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Lisa Leslie Honored Where She Should Be

By Earl Heath

Contributing Sports Writer

Lisa Leslie has been leading the way for women in basketball for decades.

The first woman to dunk in a WNBA game, the first WNBA player to sign with a modeling agency and one of the most accomplished players in league history, Leslie has now become the first Los Angeles Sparks player to be immortalized with a bronze statue outside Crypto.com Arena.

The 11-foot statue, which sits atop a 4½-foot base, was unveiled during a ceremony celebrating Leslie's remarkable career and lasting impact on women's basketball.

Leslie became the 16th person honored with a statue in what has become known as Star Plaza. The ceremony featured several basketball legends, including her former USC coach Marianne Stanley, Lakers greats Magic Johnson, Byron Scott, James Worthy and Michael Cooper, as well as former Sparks teammate and fellow Hall of Famer Candace Parker.

"The First Lady"

The statue, titled "The First Lady," captures Leslie performing her iconic dunk. It is the first statue honoring a Sparks player in Star Plaza and the second honoring a woman. The first was Gigi Bryant, who died alongside her father, Kobe Bryant, in a 2020 helicopter crash.

When Leslie first saw the statue, she had a lighthearted reaction.

"First of all, she's cute," Leslie said. "I was so worried. I did not want to look like a linebacker up here. But she's cute."

Leslie said she wanted the statue to represent both her competitiveness and her femininity.

"I wanted to make sure that this statue was a perfect blend of fearlessness and the competitor that I was and I am and I'll always be," she said. "But also ... I wore my ribbons, I had my nails polished, which y'all can't see, but the girl got her polish on because I never wanted the boys or the men to think that I was a boy."

Leslie said she wanted young girls watching her career to see themselves reflected in her.

"I wanted to play hard like them, but I wanted them to know that I respected myself and that I was a lady," she said. "And I wanted for little girls to see my ribbons when I played because I wanted them to be able to see themselves in me."

A Legacy Across Los Angeles

Standing near the statue, Leslie reflected on its location and the people who helped shape her life.

"I'm right across from Kobe. I'm right by Magic. The people who have just poured into my life," she said. "To be cemented here in Hollywood, but it's also a lasting legacy that my ancestors would be proud of."

Leslie grew up in nearby Compton as the child of a single mother and went on to star at Morningside High School in Inglewood.

Her influence extended beyond the basketball court. After winning a championship, she negotiated her own contract with Nike, becoming an early example of the crossover appeal women athletes could have. In 1996, she signed with Wilhelmina Models before the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

In 1997, Leslie joined the Sparks for the franchise's inaugural season.

Over her 12-year WNBA career, Leslie was a three-time league MVP and led the Sparks to championships in 2001 and 2002. She was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 2015.

A Competitor Who Helped Others

Michael Cooper, who coached Leslie with the Sparks, recalled first meeting her in 1994 while conducting a basketball camp in Pasadena.

"I knew she was going to be great because she challenged me to a slam dunk contest at my own camp," Cooper said. "So she went up, made her first dunk, crowd went crazy and I lost."

Magic Johnson also remembered Leslie competing against men during pickup games.

"She didn't want to play with the women. No, no, no. She wanted to play with the guys," Johnson said. "Coop and I looked up and said, 'Lisa is going at them.' She kind of dominated these dudes out there."

Cooper said Leslie would arrive early to work on post moves, including moves associated with James Worthy, Johnson and Hakeem Olajuwon.

"The uniqueness about Lisa Leslie was that she would just use those moves and work on them. She used them in a game," Cooper said.

Leslie retired in 2009 and went on to build a career in business and broadcasting. She has remained connected to women's basketball and has developed mentorships with younger players.

Watching the Game Grow

Leslie said she is proud of the growth of women's basketball and the increased attention the sport receives today.

"I'm a proud mom watching them," she said. "I'm so proud of where the women's game is."

Leslie credited the fans who supported women's basketball from the beginning but said the dream



Lisa Leslie stands with her new statue outside Crypto.com Arena. The bronze depicts the Sparks legend and "First Lady" of the WNBA mid-dunk in her No. 9 jersey. (Courtesy Photo)

was always for the sport to reach a much larger audience.

"The dream was always that we hoped that everybody across the board could see us, could see the beauty in us, could see the strength in us, could see our hard work and our resilience," she said.

"Today, they see it. They see it in a big way. We have the support that I had always hoped for."

For Leslie, the statue represents more than a career filled with championships, records and firsts. It stands as a permanent reminder of a player who helped open doors for generations of women who followed.

Inglewood Mayor James T. Butts Jr. Responds to Allegations

By Marion Apio

California Local News Fellow

Inglewood Mayor James T. Butts Jr. on Monday, Sept. 21, denied allegations involving the alleged inappropriate touching of a young person, calling the claims false and announcing legal action against those bringing them forward.

Speaking at a press conference at Inglewood City Hall surrounded by his family, community leaders, education officials and a state legislator, Butts addressed statements made by Yolanda Davidson, Najee Ali, Earl Ofari Hutchinson and Leonard Redway, Davidson and Redway are District 1 City Council candidates.

"The accusations made against me by Yolanda Davidson, Najee Ali, Earl Ofari Hutchinson, and Leonard Redway are baseless, unsourced, and completely false," Butts said.

Butts fully denied the claims and stated that his attorneys have served three individuals with cease-and-desist demands, while working to locate addresses to serve the remaining two. He accused those making the claims of relying on unverified information and failing to contact the alleged victim or the victim's family before speaking on



Inglewood City Attorney Rick Olivarez tells reporters that his office has received no official complaint or referral regarding the allegations and that no charges are pending, during a press conference at Inglewood City Hall on Monday, Sept. 21. (Photo by Marion Apio/Los Angeles News Observer)

television and social media.

"They will be held to account," Butts said.

Inglewood City Attorney Rick Olivarez said his office has not received an official complaint or referral regarding the matter, and no charges are pending. Olivarez noted that while the city was made aware of an allegation involving alleged inappropriate touching, his office lacks sufficient information to determine the precise



Dr. James Morris, County Administrator with the Inglewood Unified School District, addresses the district's responsibilities as mandated reporters during a press conference at Inglewood City Hall on Monday, Sept. 21. (Photo by Marion Apio/Los Angeles News Observer)



Assemblymember Tina McKinnor (D-61st District) cautions against a public rush to judgment, telling attendees "an allegation is not a fact," during a press conference at Inglewood City Hall on Monday, Sept. 21. (Photo by Marion Apio/Los Angeles News Observer)

circumstances.

"Accordingly, there is presently no matter before the city attorney's office for review," Olivarez said, adding that any formal submission would undergo standard review procedures.

Dr. James Morris, County Administrator with the Inglewood Unified School District, addressed questions regarding the district's responsibilities as educators and mandated reporters, emphasizing the duty to protect students and maintain confidentiality.

Morris stated that on the evening the incident allegedly occurred, a political opponent of the mayor contacted him to ask if he had fulfilled his legal duties as a mandated reporter.

"I assured her that I had," Morris said. Addressing subsequent public statements questioning whether the district had fulfilled its obligations, he added, "Throughout my career, I have never failed in my duty as a mandated reporter, nor have I ever failed to take responsibility as a school administrator."

Assemblymember Tina McKinnor, who represents the 61st Assembly District, called for taking allegations seriously while emphasizing the critical legal distinction between an allegation and an established fact.

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Aaron Donald Makes Big Return for Rams

By Earl Heath

Contributing Sports Writer

When Aaron Donald took the field at SoFi Stadium for the first time since the end of the 2023 season, the crowd erupted with an ovation that seemed to shake the building.

Donald, returning to the Los Angeles Rams after coming out of retirement Aug. 30, brought an immediate jolt of energy to his teammates and the fans. The Rams went on to defeat the New York Giants 28-6.

"If you didn't get chills when he was introduced, then you're not freaking alive," Rams coach Sean McVay said.

Donald said he "did a little bit more jumping than I used to do" during his run out of the tunnel before the game.

"I was so juiced," Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford said after watching Donald's entrance. "I couldn't control myself."

Donald Makes Immediate Impact

Donald finished the game with three tackles and one tackle for loss, according to Next Gen Stats. He played 32 defensive snaps, or 58.2% of the Rams' defensive plays.

On the Giants' first series, Donald made his



Photo AP felt. He fought through three blockers to bring down Giants running back Cameron Skattebo for a loss.

McVay was asked whether Donald was playing under a predetermined snap count.

"What do you think?" McVay responded.

The veteran defensive tackle's return was about more than his individual statistics. McVay said Donald's presence naturally draws attention and elevates the players around him.

Detroit Family Says Wrong Woman Was Prepared For Mother's Funeral After Suspected Cremation Error

DETROIT — A Detroit family preparing to say goodbye to their mother was confronted with a devastating discovery when the body presented for her viewing was not hers.

The family of Kimberlly Kaye Moore says they went to Hutchison Funeral Home ahead of her scheduled Sept. 18 viewing and found another woman dressed and prepared for the service. The discovery has raised the possibility that Moore's remains were mistakenly cremated before her family had the opportunity to see her.

Moore's children identified the apparent mix-up while preparing their mother for the viewing. Her daughter, Bianca Robinson, said she noticed a physical feature on the woman's foot that did not match her mother.

Robinson said that funeral home staff then suggested Moore may have been cremated after arriving at the facility alongside another woman. According to the family's account, staff attributed the confusion to an identification tag that may have become wet and fallen off.

That explanation has not been established as the definitive cause of the mix-up. Hutchison Funeral Home is investigating, and local reporting has confirmed that the facility has launched an internal review.

