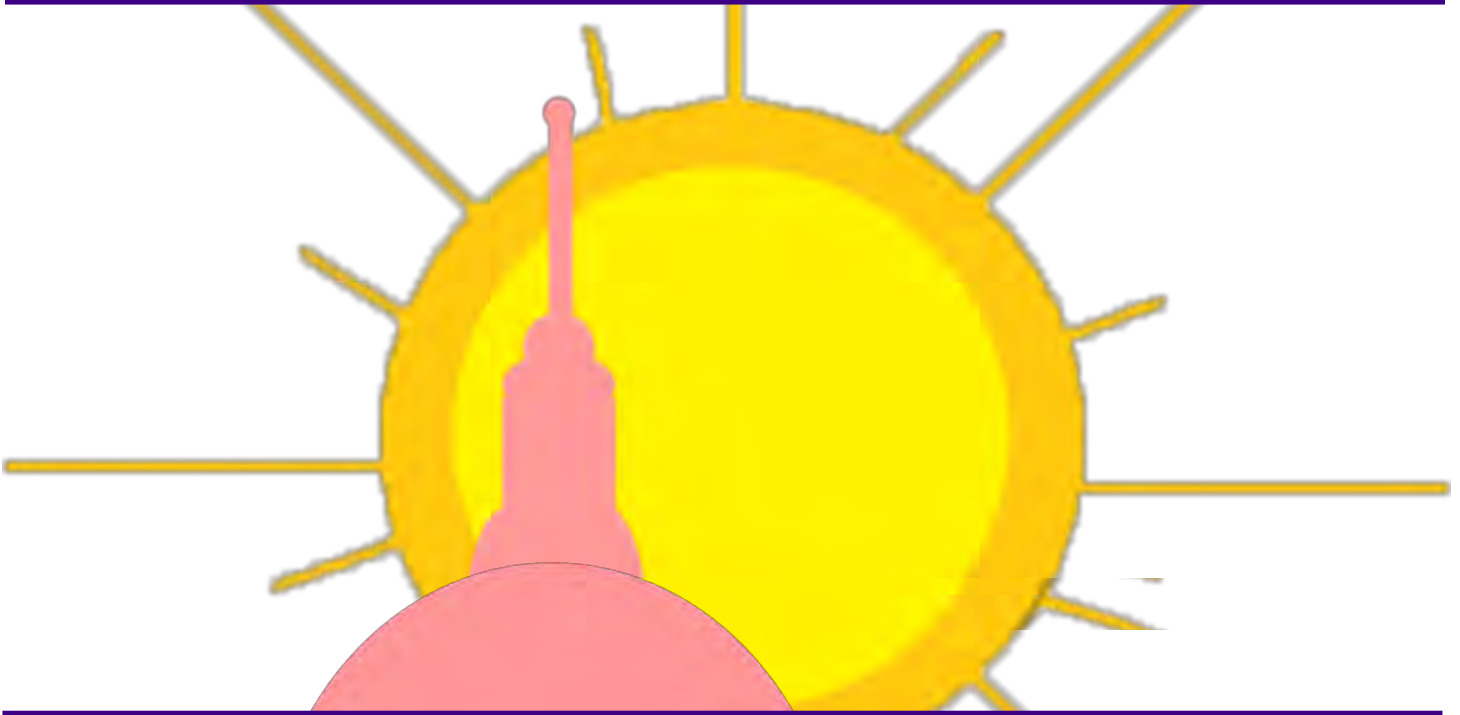


West Virginia Women's Commission 2017 Annual Report



Jim Justice
Governor



Bill J. Crouch
Secretary

The West Virginia Women's Commission 

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<https://www.facebook.com/pages/West-Virginia-Womens-Commission/91192172900>

The West Virginia Women's Commission

The West Virginia Women's Commission (WVWC) is an agency of state government that was created by the Legislature in 1977 to advocate for women and educate on issues relating to women. As an office of the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, WVWC seeks to improve the legal, social, economic, educational and political status of women by working with businesses, government agencies, and non-profit groups. Eleven citizen members, appointed by the Governor, serve as Commissioners for three-year terms. They determine the goals and projects of the Commission. Seven state department heads, or designated representatives, advise and support the Commission as Ex-Officio members. WVWC meetings are held quarterly and are open to the public.



WEST VIRGINIA WOMEN'S COMMISSION
Advocacy. Education. Research.

