

IMPACT REPORT

A look back at the stories that led to change in 2022



Amera Alexander of Detroit, left, takes photos as her sister and aunt hug her dad, Anthony Kyles, in October after he was released from the Carson City Correctional Facility in Michigan. A Detroit Free Press investigation raised doubts about Kyles' guilt. He had served nearly 25 years in prison before being freed. MANDI WRIGHT/DETROIT FREE PRESS



The Lee County (Florida) Sheriff's Office let volunteers through to bring supplies to stranded Pine Islanders after the impact of Hurricane Ian in October. RICARDO ROLON/USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA



Eddie Reilly honors each veteran who died from COVID-19 at a veterans home in Paramus, N.J., during a memorial flag ceremony in 2020. Reporting on conditions at the home led to state and federal investigations and the firing of top officials there. AMY NEWMAN/NORTHJERSEY.COM



The Austin American-Statesman printed Spanish-language versions of the entire report from the special Texas House committee investigating the Uvalde school shooting after the government said it would take weeks to do so. ROBERT GEE/USA TODAY NETWORK



Somalia Mason stands outside her home, which is in an area marked as a “heat island” in Petersburg, Va. JOYCE CHU/USA TODAY NETWORK



A-B Tech Madison's campus in Marshall, N.C., is one of three voting locations in Madison County. JOHNNY CASEY/THE NEWS-RECORD



Afghan refugees search through a box of donated shoes in an extended stay hotel in March in Urbandale, Iowa. MEG MCLAUGHLIN/THE REGISTER

Vital look at our climate
From extreme weather to dwindling water supplies, we show the impact of climate change, documenting its effects on people across the world.

Voting Rights Guide
Our journalists created a unified guide that would examine how voting laws had changed across America — in all 50 states and several U.S. territories.

Stories of change
We published reporting that made a real difference — and changed people's lives — in small towns and big cities all across America



With unmatched reach at the national and local level, Gannett and the USA TODAY Network touch the lives of millions with our Pulitzer Prize-winning content, consumer experiences and advertiser products and services.

Our portfolio includes USA TODAY, hundreds of local media outlets in 45 states across the country, and Newsquest, which operates 120 local media brands in the United Kingdom.

We have created a powerful network of news organizations that position us well to ensure and preserve the future of local journalism. We will continue to connect people to journalism that matters and connect businesses to the customers they want to reach.

GANNETT | USA TODAY NETWORK REACHES

126 million

PEOPLE EVERY WEEK



MORE THAN 2M
DIGITAL-ONLY SUBSCRIBERS



7.9M
DAILY PRINT READERSHIP

The USA TODAY Network touches the lives of 1 in 2 adults in the United States and is the leading news media publisher in circulation.

GANNETT | USA TODAY NETWORK REACHES PEOPLE
ONLINE IN ALL 50 STATES AND MORE THAN 200 COUNTRIES

SOURCES: ComScore Media Metrix U.S. Multi-Platform, September 2022; Gannett 2021 10-K; 2022 Q3 earnings report

CONTRIBUTORS

This project was made possible by the collaboration of the USA TODAY Network’s newsrooms.
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The scope of impact in 2022

Lives protected, drug costs lowered, corrupt officials exposed



Nicole Carroll
Editor-in-chief
USA TODAY

Journalism makes a difference in people’s lives every day.

Sometimes, change is small but meaningful.

A neighborhood in Petersburg, Virginia, got money for new trees after journalists showed it had higher temperatures due to being part of a heat island, a stretch of concrete that bakes in the sun and retains heat.

Sometimes, the impact is staggering.

The **Delaware News Journal** revealed that prosecutors and investigators withheld evidence that could have exonerated a man serving time for murder. The next day, prosecutors dropped all charges and released the man in the middle of the night.

Today, we share more stories of how journalism across the USA TODAY Network has changed laws and lives. Your subscriptions to local news and USA TODAY make this possible.

We stood up for consumers

● The **Fort Collins Coloradoan** uncovered how UCHealth, Colorado’s largest health care provider, marked up billing for the hormone therapy drug Zoladex by more than 1,000% from the \$783 it pays per injection. Journalists reported how UCHealth’s per-shot billing increased by 306% in four years, topping out at more than \$9,000 billed to one cancer survivor for her monthly shot. UCHealth apologized, said the drug was an “outlier” and reduced the cost of the cancer drug after acknowledging it had been overcharging patients and insurance companies for years. Patients now save thousands of dollars each month for the drug.

● **USA TODAY** exposed the problems with predatory lending, which offers quick, small-dollar loans with triple-digit interest rates to consumers who are unable to get money from mainstream banks or credit unions. After telling the story of James Hollis, who had car loans at 155% and 202%, readers around the country offered to pay off his debt. “I feel a great sense of relief,” Hollis said. “I didn’t know how I was going to make it. I was strapped.”

We held the powerful accountable

● The **Louisville Courier-Journal** disclosed how an Eastern Kentucky prosecutor was helping a defendant extricate herself from legal trouble in exchange for nude selfies she would send him online. Commonwealth’s Attorney Ronnie Goldy was suspended from practice.

● **USA TODAY** revealed California State University Chancellor Joseph Castro mishandled six years of sexual harassment, bullying and retaliation complaints against then-Fresno State Vice President of Student Affairs Frank Lamas. Castro resigned as CSU chancellor on Feb. 17, two weeks after USA TODAY’s investigation into his time as president of Fresno State sparked outrage and pressure from lawmakers, students, faculty and the public. The CSU Board of Trustees voted unanimously to adopt a series of reforms.

● Two executives of JEA, the public utility in Jacksonville, Florida, were indicted on charges of conspiracy and wire fraud following four years of investigation by the **Florida Times-Union**. Journalists revealed secretive attempts to sell JEA and details of a bonus scheme that would have resulted in top executives getting millions of dollars when it sold.

● In the wake of a mass shooting at an Indianapolis FedEx facility, the **Indianapolis Star** found that even as gun violence has increased, police and prosecutors failed to file over 100 red flag cases, some of which could have prevented at least 14 deaths and eight injuries. Red flag laws allow courts to remove firearms from people who may be dangerous to themselves and others. Marion County now requires police to submit red flag cases directly to the court when guns are seized under the law.

We protected the vulnerable

● **USA TODAY** exposed failures across the sport of competitive cheerleading, including how the governing body, the U.S. All Star Federation, delayed investigations and failed to prevent those accused or convicted of crimes from working in member gyms. USASF has since hired an outside firm to strengthen its policies and enforcement.



