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THE IMPORTED DOCTORS

Kern County built its healthcare system on foreign medical talent. What happens if the international pipeline breaks?

By Cecil Egbele
Contributing Writer | California Local News Fellow

"Kern County chose me," said Dr. Ololade Oladimeji. "I did not exactly choose Kern County."

Known as Dr. Lola, Oladimeji is a Nigerian-born internist who trained at Ladoko Akintola University of Technology in Ogbomoso. She came to Bakersfield in 2012 when her husband's oil and gas job relocated them from Texas. She has not left.

A year ago, she opened Peridot Health Medical Clinic, a primary care clinic in McFarland, a small, largely farmworker community north of Bakersfield, because so few clinics and providers served the area. "Patients are grateful to have us here and are happy to have more choices in their location and not having to travel to Bakersfield for their primary care needs," she said.

Her patients travel from nearby Delano, Wasco, Shafter, Lost Hills, and even from outside Kern County — distances that pale in comparison to the roughly 12,000 miles Oladimeji traveled from Nigeria to serve them.

Oladimeji's story of arriving in Kern County by circumstance and staying by conviction is far from unusual. The county's healthcare system has long depended on doctors trained abroad.

But recent decisions coming out of Washington, D.C., brought home the extent of Kern County's dependence on foreign-trained talent and exposed the county's vulnerability.

On January 1, the Trump administration imposed a 39-country travel ban, followed by a freeze on immigrant visas from 75 countries. Both actions threatened work permits, visa extensions,



Dr. Terrance McGill is a Bakersfield native who attended medical school at Ross University in the Caribbean before opening his private practice in Kern County, Maverick Medical care. Here he is pictured with his wife and three children.



Dr. Hector Arreaza, a Venezuelan-born and educated physician was among Rio Bravo's Family Medicine Residency Program's first residents—now teaches there.



Dr. Ololade Oladimeji, known as "Dr. Lola," runs Peridot Health Medical clinic in McFarland, serving a largely rural, farmworking community.

and green card processing for foreign-trained medical professionals already in the country.

While the visa ban was quietly lifted in May, local practitioners and local hospitals and clinics are still wrestling with how they can protect this vital pipeline and the community that depends upon it. Oladimeji said these kinds of visa restrictions will worsen the doctor shortage problem.

The federal flip-flopping on visas exposed the county's dependence on foreign-trained talent. A Physician Desert

"We're definitely in a physician desert," said Dr. Terrance McGill, a family medicine physician born in Bakersfield who attended medical school at Ross University in the Caribbean.

The shortage McGill describes has roots that go back nearly five decades. On March 5, 1978, the federal government formally designated Kern County a Health Professional Shortage Area for

primary care. That designation has never been lifted. Today, Kern County has 41 primary care physicians per 100,000 residents — it ranks in the bottom third among California's 57 counties — and well below the state average of 61 per 100,000.

McGill said he returned home in part because "we needed people who looked like me." He now serves patients in Kern County and runs Maverick Medical Care, his private practice.

More than 60 percent of Kern County's physicians come from medical schools abroad, according to data from the Medical Board of California.

"Bakersfield and Kern County is one of the hardest places to recruit to," Oladimeji said, recalling her experience as a physician recruiter at Adventist Health Bakersfield. There are locations that boast better weather and amenities, she said. "Most U.S.-born, U.S.-trained doctors are not attracted to a place like Bakersfield."

McGill, the native Bakersfield doctor who attended medical school abroad, agreed that domestic graduates have a fuller roster of choices around the state and nation, including coastal hospitals with higher salaries and cleaner air; Kern County's air quality ranks among the nation's worst.

Oladimeji said that underserved areas like Kern mean higher patient volume. Lower socioeconomic and educational backgrounds can shape patients' health outcomes, she said, contributing to higher disease rates, lower insurance reimbursement, and lower physician compensation. These factors impact recruitment. "We had to rely on foreign medical graduates, usually requiring visa sponsorships. That has been a way of getting physicians here."

Kern County has backfilled its chronic

physician shortage with foreign-born and foreign-trained doctors for decades. For those who do come to Kern County from abroad, they often arrive on J-1 or H-1B visas that are tied to sponsoring institutions. Foreign-born physicians face a narrower set of work options and so they remain.

"After residency, usually they stay about two years, and then they find that Kern County is not a bad place to be," McGill said. "Because they're already moving from different countries, it's easy for them to set their roots here. They're not born in LA or San Francisco and trying to get back."

Threats to the Pipeline

One of the pipelines routing these physicians into Kern County runs through Niles Street in East Bakersfield—the Rio Bravo Family Medicine Residency Program, operated by Clinica Sierra Vista.

The primary purpose of the program is to train and retain family medicine residents and physicians dedicated to serving the underserved in Kern and Fresno Counties. The program receives roughly 1,600 applications each year, a mix of citizens and foreign-born physicians, for 10 spots.

Dr. Hector Arreaza, a Venezuelan-born and educated physician who was among the 12-year-old program's first residents, now teaches there. "Before this program, all these communities around this clinic that were underserved had no place to go for primary care," he said. Residents see patients in the clinic and also go to hospitals, attend health fairs, and run a street medicine program for Bakersfield's homeless population.

"They are caring for the whole community," Arreaza said. "The activities are not limited to the walls of the clinic."

This whole community care model was threatened under the recent visa freeze.

During that time, McGill heard fear from his peers, "almost anger," he said, because those imported doctors know "how much they've benefited the system. Everyone needs help, but you're blocking off that pipeline to bring people over to assist."

The Trump administration quietly lifted the freeze in May. But the unease remains.

Oladimeji said that if such a policy returned, "it will definitely limit the availability, recruitment, and retention of physicians to Kern County."

The county is not without other new efforts to address physician shortages, especially through residency programs. Rio Bravo. Bakersfield Memorial Hospital recently launched a residency program in partnership with Morehouse School of Medicine, a historically Black medical school with a mission of training physicians for underserved communities. The program's second cohort arrives this July.

For now, Kern County's health system still relies heavily on foreign-born physicians committed to practicing in the region.

"I see a lot of opportunities to directly impact people's lives and health in these kinds of communities," Oladimeji said. "This resonates with my purpose."

This story was produced for the USC Center for Health Journalism's Ethnic Media Collaborative.



Dr. Ololade Oladimeji and her team pose at Peridot Health Medical clinic in McFarland, which Oladimeji opened just a year ago. "Patients are grateful to have us here."

"Why Black Women May Be the Best Jurors in America"

By Zulu Ali

My understanding of juries did not begin in law school. It began at home. I was raised by a Black grandmother and a single Black mother who treated jury duty with extraordinary seriousness. As a child, I listened to them discuss their experiences serving on juries—not casually, but with moral weight. They spoke about fairness, credibility, evidence, and responsibility in ways that stayed with me long before I ever entered a courtroom.

They viewed jury service not as an inconvenience, but as a sacred civic obligation. Years later, after working in law enforcement environments and eventually becoming a trial lawyer, I began to recognize something familiar whenever certain jurors spoke during voir dire or deliberations. I noticed the same attentiveness, skepticism toward easy narratives, practical reasoning, and moral seriousness that I had first witnessed around my family's kitchen table.

Over time, I came to a conclusion many trial lawyers quietly understand but rarely say publicly: Black women are often among the best jurors in America. That observation is not rooted in sentimentality or politics. It is rooted in experience.

I have seen the justice system from more than one side. I have watched investigations unfold, watched lawyers construct narratives, watched witnesses attempt to persuade, and watched ordinary citizens struggle with the enormous responsibility of judging another human being. Across those experiences, my conclusions about the seriousness and discernment Black women often bring to jury service have remained remarkably consistent.

The American jury system asks ordinary citizens to perform an extraordinary task. Jurors must evaluate competing stories, assess credibility, resist emotional manipulation, and sometimes stand against the pressure of the majority. The best jurors are not merely intelligent. They are discerning. They understand that justice requires patience, independence, and the courage to question appearances.

