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# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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# Out of sight, out of mind

Area still has no explicit protections for landlords and renters

BY AUSTIN RAMSEY  
MESSINGER-INQUIRER

When she and her children were forced to leave their last apartment in Owensboro nearly 10 years ago, she thought there was nowhere else to go.

A single mother with just one source of income, rental property in the city and county were hard enough to come by, let alone affordable. When she happened upon a place she and her children could call home, at least for a while, she jumped at the chance.

"It wasn't perfect, but I thought we would get it fixed up and livable," she said. "I was wrong."

What followed has been 10 years of what she describes as hell. Missing windows, leaky ceilings, a dangerous backyard — the woman and her children live in Daviess County without a working air conditioner and a heater that once went out in the dead of winter, plunging the old home into sub-freezing temperatures. Her landlord, she claims, refused to fix it "until the snow had melted."

The Messenger-Inquirer has agreed to keep the woman's name out of this story because



Photo by Austin Ramsey, Messenger-Inquirer | aramsey@messenger-inquirer.com

Kaitlin Nonweiler, executive director of the Owensboro Human Relations Commission, posts Fair Housing Month fliers in Owensboro. She feared she may be evicted from her home. Despite a lease agreement that she says guarantees her livable conditions, the home is meager at best. The few things that have been repaired, she says, have only introduced more problems into the home, and when she has opted to fix or buy things for the rental herself, her landlord has admonished her for it and refused to reimburse her expenses.

But the woman is a professional in the community. She has a good-paying job and receives modest help in food stamps every month. Few of her colleagues

or friends know the conditions she goes home to every day, and she believes she can't find or afford a better place to live.

Between missing window panes and a damaged door, mildew that has irreversibly damaged belongings and the near-constant fear that anything or everything

could break and leave her and her children exposed to the elements, she says she's nearly lost all hope.

"I'm trapped," she said. "I don't feel safe, but I don't have anywhere else left to go."

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## Standing up to bullies the message at Mount Calvary

BY AUSTIN RAMSEY  
MESSINGER-INQUIRER

An anti-bullying event at Mount Calvary Baptist Church on Saturday had one, unified message for the parents and children in attendance: Say something, because silence is serious.

Bullying, organizers say, has become an underlying issue behind many of the problems children experience today at schools, in their neighborhoods or online, and it's important to teach them how to stand up and not be a bystander, they say.

"It really starts at the home," Aresha Johnson, a Mount Calvary member and youth leader. "We don't always know what our youth are going through, and once it leaves the home, it rubs off on the rest of the community."

Few may know that better than Julius Maddox, a commu-

nity advocate who now speaks to teens about his own troubled past. Maddox, who is currently ranked the top bench presser in the world, was one of several key speakers Saturday, and he told those in attendance that his size helped contribute to him playing the role of bullied and bully.

Years later, after rediscovering his faith, Maddox said he came across one young woman who had been affected by his words.

"She told me she was still hurt by some of the things I had done and said in high school," he said. "Hearing that was tough. It hit home for me. It made me realize that the things we do and say today can affect people for the rest of their lives. It leaves lasting scars."

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## Trump seeks to cut foreign aid to 3 Central American nations

BY JONATHAN LEMIRE,  
NOMAAN MERCHANT AND  
COLLEEN LONG  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PALM BEACH, Fla. — Taking drastic action over illegal immigration, President Donald Trump moved Saturday to cut direct aid to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, whose citizens are fleeing north and overwhelming U.S. resources at the southern border.

The State Department notified Congress that it would look to suspend 2017 and 2018 payments to the trio of nations, which have been home to some of the migrant caravans that have marched through Mexico to the U.S. border.

Amplified by conservative media, Trump has turned the caravans into the symbol of what he says are the dangers of illegal immigration — a central theme of his midterm

campaigning last fall. With the special counsel's Russia probe seemingly behind him, Trump has revived his warnings of the caravans' presence.

Trump also has returned to a previous threat he never carried out — closing the border with Mexico. He brought up that possibility on Friday and

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Associated Press | Manuel Balce Ceneta

President Donald Trump speaks to reporters Friday during a visit to Lake Okeechobee and Herbert Hoover Dike at Canal Point, Fla.

