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# The Valley's News Observer

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## LA's Bureau of Street Lighting Upcoming Assessment Ballot



Photo Credit: Austin Gage

By Austin Gage  
Contributing Writer

In preparation for a proposed assessment ballot, the Los Angeles Bureau of Street Lighting held a media briefing Wednesday.

The special benefit assessment, which about half a million designated property owners should expect through a mailed ballot on April 17th, will include the specific amount calculated for their property for street light repairs and necessary maintenance. The last day to return the unique ballot, which is not the same as the Mayoral Election/State Primary Election, is June 2nd.

The Bureau, also known as the BSL for the City of Los Angeles, detailed four key themes regarding the street light assessment for holding the public education event: security and crime prevention, safety, economic activity and access, and aesthetics.

With about 185 field staff, 150 vehicles and 35 electrical crews that repair the street light system, the BSL illuminates over two-thirds of the city thanks to over 9,000 miles of conduit underground and 27,000 miles of copper wire.

In addition, the BSL has developed new technology to improve the state of streetlights across the city in the most innovative and efficient manner possible.

Development of over 1,000 EV charging stations and different types of cameras, detectors, and pedestrian counters fall into the umbrella of the BSL's recent work.

As explained by Fabian Cheng, Assistant Director and Chief Engineer for the BSL, commitment into the assessment ballot will help



Photo Credit: Austin Gage

with a broader reach than just the maintenance of streetlights.

"The Bureau of Street Lighting is providing more than lighting. What was one type of organization has grown to provide a lot more than that," said Cheng.

As part of the current process, official repair times for street light repairs average one year. If the special assessment is to pass, funding will increase resources for said repairs and improve maintenance.

Many roadblocks have made life difficult for BSL crews. These include LED lights that are due for replacement after a 10-15 year lifespan, older poles deteriorating, electrical conduit underground experiencing metal corrosion, wire/power thefts and general vandalism tainting the established elements.

While the foundation for the BSL still works as intended, it is not fully maximized in terms of efficiency.

Manuel Reyes Hago, Street Lighting Construction and Maintenance Superintendent, described the issue with the elderly system.

"Our system ages. A lot of the system [was] built in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s and is still working as we speak. The conduit is the same, the wiring is the same. We have to upgrade that constantly," said Reyes Hago. "As our system ages, the repairs do become lengthier. It involves more resources to make these repairs; we're struggling to keep afloat."

New technology such as a plasma cutter to produce doors and base wraps for the electrical



Photo Credit: Austin Gage

system, and 3D printers that make pull boxes for the street lights that serve as access points for wide areas.

Maximization of resources is something that the BSL stressed in the briefing and is something they believe the voters should be aware of.

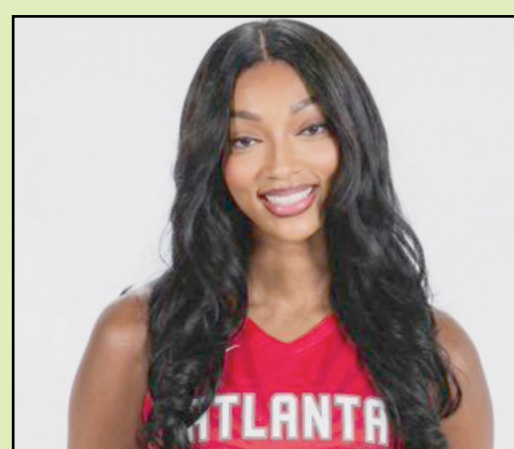
Put simply by Miguel Sangalang, Executive Director and General Manager for the Bureau of Street Lighting, efficiency is king.

"We look at data to make sure that we deploy our resources in places that need it most in terms of repairs and multiple service requests. We're using every form of technology from solar to 3D printers. We're using new engineering standards. Every single new street lighting system that's being built today is built to the highest standards now of security and function," Sangalang said.

If the assessment ballot passes, those designated property owners would see a monetary cost increase based on their property and the type of use. Under the current assessment, single family residents pay about \$53 to \$83 annually, or about \$5 a month for the costs of streetlights in their neighborhood. The updated assessment on the upcoming ballot would come out to be about \$12 a month for those residents, or \$117 annually.

Additionally, the assessment would go into effect the next fiscal year should it pass.

For more information, the BSL encourages information seekers to visit their website for more.



Angel Reese Atlanta Dream

### Basketball Star Angel Reese Joins Atlanta Dream After Major WNBA Trade

ATLANTA, GA — Angel Reese has been traded from the Chicago Sky to the Atlanta Dream in a major WNBA deal that includes future draft picks. Atlanta adds the All-Star forward to its roster while Chicago collects valuable first-round selections for the 2027 and 2028 drafts.

The trade was officially completed on Monday as both teams moved to reshape their lineups ahead of future seasons, according to CNN. Along with Reese, the deal centers on draft capital that strengthens Chicago's long-term position.

As part of the agreement, the Sky receive Atlanta's first-round picks in 2027 and 2028. Chicago also gains the right to swap second-round picks with Atlanta in the 2028 WNBA Draft.

Reese joins Atlanta after a standout start to her professional career. She has averaged around 14 points and nearly 13 rebounds per game over her first two seasons and led the WNBA in rebounding in 2025. Chicago selected her seventh overall in the 2024 WNBA Draft after she led LSU to the 2023 NCAA championship.

Reese shared her excitement about the move, saying in a statement, "I'm beyond grateful for the opportunity to join the Atlanta Dream organization. I'm focused on continuing to grow my game, competing at the highest level, connecting with the fans, and giving everything I've got to the Dream."

Atlanta head coach Karl Smesko praised her impact, saying, "Angel's ability to impact the game on both ends of the floor is elite. Her energy, toughness and instincts will thrive in our system, and we're excited to integrate her into the style of play we are constructing here in Atlanta."

Chicago Sky general manager Jeff Pagliocca said the move helps "achieve roster balance and represents a great opportunity for all parties." He credited Reese for her contributions during her time with the team and wished her success in Atlanta.



Carrie Everett, former Miss North Carolina

### Former Miss North Carolina Sadly Dies at 22 After Fight with Rare Cancer

Carrie Everett, who was crowned Miss North Carolina in 2024, sadly died at 22 after a rare cancer diagnosis. She battled metastatic gastric cancer and passed away following months of treatment that eventually stopped working.

Her family confirmed her death on April 5 through an update on GoFundMe. They wrote, "We are heartbroken to share that last night, the beautiful nightingale, Helen Carrie Everett, passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. The cries of her heart became songs that stirred the spirits of everyone who had the pleasure of hearing her sing."

Everett first experienced symptoms in July, shortly after completing her year as Miss North Carolina. She reported intense bloating and a persistent cough, which doctors initially treated as pneumonia.

Her condition changed after further tests. Blood work and scans on July 29 revealed cancer markers. A biopsy later confirmed metastatic signet ring cell carcinoma, a rare and aggressive form of gastric cancer. Doctors then moved her into immediate cancer treatment.

She began chemotherapy and other therapies soon after her diagnosis. By March 21, her family said the treatments were no longer effective, according to People.

Her family also thanked supporters for their prayers and generous donations on GoFundMe, which raised over \$72,000. They shared, "They really have helped ensure that Carrie has received all the care that she needs. With all that's going on in the world it has been beautiful to watch the communities that she's touched rally and support her on this journey."

North Carolina Central University later confirmed her death and honored her work. The university said she helped open doors for young women in pageants by reducing financial barriers and encouraging wider participation, while being remembered for her leadership and talent.

## What to Do When Inheriting a House That is Paid Off

Inheriting a house that is paid off puts you in a strong position with built-in equity, though your next steps matter. Start by confirming ownership, reviewing any tax considerations, and weighing whether keeping, renting, or selling supports your financial goals. Taking time to assess the situation early can help you preserve and make the most of the property's value. For many people, this situation arrives without much warning. A home tied to family memories suddenly becomes a major financial asset that needs clear direction. The shift from emotional attachment to practical decision-making can feel heavy, but handled carefully, it can turn into a stable and valuable opportunity for the future. What Happens Legally When You Inherit a Paid-Off House? The legal process starts with how the property was structured before the owner passed away. If the home was held in a trust, ownership can transfer directly to the named beneficiary with fewer delays. If it was passed through a will, the estate typically goes through probate, where a court validates the will and oversees the transfer. During this stage, the home cannot always be sold or refinanced right away. The executor or personal representative manages the property until the legal transfer is complete. This includes handling ongoing costs and basic upkeep to preserve the home's value. Title transfer is the key step that makes the inheritance official. Once the deed is updated in your name, you take full legal ownership and responsibility. Selling a House Selling an inherited house that is paid off is often the most straightforward way to turn the asset into usable cash. This option works best when the property does not fit your lifestyle, requires significant repairs, or is shared among multiple heirs who want a clean resolution. Of course, if you co-inherit a property, you might run into some issues. A lawyer can help

you define action for partition if needed. Before listing the home, it is important to understand its current market value. A professional appraisal or comparative market analysis can give you a realistic price range. Pricing correctly from the start can prevent the property from sitting too long, which can reduce buyer interest and lead to lower offers. Condition also plays a role in how smoothly the sale goes. Some homes benefit from light updates, such as: Fresh paint, Cleaning

Minor repairs  
Replacing worn hardware

Others may be better suited for an as-is sale, especially if the cost of renovations would outweigh the return. Timing matters as well. Market conditions, interest rates, and local demand can influence how quickly the home sells and at what price. Taking a short period to assess these factors can help you avoid rushing into a sale that leaves money behind. Managing Inherited Property: Keeping It Keeping an inherited house that is paid off can offer long-term stability, though it still requires a clear plan. The absence of a mortgage lowers monthly pressure, but ownership comes with ongoing responsibilities that should be considered early. Assess how the property fits into your life. Location, size, condition, and property taxes all play a role. A home that looks valuable on paper may not make sense if it increases commute time, requires major repairs, or carries higher annual costs than expected. Financial planning is just as important as practicality. Even without a loan, you will still need to cover insurance, maintenance, utilities, and potential upgrades. Setting a realistic budget helps ensure the property remains an asset rather than a burden. The condition should also be reviewed in detail. Many inherited homes have aging systems or deferred maintenance. Prioritizing essential repairs early can prevent larger expenses later

and protect the home's value over time. Property Maintenance Tips Keeping an inherited house in good condition protects its value and prevents small issues from turning into expensive repairs. Start with a full inspection so you know exactly what needs attention. This helps you separate urgent repairs from routine upkeep and avoid guessing where to spend money first. Focus on systems that impact safety and structure, then move to cosmetic improvements. A consistent maintenance approach often includes: Checking the roof, gutters, and drainage

Servicing HVAC systems  
Inspecting plumbing for leaks, pressure issues, or aging pipes  
Testing electrical systems  
Sealing windows and doors to improve energy efficiency

Exterior care matters just as much as the inside. Overgrown landscaping, cracked walkways, or peeling paint can affect curb appeal and signal neglect to buyers or neighbors. Frequently Asked Questions

What Is the Most Common Inheritance Mistake? Rushing decisions in estate planning strategies without understanding the full picture is the most common mistake. Selling too quickly or ignoring tax details can all reduce the value of what you inherited. Many people skip key steps like: Getting a proper valuation

Reviewing tax implications  
Talking through plans with other heirs  
Confirming legal ownership and title status

A short pause to gather facts and get clarity usually makes the biggest difference. What Devalues a House the Most? Poor maintenance is one of the biggest drivers of lost value. Signs of neglect can signal larger hidden problems.

