

Inside

Debate over Bibb priorities on Nextdoor

Supporters see change and momentum. Critics see misplaced priorities and unmet needs.

Social media offers a real-time view of how residents feel — one post at a time.

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Kamron Bennifield launches his music career with debut single ‘Pretty Nice’



Konner Hines



Campus Creatives is a new series highlighting student artists, musicians, performers and other creatives across the Greater Cleveland area who are building their craft inside and outside the classroom.

This week’s featured artist is Kamron Bennifield, an acting major in Baldwin Wallace University’s acting program who is stepping into the music scene with his debut single “Pretty Nice.”

Originally from Cleveland’s West Side, Bennifield said creativity has always been a major part of his life. While attending an engineering-focused high school, he pursued his interests in acting and singing — both of which he discovered around age 12.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bennifield began posting clips of himself singing on

social media and quickly realized listeners connected with his sound. What started as casual posts developed into writing and recording original music after he entered college.

“I always knew I wanted to be an actor, but I also always wanted to sing,” Bennifield said in a recent interview.

Now a senior at Baldwin Wallace and set to graduate in December 2026, Bennifield released “Pretty Nice” on April 10.

The track leans into an upbeat pop sound, with lyrics that explore positivity, nature and emotional connection. Bennifield said listeners can “vibe with” the song whether they’re outside with friends or simply looking for something uplifting.

“It’s about being able to find love with anything or anyone around you,” Bennifield said. “Being able to feel good when you’re outside or around people that you love.”

Bennifield said his time at Baldwin Wallace has helped him grow creatively, particularly through collaborations with other student



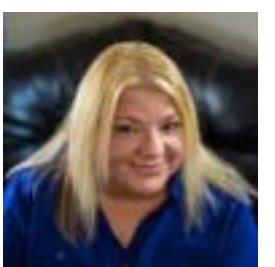
Cover art for Kamron Bennifield’s debut single “Pretty Nice.”

artists and exposure to a range of genres and styles. He credits the university’s artistic community with helping him experiment beyond what he originally envisioned for himself.

One recent experience that stood out was Baldwin Wallace’s Culture Night, where he heard music and performances representing a range of cultural

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Ohio Aging Compass centralizes resources



Rosie Palfy



COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio officials launched a new online platform designed to simplify how older residents and their families find care, services and data, after years of complaints from residents and caregivers that aging resources were hard to find.

Gov. Mike DeWine made the announcement May 1 at a news conference. The tool, called the Ohio Aging Compass, brings together information related to healthcare, housing, caregiving, transportation, and long-term care into a single website. State officials said the platform is intended to make the system easier to understand for Ohioans navigating aging-related decisions.

DeWine said the initiative builds on years of feedback from families who struggled to find reliable information when making major care decisions.

“For years, families across Ohio have told us really the same thing,” DeWine said. “When it came time to find care for a loved one, they felt that the process was really just overwhelming.”

State officials launched the Aging Compass during Older Americans Month as part of Ohio’s broader healthy-aging initiative.

A single starting point

The new platform builds on previous state efforts to improve transparency in long-term care. In 2023, DeWine created a Nursing Home Quality and Accountability Task Force. The task force preceded the 2024 launch of the Long-Term Care Quality Navigator, which lets users compare nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Officials said while thousands have used the tool, it did not fully address broader needs identified in surveys and listening sessions.

“We need a centralized place to find the care, services, and information we need,” DeWine said, quoting feedback from residents in the 2023 Ohio Governor’s Nursing Home Quality and Accountability Task Force Recommendations Report. “You shouldn’t have to visit



20 different websites to find the resources that you need.”

The Aging Compass is designed to serve as that single entry point, combining multiple tools into one platform.

Three tools in one platform

The site integrates three main components:

- Long-Term Care Quality Navigator, which allows users to compare care facilities
- Healthy Aging Resource Hub, a directory of services, programs and events
- Aging Data Explorer, a dashboard tracking more than 80 metrics tied to state aging priorities

Ohio Department of Aging Director Ursel McElroy described the platform as a “one-stop shop” for aging-related resources and services. “This is more than a website. It is a gateway to aging well,” she said.

McElroy said the system was built using input from residents across all 88 counties, including town halls, focus groups and statewide surveys.

“We didn’t start with assumptions. We started with people,” McElroy said. “We heard from hundreds of older adults and caregivers who provided feedback

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Kamron Bennifield launches his music career with debut single 'Pretty Nice' From front page



Kamron Bennifield.

backgrounds. Bennifield said the variety inspired him to keep experimenting with his own sound.

