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Difference makers

WKU-O graduates 162

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer 8 hrs ago

Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | awarren@messenger-inquirer.com Carissa Pate gets some help from her mother, Ginger Pate, right, as she puts on her mortarboard before the start of the Western Kentucky University-Owensboro Commencement Ceremony on Monday night at the RiverPark Center.

Alan Warren

Staying close to home and attending Western Kentucky University's Owensboro campus were both catalysts for Savanna Mills receiving her degree in four years.

"I couldn't have done it without being close to home," said the 22-year-old Owensboro-native who was one of the 51 who walked across the stage Monday during WKU-O's graduation at the RiverPark Center. "It definitely helped."

Mills, who graduated with a bachelor's degree of science with an emphasis on middle grades education, wanted to stay close to home so that she could live with her family while taking classes, and also maintain her current job of working in an area school system's after school program. She originally began her education career at Owensboro Community & Technical College, and transferred to WKU-O to finish her degree.

The smaller classes at WKU-O also attracted her. That, and there are more scholarship opportunities for regional campuses, she said.

"I like the smallness of it here," she said. "I like tight-knit, and it helped me. I felt like if I needed help, I could have it. It was more individualized."

She already has been hired at the new Owensboro Innovation Middle School that is slated to open in the fall, where she will be teaching science. Her goal to make science more fun for students, and to constantly keep them eager to learn more in an ever-changing technological environment.

"I'm really excited, and it all happened so fast," she said.

Judy Rouse said most students who come through the doors of the L. Reid Haire Administrative Building come to know her as Mama Judy.

That's because Rouse, WKU-O administrative assistant, gets to know students as they attend classes each day. She doesn't work with them directly one-on-one, but she sees them and knows who they are. If they have problems, she tries to come up with solutions in any way she can.

She said WKU-O students often have overcome adversity and obstacles in their quest to a college diploma. Students come from all walks of life, with many of them earning their degrees after many years of being out of school.

"I tell them to never give up," she said. "They should keep going until they get that degree."

According to Rouse, there were 162 WKU-O graduates this year, including online and face-to-face students.

Beth Laves, associate vice president of the WKU Division of Extended Learning and Outreach, said those 162 students were from fall, summer, and spring courses. Of those students, 118 earned their bachelor's degrees, 41 earned their master's degrees, and six earned certificates, and one earned an associate's degree.

Ages of undergraduates ranged from 20 to 59, and graduate student ages ranged from 25 to 54. There were 116 female graduates and 47 male graduates, with 46% being first generation students, eight being veterans, and 13 students earned a 4.0, Laves said.

Wendall Hallam, 21, of Owensboro, had a mixture of emotions as he was about to walk the stage having earned a bachelor's degree in social work. He was excited, a little nervous, and wanted to shed happy tears.