Trump says he will close the nation's southern border, or large sections of it, next week if Mexico does not immediately stop illegal immigration.



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# Redacted Mueller report may be released by mid-April

BY MICHAEL BALSAMO  
AND ERIC TUCKER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A redacted version of special counsel Robert Mueller's report on the Russia investigation will be sent to Congress by mid-April and will not be shared with the White House beforehand, Attorney General William Barr said.

Barr's timeline, included in a letter to the chairmen of the House and Senate judiciary committees, sets up a possible showdown with House Democrats, who are insisting they see the full report next week.

In his letter, Barr said Friday he shares a desire for Congress and the public to be able to read

Mueller's findings, which are included in the nearly 400-page report the special counsel submitted last week.

Barr said President Donald Trump would have the right to assert executive privilege over parts of the report. But he noted that Trump "has stated publicly that he intends to defer to me and, accord-

ingly, there are no plans to submit the report to the White House for a privilege review."

Mueller officially concluded his investigation when he submitted the report last Friday. Two days later, Barr sent a four-page letter to Congress that detailed Mueller's "principal conclusions."

Mueller did not find

that the Trump campaign coordinated or conspired with Russia, Barr wrote, and did not reach a conclusion on whether Trump obstructed justice. Barr said he and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein decided on their own that Mueller's evidence was insufficient to establish that the president committed obstruction.

## TRUMP

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

revisited it in tweets Saturday, blaming Democrats and Mexico for problems at the border and beyond despite warnings that a closed border could create economic havoc on both sides.

"It would be so easy to fix our weak and very stupid Democrat inspired immigration laws," Trump tweeted Saturday. "In less than one hour, and then a vote, the problem would be solved. But the Dems don't care about the crime, they don't want any victory for Trump and the Republicans, even if good for USA!"

As far as Mexico's role, he tweeted: "Mexico must use its very strong immigration laws to stop the many thousands of people trying to get into the USA. Our detention areas are maxed out & we will take no more illegals. Next step is to close the Border! This will also help us with stopping the Drug flow from Mexico!"

When reporters asked Trump on Friday what closing the border could entail, he said "it could mean all trade" with Mexico and added, "We will close it for a long time."

Trump has been promising for more than two years to build a long, impenetrable wall along the border to stop illegal immigration, though Congress has been reluctant to provide the money he needs. In the meantime, he has

repeatedly threatened to close the border, but this time, with a new group of migrants heading north, he gave a definite timetable and suggested a visit to the border within the next two weeks.

A substantial closure could have an especially heavy impact on cross-border communities from San Diego to South Texas, as well as supermarkets that sell Mexican produce, factories that rely on imported parts, and other businesses across the U.S.

The U.S. and Mexico trade about \$1.7 billion in goods daily, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which said closing the border would be "an unmitigated economic debacle" that would threaten 5 million American jobs.

Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, spoke out Saturday against cutting off aid to Central America, declaring that "foreign assistance is not charity; it advances our strategic interests and funds initiatives that protect American citizens."

And a group of House Democrats visiting El Salvador denounced the administration's decision to cut aid to the region.

"As we visit El Salvador evaluating the importance of U.S. assistance to Central America to address the root causes of family and child migration, we are extremely disappointed to learn that President Trump intends to cut off aid to the region," said the statement from five lawmakers, including Rep. Eliot L. Engel of

New York, who chairs the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "The President's approach is entirely counterproductive."

The Trump administration has threatened before to scale back or cut off U.S. assistance to Central America. Congress has not approved most of those proposed cuts, however, and a report this year by the Congressional Research Service said any change in that funding would depend on what Congress does.

Short of a widespread border shutdown, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said the U.S. might close designated ports of entry to re-deploy staff to help process parents and children. Ports of entry are official crossing points that are used by residents and commercial vehicles. Many people who cross the border illegally ultimately request asylum under U.S. law, which does not require asylum seekers to enter at an official crossing.

Border officials are also planning to more than quadruple the number of asylum seekers sent back over the border to wait out their immigration cases, said an administration official. The official said right now about 60 migrants per day are returned and officials are hoping to send as many as 300 per day. The official was not authorized to speak publicly about internal plans and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said Fri-

day his country was doing its part to fight migrant smuggling. Criminal networks charge thousands of dollars a person to move migrants through Mexico, increasingly in large groups toward remote sections of the border.