Continued on page A2

## World &amp; Nation

# Trump's Personnel Agency Is Asking for Federal Workers' Medical Records

By Amanda Seitz and Maia Rosenfeld

The Trump administration is quietly seeking unprecedented access to medical records for millions of federal workers and retirees, and their families.

A brief notice from the Office of Personnel Management could dramatically change which personally identifiable medical information the agency obtains, giving it the power to see prescriptions employees had filled or what treatment they sought from doctors. The regulation would require 65 insurance companies that cover more than 8 million Americans — including federal workers, retired members of Congress, mail carriers, and their immediate family members — to provide monthly reports to OPM with identifiable health data on their members.

The proposal is prompting unease from insurers as well as health policy and legal experts, who are concerned about the legality of OPM acquiring such a sweeping database of sensitive health information, and the agency's ability to safeguard it.

OPM could use the data to analyze costs and improve the system, said Sharona Hoffman, a health law ethicist at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio.

"But," she said, "they are going to get very, very detailed and granular data about everything that happens. The concern here is the more information they have, they could use it to discipline or target people who are not cooperating politically."

OPM spokespeople did not respond to repeated requests for comment. The agency's notice asks insurers that offer Federal Employees Health Benefits or Postal Service Health Benefits plans to furnish "service use and cost data," including "medical claims, pharmacy claims, encounter data, and provider data." It says the data will "ensure they provide competitive, quality, and affordable plans."

The notice, posted and sent to insurers in December, does not instruct them to redact identifying information — a burdensome process that they would need federal guidance to complete.

Instead, it states that insurers are legally permitted to disclose "protected health information" to OPM. Several experts in health policy and law consulted by KFF Health News said they interpreted the request to mean the Trump administration was seeking identifiable data.

The ask comes a year into a Republican administration that has been defined by haphazard mass layoffs and firings of thousands of federal workers, including dozens who say they were targeted in acts of political retaliation or for not embracing the White House's agenda. Under President Donald Trump, the government has also routinely tested the legal bounds of sharing sensitive and personally identifiable tax or health information across government agencies in its efforts to carry out mass immigration arrests or pursue identity fraud.

"You can anticipate a scenario where this information on 8 million Americans is now in the hands of OPM and there's a real concern of how they use it," said Michael Martinez, senior counsel at Democracy Forward, an advocacy organization that filed a public comment opposing OPM's proposal in February. Martinez previously worked at OPM.

"They've given no information about how they would treat that information once they have it," he said.

Among Martinez's concerns is how the



(KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES)

administration might use information about employees who have sought abortions — 41 states have some type of abortion ban — or transgender treatment, medical care that the Trump administration has tried to curb.

The American Federation of Government Employees, the largest union representing federal workers, did not respond to requests for comment.

Martinez and others who reviewed the notice for KFF Health News said the proposal was so vague that they were uncertain, exactly, what medical records OPM wants to access.

At the very least, they said, the proposal would allow the agency to access the medical and pharmaceutical claims of patients with their identifying information, such as names and birth dates. Claims data also includes diagnoses, treatments, visit length, and provider information.

OPM's request to view "encounter data" could allow the agency to look at "anything and everything," Hoffman noted.

That could include detailed medical records, such as a doctor's notes or after-visit summaries.

Jonathan Foley, who worked at OPM advising on the Federal Employees Health Benefits program during the Obama and Biden administrations, said he doubts the agency has the capability to ingest such minutiae.

The agency, however, could easily begin collection of personally identifiable medical and pharmaceutical claims information from insurers, he said.

Foley said he sees a benefit to OPM having broader access to de-identified claims data. In recent years, OPM has ramped up its analysis of claims data, which has allowed it to examine prescription drug costs and encourage plans to offer federal workers cheaper alternatives. He's worried, though, that the Trump administration's proposal goes too far, because it appears to seek identifiable data.

"It's kind of shocking to think of them having

protected health information without having strict guardrails," he said.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, or HIPAA, requires certain organizations that maintain identifiable health information — such as hospitals and insurers — to protect it from being disclosed without patient consent.

Those entities can disclose such information without consent only in specific scenarios, with a justification that it is deemed "reasonable" or "necessary." Even then, HIPAA mandates that they provide only the minimum amount of information required.

OPM argues in its notice that it is entitled to the information from insurers "for oversight activities."

But several people who reviewed the notice questioned whether OPM's explanation for requesting the information is sufficient.

"The language in it seems quite broad and encompasses potentially a lot of information and data and is sort of light on justification," said Jodi Daniel, a digital health strategist who helped develop the legal framework for HIPAA privacy rules over two decades ago.

Several major insurers that offer federal employee health plans — including the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, Kaiser Permanente, and UnitedHealthcare — declined to comment on their plans to comply with the notice or offer insight on where plans to implement the data sharing stood.

Only one insurer individually weighed in with a public comment on OPM's plan. In March, CVS Health executive Melissa Schulman urged the federal agency to reconsider its proposal.

"OPM's request raises substantial HIPAA compliance issues," Schulman wrote, arguing that federal law allows the agency to examine records but not to collect data. Insurers would be breaking the law by providing personal health information

for OPM's "vague and broad general purposes," she added.

Schulman, who did not respond to additional questions from KFF Health News, also raised concerns about a lack of data privacy protections. She noted that insurers could be liable for security breaches or other situations "where consumer health information is inappropriately shared and outside of our control."

In 2015, OPM announced the personal records of roughly 22 million Americans had been stolen from the agency in a data breach that has been blamed on the Chinese government.

The Association of Federal Health Organizations, which represents CVS Health and dozens of other federal health plan carriers, also weighed in with a 122-page comment opposing the notice. In it, AFHO Chair Kari Parsons emphasized that insurance carriers are bound by HIPAA to safeguard personal health information.

Federal law requires carriers "to furnish 'reasonable reports' OPM determines to be necessary," Parsons wrote, "not to furnish the individual claims data of every individual."

This isn't the first time OPM has requested detailed data from insurers. In the AFHO comment, Parsons noted OPM had made a similar proposal in 2010, prompting HIPAA concerns. She described how, after several years of negotiations with AFHO, they discussed — but OPM never finalized — an agreement in 2019 for carriers to share de-identified data with OPM.

But since then, Parsons wrote, OPM has collected such detailed information on enrollees and their families that, with OPM's new request, the agency may be able to trace even de-identified records to individuals.

OPM has not provided any update since closing comments in March. The agency would need to publish a final decision before anything officially changes.

## Sickle-Cell-Advocates-Sound-Alarm as Georgia Bill Advances

By Alexandria Green Jones

As momentum builds around new sickle cell legislation in Georgia, advocates say a deeper issue continues to threaten the very communities the disease impacts most. Black-led organizations on the front lines are still being shut out of critical funding.

The urgency grew on March 26, 2026, when the Sickle Cell Disease Protection Act advanced out of the Georgia Senate Health and Human Services Committee. While the bill still must clear the Senate floor, return to the House, and ultimately reach the governor's desk, its movement has renewed attention around the fight for equitable support for sickle cell patients and the organizations serving them.

At the same time, frustration is mounting over how federal sickle cell funding is being distributed. In February, Congress approved a fiscal package that included more than \$20 million for sickle cell programs. But many Black-led organizations doing direct, community-based work say they are not seeing those dollars.

Instead, advocates argue, much of the money is being directed to larger white-led organizations that are often far removed from the day-to-day realities of families living with sickle cell disease and may not reinvest those resources directly back into the communities most affected.

For Dr. Lakia Bailey, the issue is both personal and political.

Diagnosed with sickle cell disease at age 3, Bailey endured multiple surgeries and repeated hospitalizations throughout her life. Despite those challenges, she went on to earn a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and molecular biology and later a doctorate in molecular hematology and regenerative medicine.

"As someone who has lived with sickle cell

disease since childhood, I know firsthand that community support can mean the difference between surviving and truly living. That is why investing in community-based organizations is not optional. It is essential," said Dr. Bailey.

After seeing firsthand how many people living with sickle cell disease struggled to access adequate treatment and resources, Bailey founded the Sickle Cell Community Consortium. The organization was created to bring together patients, caregivers, community-based organizations, researchers, and health care leaders to address the urgent and often overlooked needs of the sickle cell community.

Now, as legislative conversations continue, Bailey and other advocates are calling attention to what they see as a painful contradiction: sickle cell disease is finally gaining more visibility in policy spaces, but the Black-led groups with the deepest roots in impacted communities are still being left out of the funding conversation.

"For too long, Black-led organizations have been expected to do the hardest work with the fewest resources," said Dr. Bailey. "It is deeply troubling to see millions allocated for sickle cell programs while the very organizations rooted in the community are being shut out. If the goal is to help patients, the dollars must reach the people doing the work on the ground every single day."

That exclusion, advocates say, has real consequences. Community-based organizations are often the first to help families navigate care, connect patients to resources, provide education, and push for policy change. Without equitable access to funding, many say the work becomes harder to sustain, even as the need continues to grow.

The debate also highlights a broader concern that has followed public health funding for years whether resources meant to address disparities are

truly reaching the people and institutions closest to the problem.

For Bailey, the answer must include intentional investment in Black-led organizations with proven ties to the sickle cell community.

"We cannot keep celebrating progress in legislation while ignoring the inequity in funding. Visibility without investment is not justice," Dr. Bailey explained. "If lawmakers and decision-makers are serious about changing outcomes for sickle cell patients, then they must also be serious about funding the Black-led organizations. The Black community built the advocacy, carried the burden, and sounded the alarm on sickle cell. We should not have to beg for a seat at a table we built."

As Georgia lawmakers weigh the future of the Sickle Cell Disease Protection Act, advocates say the larger question cannot be ignored: Who is being trusted to lead this work, and who is being left behind?

For families living with sickle cell disease, that answer could shape far more than policy. It could determine whether awareness is matched with action, and whether funding follows the communities that have been carrying this fight for generations.

From April 7 to 11th Dr. Bailey will host the largest convening of Sickle Cell patients, Advocates, physicians and community at The Westin Atlanta Airport, 4736 Best Road, Atlanta, Georgia.

"This moment represents more than a convening; it represents alignment," said Dr. Lakia Bailey, Founder and Executive Director of the Sickle Cell Consortium. "By bringing together leadership, community voice, and national strategy in one coordinated effort, we are creating space for real progress and collective impact."

## What to Do When Inheriting a House That is Paid Off

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Buyers often factor in repair costs and lower their offers accordingly. Location also plays a major role. Proximity to high-traffic roads, industrial areas, or declining neighborhoods can limit demand. Even a well-kept home may struggle to hold value. Outdated interiors can quietly drag down value as well. Things like the following make a property feel less move-in ready: Old kitchens

Worn flooring  
Dated fixtures  
Outdated appliances  
Poor lighting  
What Are the Worst Things To Inherit?

