



Explore Oregon's Black History on Foot



Mariah Rocker leading the Black History Tour of Albina, Dawson Park. (Credit: Oregon Black Pioneers)

Tours Spotlight Black History Across Oregon

It's not too late to join one of Oregon Black Pioneers' Black History Walking Tours! From Portland's Albina neighborhood all the way down to Jacksonville, Oregon Black Pioneers' popular public walking tours highlight locations connected to each area's African American history. Each tour explores places tied to historic

Black-owned businesses, community change, civil rights, and local Black pioneers.

In response to requests for the public to engage with Black history, Oregon Black Pioneers launched statewide walking tours in 2023 as a way to create place-based learning opportunities that foster community connection. Despite the common misconception that there is little Black history here in Oregon, OBP's tours demonstrate that there are stories connected to this history all over the state, including and beyond Portland.

The 2026 tours started in May and continue through September. OBP's Public Programs and Exhibits Manager Mariah Rocker refines the tours each year, adding and adjusting as OBP discovers more about a location, or as another location is lost. Mariah explains, "The actual buildings where Black history happened are often lost to displacement, time, or development, but the history remains and is important to acknowledge."

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REAP cuts the ribbon of the New Behavioral Health Clinical Building. Photo courtesy of REAP's Instagram.

REAP Celebrates Opening of New Behavioral Health Center

A New Space for
Healing, Wellness,
and Resilience

REAP celebrated the grand opening of its new Behavioral Health Clinical Building today with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, bringing together

community leaders, health-care partners, supporters, families, and advocates to celebrate a significant milestone in expanding culturally responsive, trauma-informed behavioral health services for youth and families.

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Faith Community Stands with Aguirre



Photo courtesy of Augustana Lutheran Church

Prayer and song
marked his
scheduled ICE
appointment

On Thursday, July 16, Augustana staff member, seminarian, and Executive Director of the VIVA Inclusive Migrant Network at Au-

gustana, Francisco Aguirre, was summoned to check in at the ICE detention center at 4310 South Macadam Ave. Mr. Aguirre was accompanied into ICE by Pastor Knutson and his lawyer, as had been their custom over the years. Supporters were contacted that week, and many gathered outside the ICE detention center for a peaceful vigil of prayer and song.

Obamacare Rates May Jump Again

New Analysis Projects Higher Premiums in 2027

(AP) — Middle-income Americans straining to pay for Affordable Care Act health insurance are unlikely to get relief next year, according to a new analysis that shows insurers in the marketplace are proposing a second straight year of double-digit premium hikes.

Across the 77 insurers in the ACA program that have submitted rate filings that are publicly available, the median proposed premium increase for 2027 is 14%, according to Wednesday's analysis from the healthcare research nonprofit KFF. The insurers cited mounting healthcare costs, federal regulatory changes and the recent expiration of pandemic-era enhanced subsidies as the biggest factors driving premiums higher.

The rise in premiums adds to what already was a significant jump in 2026, when the median rate increase was 20%, according to KFF.

While most Americans in Obamacare still qualify for subsidies that protect them from paying the full premiums, middle-class



A man walks by an healthcare insurance office in Hialeah, Fla., July 27, 2017, (AP Photo/Alan Diaz, File)

enrollees who don't get those subsidies will face an especially stark increase in costs. That group includes households with incomes at or above 400% of the poverty level — about \$63,000 per year for an individual or \$129,000 for a family of four.

The rate increases come as federal lawmakers have proposed various policy changes to overhaul the expensive U.S. healthcare system, but no comprehensive legislation has amassed enough support to pass. The higher costs are contributing

to Americans' existing worries about overall affordability, a concern that many voters say is front of mind with November's midterm elections looming.

Health insurers must send filings to regulators every year, explaining what they expect to see in premium rate changes for individual market health plans for the coming year.

Next year's rates will be finalized later in the summer, but KFF's analysis looked at those in the ACA marketplace that already are public across 16 states and

Washington, D.C., to get an early glimpse at what insurers are saying. The report measured insurers' premium increases as an average across all types of plans — bronze, silver, gold and platinum.