Joseph Hutchison Jr., the funeral home's vice president of operations, confirmed that the matter was under investigation. In a statement the funeral home said it was "heartbroken and deeply sorry" for what Moore's family had experienced and pledged to communicate with them during the review.

The situation became more tense as relatives gathered outside the funeral home. Detroit police were called to the location after the family protested.

The family had planned to hold Moore's viewing and funeral before cremating her remains afterward. Instead, they say they were left without the farewell they had arranged and without confirmation of where her remains were.

Moore's obituary lists her as Kimberlly Kaye Moore, born Nov. 18, 1964, and died Sept. 3, 2026.

The family is now waiting for answers about how the apparent identification error occurred and what happened to Moore's remains. Until the funeral home completes its review, key questions remain unresolved, including whether Moore was mistakenly cremated and how another woman came to be prepared for her scheduled viewing.



Raz B attends the Los Angeles Premiere Of HBO's Documentary Film "United Skates" February 06, 2019 in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Rodin Eckenroth/Getty Images)

Raz-B's Infant Son Showed No Signs of Trauma or Foul Play, Police Report Says

ATLANTA, GA — Police investigating the death of Raz-B and Mona Li's 3-month-old son found no obvious signs of trauma or foul play when officers responded to the family's Atlanta home, according to a newly released incident report.

Atlanta police responded to a "person down" call shortly after 8 a.m. on Sept. 8. Officers were directed to Astro Monte Thornton, who was unresponsive.

Emergency medical personnel arrived and pronounced the infant dead at the scene. The Atlanta Police Department's Homicide Unit and Crime Scene Unit were notified and responded to the home, according to the report.

Police obtained a search warrant and collected items investigators believed could have evidentiary value. Detectives noted, however, that there were no obvious signs of trauma or foul play.

Astro's body was transferred to the Fulton County Medical Examiner's Office. The office later confirmed that an autopsy had been completed, but his official cause and manner of death remain pending.

A spokesperson for Raz-B, whose legal name is De'Mario Thornton, and Mona Li announced Astro's death last week, describing his passing as unexpected.

The couple also share an older son, Versai Carter. Raz-B had posted family moments with Astro in the months after his birth, including a Father's Day photo with his children. In the statement announcing Astro's death, the family asked for privacy during this difficult time.

The newly released police report provides more details about the response at the family's home but does not establish what caused Astro's death. The medical examiner has not released a final determination, and investigators have not announced any evidence of criminal conduct.

World & Nation

Newsom Orders Oversight of AI Companies; Sen. Weber Pierson's AI Health Care Bias Bill Awaits His Action

By Antonio Ray Harvey
California Black Media

As artificial intelligence rapidly expands into health care and other high-stakes fields, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued an executive order Sept. 18 accelerating California's efforts to independently oversee AI companies and strengthen safety guardrails.

The order advances the development of an emergency shutdown mechanism, or "kill switch," for advanced frontier AI models and expedites independent safety audits. It also directs a newly formed group of global AI safety experts to submit a formal legal and technical roadmap by Nov. 16.

Newsom said the order was prompted by the federal government's resistance to regulating the industry and efforts to prevent states from enforcing their own AI regulations.

"We're not waiting to act. We're going to speed up our work on substantial and responsible AI oversight before it's too late," Newsom stated. "We're going to do this thoughtfully but with urgent velocity; the stakes are too high to wait or delay action."

The executive order is part of a broader effort by California State Government to keep regulations in step with the accelerating development and use of AI. Those efforts include legislation addressing independent audits, transparency and the potential for algorithms to perpetuate discrimination.

Among the measures awaiting Newsom's decision is Senate Bill 503, authored by Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego). The bill would require AI developers and deployers to make reasonable efforts to identify, monitor and guard against unfair bias or prejudice in medical algorithms that affect patient care.

SB 503 passed the Assembly on Aug. 24 by a 70-1 vote. The Senate concurred in Assembly amendments the following day by a 39-0 vote. The measure, a priority of the California Legislative Black Caucus, was introduced during the first year of the 2025-2026 legislative session.

"This bill will ensure that AI tools are safe, fair and equitable," Weber Pierson said. "Especially in high-stakes health care settings, by specifically requiring AI technology used in healthcare facilities be identified if it supports clinical decision-making or healthcare resource allocation, ensuring such tools are mitigated for bias and requiring ongoing monitoring of those tools."

Weber Pierson, a physician, has emphasized that AI tools used in health care and medicine are not inherently neutral. She told the Assembly Privacy and Consumer Protection Committee in July that algorithms trained on historically biased medical data could reproduce or worsen the same disparities.

Because commercial health care algorithms frequently rely on existing data, Weber Pierson said,



AI systems could inherit unscientific and systemic assumptions, including the false premise that Black people naturally have lower lung capacity.

"In the analysis of this bill, there were multiple examples that pointed out how AI bias has impacted patient care directly or indirectly," she said. "Health care is an area where we should be striving to ensure that everyone is getting the best care and becoming the healthiest Californian that they can be, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status."

Weber Pierson added, "unfortunately, what we have seen in the past is that those biases have come into play. What you see with AI is that it is only as good as what kind of information has been placed

into the system initially. And, so, if biases have been placed in the system initially, then the outcomes will be biased."

Newsom has already signed other measures intended to strengthen California's AI oversight framework. Senate Bill 813, authored by Sen. Jerry McNerney (D-Pleasanton), establishes a network of trusted AI evaluators to help ensure advanced technologies are developed and deployed safely.

On Sept. 9, Newsom also signed Assembly Bill 1405, authored by Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan (D-Orinda). The law establishes third-party auditing requirements and transparency standards intended to prevent conflicts of interest involving auditors and the technology companies they review.

Bauer-Kahan, an attorney and chair of the Assembly Privacy and Consumer Protection Committee, has focused much of her legislative work on algorithmic discrimination and ethical AI. Her committee vetted SB 503.

"I think the bill is really important. I mean, it covers all protected classes. So, it covers me as a woman who seeks health care as well," Bauer-Kahan said. "I know it's Black Caucus's priority (bill) because it's critically important to the Black community, but it's important to all protected classes."

Port of Oakland, Army Corps Sign Historic Harbor Design Agreement

By Carla Thomas
Oakland Post

A \$642 million project designed to accommodate larger cargo ships and strengthen the Port of Oakland's position as a major Pacific trade gateway moved a significant step closer to construction on Aug. 27.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) San Francisco District and the Port of Oakland commemorated the signing of the inaugural Design Agreement for the Oakland Harbor Turning Basins Widening Project during a ceremony aboard the USS Potomac, the presidential yacht once used by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The project will widen the Port's Inner and Outer Harbor turning basins, allowing today's increasingly larger and longer vessels more space to safely maneuver and turn around. The current basins are narrow, creating delays and operational inefficiencies.

Oakland Port Commission President Stephanie Dominguez Walton called the agreement a historic milestone that will support thousands of jobs.

"Today marks a historic occasion for the Port as we sign the inaugural Design Agreement for the Turning Basin Widening Project, which will keep

Oakland competitive," said Walton.

The agreement advances the project into its preconstruction engineering and design phase following years of planning and collaboration.

Lt. Col. Virginia Brickner, commander of the USACE San Francisco District, said the signing

represented tangible progress toward construction.

"We are moving forward. We are showing progress," Brickner said.

Major General Jason Kelly, USACE Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations, said dredging is critical for maritime

dominance, supply chains, and economic competitiveness.

"Dredging sustains our national economic infrastructure," he said. "The future demands more, the taxpayer deserves more, and together we're going to deliver."

For U.S. Representative Congresswoman Lateefah Simon (D-CA-12), the Port project will support jobs beyond its completion. "This will impact workers and businesses, and every shipping container represents multiple jobs."

Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee described Oakland as a gateway to international markets and spoke on earlier efforts to deepen Oakland's shipping channel to 50 feet. While serving in the California Legislature, Lee helped bring together labor, business, environmental advocates and Port officials to resolve disputes surrounding dredging and environmental protections.

"We want the Port to remain competitive economically," Lee said, excited about both protecting the environment and generating sustainable jobs in the region. "We want to make sure that we create good-paying union jobs, and that the Port continues to not just survive, but thrive."

Port of Oakland Executive Director Kristi McKenney said economic growth is dependent on investments in the Oakland Harbor's infrastructure.

"This investment and staying competitive will fuel our economy for years to come," said McKenney.

The Port of Oakland, with its partners, supports more than 98,000 regional jobs and \$174 billion in annual economic activity. The Port oversees the Oakland Seaport, the Oakland San Francisco Bay Airport (OAK), and nearly 20 miles of waterfront, including Jack London Square.



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) San Francisco District and the Port of Oakland commemorated the signing of the inaugural Design Agreement for the Oakland Harbor Turning Basins Widening Project during a ceremony aboard the USS Potomac at Jack London Square. (L-R) Major General Jason Kelly, USACE Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations, Oakland City Councilmember Carroll Fife D-3, Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee, Oakland Port Commission President Stephanie Dominguez Walton, Alameda Mayor Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft, Port of Oakland Executive Director Kristi McKenney, U.S. Representative Congresswoman Lateefah Simon D-12, Lt. Col. Virginia Brickner, and commander of the USACE San Francisco District. Photo by Carla Thomas.

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Community Level Policy Is Impacting Homelessness and Drug Abuse in California

By Bo Tefu
California Black Media | Oakland Post

Local housing capacity, behavioral health services and criminal justice policies are playing a role in California's homelessness and drug crises, according to a new report examining how policy decisions have affected outcomes across the state.