People hug after learning that their loved one is safe after a person shot and killed 8 people inside a FedEx building in April 2021. The Indianapolis Star exposed problems in how red flag cases are handled, prompting local change and national debate. MYKAL MCELLOWNEY/INDYSTAR



Joseph Castro, above, resigned as chancellor of the California State University and the school adopted a series of reforms after a USA TODAY investigation into how sexual harassment complaints were handled.

● The **Milwaukee Journal Sentinel** prompted city leaders to move to bring back a rental inspection program and start a public education campaign around electrical safety. The actions were in response to the Journal Sentinel’s investigation that found electrical fires ravage homes in the city’s poorest ZIP code at five times the rate of the rest of Milwaukee.

● The bureaucracy that someone experiencing housing insecurity in New Jersey must clear to get a photo ID, birth certificate or Social Security card can delay the very help needed to pull the individuals out of homelessness, including rental assistance, public housing and welfare. After **NorthJersey.com** wrote about the issues facing homeless people trying to get identification, legislation was passed in the state assembly to ease the process and awaits a full vote in the Senate.

● An **Arizona Republic** investigation revealed how the Arizona State Board of Massage Therapy gave second chances to massage therapists who had fondled or sexually abused their clients, and how there was little that customers could do to protect themselves. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey signed a bill into law in 2022 requiring massage therapists go through more thorough background checks before getting licensed.

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Electrician Bruce Janczak inspects a rusted electrical box that was not properly grounded in a rental home on North 16th Street in Milwaukee in June 2021. A Milwaukee Journal Sentinel report prompted city leaders to tackle the scourge of faulty wiring endangering city renters. TAMIA FOWLKES/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

From weather to water, we show climate change impact

Reporting demonstrated how people’s everyday lives affected

Emily Le Coz USA TODAY

As temperatures rise, coasts flood and storms surge inland, the USA TODAY Network is vigorously, extensively documenting the most vital climate stories. ● Humans are grappling in real time with monumental challenges from the global crisis. We’re bringing to life this struggle and explaining it clearly.



Groundwater is pumped into a canal to irrigate a field in February at Fondomonte’s Butler Valley Ranch near Bouse, Arizona. MARK HENLE/THE REPUBLIC

Our journalists deeply covered the devastation from extreme weather events like Hurricane Ian, investigated fairness over corporate control of public water in the West and explained how climate change slams working-class and minority communities.

We are keeping readers informed and making an impact with our work.

For dozens of USA TODAY Network journalists covering an event like Hurricane Ian and its aftermath, that meant blanketing the community while dealing with damage to their own homes, navigating power outages and school and daycare closures.

Here are some highlights from our powerful reporting on climate change by the USA TODAY Network in 2022.

Warmer planet leads to deadliest hurricane in decades

One of the strongest hurricanes on record hit southwest Florida with deadly force on Sept. 28. Ian leveled entire neighborhoods with 155 mph winds and up to 13-foot storm surges.

More than 300 journalists across our many local news organizations documented the devastation and told the stories of people whose lives were forever changed. They also demanded answers from elected officials. Was an evacuation order issued early enough? Will Florida equitably distribute resources to rebuild? Does the state need to do more to protect people and property?

Together, these stories, photographs and videos provided critical information to more than 17 million readers who engaged with the work online, as well as to the many customers who relied on print newspaper delivery because they had no television or internet access.

Our connection with readers provided a sense of hope and normalcy to those who had endured so much. As one reader wrote: “When I woke this morning ... and saw again the huge branches down and the roof shingles scattered over my lawn, it looked hopeless. And then I saw your Sunday paper in my driveway and thought, ‘We’re going to be OK!’ Thank you!”

Saudi company taps water source in drought-prone Arizona

The Arizona Republic published an investigation in June about a Saudi Arabian agricultural company whose sweetheart deal with the state lets it tap into Phoenix’s backup water supply with no limits or fair compensation.

The company, Fondomonte, drains an estimated 5.8 million gallons from the basin annually — enough to supply 54,000 single-family homes — amid a worsening water crisis that has state officials scrambling for solutions. The water could be worth \$4 million a year, but Fondomonte pays just \$86,000 annually to lease the land.

After The Republic investigation published, former Gov. Bruce Babbitt called for Gov. Doug Ducey and Attorney General Mark Brnovich to force Fondomonte to pay the state as much as \$38 million for the water pumped out of the Butler Valley basin over the past seven years.

Democratic attorney general candidate Kris Mayes also called for an investigation into the deal and for the state to put the lease on hold

until that investigation concluded. She also said Fondomonte should pay back fair market value for the water it already took. “I think most Arizonans find it shocking that our government is giving the state’s water away to a Saudi corporation at a time of extreme drought,” Mayes said.

And U.S. Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., introduced legislation in October to impose a burdensome tax on foreign governments for the sale and export of water-intensive crops in states experiencing dryer conditions.

El Paso air pollution plagues low-income, Latino neighborhood

Ten months after the El Paso Times highlighted the plight of a south-central neighborhood plagued by harmful air pollution, an organization representing its residents won a \$500,000 grant by the Environmental Protection Agency to fight back.

The Centro del Obrero Fronterizo, also known as La Mujer Obrera, was among six Texas groups to receive an EPA grant, the agency announced in November. It will use the money to implement an air-monitoring project that will provide “a baseline analysis across transportation emissions, environmental justice concerns, and known pollution sources.”

The El Paso Times first detailed in January how families in Chamizal bear the heaviest burden of the area’s air pollution and its health effects, which include asthma, respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease and increased mortality. Especially hard hit were the schools.

“Our neighborhood is treated like a dumping ground,” Hilda Villegas of Familias Unidas del Chamizal neighborhood association told the El Paso Times, ticking off nearby pollution sources: highways, a school bus depot, a recycling plant, a railroad fueling station.

‘Perilous Course’ tracks climate crisis in real time

A team of USA TODAY Network reporters spent months investigating how people up and down the East Coast are grappling with the climate crisis — from the natural disasters that grab headlines to the quieter forces gnawing at our personal stability, homes and livelihoods.

Journalists from more than 35 newsrooms from New Hampshire to Florida spoke with regular people this summer about real-life impacts, digging into the science and investigating government response — or lack of it.

Their reporting, published in a series of stories in September, uncovered innovative solutions, dire warnings and stark defiance from those who refuse to stand by idly as the climate worsens. It also shined a light on problems that gained attention and led to action.

