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MEAC football TV show broadcasts from Durham for NCCU's homecoming.

HEALTH NEWS

Increasing diversity in cancer clinical trials

NORTH AMERICAN PRECIS SYNDICATE

There's good news, bad news and better news about combating cancer in America these days. The good news is there's been an overall decline in U.S. cancer deaths since 1991.

The bad news is not all patients have benefited equally from advances in prevention, early detection and precision medicine. One study found that around 8.1% of cancer patients participate in a clinical trial. Of those, FDA data show that only 4% of clinical trial participants are Black and 5% are Hispanic.

What's more, minority groups overall in the U.S. have both the highest death rate and shortest survival rate for most cancers. These inequities in cancer care have been ongoing for decades, due in part to socioeconomic barriers, insufficient information about trials and their benefits, as well as other challenges.

The better news is a major funder of cancer research is working to tackle cancer disparities. Stand Up To Cancer, which raises money to accelerate the pace of research to get new therapies to patients quickly and save lives now, began formalizing its

Please see **CANCER/2A**

NC's nurses are at breaking point

By Heidi Perez-Moreno

UNC MEDIA HUB

RALEIGH — In short breaks throughout her work shift, Donna Cranford will find time to sort through stacks of patient files towering over her nursing station cubicle. The stacks grow as the day goes on at the Preston Medical Associates' busy nursing station. She makes mental notes of the million and one tasks she needs to do. The light on the office phone won't stop blinking red with unanswered voicemails and calls.

It is difficult to attend to menial paperwork when you have dozens of patients to see. "There's always something that can happen in the clinic that's going to deviate you from that," Cranford said. On most days, Cranford will power through the day's work so that she can get home to her husband and son. But some days are harder than others.

Waking up and realizing she has to go to work will trigger anxiety and nerves. Putting on her scrubs takes more mental stamina. Sometimes the bags under her eyes haven't yet deflated from the day before. "Truthfully, there are many days that are hard," Cranford said. "But I love what I do. It's important to me to be here for the patients and for my teammates because, when one of us is down, it only causes additional stress for those of us working at the department."

On a typical day, Preston Medical Associates will see as many as 125 patients, leaving the load to be split among the three licensed practitioners at the clinic. Cranford sits at one of the station's four desks – directly across from the only other nurse working the Friday shift. A third nurse originally scheduled to work has taken a personal day. Since the pandemic began, two open nursing practitioner positions have remained unfilled.

"It doesn't necessarily impact the amount of patients we are seeing, but it does put a lot of extra responsibility in and work on the two nurses that are remaining," said Schquithia Peacock, who co-owns Preston Medical Associates. "They're often there after the five o'clock hour, which is when we typically stop."

Preston Medical Associates isn't alone in facing this shortage. Across North Carolina, nurses at major hospital systems, private practices and clinics are struggling to hire nurses.

Plase see **WAR/2A**

Thank You Veterans

COURTESY

Elaine O'Neal is congratulated by supporters and well-wishers Tuesday night.

Durham makes history following Tuesday's election

By Kylie Marsh

CORRESPONDENT

DURHAM – Durham's city leadership has set an historic example for cities across the country as women of color sweep the city's top positions. Newly elected mayor Elaine O'Neal, police chief Patrice Andrews, city manager Wanda Page, and city attorney Kim Rehberg are all Black women. Durham County District Attorney Santana Deberry is also a Black woman.

Rehberg

Durham welcomed its first Black female mayor as polls closed on Tuesday night. Making history is not uncommon for O'Neal. She was the first Black woman to be named Chief District Court Judge and Superior Court Judge in the county.

During her extensive law career, she worked tirelessly for the rights of Durham's LGBTQ+ community and to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline as chair of Durham Public Schools' Superintendent's Code of Student Conduct Task Force. She also served as chair of the city's Racial Equity Task Force and as an interim dean for the NCCU School of Law.

O'Neal's mission as mayor is to "#uniteDurham," addressing the disparity in the inequitable distribution of economic opportunities the city has seen in the past decade. She invites all parties to the conversation and strategizes that public-private partnerships will benefit the city's most vulnerable.