Black women often bring those qualities into the jury box in remarkable ways. Part of this may come from history itself. Black women in America have long been required to navigate systems that were not designed for their protection or advancement. They have had to read people carefully, identify hidden motives, and distinguish sincerity from performance in ways that many Americans never have to consider consciously.

That ability matters in court. Trials are performances as much as they are presentations of evidence. Lawyers perform. Witnesses perform. Experts perform. Police officers sometimes project authority in ways that influence perception before a single fact is fully examined. Good jurors understand this instinctively. They are not overly impressed by titles, uniforms, polished speech, or institutional status.

In my experience, Black women jurors are often especially resistant to superficial credibility.

They listen carefully. They notice inconsistencies. They ask practical questions. And they often refuse to surrender independent judgment simply because others in the room appear certain.

That does not mean Black women are automatically sympathetic to criminal defendants or incapable of supporting a conviction. Some of the strongest convictions I have witnessed were supported by Black women who carefully examined the evidence and concluded accountability was necessary.

But accountability is different from reflexive punishment. And justice requires understanding the difference. Research has consistently shown that diverse juries deliberate longer, consider more facts, and make fewer factual errors than homogeneous juries. Legal scholars have also examined how lived experience shapes the way citizens evaluate power, credibility, and institutional authority. While no demographic group possesses a monopoly on wisdom or fairness, it would be intellectually dishonest to pretend that history and social experience do not influence judgment.

Few groups in America have been forced to understand power more intimately than Black women. There is also a historical irony here that should not be ignored. For much of American history, Black people—and Black women in particular—were excluded from jury service altogether. That exclusion was not accidental. The jury box represents democratic authority. To serve on a jury is to participate directly in the administration of justice. Historically, many in power feared independent Black judgment precisely because it could challenge accepted assumptions and institutional bias.

Today, public confidence in the legal system continues to erode. Americans increasingly believe courts are unequal, politicized, or disconnected from ordinary people. In that environment, jurors who bring seriousness, independence, and moral clarity into deliberation rooms are more important than ever.

Black women have long served as stabilizing democratic forces in American life. They have often carried families, communities, churches, civic organizations, and political movements with little recognition and enormous responsibility. It should not surprise us that many bring the same discipline and sense of duty into jury service.

When I reflect on this now, I often return to those conversations from my childhood. Before I ever cross-examined a witness or entered a courtroom as a lawyer, I listened to Black women discuss justice with honesty and gravity. They understood something fundamental: the power to judge another human being should never be exercised carelessly.

That lesson has remained with me throughout my legal career. Of course, no group is inherently superior. Human beings are individuals, and every juror deserves to be judged on their own conduct and character. But after years of trying cases and observing deliberations, I believe it is fair to acknowledge what experience has repeatedly shown me.

When Black women enter the deliberation room, the quality of deliberation often rises with them. Perhaps that is because generations of Black women have spent their lives learning how to see through America's contradictions while still believing in the possibility of justice.

And that may be the very quality our jury system needs most.

5 Cleveland Police Officers Injured, Gunfire Erupts During East Side Pursuit

By C&P Newswire

Five officers with the Cleveland Division of Police were injured after a violent chain of events that began with a shooting on Cleveland's East Side and escalated into a police pursuit involving gunfire, crashes, and a dramatic arrest.

According to Cleveland police, officers first responded shortly after 2 p.m. to the 5200 block of Fleet Avenue after reports that a 33-year-old man had been shot multiple times near an Open Pantry convenience store. Witnesses said the wounded victim staggered inside the store seeking help before collapsing as employees called 911.

While officers investigated the shooting scene, police spotted a vehicle repeatedly circling the area. Authorities said information gathered at the scene linked the driver — a 24-year-old suspect — to the earlier shooting. Police said the situation quickly intensified when the suspect allegedly opened fire on responding officers before fleeing the neighborhood.

Investigators said at least one police cruiser was struck by gunfire, and one officer suffered injuries believed to be caused by bullet fragments or shrapnel. Officers returned fire as the suspect sped away, leading police on a chase through Cleveland streets.

The pursuit continued until the suspect crashed into a church building along Chagrin Boulevard. Authorities said the suspect then attempted to flee on foot before officers took him into custody.

In addition to the officers injured by gunfire and debris, two other officers were hurt in separate cruiser crashes during the pursuit. One police vehicle reportedly struck a tree, while another crash occurred near East 75th Street and Kinsman Road. All five officers were later reported to be recovering.

Police said the original shooting victim was transported to a nearby hospital and remains in stable condition. The suspect was also taken to a hospital for evaluation before being booked into the Cuyahoga County Jail. Charges remain pending as



Photo: iStockphoto / NNPA.

investigators continue reviewing evidence from the incident.

The shooting and pursuit drew a massive law

enforcement response across multiple Cleveland neighborhoods and once again highlighted the dangers officers face while responding to violent

crime in the city.

Originally published by Call & Post – Cleveland — <http://callandpost.com>.

Missing Black Girl, 16, Found Hanging from Tree in N.C.

By Aisha Winfrey

Los Angeles WAVE

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — A 16-year-old Black girl who had been missing since late April has been found dead hanging from a tree, according to police and media reports.

Juliana Nzita, who recently moved to North Carolina from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was found earlier this month hanging from a tree near the United House of Prayer for All People Church in Charlotte, police said. Her death has been classified as a suicide.

Authorities said Nzita was reported missing on April 28, according to the North Carolina Beat, an independent local news outlet. Her family searched for her while online posts and tips spread across

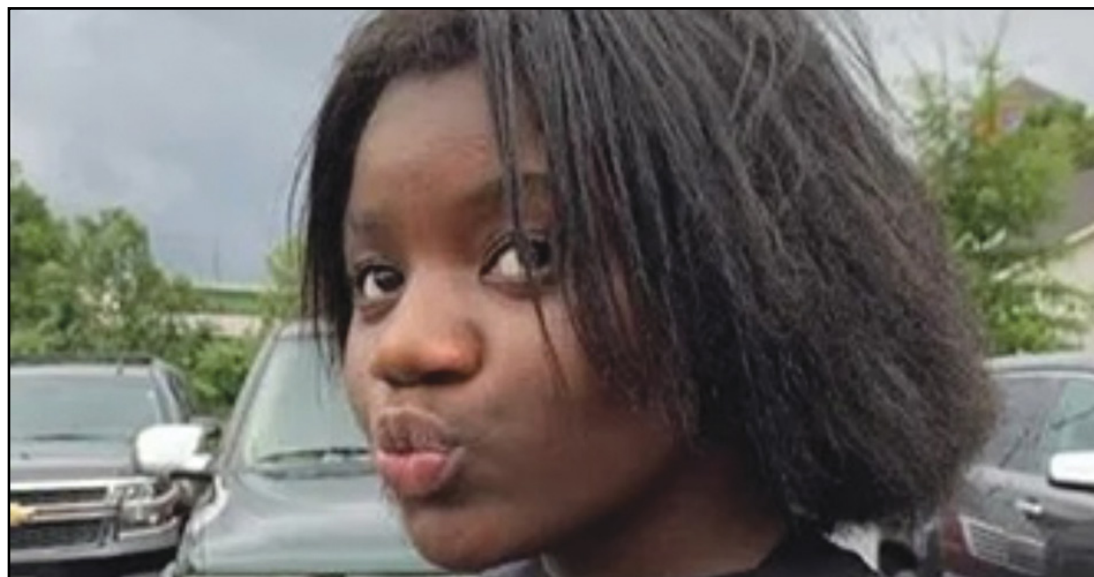
social media.

Area resident Kenneth Tolbert said he was near the church on May 8 when he spotted what appeared to be the body of a teenage girl hanging from a tree, the outlet reported. Tolbert said he alerted church members and police.

Tolbert reportedly provided video footage showing a small blue chair under a tree and a rope above, with the girl's feet still close to the ground. A church member reportedly said the area had been checked the day before and saw nothing unusual.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department records confirmed Nzita was pronounced dead at 12:40 p.m. on May 8. The report documented the location and initial findings.

Investigators said they received no response from Nzita's family when contacted. The church reportedly released no public statement.



