

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 181

By Senator Helton

[Introduced January 14, 2026; referred
to the Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §8-1-5a of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to
 2 prohibiting municipalities participating in the home rule program from establishing
 3 nondiscrimination ordinances that include protected classes in addition to what is
 4 designated in state statute.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

**ARTICLE 1. PURPOSE AND SHORT TITLE; DEFINITIONS; GENERAL PROVISIONS;
 CONSTRUCTION.**

§8-1-5a. Municipal Home Rule Program.

1 (a) — The Legislature finds and declares that:

2 (1) The initial Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program brought innovative results, including
 3 novel municipal ideas that became municipal ordinances which later resulted in new statewide
 4 statutes;

5 (2) The initial Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program also brought novel municipal ideas that
 6 resulted in court challenges against some of the participating municipalities;

7 (3) The Municipal Home Rule Board was an essential part of the initial Municipal Home
 8 Rule Pilot Program, but it lacked some needed powers and duties;

9 (4) Municipalities still face challenges delivering services required by federal and state law
 10 or demanded by their constituents;

11 (5) Municipalities are sometimes restrained by state statutes, policies, and rules that
 12 challenge their ability to carry out their duties and responsibilities in a cost-effective, efficient, and
 13 timely manner;

14 (6) Establishing the Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program as a permanent program is in the
 15 public interest; and

16 (7) Increasing the powers and duties of the Municipal Home Rule Board, subject to the
 17 limitations set forth herein, will enhance the Municipal Home Rule Program.

18 (b) The Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program is established as a permanent program and
19 shall be identified as the Municipal Home Rule Program. Any plan or amendment to a plan
20 approved by the board during the period of the Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program is continued.
21 Any ordinance, act, resolution, rule, or regulation enacted by a participating municipality under the
22 provisions of this section during the period of the Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program shall
23 continue in full force and effect unless and until repealed: *Provided*, That municipalities that are
24 participants in the Municipal Home Rule Program shall update their ordinances, acts, resolutions,
25 rules, and regulations to comply with any additions or modifications to subsection (i), subsection
26 (j), or subsection (k) of this section.

27 (c) (1) Commencing July 1, 2019, any Class I, Class II, or Class III municipality that is
28 current in payment of all state fees may apply to participate in the Municipal Home Rule Program
29 pursuant to the provisions of this section. Also, commencing July 1, 2019, up to four applications
30 per year from Class IV municipalities may be approved by the board for participation in the
31 Municipal Home Rule Program pursuant to the provisions of this section, provided the Class IV
32 municipality is current in payment of all state fees.

33 (2) The municipalities participating in the Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program on the
34 effective date of the amendment and reenactment of this section are authorized to continue in the
35 Municipal Home Rule Program, subject to the requirements of this section, and may amend
36 current written plans and/or submit new written plans in accordance with the provisions of this
37 section.

38 (3) On July 1, 2019, all municipalities currently participating in the Municipal Home Rule
39 Pilot Program shall pay an annual assessment of \$2,000 for the operation and administration of
40 the Home Rule Board. On July 1 of each year thereafter, all municipalities participating in the
41 Municipal Home Rule Program as of that date shall pay the annual assessment. Any participating
42 municipality that fails to timely remit its assessment when due may be assessed a penalty of an
43 additional \$2,000 by the board.

44 (4) There is created in the office of the State Treasurer a special revenue account fund to
45 be known as the Home Rule Board Operations Fund. The assessments required by the provisions
46 of subdivision (3) of this subsection shall be deposited into the fund, and expenditures from the
47 fund shall be made in accordance with appropriation of the Legislature under the provisions of
48 §12-3-1 *et seq.* of this code, and in compliance with the provisions of §11B-2-1 *et seq.* of this code:
49 *Provided*, That legislative appropriation is not required during fiscal year 2019.

50 (5) Any balance in the fund created under subdivision (4) of this subsection at the end of a
51 fiscal year shall not revert to the General Revenue Fund but shall remain in the special revenue
52 account for uses consistent with the provisions of this section.

53 (6) All costs and expenses lawfully incurred by the board may be paid from the fund
54 created under subdivision (4) of this subsection.

55 (7) Notwithstanding any provision of this section to the contrary, if at the end of a fiscal year
56 the unencumbered balance of the fund created in subdivision (4) of this subsection is \$200,000 or
57 more, then annual assessments shall be suspended until the board determines that the
58 unencumbered balance in the fund is insufficient to meet operational expenses. The board shall
59 notify all participating municipalities of the suspension of the annual assessment prior to the end of
60 the fiscal year and provide an estimate of when payment of annual assessments will resume.

61 (d) The Municipal Home Rule Board is continued. The Municipal Home Rule Board shall
62 consist of the following five voting members:

63 (1) The Governor, or a designee, who shall serve as chair;

64 (2) The Executive Director of the West Virginia Development Office, or a designee;

65 (3) One member representing the Business and Industry Council, appointed by the
66 Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate;

67 (4) One member representing the largest labor organization in the state, appointed by the
68 Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate; and

69 (5) One member representing the West Virginia Chapter of the American Planning
70 Association, appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate.