"I'm grateful, just grateful, to be the next mayor of our fine city in Durham, North Carolina. I'm truly motivated by how much we can and will accomplish when we all – when we all – come together and make Durham a city that

Please see **ELECTION/2A**

Locate your money with help from North Carolina's Treasurer

By Dale Folwell

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Have you ever been owed money – maybe a refund from a business, security deposit from a landlord or the return of a deposit from a utility company – and never received it? Could you be owed a tax refund that never arrived? Or maybe you never got that last paycheck from a former employer?

If so, the Department of State Treasurer may have some of your money. Even if those specific situations don't apply to you, it is still quite possible that there is unclaimed cash in your name – and as State Treasurer, I want you to have it.

As keeper of the public purse, I oversee DST's Unclaimed Property Division, which safeguards $919 million belonging to North Carolinians just like you. This property comes from forgotten bank accounts, insurance policies, refunds and stocks. We even maintain physical items found in abandoned bank safe deposit boxes.

STOCK PHOTO

Here at the State Treasurer's Office, we are in the check delivery business, which includes not just putting your missing cash back in your pocket but sending out more than $750 million in monthly pension and health care benefits to state retirees.

Returning unclaimed property is one of the most impor-

Please see **LOCATE/2A**

REPORT

Hospitals falling short on charity care

By Gary D. Robertson

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — Many North Carolina nonprofit hospitals are falling short in treating the poor for free or reduced rates to validate their tax-exempt status, State Treasurer Dale Folwell said last week while highlighting a university report on charity care.

Johns Hopkins University expanded its national analysis on hospital care for low-income residents to focus on North Carolina hospitals with the help of the State Health Plan, which covers medical costs for state employees, teachers, retirees and dependents. Folwell's agency oversees the plan.

The report found that the state's largest nonprofit hospital systems received more than $1.8 billion in estimated federal, state and local tax breaks for a 12-month period ending in 2019 or 2020, depending on how a system's finances are accounted. But charity care spending — expenses for which they don't expect to receive payment — for a majority of these systems failed to exceed 60% of the value of the system's tax breaks.

Those that failed to reach that 60% threshold included Duke Health, Vidant Health and Novant Health, according to the report, which examined financial records and information filed with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. WakeMed exceeded its tax-break value. Of the several dozen nonprofit hospitals in the state, fewer than 25 exceeded their tax exemption values with charity-care spending, the report said.

Nonprofits, which can retain revenues left over after expenses, are supposed to provide significant community benefits to justify their tax status to the IRS, the report said. They can avoid paying property or income taxes, or get reimbursed for state and local sales taxes. "The question is why should the taxpayers continue to subsidize these nonprofit hospitals?" asked Ge Bai, a professor at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School and Bloomberg School of Public Health involved in the analysis. "Why should local communities be deprived of their property tax revenues and other tax revenues that would allow them to fund local schools, parks and other public services?"

The North Carolina Healthcare Association, which represents for-profit and nonprofit hospitals and hospital system, didn't immediately have a response about the report's detailed finding. But it said the study didn't

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Durham makes history after Tuesday's election

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works for all of us," O'Neal said at her celebration party Tuesday night in Durham.


Andrews


Page

Andrews leaves the same position in Morrisville, a position she held since 2016. Andrews is no stranger to Durham, having previously served for almost 20 years with the Durham Police Department. She quickly rose through the ranks, holding the positions of district commander to captain, supervising Special Victims, Homicide, Fraud and Domestic Violence units.

In addition, Andrews was a sergeant working with Durham's gangs and narcotics units, holding the positions of detective corporal, investigative corporal and police corporal in the city's Special Operations Division.

City Manager Wanda Page spoke highly of Andrews, stating that she impressed the panel of community faith leaders, business owners, and other leading law enforcement officials tasked with the nationwide search for Durham's chief of police.

Page earned her master's degree at North Carolina Central University. Her lengthy career in Durham's finance started in the late 1980s, when she worked her way up the ranks from a senior staff accountant to assistant finance director to internal audit director. In 2008, Page rook the role of one of the city's three deputy city managers. She was promoted to interim city manager last August and confirmed permanently earlier this year.

City Attorney Kim Rehberg has worked for the city for almost 17 years. She began her legal career after earning her JD at Duke University, serving as senior assistant city attorney in the late '90s and advancing to deputy attorney in 2019. Rehberg was appointed city attorney in 2019. She is tasked with providing legal counsel for the city and its leadership bodies.

These historical achievements highlight Durham's investment in uplifting people of all backgrounds and is one step closer to a more equitable future for all.

