

Babies

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group's campaign to get the Oregon Health Authority to investigate how doulas can improve birth outcomes for women of color. Sponsored by Rep. Tina Kotek, legislation mandating further research on the topic was passed into law this year.

"While these findings are preliminary and we need to complete more research on these issues, the survey in many ways verifies what we see and hear from Black women in Oregon's communities," Monroe said. "Many are in the public health care system,

percent of African American babies county-wide have low birth weight (5.9 percent for White babies, 5.6 percent for Hispanics, and 8.1 percent for people of color overall).

"We have seen birth outcomes for both the mother and baby improve when Black women have access to affordable doula services," she said. "This is the type of community-based, direct healthcare service that can lead to big changes and ultimately equity in how Black women are treated throughout the birth process."

Key ICTC survey findings include:

- Nearly two-thirds of women did not attend birth education classes prior to delivery;
- Nearly one-third of women were concerned about their treatment during the birth of their baby;
- The majority of women surveyed have government-paid health insurance coverage;

- Over half of the women surveyed were single;

- Only 25 percent of Black women were still breastfeeding their babies at six months, compared to over 60 percent for Oregon moms overall (the national average is 40 percent).

"Because our work at ICTC relates to training women to be professional doulas

Working Kirk

Known as "The Hawthorne Bridge Guy," Kirk Reeves entertains families near Pioneer Courthouse Square with Christmas tunes, juggling tricks and a little bit of balloon magic.



PHOTO BY LISSA LOVING

and support women before, during and after birth, we need to have a deeper understanding of what's working now in the healthcare and social services sectors and where the

breakdowns in services, communications and outreach are occurring for Black women," Monroe said.

For info go to www.ictcmidwives.org.

Oregon's First-Ever Survey of Black Mothers Sheds Light on Poor Birth Outcomes

they don't have access to or support to take birthing classes or maintain breastfeeding, they often give birth alone with no support besides hospital staff, and some expressed fear during their time in the hospital based on their treatment."

Monroe cited the recent "Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile, 2010" report, which showed 11.4

BUF

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higher education, U.S. Department of Education statistics show that men of color are particularly absent from the university classroom: overall graduation rates for African and African American males are about 33 percent; for Black women the rate is just under 45 percent. The entire university system graduates just 57.3 percent of students.

An article on America's Wire by Marjorie Valbrun, "Black Males Missing from College Campuses," published earlier this year, explores the issue in depth. <http://americaswire.org/drupal7/?q=content/black-males-missing-college-campuses>

Friday a coalition of Civil Rights groups leaped to back up the new admissions guidelines, which they say "provide a roadmap for K-12 schools, colleges, and universities to implement the voluntary diversity and integration standards set by the Supreme Court's decisions in Grutter v. Bollinger (2003) and Parents Involved v. Seattle Schools (2007)."

"Racial segregation and concentrated poverty are increasing in our nation's schools, suggesting that we are backtracking on the successes of the civil rights movement," the civil rights groups said.

"Many schools are more racially isolated today than they were in the 1970s. Today's guidance recognizes the harms of re-segregation and the benefits of diversity."

That statement was signed by the ACLU, the NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund, and three other community-of-color legal associations.

Conservative observers decried the smackdown of the Bush Administration's anti-race policy. The Wall Street Journal cited a case pending before the U.S. Supreme Court concerning the University of Texas at Austin, where a plaintiff seeks to shut down "a race-conscious admissions policy."

The Journal quotes a conservative activist predicting the new guidelines will be overturned.

Meanwhile, more than 100 high school and college students crowded around tables at PSU's Smith Center, soaking up pitches from HBCUs, Ivy League schools, the Peace Corps, and more.

"We decided to put together this event because there are so many of our students who needed help and guidance," Livingston said.

Coming quickly behind the BUF is the

Oregon Community Foundation, which announced Monday it is dishing out \$40,000 to the BUF to bolster its higher education programs; in addition, it awarded \$25,000 to Elevate Oregon to improve high school graduation rates; and \$25,000 to Campfire Columbia for their Cradle-to-Career program.

"On top of that we have a huge scholarship program too, where we give scholarships to more than 2,000 students all over Oregon," said Joan Vallejo of the OCF. "Another huge barrier to higher education is funding – that much we know."

Livingston says the BUF is committed to continuing its annual college fairs as well as ongoing help and mentoring for young people who want to go.

"When you have a college education your earnings potential increases, you have greater access to health insurance, more access just to opportunities – doors open," she says. "So we want to encourage our students to get a college education – it opens the world to them."

Livingston said more volunteers from the

community are needed to give one-on-one support to the young people who come in for guidance. She said the BUF's programs are also always open to area sponsors who wish to pitch in with resources, as Portland State University and The Skanner News did with the college fair last week.

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In addition, Kaiser Permanente and Wieden+Kennedy contributed cash for four \$500 scholarships for high school and college students at the fair.

For more information go to the Black United Fund website at www.bufo.org

YouthPass

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The youth commission wants the program extended to every middle and high-school in the Portland-metro region. A 2009 survey showed that 80 percent of the 13,000 students who have a YouthPass use it almost daily. Students use the pass to get to school, to take part in sports and activities, to meet friends and to travel to jobs.

"I really need a bus pass," says Nick Cruz, a student at . "It's how I get to and from school every day, and it's how I get to the places I need to get to, and back home. If you take away my bus pass you're essentially making me stay at home the entire time."

Schools with higher numbers of students of color and low-income students use the pass more, suggesting it contributes to lev-

eling the playing field for disadvantaged teens.

"It's very important, particularly when students are moving, not just with gentrification but also because of school closures," says Jon Oster of the environmental justice group OPAL. "With closing, those students are now traveling further to get to Madison or Franklin. It's critical for youth."

Marci Jackson, a working parent, said transportation expenses put financial stress on many parents.

"I have three to buy, so that's \$75 a month just to help me get kids to and from school, and to and from activities," she said. "That's pretty expensive for parents."

When it was created, the YouthPass was funded through 's Business Energy Tax

Credit program. But last June, the Oregon Legislature decided to sunset that funding at the end of 2011.

Diskin says he understands why the tax credit program is not the best way to fund it, but he says the program is far cheaper than using a yellow bus system to transport high schoolers, and it offers many more benefits.

The state would have to reimburse 70 percent of the costs of those buses, which total about \$6 million, Diskin said.

"I do think it is the responsibility of our state to think about meeting the needs of young people, and that includes transportation."

Advocates say the YouthPass not only supports families, it helps reduce traffic congestion around neighborhood schools,

lowers carbon emissions – which helps Portland's Climate Action Plan – and introduces the next generation to public transit.

Shani Josefina Plunkett-de la Cruz, a junior at Roosevelt High School, and a Multnomah Youth Commissioner, is one of the teens who advocated for continuing the YouthPass.

"Many students in my school alone have no other option. They depend on the bus pass and for some, without it, they would not be able to get to school at all," she said. "My mom works two jobs, so she doesn't have time to drive me everywhere I need to be. With the YouthPass, I can travel to and from extracurricular activities such as sports, or the Multnomah Youth Commission."