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15-YEAR-OLD COLUMBUS GIRL DIES, Community Mourns as Authorities Urge Water Safety Awareness



Photo: iStockphoto / NNPA.

By Min. Dale Edwards

Executive Director | Call & Post

LICKING COUNTY, Ohio — A heartbreaking water rescue operation on the Licking River ended in tragedy after a 15-year-old girl lost her life following an incident that drew a massive emergency response from multiple agencies. According to fire officials, emergency crews were dispatched Sunday afternoon to the Licking River after reports that individuals were trapped in dangerous river conditions near a downed tree. Initial reports indicated that a family had been kayaking when their teenage daughter became caught in a log jam amid swift-moving waters. Rescue personnel worked tirelessly under difficult conditions to free the young girl from the river. Authorities reported that river levels remained above normal following recent weather, creating

strong currents and hazardous underwater obstacles. Rescue crews described the operation as extremely challenging due to the force of the water and the debris lodged throughout the river channel. The teenager was reportedly wearing a life jacket at the time of the incident and was transported from the scene by emergency medical personnel. Despite rescue efforts and medical treatment, officials later confirmed that the young girl had died. The loss has left family members, first responders, and community residents devastated. "This is every rescuer's worst nightmare," one local resident said after learning of the tragedy. "Our hearts go out to the family and everyone involved." The incident serves as a sobering reminder of the dangers rivers can pose, particularly during periods of elevated water levels and strong currents. Safety experts warn

that even experienced swimmers and boaters can quickly find themselves in life-threatening situations when confronted with submerged debris, changing currents, and flood-stage conditions. Local officials are encouraging residents to exercise extreme caution when enjoying Ohio's waterways and to remain aware of weather conditions, river levels, and potential hazards before entering the water. As the community grieves this profound loss, prayers and condolences continue to pour in for the family of the young victim. Counselors and support services are expected to be made available for those affected by the tragedy. The investigation into the incident remains ongoing. Originally published by Call & Post – Cleveland — <http://callandpost.com>.

Entertainment

John McClain, Music Executive Who Helped Run Michael Jackson's Estate, Dies at 71

John McClain, co-executor of the Michael Jackson estate and longtime music executive, has died at 71 in Malibu. He played a key role in shaping major artists' careers and helped rebuild Jackson's estate into a global business empire.

McClain died in Malibu last Tuesday, according to TMZ. Reports said he had been dealing with illness for several years, but his exact cause of death has not been confirmed.

He built a long career in the music industry, working as an A&R executive at A&M Records. During that time, he helped guide the success of



Janet Jackson, especially through her breakthrough album Control.

McClain also worked across several major acts in the industry. His credits and collaborations included projects linked to Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and Michael Jackson. He also had involvement in early label decisions tied to Mark Wahlberg's Marky Mark & The Funky Bunch era.

In 2009, McClain took on a major new role when he was named co-executor of Michael Jackson's estate alongside John Branca. At the time, the estate was heavily in debt following Jackson's death.

Together, McClain and Branca worked to stabilize and rebuild the estate's finances. Over time, they helped grow it into a multibillion-dollar entertainment operation with global reach.

The estate later expanded into film, stage, and live productions, including the 'This Is It' documentary, a Broadway show, a Cirque du Soleil production, and the planned Michael biopic. McClain also contributed to posthumous releases such as "Love Never Felt So Good" and "Much Too Soon."



Everything We Know About Obama's Presidential Museum

The Obama Presidential Center Museum's soft opening has revealed what guests can expect when it officially opens in Chicago on June 19.

After a decade of planning and carrying a price tag of approximately \$850 million, the Obama Presidential Center Museum will open on June 19. Thanks to the center's soft opening period currently underway for Chicago residents and schools, we've gained more insight into what the 225-foot-tall museum tower and expansive, nearly 20-acre campus hold.

Some Familiar Voices Will Guide The Tours
According to the Hollywood Reporter, several stars and athletes will narrate different areas of the tour through the presidential library. Oprah Winfrey will narrate the center's campus guide, detailing the creation of the Obama Presidential Center and its relationship to Chicago's south side. Barack and Michelle Obama, Golden State Warriors' star Stephen Curry, and chef Cliff Rome

are among the names included in the campus guide.

Tom Hanks will narrate portions of the museum guide that detail President Barack Obama's campaign and key moments of his tenure in the Oval Office. A Different World star Cree Summer will voice the Obama family's dogs through an exhibit aimed at elementary school-aged children.

The Presidential Center Is A Library, Museum, and Community Center

With the aforementioned \$850 million price tag, the Obama Presidential Center is without a doubt the most expensive presidential library in history. While the center's imposing stone tower, dubbed the "Obamalisk" by locals, is the focal point, the center is a sprawling, multi-use facility.

AP reports that Obama's presidential library will boast approximately 3,500 books. CNN adds that the presidential archive will be fully digitized for the first time, which represents nearly 30 million pages related to Obama's presidency.

One of the more impressive displays is a life-size replica of the Oval Office designed to represent how it looked when Obama was in office, with none of the, uh, "renovations" made by our current president.

Another notable feature of the campus is the "Home Court" recreation facility. The Home Court area features an NBA-regulation-sized basketball court, which should come as no surprise considering Obama's longtime love of the sport. The Home Court area will also feature several conference spaces intended for community organizing and wellness workshops.

The sprawling campus also includes a fruit and vegetable garden, a plaza dedicated to the late civil rights activist and congressman John Lewis, as well as a playground. The campus will also feature a new branch of the Chicago Public Library, along with several educational resources designed to teach K-12 students about civics and how democracy works.

The Center Will Include Several Free Amenities Open to the Public

While entry to the museum will require paid admission, many of the amenities provided by the center will be accessible to the public free of charge. Most of the outdoor amenities will be open to the public free of charge. Most of the art installations at the site are free and easily accessible. The Forum is designed to be a mixed-use space, with both paid performances and free events. The Forum, in particular, is designed to feature various lectures from notable voices in literature, journalism, and pop culture.

So if you happen to be in Chicago for Juneteenth, what better way to celebrate than the opening of the presidential library dedicated to our first Black president?

'Wonder What She Truly Feels':

Zendaya's Mother Sounds Off After Watching Her Daughter's Painful 'Euphoria' Journey End in Tragedy

By Danielle Jones

The grand finale of "Euphoria" still has viewers in shock over that tragic ending and the main character's fate.

Struggling addict Rue Bennett, played by Zendaya, became the emotional center of the HBO series that premiered in 2019.

Her raw battles with loss, relapse, and self-destruction often left viewers wondering whether she would survive long enough to find the peace she spent years chasing.

Zendaya's mom, Claire Stoermer, finally responds to share her feelings about the 'Euphoria' finale, which features a tragic ending for her daughter's character.

Sadly, Rue Bennett's story ended in tragedy. After getting caught between rival drug bosses, she was killed by Alamo Brown, portrayed by Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje.

Once Brown discovered she had been secretly helping the DEA, he laced her pain medication with her friend Ali Muhammad's house.

Muhammad avenged Rue's death by shooting Alamo in the chest three times at his strip club.

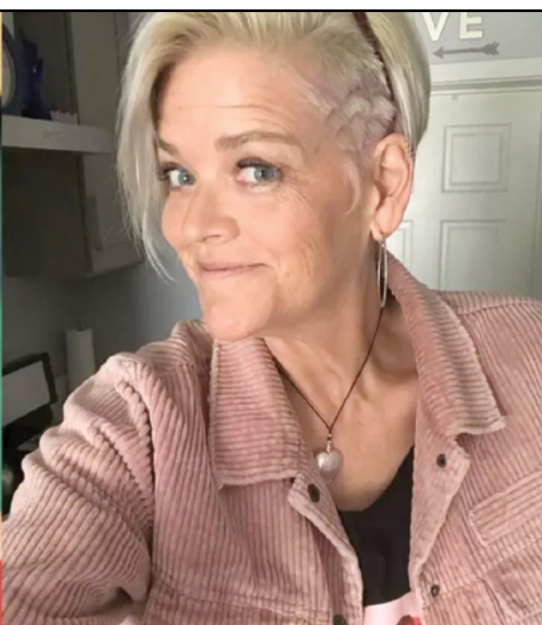
For some, the way she died seemed realistic for an addict's story. Others were upset with the overall outcome of this third season, which some described as having no clear meaning or direction.