"We want to have a good relationship with the government of the United States," Lopez Obrador said. He added: "We are going to continue helping so that the migratory flow, those who pass through our country, do so according to the law, in an orderly way."

Marcelo Ebrard, Mexico's foreign relations secretary, tweeted that his country "doesn't act based on threats" and is "the best neighbor" the U.S. could have.

Alejandra Mier y Teran, executive director of the Otay Mesa Chamber of Commerce in San Diego, said the mere threat of border closures sends the wrong message to businesses in Mexico and may eventually scare companies into turning to Asia for their supply chains.

"I think the impact would be absolutely devastating on so many fronts," said Mier y Teran, whose members rely on the Otay Mesa crossing to bring televisions, medical devices and a wide range of products to the U.S. "In terms of a long-term effect, it's basically shooting yourself in your foot. It's sending out a message to other countries that, 'Don't come because our borders may not work at any time.' That is extremely scary and dangerous."

## PROTECTIONS

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

This woman, like many others, sought help with the Owensboro Human Relations Commission, and sadly, officials there say, stories like hers are not uncommon in Daviess County. The nonprofit organization chartered by the city of Owensboro to put an end to discrimination among protected legal classes has become a sounding board in recent years for landlord-tenant disputes.

Last fiscal year, 65 percent of all commission inquiries came predominately in the form of tenants who believed they were being denied access to livable space, according to an annual report. So far this year, said Executive Director Kaitlin Nonweiler, 43 of the 70 or so complaints have been related to housing, representing about a 10 percent spike in the number of cases she says she can do very little about.

Kentucky is one of only two states in the U.S. without statewide habitability standards for renters. The Uniform Residential Landlord Tenant Act (URLTA) of 1974 furnished landlords and tenants in the commonwealth with statutory protections that encouraged both to better maintain and improve housing quality. But the law gave municipal governments like cities and counties the option to put it into effect in their jurisdictions and only roughly 4 percent of them have.

Neither Owensboro nor Daviess County is among them.

"When renters come to our office or call and they explain the situation to me, I have to basically say, 'There are no laws protecting you, and there's really nothing we can do other than listen,'" Nonweiler said. "That's what most people are looking for, too. When they come, they feel like we listen to them. They feel like they get the run-around every other place that they've gone to. Here, we listen to their story, we express empathy for them, and that means the world to

them. I tell them that we're here and we take their data. We take their story and we use it to advocate for them — for their rights. We're here to make their voices heard and give the opportunity for them to share their story. The marginalized and disenfranchised groups in our community — the poor, immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ — often don't have a voice."

In non-URLTA communities, often the only protections a landlord or tenant have are those outlined in a lease, but writing a lease or knowing what to look for in one can be challenging for the inexperienced landlord or disenfranchised tenant.

April is National Fair Housing Month in the U.S., and the Human Relations Commission, in conjunction with the Diocese of Owensboro Catholic Charities and Kentucky Legal Aid, is hosting housing workshops all month to help tenants and landlords learn more about what rights they do and don't have. It's a positive first step, Nonweiler said, in engaging both sides of often fraught relationships in frank and honest dialogue.

"Some landlords that don't have multiple apartments or multiple homes and maybe just rent out one home, they're not very knowledgeable about how to write a lease or what to put in it," she said. "That honestly is where most of the problems we see are coming from. URLTA would provide them with a framework. It has things that they have to put in a lease and other things they could take out or add themselves according to what they wanted. It would certainly benefit landlords, not just tenants."

In fact, said Jim DeMaio, executive officer of the Greater Owensboro REALTOR Association, for the most part, his organization has no problem with fair protections for both sides of landlord-tenant relationships. DeMaio said he didn't even realize URLTA wasn't already in place in Owensboro-Daviess Coun-

## FAIR HOUSING MONTH WORKSHOPS

In order to help bridge the knowledge and information gap between landlords and tenants, the Owensboro Human Relations Commission, Diocese of Owensboro Catholic Charities and Kentucky Legal Aid are hosting April Housing 101 workshops in Owensboro. They will cover fair housing laws, how to read a lease, landlord-tenant relationships and forcible detainers in English, Spanish and Burmese.