NC nonprofit hospitals falling short on charity care

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reflect many other financial benefits that hospitals provide to their coverage areas, including research, health worker training, in-kind donations and preparations for local disasters. "North Carolina's nonprofit hospitals annually submit audits to state and federal tax regulators who determine each year that hospitals meet their tax status obligations," the association said in a written statement.

The association said North Carolina hospitals and hospital systems provided $1.1 billion in charity care overall in 2019 and took close to $3.5 billion in combined losses to treat patients covered by Medicaid and Medicare. Bai said including such Medicaid and Medicare figures in charity totals can be misleading. The State Health Plan spends $3 billion on health care and pharmacy services annually to cover up to 750,000 people.

Folwell, a Republican reelected in 2020, has been critical of large, ever-consolidating hospital systems for what he calls excessive and opaque pricing while he's working to control plan costs. The plan has been told often that health care expenses are higher in part because the costs are used to cover care for the uninsured and underinsured, the report said.

The report said North Carolina policymakers could require certain levels of charity care, as some other states have done, with consequences for failing to meet them, such as limiting or rescinding tax-favored treatment. "We need solid, accountable and auditable benchmarks for what (the) definition of charitable care is so that the average person can figure out whether these entities are actually earning the right to continue to be nonprofit entities," Folwell told reporters.

Locate your money with help from NC's treasurer

Continued from page 1A

tant functions of my office. Our objective is to make sure every penny gets back into the hands of the people of North Carolina. That's why searching for property and filing claims is always free at NCCash.com, the official website of UPD.

Many individuals, families, businesses and organizations across North Carolina have received funds through our unclaimed property system. Some of these recipients, such as the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle in Raleigh, have used these funds to help those in need.

In 2020, representatives from the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle visited the State Treasurer's Office to receive a $2,550 check from UPD. They told us that food costs have soared during the pandemic, but these funds would go a long way to help them meet the needs of their community. We have returned money to the Carolina Panthers, which donated the windfall to Safe Alliance, a nonprofit serving individuals

and families in the Charlotte area. We have presented unclaimed property checks to the Thalian Association Community Theatre in Wilmington's officially designated community theater, and so many more individuals and organizations.

There are over 18 million records at NCCash.com, including lots of entries for nonprofits. We're constantly looking for nonprofits all over North Carolina who have cash at NCCash.com. It's a simple thing; we are just returning money to the people, businesses and organizations it belongs to.

As much as we greatly enjoy it, it's somewhat of a guilty pleasure because we don't want to have that money in our possession to distribute. We are dedicated to making sure your money doesn't stay in the government's hands forever, and want to send out as much of this money as we can, as quickly as we can, to its rightful owners.

That's why we need your help. Even if you don't think you are owed money, there's no harm in checking. We have more properties in our possession than there are people in North Carolina, so your odds of having money just waiting to be claimed are much higher than playing the lottery.

Please visit NCCash.com, DST's official website for unclaimed property. On that site, you can safely search for your name, as well as the names of your friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, church or charitable group to see if you or anyone you know are owed money by the state. Anyone with unclaimed property can file a claim for free at NCCash.com.

If you would prefer to call instead, our unclaimed property hotline is available at 866-NC-CASH1 (866-622-2741). Our knowledgeable staff will be happy to help you search for property and file a claim over the phone.

Have you ever lived in a state other than North Carolina? Every state has its own unclaimed property office, usually housed within their state treasury departments. It is a good idea to check with the unclaimed property office of every state where you have lived as they may have some money with your name on it.


NAPS

Increasing diversity in cancer clinical trials

Continued from page 1A

Health Equity Initiative in 2017. The initiative aims to increase minority representation in cancer clinical trials and ensure new cancer treatments are effective for all.

Moving forward, SU2C-funded research teams will be required to address issues related to recruitment and retention of patients from minority groups to improve diverse participation in cancer clinical trials.

"As one of the leading funders of cancer research, we believe it is our duty to ensure that minority representation in cancer clinical trials is addressed. Now, more than ever, better understanding of the role of biology in cancer treatment, advances in precision treatment, and development of new technologies demands that we also make significant improvements in diverse clinical trial participation," explained SU2C CEO Sung Poblete. "We are confident that this initiative will make a significant and meaningful impact to ensure all communities have equal access to potentially life-saving treatments."