The analysis found that insurers listed rising costs across the healthcare sector — from hospital visits to prescription drugs, the workforce and sicker patients — as the biggest cause of rising premiums. Overall inflation contributed to that pressure, driving prices higher across the entire economy.

Insurers also blamed the expiration of federal subsidies that had offset costs for many people and caused the Affordable Care Act program to balloon in size in recent years. When those tax credits expired in January, many plan costs skyrocketed. That prompted large swaths of enrollees to depart the marketplace, leaving sicker patients who carry higher risks and costs, and driving premiums higher.

New state-by-state data posted by the Trump administration shows that the overall ACA marketplace shrunk by more than 2.5 million people over the past year, with some states seeing declines amounting to nearly a third of their enrollee population.

Some insurers added that federal regulatory changes contributed to their requests for higher premiums. For example, they said new enrollment and eligibility requirements instituted by the Trump administration could affect the overall population of ACA enrollees.

While Affordable Care Act enrollees make up less than 10% of the population, similar cost drivers are likely to make other private plans, including employer-sponsored plans, pricier too, according to KFF's analysis.

Explore Oregon's Black History on Foot



A guide shares local history while holding open a photo book, bringing Portland's past to life through stories and conversation. Photo courtesy of oregonblackpioneers.org.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Mariah also had the inspiration to engage local experts for tours outside of Portland. "We've been fortunate to work with local experts and community organizers who are deeply knowledgeable," Rucker said, "and we are delighted to have them share their expertise with our tour groups." Mayor Denyse McGriff dazzled the group in Oregon City. Talicia Brown, founder and executive director of the Black Cultural Initiative,

poignantly kicked off the tour in Eugene. Coming up, the Salem tour will hear from Gwen Carr, Director of the Bush House Museum and emeritus OBP Board member, and in Astoria, filmmaker, historian, and storyteller Ron Craig will join the tour.

Mariah continued, "We're also excited that we can offer our Black History Walking Tours of Albina, Portland's historically Black neighborhood, for just \$10, thanks to the generous support of The Collins Foundation."

The remaining tour dates are

on sale now and are limited to 35 participants per tour. All tours are held on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon. Portland tour dates are July 25, Aug. 8, Aug. 22, Sept. 12 and Sept. 26. A Salem tour featuring special guest Gwen Carr will be held Aug. 22, and an Astoria tour with special guest Ron Craig is scheduled for Sept. 12. Tickets are available online.

Oregon Black Pioneers is Oregon's only historical society dedicated to preserving and presenting the experiences of African Americans statewide.

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Editor: Shawntell Washington • Admin Coord : Quayuana Washington
Office Mngr/Classfids: Lucinda Baldwin • Creative Director: Kenya Anderson

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Honoring Unsung Heroes & Heroines

Allen Temple Hosts Annual Awards Luncheon

The Allen Temple C.M.E Church family would like to invite you to attend their annual "Unsung Heroes & Heroines Award luncheon on September 19th, 2026, at 1:30 pm at Allen Temple C.M.E Church 4236 NE 8th Ave Portland, OR 97211.

Rev Dr. LeRoy Haynes Jr. is the Senior Pastor of Allen Temple C.M.E Church and Presiding Elder of both the Oregon/Washington and Alaska Pacific conferences.

Allen Temple C.M.E Church is a church that reaches beyond the walls to meet the needs and serve the community.

This is a fundraiser event to help with the continued cost of our outreach ministries. The cost of the tickets is \$30.00 each. Youth 12 & under \$20.00 children 5 & under free. Please contact Rev Rhonda Smith at rhondiva3@gamil.com or Regina Green at rgreen6025@gmail.com for more information.