"Being around those communities inspires me to create something new," Bennifield said.

The single was mixed by

Prosper Obaside, a fellow creative whom Bennifield met through a 48-hour film competition involving Baldwin Wallace students.

Bennifield cites Daniel Caesar, Ariana Grande, Khalid, SZA, Giveon and Harry Styles as influences. While "Pretty Nice" leans pop, he said future releases may explore R&B and other genres as he continues developing as an artist.

He also encouraged hesitant student artists to take the leap and release their work.

"If you feel like this is your calling, just do it," Bennifield said. "There's billions of people in this world. Express yourself."

"Pretty Nice" is available on Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube and

other streaming platforms.

Konner Hines is a member of the Honors College and a marketing and human resources student at Baldwin Wallace University.

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Ohio Aging Compass centralizes resources

From front page

with candor and heart."

Tools aimed at everyday users

State officials emphasized practical tools to simplify real-world decisions.

A resource hub includes a searchable database of more than 6,000 local services, ranging from meal delivery to transportation and caregiver support. Users can filter results by location and service type, and save or share information with family members.

The platform also includes a "resource finder" quiz that directs users to relevant services based on their needs, and an events calendar highlighting statewide programs.

The data explorer lets users track how their community is performing in areas such as health outcomes and quality of life, with county-level comparisons and demographic breakdowns.

"The data explorer is your window into our performance and progress," McElroy said. "It's where you can clearly see what's working, what needs attention, and how we're delivering on our commitments."

Focus on transparency and accountability

Officials said the site gives residents greater public access to government data and decision making tools.

"The Ohio Aging Compass is a major step forward in transparency and accessibility," DeWine said in a statement.

The system is also tied to Ohio's State Plan on Aging, which guides funding and policy decisions. The dashboard allows users to compare current performance against state targets.

McElroy said future updates may add artificial intelligence features, including a chatbot to help users navigate services in real time.

Support from advocacy groups

Advocates for older adults and caregivers said the platform addresses a critical gap in access to information.

Jenny Carlson, state director for AARP Ohio, said the tool reflects long-standing calls for a more user-friendly system.

"Older adults and family

caregivers repeatedly tell us the same thing. They want clear, reliable information that they can actually use," Carlson said.

She said the centralized platform could be especially valuable for caregivers balancing multiple responsibilities.

Ohio has about 2.2 million family caregivers, many juggling jobs, raising children and managing their own health needs, Carlson said.

"Giving them a clear place to start is what truly matters," she said.

Supporting caregivers

State officials say the Aging Compass is part of a larger "age-friendly Ohio" initiative to help residents remain independent and engaged in their communities.

The platform is designed for individuals, families, policymakers, service providers and community organizations seeking data to guide planning and investment.

"With millions of Ohioans now aged 50 and older, having a trusted, consumer-friendly place to find aging information is incredibly critical," Carlson said.

Looking ahead

Officials described the launch as an early step, not a finished product.

"This launch is an important first step," McElroy said. "It is an iterative foundation in our work toward fewer clicks, clearer pathways, and more accessible resources."

The state plans to continue collecting feedback and expanding the platform's features over time. The Ohio Aging Compass is now available online at compass.aging.ohio.gov.

Rosie Palfy is a print editor for The Cleveland Observer and a former Marine Corps combat correspondent.

CLEVELAND OBSERVER

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PUBLISHER
Ron Calhoun

EDITOR
Lisa O'Brien

PRINT EDITOR
Rosie Palfy

PARTNERS
The Cleveland Foundation

ADVERTISING
sales@cleobserver.com

ADVISORY BOARD
Sheila Ferguson,
Ron Harris, Devon Jones,
Mark Silverberg

PRINT LAYOUT / GRAPHICS
Ron Calhoun

info@cleobserver.com
2400 Orange Ave. Box 5324
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-236-8081

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Clevelanders share stories of starting over



Chelsea Daniel

In a culture that suggests adults should feel settled and fulfilled by their 30s or 40s, needing a reset can feel like a personal failure.

But in a city shaped by reinvention and resilience, Clevelanders understand that starting over is rarely glamorous. More often, it is the gritty work of rebuilding after divorce, job loss, grief or the realization that the life you built no longer fits.

In a city where your past may be only a few blocks away, community ties run deep and social circles can feel fixed, beginning again can be both isolating and transformative.