Commissioners

Stacy North, Chair — Monongalia County
Diana Bell — Ohio County
Belinda Biafore — Marion County
Jean Ford — Wood County
Kenyatta Grant — Kanawha County
Bob Harrison — Kanawha County
Kameron Miller — Kanawha County
Michelle Barnes-Russell — Berkeley County
Robin Young — Kanawha County

Pending Governor and Senate approval

Diana Johnson — Kanawha County
Beth Ross — Raleigh County
Karen Haring — Monongalia County

One Vacancy

Ex-Officio Members

Barbara Gandy — Division of Labor
Marykaye Jacquet — Human Rights Commission
Nancy Cline — Department of Education
Keri Ferro — Higher Education Policy Commission
Nancy Sullivan — Department of Health and Human Resources
Kelly Turner — Division of Personnel
Chelsea Walker-Gaskins — Office of the Attorney General

Staff

Julie C. Palas, J.D., Interim Executive Director

As of October 1, 2015, in an effort to assist with the reduction of costs and streamlining of efforts within the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, the Interim Executive Director of the Commission is also the Executive Director of the James "Tiger" Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission. Her salary is now being shared by both commissions. Additional measures are being considered to further reduce costs, increase donations and grants proposals, and increase education, research, studies, and public engagement regarding women in the state.

Our Mission

The West Virginia Women's Commission exists to foster women's health and wellness including economic, educational, political, and social development. We do this through advocacy, research, education, collaboration, partnerships, and recognition.

Our Vision

Promoting the equality and empowerment of all West Virginia women to ensure their full participation in society.

Significant Accomplishments in 2017

- **Concentrated strategic planning** with Commissioners to develop mission and goals and a two-year plan of outreach and partnerships:
 - ◇ Planning guided by the five WVWC Public Policy Pillars
 - ◇ Realigned efforts of the Commissioners to focus within three active working committees — Economic Empowerment, Education, and Wellness
 - ◇ Created a program for higher education students to become WVWC Student Ambassadors as liaisons between their schools, communities and the WVWC
- Conducted **public policy and statewide partners meetings** where issue topics were developed. Educational and partner activities were shared for collaborative participation, such as:
 - ◇ Provided information about the film, *Chosen*, about human sex trafficking prevention, actions that can be taken, and tools for raised awareness
 - ◇ Collaborating with West Virginia University Excellence in Women’s Health, and Libera, Inc. to create statewide Wellness Forums throughout the state in 2018
 - ◇ Volunteered for the WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence’s Purple Gala honoring women working to eliminate domestic and sexual violence
 - ◇ Volunteered for and distributed educational brochures on health, education and economic empowerment at the Charleston Community Cookout (photo to the right), the Community Senior Fair, the WV Rural Health Conference, and annual Juneteenth Celebration.



- Members of the Women’s Commission and a Student Ambassador participated on a panel on Women’s Rights at the University of Charleston with other women rights advocates (photo to the left).
- The Commission joined the West Virginia Coalition for Public Education and participated in a signing event at Fairmont State University.
- The Interim Executive Director gave a presentation on women’s rights at the International Human Rights Conference at the West Virginia State University and received a human rights award on behalf of the Commission.
- The Director also sits on the Advisory Board of the Governor’s Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs (HHOMA), participates in the HHOMA Listening Tours throughout the state, and is a member of the Healthcare Innovation Collaborative.
- Members of the Women’s Commission attended a Women in Leadership Conference in Vienna, WV.



Our Contributions

The WVWC is the only state agency mandated to bring needs and concerns of the state's female population to the attention of legislators and other government officials, providing services to state women as individuals and as members of organizations through legislative monitoring, information referral, educational workshops and seminars, publication and distribution of educational materials, and research and recognition of women's accomplishments. The WVWC:

- Conducts applied and original research on the status of women and girls in West Virginia.
- Completes outreach activities focused on needs and concerns found in research activities.
- Advocates for policy and programs with direct effect to the 51% population of the state.
- Collaborates with statewide and national organizations to create recommendations for legislative, policy driven, and program needs of the state's female population.
- Monitors (in conjunction with 20+ state and national organizations) state-level legislation and national initiatives of interest to our female population.

◇ Monitoring results were used to develop the Commission's **Public Policy Pillars**:

Child Well-Being ★ Health ★ Economic Empowerment
Education ★ Violence Against Women Prevention

— which guide advocacy on behalf of the population's interests revealed by the research.

- Makes recommendations to the Legislative and Executive branches to ensure a better status for women and families in our state.
- Promotes information from state and national organizations through social media, email, mailing lists and outreach at various expos.
- Continues to support partner organizations in advocating for issues of concern and participates in related meetings and activities.