**English** — 6-7 p.m. April 25 at the H.L. Neblett Community Center, 801 W. Fifth St.

**Spanish** — 2-3 p.m. April 28 at the SS. Joseph & Paul Catholic Church, 609 E. Fourth St.

\*\*A Burmese workshop will be offered to refugees participating in the Owensboro Community & Technical College English-as-a-second-language courses April 24 at the International Center of Kentucky Owensboro location, 2818 New Hartford Road.

ty, and he's shocked, he said, that many of the provisions he and member organizations regularly abide by aren't mandated by law.

"Obviously, if someone were to bring this to the (Owensboro) City Commission or (Daviess) Fiscal Court, I would have to wait to have a conversation with my board of directors, but knowing how we advocate for fairness between buyers and sellers, I don't know why we wouldn't advocate for fairness between landlords and tenants," he said. "We're always on the side of fairness. I don't think any of us would have a reason not to. Besides, the fact that this is already a state law makes it easier to support."

Bill Castlen, manager of Benchmark Properties in Owensboro, said his company, and most other rental outfits in the city and county, already abide by most if not all the tenets outlined in URLTA, because it's the right thing to do. His philosophy behind renting properties is that, if he wouldn't live there, no one else should either.

But "bad landlords," Castlen said, are going to be bad, no matter what the law states, and there are plenty of protections already in place for tenants to seek help outside a state statute or city ordinance. The city housing inspectors play a crucial role in helping to determine whether space is livable for a tenant, an owner or anyone, he said.

According to Catholic Charities Director Susan Montalvo-Gesser, case law

does provide some precedence for renters to seek protections, particularly as it relates to written notice and the number of days before legal action is permissible for non-payment of rent. But the lack of uniformity creates a burden on the courts and increases court costs and taxpayer dollars for common legal proceedings to take place throughout the state.

The Human Relations Commission has been lobbying city commissioners to pass URLTA in Owensboro for as far back as the law has been in place in Kentucky, according to old newspaper records. Just four years ago, the HRC, under former executive

director Sylvia Coleman, brought it to the attention of the commission during a work session. Former Mayor Ron Payne expressed support for the ordinance proposal in its entirety, but it was never drafted, and some commissioners said there simply wasn't enough evidence that people in the community suffered under unfair leases.

Montalvo-Gesser said her organization and the commission plan to take the issue back before Daviess Fiscal Court soon.

Daviess County Judge-Executive Al Mattingly said he doesn't necessarily have a problem with any particular provision within URLTA, except one that requires municipalities or counties adopt it in its entirety, without any additions or subtractions.

## MESSAGE

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

According to the Kentucky Center for School Safety, "bullying" means any unwanted verbal, physical, or social behavior among students that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and is repeated or has the potential to be repeated. That occurs on school premises, on school-sponsored transportation, or at a school-sponsored event; or that disrupts the education process."

What is perceived as bullying has changed recently with the predominance of online communications, particularly among young people.

Owensboro Middle School Assistant Principal Melissa Brown, another speaker on Saturday, encouraged children to play an active role in putting an end to the cyclical effect bullying can have by not spreading rumors and standing up to rude, violent or unfair behavior. She also told parents that they need to monitor their children online, because many children are engaging in unseen digital lives without any adult supervision whatsoever.

"We all need to take a step back and think about the role we play in fostering an environment where bullying can take place," she said. "That can be just as harmful."

The Rev. Andre Bradley said he wants to host more anti-bullying events at the church.

Austin Ramsey, 270-691-7302, aramsey@messenger-inquirer.com, Twitter: @austinrramsey

"It impresses upon the entire commonwealth the same tenets," he said, "instead of giving local communities the ability to pass an ordinance that would be specific to their needs. You may not amend or change anything."

It's simply another example of state government overreach, the judge said, and legislators in Frankfort deciding what's right for people and organizations also governed by local elected leaders. If the commission or Catholic Charities did present an ordinance, he said, he would certainly entertain debating it, but he doesn't think there would be a lot of support for it in the community.

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