In Petersburg, Virginia, for example, a story about heat islands spurred the city to open a cooling center for the remainder of the summer that previously had allowed residents to take refuge only on certain days based on “official temperatures.” And a group connected with Virginia State University that had started documenting higher temperatures in local neighborhoods got additional funding from the state to plant trees in those areas after the stories published.

More fires, more floods, but no insurance coverage

A growing number of American families face financial ruin as private insurance and government relief programs fail to keep pace with the rate of weather-related disasters amplified by climate change, the Desert Sun and USA TODAY jointly reported in January.

One of those families is the Shimbos, who lost their home in California after a December 2021 mudslide tore through their Silverado Canyon neighborhood.

Their insurance claim was denied. The family had purchased their property after the wildfire that created the mudslide conditions. Where insurance fails, the government can step in. But California’s FAIR plan, which is supposed to fill the gap when private insurance won’t cover risky areas, denied claims from the Shimbos and neighbors, as well.



After a mudslide swamped the Shimbo family’s home in Silverado, Calif., on Dec. 14, 2021, their claim was denied. PROVIDED

And there was no local or presidential disaster declaration after the mudslides to unlock public relief funds.

“It’s heartbreaking,” Tiffany Shimbo said. “We knew we were at some risk. We just didn’t know it would be this severe and that no one would help. Because we live in Orange County, it’s one of the richest counties in the world, and how does someone not come and help?”

Three weeks after the story ran, FAIR reversed course and approved the family’s claims. The story also led to an Orange County supervisor changing his mind and agreeing to help the Shimbos and other struggling residents.



Around 100 voters line up at 4 p.m. on Nov. 30 to cast their ballots for the U.S. Senate runoff during early voting at the Live Oak Public Library Southwest Branch in Savannah, Ga. RICHARD BURKHART/SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS

Voting Rights Guide looks at how voting laws changed

Online version will be updated to be useful during elections

USA TODAY NETWORK

Ordinary Americans were seeing their power at the ballot box erode in many places during a time of civic upset. Changes to their voting rights were sometimes confusing or obscured or downplayed.

As hectic daily life unfolded, people needed a central place to make sense of what was happening to their rights and how the landscape overall was shifting. Perhaps even a way to look up accurate, specific details in an evolving environment.

So a team of dedicated journalists across the USA TODAY Network began working in May to create a unified guide that would examine how voting laws had changed across America — in all 50 states and several U.S. territories.

Looming over it all was the 2020 presidential election and the false claims of widespread voting fraud made by former President Donald Trump in an attempt to overturn his loss. Trump’s own attorney general, Bill Barr, said no such fraud had occurred.

Even so, legislatures in Republican-led states won by Trump in the 2020 election began enacting laws to make voting tougher:

- Food and water couldn’t be given to voters waiting in line at the polls in some places.
- Early voting periods were shortened.
- Clamps were placed on absentee voting.

New rules seemed likely to hurt poor and diverse communities. For instance, when voting hours are limited, it makes it harder for hourly workers to get to the polls. Supporters of the new rules, such as requiring voters to show ID and that signatures be an exact match, said the changes offered uniformity and helped root out fraud.

Almost every state has modified voting rights laws over the past two decades. Republican-led states have tended to add restrictions. Democrat-led states have tended to expand access to the polls.

The voting-rights guide appeared in more

than 200 Gannett newspapers and associated websites, including USA TODAY. Millions of readers could access it free online.

The landmark project served as a ready-reference to clear up confusion, satisfy curiosity and provide accountability around changes happening across the United States.

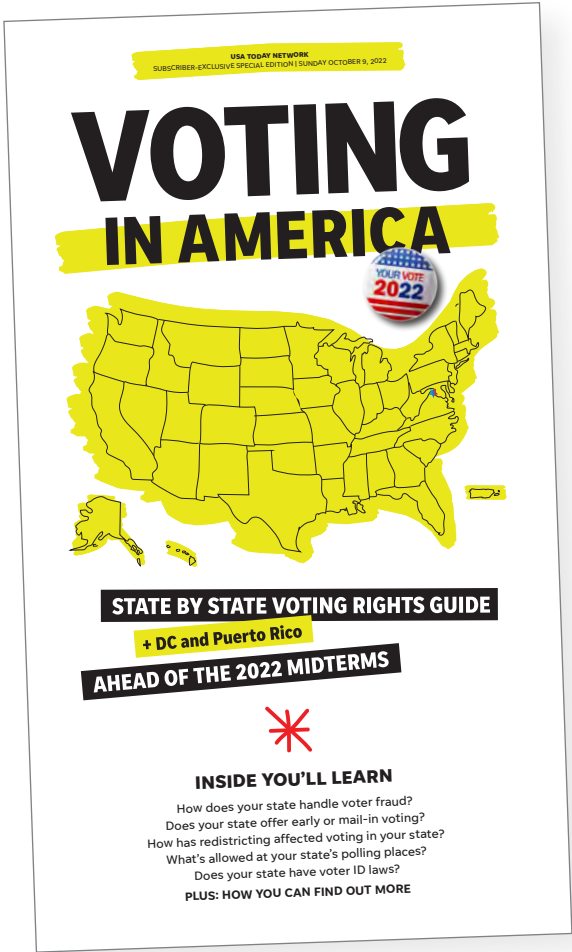
The guide, published 11 weeks before the Nov. 8 election, gave readers up-to-the-minute information on how their state laws had changed. Through an easy-to-use desktop or mobile experience, readers could also register to vote or update their voting information.

Our team of journalists also reached out to the Brennan Center for Voting Rights, a non-partisan voting rights advocacy group, to offer additional insights. Despite its broad reach, the center had never attempted such a comprehensive examination of voting rights across every state.

It praised the company’s efforts. “Only Gannett could pull off something of this scale,” said Hollis R. Towns, vice president of news for Gannett and coordinator of the project. “The company has newspapers and websites in nearly all 50 states. It was one of the most comprehensive efforts of its kind.”

All of it was presented as a public service so readers could access the content at no cost. The online version will be updated so that it will remain useful during upcoming elections.

“By practically every rubric, this was a runaway success,” Towns said. “Our goal was to educate and inform the public about how voting rights laws had changed in their state. We did that on a national scale. We know that the nation’s politics have gotten a lot more partisan, so our approach was to present just the facts.”