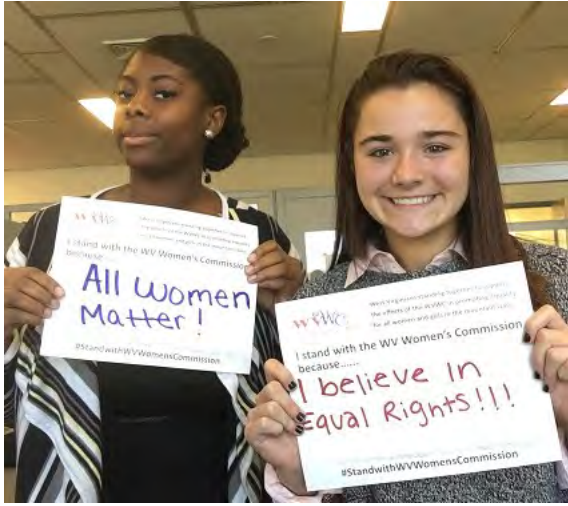


- Coordinates events throughout the year recognizing women's past achievements and continued needs, including:
 - ◇ Women's and Girls' Day at the Legislature (during session) provides opportunities to attend legislative sessions, make personal contact with legislators, and engage with community leaders to advance good citizenship
 - ◇ Women's History Month Activities (March)
 - ◇ Equal Pay Day (April) recognizing the disparity of pay that exists between genders
 - ◇ Women's Equality (August) celebrating women's right to vote
 - ◇ Ready to Run women candidate training programs
 - ◇ Celebrate Women Awards in Arts, Business, Education, Government, Labor, Math/Science, Mountaineer Spirit, Professions, Public Service, Sports, Unsung Hero, and Volunteer Service



Operations

- **Quarterly Meetings** — The WVWC holds four quarterly meetings around the state to discuss the business of the Commission and promote issues of importance to women. Notice of these public meetings is filed with the Secretary of State, and the public is welcome and encouraged to attend.



- **Planning Meeting** — Coinciding with one of the quarterly meetings, the planning meeting is a time for the Commissioners, Ex-Officio Members, and staff to evaluate the fiscal year and strategic plan.
- **Committee Meetings** — The Commissioners, Ex-Officio Members, members of the public and staff meet to plan programs and publications.
- **Executive Committee Meetings** — The Executive Committee, comprised of the Executive Director, Chair, Vice Chair, and DHHR Ex-Officio.
- **Job Corps Interns** — Receive assistance from and provide office experience for Charleston Job Corps Interns on a rotating six-week basis (photo to the left).

Ongoing Goals

- Continue to support partner organizations in advocating for issues of concern addressed through five public policy pillars — Child Well-Being, Economic Empowerment, Education, Health, Violence Against Women.
- Perform the duties of the Commission, per West Virginia Code, Article 20, §29-20-2:
 - (a) To review and study the status of women in this state;
 - (b) To recommend methods of overcoming discrimination against women in public and private employment and in the exercise of their civil and political rights;
 - (c) To promote more effective methods for enabling women to develop their skills, to continue their education and to be retrained;
 - (d) To strengthen home life by directing attention to critical problems confronting women as wives, mothers, homemakers and workers;
 - (e) To make surveys in the fields of, but not limited to, education, social services, labor laws and employment policies, law enforcement, health, new and expanded services of benefit to women, legal rights, family relations and volunteer services;
 - (f) To secure appropriate recognition of women's accomplishments and contributions to this state;
 - (g) To disseminate information for the purpose of educating the public as to the existence and functions of the commission and as to matters of general beneficial interest to women; and
 - (h) To advise, consult and cooperate with other offices of the department of health and human resources and other agencies of state government, and to receive assistance therefrom, in the development of activities and programs of beneficial interest to women and on matters relating generally to women.

Legislative Recommendations and State Initiatives

After careful consideration, the West Virginia Women's Commission respectfully offers the following recommendations. The Commissioners also look forward to working with public and private partners to bolster existing programs and initiatives provided with the goal of improving the lives of West Virginia women and their families.

Sexual Harassment Policies

Given the current stunning revelations of sexual harassment in the workplace, the Women's Commission feels a proactive approach to making the workplace safe and comfortable for all employees is a priority that cannot be overlooked. Although the state legislature has yearly sexual harassment training, sexual harassment training has been commonplace in the workplace for years to no avail. The Commission believes that all policies and training for the legislative and executive branches should be reviewed and if necessary revised. An emphasis needs to be placed on these policies so that there is no doubt about what constitutes harassment and that it will not be tolerated.

Elder Care

West Virginia has the second highest per capita percentage of elders in the country. Our state was recently recognized in a report by Wallet Hub as being one of the top 20 states with a solid adult protective services program, however we did not fare so well in all categories. West Virginia was last in quality of nursing homes. We were 49th in certified volunteer ombudsman and 34th in resources applied.

