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Data Zone Page 4

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Monologues Put Voices Behind Black Maternal Disparities

Page 2



Newsmaker
City of New Orleans Announces Priority Bills

Page 6

National News
16-Year-old Black Teen Shot By White Man



Page 7

Monologues Put Voices Behind Black Maternal Disparities



Dr. Valerie Newsome-Garcia kicked off the Black Maternal Health Week “Maternal Monologues” on April 11, 2023.

Story and Photos by Trinity Johnson
Data News Weekly Contributor

The National Healthy Start Association marked Black Maternal Health Week to bring awareness to the fact that the maternal mortality rate for non-Hispanic Black women was 55.9 deaths per 100,000 live births:

2.9 times the rate for non-Hispanic White women. This Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistic in 2020, is a reality that many Black women continue to face when considering pregnancy.

“We don’t want to scare young women out of pregnancy, we want to use this as a way to empower them and to educate them,” said Dr. Valerie Newsome-Gar-

cia, the Community Transformation Strategist at the NHSA.

“So, they know the questions to ask and to be able to advocate for themselves and it’s important to have males in this conversation too, because, in a lot of stories, we hear that the partners are the ones who are really able to advocate for those who are birthing,”

Cover Story, Continued on page 3.

INSIDE DATA	
Cover Story	2
Data Zone	4
Newsmaker	6
State & Local News . .	6
Commentary.	6
National News	7

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Cover Story, Continued from page 2.

said Newsome-Garcia, and a Grambling State University alumna. "We needed to bring the whole community together to hear the stories, but the next piece is to discuss what we want to do about it."

The first-ever "Maternal Monologues," held on April 11, 2023, allowed Black women in the community to deliver emotional birthing stories, and factual information about Black maternal health.

"I think as Black women, we think that we're supposed to get through it and suffer through motherhood," said Jazmin Sylva Roberson, the Director of Programs and Services at Labor and Love, who joined the panel of mothers who provided maternal stories at the event held at Xavier University's ballroom. "In the hospital, they come to catch the baby, or they come when something is wrong. We're [doulas] there to support women physically, emotionally, mentally, and even spiritually."

Roberson shared personal birthing experiences alongside Almetra Granger, a doctoral student at Louisiana State University, Meshawn Siddiq, a doula, and the Deputy



Local Doulas and Black Health Maternal Advocates shared the experiences of Black women during pregnancies and during the birthing experience to explain high Black maternal mortality rates.

Director at the New Orleans Health Department, and Asia Singleton, a graduate student in Xavier's Department of Public Health Sciences.

"I was a senior when I had my

baby and I was a medical scribe, so I didn't really have formal paid leave," Singleton shared. "There's a lot of policy work that needs to be done. Maternity leave is a huge

thing for me," she added.

Using the hashtag, #blackmammatter and #Maternal Monologues, the doulas and Black Maternal Health Advocates hope to

spread awareness on Black women's birthing experiences throughout the month of April. Though the first Maternal Monologues forum was a start in having dialogue about the statistics, the advocates said that more work needs to be done to remove maternal disparities in the U.S.

"I think that some of the bigger things we need to talk about are those systemic things," Meshawn Siddiq said. "In European countries, they have a year off, they have nurse home visits that are included, but we have a lot of these systemic things, which are causing stress to our minds and stress to our bodies."

As more Black women come forward to discuss how inequalities contribute to pregnancy and birth complications, the more health advocates said they can work to create better systems to reduce Black maternal fatalities.

"What makes me hopeful about the future of Black Maternal Health is that we're having these conversations," Singleton said. "When I heard about this opportunity, I was like, 'Wait, we get to talk about this? I get to share my experience.'"

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Donny Rouse, CEO, 3rd Generation

French Quarter Festival Celebrates 40th Anniversary

Photos by Demian Roberts
Data News Weekly Contributor

It was truly a party enjoyed by all during the four-day festival that marked four decades of the French Quarter Festival. What was once a festival primarily attended by locals, is now attracting people from across the globe. Other than a brief rainstorm on Saturday, the weather was amazing, and of course there was food, music and fun had by all.



Eddie Monie



John Boutte



James Andrews



Ernie Vincent



Lilli Lewis



Tricia Boutte



Oscar Rossignoli

Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events.