To better understand what starting over in Cleveland looks like, The Cleveland Observer spoke with several residents who have rebuilt their lives after major setbacks or who are creating lives that feel more authentic to who they are today.

Redefining identity after loss

For Ash Cohen, starting over began after the loss of both parents within eight months. Her mother died of cancer in 2023. Her father died the following year after an unexpected illness.

"Most people don't know what it's like to lose both parents back-to-back," Cohen said. "I felt like I had to cope with that loss on my own. Grief caused me to disconnect from old friends and extended family. It was isolating, but being alone gave me the opportunity to start over."

Cohen said the isolation gave her the time and space to explore her gender identity away from the weight of external judgment. She now identifies as nonbinary. Cohen describes this period of her life as emotionally complex but necessary for survival.

"On one hand, I was dealing with the intense grief of knowing I would never see my parents again," Cohen said. "On the other hand, I felt free knowing I was no longer bound by their expectations."

After growing up on Cleveland's East Side, Cohen moved to Lakewood, where she found support in the city's LGBTQ+ community.



Downtown Cleveland, Ohio. Credit: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.

"I met people who were kind and supportive," Cohen said. "Watching others be themselves gave me permission to do the same. It feels like a safe space."

Returning home

For Karlton Laster, starting over meant returning home to Cleveland.

After leaving a policy consulting job in Minneapolis, Laster moved back to the city and is temporarily living with family members while working for a local nonprofit and searching for his next opportunity.

The transition has required some adjustment.

Laster's bedroom is in the basement, which occasionally floods during heavy storms. "I feel like a refugee every time it rains," Laster said with a laugh.

Returning home has provided stability, but it has also underscored how much life has changed since his 20s, he said. Many of Laster's longtime friends are raising families and juggling demanding work schedules.

"I pretty much gravitated back to old social circles," Laster said. "It's different now. Friends are having kids and not leaving the house as much, so I have to find creative ways to spend time with them."

He said he talks to his best friend on the phone more often than he sees him in person, even though they now live in the same city.

Although Laster does not expect to remain in Cleveland long term, he said the city will always feel like home.

Rebuilding after personal upheaval

For Lauren Pearce, starting over began with a leap of faith.

An internationally recognized mixed-media artist, muralist and single mother of two, Pearce moved to Cleveland from West Palm Beach, Florida, in 2016 with her then-husband and children. At the time, she had never lived outside her hometown.

Pearce said the move was driven in part by a search for stronger autism resources after her youngest son was diagnosed with autism. Pearce would later receive her own diagnosis.

"I googled the top 10 cities to live in for autism resources, and Cleveland was one of them," she said.

Four years later, Pearce divorced and faced a different kind of reset: rebuilding her personal life while raising two children and expanding her career.

"Navigating complex relationships can be difficult at this stage in life, especially as an autistic person," Pearce said. "Not everybody is as upfront as me, which can make things complicated."

Despite those challenges, Pearce said she has built a thriving art practice and a strong support network in Cleveland's creative community.

"I've had an easier time building community among other artists and creatives," Pearce said. "I go slow when it comes to building relationships, allowing my body to process interactions over time. I've felt most supported by other artists and neurodivergent folks."

Moving forward

The stories of Cohen, Laster and Pearce suggest that starting over is a natural part of life. Relationships change. Jobs end. Parents die. The slow work of rebuilding begins in the aftermath.

For these residents, starting over involved rebuilding routines, relationships and community after major life changes.

Chelsea Daniel is a Cleveland-based writer and community advocate. She is a 2025 Breakthrough Writing Resident with Literary Cleveland.

America's 20 best cities to make a fresh start

FinanceBuzz looked at more than 20 data points related to employment, lifestyle, housing, and more in 75 of America's biggest cities to find the best and worst places to make a fresh start.



City	Score	City	Score
1. St. Louis, Missouri	68.5	11. Buffalo, New York	61.5
2. Cincinnati, Ohio	68.0	12. Cleveland, Ohio	60.9
3. Lincoln, Nebraska	67.4	13. Orlando, Florida	60.7
4. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	67.2	14. Tallahassee, Florida	59.3
5. Hartford, Connecticut	67.0	15. Atlanta, Georgia	58.6
6. Baton Rouge, Louisiana	64.2	16. Madison, Wisconsin	58.1
7. Little Rock, Arkansas	64.0	17. Salt Lake City, Utah	58.0
8. Lexington, Kentucky	63.0	18. Columbus, Ohio	57.9
9. Des Moines, Iowa	62.8	19. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	57.2
10. Toledo, Ohio	62.2	20. Minneapolis, Minnesota	57.2

FINANCEBUZZ



Debate over Bibb priorities on Nextdoor



Ron Calhoun



and more to daily quality-of-life concerns.