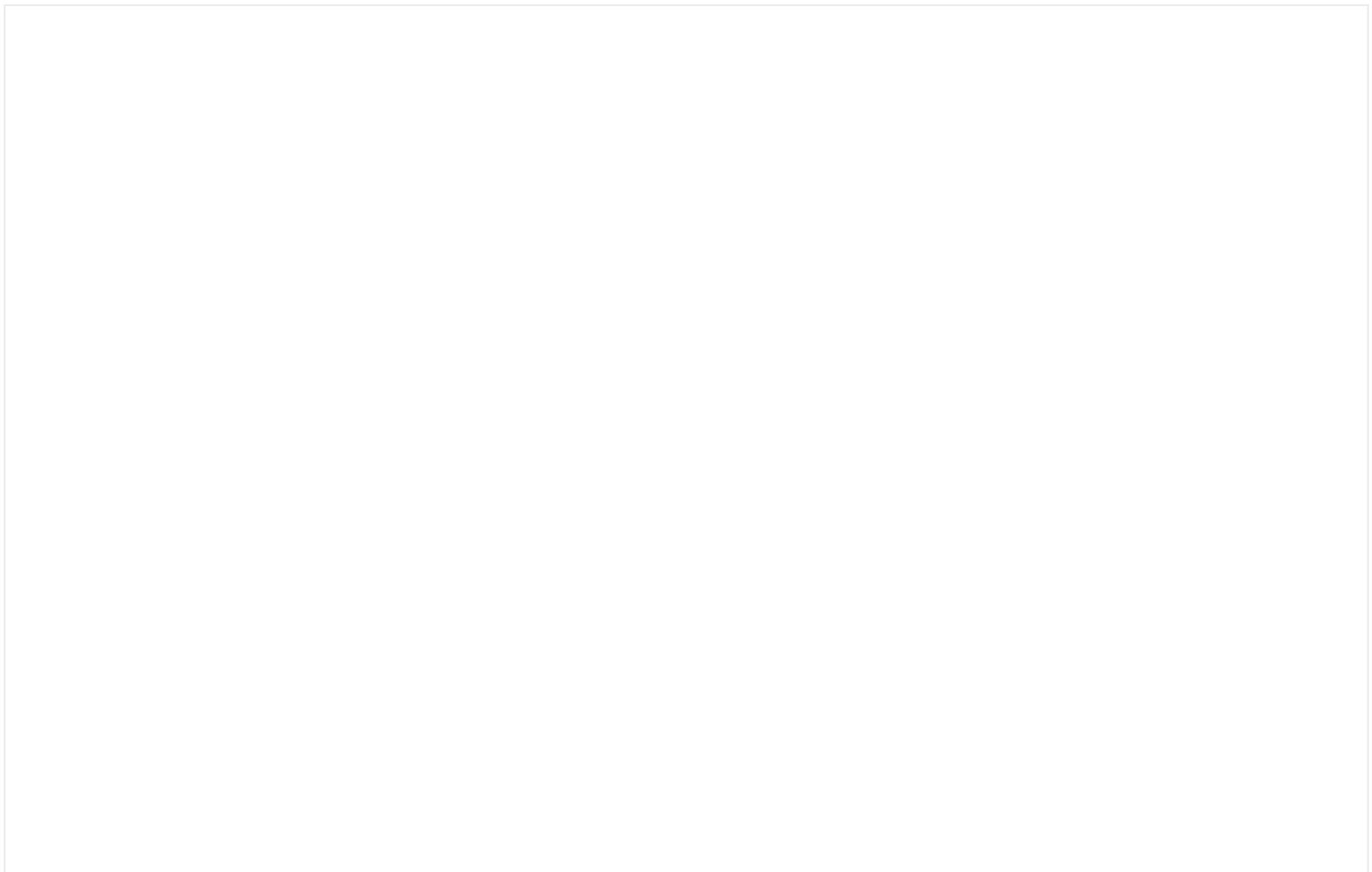
He shared similar sentiments as Mills in wanting to stay close to home to attend college. His family and work obligations kept him in Owensboro, but also it was more affordable.

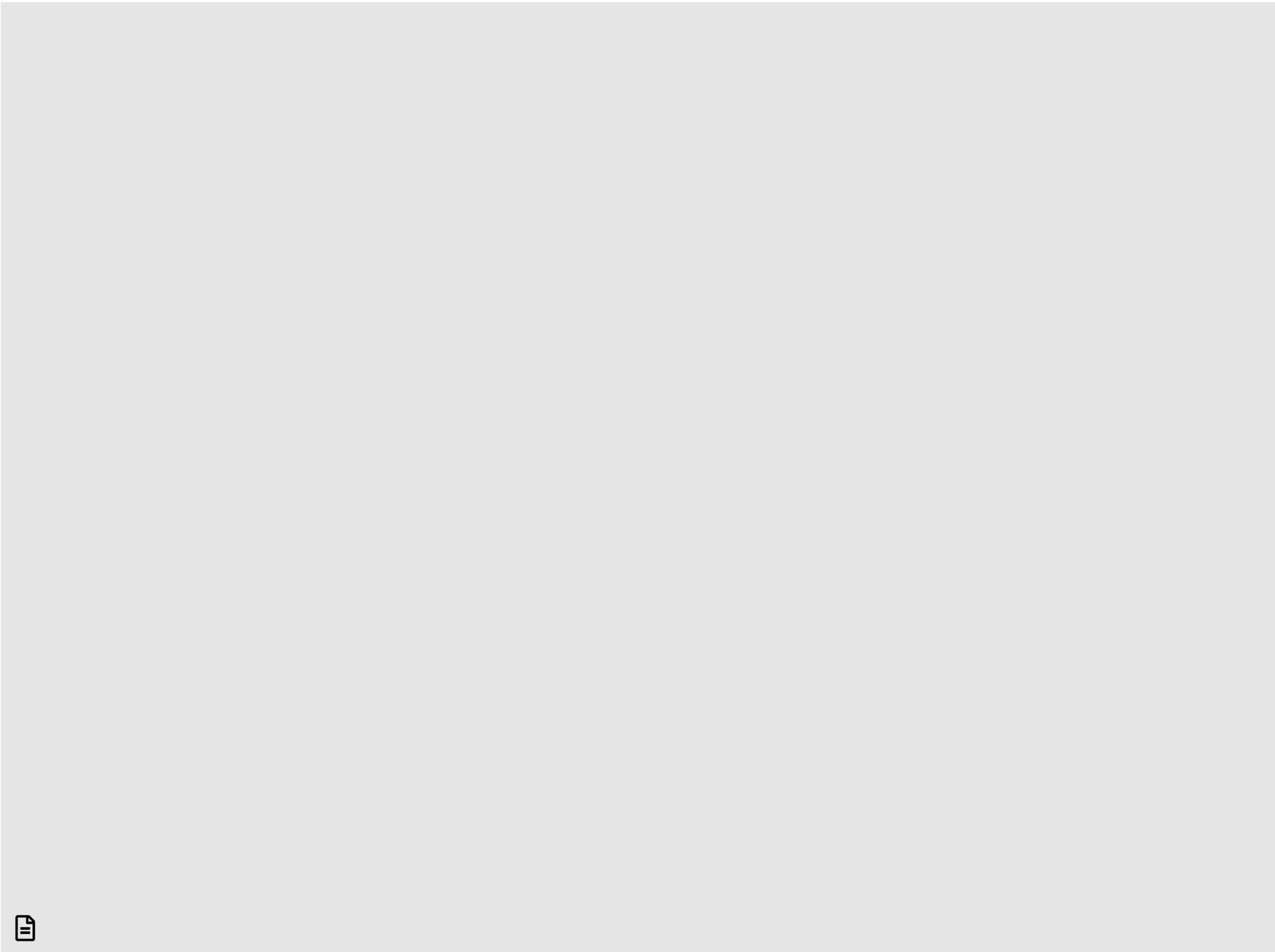
While he hasn't solidified plans for post-graduation, he knows he wants to help people.