Sci High Celebrates 30 Years in STEM Education

New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics High School also known as Sci High, celebrated its 30th Anniversary on April 6th commemorating their birthday with a Party with a Purpose. This school was founded in 1992 as a response to the need for more rigorous and innovative science and math education in New Orleans. Over the years, Sci High has become a model for STEM education, attracting students from across the city who are interested in pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The school has also been recognized for its commitment

to equity and inclusion, with programs that support underrepresented groups in STEM fields. To celebrate their 30th Anniversary, Sci High hosted a series of events and initiatives, including a Community Outreach Program, a fundraising campaign, and a special graduation ceremony for their senior class. They also highlighted some of their notable alumni and their contributions to the STEM community. Overall, Sci High's 30th Anniversary was a testament to their ongoing commitment to providing high-quality education and preparing students for successful careers in STEM.



State Senator Royce Duplessis presents New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics High School with a proclamation to commemorate 30 years in STEM education.



Mykia Jovan performs for the 30th Anniversary Party With A Purpose.



T-Ray The Violinist, Tarriona 'Tank' Ball (Tank and the Bangas), Mykia Jovan, Norman Spence II (Tank and the Bangas)

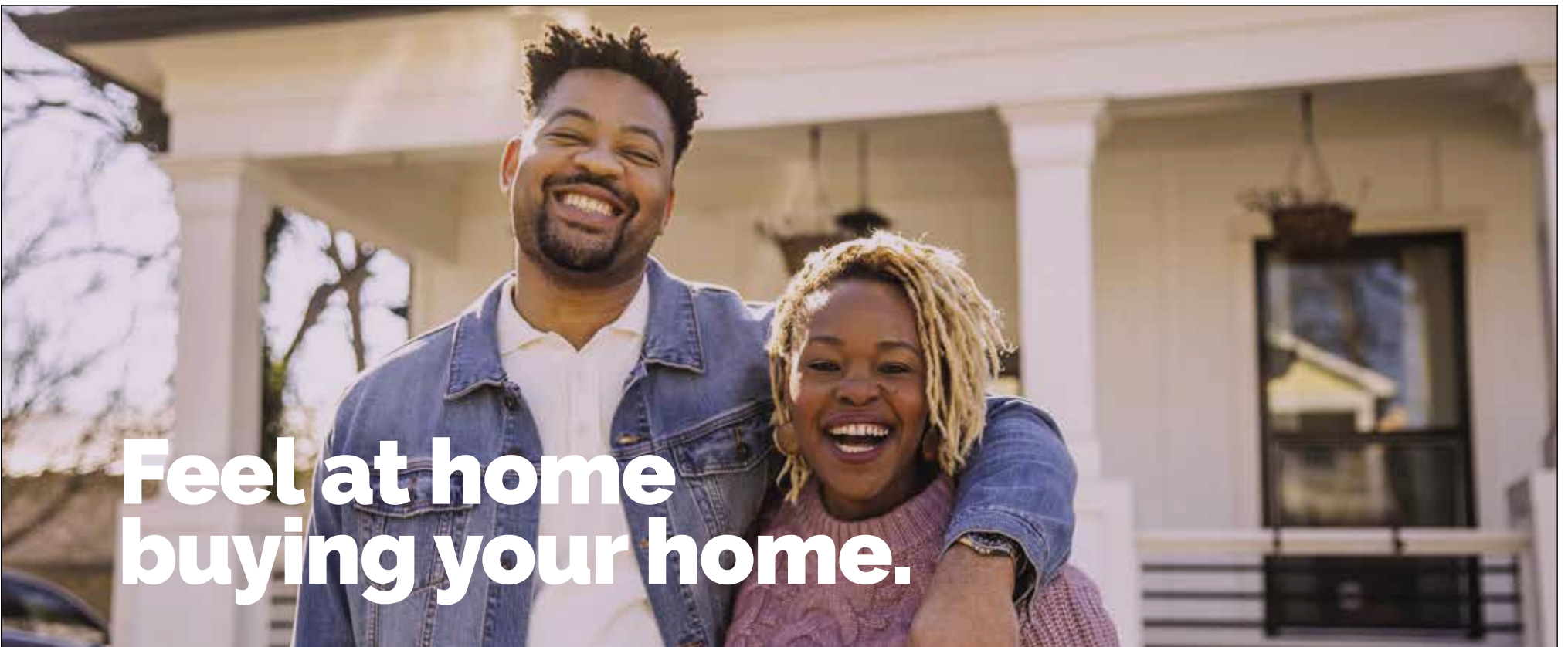
Photo credit: Drew Williamson (Communications Manager, Sci High)



Head of School Dr. Monique Cola (blue dress), Performer Mykia Jovan (white pants) Tarriona "Tank" Ball (hat) T-Ray The Violinist (blue suit) Foundation Executive Director Erica Dourousseau (green dress)



Head of School Dr. Monique Cola, and daughter Courtney Cola (Reily Foods)



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City of New Orleans Announces Louisiana Legislative Session Priority Bills

City of New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS — The City of New Orleans announced its priorities for the current Louisiana State Legislative Session. Specifically, the City is emphasizing protecting and preserving critical state funding for infrastructure and citywide projects, as well as holding negligent and irresponsible property owners accountable by the introduction of stronger criminal penalties for blighted properties.