The purpose of the award is to acknowledge and honor individuals and or organization (s) who are unknown but make a difference in the community in the city of Portland, or by assisting undeserved individuals or groups and improving their quality of life. The categories of recognition are in the following areas: Education, Drug Addiction Programs, Homeless Ministry, Athletics, Religion, Youth Programs, Journalism/Media, Arts, Health/Foster Care, Gang



Allen Temple C.M.E Church (Photo courtesy of Allen Temple C.M.E Church via Facebook)

Prevention/Intervention & Social Justice.

Award nominations must be submitted by 5 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 5, 2026. Completed applications may be emailed to Rev. Rhonda Smith or Regina Green at the email addresses listed above or mailed to 4236 NE 8th Ave., Portland, OR 97211. Additional application forms are available upon request for those wishing to submit multiple nominations.

Lloyd Center Walkers

Mall Walkers Have Until August 8 to Enjoy the Route

Mall walking has been a trusted form of exercise across the country for decades. At Lloyd Center, it has taken on a new life this year, drawing walkers of every age before the mall closes for good.

Long before Lloyd Center became a flashpoint in a fight over demolition, it was something simpler for thousands of Portlanders: a safe, level, weather-proof place to walk.

Mall walking has been recommended for decades by public health researchers as an accessible, low-barrier form of exercise, particularly for older adults and people with mobility limitations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, working with the University of Washington's Health Promotion Research Center, co-authored a national program guide on mall walking, citing strong evidence for its health benefits among



Best friends who've been meeting for walks at Lloyd Center for over four years, still showing up for each other, one step at a time.

older adults with varying physical abilities. Indoor malls offer something few outdoor walking routes can: a flat, even surface, predictable temperature, accessible restrooms, and a safe, well-lit environment regardless of rain, heat, or smoke outside.

That tradition has found new energy at Lloyd Center this year. A weekly walking group called Food Court 5000, founded by Krista Catwood, has drawn growing crowds of walkers in

retro '80s gear, looping the mall's floors together each Sunday to music and community. The group, which started as a small, fun way to get steps in, has exploded in popularity over the past year and was recently featured by NPR, drawing attention from across the country to one of Portland's most unexpected fitness scenes.

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REAP Celebrates Opening of New Behavioral Health Center

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xiety, depression, stress management, emotional regulation, and other behavioral health concerns. The event highlighted the power of partnership and a shared commitment to creating spaces where young people feel supported, valued, and empowered to thrive.

REAP was honored to welcome special guests and partners, including Ebony S. Clarke of the Oregon Health Authority, Toc Soneoulay-Gillespie of CareOregon, and Portland City Councilor Loretta Smith, who joined REAP families, staff, and community members in celebrating this important investment in youth wellness.

The Behavioral Health Clinical Building was made possible through partnerships with the Oregon Health Authority, CareOregon, Prosper Portland, Ballmer Institute, Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), and the Hillman Family Foundation. Together, these partners have helped expand access to behavioral health services that are culturally responsive, equity-centered, and



REAP Celebrates Opening of New Behavioral Health Clinical Building, Expanding Culturally Responsive Care for Youth and Families

designed to meet the needs of the communities REAP serves.

"The opening of REAP's Behavioral Health Clinical Building represents a significant investment in the future of our young people and families. This space reflects our belief that every child deserves ac-

cess to culturally responsive, compassionate, and high-quality behavioral health services. We are deeply grateful to all our partners and supporters whose collaboration has made this vision a reality. Together, we are creating pathways for healing, hope, and opportuni-

ty for the next generation." — Mark Jackson, Executive Director, REAP

The new facility expands REAP's school-based and community-centered model of care by creating additional space for clinical support, healing, and connection. Services are delivered in partnership with schools, families, and community organizations to ensure youth receive consistent, coordinated, and developmentally appropriate support within the environments where they learn and grow.

"This new clinical facility is more than a building—it is a place where youth and families will experience safety, dignity, and belonging. Our approach is rooted in trauma-informed care and cultural responsiveness, ensuring that the unique experiences and strengths of the communities we serve are honored. This

expansion allows us to deepen our impact and provide the support young people need to build resilience, achieve wellness, and thrive." — DeShawn Williams, LCSW, Clinical Director, REAP.