The report compiled by the Public Policy Institute of California found that counties that added more permanent housing beds per capita saw larger decreases in homelessness, while areas with larger declines in incarceration following Proposition 47 saw greater increases in homelessness.

"Places that saw larger increases in permanent housing beds per capita saw larger decreases in the homelessness rate," researchers Magnus Lofstrom, Shannon McConville, and Sean Cremin stated in the report.

California's homelessness rate has increased more than 60% since 2014, with unsheltered homelessness driving most of the growth. The state had the sixth-highest overall homelessness rate and the second-highest unsheltered homelessness rate among states in 2025.

Researchers found that counties with higher rents tended to have higher homelessness rates. But they did not find a statistically significant relationship between changes in homelessness and changes in local housing markets, poverty or unemployment.

The report also examined Proposition 47, the 2014 ballot measure that reclassified some drug and property offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. Researchers estimate that the law contributed to a roughly 10% increase in California's unsheltered homelessness rate, equivalent to about 7,000 additional people experiencing unsheltered



homelessness between 2015 and 2019.

The researchers also estimated that Prop. 47 was associated with a 7% to 8% increase in serious drug use, measured through overdose deaths, hospitalizations and emergency department visits. Drug treatment admissions fell by roughly 20%, largely because of fewer referrals from courts and criminal justice agencies.

"Our findings suggest that Prop 47 likely did contribute to rising rates of homelessness and drug overdoses, as well as declines in drug treatment," the researchers stated.

The report cautions that the relationship between homelessness, drug use and criminal justice policy is complex. Researchers found no consistent evidence that California's 2011 public safety realignment or pandemic-era reductions in

incarceration affected homelessness or drug use.

They also emphasized the role of the criminal justice system in connecting vulnerable people with services.

"Jails and prisons serve as sources of shelter for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness," the researchers stated in the report. They added that courts and criminal justice agencies can help connect people with the drug treatment they need.

California has made major investments in housing and behavioral health services in recent years. The researchers said state and local agencies should continue evaluating whether those investments are reaching people most at risk and whether newer policies, including Proposition 36, are effectively connecting people with treatment.

Inglewood Mayor Responds to Allegations

Continued from page A1

"An allegation is not a fact," McKinnor said.

McKinnor noted that based on publicly available information at the time of the press conference, no police report from the family had been identified. She added that the public had not heard from the student or her parents, nor had an identified complaint been presented from the student's school superintendent or cheer coach.

McKinnor highlighted that individuals promoting the allegations publicly acknowledged they did not personally witness the alleged event or speak directly with the student or her parents.

"Those distinctions matter," McKinnor said, cautioning against a public rush to judgment. "We cannot allow social media to become the judge and juror."

She urged anyone with evidence of wrongdoing to present it to appropriate authorities for an independent investigation while respecting the minor's privacy.

The press conference opened with statements of support from local leaders and family members. Carliss Richardson McGee, president of the Inglewood Unified School District Board, welcomed attendees and praised Butts as a champion for local

schools, students, teachers and families.

Butts' daughter, Asha Butts, spoke alongside her sister, Katrina, in defense of her father's record and integrity.

"As a law student, I've learned the value of integrity and the rule of law, but my father lived those values," Asha Butts said, criticizing what she described as divisive political rhetoric.

During the conference, Butts connected the controversy to his broader record in public service and ongoing local political disputes. He outlined his 54-year career, which includes work as a police officer, deputy police chief, Santa Monica police chief and Homeland Security executive for Los Angeles World Airports.

Addressing his 16 years as mayor, Butts pointed to the city's financial turnaround from near cash-flow insolvency, a 17.5% unemployment rate, a junk bond rating and deteriorating infrastructure.

He also addressed an ongoing dispute regarding city advertising revenue and a proposed ballot measure identified as Proposition BB. Butts said the city's billboard advertising program, established through agreements dating back to 2014, generates approximately \$8 million annually for city-owned

billboards. He characterized Proposition BB as an attempt to block that revenue.

"It is my belief that we have the right to self-determination," Butts said.

Butts framed the controversy as part of a historical pattern of outside entities portraying predominantly Black and Latino communities as unable to govern themselves. He recalled how his father moved their family from the South to California to protect his children from racialized stereotypes, stating that the current claims invoked similar tropes.

"This is about our choices. It's about our lives. It's about our families, our ability to build the future that we want," Butts said. "To the political opportunists who are pushing this disgusting smear campaign, know that I will not be intimidated, nor will I be bullied."

The press conference concluded without establishing the factual accuracy of the allegation. Butts denied the claims, and the city attorney reiterated that no formal complaint had been submitted for review.



This image released by Netflix shows Debbie Allen in a scene from “A Different World.” (Netflix via AP)

Can ‘A Different World’ Sequel Change Lives Like the Original Series?

Hillman is back in session

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr., Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Netflix’s new “A Different World” arrives with a burden few television comedies have to carry: The original entertained millions while helping some viewers decide where they went to college, what careers to pursue and even how they saw themselves.

Kadeem Hardison still hears about that impact nearly four decades later.

“I’m learning that every day still,” said Hardison, who played the mathematically gifted, flip-shade-wearing Dwayne Wayne. He said people would approach him, saying they went to college because of the show, became engineers because of him or even gained the confidence to pursue relationships after watching Dwayne and Whitley Gilbert’s famously winding romance.

Now a new generation is discovering Hillman College, including some of the original actors bringing it back to life. The 10-episode sequel series premieres Sept. 24 on Netflix.

Cornell Young IV, one of six young stars leading the series, played college football in Missouri and said his own college decision was largely driven by which schools recruited him. But after filming the series at historically Black colleges and universities — Clark Atlanta, Spelman College and Morehouse — in Atlanta, Young found himself reconsidering the path he took.

“I wish I would have been more like, ‘Yo, here go my tape. Like, I’m trying to come here,’” said Young, who plays Shaquille Johnson, the son of original character Ron Johnson.

The sequel follows Deborah Wayne (Maleah Joi Moon), the youngest daughter of Dwayne

and Whitley, as she begins her freshman year at Hillman. The new class also includes Rashida Duvall (Alijah Kai), Amir Rodale (Jordan Aaron Hall), Hazel Henry (Kennedi Reece) and Kojo Achebe (Chibuikem Uche).

Young said being immersed in an HBCU environment offered something he hadn’t fully understood before: a place where students could feel “protected,” “covered” and “seen” while figuring out who they wanted to become.

The Hillman effect

The original “A Different World,” a spinoff of “The Cosby Show,” premiered in 1987 and ran for six seasons. Set at the fictional Hillman College, the series introduced many viewers to HBCU life while tackling subjects ranging from apartheid and HIV/AIDS to racism and sexual assault.

The sequel’s creator and showrunner, Felicia Pride, grew up among the viewers the original series reached. She remembers watching it with her family on Thursday nights and becoming captivated by a step-show episode. As a young dancer who had never seen stepping, she recorded it on a VCR and repeatedly played it back until she learned the routine.

“That changed something in me, being able to see myself on screen,” Pride said.

Nearly 40 years later, she wants to create the possibility of that kind of recognition for someone else. She wants the new Hillman to speak just as directly to the generation entering college now.

The sequel takes on social media and the pressures of living digitally, along with isolation, immigration, campus safety, sexual orientation and sexual health. Pride said conversations with young people repeatedly revealed how technology can

leave them feeling connected and disconnected at the same time.

Some of Hillman’s concerns remain unchanged. The series also explores grief, heartbreak, friendship and the uncertainty of figuring out who you are away from home.

“The timing was so perfect now for the show to come back to be a connecting force for us,” Pride said.

Creating their own ‘Different World’

The new cast is less interested in recreating the old Hillman than making this one recognizable to their generation.

For Moon, that starts with Deborah. She studied what she called the “beautiful flaws” of Dwayne and Whitley but resisted simply blending their personalities together.

“These are big shoes to fill,” Moon said.

She wanted Deborah to stand on her own — an original character whose flaws, impulses and experiences reflect what it means to be a young Black woman coming of age now.

For Reece, that includes the constant comparison fostered by social media. She said young women are growing up with greater pressure around appearance because images of other people, and opportunities to measure themselves against them, are always within reach.

Kai sees another side of this generation’s experience: more freedom for Black women to define how they present themselves. She said there is greater room to experiment with hair, fashion, color and texture rather than conform to ideas of what others consider palatable.

She brought some of that sensibility to Rashida herself, contributing ideas for the character’s nails and changing hairstyles.

Together, their characters are not intended to offer a single definition of young Black womanhood.

The experience is “both universal, but not a monolith,” Moon said.

Can the new Hillman create its own legacy?

Hardison knows the new cast will be measured against the one that came before. He thinks that misses the point.

“Let the kids cook,” he said.

Hardison stressed that the new “A Different World” is a sequel, not a reboot. He likened comparing the two casts to comparing Michael Jordan and LeBron James — different generations playing under different circumstances.

For all the reverence surrounding the original today, Hardison remembers that it took time to become the show people now celebrate. The series underwent a major creative shift after its first season, when Debbie Allen became executive producer.

“Our first season was trash, yo,” Hardison said with a laugh. “Let the kids have some time and give them some grace.”

That may be harder to come by in today’s television business.

The original had more than 20 episodes in most seasons and years to develop its characters. The new series has 10 episodes to establish itself in an entertainment landscape where streaming services, social media, YouTube and other platforms are constantly competing for attention.

“We have to do well out the gate,” Pride said. “The times that we’re in are much more unforgiving.”

For Pride, that leaves little room for a slow start.

