot afford one, the Court will appoint you one.
Matthew W. Jackson
Attorney for the Petitioner,
Beaufort County DSS
632 West Fifth Street
Washington, NC 27889
Dates of publication: 07-23-2026, 07-30-2026, & 08-06-2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE DISTRICT COURT DIVISION COUNTY OF WAKE
FILE NO. 26CV008674-910
LAURISSA S SOILS, Plaintiff, v. KENNETH D POINDEXTER, Defendant.
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
TO: KENNETH D POINDEXTER
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is as follows: Complaint for Child Custody regarding the minor child born to the parties.
You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days from the date of the first publication of this notice, which is scheduled for September 1, 2026, and upon your failure to do so, the party seeking service against you will apply to the court for the relief sought.
This the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Laurissa Soils, Plaintiff Pro Se
919-771-6952
laurissa.soils@gmail.com
7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 25CV030363-910
VONGRETCHEN POUGH, Plaintiff, v. TONY SAWANDEE POUGH, Defendant.
TO: TONY SAWANDEE POUGH
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action.
The nature of the relief being sought is Child Custody and Visitation of the minor child, Touré Xavier Pough, born August 13, 2013.
You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than forty (40) days after the first publication of this Notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Vongretchen Pough, Plaintiff
102 Futrell Way
Smithfield, NC 27577
7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CVD006916-910
JEANNE MUTESI, Plaintiff, v. SOLOMON MUGIRAKAMARO, Defendant.
TO: SOLOMON MUGIRAKAMARO
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action.
The nature of the relief being sought is an Absolute Divorce. The Complaint also states that two minor children were born of the marriage: Ella Kaze Mugirakamaro, born March 15, 2010, and Eliana Mugirakamaro, born April 29, 2012.
You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than forty (40) days after the first publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 23rd day of July, 2026.
Jeanne Mutesi, Plaintiff
1672 Singing Bird Trail
Wake Forest, NC 27587
7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 26E001966-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 30th day of June, 2026, as Executor of the Estate of GERALD HUBERT KNOTT, Deceased, of Wake County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 16th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 16th day of July, 2026.
George Andrew Knott, Executor
308 Ortega Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27609
7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 26E000271-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 23rd day of March, 2026, as Administrator of the Estate of LYNNETTE MOORE, Deceased, of Wake County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 16th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 16th day of July, 2026.
Shannon Whitney, Administrator
4902 Little Bud Lane
Raleigh, NC 27610
7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 25E003336-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 11th day of May, 2026, as Administrator of the Estate of DONALD RAY HUGHES, Deceased, of Wake County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 16th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 16th day of July, 2026.
Destinee Angelica Hughes
Administrator
12 Gardenia Drive
Savannah, GA 31407
7/16, 7/23, 7/30, and 8/6/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CV012659-910
MARCUS SINGLETON, Plaintiff, v. LATOYA SINGLETON, Defendant.
TO: LATOYA SINGLETON
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is Absolute Divorce.
You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days after the first date of publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief

sought.
This the 16th day of July, 2026.
Marcus Singleton
200 W. Davie Street
Raleigh, NC 27601
7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CV006916-910
KIERA ROGERS, Plaintiff v. MARGO JACKSON and UNKNOWN FATHER, Defendants.
TO: MARGO JACKSON AND THE UNKNOWN FATHER OF KENDRA JACKSON
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action.
The nature of the relief being sought is permanent custody of the minor child, Kendra Jackson. Plaintiff seeks an award of permanent custody and such other relief as the Court deems just and proper.
You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than forty (40) days after the first publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 16th day of July, 2026.
Kiera Rogers
800 Tree Green Lane
Wake Forest, NC 27587
7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION:
NORTH CAROLINA, WAKE COUNTY. In the General Court of Justice, District Court Division, File#26SP000437-910 [Adoption Proceeding]
TO: UNKNOWN FATHER. TAKE NOTICE that a Petition for Adoption was filed on 2/24/26, with the Clerk of Superior Court for Wake County, Raleigh, NC, in the above-referenced special proceeding. The Petition relates to a male child, C.L.B., conceived in or about November 2017 and born to Carrie Lynn Branham on 8/30/2018, in Raleigh, NC. You are required to make defense to such pleading with the Wake County Clerk of Court no later than 8/25/26, which is 40 days from the first publication of this notice to participate in and receive further notice of this proceeding. IN THE EVENT YOU FAIL TO RESPOND, THE CLERK OF SUPERIOR COURT WILL ENTER AN ORDER ALLOWING THE ADOPTION TO PROCEED WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT. Any parental rights that you may have will be terminated upon the entry of the decree of adoption. This, the 16th day of July, 2026. Ashley Treible, Attorney for Petitioners, P.O. Box 58058, Raleigh, NC, 27658, 919-794-7511, ext. 9
7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 25CVD007590-910
JAMES STREET, III, Plaintiff, v. STACI BYRD, Defendant.
TO: STACI BYRD
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action.
The nature of the relief being sought is permanent custody of the minor child.
You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days after the first date of publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 16th day of July, 2026.
James Street III, Plaintiff
623 Pony Club Circle
Cary, NC 27519
7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CVD006758-910
VONDA M. KITTRELL, Plaintiff v. SHAWN M. SKETERS, Defendant
TO: SHAWN M. SKETERS
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is an Absolute Divorce.
You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days after the first date of publication of this notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 16th day of July, 2026.
Vonda M. Kittrell, Plaintiff
3121 Marclony Way
Raleigh, NC 27610
7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CV009055-910
YOLANDA M. JACKSON, Plaintiff v. BEYONCA L. JACKSON and UNKNOWN FATHER, Defendants
TO: BEYONCA L. JACKSON AND THE UNKNOWN FATHER OF BRAYLON NASIR JACKSON
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is custody of the minor child, Braylon Nasir Jackson. The Plaintiff seeks temporary and permanent custody of the minor child.
You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days after the first date of publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 16th day of July, 2026.
Yolanda M. Jackson, Plaintiff
2812 Wellington Ridge Loop
Cary, NC 27519
(919) 530-7933
7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CV004395-910
MARINE FEDERAL CREDIT UNION, Plaintiff, v. NICHOLAS Z. PHILLIPS and JEANNETTE L. NTONI, Defendants.
TO: JEANNETTE L. NTONI
Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action.
The nature of the relief being sought is as follows: Money owed, which is more completely described in the Complaint for Wake County File Number 26CV004395-910, to collect the money owed.
You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than August 24, 2026, which is forty (40) days from the first date of publication. Upon your failure to do so, the party seeking service against you will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 16th day of July, 2026.
MEWBORN & DESELMs, ATTORNEYS AT LAW
By: Brett J. DeSelms
Michael Tuton
Attorneys for Plaintiff
829 Gum Branch Road, Suite C
Jacksonville, NC 28540
Telephone: (910) 455-9755
Publication Dates: July 16, July 23, and July 30, 2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CV012733-910
CALETHEA VINSON, Plaintiff v. GENEVA MIZELLE and UNKNOWN FATHER, Defendants
TO: GENEVA MIZELLE AND THE UNKNOWN FATHER OF THE MINOR CHILD
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is custody of the minor child.
You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days after the first date of publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
This the 16th day of July, 2026.
Calethea Vinson, Plaintiff
3200 Stream Side Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27613
7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No.: 25E001436-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 2nd day of July, 2026, as Administrator of the Estate of MARY LOUISE JOHNSON, Deceased, of Wake County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of October, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This, the 9th day of July, 2026.
Amanda Johnson, Administrator
8939 S Sepulveda Blvd
STE 110 Box 27
Los Angeles CA 90045
7/9, 7/16, 7/23, and 7/30/2026

Arts & Culture

Afro-Atlantic Roots and the Evolution of Southern Conjuring

By **Jordan Meadows**
Staff Writer

Historians examining colonial and antebellum North Carolina are continuing to uncover how enslaved people exercised agency in their daily lives, often through clandestine spiritual and medical practices rooted in African traditions, according to compiled archival records and academic research.

These practices—commonly referred to as Hoodoo, Obeah, or conjuring—blended herbal knowledge, ritual, and belief systems to influence health, relationships, and, at times, the balance of power between enslaved individuals and their enslavers. Despite the constraints of bondage, enslaved people used conjuring as a means of making independent choices outside the view of enslavers.

In North Carolina, records show that these practices frequently centered on plant-based remedies, particularly roots believed to hold protective or transformative properties. Enslaved conjurers offered services that promised to alter circumstances in subtle but meaningful ways.

In Johnston County, for example, an enslaved conjurer named Bristoe gave a man named Tom a root that he claimed would persuade

Tom's enslaver to purchase his wife from another enslaver. In a similar case, an enslaved woman named Lucy sought out Bristoe to prevent her own sale to a distant plantation, receiving another root intended to influence her enslaver's decision.