REAP's Behavioral Health Program provides compassionate, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded care that supports youth and families experiencing trauma and adverse experiences, anxiety and depression, stress management challenges, emotional regulation challenges, behavioral health concerns, and social-emotional wellness needs.

The program is designed to provide equitable and culturally responsive mental and behavioral health care to underserved youth and families, strengthen emotional wellness, healing, and healthy development, support youth through services that promote resilience and growth, and deliver trauma-informed, equity-centered care that addresses barriers to access.

While the opening of the Behavioral Health Clinical Building is a significant milestone, REAP's behavioral health services are not a public walk-in clinic. Care is provided through established school partnerships, family referrals, and community-based referral pathways to ensure youth receive consistent, coordinated support throughout the academic year.

The opening of this facility represents what is possible when community organizations, healthcare partners, public agencies, and supporters come together with a shared commitment to the well-being and success of young people.



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Affordable Homes for Older Adults 55+

Meadowlark Place to Deliver 104 Affordable Homes in Beaverton

Community Partners for Affordable Housing (CPAH) held a groundbreaking ceremony for our newest housing development, Meadowlark Place, on July 9, 2026, in Beaverton. This community sits on the former Beaverton Community Center lot, directly across from the Beaverton City Library on SW 5th Street, adding 104 units of housing for older adults, 55+ years or older. The project was celebrated with Oregon elected officials and local leaders, including US Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, Oregon Senator Kate Lieber, Washington County Chair Kathryn Harrington, Mayor of Beaverton Lacey Beaty, Metro Councilor Gerritt Rosenthal, Oregon Field Office Director at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development Bryan Guiney, Community Action Executive Director Kemp Shuey and CPAH Executive Director Rachael Duke.



Christopher Ibeling (CPAH), Stephen McMurtrey (DCM Communities), Kevin Peterek (Banner Bank), US Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, Kemp Shuey (Community Action), Oregon Senator Kate Lieber, Bryan Guiney (HUD), Beaverton Mayor Lacey Beaty, Jilian Saurage Felton (CPAH), Rachael Duke (CPAH), Washington County Chair Kathryn Harrington, Metro Councilor Gerritt Rosenthal

Developed in partnership with DCM Communities, designed by Carleton Hart Architecture and under construction with LMC Construction, the building will

incorporate an open design concept that allows for flexibility in space usage. Designed to promote comfort, well-being, and a sense of belonging, Meadowlark

Place will feature shared spaces where residents can gather and build meaningful relationships. Amenities including a community room, outdoor courtyard,

community gardens, and a second-floor amenity deck will help create a welcoming place for older adults to age with dignity and community. Of the 104 units, 60 units are open to residents at 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI), 35 units at 50% AMI, and 9 studios at 30% AMI.

"We are exhilarated to begin the construction of Meadowlark Place in Beaverton, across from the city library and farmer's market, and around the corner from the senior center," stated CPAH Executive Director Rachael Duke. "Not only are we delivering 104 affordable apartments for older adults, but we are working in partnership with the Native American Rehabilitation Association and Bienestar, so that 30 of those apartments are set aside for seniors who have been homeless and 10 are set aside for households aging out of farmworker housing. And that isn't all! In partnership with Community Action, we are building a Head Start program so that our youngest citizens can get the kind of early childhood education that will set them up for success."

The exciting addition of the Head Start facility, provided by

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TriMet Service Changes Begin Aug. 23

Riders Encouraged to Plan Ahead

TriMet is urging riders to plan ahead and prepare for big changes coming to our transit system beginning Sunday, Aug. 23. Their website — trimet.org — has been updated to include the adjustments we are making this year to help address our current \$158 million long-term budget deficit. The adjustments affect 33 bus lines and the MAX Green Line. They bring changes for thousands of riders who depend on TriMet for safe, reliable transportation to work, school, medical appointments and much more, who may now have a longer walk; an added transfer; or an adjusted route, as part of their trip on TriMet.