Now Zendaya's mom, Claire Stoermer, is chiming in with her own thoughts about the finale, and they don't seem too far off from fans' emotions.

On June 1, one day after the finale aired, Stoermer posted a cryptic reaction on her Instagram story.

"Lots of messages in my DM's from people about last night's episode," she wrote. "I'm gonna keep my thoughts to myself."

Sharing a sliver of what she felt, Stoermer continued, "Definitely made me sad...and other emotions as well. But just gonna leave it right there....." before ending the statement.



Zendaya's mom, Claire Stoermer, finally responds to share her feelings about the 'Euphoria' finale, which features a tragic ending for her daughter's character. (Photos: FilmMagic/FilmMagic for HBO; @claire_marie64/Instagram)

Fans responded online to her reaction, noting, "I wonder what she truly feels."

Another pointed out, "I mean ya she's watching her daughter die, why tf would she wanna speak on that real or not... That's tragic asf to watch as a parent."

Most "Euphoria" fans agreed that "Rue deserved a happy ending" rather than an emotional death scene. Some are now calling it a "Horrible season, horrible ending."

"It was not supposed to end like that ... God that was full of pain," acknowledged one person.

Another said, "Zendaya carried the entire Season 3 on her back. She did an amazing job. The writing for her season was s---, which is not her fault. She deserves another award for this season."

Stoermer's reaction to the finale of season 2 of "Euphoria" appeared to be the exact opposite of her current response.

In 2022, she was shocked to see the show close out with vocals from Zendaya on her and Labrinth's track "I'm Tired."

Her mom wrote, "yo! HEARING her voice as the credits rolled...TOOK ME OUT!! tears streaming

down my face... i told Z i didn't want to watch the finale with anyone so i could cry in private! man, what a way to end it...so beautiful in every way!"

She also said, "I'm so proud...of everyone involved..."

In past years, Stoermer has celebrated her daughter's wins with the show, including winning an Emmy in 2020 and 2022 for Outstanding Lead Actress and a Golden Globe for Best TV Actress in 2023.

Zendaya has not spoken about her character's fate herself.

But she did address it in the behind-the-scenes footage shown at the end of the show, where she tearfully spoke to the crew on her last day of filming.

"I want to say thank you. I'm really grateful for every single one of you," Zendaya said, according to Page Six. "Many of you have been here from the beginning and have watched me grow up. It's been such a pleasure and an honor. Thank you so much."

When it came to concluding the series, the show's creator Sam Levinson intended to send an authentic message to the world.

He told The New York Times' Popcast the story is "a tragic one in the end — but it's also the truth. If you are experimenting or taking drugs today, it's very possible it'll kill you."

"If we were really going to be saying something, we needed to put the audience in the position of a family member who loses someone that they love, Levinson later said.

"I wanted to mirror that feeling, and I know how much audiences love Rue. It felt like I can put them in the position that I think a lot of families are in."

Zendaya's father, Kazembe Ajamu Coleman, so far has been mum about the "Euphoria" finale. But he has always been supportive of her career.

Now that "Euphoria" has ended, she has three more projects coming out this year. This includes the third installment of "Dunes," "Spiderman: Brand New Day," and "The Odyssey."

Features

Venus Williams Calls a Sabalenka Exit a Tragedy

The seven-time major champion read frustration, not a real goodbye, in the world No. 1's words

By David Kesiena
Rolling Out

When the world's top-ranked player said she wanted to walk away from the sport, Venus Williams chose empathy over alarm. Aryna Sabalenka's blunt remark after her French Open quarterfinal collapse rattled plenty of fans, but Williams heard something different in it. The seven-time Grand Slam champion treated the comment as the raw reaction of a hurting athlete rather than a serious signal about her future. The collapse that triggered the comment

Sabalenka looked headed for a routine win over Diana Shnaider. She took the opening set 6-3 and built a commanding lead in the second, climbing to 4-1 and later serving for the match at 5-4 while sitting just two points from victory. Then everything unraveled. Shnaider stormed back to steal the second set 7-5 and bageled the world No. 1 in the third, with Sabalenka dropping 12 of the final 13 games in gusty conditions that reached around 26 mph. The 3-6, 7-5, 6-0 result sent Shnaider into her first Grand Slam semifinal and extended Sabalenka's long wait for a maiden Roland Garros title. In the aftermath, Sabalenka did not soften her feelings. She told reporters she had no thoughts and no emotions left and felt like quitting on the spot. She described being stuck in a deep, dark mental hole during the match, unable to find her way back. What Venus Williams said about Sabalenka

Williams reacted with understanding. She admitted the moment made her sad and said she had been swept up in Sabalenka's emotions, feeling a surge of empathy for her. She praised the Belarusian for laying everything bare on court, where every feeling shows. Crucially, Williams did not read the comment as a real farewell. She said she did not believe Sabalenka truly wanted to leave, calling such an outcome a loss for both the player and the sport. Rather than scold her, Williams offered a gentle observation about the rhythm of professional tennis. She suggested players might benefit from a little more time to gather themselves before stepping in



Venus Williams at Taste of Tennis New York 2015. Photo: Aysports / Wikimedia Commons.

front of the cameras, a quiet acknowledgment that athletes are routinely asked to dissect painful defeats before the sting has faded. Sabalenka walks it back

The story did not end on that bleak note. Within days, Sabalenka signaled she was not actually quitting, framing the press-conference outburst as heat-of-the-moment honesty rather than a plan. At the time of the loss she had also left

the door open, saying she would see how she felt in a few days and hoped to get back on track mentally. The walk-back lined up with how Williams had read the situation from the start. It is not the first time a Paris quarterfinal has pushed Sabalenka to her limit. In 2024 she exited at the same stage and skipped her press conference entirely because of illness, with the tour later releasing her quotes on

her behalf. The pattern underscores how heavily this particular tournament has weighed on her despite deep runs in recent years. For now, attention shifts to the grass. Wimbledon offers Sabalenka a quick chance to reset, and a strong showing there would turn this French Open meltdown into a footnote rather than a turning point. Originally published by Rolling Out — <https://rollingout.com>.

National Leaders in Miami for First Black-Jewish Alliance in More Than 25 Years

Historic gathering launched emerging national alliance to combat antisemitism, racism, and division through renewed Black-Jewish solidarity

TV personality Van Jones and media executive and philanthropist Shari Redstone joined more than 100 leaders from across the United States in Miami this weekend for the National Convening on the Black-Jewish Alliance. It is the first national gathering of its kind in more than 25 years, aimed at renewing one of the most consequential partnerships in American history. Hosted by the Exodus Leadership Forum and Redstone Family Foundation at EAST Hotel Miami, the

convening brought together clergy, organizers, artists, philanthropists, educators, civic leaders and cultural figures. The goals were to strengthen relationships; confront rising antisemitism and racism; and help shape a shared national strategy for Black-Jewish partnership in the years ahead. "It has been almost a quarter century since Black leaders, Jewish leaders and leaders who are both Black and Jewish pulled ourselves together like this," said Van Jones. "With anti-Black and anti-Jewish backlash politics reaching a fever pitch, it's time to renew this partnership." Jones added, "When you combine the Jewish tradition of 'repairing the



world' with the Black tradition of 'justice for all,' you get a double helix of hope for humanity." The gathering comes at a moment of deep polarization in the United States, with increasing concern over antisemitism, attacks on democratic institutions, racial injustice and growing social fragmentation. Shari Redstone said, "This gathering reflects what we are seeing across the country — a real desire to rebuild trust, deepen relationships, and move from conversation to coordinated action. The Black-Jewish alliance is not a relic of history; it is a living partnership that is evolving in response to this moment. What we are beginning in Miami is about fostering mutual understanding, strengthening partnerships and activating resources for our shared future — one rooted in trust, shared purpose, and the commitment to social justice." Programming included a Soulful Shabbat gathering, artistic performances and facilitated conversations around difficult "wedge issues." Discussions focused on movement-building, narrative change and civic participation. Featured performers and artists included Erika Atkins, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Jon Adam Ross and Zhailon Levingston, alongside performances from participating college students. Rev. Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. said, "We are living through a period of crisis. Rising antisemitism, rising racism and growing division in our nation. But history shows us that movements are born in moments like this. This convening is not simply

about remembering past solidarity; it is about building a participatory national strategy that allows millions of people to join in the work of justice, repair and shared liberation." An outcome of the convening was the advancement of a draft National Strategy for Black and Jewish Partnership, a living framework organized around five pillars: Promoting Awareness and Historical Understanding

- Deepening Relationships and Building Trust
- Shaping a Public Narrative around Black-Jewish Allyship
- Coordinating Efforts Across the Field
- Expanding Partnerships for Collective Advocacy and Action

Throughout the convening, attendees reflected on the historic partnership between Black and Jewish communities during the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, they emphasized that the goal is not to recreate the past, but to build a broader, more durable future-facing alliance.

