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Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity

Tulsa Women's Commission 2024 Annual Report

The Tulsa Women's Commission serves as an advisory body to the Mayor concerning issues relevant to the women in the Tulsa community. The Commission is directed in its bylaws to recommend to the Mayor programs and policies designed to alleviate inequities confronting women in social, economic, and vocational pursuits.

In the spirit of the Mayor's directive, the Commission devoted significant attention in 2024 to addressing Tulsa's childcare gap, which negatively impacts working families in the Tulsa area and disparately impacts Tulsa's women. 2024 Chairwoman Mary Quinn Cooper and Vice Chair Betsy Jackson led the charge on researching, convening, and curating local expertise to better understand how the childcare gap—a national issue—impacts Tulsa women, specifically.

Commissioner Maria Carlota Palacios's research revealed that Tulsa's childcare capacity continues to decline. From a historical average of around 500 facilities, the city now has approximately 413 centers. This reduction in availability particularly affects working women, who often bear primary responsibility for arranging childcare. Through a series of focused initiatives and community engagement efforts, the Commission worked to understand and address this complex challenge.

Childcare Forums

The Commission began the year by organizing three community forums (March–May 2024) that brought together childcare experts, business leaders, and community stakeholders. These forums provided valuable insights into the challenges facing both families and childcare providers in our community. The discussions revealed that the childcare gap requires a multi-faceted approach involving employers, government entities, and community organizations. The culmination of these forums was the production of the Tulsa Women's Commission Childcare Access Report, a comprehensive analysis and set of recommendations for employers and community leaders to provide support for parents and caregiving employees. The report can be found at <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/855478559/>.

Childcare Forum Contributors

The Commission extends its deepest gratitude to the following community leaders, experts, and stakeholders who contributed their time, expertise, and insights to our childcare initiative leading up to and throughout the childcare forums:

Speakers and Consulted Community Authorities

- Johanna Derrick, College Bound Academy



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- Karen Tilkin, CEO, CAP Tulsa
- Dr. Laura Latta, Executive Director, Tulsa Higher Education Consortium
- Darek Latta, Managing Director of Crosstown Learning Center
- Aaron Merchen, US Chamber of Commerce
- Casey Moore, Regional Director of Community Service Council
- Representative Suzanne Schreiber, Oklahoma House of Representatives
- Tammie Strobel, Superintendent, Tri-County Technical College
- Annie VanHanken, Senior Program Officer at GKFF
- Joey Wignarajah, College Bound Academy

Caregiver Perspectives

- Judith Barba Perez, Tulsa Public Schools Parent and former TPS Board Member
- Carmela Hill, Carmela Hill Entertainment
- Kassey Steele, Tulsa Community College Employee
- Dr. Sarah Wyatt, Tulsa Higher Education Consortium
- Members of the Tulsa Women's Commission

Forum Participants

- Dr. Lisa Bisogno, Northeastern State University
- Jennifer Brown, City of Tulsa Human Resources
- Caren Calhoun, formerly Tulsa Educare
- Kyra Carby, formerly Gathering Place, currently City of Tulsa Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity
- Kelsey Dowdell, University of Tulsa
- Heidi Hartman, Hartman Consulting
- Wes Mitchell, 211 Eastern Oklahoma, Tulsa Area United Way
- Karl Neumaier, Celebree School
- Rue Ramsey, Tulsa Regional Chamber
- Xia Thao, City of Tulsa Human Resources
- Becky Fields Wilson, MidFirst Bank
- Dr. Sarah Wyatt, Tulsa Higher Education Consortium

The Commission learned that what appears to be a straightforward problem—the childcare gap—is one that is extremely nuanced, requiring sustained attention and collaborative solutions.

Building on these forums, Commissioner Susan Crenshaw arranged a June site visit to Hillcrest Hospital's Daycare Center, which has operated two to three blocks east of the hospital for over 40 years. This visit provided commissioners with firsthand insight into both the benefits and challenges of employer-sponsored childcare. While the center remains one of Hillcrest's most



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attractive employee benefits, it faces ongoing staffing challenges that mirror local and national industry trends.

The Commission's work gained significant momentum in October when Mayor Bynum **issued a proclamation** recognizing "Childcare and Working Families Month," highlighting the importance of supporting working families and promoting family-friendly workplace policies. This proclamation coincided with the public release of the Commission's comprehensive Childcare Access Report, which offers practical recommendations for employers and policymakers.

Another product of the childcare forums was the development of the Commission's childcare resource website (twcchildcareresources.com), led by Commissioner Laura Latta. This website serves as a centralized hub for childcare information and resources in the Tulsa area, supporting both families and employers seeking to address childcare challenges.

Looking to the Future: Upcoming Focus Areas in 2025

As we move forward, we remain committed to our mission of advising the Mayor and developing recommendations that support women's full participation in Tulsa's social, economic, and civic life.

During the Commission's annual retreat (July 2024), members identified three strategic focus areas for future work:

- Women's economic security and housing stability
- Mental health and trauma recovery
- Health, safety, and empowerment

The commission will dedicate 2025 to better understanding each of these multifaceted challenges that impact women and how support can be provided to lessen the impact.

Leadership transitions marked the latter part of the year, with Dr. Laura Latta assuming the role of Chair and Kate Neary serving as Vice Chair beginning in October 2024. Under this new leadership, the Commission continues to build on its childcare access initiative while developing strategies to address its newly identified focus areas.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Laura Latta
Chair, Tulsa Women's Commission

2024 Tulsa Women's Commission: *Premadonna Braddick, Susan Bynum, Mary Quinn Cooper (2024 Chair), Susan Crenshaw, Dezeray Edwards, Ashleigh Frohrip, Betsy Jackson (2024 Vice Chair), Charisa Jacobs, Deidra Kirtley, Dr. Laura Latta (current Chair), Janet Levit, Amy Mariska, Dr. Meg Myers Morgan, Kate Neary (current Vice Chair), Maria Carlota Palacios*