SU2C is collaborating with a number of industry leaders who are also committed to improving cancer disparities, including Genentech, Exact Sciences, Bristol Myers Squibb and Amgen.

Funding from these donors supports SU2C's Health Equity Initiative, including cancer screening and clinical trial awareness efforts as well as research into specific types of cancers that disproportionately impact people of color.

Another collaboration with the Black Women's Health Imperative and Friends of Cancer Research is Project TEACH, which will empower Black women to effectively engage with researchers and clinicians as well as increase participation of Black women in cancer-focused clinical trials. Project TEACH is supported by the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute.

"Bringing a diverse patient population into the clinical trials arena is complex," said Dr. Edith A. Perez, professor of medicine at Mayo Clinic. "As a part of this effort, Stand Up To Cancer is amplifying the conversation around health equity so that researchers, institutions and cancer research funders join this effort and become more engaged in increasing diversity in cancer clinical trials, similar to Stand Up To Cancer's successes in normalizing collaboration across cancer research."

For further facts and stats about Stand Up To Cancer, go to www. StandUpToCancer.org.

LUCAS PRUITT

Schquthia Peacock at the Preston Medical Associates office in Cary.

'We've been in this war for almost two years now'

Continued from page 1A

In Wake County alone, there are roughly 800 vacancies for nursing positions at WakeMed Hospitals, hospital spokesperson Debra Z. Laughery said.

A September survey by the North Carolina Nurses Association found that, among more than 450 respondents, the majority reported feeling additional stress and burnout due to the pandemic and nursing shortage. Around 58% of respondents reported experiencing shortages in their workplace. "Has it had an impact? Absolutely — it limits our ability to be able to take care of patients," said Dennis Taylor, who formerly served as president of the N.C. Nurses Association.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it felt as though nurses were adapting to the demand of working additional hours and handling viral caseloads among patients. Taylor, who is a trauma ICU nurse at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist, said nurses were learning to adapt, including hopscotching to different departments based on staffing needs. "They were very good at adapting to changing their roles and potentially working in areas that they might not necessarily have been educated in," Taylor said. "Basically, just pitching in and doing whatever needed to be done to take care of the patients that needed to be taken care of."

The distribution of the vaccine, which began in December, provided a glimmer of hope. By spring, COVID-19 case counts were decreasing. But, months later, hospitalization and ICU capacity rates were rising again following a surge of delta variant cases. Nurses faced a second COVID-19 wave, having barely recovered from the first. "People are tired," said Meka Douthit, director of nursing at Cone Health in Greensboro and current president of the state Nurses Association. "We've been in this war — it's like a war-zone — for almost two years now."

The UNC Health system reported over 1,000 registered nurses openings in August. Nursing turnover had increased from 17.8% in 2019 to 19.5% in 2020, according to a national survey from Nursing Solutions Inc. But staffing shortages among nurses isn't only linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. It only made the issue ever so clear.

One of the biggest contributors to the shortage is a decline in nurse educators able to train and recruit incoming nurses to the field. Only 3% of nurses in North Carolina are also educators out of about 125,000 practitioners working across the state, according to research from the N.C. Board of Nursing. But it's not that there's a lack of interest in the field. Getting into nursing school is increasingly competitive, and many schools turn prospective practitioners away. Salaries for nurse educators are also, on average, lower than what they could be making at a hospital or private practice. "Nursing is having a really difficult time right now recognizing nurse educators as a profession within itself," Taylor said.

Civil rights groups sue over North Carolina redistricting

By Lynn Bonner
THE POLICY WATCH

The state NAACP, Common Cause, and individual voters are suing key Republican legislators and the state Board of Elections, saying the way the legislature is drawing new districts violates the law. They are asking a judge to tell the Board of Elections to the delay the candidate filing period and next spring's primary to give the legislature time to use a constitutional process to draw new plans.

The legislature held public hearings on redistricting plans last week, but it has not voted on any. Legislative committees are set to debate redistricting proposals next week. Republicans posted new proposed maps for state Senate districts and congressional seats. The congressional map appears to be different from any available for the public hearings.

Multiple lawsuits over the decades have forced legislatures to draw and redraw election districts.

Lawyers for Republican legislators have argued to courts in the past when their plans are challenged that there was no time to make changes, said Allison Riggs, chief counsel for voting rights at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice. "The legislature is running out the clock," she said.