Debate over city spending and neighborhood needs

Another recurring point of discussion on Nextdoor involved spending at City Hall, including office furnishings.

Some residents defended those purchases as routine or justified. One commenter wrote, "The Mayor's chair must be comfortable, ERGONOMIC and fully adjustable ... I think Cleveland can afford new chairs and drapes for City Hall."

Others said those expenses felt out of touch, given the challenges facing neighborhoods and schools. Carl Thomas wrote that such spending seemed misplaced while "schools are closing with people being paid off, and many neighborhoods are a mess." Another resident, GA T., argued for a more frugal approach, writing, "I bought used ... and got a chair that looks brand new for one-quarter of the price. Perhaps he should bargain shop for quality too."

As presented here, those quotes are used to show resident sentiment on Nextdoor. They should not be read as independently verified findings unless confirmed

Residents on Nextdoor, a social network designed for neighborhoods, are sharply divided over Mayor Justin Bibb's priorities, with debate centering on city spending, public safety and the future of Burke Lakefront Airport. To read the comments, join Nextdoor online.

Posts reviewed for this article show a mix of frustration, support and skepticism about the city's direction. Some residents praised Bibb's development agenda and willingness to pursue change, while others said neighborhood concerns are being overshadowed by high-profile projects and city image.

That debate comes as a group called The Accountable Cleveland Era launched and recently shut down a recall effort against Bibb, citing concerns about spending, transparency and leadership. Recent reporting also shows that nearly 6,000 people responded to a city-backed survey about the future of Burke Lakefront



A Cleveland street in need of repair. Credit: YouTube.

Airport, with 85% favoring a more accessible lakefront.

On Nextdoor, some residents said they believe everyday concerns are receiving less attention than development plans and public image.

One resident, Charles A., wrote, "His incompetence is destroying the city and its future." Another resident, John Noernberg, pointed to neighborhood safety concerns, writing, "Could hire more police instead of going on wasted trips. People speed on 25 mph street all day and night and have never seen a cop ticket one person."

Those comments reflect frustration expressed online, though they do not by themselves establish whether the underlying claims are accurate. They do, however, show that for some residents, the debate over Bibb's leadership is tied less to rhetoric

through documents, public records or additional reporting.

Burke debate draws strong reactions

The future of Burke Lakefront Airport remains another major source of disagreement among residents. A city-backed survey on lakefront redevelopment drew nearly 6,000 responses, and recent reporting said 85% of respondents supported a more accessible lakefront.

On Nextdoor, some residents supported redevelopment and said they see it as part of a broader effort to modernize the city. Cathy Stanton wrote, "I'm glad I voted for him. He's young and has a lot of new ideas; he won't do everything right, but he's doing something."

Other commenters questioned the financial and environmental implications of closing the airport. Charles A. argued that closing Burke would



online portal. **Advocacy, education and engagement**

Residents who want to respond to city policy can attend public meetings, contact City Council members, follow reporting on accountability efforts, and participate in public feedback opportunities tied to redevelopment planning.

Readers should distinguish between verified reporting and resident opinion posted online.

Social media comments can show public sentiment, but factual claims should be checked against official records, public documents and reported sources.

The online debate over Bibb reflects broader disagreements about leadership, neighborhood investment and Cleveland's future.

Supporters see change and momentum. Critics see misplaced priorities and unmet needs.

As debate over Burke continues, neighborhood forums like Nextdoor are offering a real-time view of how residents are interpreting the city's direction — one post at a time.

cost Clevelanders millions of dollars and claimed the site would require extensive environmental cleanup. That claim was made in resident commentary and was not independently verified in this article.

The split reflects a broader disagreement over whether redevelopment represents progress or an expensive gamble.

For readers, the value is not that every online comment is a proven fact. The value is seeing which issues are resonating in the community and where public concern is gathering.

Solutions and resources

City-backed redevelopment outreach around Burke has continued through surveys and public discussion.

Residents can report neighborhood service concerns by calling 311 or using the city's

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Faith: The law of seedtime and harvest



Minister Sharon Lewis



Genesis 8:22 in the New Living Translation says, “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

Many who have planted a seed know that there are certain actions, along with the passage of time, that are required for it to grow and mature into its designated being. The law of seedtime and harvest is a perpetual, irreversible law of God. Some might say that it is a covenant of exemption from hardship.