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Hollis R. Towns
Vice president of news for Gannett and coordinator of the project



Voters fill out ballots on Nov. 8 at Salem Lutheran Church in Rockford, Ill. CHRIS NIEVES/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR



Dr. Isaac Agboola of Yale New Haven Hospital in Connecticut researches racial disparity in the use of restraints on hospital patients. A New York team investigation found at least 50 cases of improper restraints, prompting new reports to come forward. MARK VERGARI/THE JOURNAL NEWS



New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy signs legislation in July creating a system of licensing for law enforcement after an Asbury Park Press report into police abuses. AMY NEWMAN/NORTHJERSEY.COM



Frank Card, who played in the American Basketball Association, told the IndyStar in 2021 that the NBA was “waiting for us to die off” rather than pay them financial support. Card died months later, but after the Star’s coverage the NBA finally voted to give players pensions. PROVIDED BY DROPPING DIMES FOUNDATION

Our newsrooms throughout the country bring about change

Jean Hodges USA TODAY NETWORK

Americans entered 2022 still riding many of the waves of anxiety and pain, problem-solving and cooperation that had rippled outward when the coronavirus pandemic first hit. ● On top of our feelings about a new world of work, home life, family budgets and health care woes, inflation motored up and the prospects of a recession loomed. ● The country’s systems of care, the web of local and state authorities, the movement of people — these things all strained in this changed world. At times, the stress led to or masked horrific abuses, severe governmental breakdowns or patterns of personal tragedy. Or the societal pressure uncovered grace that allowed for a moment of much-deserved humanity and attention to a lonely corner. ● USA TODAY Network journalists waded through these dynamics to find what the public needed to know most.

Gannett’s dedicated USA TODAY Network newsrooms published reporting that made a real difference in small towns and big cities from coast to coast, leveraging our power as an organization that covers America locally — and as one country.

Telling the stories and exposing wrongs led to a string of direct actions in the real world in 2022.

Our journalists pushed for safety. Their work led to changes in laws. They advocated for transparency, justice and fairness, especially for overlooked communities. They lifted

people up.

In our first Gannett Impact Report, you’ll find a sampling of the journalism that made a difference in our communities: stories of people of color being recognized decades after their accomplishments, a man exonerated after years in prison, investigations launched and reforms law enacted to hold police officers to account.

These stories and many others in the communities we serve show the power of our journalism — to create a better tomorrow.

NBA agrees to pensions for American Basketball Association players after IndyStar’s work

The IndyStar has been covering the struggles of former American Basketball Association players for years as they fought for financial support from the NBA through the help of the Dropping Dimes Foundation. Wonderful storytelling and dogged reporting highlighted the hardships of these players. The depth and impact of our reporting was clear when the NBA finally voted to give players pensions and gave the news organization the scoop. The vote was life-changing for 115 former players and their families. The former ABA players are now in their late 60s, 70s and 80s. Some are homeless, living under bridges. Some die alone with no money for a gravestone. Others can’t afford dentures or a new suit to go to church. Those players blazed the trail for what the NBA game is today, fast-paced with 3-pointers and slam dunk contests. The NBA board of governors voted in July to pay \$24.5 million to the former American Basketball Association players.

NORTHEAST

New Jersey passes law to license police officers after Asbury Park Press probe

The Asbury Park Press launched an investigation in 2018 into police abuses, concluding with a call for reforms, including the licensing of police officers so they could not simply move between departments when they commit an offense. The journalists stayed on top of the story for four years. Finally, the Legislature and governor agreed.

In July, the state approved a licensing law that will keep bad cops off the street for good. Gov. Phil Murphy said the law will send “a strong signal to the community that transparency and accountability matter. These are the foundational principles for rebuilding the

bonds of trust between the police and the communities they serve.”

Licensing was one of several recommendations the Asbury Park Press made in its police misconduct series “Protecting the Shield.” The series highlighted the fact that New Jersey stood nearly alone in the nation in failing to license police officers. The law disqualifies officers and recruits if they’ve been convicted of a crime, named in a domestic violence restraining order, convicted of two or more driving while intoxicated or reckless driving offenses or found to be a member of a hate group. It also establishes mandatory continuing education.

New Yorkers cite project when reporting use of hospital restraints

A USA TODAY Network-New York and Rochester newsroom investigation revealed at least 50 cases of hospital patients being improperly restrained in the state, including men and women who were handcuffed, hit with batons, drugged and left strapped to beds up to 12 hours without regular check-ups and water. The monthslong probe included analysis of reams of hospital inspection reports obtained

via public records request. It uncovered why thousands of hospital patients are restrained in emergency rooms and other hospital wards across New York with limited independent oversight. Several New Yorkers have cited the investigation when filing complaints with state officials about their experience.

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USA TODAY reporters broke the story about accusations against “Cheer” star Jerry Harris and failures across the sport, leading to a published list of banned members and more accountability. GETTY IMAGES

USA TODAY exposes cheerleading problem, leading to outside review and bigger list of ineligible members

When you get to the fifth episode of the second season of “Cheer” on Netflix, you’ll see the USA TODAY investigative reporters who broke the story about season one star Jerry Harris being accused of soliciting sexually explicit photos and sex from minors.

More than that, they found failures across the sport of competitive cheerleading, including how the governing body, the U.S. All Star Federation, delayed investigations and failed to prevent those accused or convicted of crimes from working in member gyms. USASF has since hired an outside firm to strengthen its policies and enforcement. Also, at the time of our investigation, USASF had a flawed process for investigating complaints against people accused of misconduct, such as bullying, financial impropriety and sexual abuse.

We found 74 registered sex offenders missing from a list of banned members. Since our investigation, USASF and governing body USA Cheer combined the names of ineligible members into one list of nearly 200 names. And in a statement posted on social media, USA Cheer said it had notified Netflix that people on its suspended list had appeared on the show, calling their appearance a “presumed oversight.”

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NorthJersey.com follows tips to expose COVID deaths at veterans homes, prompting investigations, firings

As COVID-19 raced through the state-run veterans home in Paramus, New Jersey, in 2020, an administrator using the pseudonym “vetkeeper” and an encrypted email service based in Switzerland contacted NorthJersey.com to report what he was seeing. His tips, along with independent reporting, led to in-depth stories detailing the chaos. Recently, the vetkeeper revealed his identity and gave journalists insight into the key issues still plaguing the veterans homes.

This work has prompted ongoing federal and state investigations and the firing of top officials at the homes and the agency that oversees them.