Senate leader Phil Berger's office and House Speaker Tim Moore's office did not respond to emails. In a tweet, Rep. Destin Hall, the House Redistricting Committee chairman, said, "The Democrats Sue Til Blue strategy has become so desperate that they are now suing BEFORE maps are even passed."

In 2017, the state lost a case over its congressional map, with courts deciding that the plan was an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. In 2019, judges threw out legislative maps for being unconstitutional partisan gerrymanders. Republicans said as redistricting got underway this year that they would draw maps without considering data on partisanship or race. They refused to do a study of racially-polarized voting, which Democrats said was needed. At public hearings last week, voters pushed back, saying legislators can easily identify voting blocs without using data.

Republican mapmakers failed to follow instructions in a state Supreme Court decision from 2002 requiring legislators draw districts that comply with the federal Voting Rights Act before they draw other districts. Voting Rights Act districts give voters of color the opportunity to elect candidates of their choice.

"We need a court to recognize that our clients have rights that are already being violated," Riggs told reporters. "North Carolina cannot handle another decade of unconstitutional maps. The harm that that does to our democracy is one that we've been feeling the ramifications of for 10 years. It's too much, and we're going to start fighting back today."

'Dark and scary times' for public education

By Greg Childress
THE POLICY WATCH

After four years of President Donald Trump, a global pandemic, and a culture war fueled by the false narrative that Critical Race Theory is taught in public schools, educators and their progressive allies are exhausted and understandably so, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones told attendees of the 2021 Color of Education Virtual Summit.

But America is in a "dangerous period," Hannah-Jones warned, so educators and their allies must brush back fatigue to fight against a well-organized effort to discredit public education. "The right [conservatives] is extremely organized," Hannah-Jones said. "We're looking at the takeover of school boards, efforts to set state policy around curricula, what can and can't be taught."

Hannah-Jones also took aim at the media, charging that the profession is failing the nation at a time when it's needed most. "We cannot treat this as business as usual; as "both-sides-ism" when one side does not actually believe in majority rule and democracy, but we are doing that," she said.

Across the country, the year has been marked by protests at school board meetings over face mask mandates and CRT despite repeated science-based directives from public health officials and educators' assurance that the obscure academic discipline that examines how American racism has shaped law and public policy isn't taught in K-12 classrooms.

Hannah-Jones said progressives must counter such propaganda with facts and evidence.

"You have to be well-prepared," she said. "If they are organizing folks to go to school board meetings and talk for two hours about anti-CRT, then you need to organize people to go to school board meetings and talk for two hours about why it's important for our children to learn an accurate [history]."

In 2018, Hannah-Jones was the inaugural keynote speaker for Color of Education event. She warned the audience then that her presentation wouldn't leave them feeling optimistic about the future of public education. Little has changed since that time, and in fact, the future of public education appears bleaker. "I'm worse [more pessimistic] than I was before," she said. "It's been a long five years. A lot has happened and if you look at the indicators of educational equality, we haven't seen improvement."

This year, North Carolina's Republican-led General Assembly joined with legislatures in multiple states in passing legislation to restrict what could be taught in K-12 schools about America's racial history. Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed GOP-backed House Bill 324 in September saying it "pushes calculated, conspiracy-laden politics into public education."

Hannah-Jones lived in the Triangle for six years. Her first journalism job was in 2003 covering the Durham Public Schools in the Durham bureau of The News & Observer. The county was about a decade past a volatile school merger that unified the wealthier, majority-white county schools district and the poorer, mostly Black city schools. "I was spending my time in schools where every single kid was Black, every single kid was poor, and administrators and teachers were working their asses off and were unable, clearly, to produce the same results of schools where only 10% or 20% of kids were living in poverty, and that had every resource in the world," she told the 2018 audience.

In this week's presentation, Hannah-Jones agreed that the political landscape around public education in North Carolina has shifted dramatically — and not for the better — since she was a young reporter covering public schools in Durham. In addition, Hannah-Jones said education funding in the state has been slashed and the cap, or maximum number, has been lifted on charter schools, further promoting segregation.

"A place like Wake County that for years was a model of integration is now losing white population who are now going to majority-white charter schools," she said. "So, I think that a lot has changed. Where North Carolina was really a progressive state for a Southern state, it has lost any semblance of that progressiveness in its state politics."