“The City’s 2023 legislative agenda is another demonstration of my administration’s priorities and commitment to addressing public safety as a matter of public health and quality of life in our city,” said Mayor LaToya Cantrell. “We remain steadfast in our efforts to improve the quality of life of our residents, and I want to thank the members of the Orleans Delegation for working so closely with my administration to move this agenda forward.”

The City and our state legislators will also be advocating for, prioritizing the Sewerage and Water Board Power Plant to ensure that the project can continue to move towards completion. This project will ensure that the residents and businesses of New Orleans have reliable storm drainage, water distribution and sewer



systems by transitioning to Enter-gy-generated electricity directly from the grid and will ultimately result in fewer boil-water advisories and an overall greater degree of reliability.

Other proposed projects for State Capital Outlay Funds include the redevelopment of Lincoln Beach, renovation of the former VA Hospital and improvements to several recreational facilities and playgrounds across the city.

Additionally, the following proposed Senate and House Bills by our local representatives support public safety personnel and boost our blight remediation efforts.

SB127 by Senator Duplessis – Public Safety Personnel Property Tax Exemption

This constitutional amendment would allow parish governing authorities to exempt up to \$2,500 in assessed valuation of property taxes for qualified first responders who live and work within the same parish. Police officers, firefighters, emergency medical professionals and 9-1-1 emergency call takers would be eligible.

“I filed Senate Bill 127 in direct response to what we have heard from first responders in New Orleans,” said District 5 Senator Royce Duplessis. “And what we have

learned is that property tax incentives can be a critically important tool for recruiting, and just as importantly, retaining highly qualified first responders to live and work in our great city. SB127 provides that relief, and in doing so will make New Orleans an even more attractive destination for police, fire, EMS and 9-1-1 personnel to answer the call to public service.”

HB270 by Representative Willard – Weed cutting in Orleans Parish

This bill will simplify the process and reduce the administrative burden for the City to remove tall grass, weeds, graffiti, trash and debris from the 15,000 vacant lots in the city by extending the required notice period from twelve to twenty-four months.

“I’m excited to partner with Mayor Cantrell on House Bill 270 to streamline the processes for cleaning up and mowing littered and overgrown vacant lots in our city,” said District 97 Representative Matthew Willard. “This is an issue that has persisted since Hurricane Katrina, and I am determined to be a part of the solution to this problem that has impacted the quality of life for residents in every corner of New Orleans.”

HB370 by Representative Landry – Criminal Blighting of Property

This bill comes at the request of the Division of Code Enforcement, and it will strengthen the criminal blight statute, which is currently ineffective in compelling owners of commercial and large residential apartment buildings due to the existing weak penalties. This measure would allow for prosecution concurrent with the review of the administrative judgement. These stronger penalties should compel the most egregious bad actors to improve and maintain their properties.

“There are far too many families in New Orleans, and all across Louisiana, who are forced to live in sub-standard and often hazardous housing conditions, with few options, if any, to force delinquent landlords to make repairs or improve conditions,” said District 91 Representative Mandie Landry. “I am grateful that this productive partnership with Mayor Cantrell and her administration will result in stronger state laws. House Bills 276 and 370 will give the City much needed tools to hold careless property owners accountable for ignoring the needs of their tenants and disregarding real quality of life issues.”

Commentary

New Gun Laws From Legislature?

Kenneth Cooper
Think504.com

Should 18-Year-Olds Be Allowed to Roam the Streets Packing?

I’ve been sitting here for an hour thinking of ways to tell you that HB131 is a dumb bill. Finally, I’ve settled on one. Here goes: HB131 is a dumb bill. Whew. The conciseness, the clarity. So glad I found a way to figure that out.

What is HB131? Nothing much. Just some random bill that would allow 18-year-olds to conceal and carry without training or a permit. We’re talking about carrying a gun or guns, of course. Presently, the bill is sitting in the Criminal Justice Committee waiting to die or be put

before the Full House.

Yep. That’s right. After a month that’s seen two mass shootings by maladjusted 20 something year-olds, our Reps. are about to consider covertly arming 18-year-olds. Brilliant. Welcome to the start of this year’s legislative session.