Inherited properties with major structural issues can quickly become expensive. Homes with



outdated systems, foundation damage, or long-term neglect may require immediate repairs that cost more than expected. Properties with liens or unpaid taxes can also create problems. Even if the home is paid off, outstanding debts tied to the property may need to be resolved before you can sell or fully take ownership. This can delay decisions and reduce the overall value of the inheritance. Inheriting a House That Is Paid Off: Now You Know There's a lot to do when inheriting a house that is paid off. Use this information, and you should have an easier time. Do you need more real estate advice? We have lots of other great posts to help you out.

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Entertainment

MOVIE REVIEW (★★½) Stars

# You, Me & Tuscany

She loves him. She loves him not. He loves her. He loves her not. One woman. Two men. She's living a lie and falling in love under the Tuscan sun.

How did that happen? That premise, by Kristin Engle, involves a young woman, an Italian villa and a big fib. That notion was turned into a script by Engle's screenwriter husband Ryan Engle. It's not the kind of project that usually includes a Black female lead character. But that unique possibility drove producer Will Packer (*Girls Trip*) to build a love story around that atypical casting. Something in the mold of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* or *Mamma Mia!*: Something that meets rom/com genre requirements but also adds a fresh spin.

The night the very unprofessional house sitter Anna (Halle Bailey, *The Little Mermaid*) winds up in a hotel bar alone, not much is going right. She's just lost a job for wearing her last client's clothes (Nia Vardalos, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*). A depressed Anna catches the eye of an Italian tourist, Matteo (Lorenzo de Moor). He casually mentions that he owns an empty villa in a small Tuscan town. Before you can say "arrivederci," she's on a plane to Italy—and he has no idea.

With director Kat Coiro (*Marry Me*) at the helm, all the production pieces are assembled in a very simple and commercial way. The bright lighting and glossy cinematography (Danny Ruhlmann) make *Tuscany* look like a shiny, postcard-perfect



The cast of *You, Me & Tuscany*

setting. However, it's not as impressive as the cinematography in *The Equalizer 3*, which made Italy's Amalfi Coast so dramatically beautiful you'd want to grab your passport and go. For a broke twentysomething, Anna dresses awfully well (costume designer Massimo Cantini Parrini) and has lots of clothes for someone who arrived in Italy with just a purse and a shoulder bag. Another hiccup is the bland, mediocre rom/com score (composer John Debney).

By comparison, the very catchy playlist is more successful, mirrors Anna's journey and helps to create a hip, romantic mood: Grammy winner Olivia Dean crooning "So Easy (To Fall in Love)," Ari Lennox's ode to Black women "Soft Girl Era," "Let Me Love You" by Mario and Estelle's meditative "Live, Love, Learn." Production designer Elena Albanese (*The Spiderwick Chronicles*) is a champ at making the villa gorgeous. Also, momentum is never an issue because editors Zene Baker and Troy Takaki (*Almost Christmas*) give the film a steady, engaging rhythm. What's on view is sometimes formulaic, sometimes unpredictable.

Anna arrives in Matteo's hometown of San Conessa (actually Pienza in Tuscany's Val d'Orcia region). She barely has a dime in her pocket. Stranded, with all the hotels booked, a friendly taxi driver Lorenzo (Marco Calvani) drives her to Matteo's villa, Casa Luna. She sneaks in and spends the night. In the morning, she encounters his family and lies

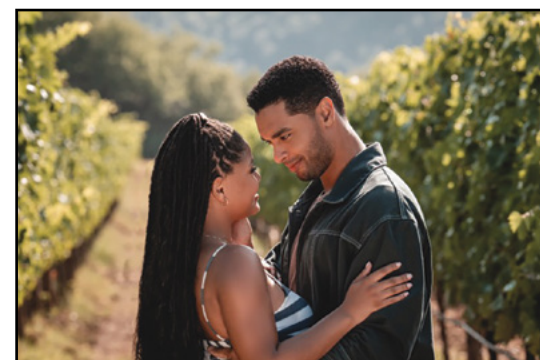
about why she's there. Surprisingly, they embrace her. There's Matteo's mom Gabriella (Isabella Ferrari), the very wary grandmother Nonna Alessia (Stefania Casini, 1900), dad Vincenzo (Paolo Sassanelli) and the wild sister Francesca (Stella Peczolli). But the relative that catches Anna's eye is Michael (Regé-Jean Page, *Bridgerton*), Matteo's very suave cousin—and rival.

Coiro handles what's in front of her well. Her directing style is pretty standard for the genre. No striking artistry, just proficient filmmaking, and she builds the romance, jealousy and drama efficiently. But for a romantic comedy, the romance far outweighs the funny stuff. It misses opportunities for physical humor or biting satire. Most of the comedy comes from Anna's smart mouth friend Claire (Aziza Scott, *Home Before Dark*). But there's something so cliché about the character, the mannerisms and dialogue that Claire borders on being a sassy Black woman trope.

Coiro is far better with the flirting, goo-goo eyes, heart-yearning elements. Which is good news for those who like involving love stories, especially female audiences. They'll find it easy to put themselves in Anna's shoes and ogle the man she adores. Why? Because there's no shortage of glam shots of the very photogenic Page. Shirt on. Shirt off. Smiling bright enough to light up the screen. His *Bridgerton* fans get all the Regé-Jean they can handle.



Halle Bailey and Regé-Jean Page in *You, Me & Tuscany*



Halle Bailey and Regé-Jean Page in *You, Me & Tuscany*

There's a weird part to Engle's script. Basically, the lead character is a con artist with little remorse. Unethical and hardly a role model. It's a bit unsettling. But her masquerade gives the movie its distinct verve. And along the way, the duplicitous interloper mends a family that's in great discord. Gabriella says, "You are the key to bringing our family together." Also, Anna's secondary trait as a wannabe chef, trained but not a professional, adds a cuisine angle that's oh so perfect for Italy.

Halle Bailey has an accessible young woman quality and plays a habitual liar in the most charming way. Casting her instead of a supermodel makes this Anna very approachable. However, some may wonder what could have been if a comic actress was in the role. Someone with the comedic instinct of Tiffany Haddish or Melissa McCarthy who knows how to milk the humor out of scenes. It's a thought. Meanwhile, Page, who's matinee idol handsome and very debonair, gives a performance that lacks depth and layering. Peczolli as the very saucy, twerking sister is hysterical. The rest of the supporting cast is vivacious and very amped up, like they're on a TV show.

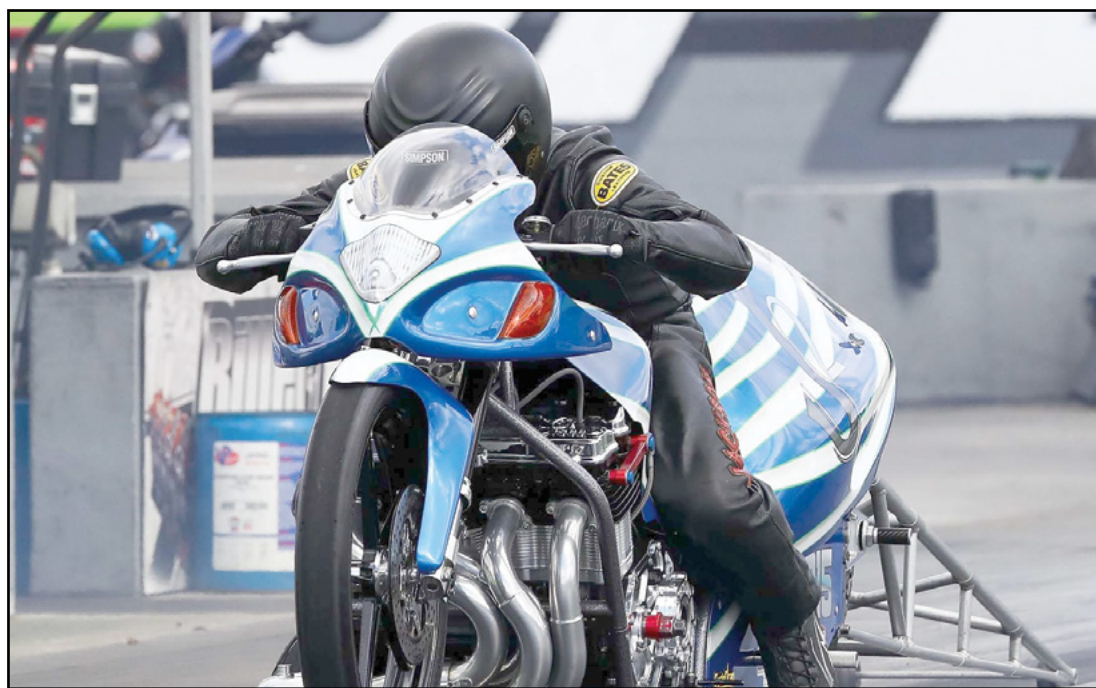
It's easy to ignore the flaws and just have a good time under the Tuscan sun. She loves him. She loves him not. She lies. She mends. She entertains.



Regé-Jean Page, Halle Bailey and Lorenzo de Moor in *You, Me & Tuscany*.

## Historic Moment in Motorsports:

# Black Leadership, Speed, and Legacy to Converge in Gainesville, Florida



Manufacturers Cup Series

Something powerful is happening in Gainesville, Florida, this April and it goes far beyond the roar of engines and the thrill of competition. From April 10–12, the Manufacturers Cup Drag Racing Series will take over the city, bringing together the fastest motorcycles in the nation, elite riders, and thousands of fans for one of the most electrifying racing events in the country. The event will be held at the Gainesville Raceway, home of the NHRA Gatornationals. But this isn't just about speed—it's about ownership, representation, and rewriting what leadership in motorsports looks like.

At the center of it all is Broderick "Hollywood" Jackson, a visionary entrepreneur and one of the few Black Americans in the country leading a national professional drag racing series. Not only is Jackson the driving force behind the Manufacturers Cup,

but he is also producing and controlling his own live broadcast platform—an unprecedented level of ownership in a space where Black leadership has historically been underrepresented.

Jackson's presence in motorsports represents more than personal success—it symbolizes a shift. In an industry where Black Americans have often been participants but rarely decision-makers, his leadership stands as a powerful example of what is possible when talent, vision, and ownership come together. His work is opening doors, creating opportunities, and inspiring a new generation of Black entrepreneurs, racers, and creators to see themselves not just in the race—but in control of it.

The event itself promises a full-throttle experience. Fans can expect high-stakes competition, record-breaking speeds, and a festival-like



atmosphere that brings together racing enthusiasts from across the country. Whether you're arriving in an RV, camping out for the weekend, or attending for a single day, the Manufacturers Cup offers an immersive experience that blends adrenaline, community, and culture.

Beyond the track, the event carries deeper meaning for the Black community. It highlights the importance of building and owning platforms, supporting Black-led ventures, and expanding representation in industries where it has long been limited. It's a reminder that excellence isn't confined to traditional spaces—and that innovation and leadership can thrive anywhere.

For those who can't attend in person, the experience won't be out of reach. Thanks to Jackson's

forward-thinking approach, the entire event will be broadcast live worldwide through RaceManCup.com, allowing viewers from around the globe to witness the action, energy, and impact in real time.