BUSINESS BRIEFS

NETWORKING
Ambition in Heels Second Annual Sip and Shop is Nov. 7, 2-8 p.m., Holiday Inn Suites, Airport Boulevard, Morrisville. Call (919) 862-6849 for vendor info.

FALL FEST
Fall Fest at Bowstring is Nov. 7, 1-6 p.m., 1930 Wake Forest Road.

LAUNCH WENDELL
Town of Wendell and Wake Tech have partnered to create LaunchWENDELL to help 10-20 entrepreneurs and small business owners execute a business plan.

To learn more, visit www.launchwendell.com.

GDBCC
* Nov. 9, noon to 1 p.m. – Safiya Allsop, director of operations and programs, Walker's Legacy, is the next guest speaker at the Greater Durham Black Chamber of Commerce Speaker Series. Register at gdbccss7.eventbrite.com.

* Nov. 12, noon to 1 p.m. – Raafe Purnsley, community outreach coordinator at Durham Co-op Market, will discuss exploring co-ops as a startup. Register at coop101.eventbrite.com.

RALEIGH CHAMBER
* Nov. 17, 9-11 a.m. – Courageous Conversation: Code Switching. Register at raleighchamber.org. No refunds after Nov. 10.

EMPLOYMENT
Our StopShopBuyBlack Market is hiring staff. Apply at ourstopshop.com/bbmhiring.

LOCATION
Zweli and Leonardo "Leo" Williams will open a third Durham location at American Tobacco Campus next summer. Zweli's Ekhaya will completely transform the space formerly occupied by Saladelia in the Crowe Lobby.

Send business briefs to info@triangletribune.com.

MATT YORK/AP

Kisha Gulley appears with her sons Sebastian, 2, left, and Santana, 5, in Phoenix.

Women of color growing force as mom influencers

By Astrid Galvan
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — Kisha Gulley was once kicked out of a Facebook group for mothers with autistic children after a contentious debate she felt was racial. Over and over, she clashed with the white-dominated groups she'd sought out for support as a new mom. So Gulley, who is Afro Latina, started her own parenting blog and social media accounts. It's now a source of income for her.

The multibillion-dollar world of sleep training guides, toddler activity ideas, breastfeeding tips and all things parenting has traditionally been overwhelmingly white. Parenting book jackets feature mostly white faces. The so-called mom influencers that brands choose to advertise their products have, until recently, also been mostly white.

This has left a hole for women of color — especially new moms — who struggle to find culturally relevant parenting advice and products. Increasingly, they're taking matters into their own hands. "If I can't find it, that's when we have to start creating that for ourselves. I knew I couldn't be the only person that had these questions," said Gulley, who lives in Phoenix.

When she learned her firstborn son was autistic, Gulley dove deeply into research, digging for any resources that might help her family. And even though there was a lot of information out there, there were small but significant questions that many experts couldn't answer.

How, for example, could she comb through her son's thickly-textured hair without triggering his sensory issues? What's a good sunscreen to use on dark skin that doesn't leave white residue?

It was a frustrating time for her that climaxed in the Facebook group when she felt that several white women were dismissive and rude to a Black mom who had sought advice about how to talk to her family about her child's autism diagnosis. The women didn't grasp that in some communities of color, older generations can be apprehensive about autism and tend to think issues come down to behavior and discipline. Gulley defended the mom, and was kicked out of the group. She grew her own social media presence soon after, and now makes a living from it, earning more now than she did in her 15 years as a flight attendant, she said.

For Stacey Ferguson, the need for diverse parenting voices has been top of mind for many years. She struggled to find online forums and communities that resonated with her experiences as a Black mother. Ferguson, a lawyer by training who is now a business owner, founded Blogalicious, an organization and annual conference that helped women of color monetize and grow their blogs, 12 years ago.