Review of crash by Worcester reporters prompts police to change their story

A speeding car full of teenagers. A tragic wreck. A delay in help from police. A 13-year-old died. The Worcester Telegram in Massachusetts investigated with a watchdog angle and found discrepancies between the police report and radio transmissions that indicated the crash happened just moments after an officer noticed the SUV. Reporters canvassed the neighborhood and obtained surveillance video from nearby businesses that showed police following the SUV at a distance. Worcester police’s first accounts of what happened were shown to be false. After Worcester newsroom reporting, police changed their story. Families have cited the work as meaningful for civic discussion and for them personally.



Shaun Hutchinson, right, and Yahaira Padilla of Bergen County Veterans Services talk with a homeless man sleeping in the woods in January. NorthJersey.com coverage of issues homeless people face getting IDs led to new legislation that’s making its way through the New Jersey Legislature. TARIQ ZEHAWI/NORTHJERSEY.COM

New Jersey Assembly passes bill addressing issues homeless people face getting IDs after story shows problems

The bureaucracy and hurdles that someone experiencing housing insecurity in New Jersey must clear to get a photo ID, birth certificate or Social Security card can delay the very help needed to pull the individual out of homelessness, including rental assistance, public housing, welfare and other social service programs. This concern is made more urgent as many shelters are overwhelmed with dwindling staff and a rise in those seeking services. After

NorthJersey.com wrote about the ID issues, Assemblyman Daniel Benson sponsored legislation to address some of the problems the story exposed. The legislation passed the Assembly and awaits a full vote in the Senate. Also, the Motor Vehicle Commission changed its rules so customers wouldn’t have to present their Social Security card to prove their Social Security number, an issue included in the article.

Newsrooms shine light on achievements by African Americans that result in recognition years later

Two news organizations learned of honors not bestowed on deserving African Americans decades earlier. An Asbury Park (New York) Press column on an almost-forgotten baseball milestone from the Negro League brought to the forefront the longest home run ever hit. The column led to a community celebration and a commemorative plaque being affixed to a rock behind the local baseball field backstop. It explains how, on July 24, 1936, “the great Josh Gibson hit a legendary 600-foot home run that reached the backyard of the Belmar Post Office.” MLB finally became integrated for good in 1947, when the Brooklyn Dodgers started Jackie Robinson. Gibson died earlier that year at age 35, but his popularity and near-mythical status helped open the door.

And digging by the Springfield (Illinois)

State Journal-Register led to a story about a Black student at Springfield High School who was denied valedictorian honors in 1984 even though she had earned the title. Tracey Meares, now a Yale law professor, and a white student were instead given “top honors” designations.

The school stopped bestowing valedictorian titles for 10 years after Meares was denied the title.

Thirty-eight years later, School District 186 Superintendent Jennifer Gill righted the wrong and awarded Meares the valedictorian title during the premiere of a documentary recounting the snub. Springfield’s story was picked up by media around the globe.

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Superintendent of Springfield (Illinois) Public Schools District 186 Jennifer Gill puts a valedictorian’s medal on Tracey Meares in April. Meares was awarded the valedictorian title after being denied it in 1984. PROVIDED BY THOMAS J. TURNEY



Mark Purnell, right, pulls on a Delaware Innocence Project T-shirt just given to him by attorney Herb Mondros after Purnell was released from prison in April. New revelations in the News Journal prompted prosecutors to drop all charges against Purnell. WILLIAM BRETZGER/DELAWARE NEWS JOURNAL

Men exonerated of murder convictions after Delaware, Detroit investigations

Two men who were serving time for murder were released after investigations in two USA TODAY Network newsrooms.

In fall 2021, the Delaware Supreme Court overturned the 2008 murder conviction of a then-16-year-old named Mark Purnell because prosecutors withheld evidence that could have exonerated him. He was not released from prison then because prosecutors said they wanted to retry the case. Months went by. The Wilmington News Journal wrote about prosecutors telling the court that Purnell should not be released on bail because he would pose an extreme danger to the community. But behind the scenes, and in order to avoid a civil suit, they had offered Purnell a deal that if he pled guilty to a lesser charge, they would free him immediately. The News Journal story also included new revelations showing that even since the Supreme Court ruling, prosecutors and investigators were still withholding evidence, specifically a police in-

terrogation where another person confessed to the crime. The next day, prosecutors dropped all charges and released Purnell in the middle of the night.

In the second case, six months after the Detroit Free Press published an investigation showing evidence in Anthony Kyles’ murder case had emerged raising doubts about his guilt, Oakland County’s Conviction Integrity Unit concluded he was wrongfully convicted. On Oct. 12, Kyles was freed. He spent nearly 25 years in prison for a house fire in Pontiac, Michigan, that killed four people. The Free Press’ investigation said a fire expert reexamined the case and determined the initial investigators “committed a grave error” concluding the fire was arson. A key witness has recanted, saying he lied to the jury about what he saw. Before the Free Press’ investigation was published, the director of the Conviction Integrity Unit said her unit would review the case. That review led to Kyles being released from prison.



Dr. Michael Spalding at his home in Nashville on March 7. NICOLE HESTER/THE TENNESSEAN

\$1.4 million in pledges pour in to college fund for undocumented students after the Tennessean publishes story

The Tennessean in Nashville wrote in March about Dr. Michael Spalding, who started a fund years ago to help undocumented students in Tennessee go to college. More than 60 years ago as a broke teenager, Spalding got help going to college from an older golf buddy. He now returns that generosity. The story sparked \$1.4 million in pledges and donations — including a single anonymous donation of \$1 million — to Spalding’s the Equal Chance for Education nonprofit. So far, 132 students have graduated with help from the nonprofit. “I will always be in awe of generosity of ECE supporters, in Nashville and throughout the U.S.,” said Molly Haynes, ECE executive director, in a statement.

City red-tags Virginia group home after extensive reporting on conditions

A Progress-Index story revealing desperate living conditions in a Petersburg, Virginia, assisted living home led to official investigations resulting in the business being shut down, loss of the owner’s license and criminal charges. Over 80 residents were moved to safer facilities.

Months of reporting included interviewing

residents, former employees and management, and even neighbors who knew and helped out the people who lived there. Interviews with some residents led to an additional investigation by the city’s Adult Protective Services that found at least one resident’s stimulus funds were misused by management.

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST

Tennessee high court finds sentencing law for juveniles unconstitutional, citing Tennessean report

A 2019 Special Report by The Tennessean was cited by the Tennessee Supreme Court when it issued a ruling finding the nation’s harshest mandatory sentencing law for juveniles to be unconstitutional. Under the law, found to violate the Eighth Amendment prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment, juveniles found guilty of committing first-degree murder were required to serve a minimum of 51 years of a mandatory life sentence before they could be considered for parole.