This is more than a race. This is about legacy. This is about breaking barriers and building something real—from the ground up.

As Broderick "Hollywood" Jackson continues to expand his influence and elevate the sport, one thing is clear: this is just the beginning.

Watch live or learn more at RaceManCup.com. Let's show up. Let's support. Let's build.

For press or sponsorship inquiries, contact info@racemancup.com or (404) 669-6140

# Rediscovering Early Black Cinema With New Race Films and 1970s Black Movies DVD Sets



Race Films and 1970s Black Cinema DVD sets

CED Services, a direct response marketing company providing classic films direct to consumers, has released two DVD sets that pay tribute to early and classic Black cinema. The first one, *The Race Films DVD Set*, offers a unique and invaluable collection of featuring 95 full-length Race Films and 45 short films. These films were made by and for Black Americans during the first half of the 20th century, a period when mainstream Hollywood largely excluded Black filmmakers and actors.

The second one, *The 1970s Black Movies DVD Set*, offers a unique and invaluable collection

of 1970s African-American cinema, featuring 100 Black-themed movies from that decade.

Race Films emerged as a response to the racial segregation and discrimination pervasive in the early 20th-century American film industry. These films provided African-Americans with a platform to tell their own stories, high lighting experiences and perspectives that were otherwise ignored or misrepresented in Hollywood. The term "Race Films" reflects the era's vernacular, acknowledging the unique cultural and social context in which these films were produced.

One of the most notable figures in the Race Film movement was Oscar Micheaux, a pioneering director whose work is prominently featured in the *Race Films DVD Set*. Micheaux was a trailblazer, breaking barriers and setting new standards for African-American filmmakers. His films addressed complex social issues and offered nuanced portrayals of Black life, challenging the stereotypes perpetuated by Hollywood. The inclusion of Micheaux's films in the set highlights the depth and significance of his contributions to early Black cinema.

Both DVD sets provide an opportunity to explore these groundbreaking films and appreciate the artistry and dedication of the filmmakers who created them. Each film in the collection has

been carefully selected to represent the diversity and richness of the respected era. From dramatic narratives to musical performances, these films capture a wide range of genres and styles, showcasing the versatility and talent of African-American artists.

The collection features a variety of films, each with its own unique story and impact. For example, Micheaux's films often tackled themes of racial injustice, identity, and resilience, providing a powerful commentary on the societal challenges faced by African-Americans. Other films in the collection highlight the vibrant cultural life of Black communities, with musicals, comedies, and dramas that celebrate the richness of African-American heritage.

In addition to the feature-length films, the set includes 45 short films that provide further insight into the creative landscape of the time. These shorts offer a variety of perspectives and stories, complementing the longer works and enriching the overall viewing experience. The inclusion of these shorts underscores the breadth of content available in the *Race Films DVD Set*, making it a comprehensive resource for anyone interested in early African-American cinema.

The significance of the DVD sets extends

beyond entertainment. It serves as an educational tool, providing historical context and promoting a deeper understanding of the cultural and social dynamics of the early 20th century. By preserving these films, the set ensures that future generations can learn about and appreciate the contributions of African-American filmmakers to the broader narrative of American cinema.

The sets are also an important resource for scholars, educators, and students studying film history, African-American studies, and cultural studies. The collection offers valuable primary sources that can enhance research and teaching, providing a more comprehensive view of the film industry and its evolution. The availability of these films on DVD makes them accessible to a wide audience, facilitating their use in academic and educational settings.

For those interested in exploring the history of Black cinema, both the *Race Films DVD Set* and the *1970s Black Movies DVD Set* are indispensable collections to have. They offer a rare opportunity to experience the creativity, resilience, and talent of early African-American filmmakers. By bringing these films to a modern audience, the set helps to preserve and celebrate an important chapter in the history of American cinema.

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#### SUMMONS

#### (CITACION JUDICIAL)

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 NOTICE TO DEFENDANT (AVISO AL DEMANDADO): MELODY SAHABI, FARAMARZ SAHABI, and DOES 1 to 50  
 YOU ARE BEING SUED BY PLAINTIFF (LO ESTÁ DEMANDANDO) EL DEMANDANTE): SHAHIN JABILI  
**NOTICE!** You have been sued. The court may decide against you without your being heard unless you respond within 30 days. Read the information below.  
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for waived fees and costs on any settlement or arbitration award of \$10,000 or more in a civil case. The court's lien must be paid before the court will dismiss the case. **¡AVISO!** Lo han demandado. Si no responde dentro de 30 días, la corte puede decidir en su contra sin escuchar su versión. Lea la información a continuación. Tiene 30 DÍAS DE CALENDARIO después de que le entreguen esta citación y papeles legales para presentar una respuesta por escrito en esta corte y hacer que se entregue una copia al demandante. Una carta o una llamada telefónica no lo protegen. Su respuesta por escrito tiene que estar en

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 Santa Monica, CA 90401  
 The name, address, and telephone number of plaintiff's attorney, or plaintiff without an attorney, is (El nombre, la dirección y el número de teléfono del abogado del

demandante, o del demandante que no tiene abogado, es): Alan S. Turlington, Esq.; Victor Vera, Esq.; TUSH LAW LTD., 18071 Irvine Blvd., Tustin, CA 92780  
 Tel. (949) 575-8874  
 DATE (Fecha): October 31, 2025  
 David W. Slayton,  
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Features

# Bonta and Weber Pierson Lead on State Health Policy as Disparities Persist

By Joe W. Bowers Jr.  
California Black Media

Nearly 6 in 10 Californians delayed or skipped medical care in the past year because of cost, and 4 in 10 reported their conditions worsened as a result — trends that disproportionately affect communities already facing disparities, including Black Californians.

Black Californians have the shortest life expectancy in the state — about 74.6 years compared to more than 80 years statewide — and they face higher rates of maternal mortality, chronic disease and preventable hospitalizations. Those realities are compounded by rising healthcare costs and new federal policy changes that state leaders say could reverse years of progress.

Against that backdrop, for the first time in California history, two Black women are leading the Legislature's top health policy bodies — positions that will shape how the state responds to those challenges.

Mia Bonta (D-Alameda), who represents the 18th Assembly District, chairs the Assembly Health Committee. Dr. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego), a board-certified obstetrician/gynecologist representing the 39th Senate District, chairs the Senate Health Committee. Both are members of the California Legislative Black Caucus (CLBC), and Weber Pierson serves as the caucus chair.

Their leadership comes at a moment when policy decisions made in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., are expected to affect access to care for millions of Californians. Both lawmakers say their roles give them an opportunity — and responsibility — to address longstanding inequities affecting Black communities.

Bonta said her leadership is shaped by personal experience navigating inequities in healthcare.

"I've had to endure instances as a Black woman with healthcare providers questioning my need for different drugs, for questioning whether or not I had the right diagnosis," she said.

"At the baseline of it all, I believe that healthcare is a human right... and our healthcare system... has a lot of inequities," she added.

Weber Pierson, drawing on her experience as a physician, said her focus is on translating policy into better patient outcomes.

"We've put a lot of good laws in place. The next step is making sure those laws are actually improving outcomes for patients."

Both lawmakers pointed to legislation they are advancing to address disparities in access and care.

Bonta highlighted measures like Assembly Bill (AB) 2368, which would codify CalAIM programs — a Medi-Cal initiative that connects



Asm. Mia Bonta (D-Oakland) and Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego), both chairs of their respective health committees, convened a joint hearing on March 10, 2026. (Screenshot)

patients to services like housing, food and other social supports — shown to improve outcomes in Black communities. She also pointed to AB 3161, a bill that would require hospitals to collect and report patient safety data by race, income and other demographic factors.

Weber Pierson pointed to proposals including Senate Bill (SB) 987, which would create a state fund to help offset federal Medicaid cuts, and SB 503, which addresses bias in artificial intelligence used in healthcare.

At a recent Assembly Health Committee hearing, Bonta advanced her bill AB 2651, the Informed Parents Healthy Schools Act, which requires schools to notify parents when vaccination rates fall below herd immunity thresholds.

Each year, the Legislature regularly passes health-related laws, many of which amend or add sections to the California Health and Safety Code.

Bonta said a key step is ensuring that those laws are backed by clear data and oversight.

"You can't fix what you can't measure," Bonta said.

She said enforcement tools now include reporting requirements, corrective action plans and potential involvement from the Department of Justice.

Weber Pierson said the focus now is on how that data is used.

"We have to be intentional about collecting the right data and using it to drive change," she said.

Both lawmakers pointed to rising costs and federal policy changes as immediate threats to access to care.

During a joint informational hearing of their committees in March, convened to examine the impact of federal healthcare changes on California's system, they outlined how those pressures are

already affecting Californians.

"When people are this worried about costs, they change their behavior... that means people will make life and death decisions," Bonta said.

Weber Pierson said federal actions could reverse recent gains in coverage.

"At this point, this country is facing \$1 trillion in cuts, mostly to Medicaid and other health programs," she said.

She said the reductions could limit access to physicians and preventive care.

Bonta said as many as two million Californians could lose Medi-Cal coverage as a result of federal changes. She said the Legislature is preparing to respond.

"I'm focused... on making sure that we have as many Californians as possible covered," she said.

She added the Legislature will work to prevent disinvestment in primary care.

Both chairs acknowledged that expanded coverage has not eliminated disparities.

"Health coverage is foundational, but we still need to do more to ensure that access... is appropriate, timely, and affordable," Weber Pierson said.

Bonta said access must include culturally competent care.

"It's one thing to have coverage on paper, but if you don't have a provider... that provides culturally concordant care... then it's not really access," she said.

Maternal health remains one of the most significant disparities affecting Black Californians.

"We know where the disparities are," Weber Pierson said. "The question is how we make sure every patient is receiving the same standard of care."

Bonta pointed to gaps in access, including maternity deserts.

"We have parts of California now where a woman could have to travel up to two hours to deliver a baby," she said.

Both lawmakers also highlighted chronic conditions such as hypertension and diabetes as ongoing drivers of inequities in Black communities.

"We have to make sure people can access care early and stay connected to care," Weber Pierson said.

The March joint hearing demonstrated how the Assembly and Senate health committees are working in coordination as they prepare for budget and policy decisions.

"Even though we are in two separate houses, we are all dealing with the same issues and repercussions of what is happening at the federal level," Weber Pierson said.

# Delaying Kindergarten May Have Limited Benefit

By Christina A. Samuels  
The Hechinger Report

When my son was about to turn 5, I was faced with a decision that may be familiar to parents of children whose birthdays are close to kindergarten enrollment cutoff dates.

In my local school district, children must be 5 years old on or ahead of Sept. 1 before they enroll in kindergarten. With a late September birthday, my son was only a few weeks too young to make that cutoff. A friend of mine whose child had a similarly

timed birthday was trying for early enrollment. Should I, too?

Ultimately, I decided against it, swallowing thousands of dollars for another year of preschool tuition. Instead of starting kindergarten just a few weeks short of 5, my son started when he was just a few weeks away from turning 6. And while I was not "redshirting" — intentionally holding my child back for a year when he would have otherwise been allowed to enroll — the supposed benefits of redshirting were part of my thinking. Of course,

I thought, boys need more time to mature, and starting school on the older end of his cohort would be a clear win.