The service adjustments coming in August are part of TriMet's multi-year strategy to resolve our deficit by reducing expenses and increasing revenue. These changes streamline our service, focusing on areas where people are most likely to ride, while reducing du-



A person with groceries approaches a TriMet bus (Photo courtesy of TriMet)

plication and eliminating service where ridership is very low.

TriMet's upcoming service changes, taking effect Aug. 23, were developed with input from riders and the community to preserve as much service as possible while addressing budget challenges. The changes will reduce overlapping routes and discontinue

service in areas where ridership is low. The MAX Green Line will operate a shorter route, running only between Gateway and Clackamas Town Center transit centers. Riders will still be able to connect with other MAX lines at Gateway, and for many passengers, a bus route may provide a faster option for reaching Downtown Portland.

Dozens of bus lines will be combined or adjusted where routes overlap or run close to one another, helping create a more efficient system while maximizing service investments. Some routes will be modified to maintain service in higher-ridership areas, while others will run less frequently during times when fewer people are rid-

ing. Two bus lines will be discontinued in areas with very low ridership and no nearby alternative TriMet service.

A total of 34 of TriMet's 79 bus lines and five MAX lines will be directly affected by the upcoming service changes, including the elimination of two bus lines. Riders throughout the system may experience changes to their daily commutes, and TriMet encourages passengers to visit trimet.org and plan a trip for Aug. 23 to understand how the updates may impact their travel. Later this summer, TriMet will also update its Trip Planner with information on bus service for Portland high schools. While that service will continue, some students may need to adjust their routes compared with previous years.

The August service changes are part of a larger effort by TriMet to align spending with available resources and address the agency's significant long-term budget deficit. During the current fiscal year, which began July 1, much of the effort to reduce the budget gap comes from internal spending cuts, including a historic reduction in staffing levels.

Rising Oil Prices Send Gas Costs Higher



Gas pumps are seen at a gas station in Buffalo Grove, Thursday, June 25, 2026. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh)

US Gas Prices Back Up to an Average of \$4 a Gallon as Iran War Heats Up

(AP) — U.S. gas prices jumped to an average of \$4 a gallon again Monday as the U.S. and Iran launched more attacks.

According to motor club federation AAA, the national average for a gallon of regular gasoline is now back to \$4. The average price a year ago was \$3.14 a gallon.

The price is a national average, meaning drivers in some states have been paying well over \$4 a gallon for a while now, while others pay less. Prices vary between states due to factors ranging from nearby supply to differing tax rates.

People around the world are also dealing with high gas prices as a result of the war.

Gas prices first went over \$4 a gallon on average at the end of March. They dipped below that in mid-June and continued to fall as crude oil prices eased when the U.S. and Iran reached an interim deal. Even then, President Donald Trump expressed frustration that gas prices weren't falling as quickly as oil prices.

Affordability is likely to be a key issue for voters in the U.S. midterm elections, and higher gas and oil prices can help push up prices for groceries and other goods.

Oil prices have climbed again in recent days as the U.S. and Iran move closer to resuming an all-out war.

Brent crude, the international standard, fell slightly by Monday morning trading in the U.S. — down \$1.64 to \$86.46 per barrel. But that's still much higher than prewar levels, when crude was going for close to \$70 a barrel. Meanwhile, benchmark U.S. crude dropped \$1.87 to \$79.91 per barrel.

Affordable Homes for Older Adults 55+

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Community Action, will bring three preschool classrooms to the community's commercial space, along with indoor and outdoor play spaces for kids to learn and grow. CPAH is thrilled to bring this much-needed resource to the Beaverton Area. By combining affordable older adult housing with early childhood education, we're helping build a vibrant, intergenerational community where community members of all ages can thrive together.

"Meadowlark Place reflects the best of the Oregon way," said Washington County Chair Kathryn Harrington. "Across jurisdictions, we come together, collaborate, and lift up solutions that strengthen our communities. Housing is the building block of a prosperous and just society, and we are proud to support the City of Beaverton as this new home for seniors comes to life."