In a survey and town halls and forums conducted by the Women's Commission, we found that Elder Care issues outranked child care issues for many women across our state. Elder care services vary widely by county and are difficult to locate. Finding affordable quality home health care aids that are affordable is a huge problem for working women who often times need to arrange for both elder care and child care. Elders who need intermittent nursing care and are unable to stay at home alone, but don't qualify for nursing home care, are a growing segment of our population. The Women's Commission is advocating for a tax incentive for assisted living providers to accept the payment rate of DHHR clients.

The West Virginia Women's Commission request that a legislative committee be appointed to consider legislation and possible funding needs that could coordinate current services and programs already in existence as well as the possibility of new legislation to promote better solutions to the growing needs of elders. It is imperative to make West Virginia a safe place to grow up — and a safe place to grow old.

Economic Empowerment and Education

Economic hardship for women in West Virginia is still very high because of a multitude of problems. Women in West Virginia are less likely to be a part of the labor force (ranked 51st), less likely to have a college degree (also ranked 51st), and less likely to hold a management or professional position (ranked 39th). West Virginia's women are more likely to live in poverty (ranked 43rd) and have a larger wage gap between men and women (ranked 50th).

These factors present significant impediments to economic security for women. The Women's Commission is advocating a variety of ways to improve the position of women in West Virginia. Through collaboration with Department of Education and other various organizations, girls are being encouraged to participate in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) programs in school. The Commission proposes programs that will encourage women to train in nontraditional jobs, especially as many of those positions pay more money.

Working with the Department of Education, other state agencies, state colleges and technical schools will enhance opportunities and outcomes. We are advocating for a position in the Governor's Office to research grant possibilities and coordinate those programs with all state agencies.

The Commission is currently participating in the College Dreams Ignited program which helps adult women who are nontraditional students overcome barriers to going to college. The Commission is proposing a change to the Promise Scholarship program to include students who are more than two years out of high school to allow for a more robust college graduation rate.

Many women (and men) work part-time, and although they can be paid well, such as for weekend work as a nurse at a hospital — but because of their part-time status if they are laid off, they are ineligible for unemployment. This can be an undue hardship for families that rely on this income. The Women's Commission would like to see a study group that will consider the possibility of unemployment benefits based on earnings as opposed to hours to consider the feasibility of providing for these types of workers.

Gender Equity on Boards and Commissions

West Virginia has significant underrepresentation of women in the state legislation and on state boards and commissions. In the early 1990's, West Virginia hit a high point with 20.9% female representation in the state legislature. We have steadily fallen since that time to our current low of 13.9%. The commission believes that representation of women in the state legislature should be a priority. Women make up 51% of our population. Women can better represent their own diverse needs and concerns. The Commission continues to provide training to women across the state on how to run for office or become a campaign manager.

The Commission has developed a program to involve young women in the policy arena and thus make them more amenable to serving on boards and commissions and becoming involved in politics. The WVWC Student Ambassador Program has been very successful with 6 college ambassadors from around the state who have done projects on mental health, women in politics, domestic violence awareness and nutrition education. These young ladies are outstanding representatives for the Commission and the State of West Virginia.

Another means of increasing the involvement of women is through gender equity on boards and commissions. Policies, regulations, and present legislative recommendations that directly affect the lives of women and children are often created through those boards and commissions. Diversity improves the outcomes of those entities by giving broader perspectives.

There needs to be a concerted effort to obtain gender equity on state appointed boards and commissions, especially that have economic and political impact. The state needs to set the example for local communities, thus putting women in positions to effect community development that will meet the specific needs of women. The Women’s Commission is calling on the governor and state legislature to adopt a resolution that State Boards and Commissions be gender balanced to the extent possible by 2025.

The Women’s Commission is leading that change by seeking male commissioners when vacancies become available — and now has its first male commissioner serving in his the second year of a three year appointment.

State Seal

The Great Seal of WV designed by Joseph A. Diss Debar was adopted in September of 1863 by the state legislature. Although the seal contains a miner, who represents industry, and a farmer, who represents agriculture, there is nothing to represent the women of WV who have made this great state what it is today. It was most likely a sign of the times that women were not included on the great seal or the less seal of West Virginia. The Women’s Commission would like to see the seal updated to include a woman.

The Secretary of State’s office has a program which encourages students to “design their own State Seal” utilizing what they have learned in West Virginia History classes. Perhaps this program could be promoted and extended beyond elementary school to get a new state seal that includes a woman and the contributions they have made to our state.

This would not be expensive and could be done easily to provide recognition to the talents and accomplishments women have had in West Virginia.

West Virginia Women’s Commission Funding

The Women’s Commission respectfully asks the State Legislature to reinstate its funding at fiscal year 2017 appropriation levels for fiscal year 2019 to continue its important work.



West Virginia Women’s Commission

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