But are those perceived benefits of redshirting — a term borrowed from athletics and sports eligibility rules — really true? A new study suggests that whatever academic boost children may experience when they are the oldest in their kindergarten class fades by the time they reach third grade.

"For the average kid, they're not going to get that much of an advantage," said Megan Kuhfeld,

the director of growth modeling and data analytics at NWEA, an assessment and research organization behind the Measures of Academic Progress, or MAP, tests used by tens of thousands of schools across the country.

For this analysis, NWEA studied the 3 million students who took the kindergarten through second grade MAP Growth assessment between 2017 and 2025. Researchers also followed a cohort of students who started kindergarten in the 2021-22 school year to see what their test results looked like when they were in third grade, compared to when they entered school.

Students who started kindergarten a year later than their peers had measurable advantages in reading and math. Compared to the average academic growth of kindergartners, the academic advantage of "redshirted" children represented 20 percent to 30 percent of an academic year of learning.

That advantage didn't last long, however. By the time students entered third grade, children who had been held back a year were indistinguishable from their peers academically.

The NWEA study didn't dig into the factors behind these findings, but Kuhfeld has some theories. First, there might be some benefit to children of having older peers in the classroom to serve as academic and behavior role models. In other words, children like my son, who started school as an older 5-year-old, could be a positive influence on children who turned 5 shortly before the cutoff for kindergarten enrollment. Children who are already much older than their grade-level peers have no model to emulate.

The benefits of starting school late may also disappear because children who enter school already knowing the kindergarten curriculum may get bored, Kuhfeld said. Classrooms aren't necessarily set up to push along children who are already meeting academic standards; instead, the teacher is likely to be focused on children who need more help.

Among the more surprising results of the study for me was that redshirting is relatively uncommon. For each of the years studied, about 5 percent of kindergartners started school a year after official eligibility. That peaked at 6.4 percent in fall 2021. The children most likely to be held back a year are white students and boys; redshirting was also more common in low-poverty and rural schools.

Considering how rare the phenomenon is, it sure is talked about a lot. Kuhfeld said that may be because people are more aware of, and worried about, the higher academic demands of kindergarten. Also, Kuhfeld said, the idea of holding children back gained more attention after a prominent author, Richard Reeves, wrote a 2022 article recommending that all boys be redshirted to give them an extra year for their brains to mature. (Rise Together, a fund established by Reeves, is one of The Hechinger Report's many donors.)

Kuhfeld said that the study focused solely on academics, not behavioral outcomes or other factors, so parents should make decisions that work for their individual children.

But there are social implications of being older than your grade-level peers, she noted. Parents of kindergartners might not be thinking about this when their children are young, but what does it mean to be the first of your friends to go through puberty, or one of the oldest high school seniors?

"It's worth considering there are trade-offs," Kuhfeld said. "It's often painted in conversation as, 'Of course you would do this,'" she added. "There's actually a lot of nuance here."



Student painting in class

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## Features

# Black Women in Rural Areas Grapple with Stark Decline in Obstetric Care

By Ashleigh Fields

Special to the AFRO

Black women in rural areas are facing the brunt of declining medical services, including access to obstetric care as new policies threaten clinic and hospital closures.

Under the current White House administration's summer spending package, federal reimbursement for services covered through Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act severely declined leaving rural healthcare providers to fend for themselves amid pressing patient concerns.

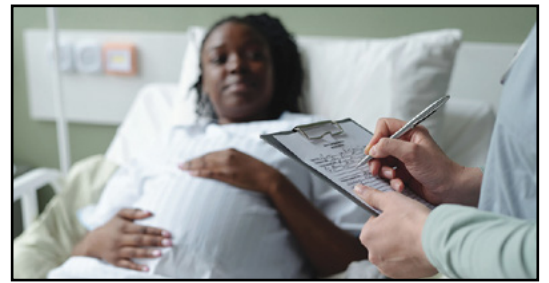
"The risks facing women in rural communities is due to hardship in receiving routine screenings and also access for treatment if conditions/diseases arise. Also, in rural areas there are few specialists," Dr. Sonya Buchanan, a preventative medicine physician and Meharry Medical College graduate, told the AFRO.

"Most specialists practice in larger cities with larger populations. Commuting to and from for treatment of chronic illnesses or cancer may not be possible for a number of reasons including financial, logistics or missing time from work," she added.

In response to the 47th president's spending bill, Georgia Rep. Nikema Williams (D) introduced the Maternal Health Equity Under Medicaid Act to raise federal matching rates to 90 percent for Medicaid expenditures on maternal healthcare. Nearly 1 in 5 or 20 percent of rural adults and 40 percent of rural children rely on Medicaid or Children Health Insurance Program. Amid cost concerns, rural Americans also face geographic challenges that present threats to healthcare. Most live an average of 10.5 miles from the nearest hospital, versus just 4.4 miles for their urban counterparts, according to the National Rural Health Association. "Medicaid is the largest payer of maternity care in this country and

must be part of the solution to the maternal health crisis. Too many people are still falling through cracks in our healthcare system, especially Black mamas who continue to face a worsening maternal health crisis," Williams said in a statement noting that 42 percent of births are financed by Medicaid. Still, women who enroll in Medicaid in their third trimester have a 4.7 times higher likelihood of experiencing maternal mortality and a 1.5 times higher risk for infant mortality, according to her office. "Raising the federal match for maternal care will give states the resources they need to expand care and save lives. As Republicans threaten devastating Medicaid cuts, this legislation is a clear statement: we must invest in care, not cruelty," the Georgia lawmaker said. As of 2022, more than two-thirds of rural hospitals in eight states were without obstetric services, according to a Health Affairs study. From 2010-2022, 12 states also reported the loss of 25 percent or more obstetric services in rural hospitals. "The mass closures of obstetric wings in rural hospitals have been a major issue for years now. In North Carolina, 40 percent of our counties have no facilities at all for maternity care. The passage of the Big Beautiful Bill—I like to call it the Big Ugly Bill—is only going to make these issues so much worse. Labor and delivery units are often the first to get cut when hospital budgets get low," Rep. Alma Adams (D-N.C.) told the AFRO. "This bill made major cuts to Medicaid dollars, which hospitals rely on to stay afloat. It also created new restrictions making it more difficult to remain eligible for Medicaid," she added. The United States remains the only developed country with a rising maternal mortality rate, according to UNICEF, with deaths skewed towards women of color. Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications and twice as

likely to lose an infant to premature death. Women in rural communities are threatened the most. All 50 states were given access to the federal Rural Health Transformation Fund which provides over \$100,000 to strengthen and modernize health care in rural communities across the country. "While it won't fully alleviate the burden of these Medicaid cuts, our state will be using some of these dollars to keep rural hospitals in business and expand maternity care access in our state, focusing on non-medical barriers to care, too," Rep. Adams said. "Let's be honest, though—this is a band-aid to our country's Black maternal health crisis. We need comprehensive legislation to address it, like the Momnibus Act, which we're reintroducing soon with Rep. Underwood and Sen. Booker. We need major action soon, because our country is reaching a boiling point, and our moms deserve better," Adams continued. The Momnibus Act is a package of 13-bill acts that address social determinants, mental health, workforce diversification, and data collection, with over \$1 billion in proposed investments dedicated to solving the maternal mortality crisis. While lawmakers address issues through policy, doulas have also been stepping in to bridge the gap by providing travel services to address the lack of care in rural communities. "Historically, doulas were responsible for assisting those giving birth and midwives, and were often among the few enslaved individuals who were allowed to travel due to the indispensability of their services. However, as births moved into hospitals, the non-clinical support system declined—removing an invaluable service for expectant mothers, particularly those within communities disproportionately affected by maternal mortality rates and limited access to medical care and birthing services," according to Valerie Rochester, chief health



Lawmakers, healthcare advocates and mothers push for reforms as rural areas face a decline in obstetric care. Credit: iStockphoto / NNPA.

equity officer at Creating Healthier Communities (CHC). "Increasingly, research suggests that doulas are not only beneficial in better health outcomes, but also in reducing unnecessary medical procedures and, therefore, healthcare costs. A recent study of Medicaid beneficiaries found that women who received doula support had both lower cesarean and preterm birth rates," she added. Jacque Souza, a self-employed doula, said families in areas without immediate access to healthcare or concerns about care in hospitals have benefitted from the at-home services doulas provide. "A birth doula holds space so birth can unfold with dignity. She does not replace medical care but helps mothers make the best decisions when bringing a baby into the world," Souza told the AFRO. Doulas also provide extensive treatment after babies are born. "A postpartum doula also has an important, though often less visible, role. She helps families navigate the unique and delicate time of postpartum, those days when nights are long and the days feel endless. A postpartum doula guides and cares for new mothers during this profound transition," Souza said.

## State of Black California: New Data Shows Black Californians Falling Behind as Leaders Convene at UCLA to Confront Crisis

By Joe W. Bowers Jr.

California Black Media

New data showing rising unemployment and widening economic gaps for Black Californians framed a statewide conference at UCLA, where more than 200 advocates, policymakers, elected officials, scholars, entertainers and community leaders gathered to examine the conditions facing Black Californians and to push solutions for a thriving Black California.

Hosted by the UCLA Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies in partnership with the California Legislative Black Caucus (CLBC), the "State of Black California" conference focused on collecting and confronting data on the condition of Black Californians and connecting it to community experience, policy and political power.

Dr. Michael Stoll, UCLA professor and faculty director of the Black Policy Project, reported that Black unemployment rose from 5.6% to 7.5%, adding roughly 25,000 unemployed workers—the largest increase among racial groups.

The rise was most pronounced among Black women, including those with college degrees—a pattern that highlights why the issue is particularly urgent, as the California Black Women's Collective Empowerment Institute (CABWCEI) reports that Black women are the primary earners in about 80% of Black households statewide.

The data also showed rising involuntary part-time work and a growing number of individuals disconnected from both employment and education. Stoll pointed to the erosion of public sector jobs—long a pathway to stable, middle-class employment—as a key factor reshaping opportunity.

The conference opened with community leaders who connected those findings to lived experience.

Dr. Brandon Nicholson, chief executive officer of The Hidden Genius Project, called for stronger investments in Black youth and clearer pathways into technology and leadership.

Mina Anochie, research and policy fellow at Altagena Rising, described ongoing gaps in disaster recovery following the Eaton Fire, including families who still had not been contacted by relief agencies.

Dr. Rhianna Rogers, senior vice president of research and programs at the California Black Women's Collective Empowerment Institute, pointed to the economic pressures facing Black women, who often serve as primary breadwinners while facing wage gaps and higher poverty rates.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, in a prerecorded message, and Assemblymember Isaac Bryan (D-Ladera Heights), CLBC vice chair, connected the purpose of the conference to public policy.

Bass called it "one of the most important convenings of Black leadership in California." In his remarks Bryan emphasized the need to move from data to outcomes, connecting the research to legislative priorities.

In a fireside chat with Dr. Lorrie Frasure, director of the Bunche Center, Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber tied political power directly to participation and warned that forces outside California continue to shape local access and influence.

"If you don't vote, you are allowing someone else to determine your future," Weber said, urging attendees to use their "juice"—their individual influence—to push back against misinformation and policies coming out of Washington that affect Black communities.