“We don’t have the benefit of, you know, growing with the show and the show figuring itself out,” she said. “So I hope people show up. I hope they watch it together.”

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Gladys Knight Today: What The ‘Empress of Soul’ Is Doing At 82

At 82, legendary songstress Gladys Knight continues to captivate audiences with her timeless soul music and vibrant spirit.



At 82, Gladys Knight is still riding the “Midnight Train,” traveling the world and performing for generations of devoted fans. But on Sept. 17, the legendary singer announced that she plans to slow down her touring schedule, completing a handful of remaining performances before stepping away from the road to spend more time with her family.

“After heartfelt discussions with my team, I recognize that no matter how much I love lifting spirits in song, it’s time for the midnight train to make just a few more stops. I’m finishing the year strong with my remaining performances,” the seven-time Grammy Award winner said in her Instagram post in September. “Looking forward to

new ventures next year. Again, I am so very grateful for all the love and support over the years. God bless all of you.”

This came several weeks after the singer shared an Aug. 28 statement announcing that she would be taking time to step away from the spotlight to spend time with her family and children.

“After much soul searching I’ve decided that I will be easing into fewer performances while focusing on transitioning into the next stage of my career and life moving forward,” the statement read in part. “I’ll be spending more time on projects with my husband and visiting with my grandbabies and am looking forward to this new era.”

Legal Notices

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Jimenez, Deputy Clerk (Adjunto) (SEAL) NOTICE TO THE PERSON SERVED: You are served. LOS ANGELES NEWS OBSERVER	PUB: Sep 3, 10, 17, 24, 2026 FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT FILE NO: 2026186415 Doing business as: AHLU REVIVE at 808 W 1/2 168TH ST, GARDENA, CA 90247 County: Los Angeles Full name of registrant(s): HAMNA ALI at 808 W 1/2 168TH ST, GARDENA, CA 90247 The business is conducted by: Individual SIGNED: HAMNA ALI, OWNER The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name or names listed above on: N/A This statement filed with the County Clerk of Los Angeles County on: 08/31/2026 DEAN C. LOGAN Los Angeles County Clerk By: MARY JOANNE PUAINA, Deputy	This fictitious Business Name Statement expires five years from the date it was filed in the County Clerk's Office. A new fictitious business name statement must be filed before that time. 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By Bo Tefu
California Black Media



Pastor Leon "Sonny" Clark longtime pastor of New Baptist Church in Santa Ana.

Rev. Leon "Sonny" Clark, Longtime Orange County Pastor and Community Leader, Dies at 72

Rev. Leon William "Sonny" Clark, longtime pastor of New Spirit Baptist Church in Santa Ana and a respected faith and community leader in Orange County, died Sept. 9. He was 72.

Born Oct. 2, 1953, in Bennettsville, South Carolina, Clark was a U.S. Navy veteran who later built a life of service centered on family, faith, ministry and community.

Clark began his formal ministry at Metropolitan Baptist Church in Altadena in 1978. After acknowledging his call to ministry in 1980, he preached his first sermon and went on to serve churches throughout Southern California, including Second Baptist Church in Riverside, Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Rubidoux, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in Pomona and Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda.

In November 2003, Clark was called to lead New Spirit Baptist Church in Santa Ana, where he served as pastor for more than 22 years. His work extended beyond the pulpit through counseling, mentoring, civic engagement and efforts to strengthen Orange County's African American community.

Clark was involved with the Orange County Heritage Council and supported efforts to preserve and celebrate African American history and culture. He assisted with the Orange County Black History Parade and Unity Festival, served on the Interfaith Committee and Orange County Transit Authority, and was president of the Orange County Ministers Conference.

In 2024, the City of Santa Ana recognized Clark for his contributions to the community. He also received the Orange County Southern Baptist Association Hall of Faith Award and was previously honored as Pastor of the Year by the Orange County Heritage Council.

Clark is survived by his wife, Andrea Joyles Clark; six children, Shawn Williams, Le Ondra Clark Harvey, Kyla Coward, Joshua Clark, Marissa Clark and Ashley Clark; grandchildren and great-grandchildren; siblings; extended family; and the New Spirit Baptist Church congregation.

A wake will be held Thursday, Oct. 1, from 4 to 8 p.m. at New Spirit Baptist Church, 701 S. Sullivan St. in Santa Ana, with a remembrance service from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

A Celebration of Life will be held Friday, Oct. 2, at Friendship Baptist Church, 17145 Bastanchury Road in Yorba Linda. Viewing begins at noon, followed by the service at 1 p.m.

Burial will take place Monday, Oct. 5, at 10:15 a.m. at Riverside National Cemetery.

Clark often shared a guiding principle that shaped his ministry: "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."



Shutterstock Fremont, CA, USA - June 19,2022: Exterior view of Tesla factory.

Tesla Race Discrimination Trial This Week Set to Begin in Oakland

Tesla is scheduled to go on trial Sept. 21 in Oakland over California's allegations of systemic racial harassment, discrimination and retaliation against Black employees.

Opening statements are set to begin Sept. 21 at 9 a.m. in Alameda County Superior Court. The trial had previously been scheduled to begin July 20.

The case, filed by the California Civil Rights

Department (CRD) in 2022, will be decided by a judge rather than a jury. The court estimates the bench trial will continue through Oct. 30, with each side receiving about 45 hours to present its case.

CRD sued Tesla following a roughly three-year investigation into conditions at the company's California facilities. The department alleges Black employees were routinely subjected to racial slurs, including the N-word, sometimes in the presence of — or by — supervisors and managers.

According to the lawsuit, workers at Tesla's Fremont factory referred to the facility as the "plantation" and called Black employees "slaves." The state also alleges that Black workers were segregated, assigned more labor-intensive jobs and paid less than non-Black employees.

An analysis cited by CRD found that Black employees' monthly compensation was \$1,533 lower than that of white workers from June 2018 through June 2024. Black employees who complained allegedly faced harsher performance reviews, reprimands and termination.

Tesla has denied wrongdoing in racial discrimination cases and has maintained that it does not tolerate workplace harassment.

In May, the Alameda County Superior Court rejected Tesla's attempt to have the state's case dismissed, ruling that CRD had presented evidence raising factual questions about the company's potential liability.

"Tesla claims to be built on the promise of creating a more sustainable future," said CRD Director Kevin Kish. "But its employment practices remain rooted in some of the ugliest relics of the past. Black workers are paid less for their work. They are subjected to racist slurs. They face threats of being fired for speaking out. In California, we will not and cannot allow these alleged practices to continue. We look forward to having our day in court to hold Tesla accountable and to protect the rights of workers in our state."

The trial is expected to examine whether Tesla knew about the alleged conduct and failed to prevent or correct it.

Asm. Kamlager-Dove to Run for Co-Chair of the House Democratic Communications Team

U.S. Representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA-37) is running to become co-chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, putting digital media, new platforms, and Los Angeles' creative industry at the center of her campaign for a leadership role within the Democratic Caucus.

The California Democrat said her decision to seek the position was shaped by the 2024 presidential election and what she described as a major lesson from the party's defeat: Democrats needed to do more to reach voters through social media, creators, independent journalists, podcasts, and other emerging platforms.

Kamlager-Dove said she responded by immersing herself in the changing media landscape and experimenting with new ways to communicate with voters. After President Donald Trump took office, she launched "Is This Sh*t Legal?" to explain the legal issues surrounding actions by the administration, why they mattered, and how Democrats were responding.

"I've also prioritized building lasting relationships with creators, podcasters, and independent journalists, so we're consistently reaching their audiences and making sure our message is part of the conversation year-round," Kamlager-Dove wrote in a letter seeking support from House Democrats.

She said she has filmed content with more than a quarter of the caucus during the current term, with some members joining her multiple times.

Kamlager-Dove said one of her biggest goals would be connecting Los Angeles' creative talent with the Democratic Caucus. She specifically pointed to writers, producers, storytellers, and digital creators as potential partners in helping Democrats explain their agenda and connect with voters.

"Hollywood understands how to tell complicated stories in compelling, accessible ways that meet people where they are," she wrote.

Her bid comes as Democrats continue to grapple with a media environment in which voters increasingly encounter political information through social platforms, podcasts, creators, and independent digital outlets.

Kamlager-Dove also emphasized the importance of unity within the caucus, arguing that Democrats need to work collectively rather than as individual lawmakers.

She said she wants to serve as a bridge between Democratic leadership and members of the caucus while ensuring lawmakers and their districts have a voice in the party's messaging.

"Above all, I'm committed to being a trusted voice for every member of this caucus and to ensuring that you and your districts are represented when decisions are made, and messaging is shaped," Kamlager-Dove wrote.

Kamlager-Dove is seeking the support of House Democrats as she makes her case for the DPCC co-chair position, drawing on her experience in digital communications and Los Angeles' entertainment and creative industries.

Poll: Becerra Widens His Lead Over Hilton; Californians Split on Wealth Tax

Democrat Xavier Becerra holds a 22-point lead over Republican Steve Hilton in California's governor's race, while voters remain closely divided over a proposed one-time tax on billionaires, according to a new Public Policy Institute of California poll.

The September PPIC survey found that 60% of likely voters support Becerra, compared with 38% for Hilton. His lead is actually narrower than it was in July, when he led Hilton 61% to 36%.

Becerra leads among independent voters, with 57% supporting him compared with 38% for Hilton. Party loyalty remains strong, with 93% of Democratic likely voters backing Becerra and 92% of Republicans supporting Hilton.

Hilton leads in the Central Valley, where 52% of likely voters support him compared with 46% for Becerra.

