

Paring the list: A private contractor, Liberty Healthcare of Oklahoma, began last week assessing the needs of all 6,000 Oklahomans on a waiting list for developmental disability home and community-based services. Officials say the assessments are the first step in eliminating the list, which has long been perceived as an embarrassment by Republicans and Democrats alike.

“For the first time, the Legislature will be able to determine the cost for eliminating that waiting list for Oklahomans who need support to live, work and thrive in communities throughout our state,” state Sen. Rosino, R-Oklahoma City, said. “We’re also providing families service navigation to connect them immediately to services currently available while they are waiting.”

The list has shrunk in recent years, although there is some debate about whether it’s through attrition or increased access to services. Some families have been waiting for more than a decade for help. Secretary of Human Services and Early Childhood Initiatives Justin Brown said the Department of Human Services has also contracted for a new case management service, issued a request for proposal for a rate structure analysis and will soon issue an RFP for a national consultant to “help us modernize our overall service array to better meet the needs and expectations of self-advocates and families.”

It was not immediately clear how long the assessments will take. Study hall: The interim studies that often shape legislation in the following legislative session began in earnest last week. Among the issues covered: Medical marijuana. A two-day study geared toward issues related to medical marijuana and general agriculture nevertheless ranged rather far afield — so to speak. Among those speaking were new Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority Director Adria Berry, who said the agency continues struggling to fill staff positions, and Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Information Officer Mark Woodward, who said inroads are being made into illegal grow operations exploiting the state’s medical marijuana laws. Expungement. Criminal justice reformers made the case for spending federal COVID-19 relief funds to implement the technology needed for automatic expungement of certain low-level offenses. Proponents said as many as 65,000 Oklahomans were eligible for expungement but few will pursue it because of the cost

involved. Sentencing reform. Rep. Meloyde Blancett, D-Tulsa, said finding alternatives to incarceration for non-violent misdemeanors is difficult because of a lack of data, and especially uniform data, from the state's 77 county jails. Workin': At 2.8%, Oklahoma City tied Salt Lake City for July's lowest unemployment rate in the Bureau of Labor Statistics large city category. Tulsa's unemployment rate decreased from 3.9% to 3.1%, and the number of unemployed decreased by about 4,000 to 15,079, compared to 37,552 in July 2020. The number of people working also declined, however, both in Tulsa and throughout the state. Tulsa payrolls shrank by about 2,200 from June to July, and by about 15,000 statewide. More birthdays: The Oklahoma State Department of Health said the state's infant mortality rate declined from 8.2 deaths in the first year per 1,000 live births to 6.7. That's still well above the national rate of 5.9 deaths per 1,000 births. No smoking: Directors of the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust asked the Legislature to further limit Oklahomans' exposure to second-hand smoke and emerging products such as nicotine toothpicks and vapor products. Specifically, the TSET board called for allowing local governments to adopt public smoking policies more stringent than state law, and to reverse a new law that excludes most new nicotine products from the taxes and regulations on traditional products such as cigarettes and smokeless tobacco. The TSET board also adopted a resolution reiterating its mission, which has come under attack from lawmakers and others eager to tap into agency's \$1.2 billion trust fund. Bottom lines: Jason Reese, Gov. Kevin Stitt's general counsel, resigned after eight months on the job. ... "Ridiculous," is how the Oklahoma Democratic Party described 2nd District Congressman Markwayne Mullin's involvement in a scheme to get American citizens out of Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover. ... Third District Congressman Frank Lucas, whose sprawling district includes Osage and most of Creek Counties, met with the Tulsa Regional Chamber, Mayor G.T. Bynum and new University of Tulsa President Brad Carson, a former colleague in the U.S. House of Representatives. ... State Sen. Rob Standridge, one of the most vocal opponents of COVID-19 prevention mandates, said he's pushing Cleveland County commissioners

to distribute information on the benefits of monoclonal antibody treatments, which have been given emergency approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, for COVID patients. ... The Lawton-Ft. Sill Region Airport received a \$3 million federal transportation grant to renovate its passenger terminal. â€” Randy Krehbiel, Tulsa World Featured video: -- Randy Krehbiel, Tulsa World

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