71 The Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Organization and the Chair of the
72 House Committee on Government Organization shall serve as ex officio nonvoting members of
73 the board.

74 (e) The Municipal Home Rule Board shall:

75 (1) Review, evaluate, make recommendations, and approve or reject, for any lawful
76 reason, by a majority vote of the board, each aspect of the written plan, or the written plan in its
77 entirety, submitted by a municipality;

78 (2) By a majority vote of the board, select, based on the municipality's written plan, new
79 Class I, Class II, Class III, and/or Class IV municipalities to participate in the Municipal Home Rule
80 Program;

81 (3) Review, evaluate, make recommendations, and approve or reject, for any lawful
82 reason, by a majority vote of the board, the amendments to the existing approved written plans
83 submitted by municipalities: *Provided*, That any new application or amendment that does not
84 reasonably demonstrate the municipality's ability to manage its associated costs or liabilities shall
85 be rejected;

86 (4) Consult with any agency affected by the written plans or the amendments to the
87 existing approved written plans; and

88 (5) Perform any other powers or duties necessary to effectuate the provisions of this
89 section: *Provided*, That any administrative rules established by the board for the operation of the
90 Municipal Home Rule Program shall be published on the Municipal Home Rule Board's website,
91 and made available to the public in print upon request.

92 (f) Any Class I, Class II, Class III, or Class IV municipality desiring to participate in the
93 Municipal Home Rule Program, or any municipality desiring to amend its existing approved written
94 plan, shall submit a written plan to the board stating in detail the following:

95 (1) The specific laws, acts, resolutions, policies, rules, or regulations which prevent the
96 municipality from carrying out its duties in the most cost-efficient, effective, and timely manner;

97 (2) The problems created by those laws, acts, resolutions, policies, rules, or regulations;

98 (3) The proposed solutions to the problems, including all proposed changes to ordinances,
99 acts, resolutions, rules, and regulations: *Provided*, That the specific municipal ordinance instituting
100 the solution does not have to be included in the written plan; and

101 (4) A written opinion, by an attorney licensed to practice in the State of West Virginia,
102 stating that the proposed written plan does not violate the provisions of this section.

103 (g) Prior to submitting its written plan, or an amendment to an existing approved written
104 plan, to the board, the municipality shall:

105 (1) Hold a public hearing on the written plan or the amendment to the existing approved
106 written plan;

107 (2) Provide notice of the public hearing at least 30 days prior to the public hearing by a
108 Class II legal advertisement: *Provided*, That on or before the first day of publication, the
109 municipality shall send a copy of the notice by certified mail to the Municipal Home Rule Board and
110 the cabinet secretary of every state department;

111 (3) Make a copy of the written plan or amendment available for public inspection at least 30
112 days prior to the public hearing; and

113 (4) After the public hearing, adopt an ordinance authorizing the municipality to submit a
114 written plan or amendment to the Municipal Home Rule Board: *Provided*, That the proposed
115 ordinance has been read two times, as required by §8-11-4 of this code.

116 (h) By a majority vote, the Municipal Home Rule Board may select from the municipalities
117 that submitted written plans and were approved by the board by majority vote new Class I, Class II,
118 Class III, and/or Class IV municipalities to participate in the Municipal Home Rule Program.

119 (i) The municipalities participating in the Municipal Home Rule Program may not pass an
120 ordinance, act, resolution, rule, or regulation, under the provisions of this section, that is contrary
121 to the following:

122 (1) Environmental law;

123 (2) Laws governing bidding on government construction and other contracts;

124 (3) The Freedom of Information Act;

125 (4) The Open Governmental Proceedings Act;

126 (5) Laws governing wages for construction of public improvements;

127 (6) The provisions of this section;

128 (7) The provisions of §8-12-5a of this code;

129 (8) The municipality's written plan;

130 (9) The Constitution of the United States or the Constitution of the State of West Virginia;

131 (10) Federal law, including those governing crimes and punishment;

132 (11) Chapters 60A, 61, and 62 of this code or any other provisions of this code governing
133 state crimes and punishment;

134 (12) Laws governing pensions or retirement plans;

135 (13) Laws governing annexation;

136 (14) Laws governing taxation: *Provided*, That a participating municipality may enact a
137 municipal sales tax up to one percent if it reduces or eliminates its municipal business and
138 occupation tax: *Provided, however*, That if a municipality subsequently reinstates or raises the
139 municipal business and occupation tax it previously reduced or eliminated under the Municipal
140 Home Rule Pilot Program or the Municipal Home Rule Program, it shall reduce or eliminate the
141 municipal sales tax enacted under the Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program or the Municipal Home
142 Rule Program in an amount comparable to the revenue estimated to be generated by the
143 reinstated tax: *Provided further*, That any municipality that imposes a municipal sales tax pursuant
144 to this section shall use the services of the Tax Commissioner to administer, enforce, and collect