Affordability remains a major factor: 65% of likely voters say candidates' plans to address cost-of-living issues are "very important" to their vote.

"Affordability continues to be top of mind for Californians when considering their choice for governor," said Mark Baldassare, PPIC Statewide Survey director and Miller Chair in Public Policy.

The poll also found a narrow split over Proposition 40, a proposed one-time tax of up to 5% on taxpayers with assets exceeding \$1 billion. Fifty-two percent of likely voters said they would vote yes, while 46% said they would vote no.

Support for the wealth tax varies sharply by party. Seventy-two percent of Democrats favor Proposition 40, compared with 46% of independents and 21% of Republicans.

Two competing measures also drew majority support. Fifty-one percent back Proposition 41, while 54% support Proposition 42, both of which could affect the wealth-tax proposal.

The findings come as Californians express broader frustration with the state's political direction. Seventy-one percent of likely voters expect bad economic times in California over the next year.

"Californians are clearly grumpy and aren't enamored with any particular political party or movement," Baldassare said.

The survey interviewed 1,745 California adults, including 1,103 likely voters, from Sept. 4-10. The margin of error for likely voters is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

Asm. Corey Jackson Announces Launch of 24-Hour Childcare in His District

Assemblymember Corey Jackson (D-Moreno Valley) has secured \$2 million in state funding to launch a proposed childcare special district serving families in Moreno Valley and Perris, paving the way for a system designed to provide childcare 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Moreno Valley-Perris Childcare Special District would be the first special district in California focused specifically on childcare, according to Jackson's office. The state funding will cover startup, planning, and formation costs and help the district meet requirements set by the Riverside Local Agency Formation Commission, or LAFCO.

The proposed district would coordinate a mixed-delivery childcare system that could include home-based and center-based care. The goal is to provide universal childcare for families who work overnight, early morning, or other nontraditional shifts.

Jackson's office says Moreno Valley is a certified "childcare desert," with licensed childcare spaces available for only 15% of children with working parents. Infant care in Moreno Valley averages \$2,776 a month, or about 35.7% of median household income. In Perris, licensed infant care can cost more than 60% of an individual worker's gross median earnings, according to the assemblymember's office.

"Securing this \$2 million in startup funding is a monumental victory for the working-class families of Moreno Valley and Perris who have been trapped in a childcare desert for far too long," Jackson said.

The proposal follows Jackson's unsuccessful

effort to establish the district through Assembly Bill 2083. The legislation would have created the district as a dependent special district covering Moreno Valley, Perris and their spheres of influence, with Riverside LAFCO responsible for reviewing its formation and boundaries.

The new funding allows the district's formation to move forward without requiring mandatory contributions from local school districts and other stakeholders, according to Jackson's office. His spokesperson, Daniel Peeden, said Jackson hopes the district can be operating by 2028.

The proposal has faced questions from some local officials. Moreno Valley City Councilmember Ed Delgado, who is running against Jackson for the 60th Assembly District seat, said he supports affordable childcare but questioned how the proposed district would operate and how much it would ultimately cost.

"Basically, he didn't have a plan. We didn't see a plan," Delgado said, adding that officials had questions about operating costs, insurance and eligibility.

"It's going to take a lot more than \$2 million to create a special district to provide affordable childcare," Delgado said.

Delgado has suggested working with existing childcare centers to subsidize costs for local families rather than creating a new agency.

Jackson's office says the program will lower barriers to "workforce participation" and reduce "affordability anxiety" for young families. This landmark District is poised to trigger a virtuous cycle of economic upward mobility and long-term regional prosperity in the 60th Assembly District, his office added.

Padilla Presses FBI Director on Election Interference, Citing Riverside Sheriff Ballot Case

U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-Calif.) pressed FBI Director Kash Patel on the bureau's role in the upcoming midterm elections on Sept.15, citing the seizure of more than 650,000 ballots by Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco as he sought assurances that federal agents would not take similar action.

During a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, Padilla asked Patel whether the FBI would commit to not seizing ballots, voting machines, or other election materials before the 2026 election is completed, results are certified, and any recounts or election contests are resolved.

Padilla referenced the FBI's seizure of ballots in Fulton County, Georgia, earlier this year and what he called a "copycat move" in California, where Bianco's department seized ballots from the November 2025 Proposition 50 election as part of an investigation into alleged discrepancies in the vote count.

"My question to you is, can you make the same commitment?" Padilla asked.

"Yes," Patel responded.

The Riverside case has become a flashpoint in California's debate over election administration. Bianco, a Republican candidate for governor at the time of the seizure, said his investigation was intended to determine whether ballots had been improperly counted. State and local election officials disputed the allegations, while California Attorney General Rob Bonta challenged the sheriff's actions in court. The California Supreme Court later ordered the investigation paused while the legal dispute continues.

Padilla also pressed Patel about the FBI's handling of congressional oversight requests, saying senators had waited nearly a year for answers to questions submitted after a previous hearing.

"It has been almost a year, and we still have not gotten responses, no answers to our questions for the record submitted last year," Padilla said.

Patel said those questions had been answered, but still needed to be delivered through the Justice Department. He agreed that the end of October was a reasonable deadline for responses to questions submitted after Tuesday's hearing.

The California senator also questioned Patel about the FBI's investigation of shootings involving Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection personnel. Padilla asked whether FBI leadership had instructed field offices to stop investigating excessive use of force by immigration enforcement officers.

"No," Patel said.

Patel said the FBI's role varies from case to case and that the bureau does not have a blanket rule requiring it to lead every investigation. When Padilla asked about the status of investigations into shootings involving ICE personnel, Patel said he would need to consult with the Department of Homeland Security before providing details.

Padilla's questioning came as federal and state officials prepare for the November midterm elections amid heightened concerns about federal involvement in election administration. His office said Patel's commitment was meant to ensure that the FBI would not seize election materials before the election process is complete.

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Local

31st Annual Central Avenue Jazz Festival-Let the Music Play On

By Ricky Richardson
Contributing Writer

Los Angeles, CA, the 31st Annual Central Avenue Jazz Festival is one for the record books. People were feeling both festive and sad. Everyone was happy to attend this year's iteration of the jazz festival. People were equally sad knowing that this is the final festival under Councilmember Curren D. Price, Jr., of The New Ninth District.

The festival was held along Central Avenue between Vernon Avenue and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, with live performances on multiple stages and at the Historic Dunbar Hotel, a rich buffet of culinary experiences, and a family of pavilions--- Youth, Health & Wellness, Public Resources, and the Arts Pavilion curated by La Mancha Gallery.

A little backstory. Back in the day, Central Avenue was once the West Coast mecca for jazz music. Fortunately, the rich history of jazz and Black culture is still preserved. Every third Saturday in September, the Central Avenue Jazz Festival has been celebrated for three decades plus.

Imagine, if you will, the atmosphere from back in the day. The jazz scene on Central Avenue was vibrant and thriving for roughly 35 years, from the 1920s to 1955. The historic Dunbar Hotel was the heart. Due to the climate at the time, Black musicians stayed at this venue. The artists hung out between their sets and after their gigs. There were many clubs on Central Avenue. Club Alabam was next door to the Dunbar Hotel, The Last Word was across the street, and the Downbeat was down the block. Other jazz spots were the Lincoln Center (the Apollo of the West), Jack's Basket Room (33rd & Central- legendary after-hours jams featuring Wardell Gray, Dexter Gordon, and Miles Davis). Dolphin's of Hollywood was down the street. Legendary Jelly Roll Morton played to standing room crowds between 1917 and 1922 right here at the Cadillac Coffee on Central Avenue.

One can travel throughout the world, and

the one consistent finding/observation is that music is a universal language. America's number one art form is a unifier. You can find jazz festivals and a global jazz community everywhere you travel.

Central Avenue Jazz Festival serves as a reunion of different sorts. Some members of local high schools hang out at the festival, several families meet up at the festival, and members of the jazz community get together each year on "The



Tatiana Tate (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

Avenue." The large, diverse, multicultural crowd of jazz connoisseurs is proof positive of jazz serving as a unifier.

Keeping the Jazz Torch Lit

The global jazz community should be proud of the "City of Angels" and the work that is being done to preserve the legacy of jazz into the future. This is due to the many jazz institutes in Los Angeles teaching jazz or has a jazz studies department. The commitment and dedication of the students were showcased at this year's Central Avenue Jazz Festival.

Jazz America is one of several bands performing at the Festival. Jazz America was co-founded by Buddy Collette, Valerie Fields and Michael O'Daniel in 1994. The band has been tasked with opening the festival since...forever. The band is under the direction of bassist, comedian, and educator Richard Simon. Jazz America played their arrangements of jazz standards before a captivated crowd. They opened their set with a nod to New Orleans with "Secondline." They continued with "Society Red," by Dexter Gordon, "Bernie's Tune" by Gerry Mulligan with a nod to Plas Johnson, "Doodlin'" by Horace Silver, and "Tin Tin Deo" by Dizzy Gillespie, to name a few.

The Fernando Pullum Community Arts Center Jazz Band is another well-known institution in Leimert Park Village, the heart of the African American community in Los Angeles. The talented youth from this program are more proof of the jazz train moving forward. Their thrilling performance consisted of "Jazz Crimes," "Red Clay," "Thriller," and "You Rock My World." All four selections featured a breakout performance by Ché Tafari on piano, and the last two tracks featured Kennedy Staunton, an incredible singer and dancer.