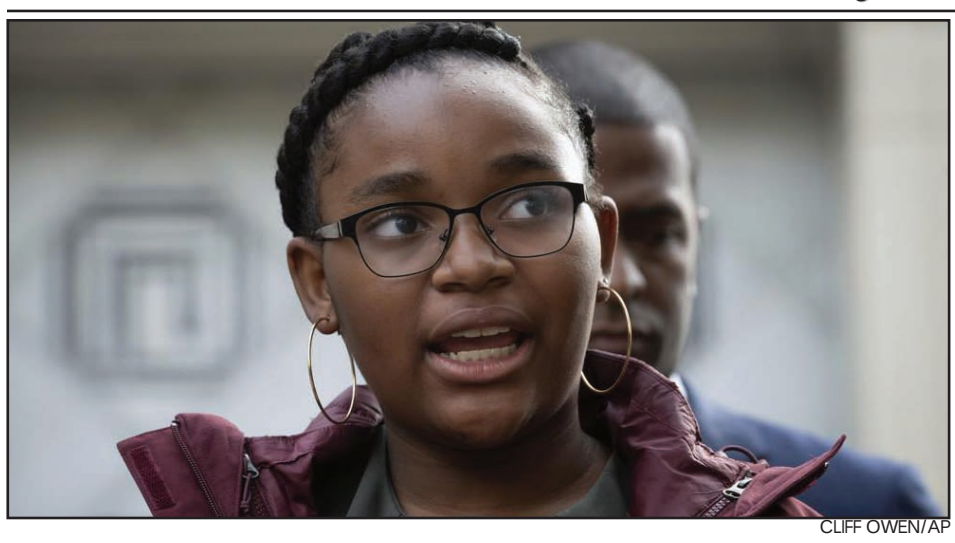
The first Blogalicious conference drew 177 people; by the time Ferguson decided to shut them down in 2017, 500 people attended each year. "There really was like this feeling of magic in the room. And what we were really surprised about was that a lot of brands were really interested to come and meet our community," Ferguson said.

Over the years, mommy bloggers have evolved into Instagram influencers. Carefully curated images accompany posts with tips on how to get a baby to sleep or teach them to feed themselves. Often, influencers advertise products they say moms might find helpful. The trend was started mostly by white women and the brands that sought them out. Ferguson says the landscape is much more diverse now, and brands are more intentional about reaching a diverse range of parents.

But a problem persists. Marketing budgets are much more limited for multicultural targets than for general advertising, Ferguson said. Traditionally, white women have been paid to market to general audiences. That means a white mom could earn much more money marketing to an audience of all ethnicities and races than a woman who markets specifically to, say, Latina moms. "It's still that archaic way of looking at marketing," Ferguson said. "The brands and the agencies that understand (the need to diversify) are making progress. The issue is that there's still so many that are behind."

There's no consensus on just how much brands and companies spend on advertising or sponsoring through mom influencers, but several marketing experts said it's in the billions each year. Brands are just now catching up to the Latino and Black American markets, said Larry Chiagouris, a professor of marketing at Lubin School of Business at Pace University.

Chiagouris said the parenting influencer world has been dominated by white women because they've been the majority in the past, but that he's increasingly seeing Latinas, Black and Asian American women joining the sphere. "It's like a chicken and an egg situation. Marketers want to spend money on Latino influencers, but you have to find them. There's not as many as you might think," Chiagouris said.



CLIFF OWEN/AP

Malana Pinckney, 12, a daughter of Reverend Clementa Pinckney who was killed in the 2015 Mother Emanuel AME Church shooting, speaks with reporters outside the Justice Department.

Victims of SC church massacre get settlement

By Meg Kinnard
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Families of nine victims killed in a racist attack at a Black South Carolina church have reached a settlement with the Justice Department over a faulty background check that allowed Dylann Roof to purchase the gun he used in the 2015 massacre.

The Justice Department will pay $88 million, which includes $63 million for the families of the nine people killed and $25 million for five survivors who were inside the church at the time of the shooting.

Bakari Sellers, an attorney who helped broker the agreement, told The Associated Press the "88" figure was purposeful. It's a number typically associated with white supremacy and the number of bullets Roof said he had taken with him to the attack. "We've given a big 'F you' to white supremacy and racism," Sellers told the AP. "We're doing that by building generational wealth in these Black communities, from one of the most horrific race crimes in the country."

According to the Justice Department, settlements for the families of those killed range from $6 million to $7.5 million per claimant. Survivors' settlements are $5 million per claimant. Months before the June 17, 2015, church shooting, Roof was arrested on Feb. 28 by Columbia, South Carolina, police on a drug possession charge. But a series of clerical errors and missteps allowed Roof to buy the handgun he later used in the massacre.

The errors included wrongly listing the sheriff's office as the arresting agency in the drug case, according to court documents. An examiner with the National Instant Criminal Background Check System found some information on the arrest but needed more to deny the sale, so she sent a fax to a sheriff's office. The sheriff's office responded it didn't have the report, directing her to the Columbia police.