"What led me to pursue my social work degree was that I knew I wanted to impact humanity for the better, and I knew that social work would allow me to do that in a very real, intentional way," he said. "I feel like once I graduate the world is kind of wide open for me, and I just know that I want to be a difference maker."

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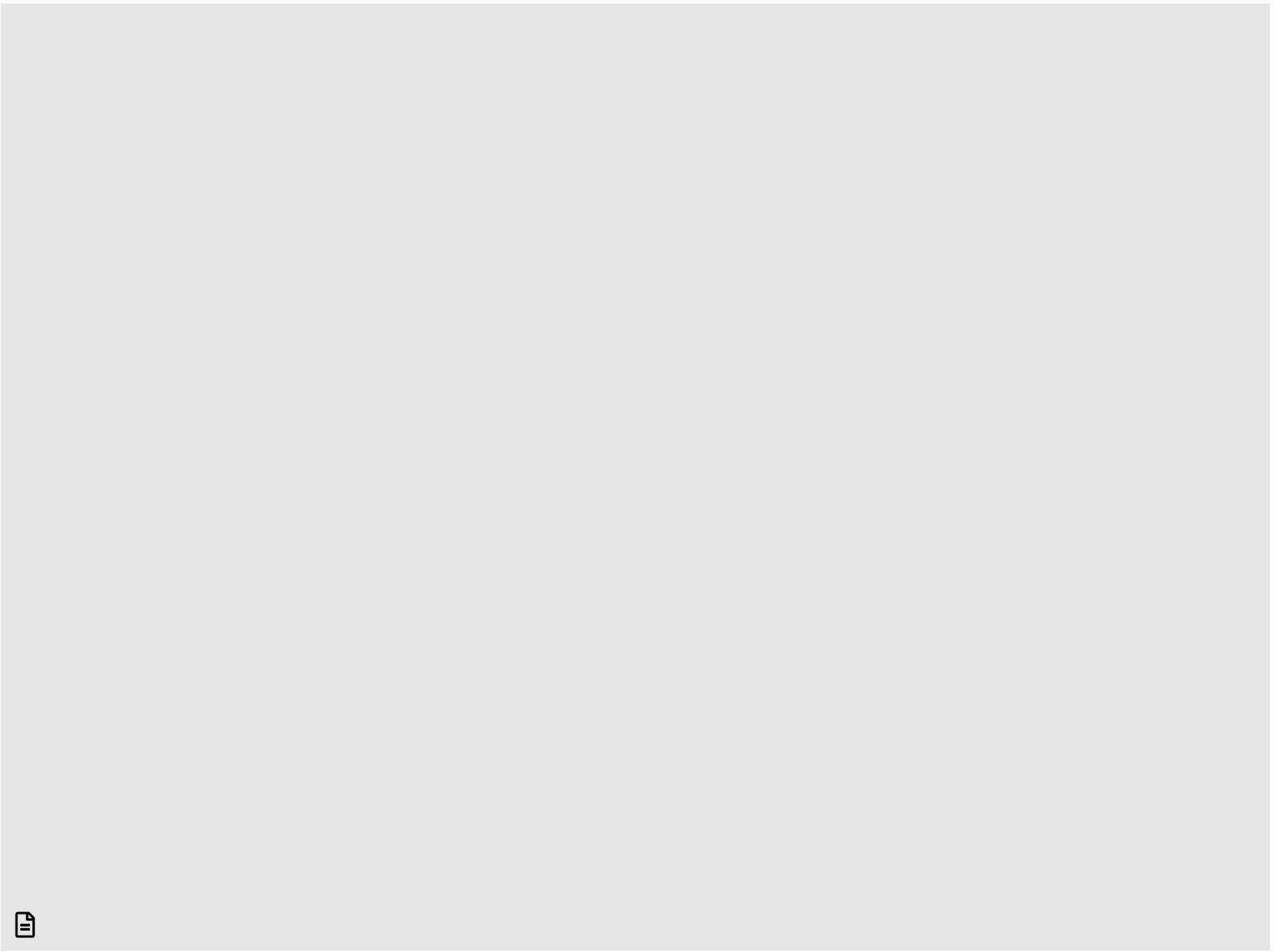
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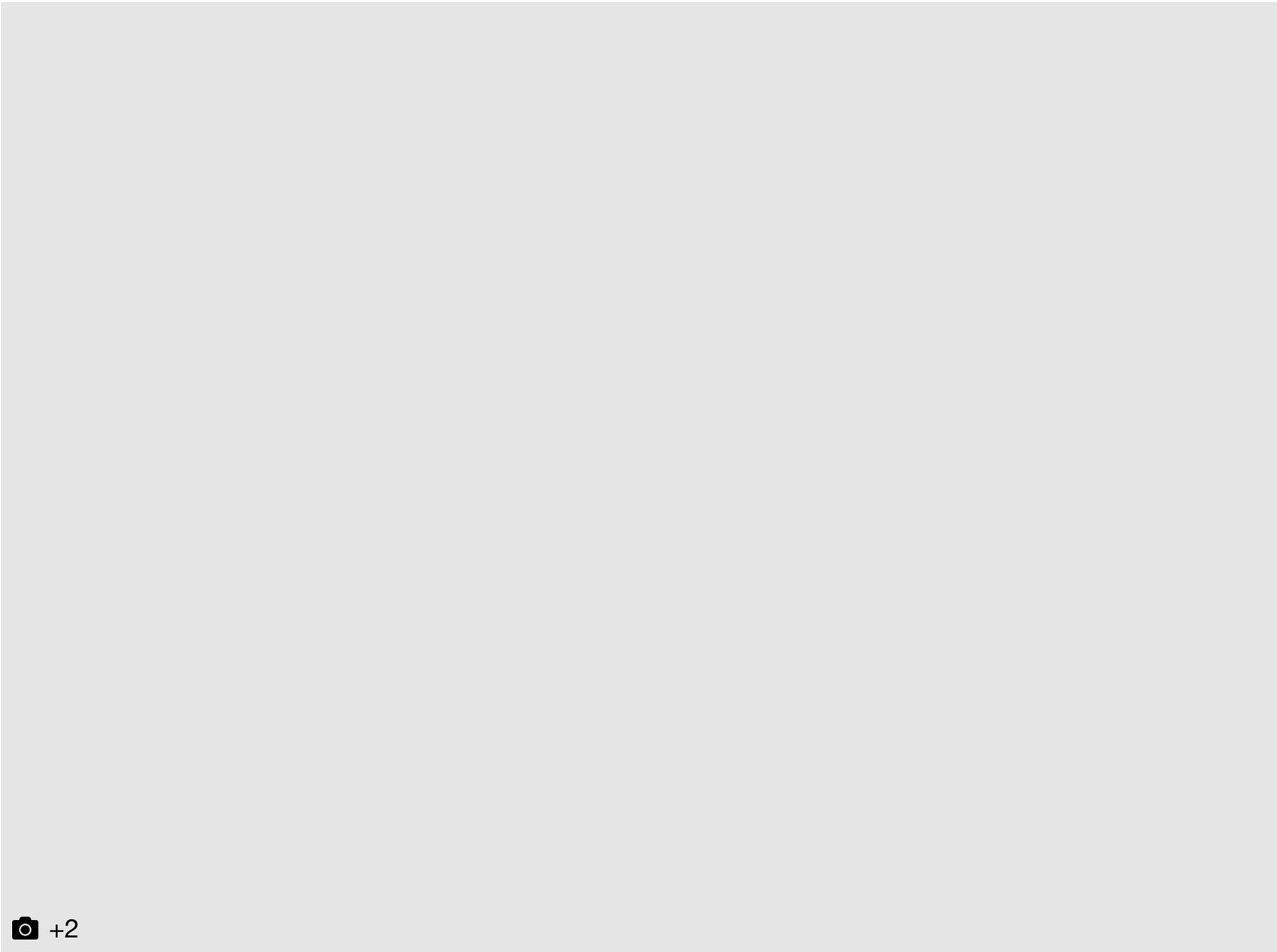