Los Angeles South Central Players, led by Maestro Eloy Adame, is credited with educating and training generations of talented youth in the intricacies of jazz, R&B, soul, cumbia, and pop. They were great during their time in the spotlight at the Dunbar Hotel. They performed "Ove Como Va," by Santana, "I Would Rather Go Blind," by Etta James, "Como La Flor," by Selena, "Sin Antes te Hubiera Conocido," by Karol G, and concluded

with "Chameleon" by Herbie Hancock. Shout-out to Gianna for her standout vocals along with the tight band.

USC Jazz Ensemble, aka Dunbar Ensemble, performed in the lobby of the historic Dunbar Hotel, under the watchful eyes of Billy Holiday and Ellington posters hanging on the wall. The group consists of Hannah Norman, a versatile jazz, neo-soul, and folk singer. Hannah is the Leimert Park Jazz Festival College Scholarship Winner 2025, in the vocalist category. Hannah was accompanied by Quinn Sums-bass, Phia Papouchado-drums, Julian Najah-piano, and Sylvester Onyejiaka-saxophone. Their set list featured "Time After Time," "Midnight Sun," "Autumn Serenade," and "Blue Rose," to name a few.

Emerging Artist Fanning the Flames of Jazz

The 31st Annual Central Avenue Jazz Festival featured an array of emerging jazz artists, jazz lions, making a lot of waves and noise in the global jazz community.

Fresha, bass and vocals, were awesome, accompanied by Brian Hargrove on synths and Joe Tavaréz on drums for an unforgettable, crowd-pleasing performance.

The crowd and I were grooving along with trumpeter Tatiana Tate as she was wailing on stage in front of an enthusiastic crowd.

Isaiah Collier (sax) Plays Coltrane. What more needs to be said? The 2026 global jazz community is celebrating Coltrane at 100. Isaiah Collier did justice while celebrating the musical legacy of John Coltrane. The crowd would agree with me that this set was LIT!

The Billy Mohler Quartet was smokin' when I stepped in to hear them as they were performing the last song of their set, "Evolution." Prior to that, their fantastic set consisted of the tracks "Deconstructions," "Adaption," "Roundtrip," and "Even Tide." The Billy Mohler Band: Billy on bass, Julien Knowles-trumpet, Devin Daniels-alto sax, and Myles Martin-drums.

Endea Owens, bass and bandleader, was another tremendously talented artist who left a lasting impression on the hearts and minds of all in attendance.

New Orleans Culture in Los Angeles



Isaiah Collier (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

The Top Shelf Brass Band left an indelible mark on the crowd with the contagious and welcome vibes of New Orleans... meaning let's party as they roamed up and down "The Avenue."

Internationally Known Established Artists

The Central Avenue Jazz Festival booked a stellar lineup of artists to entertain on "The Avenue." The World Stage Big Band featuring Almita Delone and Dwight Trible.



Jason Marsalis (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

Alfredo Rodriguez Band featuring Pedrito Martinez brought on the heat. This tight band thrilled the crowd with a set of Afro-Cuban music, to the delight of the salsa dancers on the dance floor.

The Marsalis Family of New Orleans is synonymous with jazz on an international level. It was a great treat to have royalty on the lineup. Jason Marsalis Quartet featuring Vanisha Gould combined sleek improvisation with soulful vocals for an exciting afternoon of great music. A couple of highlights from their set consisted of "That's Not Even a Tune," followed by "Orchid Blue," by Ellis Marsalis. The next two selections featured Vanisha on vocals for "Cute Boy" and "That Lady's in Love With You" from the movie soundtrack Some Like It Hot.

Sheila E. is a legendary multi-instrumentalist, singer, songwriter, and bandleader from a legendary family of musicians. Mr. Pete Escovedo is her dad. Sheila E. got her high-octane set underway with an "Intro" while rocking the drums. The band continued their dazzling and sensational performance with "Come Together," by the Beatles, followed by "Holly Park," "E-Train," and "Every Day People," by Sly & The Family Stone. Our musical journey continued with "Yellow Submarine," by The Beatles, "A Love Bizarre," "Happy Feelings," and "What The World is Love." Hopefully, you have picked up the theme / thread about UNITY throughout the set. Sheila E. closed out her highly entertaining set with "Glam Medley." Just like that! Sheila E. closed out the 31st Annual Central Avenue Jazz Festival with the fiery energy of a funkified, intensified old skool house party to the delight of the grown folks, aka, party people.

I'm wondering if you can't get enuff of that funky stuff, and if you want to have a funky good time. I have it on good authority that Sheila E. is headlining another music festival in a couple of weeks in the thriving and beautiful city known as "The Jewel of the South Bay!"



Sheila E. (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

Observer

BAKERSFIELD, LOS ANGELES VALLEY

STORY OF THE WEEK

IN MEMORIAM: Civil Rights Icon Revered Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr. Passes Away at 84

Civil Rights icon Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., whose career took him from his early collaboration with Martin Luther King to creating the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition to two runs for the presidency and then ultimately passing the torch to a new generation died Tuesday according to his family.

KEEP READING

TOP NEWS THIS WEEK

All-Star Weekend Comes Home: Inglewood Shines on the NBA's Biggest Stage

Observer

BAKERSFIELD, LOS ANGELES VALLEY

STORY OF THE WEEK

Extend Obamacare Tax Assembly Votes to Pass Pressuring Congress and

On Feb. 5, the California State Assembly voted Resolution 25 (AJR 25) – legislation focusing on health care costs authored by Assemblymember and Democrat Dan Claitor (D-10).

Observer

BAKERSFIELD, LOS ANGELES VALLEY

STORY OF THE WEEK

Bakersfield Trailblazer and Ward 1 Advocate, Dies

Residing public servant whose decades of work in local government, law enforcement, education, and more died. Her passing marks the loss of a historic figure.

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Rams Get Fired Up at Home Opener

By Earl Heath
Contributing Sports Writer

The Los Angeles Rams came out fired up for their true home opener and rolled to a 28-6 victory over the New York Giants at SoFi Stadium.

But the biggest roar of the night came before the game even began.

Aaron Donald ran onto the field for the first time since the end of the 2023 season, sending the SoCal crowd into a frenzy. His return brought an

immediate burst of energy to the Rams and their fans.

Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford said he was “so juiced” after watching Donald run out of the tunnel.

“I couldn’t control myself,” Stafford said.

Donald’s Return Energizes Rams

Donald finished with three tackles and a tackle for loss while playing 32 defensive snaps, or 58.2% of the Rams’ defensive plays, according to Next Gen

Stats. He was credited with zero pressures.

On the Giants’ opening series, Donald made an immediate impact, fighting through three blockers to bring down running back Cameron Skattebo for a loss.

Asked whether Donald was playing on a snap count, Rams coach Sean McVay joked, “What do you think?”

“You tell him to come out,” McVay added.

McVay said Donald’s presence naturally draws

attention and raises the level of the players around him.

“He elicits attention,” McVay said. “He brings everybody up around him. And I didn’t think it was by coincidence that the energy that we played with [tonight]. I thought really the defensive coaches did a great job with their game plan, but ultimately just elevating situations he’s in and people that he’s around and that’s what the greats do and that’s what he does.”

Stafford, Adams Lead the Offense

Stafford put together a big night, completing 22 of 31 passes for 327 yards and four touchdowns.

With Puka Nacua sidelined by a hip injury, Stafford spread the ball around and connected with nine different receivers.

Davante Adams was the primary beneficiary, catching 10 passes for 195 yards and two touchdowns. He had five catches for 145 yards before halftime, including a 31-yard touchdown and a 64-yard reception that set up another Rams score.

Adams finished just 11 yards short of his career high of 206 receiving yards.

He also tied Torry Holt and Michael Irvin for the ninth-most 100-yard receiving games in NFL history, with 47.

Stafford continued to climb the NFL record book as well.

His third-quarter, 11-yard touchdown pass to Adams was the 426th regular-season touchdown pass of his career, moving him past Philip Rivers. Stafford now trails only Tom Brady (649), Drew Brees (571), Peyton Manning (539) and Aaron Rodgers (528) on the all-time list, followed by Brett Favre (508).

“This game is a special game,” Stafford said. “It’s treated me and my family and my life really well. So, just happy to be a part of it and have so much respect for those guys that did it before me.”

Stafford also became the second player in NFL history to record at least 25 games with three or more touchdown passes for multiple franchises. He has 25 such games with the Rams and 42 with the Detroit Lions.

Defense Takes Control

The Rams defense held New York to just 182 total yards, nearly 200 fewer than the 49ers produced against Los Angeles in Week 1.

Giants quarterback Jaxson Dart left the game early in the first quarter, further complicating New York’s efforts to generate offense.

With Donald back in the lineup, the Rams defense helped set the tone from the opening possession and kept the Giants from finding any sustained offensive rhythm.

For the Rams, the 28-6 victory provided an energetic homecoming — and Donald’s return made the night even more memorable.



DeVante Adams -Snags one of his 9 catches

Trojans Outlast Rutgers in Big Ten Opener

By Earl Heath
Contributing Sports Writer

It was a wild shootout, but No. 12 USC remained unbeaten as quarterback Jayden Maiava threw for 277 yards and two touchdowns and King Miller rushed for 102 yards and a touchdown in a 42-35 victory over Rutgers in the Big Ten opener for both teams before 43,045 fans.

The Trojans (4-0) never trailed, building a 35-21 cushion with 5:52 left in the third quarter. Rutgers (0-3) closed the gap to 35-28 before the teams traded touchdowns in the fourth quarter.

USC played without freshman receiver Trent Mosley, who sat out with a knee injury. Fellow freshman Kayden Dixon-Wyatt stepped up with five catches for 77 yards.