Next, the panel "Pathways to Success: Education, Artificial Intelligence and Opportunity



Michael A. Stoll, Professor of Public Policy at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, presents during the State of Black California convening. Photo by CBM

in California," turned to the future and the question of who will shape it.

Participants included Assemblymember Dr. LaShae Sharp-Collins (D-San Diego), singer and activist Aloe Blacc, senior UCLA researcher Dr. Tiera Tannkley and moderator Dr. Safiya Noble, professor at UCLA.

Sharp-Collins framed the issue in terms of accountability and leadership. She said, "There is a difference between leading Blacks and Black leaders."

She also raised concerns about the use of new technology in schools, asking, "Why are we experimenting on Black kids?"

"Blackness is codified as failure," Tannkley said, warning that data-driven systems can reinforce bias.

Noble raised broader concerns about artificial intelligence, while Aloe Blacc emphasized the need to align education, visible opportunities and attainable jobs.

Sharp-Collins also made the case for belief and investment, saying, "It's going to take someone to believe that all students can achieve."

The panel on, "Affordability & Stability: Building Thriving Black Communities," focused on the widening gap between wages and the cost of living.

Panelists included Kevin Harbour, chief executive officer of BizFed Institute; William McGee, California deputy superintendent of public instruction; Sen. Laura Richardson (D-Inglewood); and moderator Dr. Jasmine Hill, assistant professor at UCLA.

Harbour defined the issue in direct terms: "Affordability is the ability to have your income exceed your expenses."

As the discussion shifted from education to job outcomes, McGee pointed to a structural gap between credentials and stability.

"Credentials just to end up in low wage work," McGee said, describing how for Black workers completing school does not guarantee access to jobs with wages, benefits or long-term security.

Richardson linked economic mobility to policy choices, warning, "When you stop DEI... the door is closed."

Harbour also pushed ownership as a strategy for long-term stability, saying, "Getting a job is cool. Getting a business is better."

The closing panel, "Culture as Power: Art, Voice, and the Fight for Black Futures," shifted the focus from conditions to power—who defines the narrative and who benefits from it.

The panel featured Bryan, Assemblymember



Panel moderated by Dr. Safiya Noble featuring Assemblymember Dr. LaShae Sharp-Collins, Dr. Tiera Tannkley, Senior Researcher, and Aloe Blacc, artist and activist, during the State of Black California event.

Sade Elhawary (D-Los Angeles), Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, activist & author Chuck D and moderator Dr. Gaye Theresa Johnson, professor at UC Santa Barbara.

Bryan grounded the discussion in community experience, saying, "Real change comes from the people who have been most impacted."

Chuck D tied culture directly to political struggle. "A federal administration... is actively trying to erase our culture," he said. He also warned against mistaking digital activity for movement building, saying, "Social media is not our space for movement and change."

Elhawary pointed to the importance of

representation and access to policymaking, while Johnson framed culture as central to how policy is shaped and understood.

Throughout the conference, UCLA leaders, including Frasure and Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Dr. Darnell Hunt, stressed the university's role in producing data that can inform public policy.

Members of the Legislative Black Caucus, including Bryan, Elhawary, Sharp-Collins and Richardson, pointed to the need to turn those findings into concrete policy solutions.

"You cannot develop policy if you don't know the condition of the people," Bass said.



Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber speaks with Dr. Lorrie Frasure, Director of the UCLA Ralph J. Bunche Center. Photo by CBM.

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## Political

# Political Playback:

## California Capitol News You Might Have Missed

By Bo Tefu  
California Black Media

### California Sees Surge in Gas Prices, Igniting Fresh Political Blame Game



Shell gas station in Redlands, San Bernardino County, California, on April 11, 2026.

California drivers are once again paying the highest prices at the pump in the nation, setting off a renewed clash between Democrats and Republicans over who is responsible — and what should be done.

The average price for a gallon of regular gasoline in California hovered around \$5.90 this week, according to the American Automobile Association (AAA), roughly \$1.70 higher than the national average.

The spike follows a broader trend: the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that gasoline prices surged more than 20% in March, driving the largest monthly increase in the Consumer Price Index in nearly two years.

As costs climb, political leaders are sharpening their arguments.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has pointed to global instability and federal dynamics as key drivers. Last week, his office posted on X in response to a White House post celebrating falling prices for select consumer goods:

"The White House is celebrating because prices for men's underwear and accessories are down one-fifth of 1%," Newsom's office posted. "Sir, we just want lower gas prices. But big congrats on your underwear accessories."

The job underscored Newsom's broader message: that Californians are feeling pain at the pump despite marginal declines in other consumer costs.

Republicans, however, are placing the blame squarely on state policy.

Speaking on Fox News, former California GOP Chair Jessica Milan Patterson argued that policies instituted by Newsom and the Democratic supermajority in the California Legislature have driven up costs through taxes and regulations.

"We have the highest gas prices in the nation. We pay \$1.50 to \$2.00 more per gallon than the rest of the country," Patterson said. "It is because of high gas taxes... special fuel mandates... regulations here in California... real leadership would have said... I would suspend the gas tax tomorrow."

Democrats counter, arguing that global oil markets, refinery constraints and corporate pricing practices all play a role. Some have pointed to ongoing state efforts to increase oversight of oil companies and penalize excessive profits.

Energy analysts broadly agree that California's higher taxes and environmental standards contribute to elevated prices, but also note that refinery outages, supply limitations and international conflicts can quickly push costs higher.

With summer travel season approaching and volatility in global oil markets continuing, Californians may face sustained high prices — even as leaders in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. continue to argue over who is responsible for the pain at the pump.

### A \$37.2 Million Boost: California Announces New Funding for Apprenticeships and Workforce Training

## Do You Know How Much Sugar Is in Your Drink? Sen. Weber's Bill Will Require Restaurants to Let You Know

By Antonio Ray Harvey  
California Black Media

On April 8, Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego) introduced a public health bill that would require chain restaurants to include warning labels on their menus for beverages with high sugar content.

Senate Bill (SB) 869 requires chain restaurants with 20-plus locations to display a specific, visible "factual warning statement" for beverages containing 50% or more of the recommended daily added sugar limit.

"This information will be placed where it matters most, directly on menus, right at the point of selection, whether printed, digital, or at drive-thru," said Weber-Pierson, chair of the California Legislative Black Caucus (CLBC) at a news briefing at the State Capitol.

"SB 869 does not ban products, and it does not limit consumers' choices. What it does is empower consumers with knowledge to make informed decisions," Weber added.

On April 9, the bill passed out of the Senate Health Committee with a 9-0 vote and was referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee.



Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson's bill, SB 869, would require chain restaurants to label beverages containing high levels of added sugar — defined as 50% or more of the recommended daily amount — on their menus. If passed, chain restaurants with 20 or more locations would be required to place a warning icon on menus beginning Jan. 1, 2028. CBM photo by Antonio Ray Harvey.

California is investing \$37.2 million to expand apprenticeship and workforce training programs, aiming to support more than 60,000 residents and strengthen pathways into high-demand careers.

On April 9, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the funding through the California Apprenticeship Council Training Fund and the California Workforce Development Board's High Road Training Partnerships. The initiative is designed to help Californians gain job skills while addressing workforce shortages across key industries.

According to Newsom's office, the investment highlights the state's broader effort to connect education, training, and employment.

"Through these programs, we're strengthening training opportunities for Californians to earn, learn, and build a future without taking on debt," Newsom said in a statement.

About half of the funding, \$18.6 million, will support 160 state-registered apprenticeship programs serving more than 55,000 workers, primarily in construction and skilled trades such as electrical work, plumbing, and HVAC. State officials say these jobs often provide stable careers with median wages above \$70,000 per year.

The remaining \$18.6 million will fund workforce training through High Road Training Partnerships, which will train at least 4,600 workers in industries including health care, manufacturing, and technology. Several organizations received major awards, including \$3.5 million each for the Miguel Contreras Foundation to expand health care career pathways, the San Bernardino Community College District to grow regional workforce programs, and The Empowerment Center to expand mental health training in disaster-affected communities.

California Labor Secretary Stewart Knox said the effort brings together education and industry to create clearer career pathways.

"Apprenticeships and workforce training are most effective when education, industry, and workforce systems work together," Knox said.

State officials say the funding also supports broader economic goals, including growth in clean energy, cybersecurity, and health care. The investment is part of a long-term strategy to expand access to good-paying jobs while preparing workers for California's evolving economy.

### Under Pressure, Rep. Eric Swalwell Suspends California Governor Bid Amid Mounting SA Allegations

Rep. Eric Swalwell (D-CA-14) has suspended his campaign for California governor following mounting pressure from leaders within his own party, capping a tumultuous week dominated by sexual assault allegations and political fallout.

The decision came over the weekend, days after California Democratic Party (CADEM) Chair Rusty Hicks publicly rebuked the allegations as "deeply disturbing" and urged all candidates to reassess the viability of their campaigns.

Swalwell, who is seeking reelection to Congress, had been a candidate in California's 2026 gubernatorial race. His exit follows a wave of scrutiny triggered by reports published April 10 by Politico and other outlets detailing accusations from a former staffer. The woman alleged that Swalwell engaged in sexual encounters with her while she was his subordinate and sexually assaulted her on two occasions. The allegations have not been independently confirmed.

Additional reporting cited three other women who accused Swalwell of making sexual advances and sending explicit messages and photos. Separately, documents obtained by Politico show that a former employee who settled a workplace discrimination dispute with Swalwell's office agreed to confidentiality and non-disparagement provisions — contradicting earlier claims by his campaign that no staffers had signed such agreements.

Swalwell has denied the allegations, calling them "false" and politically motivated, and emphasizing his record of supporting women during nearly two decades in public service.

Still, the controversy quickly destabilized his campaign. Several senior staff members resigned, and some endorsers withdrew or paused their support. Hicks stopped short of explicitly calling for

Swalwell to exit the race but underscored the stakes.

"First, the stories of victims and survivors should be heard and believed. Period," Hicks said. "Second, any person engaged in misconduct must take responsibility and be held accountable for their actions — including a member of Congress and candidate for governor."

Hicks added that his earlier directive to candidates remained in effect: "My call for all — repeat, all — candidates for governor to 'honestly assess the viability of their candidacy and campaign' still stands. In fact, that call is more important now than ever before."

Calls for Swalwell to step aside intensified from within the field of candidates. Tony Thurmond, California's Superintendent of Public Instruction and a fellow gubernatorial candidate, urged Swalwell to resign from Congress and end his campaign.

"I'm here to acknowledge the courage of the many brave women who have shared accounts of sexual assaults ... it's a sad day and it is difficult to hear these troubling accounts," Thurmond said, adding that Swalwell should "take responsibility for your actions" and "step away from this race for governor."

Across the aisle, Republicans failed to select a candidate they will back for governor, leaving the party without a unified standard-bearer after delegates declined to coalesce around either Chad Bianco or Steve Hilton during the California Republican Party convention held this weekend in Sacramento. That stalemate underscores divisions within the GOP field, too, as the 2026 race continues to take shape.