Conjuring was also used as a form of protection against violence. According to testimony from the period, Bristoe performed a ritual for an enslaved man named Jacob, applying a powder to his hand that was said to prevent his enslaver from whipping him. In another instance, a conjurer named Quash provided a talisman to a different enslaved man, also named Jacob, instructing him to hide it at his enslaver's doorway to encourage kinder treatment.

Whether or not these practices were effective in a literal sense, historians note that they represent deliberate efforts by enslaved people to assert some control over their conditions.

In some cases, these same systems of herbal knowledge were used in more direct and dangerous forms of resistance.

Legal records from the 18th century show that colonial authorities frequently prosecuted enslaved individuals for poisoning, which was viewed as a covert method of resistance. One such case occurred



in Hyde County in 1756, when an enslaved man named Daniel became fearful after learning that his enslaver would marry a woman reputed to be especially harsh. After expressing his concerns to another enslaved man, Peter, Daniel later used a dried rattlesnake head to create a powder that he secretly administered in his enslaver's food and drink, resulting in her death. The act, however, was

revealed through testimony, and Daniel was convicted of murder.

Other uses of conjuring and herbal remedies focused on bodily autonomy rather than retaliation. In 1779, an enslaved woman named Jane sought out a conjurer named Caesar for a substance referred to as “truck,” which was believed to function as a contraceptive. Historians note that enslavers often encouraged

or coerced reproduction among enslaved people to increase their labor force. By seeking contraception, Jane made a personal decision about her body that directly conflicted with her enslaver's economic interests.

In Chowan County, an enslaved woman named Esther, who had likely spent most of her life in the household of Anne Hall Blount, attempted to poison her enslaver in 1779 by placing verdigris—a substance sometimes used medicinally—into her tea. The act came just a few years after Blount had participated in the Edenton Tea Party Resolves, a political protest against British taxation that symbolized women's role in the independence movement.

Scholars emphasize that conjure practices were not solely acts of resistance but also served as a widespread alternative medical system in the South. Due in part to a shortage of formally trained physicians—evidenced by high patient-to-doctor ratios in the 19th century—Black conjurers and herbal healers served both Black and white populations. Their knowledge of botanical remedies filled critical gaps in healthcare, even as these practices were often dismissed.

While rooted in Afro-Atlantic spiritual systems, these practices evolved through interactions among

African, Native American, and European communities in the South. Historical evidence indicates that people across racial and class lines sometimes sought out conjurers for treatment or guidance.

Court records from North Carolina and Virginia show multiple indictments of enslaved individuals accused of using powders, roots, or other substances to cause harm. Authorities often interpreted conjuring not just as superstition, but as a direct threat to social order and control.

Taken together, these accounts illustrate how enslaved people navigated an oppressive system using the tools and knowledge available to them. Historians caution, however, that the archival record remains incomplete, leaving many individual motivations and experiences open to interpretation as research into this aspect of early American history continues.

Additional materials are available from *Conjuring Realities: Southern Supernaturalism and Race from the Antebellum Era to the Early Twentieth Century* (Summer 2025), produced by the University of South Carolina, as well as digital exhibits and archival records provided by MosaicNC.

Review: HADESTOWN Reimagines Greek Mythology

By **Dominique Heath**
Columnist

For five days, HADESTOWN stepped off the Broadway stage and onto the big screen, giving moviegoers a rare opportunity to experience the Tony Award-winning musical on the big screen. More than a filmed stage production, HADESTOWN is a bold reinterpretation of Greek mythology that blends ancient storytelling with the musical traditions of New Orleans, creating a production that feels both timeless and strikingly modern.

The musical intertwines two Greek myths: the love story of Orpheus and Eurydice and the complicated relationship between Hades, ruler of the Underworld, and his wife, Persephone. While the original myths are centuries old, HADESTOWN places them in a world shaped by jazz, blues, folk, and gospel, proving that great stories can transcend both time and culture.

The New Orleans influence is impossible to ignore. Rather than treating jazz as background music, the production allows it to shape the pace, emotion, and personality of the story. Hermes takes on the role of storyteller, guiding the audience through each chapter with ease, emotion, and flare, while the live band becomes as much a part of the narrative as the actors themselves. The result is a musical that uplifts Black American music.