Running back Riley Wormley rushed for a touchdown and later caught a scoring pass that put USC ahead 42-28 with 3:04 remaining.

“I just kept my speed passing the goal line and then eventually got my opportunity,” Wormley said after the game.

“I just appreciate Jayden for that.”

For Rutgers, Dylan Lonergan passed for 252 yards and three touchdowns, while Antwan Raymond rushed for 122 yards and a touchdown.

The Scarlet Knights fell to 0-3 for the first time since 2008.

Maiava remained efficient while utilizing nine different receivers.

In addition to Dixon-Wyatt, Corey Simms caught four passes for 72 yards and a touchdown, while Mark Bowman and Tanook Hines each had three receptions.

USC head coach Lincoln Riley was particularly impressed with Wormley and Simms.

Travel Doesn’t Slow Trojans

The game marked Southern Cal’s first trip to



USC Safety Christian Pierce Honored as Jim Thorpe Award National Defensive Back of the Week (Photo-USC Athletics)

the East Coast since playing at Boston College in 2014. Riley said the travel was not responsible for the Trojans’ sluggish stretches.

“I don’t think it (travel) did have an impact,”

Riley said. “I thought we started off the game edgy, with momentum, no matter where you’re playing, when you got somebody backed up in their half and you give up a 40-yard play on a fake punt, especially on the road, it just flips momentum, it kind of breathes life into them.”

Senior defensive back Prophet Brown set a school record with a 99-yard interception return.

Pierce Earns National Recognition

USC defensive back Christian Pierce led all tacklers with 11 and was named the Jim Thorpe Award National Defensive Back of the Week following the Trojans’ victory.

Pierce delivered a complete performance with 11 tackles, including six solo stops, one interception and two pass breakups. The interception was his first of the season.

Pierce picked off Lonergan on Rutgers’ second play of the game and returned it 16 yards to the Rutgers 24-yard line.

USC scored two plays later, with the interception setting up the Trojans’ first touchdown.

Pierce led all tracked defensive backs nationally in tackles during Week 3.

His physical play and steady presence provided a spark for USC’s secondary throughout the road victory.

Oregon Comes to the Coliseum

No. 12 USC returns home to welcome No. 20 Oregon to the Coliseum for its Big Ten home opener.

Kickoff is set for 4:30 p.m. PT on Saturday, Sept. 26. The game will air live on NBC.

Bruins Offense Explodes in Big Ten Opener

By Earl Heath
Contributing Sports Writer

UCLA’s offense exploded in its Big Ten Conference opener as the Bruins improved to 3-0 with a 52-38 victory over Purdue at the Rose Bowl Stadium before 30,916 fans.

Wayne “The Roadrunner” Knight led the Bruins’ offensive attack, finishing with 177 rushing yards and 252 all-purpose yards.

It marked his 14th career game with at least 100 all-purpose yards and his sixth with more than 100 rushing yards.

“The biggest thing for us was to just put it all together,” Knight said. “And I think that we stepped up to that challenge — what we did on the ground, in the air. But the guys up front, no matter who is in there, as guys are rotating all the time, whoever is in there is going to put up front. They are working as a team.”

Bruins Continue Fast Starts

UCLA eclipsed 50 points and improved to 3-0 (1-0 Big Ten) for the first time since 2023, when the Bruins accomplished both in a 59-7 home victory over North Carolina Central.

The Bruins have been explosive early this season, scoring 21 points in the first quarter in each of their three games.

UCLA has also outscored its opponents 56-17 in the fourth quarter through the first three games of the season.

Head coach Chesney has now won 13 consecutive regular-season games dating back to 2025 as the Bruins continue to build momentum.

Quarterback Nico Iamaleava said preparation was a major emphasis heading into the Purdue game.

“I thought in week one, I thought we performed well,” Iamaleava said. “Maybe not to our max potential, but we had a great week of preparation and that was the main thing, going into week three. It was our preparation during the week. I thought that in week two, we took it lightly. We did not prepare well. You guys saw the results. I think that in week three, that was the emphasis, our preparation.”

Omosigbo Sets the Tone

Linebacker Sammy Omosigbo continued to make an impact for the Bruins, forcing two fumbles while recording 12 tackles and two sacks.

“This was a game that was gritty, first game in the Big Ten and the other team is very talented,” Omosigbo said. “Both teams being talented, you’ve got to prepare. You’ve got to win the game during the entire week. Going forward, it starts tomorrow for the next Saturday.”

Up Next

The Bruins travel to Maryland next week as they continue Big Ten Conference play.



Wayne “Roadrunner Knight rolls for some of his 177 yards vs Perdue Photo-Jevone Moore

Local

Doulas Are Helping Black California Moms Navigate Pregnancy

Even as High Mortality Rates Persist

By McKenzie Jackson
California Black Media

After losing twins, Long Beach resident Cassandra Carter approached the birth of her daughter, Nyomi, last November with anxiety. She wanted support for herself and her husband, Adewole, that extended beyond routine medical care.

“Getting pregnant as a Black woman, I wanted a team around me that made me feel safe,” she said. “I know all about the mishaps that Black women experience.”

Carter, a therapist and self-described hippie, hired Yvette Perry, a doula and co-founder of Divine

a moment and even set up candles in the birthing suite.

“Whatever I needed for my comfort, she was there,” Carter said of Perry. “She was there as an advocate and voice. I had a really serene birthing experience because I had someone extra who wasn’t tied to me as my family.”

Perry, a doula for nearly six years, said preexisting conditions, poor communication and dismissive hospital care heighten health risks for Black mothers.

“Sometimes, Black mommies are not being heard. They don’t know they have rights. They don’t know they can say, ‘no,’” Perry explained. “Doulas

In California, Black women experience the highest pregnancy-related mortality rate — about four times greater than other women, according to statistics. From 2021 to 2023, the leading causes of pregnancy-related deaths included cardiovascular disease, COVID-19, hemorrhage, sepsis, amniotic fluid embolism, and pulmonary embolism.

The Centering Black Mothers in California report found that structural racism — including barriers to high-quality health care, and chronic stress—disproportionately harms Black women.

In a statement to California Black Media (CBM), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) said maternal mortality disparities stem from multiple factors. The department said addressing structural racism, listening to Black women’s experiences and reducing provider bias are key to closing the gap.

California began covering doula care as a Medi-Cal benefit in 2023, providing eligible patients with support during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period, according to CDPH.

Whitney Dotson of Inglewood wanted an expert on pregnancy, labor, and delivery to guide her and her husband, Anthony, through the birth of their son, Anthony III. So, she hired Perry for doula support.

“It’s always more comfortable when you can have a second opinion,” she said. “Knowing she was better versed in what the options were, made me more comfortable.”

Dotson, 39, had a healthy pregnancy but faced recommendations common for expectant mothers over 35. Her doctor advised inducing labor at 39 weeks, but she hoped to carry to full term.

“I wasn’t comfortable with that,” she admitted. Perry provided Dotson with information about induction guidelines and alternatives, helping her understand her options and communicate her preferences.

Then, Dotson returned to her doctor.

“I said, ‘I don’t want to — and this is why,’” she recalled. “He agreed and pushed the induction date back a week.”

Perry also advised Anthony on how he could support his wife during and after the pregnancy and during Anthony III’s birth. She also reminded Dotson to change birthing positions — from her back to her hands and knees.

Before Saveneh Martinez became a doula with Fierce Advocates in Contra Costa County, she was a new mom, uneducated on aspects of birth, which led to her first child, Colton, being placed in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

“I didn’t know my choices,” she said.

Martinez called it “lifesaving” for expecting moms to have a doula.

“It should be a medical right,” she said.

California Perinatal Quality Care Collaborative (CPQCC) Senior Associate Medical Director Kimberly D. Gregory said research suggests that doulas decrease the pre-term birth rate and the likelihood of a C-section.

“Having a doula is a proactive thing to do,” she said.

Efforts are being made across the state to reduce maternal deaths.

CDPH’s Title V Action Plan aims to reduce pregnancy-related deaths among Black birthing mothers from 49.7 to 42.3 per 100,000 live births by 2030 through improvements in patient-centered care, expanding community-based perinatal teams, and addressing the social factors that contribute to poor maternal health outcomes.

CDPH’s Black Infant Health (BIH) Program and Perinatal Equity Initiative (PEI) have already begun to make headway.

“BIH’s prenatal group model improves key intermediate outcomes for participants, including increased social support and empowerment, better stress management, reduced depressive symptoms and gains in health knowledge and behaviors such as safe sleep practices and reduced smoking,” the CDPH told CBM.

“PEI’s early implementation results show progress across several participant-reported areas, such as improved birth experiences, breastfeeding initiation, and coparenting skills among fathers and partners,” the CDPH statement continued.

Gregory said the California Pregnancy Associated Review Committee examines maternal deaths and develops guidelines to help hospitals improve care. One of its main recommendations focuses on how hospitals respond to hemorrhaging, a leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths.

Gregory said CMQCC also created standard clinic care practices for cardiovascular disease and sepsis, two more drivers of maternal mortality, but widespread implementation across the state is pending.

She noted that although there are 800 maternal deaths a year in the U.S., there are also 3.6 million births.

“Most people will do well,” she said. “But you should know about complications like preterm birth. You should know about complications like diabetes, preeclampsia and postpartum depression.”

Martinez said doulas help to make birthing the transformative experience that it is, instead of a routine clinical transaction.

“Being able to feel heard, seen, safe, respected, and just being able to create spaces for them to be held as well,” she said.