To fully answer the question, HB131 is mostly a bill of omission as opposed to addition. It starts with the qualifications. Being 21 years of age as a necessary and sufficient condition to concealed carry? Omitted. From there, the bill goes on to omit an entire paragraph from present law. That would be the paragraph stipulating the necessity of a permit at all. So, if passed, present law would allow a kid fresh out of high school to

hit the streets packing.

I remember when I was 18, all young, dumb, and full of ill-temper and testosterone. I remember having friends who were 18, too. They were just like me. I doubt we were anomalies. After raising two kids who were once 18 and knowing their friends, I’m pretty much sure of it.

If I only knew then what I know now. That famous saying.

I think if I did know then what I know now, I’d conclude that I shouldn’t be allowed to freely walk the streets with a gun in my pocket or waistband. It wouldn’t have been a good idea for my friends to do so either. Did I mention that HB131 is a dumb bill?

One may ask: why is this necessary? It’s not a question of rights. The 2nd Amendment, much to the

denial of Conservatives, has always been a highly regulated right. If you don’t think so, go try to freely purchase something fully automatic or a rocket launcher. You’ll be met with state restrictions whether you’re part of a militia or not.

Rep. Danny McKormick is the author of the bill. He’s on record asking the question of “why don’t we trust law-abiding citizens with their Second Amendment Rights?” The answer is we do. But rights aren’t absolute. They’re conditional. We grant rights based on levels of maturity, arbitrary as they may be. A 13-year-old, for example, isn’t allowed to get married, vote, or own a gun. We’ll see what arguments Rep. McKormick puts forth when HB131 has its hearing.

It’s a conflicting time for 18-year-

olds, though. On one hand, we have Rep. McKormick, a man who really believes in them, in their cognitive capacity at least. But on the other hand, we have Sen. Beth Mizell who feels they aren’t even mature enough to be allowed in a bar. Sen. Mizell has filed a bill, SB194, that would make it illegal for anyone under 21 to enter a bar.

New Gun Laws From Legislature?

So, in one session, we may have an instance where legislators cast their votes saying being around a beer or two is too intoxicating for 18-year-olds to handle, but walking up the street with a gun tucked in their waist isn’t. Strange times in Louisiana. Strange indeed. As I said, welcome to this year’s legislative session.

Attorneys Ben Crump and Lee Merritt Seek Justice for 16-Year-old Black Teen Shot By White Man Because He Rang Wrong Doorbell

Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent

Nationally renowned civil rights and personal injury Attorneys Ben Crump and Lee Merritt have been retained by the family of sixteen-year-old Ralph Yarl, who was shot twice in the head and arm by an unidentified White male assailant.

Yarl, a 16-year-old African American, was shot after accidentally ringing the doorbell of the wrong home while attempting to pick up his sibling.

According to the Kansas City Defender, the White man reportedly shot Yarl in the head through the glass door, then when Yarl was already bleeding out on the ground, shot him again.

"The family has described it as a hate crime, and community members are calling for justice for the young victim," reported The Defender, a member of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA).

The NNPA is a trade of more than 230 African American-owned newspapers and media companies representing the Black Press of America.

"This was not an 'error'; this



Ralph Yarl, a 16-year-old African American, was shot after accidentally ringing the doorbell of the wrong home while attempting to pick up his sibling.

was a hate crime. You don't shoot a child in the head because he rang your doorbell. The fact that the police said it was an 'error' is why America is the way it is," Dr. Faith Spoonmore, Yarl's aunt, told The Defender.

Authorities reportedly escorted the suspect to police headquarters following the shooting, briefly inter-

viewed him and released the man.

Yarl's family said they are outraged that the perpetrator has not been held accountable.

"This man intended to kill an innocent child simply because he rang the doorbell of the wrong house," Dr. Spoonmore asserted.

"He looked him in the face and shot him... and the individual is

free to go about his day as if he did a great deed. While my nephew Ralph Yarl is a great kid, an intelligent kid, a Black boy is left with so many broken pieces."

Crump and Merritt, nationally recognized Civil Rights Lawyers who has represented Ahmaud Arbery and Cameron Lamb, announced they would represent Yarl's family.

Shaun King, a well-known Activist and Journalist, announced that he's also assisting with the case.

The Defender, which was the first outlet to report on the shooting, said the Yarl family has urged supporters to help spread awareness about the case and bring attention to the issue of racial violence in America.

"There is no excuse for the release of this armed and dangerous suspect after admitting to shooting an unarmed, non-threatening, and defenseless teenager that rang his doorbell," Crump and Merritt said in a joint statement.

"We demand swift action from Clay County prosecutors and law enforcement to identify, arrest, and prosecute to the full extent of the law the man responsible for this horrendous and unjustifiable shooting."

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LAUREN JAUREGUI //
TRACK 03

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