The choice to tell a Greek myth through the sounds of New Orleans is one of the production's most compelling creative decisions. It demonstrates how stories evolve as they pass through different cultures. The themes of love, loss, hope, and perseverance remain unchanged, but the music gives them a new voice rooted in a city whose artistic legacy has influenced generations of musicians and storytellers.

Beyond its music, HADESTOWN offers pointed social commentary.



In this retelling, Hades is less of a mythical god and more of an industrial magnate. He builds an empire on labor, convincing workers that the walls surrounding HADESTOWN exist

for their protection. They are promised security, stability, and purpose, but in exchange they surrender their freedom, spending their days working endlessly while slowly forgetting who

they are and why they came.

The wall becomes one of the production's strongest symbols. Built under the promise of safety, it ultimately serves to isolate and control the very people it claims to protect. It becomes easy for audiences to interpret and draw parallels to the wall as a commentary on labor, class, politics, and wealth.

At its center, however, HADESTOWN remains a love story.

Orpheus and Eurydice are not portrayed as flawless heroes. They are two young people trying to build a life together while navigating poverty, uncertainty, and impossible choices. Their relationship feels contemporary because its struggles are familiar. Love alone cannot erase hardship, yet hope continues to drive both characters forward, even when the outcome seems inevitable.

The cast brings that emotional weight to every performance. Each actor fully embraces the produc-

tion's unique style, balancing humor, heartbreak, and powerful vocals without overshadowing one another. The chemistry among the ensemble and the actors reinforces one of the musical's central messages: no story belongs to a single generation. Each retelling allows new audiences to discover something different.

That may be HADESTOWN's greatest achievement. Rather than simply adapting Greek mythology for modern audiences, it reimagines it through an American cultural lens while preserving the emotional core that has allowed these stories to endure for thousands of years.

For audiences fortunate enough to catch its limited theatrical release, HADESTOWN offered more than an evening of entertainment. It demonstrated how music, mythology, and social commentary can come together to create a production that feels just as relevant today as the stories did when they were first told.

WRITER MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Continued from page 2

all but two of the defendants from minorities.

Shortly before trial he was overheard saying: “I’m going to help them fry the nigger.”

The UN’s rapporteur on arbitrary detention is also being asked to consider how new evidence only disclosed to Abu-Jamal’s defense team in 2018 raises serious doubts about the credibility of the state’s main eyewitness, Robert Chobert. Weeks after the trial concluded, Chobert wrote to the chief prosecutor inquiring about “the money own to me”.

One of the main thrusts of the petition is that Abu-Jamal’s current sentence, life without parole – is in itself a form of arbitrary detention in breach of international rules. The sentence has been dubbed “death by incarceration”, but Abu-Jamal thinks of it as “slow death row”.

He said: “It is death row without a specific date of execution. Or execution through time.”

He said he was struck by the contrast between America’s fondness for life sentences – more than 200,000 people are on them, about one in seven of all prisoners – and the approach of other advanced countries such as Norway. When Anders Breivik committed the deadliest mass shooting by a single person in modern times in Oslo in 2011, killing 77 people, he was sentenced to the country’s maximum penalty – 21 years, extendable on review every five years thereafter.

Breivik is unlikely ever to be released, but the system has not irrevocably slammed the door on him. “Such a response would be impossible, unthinkable in any of our 50 states,” Abu-Jamal said.

The UN working party has no direct enforcement powers within the US. But his legal team are calculating that a strong condemnation from the world body would support the push back home for a retrial or a commutation of his sentence.

At the very least, Abu-Jamal welcomes the chance to present the facts of his case to experts who have not come under the intense political pressure faced by elected judges (all Pennsylvania’s judges are elected). He remembers being “flabbergasted” in 1995 when he learned that four out of the seven justices on the state supreme court had been endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police.

“Presenting my claims to the UN will be one of the first times that judges will be hearing them without a vested interest,” he said.

Abu-Jamal was 14 when he was literally booted into the Black liberation struggle. It was 1968 and he was at a protest in Philadelphia against the segregationist presidential candidate George Wallace when a Philadelphia police officer kicked him in the face.

A year later he co-founded the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther party and became a regular contributor to the party’s newspaper. From there he built a successful career as a writer and broadcaster, serving as president of Philadelphia’s Association of Black Journalists.

All that came crashing down when he was arrested in the early hours of 9 December 1981. He was supplementing his income by cab driving, and happened to be passing the corner of 13th and Locust Streets just when his brother William Cook was being detained in a traffic stop by police officer Faulkner.