The sower

The Bible is full of stories about seeds. But to understand seedtime and harvest, you must first understand the sower. The first question, though, is who or what is the seed?

Some people believe that your seed is only giving and finances. The seed has little to do with money and everything to do with your life practices, including your relationship with God. So, the sower is anyone who desires to see an outcome on the earth.

The body of Christ should pattern itself after God, who is the original sower. Jeremiah 29:11 in the New Living Translation (NLT) says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

By the same token, Satan is also a sower. He roams, seeking someone to destroy. He desires certain outcomes on the earth. 1 Peter 5:8 NLT says, “Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”

The seed

The seed is anything capable of producing within a season of harvest. That includes your thoughts, words, deeds and anger. A man can be a seed; almost anything can function as

soil, where they produced a crop.

The birds ate the seeds that fell along the path. This represents those who hear the word but do not accept or understand it. The seed that fell on the rocky ground grew quickly in the shallow soil but died just as quickly in the heat of the day.

This represents those who receive the word but whose faith is not strong enough to stand during trials. The seeds that grew among the thorns represent those who allow the worries of life to make them turn away from God.



a seed. If you plant wickedness, hatred, or even slumber when it would be wiser to work, there is an expected outcome to your actions.

The soil

How the seed grows does not just depend on the quality of the seed. It also depends on the quality of the soil. The parable of the sower, told in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8, tells the story of a farmer scattering seeds. Some seeds fell along the path, some in rocky places, others among thorns, and others fell on good

Lastly, the seeds that fell on good ground represent those who understand and stand on the word of God. To make it plain, the soil is man’s heart. Proverbs 4:23 in the New International Version (NIV) says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” If you decide to read that passage, start with verse 19 to get the full meaning of the text.

The harvest

Do not be deceived. The harvest reflects the quality of a man’s life and is dependent on

the seeds he plants in the earth. God reaps a harvest in the earth, and His angels gather His harvest, for they are instruments of God. Humanity reaps a harvest from what it has planted, good or bad.

Believe it or not, someone else can plant in your garden and reap your harvest, but that is a lesson for another time.

Know that for the body of Christ, Satan reaps no harvest upon the earth. He is already defeated. He plants in vain. Several verses in the Bible speak about reaping a harvest.

One such verse is in Galatians 6:9 NIV, and it says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

The promises of God are dependent on our consistency and steadfastness, for the promises of God are “yes” and “amen” according to 2 Corinthians 1:20 NIV. Because there is time between the planting and the reaping, understand that you cannot wait until the night before you need to plant the seed.

Any farmer will tell you that there is a season for planting and a season for harvesting. Both take time. Both are processes that cannot be altered.

Sharon Lewis is a licensed minister and leader of Christian Quest Ministries in Cleveland. She has degrees from John Carroll University and Cleveland State University and is a certified functional nutrition counselor.

Legal Aid: Using rent escrow for repairs



Tonya Sams

Many tenants are unaware of their rights when a landlord fails to make repairs to their property to keep it livable and safe. In Ohio, one option is rent deposit, often called rent escrow in housing court.

“A tenant can use rent escrow and pay their rent to the Clerk of Court to protect themselves from being evicted, while trying to get the landlord to make repairs,” said Barbara Reitzloff, a supervising attorney in The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland’s Housing Practice Group. “Tenants do not need an attorney to start the process.”

There are a few things that tenants should know before starting the rent escrow process.

“It’s a fairly simple process, but tenants have to plan ahead,” said Reitzloff. “Unless it’s an emergency, like no heat in the

winter, tenants must give the landlord 30 days’ notice in writing listing the repairs needed. The tenant should give the landlord the notice with the rent.”

“The landlord then has a reasonable amount of time, usually 30 days, to make the repairs. If they don’t, and the tenant is current in rent, the tenant can pay the next month’s rent into escrow. The tenant can’t wait until they get a three-day eviction notice for nonpayment and then decide to put their rent into escrow,” she continued.

Paying rent into escrow protects a tenant from being evicted for nonpayment, but tenants sometimes take other actions that do not protect them.

“You can’t just stop paying rent because of the condition of the rental,” Reitzloff said. “You also can’t make the repairs yourself and then deduct the cost from the rent.”

Once the rent escrow process begins, some courts, like the Cleveland Housing Court, hold mediations to try to help the tenant and landlord work

something out, including releasing the funds to the landlord if the repairs are made, or splitting the money on deposit with the tenant if they want to move out.