Organizers plan for the convening to become an annual gathering focused on strengthening Black-Jewish partnership and advancing collaborative action nationwide.

For more information about the emerging National Strategy for Black and Jewish Partnership and future initiatives, contact ethan@dreammachine.org.

For information about EXODUS Over Dinner, visit <http://exodusoverdinner.org/>.

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Features



Photo courtesy Darkness Rising Project, <https://www.darknessrisingproject.org>.

Using Art, Healing, And Community to Transform Mental Health Dialogue

By Judaea Ingram
Special to The Carolinian

RALEIGH, N.C. — Music filled the air as families danced through the crowd, children gathered around activity stations, and community members explored wellness resources from local organizations. Black-owned businesses lined the streets while people stopped for chair massages, conversations, and moments of connection inside the wellness suite. At the center of the event stood a simple but powerful reminder: “You Matter.” For Darkness RISING, those words represent far more than a slogan. They reflect the organization’s mission to break the stigma surrounding mental health in the Black community while creating spaces centered on healing, honesty, and hope. Operating at the intersection of the arts and mental health, Darkness RISING uses music, storytelling, wellness programming, and community engagement to inspire healing while addressing barriers that have historically prevented many Black Americans from accessing mental health support. The organization hosts a variety of programs and events throughout the year, including block parties, wellness workshops, mixers, kickoff events, community classes, and Darkness RISING: Live — a free annual arts and wellness festival now celebrating its ninth year. The festival combines entertainment with healing-centered resources, featuring live music, dancing, singing, food trucks, Black vendors, children’s activities, mental health resources, wellness spaces, and opportunities for open conversations about mental health. While the events may feel celebratory on the surface, organizers say the deeper purpose is creating safe

spaces where people can feel comfortable discussing mental health without fear of judgment. Darkness RISING also provides free nationwide resources, including a Black Mental Health Resource Packet, a Black Mental Health Provider Database, and its “Find Me a Therapist” initiative, which helps connect individuals with culturally competent care. The organization’s work is rooted in addressing longstanding inequities that continue impacting mental health access within Black communities. Historically, segregation, redlining, racial discrimination, incarceration, poverty, and unequal healthcare access have contributed to higher rates of behavioral health challenges while simultaneously limiting access to proper treatment and support. Darkness RISING approaches those issues through what organizers describe as a transformative justice lens, focusing on healing rather than punishment and creating equitable wellness opportunities for marginalized communities. Its REBUILD program specifically supports justice-involved and formerly incarcerated people of color through free therapy and wellness support, while the REBUILD Youth program focuses on young people impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences, also known as ACEs. For Rudolph, therapy became life-changing after decades of incarceration and years of rejection after returning home. “I came home in 2015, started my own computer company, investing in real estate, did the normal thing and got some jobs here and there and was met with rejection after rejection and people telling me I am not a good person,” Rudolph shared. “Even had a rejection in church.” He said one of the hardest battles became overcoming the mental

barriers created during incarceration. “I got in touch with a couple of friends, and they explained to me how I had to get over the mental hurdles and get rid of the way my prison mindset was in order to survive and become successful,” he said. Rudolph later moved to North Carolina hoping for a fresh start, but the struggle continued. “Things were looking bad,” he said. “Could not get a job. The struggle was real.” Eventually, therapy and support through organizations like Darkness RISING helped begin his healing process. He said working alongside other justice-involved men through therapy gave him the ability to rebuild mentally while finding community with people who understood his experiences. Stories like Rudolph’s reflect the foundation behind Darkness RISING’s mission: ensuring people feel seen, supported, and worthy of healing regardless of their background or circumstances. Community

members who attend the organization’s events often describe them as emotionally transformative. Some participants say Darkness RISING encouraged them to seek therapy for the first time, while others say the organization gave them a safe space to openly discuss struggles they previously kept hidden. “I have been encouraged by the beautiful, generous, brave and open individuals who come together and use their talents to create art, share personal experiences and provide hope to those who may be struggling with mental health,” one participant shared. By combining art, wellness, education, and community outreach, Darkness RISING continues changing how mental health conversations happen within the Black community. Not through silence. But through healing, honesty, connection, and joy. Originally published by The Carolinian — <https://caro.news>.

When Politics Intersects with Professional Sports

By David Marshall
Jacksonville Free Press (TriceEdneyWire.com)

It appears that every week, there is a news story or event that leaves us even more tired and weary of the political climate we live in. At a time when we should be paying increased attention to evolving events, we also face the personal need for emotional and mental breaks from the chaos. Taking that mental off-ramp to recharge and receive the temporary relief we need is critical. Sports can often be used as that emotional and mental off-ramp. While the same can be said of music and other forms of entertainment, sports have a unique way of uniting people of various backgrounds. This is particularly true when attending live sporting events where sports arenas and stadiums become safe spaces for passionate sports fans to escape the polarizing cultural wars between conservatives and liberals. At the beginning of every professional sporting event, it has become an American tradition to stand during the playing of the national anthem. By doing so, it represents a moment of unified respect for our nation that goes beyond race, class, gender, age, political affiliation, and religion. It represents a time before the game when players, coaches, and fans of opposing teams are Americans first, and are joined together as one American team. The national anthem is a few precious minutes where patriotism and unity are established. It establishes an atmosphere of fan camaraderie where MAGA conservatives and die-hard liberals can cheer together for their favorite home team while being free of the political divisions from the outside world. Fans sitting in the stands can be totally unaware of the political persuasions of those around them because political differences are put aside, and support for the home team on the court or field becomes the unifying shared interest of those in attendance. It is a part of the game day experience

that can easily be overlooked and taken for granted. As starting quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, Colin Kaepernick received backlash on multiple fronts when he used kneeling during the national anthem as a means of silently protesting racial injustice and police brutality. At the time, Joe Lockhart was the executive vice president in charge of communications and government affairs for the NFL. He later became a political analyst for CNN. In a column written in 2020, Lockhart stated, “No teams wanted to sign a player — even one as talented as Kaepernick — whom they saw as controversial, and therefore, bad for business.” Colin Kaepernick was not blackballed from the league because of his lack of skills, injuries, or salary demands. He was ostracized because he became a financial liability. “For many owners, it always came back to the same thing,” Lockhart wrote. “Signing Kaepernick, they thought, was bad for business. An executive from one team that considered signing Kaepernick told me the team projected losing 20% of their season ticket holders if they did. That was a business risk no team was willing to take, whether the owner was a Trump supporter or a bleeding-heart liberal. As bad of an image problem it presented for the league and the game, no owner was willing to put the business at risk over this issue.” Looking back, I personally believe he should strategically use his platform as an NFL player in speaking out against racial injustice and police brutality, but his method underestimated the fan reaction when he invaded the political safe zone on game day with controversial social issues. It arguably led to Kaepernick losing his promising NFL career and not being re-signed by any other team in the league. Recently, the New York Giants’ starting quarterback was another NFL player who misjudged a politically sensitive situation by introducing President Trump at a MAGA rally. Jaxson Dart’s decision will not cost him his job and career, but it did result in a backlash from a different perspective: The public backlash came from those defending the Black cause, including one of his New York Giants teammates. Linebacker Abdul Carter initially voiced discomfort with the optics of the event, according to multiple reports. “Some things are bigger than football, and this is one of those things,” Carter told reporters during a press conference. “If he chooses to align himself with a man like President Trump, it’s my responsibility based on what I believe and what I stand on to not only show my teammates that I’m against that, but to show the world.” Dart, along with other Trump supporters, cannot forget that the majority of players in the NFL are Black. Abdul Carter’s comments refer to the character of a leader. If Dart is accepting the character of an anti-DEI leader, how can he, with any sense of credibility, be the quarterback and leader of a locker room that is predominantly Black? Hopefully, during the private meeting used to repair the fractured locker room, the team will learn that a player in leadership cannot bring racial insensitivity into another version of the NFL safe zone. This is why diversity, equity, and inclusion are always needed to bring racial awareness when needed. David W. Marshall is the founder of the faith-based organization TRB: The Reconciled Body and the author of *God Bless Our Divided America*.