The Tennessean found that 185 people were imprisoned under those terms and explored the evolving science around the development of the brain in children as well as the impact and prevalence of adverse childhood experiences and the connection of criminal justice issues with poor health care, education and family environments.

The ruling, which puts Tennessee more in line with the rest of the nation, provides judges the opportunity to consider mitigating circumstances and for those convicted to receive parole consideration after about 25 years.



Tyshon Booker, who was sentenced to life in prison as a juvenile, appears during a hearing in 2017. The Tennessean's reporting since then was cited by the state Supreme Court when it found Tennessee's sentencing law for juveniles unconstitutional. BRIANNA PACIORKA/NEWS SENTINEL

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North Carolina investigation leads to child welfare class-action suit

A six-month reporting investigation that exposed shocking problems with the North Carolina system of locked psychiatric wards for children in late 2021 has led to a class-action lawsuit in December 2022.

Child advocates, kids, families and the state NAACP filed a class-action case in federal court against the state’s Department of Health and Human Services, citing the USA TODAY Network-North Carolina project.

The reporting found that in addition to documented abuses inside these troubled security centers, caseworkers are sometimes sending foster kids (who are disproportionately Black and brown) there because of a lack of beds elsewhere — not because the children need mental health inpatient treatment.

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Good Samaritan pays off predatory loan debt of man featured in USA TODAY

James Hollis can say goodbye to a pair of predatory loans with triple-digit interest rates. A half-dozen good Samaritans from around the country offered to pay off the debt after USA TODAY wrote in November about Hollis, who lives on Social Security disability and \$23 in monthly food stamps, and his \$3,050 in car title loans he obtained to fix a faulty transmission. Hollis said he was blown away with the generous offers. Lorne Lavine, a dentist from Encino, California, who owns a dental technology company, covered the tab. Lavine said he wanted to help Hollis and was stunned about the interest rates of nearly 155% and 202% on the car title loans.



Debris is scattered throughout what remains of Pine Island Road in Matlacha, Florida, on Oct. 2, after the impact of Hurricane Ian. RICARDO ROLON/USA TODAY NETWORK-FLORIDA

Florida journalists help Hurricane Ian victims

In addition to the work on climate change related to the devastating damage left by Hurricane Ian, journalists’ stories throughout October pointed to problems getting help to those most in need, with immediate action to correct the problems.

For example, The News-Press in Fort Myers found that Lee County Sheriff’s Office deputies had repeatedly turned away volunteers, including the Cajun Navy, who were bringing supplies to stranded Pine Islanders. After the News-Press’ story published, the sheriff’s office contacted the Cajun Navy to ensure their volunteers were getting through, guaranteeing they could bring islanders fresh food, water, gas and other supplies.

In another story, journalists talked to four families who were weighing their next steps after losing their homes to Hurricane Ian. One just wanted a safe space for a cancer patient’s final months. Offers of housing came in after the story published, allowing the family to stay in the area and complete cancer treatment.

The Naples Daily News reported on problems at Harmony Shores mobile home park, which told residents their homes were uninhabitable. The community rallied to support the residents with legal assistance, electrical work and more.

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Residents of Harmony Shores Mobile Home Port and volunteers distribute meals to residents in Naples, Florida, on Oct. 5. Most of the homes in the port were flooded by Hurricane Ian. DARRON R. SILVA/SPECIAL TO THE NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Prosecutor suspended after Louisville Courier Journal reveals he promised favors for nude images

The Facebook messages were hard to believe: An Eastern Kentucky prosecutor was helping a defendant extricate herself from legal trouble in exchange for nude selfies she would send him online. The Courier Journal obtained more than 250 pages of messages that explicitly spelled out the strings Commonwealth’s Attorney Ronnie Goldy pulled for the defendant to get nude photos and videos: “When do I get to see a video?” “When am I not gonna have a warrant hahaha.” The Courier Journal’s exclusive story in July shocked the legal profession in Kentucky and within three days prompted a full-blown inquiry that then resulted in Goldy’s suspension. He has been shorn of his state salary and caseload.

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Grand jury indictments follow Florida Times-Union’s yearslong investigation

A federal grand jury indictment was unsealed in March in Jacksonville, Florida, charging two former executives of JEA, the city’s public utility, with conspiracy and wire fraud. The charges follow four years of investigation by the Florida Times-Union into secretive attempts to sell JEA and details of a bonus scheme that would have resulted in top executives getting millions of dollars when it sold.

In just one week, the Times-Union published 12 stories and three videos, from breaking news and commentary to what’s known about the people, utility and scandal. A local television station credited Times-Union’s journalism for its role in revealing the JEA debacle.



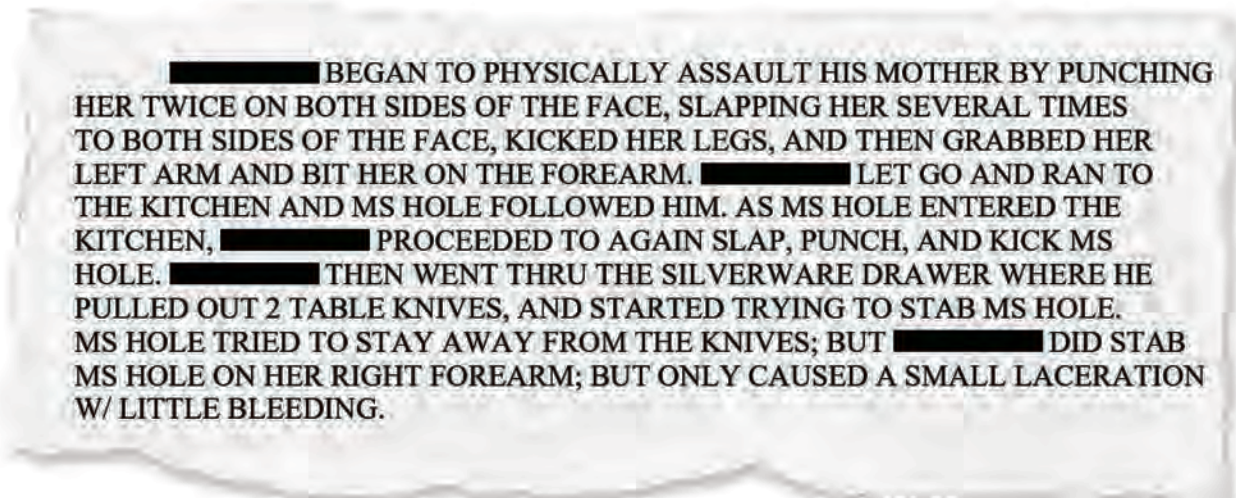
Gabriel, Jimena and Dayami play in Citrus Park Village in Vero Beach, Florida, after school in October. Reporting and photography by TCPalm took the city and FAA to task for planning to evict everyone who lived there, and as a result all 70 families were allowed to stay.