“The court holding onto the rent is the incentive to get the landlord to make repairs. It’s more effective with private landlords as opposed to those in subsidized housing, because the landlord in subsidized housing will still receive the larger subsidy payment while the tenant pays their portion into the court,” Reitzloff added.

Tenants can also make a complaint with the city about the condition of the property.

“The city will send an inspector out. If there are code violations, they’ll cite the landlord. The landlord must make the repairs to satisfy the city, and if they don’t, they can be charged criminally,” said Reitzloff. “So not only will the landlord not receive rent, but they could also end up with a criminal misdemeanor charge. Some violations could cost the landlord \$1,000 a day for every day out of compliance.”

To learn more about

rent escrow, visit lasclev.org/RentDepositBrochure.

Having issues regarding housing? Legal Aid may be able to help. Attend a free Legal Aid Brief Advice Clinic. For a full schedule: lasclev.org/clinics.

To apply for free legal services, call 888-817-3777 or apply online: lasclev.org/apply.

Tonya Sams is a development and communications manager at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

How to Rent Deposit when Housing Issues are a Problem

Cómo Crear una Cuenta en Plica para Depósito del Alquiler cuando las Condiciones de Vivienda son Problemáticas



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Care, not cuffs: Breaking the cycle of incarceration



Jennifer Bailey



Across Ohio, law enforcement agencies are changing how officers respond to people experiencing mental health crises, aiming to avoid tragedies like Eleanor Bumpurs, Deborah Danner, Daniel Prude and Tanisha Anderson, who died after encounters with police during or involving mental health crises.

Since 2000, through the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training program, law enforcement has been building skills to help identify people with mental illnesses and ways to intervene accordingly. Through CIT, people experiencing mental illness have the opportunity to avoid deeper involvement in the criminal justice system and move onto a clinical track, leading to support, stability and healing.

Shannon Scully, director of justice policy and initiatives, said officers are often misassigned to these calls. “They [law enforcement] kind of get put between a rock and a hard place,” Scully said, “because we rely on them as a safety net when we don’t have other options.”

However, programs that train police to identify mental illness are being implemented to mitigate this issue.

Luke Russell, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Ohio’s CIT program, said that Ohio has trained more than half of the state’s police officers in CIT. Police-led and nonpolice crisis response programs, like CIT, have been diverting individuals with mental illness toward the clinical track.

The origins of intervention

The CIT model was born from tragedy in Memphis, Tennessee.. In 1988, Dr. Randy Dupont and Maj. Sam Cochran developed the program after an officer shot and killed a man with serious mental illness. From this, the Memphis chapter of the NAMI, the University of Tennessee Medical School, and the University of Memphis

collaborated to provide more training for police officers to identify and support those with mental illness.

CIT has been utilized by many communities and has been implemented statewide in Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, Utah, and Ohio. Russell said that the 40-hour training includes education about mental illness, lived experience testimonials, role-playing exercises and Hearing Distressing Voices Simulation.

CIT in action

According to the Cleveland Division of Police’s CIT brochure, people can call 911 in an emergency, the Cleveland police non-emergency line at 216-621-1234 or the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for mental health crisis support.

Callers should provide as much information as possible about the situation, including the name of the person in crisis and a description.

The caller should also provide a list of medications and whether the person has stopped taking them, if they know this information. Information regarding access to weapons and any known history of interacting with police



AI-generated illustration. Credit: ChatGPT.

should also be shared when calling.

CIT provides the opportunity for law enforcement to recognize symptoms of a mental health crisis instead of seeing the behavior as criminal intent. Dispatchers are also being trained to better identify calls suited for CIT. According to the 2024 City of Cleveland Mental Health Response Advisory Committee (MHRAC) annual report, 90 of 92 dispatchers



Credit: ChatGPT-generated image

received “dispatch-focused” behavioral health training.

Emily Ribnik, director of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence, emphasizes early intervention. “The earlier in any process that you can appropriately identify somebody and get them to the right care at the right time with the right place, that’s where you really start to see a lot of those results,” Ribnik said.

In Cleveland, the need is clear. CIT officers responded to 4,901 incidents in 2025, averaging

individual has gotten involved with the local justice system. In both cases, the goal is to match people with services, not charges. Whether diversion or deflection, the data suggests CIT is making an impact.

Ongoing challenges

Russell said the shortage of psychiatric inpatient beds in Ohio hospitals, a lack of mental health case managers and high turnover rates have created major gaps in follow-up care.

