

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2025 REGULAR SESSION

Committee Substitute

for

House Bill 3297

By Delegates McGeehan, Hanshaw (Mr. Speaker),
Phillips, Ellington, Criss, Jeffries, Gearheart, Riley,
and Leavitt

[Originating in the Committee on Government
Organization; Reported on March 17, 2025]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section,
2 designated §18B-11-8, relating to creating the Washington Center for Civics, Culture, and
3 Statesmanship within West Virginia University; creating the center as an independent
4 entity within West Virginia University; requiring the university to provide the center with
5 reasonable infrastructure, classroom space, and office space; stating the center's
6 purposes and goals; stating the center's policies; providing for the appointment of tenure-
7 track faculty; authorizing the center to offer courses and to develop various degrees;
8 providing for a director of the center; providing for the director's appointment and the filling
9 of vacancies; providing for an academic council; enumerating areas over which the
10 director has sole and exclusive authority; and providing for an annual report.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 11. MISCELLANEOUS INSTITUTES AND CENTERS.

§18B-11-8. Washington Center for Civics, Culture, and Statesmanship.

1 (a) There is hereby created as an independent entity the Washington Center for Civics,
2 Culture, and Statesmanship, to be located and operated at West Virginia University, which shall
3 provide reasonable infrastructure, classroom space, and office space for the center. The center is
4 established for the purpose of creating and disseminating knowledge about classical western
5 history and culture and American constitutional thought and forming future leaders of this state
6 through research, scholarship, teaching, collaboration, and mentorship.

7 (b) The center's goals shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

8 (1) To enrich the curriculum in American constitutional studies, including the core texts,
9 influential thinkers, and great debates of western civilization;

10 (2) To educate university students in political philosophy, constitutional governance,
11 economic thought, western history and culture, and the principles that inform republican self-
12 government;

13 (3) To educate university students in the foundations of responsible leadership and

informed citizenship and to cultivate future generations of leaders in this state;

(4) To offer university-wide programming related to the values of open inquiry and civil discourse;

(5) To expand the intellectual diversity of the university's academic community and to create a rich forum for the development of ideas across the political and ideological spectrum;

(6) To support faculty and graduate student scholarship that advances understanding of American constitutional thought and institutions;

(7) To promote scholarly collaboration within the university and beyond; and

(8) To host lectures, debates, and symposia, and sponsor visiting scholars, speakers, teachers, and thinkers.

(c) The center shall adhere to the following policies:

(1) The center shall educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth;

(2) The center shall equip students with the skills, habits, and dispositions of mind they need to reach their own informed conclusions on matters of social and political importance;

(3) The center shall value intellectual diversity in higher education, including in faculty recruitment, hiring, and appointment, and aspire to enhance the intellectual diversity of academic life at the university; and

(4) The center shall create a community dedicated to an ethic of civil and free inquiry, which respects the intellectual freedom of each member, supports individual capacities for growth, and welcomes the differences of opinion that naturally occur in a public university community.

(d) The center shall be an independent academic unit of the university with the authority to house tenure-track faculty who hold their appointments within the center. Not fewer than five tenure-track faculty positions shall be allotted to the center. Faculty appointed within the center shall not be required, but may be permitted, to hold joint or courtesy appointments within any other division of the university. No university official or faculty from outside the center shall have the

authority to block faculty hires into the center.

(e) The center shall offer courses and may develop certificate, minor, major, and graduate programs, and offer degrees. The center shall also develop a statesmanship minor that allows students taking different majors to study the principles of our republican government.

(f) The center shall be led by a director who shall report directly to the president of the university and the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The Governor shall appoint an initial director not later than 30 days after the effective date of this section. The director shall be an expert on the western tradition, the American founding, and American constitutional thought, and shall have publicly demonstrated, through speeches, publications, or presentations, a commitment to the purposes, goals, and policies of the center. The director's term shall be for five years and shall be renewable. The director shall have the protection of tenure or tenure eligibility. Any existing tenure with the university held by a director shall be maintained with the university.

(g)(1) Not later than 120 days after the effective date of this section, the director shall appoint a seven-member center academic council. Four members of the council shall form a quorum.

(2) The academic council shall be comprised of scholars with relevant expertise and experience. Not more than one member of the council may be an employee of the university.

(3) Three members of the academic council shall serve initial terms of two years and four members shall serve initial terms of four years, which the members shall determine at their first meeting, and select replacements for vacant seats. All subsequent terms after the initial terms shall last for four years.

(4) To fill a vacancy for the center director after the initial director, following a national search, the academic council shall transmit to the Governor a list of finalists from which the Governor shall select a director.

(h) The director shall have the sole and exclusive authority over areas enumerated in this subsection. With regard to these enumerated areas, the director is not required to seek the

approval or agreement of the president of the university, the provost and vice president for academic affairs, or of any other university official, and all of the director's decisions pertaining to these enumerated areas are final. The director has the sole and exclusive authority over the following areas:

(1) Managing the recruitment and hiring process and extending offers for employment for all faculty and staff;

(2) Terminating the employment of any staff;

(3) Tenure decisions affecting the center's professors and teachers;

(4) Overseeing and developing the center's curriculum;

(5) The center's budget and expenditures;

(6) Scheduling and holding any conferences relevant to the center's mission; and

(7) Scheduling, inviting, and hosting speakers and presenters.

(i) Any employment contracts made pursuant to subsection (h) of this section to tenure-track faculty appointed to the center shall guarantee:

(1) Reappointment elsewhere in the university, at the same rank and compensation, in the event the center is discontinued; and

(2) An office in the department to which the professor or teacher is reappointed in the event the center is discontinued. The office in the new department shall be comparable, to the extent practicable, to the office space utilized by the professor or teacher during his or her time working for the center.

(j) The director of the center shall submit an annual report to the West Virginia University Board of Governors and to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance. The report shall provide a full account of the center's achievements, opportunities, challenges, and obstacles in the development of this academic unit.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to establish the Washington Center for Civics, Culture, and

Statesmanship at West Virginia University.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.