KAILA JONES/TCPALM

FAA reversal follows TCPalm columns spotlighting mobile home park

When TCPalm learned the Federal Aviation Administration was threatening 70 Florida families in a mobile home park with eviction because the park was on airport grounds, journalists went to Vero Beach to learn about the diverse, lower-income neighborhood and its residents. They took pictures paired with back-to-back columns in October that not only told residents’ stories but also took the FAA

and city to task for treating residents inhumanely during an affordable housing crisis. The day after a second column published, the city manager called to say the issue had been resolved and the residents could stay. “We’re going to submit an amended corrective-action plan that has a way to keep Citrus Park Village just as it exists today,” City Manager Monte Falls said.



A 2013 police report about the FedEx shooter. Redacted by IndyStar. PROVIDED

MIDWEST

IndyStar red flag probe exposes problems after mass shooting, leading to stronger enforcement of the law

In the wake of a mass shooting at an Indianapolis FedEx facility, an Indianapolis Star investigation found that even as gun violence increased, police and prosecutors failed to file over 100 red flag cases, some of which could have prevented at least 14 deaths and eight injuries. Red flag laws allow courts to remove firearms from people who may be dangerous to themselves and others. In the year since the shooting, Marion County now requires police to submit red flag cases directly to the court when guns are seized under the law. This investigation was a finalist for the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Local Reporting.

Since journalists began reporting on problems with the red flag law:

- More than 90% of Indianapolis police gun seizures have resulted in red flag court filings, as opposed to 36% previously.
- Cases are being resolved in a matter of weeks as opposed to months or years.

Revelations about the failures in the FedEx shooting have also played a role in the national dialogue about red flag laws, factoring heavily into a U.S. Senate hearing in April.

Des Moines Register’s stories on the suffering of Afghan refugees leads to better conditions for many

After Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, more than 900 refugees began arriving in Iowa so they could build safer lives.

However, it became so difficult that one parent called the police, saying they had no food and didn’t know what to do. Des Moines Register staff interviewed dozens of refugees who said they were languishing in substandard housing with little to no access to resources. Resettlement agencies were overwhelmed by the number of refugees who arrived all at once.

Within days, the work published in April generated significant reader response. Agencies and individuals stepped up to get the refugees some of what they needed.

The lives of refugees have slowly improved as many have finally gotten housing, jobs and other assistance, such as medical care. Most are now self-sustaining, though the affordable housing situation continues to be a problem.

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After Register publicizes teen’s homicide case, she avoids prison

Last year, after months of work, the Des Moines Register published an investigative piece on 17-year-old Pieper Lewis, who faced up to 20 years in prison for killing a man she says raped her multiple times when she was 15. Prosecutors never disputed that she was sexually assaulted or was a sex trafficking victim. Yet she was charged with killing her alleged rapist, and the man accused of trafficking her has never been charged. Her attorneys feared she was headed to prison, but in September a judge sentenced her to probation, and her conviction may be expunged. All three of her attorneys credited the Register’s work with her avoiding prison.



Jim Gaillard, vice president of Ezekiel Project Hope, a housing improvement group, examines an outlet in a home currently owned by the City of Milwaukee. EBONY COX/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel probe into electrical fires sparks action

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel’s 2021 Wires and Fires investigation prompted city leaders to move to bring back a rental inspection program and start a public education campaign around electrical safety. State leaders are examining whether landlords can be required to have insurance on their properties. The actions were in response to the investigation that found electrical fires ravage homes in the city’s poorest ZIP code at five times the rate of the rest of Milwaukee.

Council members want the city to analyze electrical code violations as officials consider implementing routine inspections. Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers has called the Journal Sentinel’s findings “gut-wrenching.” The project was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for Public Service, a finalist for Harvard University’s Goldsmith Prize for investigative reporting and won first place from Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Journal Sentinel investigation into veterans home spurs bipartisan action

A Milwaukee Journal Sentinel investigation into chronic health and safety problems at a veterans nursing facility prompted bipartisan calls for action. The investigation exposed how the veterans home in Union Grove, Wisconsin, has one of the most troubling records in the nation in terms of violations and fines. Among the problems: lack of water, medication errors and abuse allegations. One veteran at the home died after becoming dehydrated. In response, federal lawmakers from both political parties called for more oversight, and a state senator requested a hearing on the facility.



Veteran and resident Ken Blue sits in his room at Wisconsin Veterans Home, Boland Hall, in Union Grove on Monday, May 9, 2022. The facility has a high number of federal deficiencies when compared to other such state veterans nursing homes around the country. MIKE DE SISTI / MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Central Wisconsin news organizations find the real impact of inflation, and restaurant owners pitch in to help

USA TODAY NETWORK- Wisconsin talked with readers across Central Wisconsin to find out how inflation and increasing prices have impacted their budgets and day-to-day life, and it was clear it has not hit everyone equally. People who had been able to afford a higher cost of living before the price increases said the impact has been minimal, while those who already had been struggling to make ends meet were most hurt. Two responses from readers about how their lives were changed stood out. One came from a woman who said she was eating only one meal some days so her children and grandchildren could eat three. The other was a restaurant owner who was on the brink of bankruptcy as they tried to absorb rising costs so they didn't have to continue raising prices for customers. After the article was published, the struggling restaurant owners gathered food and donations for the family in need.

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Eastern Michigan University commits to external Title IX reviews; lawmakers introduce bills for sex assault survivors

In 2020, amid questioning by the Detroit Free Press ahead of an article and during reporting on three sex assault cases, Eastern Michigan University hired an outside firm to review its actions in three Title IX cases. In May 2022, EMU released the results of that investigation. While it lauded the conclusions as proof it did nothing wrong, the firm found deficiencies in the school's Title IX files in the cases, with key communications and notes missing. It also stated that lack of information

limited the understanding of the school's response.