Originally published by Jacksonville Free Press — <https://www.jacksonvillefreepress.com>.

Uptown Music Theatre Summer Camp Returns to Inspire the Next Generation of Performers



Photo courtesy LA Data News Weekly.

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief | New Orleans Data News Weekly

For 25 years, Uptown Music Theatre (UMT) has helped young people across New Orleans discover their talents, build confidence, and develop a love for the performing arts. This summer, the organization will once again open its doors to aspiring performers through its Annual Summer Camp Program. Founded by renowned New Orleans Jazz Musician and Educator Delfeayo Marsalis, Uptown Music Theatre has become a cornerstone of arts education in the city. The program provides youth with professional-level training in musical theater while creating a supportive environment where creativity, teamwork, and self-expression can flourish. The 2026 UMT Summer Camp runs from June 1st through July 10th and is open to young people ages 8 to 18. Camp activities will take place Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Contemporary Arts Center. Participants will receive instruction in acting, singing, dancing, stage movement, and performance techniques from

experienced theater professionals and educators. Throughout the Six-Week Program, students will work together to develop their skills and prepare for a culminating stage production that showcases what they have learned. Marsalis founded Uptown Music Theatre with a vision of providing young people with opportunities that extend beyond the classroom. Over the years, the organization has helped hundreds of students develop discipline, leadership skills, and confidence while exposing them to the transformative power of the arts. The Summer Camp continues that mission by offering youth a chance to spend part of their summer immersed in a creative environment that encourages artistic growth and personal development. As New Orleans continues to celebrate its rich cultural heritage, programs like Uptown Music Theatre play an important role in ensuring that the next generation of performers, artists, and community leaders have the opportunity to learn, grow, and shine on stage. Originally published by Data News Weekly — <https://www.ladatanews.com>.



David W. Marshall is the founder of the faith-based organization TRB: The Reconciled Body and the author of *God Bless Our Divided America*.

Political



Political Playback:

California Capitol News You Might Have Missed

By Bo Tefu
California Black Media

UCLA Report Exposes Deepening Economic Instability for Black Californians

Black Californians saw a sharp rise in unemployment and worsening job stability between 2024 and 2025, according to a May 2026 report from the UCLA Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies' Black Policy Project. The report links the shift to federal funding rollbacks, public sector job losses, reduced diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, and a broader economic slowdown.

Using Current Population Survey data, the analysis found Black unemployment increased from 5.6% in 2024 to 7.5% in 2025. That marked the largest one-year increase among racial and ethnic groups in California. That downturn left Black workers facing double the unemployment rate of White Californians by the end of the reporting period.

The report shows the impact was not evenly distributed. Black women experienced a steep rise in unemployment, from 3.5% to 7.1%. College-educated Black women saw one of the most dramatic increases, with unemployment rising from 2.7% to 8.5%. Black men also remained under pressure, with unemployment holding at elevated levels, including 15.9% among those without a high school diploma.

Overall employment levels changed only slightly, but the report said those numbers masked deeper shifts in job quality. Black women's employment rate fell by about 6 percentage points, while Black men's employment rose by about 5 percentage points, driven in part by increased part-time work rather than stable full-time positions with benefits.

A key concern in the report is the rise in involuntary part-time work. Among Black Californians, it increased from 39% to 49%, the largest jump of any group. College-educated Black men saw particularly sharp growth in involuntary part-time employment, rising by nearly 30 percentage points.

The study also found declines in public sector employment, long a key source of stable jobs for Black workers. Black Californians' share of state government jobs fell by nearly 2 percentage points, while municipal employment dropped by nearly 3 points. Researchers pointed to funding cuts and reductions in DEI-related roles as contributing factors.

Institutional disconnection, defined as not being employed or enrolled in school, also rose by 3 percentage points, with the steepest increases among Black women and prime-age adults.

The report concludes that these trends reflect structural changes in California's labor market and recommends stronger labor protections, expanded workforce programs, and sustained investment in education and Black-led economic initiatives.

We Are Ready! California Leaders Are Preparing to Welcome World Cup

With the 2026 FIFA World Cup set to begin this week, California officials say they are ready to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the globe as the state prepares to host 14 matches. That's more than any other state in the nation.

During a June 5 media briefing, leaders from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), the California Highway Patrol, the California Department of Transportation, the California National Guard, local law enforcement agencies, and federal partners outlined extensive preparations already underway to ensure the tournament is safe, secure and seamless.

California will host eight matches in the Los Angeles region and six in the San Francisco Bay Area, including knockout-round contests and the U.S. Men's National Team's opening match in Los Angeles.

Caroline Thomas Jacobs, Director of Cal OES, said the state is taking a "whole-of-government" approach to hosting the World Cup and ensuring safety and security.

"The 2026 FIFA World Cup will bring hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world to California, showcasing our communities, our culture and our economy on a global stage," said Thomas Jacobs. "It requires an extraordinary level of coordination to help ensure everyone can safely enjoy the matches, the fan events, and celebrations that come with the World Cup. Public safety is always our top priority."

State officials said planning efforts have been underway for more than a year and involve coordination among federal, state, local, tribal and private-sector partners. The preparations include public safety operations, transportation planning, cybersecurity protections, emergency response coordination, intelligence sharing and public information campaigns.

The World Cup, which runs from June 11 through July 19, is the largest in FIFA history, featuring 48 teams and 104 matches across the United States, Canada and Mexico. California's 14 matches will be played at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood and Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara.

The state is drawing on lessons learned from

previous large-scale events, including Super Bowl LX, which was held in the Bay Area earlier this year.

Officials say many of the same planning frameworks used for the Super Bowl are now being expanded for the World Cup, including real-time intelligence sharing, coordinated emergency response teams, advanced traffic management and transportation operations.

Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol Sean Duryee said, "What an honor. It's going to be historic. The work has been done, and the foundation has been laid. We are ready. We're ready to host some historic games."

Duryee said law enforcement, first responders and emergency managers have done the work to lay out operational plans, transportation plans and contingency plans at the state, county, regional and local levels "in case something goes awry."

The World Cup is also expected to serve as a major test run for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles. LA28 Chief Executive Officer Reynold Hoover recently said organizers will closely study the World Cup's transportation, security and crowd-management operations as preparations continue for the Olympics.

"What makes the World Cup different from a typical event is the scale duration and complexity of this event. This is not a one-day operation. This is a month-long international event involving multiple host cities, fan festivals, airports, transportation systems, hotels, critical infrastructure and millions of people moving throughout California every day."

CAGOP Chair Corrin Rankin Launches "Victory 26" Ahead of Nov Elections

The California Republican Party (CAGOP) on June 3 unveiled its "Victory '26" slate of statewide candidates, framing the rollout as an effort to challenge Democratic control ahead of November's general election.

Speaking at party headquarters in Sacramento, CAGOP Chair Corrin Rankin said the initiative is aimed at offering voters an alternative to what she described as longstanding one-party dominance in the state.