Although CIT is proving to be impactful, follow-up care is needed. Scully said, “The mental health system for so long has just been under-resourced. And so there isn’t just one thing we can do to address all of these challenges.” Ultimately, CIT serves as a vital first step but not the entire solution.

The road ahead

Because of CIT programs, mental health crisis support is being addressed, and community connections are being formed, but the need for help remains high, and there is still more to do after the person is no longer in crisis.

As effective as CIT can be, it still begins with a 911 call and a police response. Across the country, some communities are building a different model entirely. Some advocates and communities are questioning whether law enforcement should respond to all mental health crises.

The third story in this series will look at non-police-based programs that provide support and resources to those experiencing mental health crises.

Jennifer Bailey is a licensed clinical social worker and registered drama therapist.

about 408 incidents per month, according to the 2025 MHRAC annual report. The report also found that only 2.4% of CIT incidents resulted in an arrest.

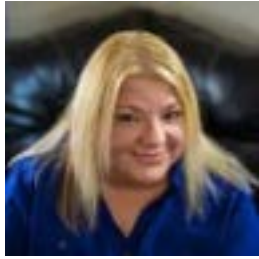
The goal of CIT training is de-escalation using tactics like active listening, non-threatening communication, calm body language and identifying signs of mental illness. Once the situation is de-escalated, law enforcement assesses whether it is resolved or more support is needed.

Through de-escalation, law enforcement officers can connect individuals experiencing behavioral health crises with diversion and deflection programs designed to reduce involvement with the criminal justice system.

Defining the on-ramp to care

Ribnik defines deflection as the connection of individuals and services before they have formal involvement with the justice system. Diversion is similar to deflection but occurs after the

Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission opens new headquarters, expands services



Rosie Palfy



SCAN TO LISTEN



Officials cut the ribbon during the grand opening of the new Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission headquarters. Credit: Cuyahoga County

Cuyahoga County officials and veteran leaders marked the April 24 opening of the Veterans Service Commission's new headquarters, highlighting expanded services and improved access for veterans.

A colorful "Welcome Vets" mural greets visitors inside the new 30,000-square-foot facility at 3950 Chester Ave., Cleveland. The headquarters consolidates services in one location and adds a free gated parking lot, training space and expanded capacity.

The commission traces its roots to 1886, when it was established as the Soldiers' & Sailors' Relief Commission to assist veterans in need and their families, according to Case Western Reserve University's Encyclopedia of Cleveland History.

In 2024, Cuyahoga County Council approved an \$8.3 million

Ronayne was young, showing him and his brother an Army jacket, blanket and footlocker from his time in the service.

After his father's death, Ronayne said, his mother married a Marine who shared that pride in service.

"We need this Veterans Service Commission," Ronayne said. "We need it more than ever today."

Veterans have not always received the dignity and respect they deserve, Ronayne said,

Santiago said she discovered the commission while searching online for veterans resources after her family experienced financial difficulties.

"And like many veterans, asking for help isn't always easy," Santiago said.

She said the agency helped her family with mortgage payments, utilities, food and school supplies. Later, she said, the commission encouraged her to apply for a position there.

"That turned out to be one of the best decisions I've ever made," she said.

Santiago said she now helps veterans facing many of the same challenges she once experienced.

"Programs like this don't just provide assistance," Santiago

said. "They restore stability, dignity and hope."

Services and resources

The commission provides emergency financial assistance for:

- rent, mortgage, security deposits and utilities
- food and household essentials
- clothing, shoes and personal hygiene items
- transportation to dental and medical appointments

Additional services include:

- assistance with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs claims and benefits, including disability compensation and pensions
- healthcare enrollment
- outreach for homeless and at-risk veterans
- memorial and burial assistance
- support for veterans and dependents
- DD Form 214 discharge upgrades and corrections

The Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission headquarters is at 3950 Chester Ave. in Cleveland. Veterans and dependents can learn more at cuyahogavets.org, call 216-698-2600 or visit the headquarters.

Rosie Palfy is a print editor for The Cleveland Observer and a former Marine Corps combat correspondent.



construction contract for the project using general fund dollars.

Jon Reiss, the commission's executive director and an Army veteran, said the agency's previous headquarters lacked dedicated parking for veterans seeking services.

The new headquarters includes expanded parking, dedicated training rooms and additional space to support veterans for decades to come, Reiss said.

"Our last space was about half this size," Reiss said. He said the larger facility will allow the commission to continue adapting services as the needs of the county's veteran population grow.

Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne described the project as part of a broader commitment to veterans, citing economic challenges affecting many families.

Ronayne also spoke about his personal connection to the military, recalling that he grew up with deep respect for the uniform.

He recalled his father, an Army veteran who died when

adding that the new headquarters comes at an important time for veterans facing financial hardship.

Retired Army Maj. Gen. John C. Harris Jr., director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, said the new headquarters represents more than "brick-and-mortar," calling it a reflection of Cuyahoga County's commitment to veterans.

Harris, a Cuyahoga County native, said about 65,000 veterans live in the county — nearly one-tenth of Ohio's veteran population.

He praised Ohio's county-based approach to veterans services, calling it "the best model in the nation." He also described Cuyahoga County as one of the state's leaders in caring for veterans and their families.

"Our obligation is not just to care for veterans, but to ensure that our veterans thrive," Harris said.

Army veteran Anna Santiago, who now works for the commission, described how the agency helped her family after she left full-time work to attend nursing school.

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Opinion: How Black reality TV can shape mental health and reinforce old stereotypes



Zeus Network promotional image.



Amaya Gentry

In 2025, model and former reality star Eva Marcille asked the crowd at the Essence Festival of Culture in New Orleans what reality television shows they were watching. She got some common responses. “Love Island,” “Love & Hip Hop,” “The Real Housewives” and “Basketball Wives” are a few of the reality television shows mentioned.

Those reality television shows share many similarities. These programs bring millions of viewers the behind-the-scenes drama of a group of people living a niche lifestyle.

They are notable for their diverse casts and their influence on American culture. But they also stand out for the ways cast members of color are often portrayed negatively.

The reality of reality television

Britannica defines reality television as “a television genre encompassing a wide variety of purportedly unscripted programming.” Reality television covers many formats, from game shows and cooking competitions to dating and lifestyle shows.

Reality television is common,

making up 57% of all television programming, according to a survey by ElectroIQ, an investigative technology company.

Although they are described as unscripted, reality television shows are still shaped by writers, producers and editors.

HowStuffWorks has described the process as one in which producers and editors collect raw footage and shape a narrative.

Ryan Stradel, a Writers Guild of America member, said, “Unscripted storytelling is often about working backward ... crafting an inevitable occurrence into an emotional, humorous or provocative journey.”

Participant portrayal in reality television

Because conflict is prioritized, the worst moments involving a situation or participant often remain in the final edit.

These moments, often heightened by tense music and cliffhanger commercial breaks, can become fan favorites and help shape a reality television star’s reputation.

Reality television differs from scripted programming because its stars are real people who often have unrehearsed, vulnerable moments broadcast to millions.

A reputation can develop from moments on a show, no matter how brief a participant’s

time on television was. Afterward, many participants struggle to find jobs or gain respect, and some have spoken openly about regretting their time on reality television.

Reality television editors also can reinforce stereotypes when deciding what to keep and what to omit. Stereotypes such as jocks, nerds and video vixens are used to reduce participants to formulaic caricatures that fit easily into a narrative.

Because Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) people are underrepresented on television, their portrayals are more likely to be scrutinized.

Negative stereotypes and BIPOC mental health

The portrayal of people of color in media can create a monolith out of a diverse group of people. Because reality television is presented as unscripted, those portrayals can push people of color into a few reductive boxes.

Scholars who study reality television have raised concerns that the genre can mainstream stereotypical ideas about race.

A 2008 Howard University study found that all 10 reality television shows it reviewed had at least one stereotypical Black character.

Another problem can arise when viewers identify with a reality television caricature. In the 1970s, essayist Kenneth

Burke developed identification theory, which holds that people seek commonalities with others to establish connections.

Researchers have hypothesized that seeing negative images of people who look like them can harm viewers’ self-image.

Researchers at the Scholars Strategy Network found that prolonged television exposure was associated with lower self-esteem among Black boys and girls

Black people are underrepresented in white-dominated media and often poorly represented in Black-focused media.

Journalist Yomi Adegoke wrote, “Most [Black-focused] series unapologetically exacerbate the worst stereotypes that plague the Black community: toxic relationships, absent fathers, financial irresponsibility.”

These portrayals can create the illusion that all Black people face these struggles and that those struggles explain behavior shown on reality television.

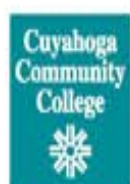
Amaya Gentry has a bachelor’s degree in biology and has worked as a quality control chemist.



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