Long Beach resident Cassandra Carter approached the birth of her daughter, Nyomi (pictured), last November with anxiety after losing twins. She is pictured here with her husband.

Birthing Services LLC in Lancaster. Perry helped Cassandra craft a detailed birth plan.

“I was worried about postpartum depression. Mrs. Yvette knows a lot about how postpartum affects men as well,” Carter explained.

Perry was present the day Nyomi was born. She held the baby when Carter or her husband needed

empower them. We are there to educate them Perry’s concerns reflect a broader public health crisis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2024 maternal mortality report, non-Hispanic Black women in the U.S. died from pregnancy-related causes at a rate of 44.8 deaths per 100,000 live births.

CalAIM Helped Alfred Flores Rebuild His Life.

Why Can’t More Californians Access Its Benefits?

CalAIM offers housing and health care support through Medi-Cal, but fragmented health-plan rules, administrative barriers and limited awareness can make those benefits difficult for vulnerable Californians to access.

Marion Apio reported this story while participating in the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism’s 2026 California Health Equity Fellowship.

By Marion Apio
California Local News Fellow

California’s largest Medi-Cal transformation—California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal, or CalAIM—was designed to connect residents experiencing homelessness, trauma, and chronic illness directly to health care and social services. The statewide initiative allows healthcare providers to bill Medi-Cal for intensive, field-based care coordination, bringing doctors, social workers, and housing navigators directly to unsheltered residents where they live.

Yet despite CalAIM’s ambitious promise to fund care outside clinic walls, health care providers say many unhoused Angelenos still face steep barriers to accessing these services. Health plans have not always been aligned on which services to offer, creating a patchwork of coverage across the state. For patients, those differences can mean delays in approvals, changes in available services or additional paperwork before care or housing assistance can move forward.

“Under CalAIM, there has been this incredible ability to pay for certain things that are helpful to anyone experiencing homelessness,” said Margot Kushel, Professor of Medicine, UCSF Director of UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative. “We can pay for things like street medicine. We can pay for enhanced case management, housing tenancy support services to keep people in their housing, and things like first and last month’s rent to help people.”

“Pathways to housing are highly effective, she added, “but we need more of them. The problem is not so much that it doesn’t work for the people it’s



Artie Vasquez, a case manager with St. John’s Community Health, poses for a photo. Photo by Marion Apio

Flores was only 17 when he first entered California’s prison system as an adult.

Raised around family members involved in gang life and without financial resources for a private legal defense, the young Flores cycled through juvenile halls and state prisons, including the California Institution for Men in Chino and a correctional facility in Delano.

“I was tried as an adult and we didn’t have any lawyers or nothing,” Flores said. “So, yeah, I was misjudged, you know. But it is what it is.”

Decades after his release, the consequences of incarceration lingered. Diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder, Flores struggled to navigate crowded public spaces and complex social service systems. Unhoused and contending with uncontrolled diabetes, his health rapidly deteriorated.

Flores’ path changed when he met Artie Vasquez, a community health worker and case manager with St. John’s Community Health. Vasquez helped Flores navigate and access medical care through case management services provided under CalAIM’s Enhanced Care Management benefit — and, just as importantly, helped him secure an apartment in Inglewood using Medi-Cal dollars.

Enhanced Care Management (ECM) — a Medi-Cal benefit that provides intensive, individualized care coordination for members with complex needs — pairs members with a care manager who coordinates physical, behavioral and social services, while Community Supports address needs such as housing instability, nutrition and chronic-condition management.

“I can go in and out of my house. I can shower whenever I want. Use the restroom whenever I want. It’s my house, you know,” Flores said.

Artie Vasquez, who overcame similar life challenges before becoming a case manager, said the program provides the scaffolding needed for individuals leaving incarceration to successfully transition back into society.

Medi-Cal covers close to 14 million residents statewide. In Los Angeles County, where over 70,000 people experience homelessness on any given night, connecting high-need populations to social safety nets remains an operational challenge.

CalAIM addresses these challenges through Community Supports, or non-medical interventions, such as move-in security deposits, housing navigation, and modifications to make housing accessible.

For frontline clinics, the growth in such services represents a massive shift in how care is delivered.

Christina Guevara, an Enhanced Care Management program manager at St. John’s Community Health has watched this safety-net infrastructure expand over six years.

In just the past three years, St. John’s CalAIM caseload has surged from under 1,000 patients to nearly 1,600, serving a community that is roughly

55% Latinos and White as well as 26% Black, according to Monica Cotom, director of CalAIM at St. John’s Community Health.

Guevara noted that language barriers, low health literacy, and a lack of support systems frequently cause low-income patients to drop out of care. She said that is especially true for older patients who may struggle to navigate complex medical instructions or question a doctor’s diagnosis.

In one instance, St. John’s case managers worked with an unhoused domestic violence survivor living in a shelter who avoided medical visits out of fear of being located by an abuser. Through biweekly phone calls, virtual support groups, and accompanied clinic visits, case managers helped the survivor secure permanent housing and reduce his hemoglobin A1C level from a dangerous 14% down to 7% over an 18-month period.

Yet, administrative breakdowns regularly interrupt patient care.

“The health plans have never been quite aligned for this program across the board, and so that’s been the barrier,” said Cotom. “We have to fluctuate with whatever the health plans need, and so that makes it hard.”

Because each Medi-Cal managed care plan operates with its own documentation requirements, billing systems, and approval rules, caseworkers must constantly adapt to conflicting administrative processes. For unhoused patients, these hurdles translate directly into real-world delays. For unhoused clients, bureaucratic errors can pause housing placements for months.

In Inglewood, city officials acknowledge that awareness remains a barrier.

Roberto Chavez, HUD programs manager for the City of Inglewood, called CalAIM an “untapped resource,” and noted that municipal governments



A St. John’s Community Health medical assistant attends to an unhoused patient during a mobile clinic outreach in Los Angeles. Photo by Marion Apio

currently lack public education campaigns to connect eligible residents with the state program.

“Not too many people are aware of that,” Chavez said. “Again, that requires some education of the residents and people experiencing homelessness, as well as any staff that’s in charge of identifying resources.”

When asked what the city is doing to publicize CalAIM to unhoused residents, Chavez said the city relies on partner non-profits rather than municipal outreach.

“Nothing at the current moment,” Chavez said. “But we direct folks to the St. Margaret’s Center, and they make folks aware of the CalAIM program, as well as the South Bay Cities Council of Governments.”

Addressing why local agencies struggle to roll out CalAIM seamlessly, Kushel called it a nearly impossible task.

“When you’re frantically trying to plug up



Photo by Marion Apio

holes from 50 years of failed policies at every level of government in a wildly unequal country where there’s rampant income inequality ... it’s also really an impossible task,” Kushel said, adding that local authorities are “trying to put fingers into sort of a leaking bucket, and it’s very hard to do that.”

Ashley Watson was offered CalAIM services in June 2025 while living in her car in Los Angeles. Working with Stephanie Ortiz, a case manager, Watson secured several jobs to raise her monthly rental budget from \$1,200 to \$2,000. When bad credit led to apartment rental rejections, Ortiz assisted in securing a guarantor.

However, during the application process, an administrative error caused Watson’s Medi-Cal coverage to terminate unexpectedly. It took nearly a month of staff effort to restore her coverage before security deposit and move-in funding could be released. Watson moved into her apartment in November 2025 and officially graduated from the program in June 2026.

Mary Vargas, Community Supports program manager at St. John’s, said administrative gaps leave the most vulnerable clients behind.

“A lot of people don’t understand why and feel powerless in their own care,” Vargas said. “If you’re powerless, have a chronic condition, and are alone with no support, your health significantly declines.”

Guevara reported that rising fears around immigration status and potential scams have led members to decline home visits or ignore phone calls from case managers. To support clients facing these anxieties, St. John’s transitioned many in-person check-ins to virtual appointments.

DHCS acknowledged that some immigrant families are experiencing fear about data-sharing with federal agencies that might use the information in enforcement actions. The department said it does not track whether people decline CalAIM services because of those concerns, but encouraged eligible Medi-Cal members to maintain their coverage and continue seeking care.

Vasquez noted that individuals released from state prisons face delays of 30 to 90 days before their active Medi-Cal status is reinstated.

Those delays force clinics to rely on sliding-scale fees based on income —which many newly released participants do not have —while unhoused individuals without physical addresses often rely on family members’ addresses to keep their mail delivered and avoid losing coverage.

But for those who get past the hurdles and receive services, the results can be life changing.

Flores is now enrolled in online business and culinary arts classes through Coastline College, working toward his long-term goal of financial independence.

“Before, I didn’t know how to go about things, but now with my medication, my doctors, and my case manager who always calls to see if I’m doing okay, it has helped me a lot—and I can trust the system,” Flores said.



CalAIM team members with St. John’s Community Health pose during mobile outreach in Los Angeles. Photo by Marion Apio

serving; it’s that it’s under-resourced for the people it’s serving, and most people don’t get it.”

Across Los Angeles County, community organizations and street medicine teams report spending significant hours navigating complex enrollment portals and billing hurdles that delay care for residents in critical need.

More than four years after California launched CalAIM to use Medi-Cal funding for nonmedical needs such as housing, food and case management, overall Medi-Cal enrollment has declined from about 15 million in 2023 to 13,910,180 in April 2026, according to the California Department of Health Care Services. CalAIM is not a separate insurance program and does not have its own enrollment or withdrawal process; people enroll in Medi-Cal and may qualify for CalAIM services based on their needs.

For 53-year-old Alfred Flores, connecting with a CalAIM-funded street medicine team along the Los Angeles River proved transformative.