CPAH will provide planned services and programming, such

as CPAH's Thriving in Place program, which emphasizes older adult health and wellness activities, in addition to connecting residents to countywide senior services. 30 units are reserved for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), providing housing with wraparound services for seniors who have experienced chronic homelessness, provided by Bienestar and NW NARA.

"Meadowlark Place represents the kind of partnership driven, future focused investment that strengthens Beaverton for generations. By bringing affordable senior housing and vital early learning opportunities together in the heart of our city, we're building a community where every resident, at every stage of life, can thrive," said Beaverton Mayor Lacey Beaty. "I'm grateful to our local, regional, and federal partners for helping make this vision real, and I'm proud that Beaverton continues to lead with compassion, innovation, and a commitment to dignity for all."

OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

The Threat against Black Voters and American Democracy

By Rev. LeRoy Haynes Jr

There is an existential threat against Black Voters and Democracy with the April 29, 2026 decision by the United States Supreme Court decision to dismantle the last central pillar of the 1965 Voters Rights Act.

In striking down Louisiana Congressional map and signaling that majority-minority districts are constitutionally suspect. The court has with the stroke of a pen, undone what Doctor Martin Luther King Jr, Medgar Evers, John Lewis, and hundreds of other known and unknown leaders and civil-rights foot-soldiers fought and died for to fulfill the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution.

We paid a costly price for the 1965 voters Righters Act in blood, sweat, and tears. People died! Black folks, White folks, Brown folks, churches were bombed, people were beaten half to death and jails were filled. As an organizer in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), I lived the experience in the struggle to include Black, Brown, and Indigenous people into full Citizenship with Civil and Human Rights.

In the historical perspective, we fought a civil war to bring forth emancipation of Black Slaves. We passed Reconstruction constitution amendments (13th, 14th and 15th).

For a short period of time newly Black Citizens were permitted to vote, but by 1896, the right to vote was taken away through legal strategies, violent terrorism, voter suppression laws. For nearly 100 years Jim Crow kept Blacks from voting until the Modern Civil-rights movement.

Now, the John Roberts's partisan Supreme Court after striking down Section 2 of the Voters Rights Act of 1965, strikes down section 4, leaving only a hollow skeleton.

This is an intentional existential threat to Black Voters and American Democracy. It is Jim Crow 2.0; it is a move to break the movement for Freedom, Justice and Equality and turn the nation and Black Voters back to the 1950's. The evidence is manifested in now former Confederate States Legislators rapidly started drawing, redistricting maps to eliminate Black districts with President Trump's direction, even with some voting already having taken place.



Rev. LeRoy Haynes Jr.

Let us be perfectly clear-this is not a technical adjustment.

Congresswoman Terri Sewell of Selma, Alabama captures it when she stated: "(It's) the greatest reduction in representation for Black and Minority voters since the years following Reconstruction." Some analysts project as many as nineteen majority-minority House seats may be redrawn out of existence.

Do not think because we lived in the Northwest and Oregon, this Supreme Court decision will not affect us. History has taught us that the battle for the Voters Rights Act will reach us in a variety of ways. We are already hearing calls to eliminate mail in ballots. What effect Black and Minority Voters will affect us on the Federal level as well as State and Local.

Doctor King last written book was - *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*

Our Nation, State and City have a choice, do we fulfill the Dream of King and those who died and sacrificed their lives for Freedom, Justice, and equality, or do we fall into chaos and return to Jim Crow days? I for one and many others of all races, and faith traditions say no to Jim Crow 2.0. Let a new Movement for Freedom, Justice and Equity break forth.

By Rev. LeRoy Haynes Jr.; President of the Albima Ministerial Alliance (AMA) and Chairperson of the AMA Coalition for Justice and Police Reform. Contact at e-mail: allentemplepdx@gmail.com, phone: (503) 421-5353.

Lloyd Center Walkers

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"People come to Lloyd Center to walk because it works, rain or shine, hot or smoky, any day of the week," said Sarah Taylor, with The Braided River Gallery inside Lloyd Center. "It's flat, it's safe, it's indoors, and it's brought together people who never would have met otherwise. That's not something you can replace with a parking lot."