145 the tax required by the provisions of §11-15-1 *et seq.*, §11-15A-1 *et seq.*, and §11-15B-1 *et seq.* of
146 this code and all applicable provisions of the Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement: *And*
147 *provided further*, That the tax does not apply to the sale of motor fuel or motor vehicles;

148 (15) Laws governing tax increment financing;

149 (16) Laws governing extraction of natural resources;

150 (17) Marriage and divorce laws;

151 (18) Laws governing professional licensing or certification, including the administration and
152 oversight of those laws, by state agencies to the extent required by law;

153 (19) Laws, rules, or regulations governing the enforcement of state building or fire codes;

154 (20) Federal laws, regulations, or standards that would affect the state's required
155 compliance or jeopardize federal funding;

156 (21) Laws or rules governing procurement of architectural and engineering services:
157 *Provided*, That notwithstanding any other provision of this section to the contrary, the change
158 made in this subdivision applies prospectively and any ordinance enacted by the participating
159 municipalities prior to the effective date of the amendments to this section during the 2019 regular
160 legislative session and pursuant to the Municipal Home Rule Pilot Program remains in effect.

161 (22) The provisions of chapter 17C of this code; or

162 (23) Laws, rules, or regulations governing communication technologies or
163 telecommunications carriers, as the term "telecommunications carrier" is defined by the Federal
164 Communications Commission in 47 U.S.C. §153 or as determined by the Public Service
165 Commission of West Virginia.

166 (24) Laws governing the sale, transfer, possession, use, storage, taxation, registration,
167 licensing, or carrying firearms, ammunition, or accessories thereof.

168 (j) The municipalities participating in the Municipal Home Rule Program may not pass an
169 ordinance, act, resolution, rule, or regulation under the provisions of this section that:

170 (1) Affects persons or property outside the boundaries of the municipality: *Provided*, That
171 this prohibition under the Municipal Home Rule Program does not limit a municipality's powers
172 outside its boundary lines to the extent permitted under other provisions of this section, other
173 sections of this chapter, other chapters of this code, or court decisions;

174 (2) Enacts an occupation tax, fee, or assessment payable by a nonresident of a
175 municipality; ~~or~~

176 (3) Imposes duties on another governmental entity, unless the performance of the duties is
177 part of a legally executed agreement between the municipality and the other governmental entity,
178 or is otherwise permitted by state law; or

179 (4) That recognizes additional classes of persons entitled to protection in addition to those
180 classes of persons recognized by existing state statutes, and any such existing ordinances are
181 void and enforceable.

182 (k) Municipalities may not prohibit or effectively limit the rental of a property, in whole or in
183 part, or regulate the duration, frequency, or location of such rental, in whole or in part. A
184 municipality may regulate activities that arise when a property is used as a rental: *Provided*, That
185 such regulation applies uniformly to all properties, without regard to whether such properties are
186 used as a rental: *Provided, however*, That nothing in this subdivision may be construed to prohibit
187 a municipality from imposing a hotel occupancy tax as prescribed in §7-18-1 *et seq.* of this code.

188 (l) A municipality participating in the Municipal Home Rule Program may amend its written
189 plan at any time subject to the requirements of this section.

190 (m) A municipality participating in the Municipal Home Rule Program may amend any
191 ordinance, act, resolution, rule, or regulation enacted pursuant to the municipality's approved
192 written plan at any time as long as the amendment is consistent with the municipality's approved
193 written plan, as modified by any amendments adopted pursuant to this section, complies with the
194 provisions of this section, and the municipality complies with all applicable state law procedures
195 for enacting municipal legislation.

196 (n) On or before December 1 of each year, each participating municipality shall give a
197 written progress report to the Municipal Home Rule Board, and on or before January 1 of each
198 year, the Municipal Home Rule Board shall give a summary report of all the participating
199 municipalities to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance.

200 (o) Notwithstanding any other provision of this code to the contrary, a distributee under the
201 provisions of this section may not seek from the Tax Division of the Department of Revenue a
202 refund of revenues or moneys collected by, or remitted to, the Tax Division of the Department of
203 Revenue, nor seek a change in past amounts distributed, or any other retrospective adjustment
204 relating to any amount distributed, to the extent that the moneys in question have been distributed
205 by the Tax Division to another distributee, regardless of whether those distributions were
206 miscalculated, mistaken, erroneous, misdirected, or otherwise inaccurate or incorrect. For
207 purposes of this section, the term "distributee" means any municipality that has enacted a sales
208 and use tax under this section or as otherwise permitted by law that receives or is authorized to
209 receive a specific distribution of revenues or moneys collected by, or remitted to, the Tax Division
210 of the Department of Revenue pursuant to this section.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to prohibit municipalities participating in the Home Rule program from establishing additional protected classes of persons beyond what is designated in state statute.

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