KSP jail incident



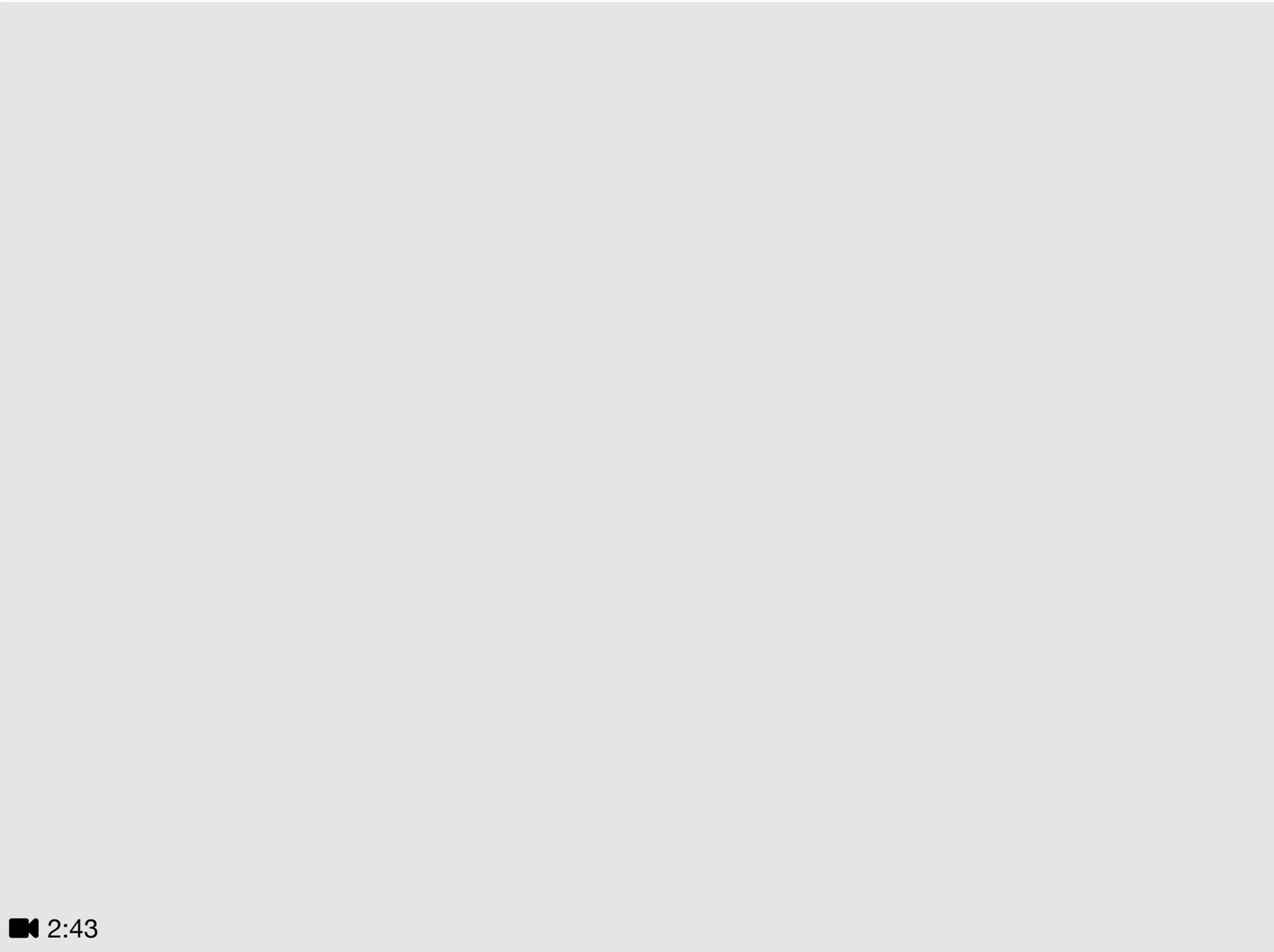


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