A shootout ensued. Abu-Jamal was shot in the chest. Faulkner was struck multiple times and died in hospital hours later.

At trial, the state accused Abu-Jamal of murdering Faulkner. The prosecutor presented the jury with samples of his Black Panther writings to suggest an antipathy towards police, and on the back of that plus the questionable testimony of Chobert and other state witnesses he was convicted and sentenced to death.

He remained on death row for 28 years until 2011 when he was switched to life without parole after a court found his original capital sentence unconstitutional.

As has been the case throughout his incarceration, he did not discuss the specifics of the charges leveled against him with the Guardian. But he did talk about the toll that decades behind bars has had on him and on his family.

There has been the toll of distance, of separation, from his burgeoning family of four generations. How many great-grandchildren does he have?

“I don’t even know, but it’s quite a few.”

Being Abu-Jamal, he puts the pain of forced isolation in a political context. “The state creates a system of solitary confinement for people on death row to dehumanize them to the people who love them. You cannot touch this person.”

Artist Betye Saar, Whose Work Reflect Black Identity, Has Passed Away At 99

AP NEWS - Artist Betye Saar, whose work reflects Black identity, culture and spirituality, died Sunday morning in Los Angeles at 99.

Saar's death was confirmed Monday by relatives. She would have turned 100 this week.

A central figure of the 1960s Black Art Movement, Saar pioneered assemblage boxes, or sculptures made of found objects, and reclaimed Jim Crow-era memorabilia as powerful totems of Black liberation.



“Her symbolically rich body of work has evolved over time to demonstrate the environmental, cultural, political, racial, technological, economic, and historical context in which it exists,” according to Roberts Projects, the Los Angeles gallery that represents her.

Saar began her career in design and shifted to art at age 35. She continued to make art into her 90s. She grew up in Pasadena and was part of a community of Black artists in nearby Altadena; she often cited Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers as an early source of inspiration.

Saar’s practice incorporated painting, printmaking, sculpture and found objects including dolls, washboards and other antiques. Boats, clocks, cages and altars recur in her practice, as well as symbols of the occult and cosmology. She often referenced her astrological sign of Leo in the form of lions, punctuating many works.

“Her appropriation of Black collectibles, heirlooms, and utilitarian objects are transformed through subversion,” the gallery said. “Among the older generation of Black American artists, Saar is without reproach.”

Made in 1969, “Black Girl’s Window,” was groundbreaking. Still, it wasn’t widely celebrated until decades later, and it was acquired by

the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2019. “There weren’t that many galleries in Los Angeles at the time and there certainly weren’t any for Black artists,” she once said in an interview.

“The Liberation of Aunt Jemima,” created in 1972, is one of her most important works. It features memorabilia she collected that denigrated Black people, included a “mammy,” or 19th century minstrel character who smiled while serving white slave owners.

In Saar’s hands though, the figure is reclaimed: She smiles, but holds a rifle and has a hand grenade.

It came in response to the 1968 assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee. Saar said King’s death “triggered a rage within me, and the mystic transformed into the warrior.”

“I had a lot of hesitation about using powerful, negative images such as these – thinking about how white people saw Black people, and how that influenced the ways in which Black people saw each other,” Saar said. “What saved it was that I made Aunt Jemima into a revolutionary figure.”

After more than 130 years, Quaker Oats announced it would retire its Aunt Jemima brand in 2020, acknowledging the logo and its origins were “based on a racial stereotype.”

Saar taught and mentored generations of Black artists, including painter Kerry James Marshall.

Though Saar’s work was exhibited in a 1975 solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in the decades that followed large institutions have exhibited her work



only sporadically. In 2019 though, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and MoMA mounted concurrent solo shows.

In spring 2026, Saar was inducted to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

“She had boundless energy for making art. I think she had a lot to say and was tired of the art world being dominated by white males,” said Angela Robinson Witherspoon, who produced and directed a documentary in 2023 on Saar’s life. “Betye Saar: Ready to Be A Warrior” features interviews with John Legend, Tina Knowles and other prominent voices.

“She was raising her three young daughters and she wanted to be part of the Civil Rights Movement,” Robinson Witherspoon said. “Let’s Get It On: The Wearable Art of Betye Saar,” which focuses on costume design, is currently on view at Robert Projects in Los Angeles, and there are 26 of an eventual 100 dolls on view at the New-York Historical Society in Manhattan.



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