### Who's in Charge — Doctors or AI? Asm. Bonta's Bills Take Aim at Health Tech

California lawmakers are weighing new limits on artificial intelligence in health care, as concerns grow over whether technology is beginning to override doctors' judgment in patient care.

At a legislative hearing held April 7 and led by Assemblymember Mia Bonta (D-Alameda), chair of the Assembly Health Committee, lawmakers advanced Assembly Bill 2575. The bill, introduced by Assemblymember Liz Ortega (D-San Leandro), would require safeguards to ensure AI tools support, rather than replace, clinical decision-making.

The proposal comes as AI is rapidly being integrated into hospitals and clinics. AB 2575 would require health facilities to provide written disclosures about how AI tools function, including their risks and intended use. It also makes clear that health care workers can override AI recommendations, when necessary, based on their professional judgment.

"In health care, artificial intelligence should only support clinical judgment, not replace it," said Ortega to lawmakers.

The bill would also prohibit employers from retaliating against workers who override or rely on AI systems in good faith. In addition, it would block developers and health care providers from avoiding liability by blaming workers who fail to override flawed AI outputs.

Supporters say the measure addresses real-world risks tied to AI errors and bias. Cathy Kennedy, president of the California Nurses Association, said many workers are required to use AI tools without understanding how they work. "When employers expect nurses to rely on this technology that we cannot meaningfully evaluate, object to, or override, then it puts our patients' safety at risk," she said.

Labor advocates argue the bill is part of a broader push to ensure human expertise remains central in the workplace. They say AI should enhance care, not dictate it.

But business and medical groups pushed back, warning the bill could slow innovation and add new burdens. Alexis Rodriguez, speaking in opposition at the hearing on behalf of the California Chamber of Commerce, said the proposal could limit tools already improving care.

"AI is already helping clinicians detect sepsis sooner, improve the accuracy of cancer screenings, assist with screening patients' medication orders, and more," said Rodriguez.

Physician groups also raised concerns about the impact on workloads and legal risk. George Soares, representing the California Medical Association, said the bill may create unintended consequences. "This bill is overly broad and risks creating unintended consequences that could ultimately harm the very patients it seeks to protect," said Soares.

### California Gov't: Most of the Hospices Accused of Fraud By Social Media Influencers, Officials, Receive Federal Aid - Not Medi-Cal

California officials say hospice providers accused of fraud by conservative influencers and some lawmakers are more likely billing federal programs, not the state's Medicaid system, pushing back on claims that fraud is widespread in Medi-Cal.

The response follows a state investigation into a Los Angeles office complex highlighted in viral videos and political criticism. Influencers, some state lawmakers and federal government officials have alleged that California is failing to control fraud among hospice providers.

State health officials say the facts tell a different story. Of 48 licensed hospice businesses linked to the Van Nuys site, only 19 are eligible to bill Medi-Cal. Most rely on Medicare, a federally managed program that covers the majority of hospice spending.

The findings underscore a key divide in the debate over fraud oversight. While California licenses hospice providers, the federal government oversees Medicare billing, where state officials say much of the suspected fraud occurs.

A spokesperson for Gov. Gavin Newsom, Diana Crofts-Pelayo, said California has already taken aggressive steps to combat hospice fraud and emphasized that enforcement efforts are ongoing. She also urged federal authorities to strengthen oversight of Medicare, where most hospice reimbursements are processed, saying, "We're doing our part to raise standards, and it's time for Washington to step up."

California Attorney General Rob Bonta has also underscored that while Medi-Cal fraud does occur, it is being actively investigated and prosecuted. During an April 8 news briefing, Bonta announced charges against 21 individuals and the arrest of five suspects tied to a large-scale scheme that fraudulently billed Medi-Cal for approximately \$267 million using stolen identities and sham hospice companies. According to investigators, no legitimate hospice services were ever provided in the case, which involves allegations of identity theft, money laundering, and coordinated billing fraud. State officials say the case demonstrates both the existence of bad actors within the system and California's capacity to detect, halt, and prosecute fraud, countering claims that abuse is unchecked.

Bonta's investigation was prompted in part by claims that nearly 200 hospice businesses were operating out of a single address. State officials disputed that number, saying the building houses 48 licensed providers and is zoned for multiple office spaces.

Investigators are now reviewing whether those providers are actively operating, properly staffed, and maintaining patient records. Results from the latest inspection are expected in the coming weeks.

Federal authorities have also acted. Prosecutors recently charged eight individuals in connection with an alleged \$50 million hospice fraud scheme in the Los Angeles area.

Despite disagreements over responsibility, both state and federal officials acknowledge that fraud exists. California leaders are now calling for stronger coordination with Washington to improve oversight and prevent abuse across the system.

California Assembly Republican Leader, Assemblymember Heath Flora (R-Lodi) is calling for a special legislative session on fraud.

"Let's be honest. This latest announcement from the Attorney General is not proactive. It shows how large this problem became before it was stopped. I'm calling for a special session on fraud in California's state programs. Enough of the announcements while California lags behind and lets the federal government take the lead," Flora said in a statement.

"The question is simple: why did it take so long to get here? This is not limited to one program. We've seen serious concerns in hospice, Medi-Cal, high-speed rail, homelessness spending, and in-home health services, to name a few. Same pattern every time. Money goes out. Oversight doesn't keep up," he said. "Californians deserve to know how much was lost, who was supposed to be watching, and what is being done to make sure it never happens again."

The proposal would amend the California Retail Food Code. Often called "CalCode," it is a comprehensive set of laws within the California Health and Safety Code that sets uniform health, sanitation, and safety standards for all retail food facilities, including restaurants, markets, and food vendors.

Because the SB 869 expands the scope of existing crimes within the Retail Food Code, failure to display required sugar warnings would be punishable and classified as a misdemeanor.

Weber Pierson told California Black Media (CBM) that local health officials would be responsible for enforcing the new duties as part of a state-mandated local program. The bill does not apply to "mom and pop shops," she said.

"We don't want to place any undue burden on those shops," Weber-Pierson told CBM. "That is why we are focusing on 'large-chain restaurants,' defined as 20 or more restaurants."



Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego), left, conducts a sugar content demonstration at the State Capitol to promote ingredient transparency and help consumers make informed health choices by highlighting beverages that contain 50% or more of the recommended daily value for added sugar (more than 25 grams). Her bill, SB 869, would require chain restaurants to place warning labels on drinks with high added sugar content. CBM photo by Antonio Ray Harvey.

over 25 grams of added sugar, which accounts for 50% of the recommended daily limit.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require restaurants to show sugar content directly on their printed menus. While menu boards at covered establishments must display calories for each item, they are only required to provide detailed sugar content as part of additional written nutrition information available to customers upon request, according to the FDA.

SB 869 is similar to the legislation implemented in New York City. It is the first U.S. city to require chain restaurants to place warning symbols on items with over 50 grams of added sugar, aiming to curb diseases like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

"People don't need perfection handed to them—they need honesty and transparency," said Christine Fallabel, director of Government Affairs for the American Diabetes Association. "Transparency isn't about restriction, it's about respect. And respect is what turns small, informed choices into lasting, healthier lives."

While the FDA requires large chain restaurants to make some nutrition information available in restaurants, there is currently no requirement for added sugar to be publicly disclosed for restaurant foods, researchers said.

According to a report by the University of California, Davis (UC Davis), researchers discovered that warning labels reduced the probability of ordering a high-added-sugar item by 2.2%. However, only 21% of the consumers exposed to the added-sugar warning labels noticed them.

Sarah Bocter, a student from San Francisco's Galileo Academy of Science and Technology, who aspires to be a cardiologist, was one of the speakers at the news conference.

Bocter, a student volunteer for the American Heart Association, said she "hangs out with friends who like to order fun drinks and smoothies," but sometimes they are not aware of the beverages' content. She supports Weber-Pierson's bill.

"Clear icons on menu level the playing field so everyone has access to the same information," Bocter said. "I would also like to clarify that SB 869 doesn't tell anyone what to drink. It's a simple, common-sense step that respects personal choice while improving transparency."

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Sports

# Bruins Make History with Record-Setting Night at WNBA Draft



*BRUINS at the WNBA Draft -courtesy photo-*

**By Earl Heath**  
*Contributing Sports Writer*

Fresh off UCLA's first national championship, a historic group of Bruins is already moving on to the next chapter—this time at the professional level.

Six UCLA players were selected in this year's WNBA Draft, setting a new record for the most players chosen from a single program in one draft class. Even more impressive, five Bruins were taken in the first round, surpassing the previous mark of four set by UConn in 2002.

**A Historic Run for UCLA**

Center Lauren Betts led the way, going No. 4 overall to the Washington Mystics and becoming the first Bruin off the board. Betts kept things light after her selection.

"I'm not a Mystics fan," she joked. "But I think they did really good with the draft, and they may have won overall."

Gabriela Jaquez followed immediately at No. 5, landing with the Chicago Sky. Moments later, Kiki Rice made history as the Toronto Tempo's first-ever draft pick, marking a milestone not just for UCLA, but for the expansion franchise.

Angela Dugalic became the fourth Bruin selected in the top 10, further cementing UCLA's dominance in the draft's early rounds.

Gianna Kneepkens closed out the first round for UCLA, heading to the Connecticut Sun and capping off a remarkable opening stretch for the program. She'll be joined there by teammate Charisma Osborne—also known as Charlese Leger-Walker—who was selected No. 18 overall, making her the sixth and final Bruin taken.

Kneepkens reflected on the shared experience of going through the draft process alongside her teammates:

"It's been incredible. I couldn't have asked for a

better situation. To see the work they've put in and watch them reach this moment—it's amazing."

Family, Legacy, and the Next Chapter  
For Betts, the night was also about family. Surrounded by loved ones, she shared a lighthearted message for her younger sister, Sienna, who remains at UCLA.

"We don't even go to the same school anymore, so you're going to have to actually go shopping and buy some clothes for yourself—and please stop stealing mine," she said, laughing.

The moment underscored both the personal and program-wide pride surrounding UCLA's achievement.

**League-Wide Headlines**

While UCLA dominated the storyline, the top overall pick also drew attention. The Dallas Wings, holding the No. 1 selection for the second consecutive year, chose to reunite UConn stars Paige Bueckers and Azzi Fudd as they aim to return to championship contention.

Fudd is expected to earn a record-setting \$500,000 in her rookie season, following a new collective bargaining agreement between the league and the WNBA. The deal raises the WNBA salary cap to \$7 million in 2026, a significant jump from just over \$1.5 million last season.

**A Defining Moment for the Program**

For UCLA, the night was about more than draft positions—it was a statement. A national title and a record-breaking draft class signal a program firing on all cylinders and producing talent ready to make an immediate impact at the next level.

As these six Bruins begin their professional journeys, they carry with them not just individual promise, but the legacy of a team that made history together.



*Shohei Ohtani hit a leadoff home run back-to-back games vs the RANGERS*



*Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Justin Wrobleksi (70) throws New York Mets center fielder Tyrone Taylor (28) out at first in the sixth inning at Dodger Stadium. Jayne Kamin-Oncea-Imagn Images*

# Dodgers Stay Hot with Series Wins Over Rangers, Mets

**By Earl Heath**  
*Contributing Sports Writer*

The Los Angeles Dodgers continue to build momentum early in the season, taking two of three games from the Texas Rangers before opening their next series with back-to-back wins over the New York Mets.