The school announced it had begun to work on its record-keeping, committed to external reviews every three years and said it was considering a reporting system that allows anonymous reporters to continue to message with Title IX staff after their initial report. Michigan lawmakers introduced House bills to extend the statute of limitations for civil recourse for survivors of sexual assault.

Story of Michigan man's death and photo of his grieving son haunted Oprah Winfrey, inspired documentary

Early in the coronavirus pandemic, Keith Gambrell took his father, Gary Fowler, from hospital to hospital, trying to get him the medical care he needed. But Fowler was repeatedly turned away, refused coronavirus testing and died April 7, 2020, in his Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan, home. Gambrell first told the story of the family's struggle to get medical care to the Detroit Free Press. The account also was published in USA TODAY. That is where Oprah Winfrey saw it and was stirred to action. Winfrey made a documentary, "The Color of Care," highlighting the death of Fowler and a dozen other families. It detailed the racial health disparities that have led to a disproportionate number of deaths in communities of color from COVID-19. The film aired May 1 on the Smithsonian Channel and also will be shown to medical students, doctors and others in partnership with the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Michigan proposes 32 juvenile justice reforms after report on teen

The Detroit Free Press partnered with ProPublica and Bridge, a nonprofit newsroom in Michigan, in July 2020 to report on Grace, a 15-year-old who was sent to juvenile detention for not doing her online coursework during the pandemic. The story brought national attention to her plight, leading to her release that same month and the creation of the Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform to review Michigan's juvenile justice system. In July 2022, the task force made 32 recommendations that aim to transform what happens when young people get in trouble with the law, including keeping low-level offenses out of the courts, limiting when children can be detained and ensuring juveniles have access to attorneys trained in juvenile matters.

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This photo of Detroit resident Keith Gambrell looking out a window while quarantining at home with COVID-19 symptoms – along with the story of his struggle to find medical care for his father – spurred Oprah Winfrey to make the documentary, "The Color of Care." RYAN GARZA/DETROIT FREE PRESS



Patricia Luna, left, and Patricia Guajardo cry while listening to state Sen. Roland Gutierrez, D-San Antonio, speak at a news conference on the courthouse square in Uvalde on June 2, days after a mass shooting at Robb Elementary School. JAY JANNER/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

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WEST

Austin American-Statesman publishes Uvalde video, report in Spanish after officials’ delays, then they follow suit

Weeks after one of the nation’s deadliest school shootings, authorities in Uvalde, Texas, continued to hide the truth about the police response when a man with an AR-15-style rifle killed 19 students and two teachers. But the Austin American-Statesman helped bring truth to the grieving community and the nation in two ways. The Statesman became the first outlet to obtain and publish a 77-minute video from the Robb Elementary School hallway which showed officers not intervening for more than an hour, as officers have trained since the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. The Statesman’s work to share the video with the public impeached government leaders’ statements describing law enforcement as

performing heroically. Five days after the Statesman released the video, state lawmakers published an edited version. The Statesman also published in Spanish the entire report from the special Texas House committee investigating the deaths. They did this as a public service for the Uvalde families and the greater community, where half of county residents age 5 or older speak a language other than English at home. News leaders embarked on a round-the-clock effort to translate the report after a member of the committee initially said it would take two weeks to translate. An official publication of the translation came two days after the Statesman produced the report.

Arizona Republic investigation leads to new massage therapist law

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey signed a bill into law in 2022 requiring massage therapists go through more thorough background checks before getting licensed. The Arizona Republic investigative series, which published in 2021, revealed how the Arizona State Board of Massage Therapy gave second chances to massage therapists who had fondled or sexually abused their clients, and how there was little that customers could do to protect themselves. Massage therapists are required to have fingerprint clearance cards beginning in January 2023 for initial licensure and license renewal. Rep. Jennifer Longdon, D-Phoenix, drafted the bill after reading this series, saying the changes in the law were designed to “create more safety around an industry I care about.”



Hollie Quinn and her husband Patrick Quinn pose for a portrait at their home in Fort Collins, Colorado on March 24. JON AUSTRIA/THE COLORADOAN

Health care provider slashes price of cancer drug after admitting it overcharged patients after Fort Collins Coloradoan’s work

The Fort Collins Coloradoan in April uncovered how UCHealth, Colorado’s largest healthcare provider, marked up billing for the hormone therapy drug Zoladex by more than 1,000% from the \$783.61 it pays per injection. Working on a tip from a cancer survivor, journalists’ reporting detailed how UCHealth’s per-shot billing increased by 306% in four years, topping out at more than \$9,000 billed to her insurance for the most recent monthly shot. UCHealth, spurred by this work, called the billing a “mistake” and offered a refund to patients who had paid the higher cost.

The cancer survivor, Hoillie Quinn, wrote in an email to the Coloradoan: “While I appreciate that UCHealth is now reducing/correcting the price for this particular drug, I am troubled by the fact that I had to shine a public spotlight on UCHealth’s behavior in order to be taken seriously. ... I tried for weeks talking to UCHealth privately, only to be dismissed and told that I had ‘incorrect information,’ which I did not. In other words, I was called a liar in the hopes that I would go away.”



Former Fresno State student Xitllali Loya-Alcocer, left, organized a protest Feb. 5 of about 40 decrying the university’s handling of sexual assault and harassment complaints. RON HOLMAN/USA TODAY NETWORK

Cal State trustees adopt reforms, chancellor resigns after USA TODAY investigation

California State University’s Board of Trustees voted unanimously in March to adopt a series of reforms in response to USA TODAY’s reporting. Journalists revealed its chancellor mishandled six years of sexual harassment, bullying and retaliation complaints against then-Fresno State Vice President of Student Affairs Frank Lamas. Joseph Castro resigned as CSU chancellor on Feb. 17, two weeks after USA TODAY’s investigation into his time as president of Fresno State sparked outrage and pressure from lawmakers, students, faculty and the public. Trustee Douglas Faigin thanked USA TODAY for the investigation, saying: “We are here today, going through this catharsis and great

change for the better because of a free press in America and specifically USA TODAY and Kenny Jacoby. Now, a lot of people have been offended (by) that — I’ve been told that they don’t like the idea that this guy is writing stories, exposing things and showing that there are negative things about the CSU. We would not have known about any of this stuff because ... all these facts were withheld from us. And obviously, we would have done something about it if we’d known. But we didn’t. But here comes USA TODAY, Kenny Jacoby, and six months of hard work, effort that’s not easy. Believe me, investigative reporting is not easy. And he was able to develop that story. And look at all the changes that have occurred because of that.”