"What we're offering is a viable option to the one-party rule," Rankin said. "Who you see before you today are your neighbors, and they want a better California."

Rankin said the GOP ticket is intended to address voter concerns about affordability, housing, taxes, and homelessness. She cited polling showing 57% of Californians believe the state is on the "wrong track," describing the moment as a "precipice" for the state's political direction.

The "Victory '26" slate includes Republican candidates for all eight statewide executive offices. Party leaders said the coordinated lineup is designed to strengthen competitiveness in a state where Democrats hold a nearly 2-to-1 voter registration advantage.

The launch follows the June 2 primary, in which Republican gubernatorial candidate Steve Hilton led the field with nearly 28% of the vote as of early June 3, according to preliminary results. Final tallies had not yet been certified.

Hilton, a former Fox News host, used the event to criticize Democratic leadership in California and argue that key economic challenges have worsened under their governance.

"The Democratic Party in California has had 16 years to show that their ideas work well," Hilton said. "We're still waiting. We have the highest poverty rate in the country, the highest unemployment rate of all 50 states, the highest cost of living by far."

Republican leaders and candidates repeatedly pointed to cost-of-living pressures and out-migration as central campaign themes. Secretary of State candidate Don Wagner said economic strain has driven residents out of the state, saying, "It's gotten us to a place where our three biggest exports are fruits, nuts and grown children."

Other candidates on the slate, including State Superintendent of Public Instruction hopeful Sonja Shaw, focused on education reform and parental rights as key campaign priorities.

The GOP said the "Victory '26" effort will continue through the general election as it seeks to expand its reach beyond traditional Republican voters.

California Nets \$260 Million in Stolen Goods From Retail Theft Rings

California officials say an expanded statewide crackdown on organized retail theft has resulted in the recovery of nearly \$260 million in stolen goods and more than 32,000 arrests since late 2023, as the state continues to invest heavily in combating retail crime networks.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the latest figures in Sacramento on June 4, highlighting what his administration described as record-level enforcement tied to the state's organized retail crime initiative.

Authorities say 32,613 arrests have been made and 25,843 cases have been referred for prosecution since October 2023.

"Public safety starts with accountability," Newsom said. "Over the last two years, we've made the largest investment in state history to combat organized retail theft, giving local law enforcement and prosecutors the tools they need to dismantle criminal networks."

The enforcement effort is funded through more than \$242 million in state grants distributed to 38 local law enforcement agencies by the Board of State and Community Corrections. Officials say the funding supports specialized investigative teams, technology, and coordination between police departments, prosecutors, and retailers.

State officials also credited the California Highway Patrol's Organized Retail Crime Task Force, which has conducted more than 4,500 investigations, made over 5,100 arrests, and recovered more than 1.6 million stolen items valued at over \$74 million since 2019.

In the most recent reporting quarter alone, agencies reported 3,553 arrests and 2,947 cases referred for prosecution.

"California's investment in combating organized retail theft continues to pay dividends," said Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) Chair Linda Penner.

Penner said the grants are helping agencies pursue complex criminal operations and recover stolen property at scale.

Local enforcement operations have targeted retail theft rings across the state. In Los Angeles County, sheriff's deputies recovered about \$4 million in stolen cargo tied to multiple retailers, including Foot Locker, Epsom, and Ulta. In Costa Mesa, police recovered roughly \$150,000 in stolen merchandise linked to online resale activity. Bakersfield police arrested four suspects tied to thefts targeting national chains, while San Jose police reported 72 arrests through 29 enforcement operations.

The state has also invested \$24 million in a vertical-prosecution program supporting 13 district attorney's offices, leading to 2,615 theft-related convictions, including 772 felony convictions and 910 cases tied directly to organized retail theft.

Officials say the crackdown comes as preliminary FBI data shows broader crime declines in California, including a nearly 10% drop in violent crime and a more than 14% decline in property crime compared to the previous year.

Ticketmaster "Monopoly" Bill Draws Fire From Consumer Advocates

A coalition of consumer advocates, business organizations, and community groups is urging California lawmakers to reject Assembly Bill (AB) 1720, arguing that the measure targets ticket buyers and sellers rather than addressing what they describe as the dominant market power of Live Nation/Ticketmaster.

In a letter sent to Assembly Arts, Entertainment, Sports and Tourism Committee Chair Buffy Wicks (D-Oakland), the coalition said AB 1720 would restrict how consumers can resell tickets they legally own while leaving Ticketmaster's control over primary ticket sales, pricing, and fees largely untouched.

"AB 1720 punishes consumers rather than confronting the real source of the problem: unchecked power by a single player that keeps prices high and limits access," the letter states.

Authored by Assemblymember Matt Haney (D-San Francisco), AB 1720 — known as the California Fans First Act — would cap the resale price of tickets for concerts and other live entertainment events at no more than 10% above the original purchase price, including fees.

Supporters say the bill is intended to curb ticket scalping and protect consumers from excessive markups in the secondary market.

Haney argues that professional brokers and automated bots purchase tickets in bulk and resell them at inflated prices, making live events less affordable for fans. The bill has advanced through multiple Assembly committees and passed the Assembly floor in May.

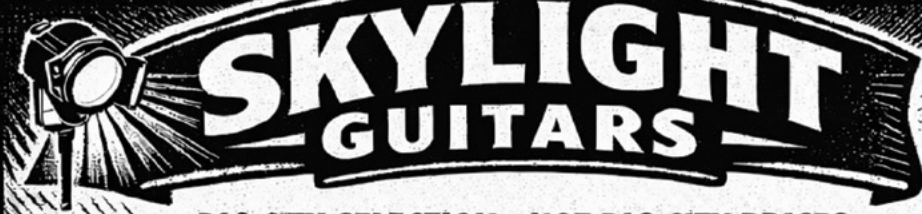
Opponents, however, contend that the legislation focuses on a relatively small portion of the ticketing market while failing to address broader concerns about industry concentration. In their letter, they note that resale transactions account for about 9% of ticket sales and argue that Ticketmaster would retain the ability to use practices such as dynamic pricing, exclusive presales, and inventory holdbacks.

The coalition also raised concerns about the bill's impact on low-income consumers who may need to resell tickets when plans change. They argue that tying resale limits to an often unclear "original price" could force consumers to sell at a loss or risk violating the law.

The letter was signed by leaders from organizations including the California League of United Latin American Citizens, the California Black Chamber of Commerce, the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, the National Action Network Sacramento, and the California Live Events Equity Alliance.


The debate comes amid continuing scrutiny of Live Nation and Ticketmaster's market dominance. California remains among the states pursuing antitrust action against the company after declining to join a recent federal settlement that critics argued did not go far enough to curb monopolistic practices, according to the coalition's letter.

Critics of AB 1720 say lawmakers should focus on increasing transparency and competition in the primary ticket market rather than imposing new restrictions on consumers.



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Local

Applications Open This Summer for the California Civic Media Program Supporting Local Journalism

By Antonio Ray Harvey
California Black Media

The California Civic Media Program's grants will open in the summer of 2026, with the first round of award decisions and funding distributions expected to be officially announced in the fall of 2026, according to the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz).

Referred to as the Civic Media Fund, the program is a \$20 million public-private partnership aimed at strengthening local journalism, improving access to reliable information, and increasing community engagement across California. The program is funded by a \$10 million appropriation from the state and a \$10 million matching contribution from Google.

Regina Wilson, Executive Director of California Black Media and a member of the program's advisory board, said the fund is a "step in the right direction."

"I believe the Civic Journalism Fund is one of many tools that will be needed to help save local journalism. It may not satisfy all of the needs that community media, or journalism more broadly, faces at this moment," Wilson said. "But it does infuse much-needed resources into an industry that has been badly harmed by federal policies and market shifts that began decades ago and have steadily weakened local news."

Wilson added, "I believe the Civic Journalism Fund is one of many tools that will be needed to help save local journalism. It may not satisfy all of the needs that community media, or journalism more broadly, faces at this moment. But it does infuse much-needed resources into an industry



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that has been badly harmed by federal policies and market shifts that began decades ago and have steadily weakened local news."

