

DOLLY PARTON IMAGINATION LIBRARY

# FREE BOOK PROGRAM TO OFFER BILINGUAL OPTION



MIKE SIMONS PHOTOS, TULSA WORLD

Rebecca Harrison, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library community engagement manager, stands Thursday with a cardboard cutout of Dolly Parton and English-Spanish language books that are now part of the program.

## Children receive a free title each month until they turn 5

LENZY KREHBIEL-BURTON  
Tulsa World

"The Little Engine That Could" will soon be showing up on some Tulsa-area bookshelves in both Spanish and English.

Starting this summer, Oklahoma families who participate in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library will be able to choose between books solely in English and books that are in both English and Spanish.

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library mails a free book each month to participating children until they turn 5 years old. Started in 1995 with a single county in Tennessee, it has given away more than 277 million books to date to children in the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland and the United Kingdom through partnerships with local affiliates.

"It's very exciting," said Rebecca Harrison, community engagement manager for the Tulsa City-County Library's branch of the Imagination Library. "I go to a lot of outreach events, and that's one of the questions I always get.

"We have a lot of families in Tulsa County who speak Spanish at home and want their kids to speak it at home or are just interested in getting bilingual books at home."

Families who request the bilingual option by July 1 should begin to start getting those titles in the mail in August.

Since some books are not available in both English and Spanish, some titles will be different for families who choose the bilingual option, Harrison



Books in both English and Spanish are now part of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

said. However, first-time participants will still get the Watty Piper book — Parton's favorite title from childhood — regardless of which language option they choose.

In 2022, the Oklahoma Legislature authorized the Oklahoma State Department of Education to partner with community-based organizations to take the program to all 77 counties.

To date, the Imagination Library is now available in 67 Oklahoma counties through agreements with nonprofit organizations, library systems, tribes, an electric co-operative and the United Way.

The Tulsa City-County Library began participating in 2023 as part of a partnership with the George Kaiser Family Foundation's Birth Through Eight Strategy for Tulsa.

"We're most excited that this makes the program more accessible for more families," Harrison said. "There are definitely folks who didn't want to sign up to receive books that are all in English when that's a language they don't speak at home. Hopefully more families sign up thanks to this change."

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could only get the prescriptions filled in up to 90-day increments. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Jo Anna Dossett, D-Tulsa, and Rep. Cindy Roe, R-Lindsay, who is also

GINNIE GRAHAM

a nurse. The purpose is to support women, especially those who live in remote areas, in getting consistent access to medication. Some rural areas may require a 45-minute or hour drive to the closest pharmacy. Problems like an unreliable car might lead to delayed refills.

Also, it's fair to treat women the same as men when it comes to birth control access. It's not like men are limited in how many condoms can be purchased.

"There were fears that we'd be seeing more restrictions to access. So it's exciting to me to see the opposite, and hopefully it's a trend," said Laura Bellis, executive director of the Take Control Initiative, a Tulsa nonprofit that provides free contraception to eligible people in the county.

The legislation reflects the attitudes of Oklahomans toward birth control to prevent and plan pregnancies.

An Amber Integrated survey in February found that 89% of Oklahomans say birth control should be available and that 70% say they would be less likely to support a political candidate seeking to make contraception more difficult to get. In addition, 72% of Oklahomans say emergency birth control should be available; 67%

Please see GRAHAM, Page A8

## Advocates urge saving mediation program

KEVIN CANFIELD  
Tulsa World

Every Wednesday, the City Council sets aside time at the end of its meeting to receive public comments on issues not specifically related to that day's agenda. That portion of the meeting is so far down the agenda that it's not videotaped for the public record.

It's always a mixed bag. On some Wednesdays, the bag is empty — no one signs up to speak about anything.

This Wednesday night was different. Five people, including a former judge and a sitting judge, stood before councilors to urge them to find money in the city's proposed fiscal year 2025-26 budget to help fund the Early Settlement Center for Mediation.

"Having spent 45 years in this legal arena, I come before you to speak with confidence and certainty about the value of early settlement in this community. ... Sometimes we're brought into the legal system against our will, but we still have to bear those costs," said former Tulsa County District Judge Linda Morrissey. "It's a huge financial toll for most people. It's a huge emotional toll for most people.

"Early settlement is a ramp off."

The program was established by the city under then-Mayor Jim Inhofe in 1982, and the city has helped fund it ever since. But Mayor Monroe Nichols did not include money for the Early Settlement Center in his proposed \$1.1 billion budget.

Tulsa's share of the cost for the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1, is \$48,000. That's 21% of the overall

Please see MEDIATION, Page A8