Under the system's operating procedures, the examiner was directed to a federal listing of law enforcement agencies, but Columbia police did not appear on the list. After trying the separate West Columbia Police Department and being told it was the wrong agency, the examiner did nothing more. After a three-day waiting period, Roof went back to a West Columbia store to pick up the handgun.

The lawsuit for a time was thrown out, with a judge writing that an examiner followed procedures but also blasting the federal government for what he called its "abysmally poor policy choices" in how it runs the national database for firearm background checks. The suit was subsequently reinstated by a federal appeals court. "The mass shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church was a horrific hate crime that caused immeasurable suffering for the families of the victims and the survivors," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement. "Since the day of the shooting, the Justice Department has sought to bring justice to the community, first by a successful hate crime prosecution and today by settling civil claims."

In 2017, Roof became the first person in the U.S. sentenced to death for a federal hate crime. Authorities have said Roof opened fire during the Bible study at the church, raining down dozens of bullets on those assembled. He was 21 at the time. The slain included the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, pastor of the AME Emanuel Church, a state senator, as well as other pillars of the community. They all shared deep devotion to the church, known as Mother Emanuel, and passed that faith along to their families, many of whom offered Roof forgiveness when he appeared in court just days after the attack.

The FBI has acknowledged that Roof's drug possession arrest should have prevented him from buying a gun. Speaking with AP in Washington ahead of the news conference, Pinckney's eldest daughter recalled the night of the shooting and said she was committed to maintaining the legacy of her father, who died when she was 11.

"I've done whatever I can to keep his memory alive and to carry on his legacy throughout my life," Eliana Pinckney, 17, told the AP. "Just to make sure that the memories that I have with him can be shared with other people, so that other people are inspired by the life that he lived, and the life that he would keep living if he was still here."

The deal, which was reached last month, is still pending a judge's approval, Sellers said. "All nine of these families have been so strong, and they deserve this closure," Sellers said. "Of course we wanted more, but this is just, and this is justice, and finally, these families can say that they got it."

Supreme Court takes up major gun rights case

By Clayton Henkel
THE POLICY WATCH

All eyes will be on the U.S. Supreme Court this week when the high court will take up the first major Second Amendment case in more than a decade. The case, New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen, could have major implications for states and their ability to regulate guns, according to three Duke University scholars.

Law professor Joseph Blocher, co-director of the Center for Firearms Law, says this marks the first time since 2008, when the court struck down a Washington, D.C., ban on handgun ownership in the home, that gun rights or regulation have been before the nation's highest court.

"Although the vast majority of Second Amendment challenges since Heller have failed, that is most gun regulations have been upheld against Second Amendment challenges, many states have chosen to deregulate guns in various ways that the Constitution does not specifically require," said Blocher.

Darrell Miller, who also co-directs the Center for Firearms Law at Duke Law, agrees that much of the action on gun rights these days is happening in state houses across the nation. "[But] this is the case that gun rights advocates have really been waiting on, and at issue in this case is one of the many open questions that were left in the District of Columbia-Heller case, under what circumstances can a person carry a firearm off his or her property and under what conditions," Miller explained.

While Wednesday's case deals with the permitting regimen in New York, Miller believes that it could open the door to the Supreme Court deciding how far you can carry a gun, and what guns are protected in subsequent litigation. Miller says New York is also a "may issue" permitting state versus a "shall issue" permitting state.

North Carolina is a "shall issue" state with concealed handgun permits. Duke psychiatry professor Jeffrey Swanson is watching the case to ascertain what this could mean for firearm-related violence in the future. "If the state says you have the right to walk around in the community with a handgun in your pocket, more people are going to do that," Swanson said. "If that state can't exercise discretion in saying who is going to get to carry a gun, you are going to have a broader range of people, including more who engage in risky behavior, who are carrying a gun."

There has been an exponential increase in the number of Americans with concealed carry permits over the last five years, according to the Duke researchers. "You can have the same or even a declining number of violent acts, but if more of those acts involve guns, more people are going to die," Swanson said. "And, if states cannot restrict gun carrying to anybody unless they have a felony record or have been involuntarily committed to a psychiatric hospital, you're just going to have a lot more risky people with guns and then you are going to have more fatalities."

While mass casualty shootings captivate the public's attention whenever they occur, the country averages 109 gun deaths per day. Swanson noted the majority of those deaths are suicides.