For many older Portlanders and people with disabilities, Lloyd Center has functioned as one of the only reliable indoor walking routes in the city, a level, weatherproof loop that does not require a car, a gym membership, or

good weather. Outdoor sidewalks and trails in Portland are frequently uneven, poorly lit, or exposed to extreme heat, cold, and wildfire smoke, conditions that can make walking outside unsafe or impossible for people managing chronic health conditions.

When Lloyd Center closes on August 8, that resource disappears, along with the community that has formed around it. Organizers and longtime walkers say they do not yet know where they will go next.

"We're not just losing a building. We're losing a place where people of every age can move their bodies safely, together, for free, every single day," Taylor said.

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Nolan Wells to Be Remembered by Rev. Al Sharpton

An 18-year-Old's Death and a Family's Search for Answers

(AP) — Family and supporters of Nolan Xavier Wells gathered in a Mississippi church Monday to mourn and celebrate the 18-year-old, whose death following a July 4 boat trip with friends has captured national attention and prompted calls for an independent investigation.

The Rev. Al Sharpton was scheduled to officiate the funeral, with a call to justice delivered by the family's lawyer, Ben Crump, a prominent civil rights attorney.

In the lead-up to the ceremony, relatives filed into the Ocean Springs, Mississippi, church for a visitation period, backdropped by gospel singers and a photo slideshow featuring Wells, often grinning and decked out in football gear.

Wells' mother, Christine Wonsley, said they would use the occasion to celebrate the life of their son, who she described as a "bright light" and a "sensitive soul."

"He would not want us to be sitting around crying and eating, and so what we're gonna do is kind of have a party to celebrate him," she said last week.

Wells' death has captured national attention, galvanizing Black leaders and touching off fraught discussions of racial tension and mistrust of law enforcement in the Deep South. The teenager, who was Black, had traveled by boat to Horn Island, a popular Fourth of July destination, with a group of



Updated photo provided by the family in July 2026 shows Nolan Xavier Wells with his mother, Christine Wonsley. (Family photo via AP)

friends from high school, all of whom were white. He did not return with his friends to the mainland that evening, officials said. His body was found two days later off the island's coast. Jackson County Sheriff John Ledbetter has said Wells' friends are cooperating with the investigation, which remains ongoing. He said initial interviews suggested Wells chose to stay on the island and that his friends believed he would get a ride with someone else.

But the still-unknown circumstances leading to Wells' disappearance have fu-

eled rampant online speculation, along with questions from his parents about why he was left behind.

Crump has said another witness reported Wells planned to leave on the boat with his friends, contradicting the sheriff's statement. He also alleged that messages appeared to have been deleted from the phone, which was found with Wells' friends, along with his keys.

The attorney, who is leading his own investigation into the death, said he would work alongside the local prosecu-

tor to inspect the device. The prosecutor agreed last week to present the results of the investigation to a grand jury once it is completed, Crump said. "Our lived experiences tell us that we must question everything, everybody's role, law enforcement's role," Crump said. "That is the lived experience as Black people in America."

Wells, who would have turned 19 next month, played wide receiver on the football team at Southwest Mississippi Community College in Summit, Mississippi, and had aspirations of playing at a high-level Division I program.

"He was very sociable with everyone, didn't meet a stranger," his coach, Les George, told WAPT-TV. "He would pop up at my office and come sit on the couch just to hang out and talk."

His death has drawn support from high-profile members of the Black community. Actor and producer Tyler Perry is helping pay for Wells' funeral. Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick is helping pay for his independent autopsy, and filmmaker Spike Lee attended a news conference last week in support of Wells' family. In a joint statement last week, members of the Congressional Black Caucus called for an independent and transparent investigation into Wells' death, adding that "too many questions remain unanswered."

"We hope the outpouring of concern and support from people across the country in recent days brings them some comfort in the days ahead," they said.

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