GO-Biz is California's primary office for economic strategy, job growth, and business assistance. It serves as the single, centralized point of contact for companies seeking to start, expand, or relocate within the state.

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (D-Oakland) authored Assembly Bill (AB) 886, the "California Journalism Preservation Act," (CJPA) to put pressure on digital advertising monopolies and major tech platforms like Google and Meta to subsidize local news outlets for utilizing their journalism content.

Wicks said she authored AB 886 to help ensure the sustainability of local journalism, as news outlets across the country are downsizing and closing at alarming rates.

Wicks's office discovered through a study produced by Northwestern University that an average of two and a half newspapers in the country close every week, and that the United States has lost

two-thirds of its newspaper journalists since 2005. California has lost more than 100 newspapers in the last decade alone.

"The CJPA provides a lifeline for news outlets — large, small, and ethnic — by directing a portion of the ad dollars back to the print, digital, and broadcast media that bear the entire cost of gathering and reporting local news while Big Tech bears none," Wicks stated after she introduced the bill. "It's time they start paying market value for the journalism they are aggregating at no cost from local media."

To help navigate the state's landmark \$20 million Civic Media Program, GO-Biz created an Advisory Board consisting of a nine-member panel. The advisory board holds public meetings throughout the year to provide recommendations to GO-Biz on the program's approach and guidelines of the program. Meetings will be noticed on the Civic Media Program webpage.

GO-Biz appointed news industry leaders and journalistic advocates with knowledge of fact-seeking, verification, objective journalism, and the persistent watchdog oversight of the world's fourth-largest economy to the Civic Media Program Advisory Board.

"An informed public is the foundation of a healthy democracy," stated Dee Dee Myers, Senior Advisor to Gov. Gavin Newsom and Director of GO-Biz.

"By bringing together distinguished leaders from across the state who care deeply about supporting local journalism, expanding access to trusted information, and improving newsroom sustainability, the Civic Media Program will help Californians stay connected to the issues that shape

their lives and strengthen their communities," Myers added.

To ensure strict editorial freedom, GO-Biz appointed the James B. McClatchy Foundation as the third-party administrator for the state funds following a thorough Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

The nonprofit foundation is in charge of designing overarching program guidelines in conjunction with GO-Biz, while the advisory board independently processes and scores all grant applications ahead of final awards.

"Through longstanding regional partnerships in the Inland Empire and Silicon Valley, and statewide collaboration with community foundations across California, we're prepared to help ensure this program reaches newsrooms where they are, while fully protecting editorial independence and honoring the leadership of journalists, publishers, and nonprofit newsrooms who know their communities best," stated Priscilla Enriquez, President and CEO of the James B. McClatchy Foundation.

Wilson said by setting up the fund to support community news, "the Governor and the Legislature are acknowledging that local journalism matters and that community news organizations play a vital role in informing residents, strengthening civic engagement, and holding institutions accountable."

"This investment alone will not solve every challenge facing the industry. But it is a meaningful start, and we should continue building on it with additional strategies and long-term solutions that protect and sustain local journalism for future generations," said Wilson.

Woman Who Won \$15M Discrimination Lawsuit Against Fresno Fights Back as City Tries to Decrease Her Award



Photo Caption: La-Kebbia "Kiki" Wilson. Courtesy of La-Kebbia "Kiki" Wilson.

By McKenzie Jackson
California Black Media

Lawyers for La-Kebbia "Kiki" Wilson, a Black woman who won a \$15 million racial discrimination lawsuit against the City of Fresno in March, fired back at the city's motion for a new trial with a pointed response, calling it a distortion of the facts.

Wilson's attorneys, Gary G. Goyette and Kevin Schwin, said in their 32-page notice to U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California Judge Kirk E. Sheriff that the city presented a "watered-down version of the facts" that ignores egregious conduct Wilson suffered and dismisses the reputational harm caused to her on grounds unsupported by law.

The lawyers, who also represent Wilson's co-plaintiff Charles Smith, insist the jury's unanimous verdict was objective and should stand.

"Contrary to the City's arguments, the jury followed the law," they wrote in the notice dated May 20. "The verdict is supported by the evidence and is entitled to great deference by the Court. However, to the extent the Court is inclined to remit the damages, any remittitur must reflect the maximum amount sustainable by the proof."

The case centers on allegations of years of racial harassment, retaliation, and inadequate oversight within Fresno's Code Enforcement Department. A federal jury ruled in favor of Wilson, who worked as a Community Revitalization Specialist from 2004 to 2013 and again from 2016 to 2022. The jury also sided with Smith, a former part-time and later full-time Code Enforcement employee, holding the city liable and awarding him \$400,000 in damages.

The lawsuit describes repeated racial harassment by supervisor Howard Lacy — including calling Wilson an "entitled n****r" in 2018 — and retaliation after complaints were raised, while Fresno's leadership failed to respond. The allegations date back as far as the early 2000s.

Wilson cried when the jury ruled in her favor. "I was so happy the jury believed I was the person I said I was," she said. "For Black people in general, we want people to respect us for who we are — not what we are stereotyped to be."

"I wasn't thinking about money at all," Wilson added. "I felt vindicated."

Fresno's attorneys filed a motion for a new trial or a partial new trial to reduce the damages in April. They wrote that the March 11 judgment in favor of Wilson and Smith "exceeds awards that case law has held excessive, despite more concrete proof of more severe emotional distress in those other cases."

"Despite a record that objectively supports a sum lower than in other reported cases, this jury returned an award that far exceeds other amounts that have been judicially found to be excessive," the 30-page motion read. "A trial judge has both broad authority and a duty to intervene where a damages award is excessive. Not only does the size of the verdict alone warrant such intervention, but so do other circumstances that indicate that a judge's moderation should accompany the jury's verdict."

When contacted by California Black Media (CBM), spokespersons for the Fresno City Attorney's Office and Whitney, Thompson & Jeffcoach LLP declined to comment.

In the days after the trial, Fresno City Councilmember Miguel Arias urged the city not to appeal, saying further litigation is costly and unjust to Fresno taxpayers.

"The conduct described in this case was wrong and reprehensible and does not reflect the values of our city or the safe, respectful workplace every employee deserves," Arias said. "It is time for the City to take responsibility, resolve this matter, and learn from the mistakes that were made under the prior city attorney."

The next hearing is scheduled for June 15, continuing a long-running legal battle that began

with the lawsuit's filing in 2019.

In their filing, Wilson's lawyers reiterated her claims — including that Lacy called her lazy and dishonest and pressured co-workers to stay away from her — and argued in favor of the jury's verdict.

Goyette and Schwin wrote that the jury carefully weighed the evidence over two days, even ruling in the city's favor on some issues and awarding Smith less than requested. They said jurors accurately assessed emotional distress damages.

"For these reasons, determinations about 'intangible, non-economic losses' are 'peculiarly within a jury's ken,'" they wrote.

They also argued that the jury's finding is legally protected and entitled to respect.

"A district court may not grant a new trial simply because it would have arrived at a different verdict," they said.

The amount awarded is tied to the scope and severity of the harm done to Wilson, according to their filing. The attorneys said she experienced intimacy problems with her husband, was diagnosed with anxiety, developed heart problems, and experienced weight gain, insomnia, hair loss, and social withdrawal as a result of what she endured.

Wilson's reputation was also tarnished professionally by years of discrimination and retaliation by Lacy.

"It negatively impacted literally everything that is meaningful in life — her family, her career, her health, and her relationships with other people," the lawyers said.

They also rejected Fresno's argument that damages should be reduced under federal limits, noting the case includes state law claims that allow higher awards.

Wilson said the city tried to portray her as an "angry Black woman," adding that anyone would react to the treatment she endured.

"Black, white, Hispanic, Asian," she said. "Anyone would be angry. We need to start normalizing Black women's anger. I'm not a robot. I get emotional sometimes. Black women are human. I have a right to be upset when people are hurting me."

Wilson said the case is emotional but remains committed to seeing it through.

"They don't care anything about what this verdict was," she said about the city. "They acknowledge that something happened but say it wasn't on their watch."

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