**Walk-Off Drama at Dodger Stadium**

The weekend series against Texas delivered plenty of fireworks, starting with a dramatic Game 1 comeback.

The Rangers jumped out to a 3-1 lead in the first inning after former Dodger Corey Seager blasted a three-run home run off right-hander Tyler Glasnow. But Los Angeles responded steadily. Max Muncy launched a home run in the fourth, Hyesong Kim added a sacrifice fly in the fifth, and Andy Pages delivered a key double in the sixth to

give the Dodgers a 5-4 edge.

Game 2 proved even more thrilling.

Pages came through again with a two-run homer in the eighth inning to put the Dodgers ahead 7-4. But the ninth inning unraveled when closer Edwin Díaz allowed a leadoff single, followed by a two-run homer from Evan Carter that cut the lead to one. After recording two outs, Díaz surrendered a game-tying single to Ezequiel Durán.

That set the stage for Muncy.

With two outs in the bottom of the ninth and already two home runs on the night, Muncy fell behind 0-2 before Texas reliever Jacob Latz left a slider over the plate. Muncy crushed it 401 feet for a walk-off, three-home-run performance, sealing an 8-7 Dodgers victory.

The Dodgers dropped the series finale, though Shohei Ohtani continued to shine, leading off the

game with a home run—his second consecutive game opening with a long ball.

**Strong Start Against Struggling Mets**

Los Angeles carried that momentum into its series against New York.

In Game 1, Justin Wrobleksi delivered a dominant outing, tossing two-hit ball over a career-high eight innings in a 4-0 win. He struck out two, walked none, and needed just 90 pitches—64 for strikes—to keep the Mets' offense in check.

Andy Pages stayed hot at the plate, launching a three-run homer, while Ohtani extended his on-base streak to 47 games after being hit by a pitch in the first inning. The mark ties him with Ron Cey for the second-longest on-base streak in Dodgers history.

Game 2 featured a tight pitchers' duel between Yoshinobu Yamamoto and rookie Nolan McLean.

The game remained deadlocked until the eighth inning, when the Dodgers pushed across the go-ahead run en route to a 2-1 victory.

The Mets' struggles continued, as the loss marked their seventh straight. During that stretch, New York has been outscored 36-10, dropping to 7-11 and into last place in the National League East.

**Building Early-Season Momentum**

With strong pitching performances, timely hitting, and standout moments from stars like Muncy, Ohtani, and Pages, the Dodgers are showing signs of a team finding its rhythm early.

As the season progresses, Los Angeles appears poised to remain a force in the National League—combining power at the plate with consistency on the mound.

# Rossi, Foster to Be Inducted into Long Beach Motorsports Walk of Fame

**By Earl Heath**  
*Contributing Sports Writer*

Long Beach will celebrate two influential figures in racing and public service this week as NTT IndyCar Series driver Alexander Rossi and former Mayor Bob Foster are inducted into the Long Beach Motorsports Walk of Fame.

The ceremony will take place in front of the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center on South Pine Avenue, adding two more names to a landmark that honors individuals who have left a lasting impact on the city's rich motorsports legacy.

**Honoring Leadership and Civic Impact**

Bob Foster, who served as mayor of Long Beach from 2006 to 2014, is being recognized not only for his support of motorsports in the city but also for his broader civic leadership.

A graduate of San José State University, Foster went on to serve as a trustee for the California State University system from 1997 to 2006. In 2015, he received an honorary Doctor of Human Letters degree from his alma mater.

Known for his direct, no-nonsense leadership style, Foster built a reputation for fiscal discipline and accountability. During his time in office, he guided Long Beach through the 2008 financial crisis while advancing environmental initiatives and improving city operations.

Former Congressman Robert Garcia praised Foster's legacy, noting:

"As mayor of Long Beach for eight years, Bob transformed the city into an economic powerhouse, led us through the 2008 financial crisis, signed historic agreements to clean our air and water, and



*Alexander Rossi will try to win his third Grand Prix in Long Beach. Photo Credit: Penske Entertainment | Chris Owens*

made city government more efficient and responsive to residents."

**A Racing Star with Local Ties**

Joining Foster is Alexander Rossi, a Southern California native and accomplished driver in the NTT IndyCar Series.

Rossi, born September 25, 1991, has built an international racing résumé that includes competing in five Formula One Grands Prix in 2015. He also raced in the GP2 Asia Series early in his career, where he quickly turned heads with a fourth-place finish in his debut race after starting 13th on the grid.

Closer to home, Rossi is best known for his success on the streets of Long Beach. He is a two-time winner of the Grand Prix of Long Beach, one of the most prestigious races on the IndyCar calendar.

His achievements and continued presence in the sport make him a fitting addition to the Walk of Fame, which celebrates those who have helped shape Long Beach's identity as a premier motorsports destination.

**Continuing a Storied Tradition**

The Long Beach Motorsports Walk of Fame stands as a tribute to the drivers, pioneers, and leaders who have contributed to the city's racing heritage. With the induction of Foster and Rossi, that legacy continues to grow—bridging past leadership with present-day excellence on the track.

Attendees are encouraged to park in the Pine Avenue garage south of Seaside Way for the ceremony.

Local

# Building Bridges of Support:

## How AAPI Equity Alliance Is Strengthening California's Anti-Hate Network

By Edward Henderson  
California Black Media

*When Aurelle Garner stepped out of her car one summer evening and saw a group of youths marching down her street, her stomach dropped.*

What had begun as slurs hurled at her and her transgender children at a local park had escalated to violent pounding on their front door. Garner said that, before that incident, local law enforcement had repeatedly minimized her reports of harassment.

It was not until she contacted the Legal Department at The LGBTQ Center Long Beach that her family finally found help.

"I don't know where we'd be if it weren't for their help," Garner, who lives in Southern California, said. "They didn't just give legal advice. They helped us navigate a system that had otherwise dismissed us."

That support exists because The LGBTQ Center Long Beach does not work in isolation.

The Center partners with the AAPI Equity Alliance under California's Stop the Hate program, a statewide coalition aimed at preventing hate and supporting survivors.

As the Los Angeles County Regional Lead, AAPI Equity Alliance works with the Center and dozens of other community-based organizations to connect people to legal aid, mental health services, and support. The programs also work in tandem with CA vs Hate, the state's anti-hate hotline and virtual reporting system that connects people across California with organizations like the LGBTQ Center Long Beach — that provide support services.

Garner's experience illustrates the kind of harm that often falls outside the narrow legal definition of a hate crime but still leaves families traumatized and unsafe. It also shows how AAPI Equity Alliance's leadership in the Stop the Hate ecosystem translates state funding and policy into real, on-the-ground support.

In May 2022, Patricia Roque said she and her parents were attacked after a late-night stop at a fast-food drive-thru in Southern California. After hitting their car, the other driver pulled alongside them and mocked them using a racist Asian accent. Then, he threatened to kill them. The situation escalated when the man returned while the family was waiting for police and assaulted Roque's father, fracturing his rib and choking her mother before bystanders intervened.

"The police arrived long after it was over," Roque told California Black Media (CBM). "By then, the damage was already done."

The following day, Roque's family was connected to the Filipino Migrant Center (FMC), a community-based organization that has received Stop the Hate funding and works within the broader AAPI Equity Alliance network. FMC provided immediate support -- helping the family navigate legal options, organizing emergency financial assistance to cover medical bills and missed work, and offering emotional and community care while the criminal case unfolded.

"But the process is long and complicated. When you need help right away, that delay is a huge barrier. FMC was there immediately," Roque said.

The criminal case did not result in the accountability the family hoped for. But Roque said the support she received transformed her relationship to her community and to advocacy.

"Before this, I wasn't involved in organizing at all," she said. "Through this process, I realized my voice mattered. FMC helped turn something traumatic into a way to support others and push for change."

Stories like Garner's and Roque's are part of a much larger reckoning that began at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders across the country experienced a surge in harassment, discrimination, and violence fueled by racist rhetoric.

In response, AAPI Equity Alliance partnered with San Francisco's Chinese for Affirmative Action and the Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University to launch Stop AAPI Hate in March 2020. Since then, the project has collected more than 9,000 reports nationwide documenting incidents ranging from verbal harassment and workplace discrimination to physical assault and child bullying.

"People tend to think about hate only when it turns violent," said Kiran Bhalla of AAPI Equity Alliance. "But there are everyday acts of discrimination that people endure constantly. Without some kind of recourse, that harm just keeps going."

The data helped spur unprecedented action in California. In 2021, the State Legislature passed the \$165.5 million Asian Pacific Islander Equity Budget, signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom. Of that total, \$110 million was dedicated to victim services, education, and outreach. In August 2023, California invested an additional \$40 million to expand California's Stop the Hate program to serve a broader range of communities affected by hate and discrimination.

Today, the program supports roughly 100 nonprofit organizations statewide. As Los Angeles County Regional Lead, AAPI Equity Alliance coordinates grantees, facilitates cross-community collaboration, and helps ensure services reach those most impacted.

A recently released survey estimated that approximately 3.1 million Californians directly experienced hate, with Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders, Black or African Americans, and other communities of color, including Asian Americans, among those most likely to experience hate.

Black Californians, however, remain the most targeted group when it comes to reported hate crimes.

Nearly 48% of Asian American and Pacific Islander adults in California reported experiencing a hate incident in 2024, according to Stop AAPI Hate research. Most incidents were not criminal, leaving survivors with little recourse through the legal system.

That gap is precisely where AAPI Equity Alliance and its partners focus their work. The Stop the Hate framework prioritizes non-carceral responses, recognizing that policing alone often fails survivors and can further harm Black, brown, and immigrant communities.

Instead, the work centers on data and research, policy advocacy, community care, and public education. Through school-based programs, legal advocacy, emergency assistance, and survivor-centered services, the network aims to interrupt cycles of harm before they escalate.

For survivors like Garner and Roque, that support has made the difference between enduring trauma in silence and finding a path toward healing and collective power.

"When people experience hate, there's often a profound sense of isolation," Bhalla said. "This work helps people get back to school, back to work, back to their lives. It reminds them they're not alone."

### Get Support After Hate:

California vs Hate is a non-emergency, multilingual hotline and online portal offering confidential support for hate crimes and incidents. Victims and witnesses can get help anonymously by calling 833-8-NO-HATE (833-866-4283), Monday to Friday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. PT, or online at any time. Anonymous. Confidential. No Police. No ICE.

This story was produced in partnership with CA vs Hate. Join them for the first-ever CA Civil Rights Summit on May 11, 2026. More information at [www.cavshate.org/summit](http://www.cavshate.org/summit)



Filipino Migrant Center stands in solidarity against Anti-Asian Violence (Courtesy of AAPI Equity Alliance)



Patricia Roque (Courtesy of AAPI Equity Alliance)



Aurelle Garner, who received services from The LGBTQ Center Long Beach (Sponsored by AAPI Equity Alliance) to aid her transgender children. (Courtesy of AAPI Equity Alliance)



Patricia Roque (far right) pictured with her family at a Stop Asian Hate rally after her father's assault (far left). (Courtesy of AAPI Equity Alliance)

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