

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

SENATE JOURNAL

EIGHTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION, 2026
EIGHTH DAY

Charleston, West Virginia, Wednesday, January 21, 2026

The Senate met at 11:03 a.m.

(Senator Smith, Mr. President, in the Chair.)

Prayer was offered by the Honorable Bill Hamilton, a senator from the eleventh district.

The Senate was then led in recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by the Honorable Scott Fuller, a senator from the fifth district.

Pending the reading of the Journal of Tuesday, January 20, 2026,

At the request of Senator Thorne, unanimous consent being granted, the Journal was approved and the further reading thereof dispensed with.

The Senate proceeded to the second order of business and the introduction of guests.

The Senate then proceeded to the fourth order of business.

Senator Helton, from the Committee on Health and Human Resources, submitted the following report, which was received:

Your Committee on Health and Human Resources has had under consideration

Senate Bill 228, Relating to use of technology in child abuse and neglect investigations.

And,

Senate Bill 446, Including certain mental health disorders in existing public health programs.

And reports the same back with the recommendation that they each do pass; but under the original double committee references first be referred to the Committee on Finance.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Helton,
Chair.

The bills, under the original double committee references, were then referred to the Committee on Finance.

Senator Grady, from the Committee on Education, submitted the following report, which was received:

Your Committee on Education has had under consideration

Senate Bill 428, Creating three separate job titles for school bus operators.

And reports back a committee substitute for same with the following title:

Com. Sub. for Senate Bill 428 (originating in the Committee on Education)—A Bill to amend and reenact §18A-4-8 and §18A-4-8a of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to replacing the current class title for school bus operator with the bus operator I, bus operator II, and bus operator III class titles; assigning pay grades to each of the new class titles; and increasing the cafeteria manager pay grade.

With the recommendation that the committee substitute do pass; but under the original double committee reference first be referred to the Committee on Finance.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy N. Grady,
Chair.

The bill (Com. Sub. for S. B. 428), under the original double committee reference, was then referred to the Committee on Finance.

Senator Helton, from the Committee on Health and Human Resources, submitted the following report, which was received:

Your Committee on Health and Human Resources has had under consideration

Senate Bill 436, Relating to statewide prevention plan.

And reports the same back with the recommendation that it do pass; but under the original double committee reference first be referred to the Committee on Finance.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Helton,
Chair.

The bill, under the original double committee reference, was then referred to the Committee on Finance.

The Senate proceeded to the sixth order of business.

On motions for leave, severally made, the following bills and joint resolution were introduced, read by their titles, and referred to the appropriate committees:

By Senators Hamilton, Azinger, Deeds, Fuller, Garcia, Oliverio, Phillips, Takubo, Thorne, Weld, Woelfel, and Woodrum:

Senate Bill 549—A Bill to amend and reenact §52-1-17 and §52-2-13 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to increasing juror pay from \$40 per day to \$100 per day.

Referred to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Woelfel:

Senate Bill 550—A Bill to amend and reenact §3-5-7, §3-5-13, §3-5-13a, §3-10-3, and §24-1-3 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended; and to amend the code by adding two new sections, designated §3-5-6f and §24-1-3a, relating to the Public Service Commission of West Virginia; eliminating appointment process and providing for nonpartisan election of commission members; authorizing appointed commissioners to complete existing terms; setting requirements for candidates for office of commissioner; providing for election of commission chair; providing for initial, staggered elections of three commissioners to five and one-half year terms; providing for subsequent regular elections of commissioners to six-year terms; establishing election procedures; and providing for process to fill commission vacancies.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Senator Woelfel:

Senate Bill 551—A Bill to amend and reenact §18B-2A-1 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to institutional boards of governors; and restoring voting rights to faculty, student, and employee members of the boards of governors.

Referred to the Committee on Education; and then to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Senator Woelfel:

Senate Bill 552—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section, designated §18-9A-27, relating to public school support; authorizing county boards of education to designate schools as rural anchor schools; setting eligibility criteria; providing for state aid formula treatment for designated rural anchor schools; establishing limitations; providing for use of additional state aid funding provided to rural anchor schools; requiring reporting by county boards; and providing for rulemaking.

Referred to the Committee on Education; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Woelfel:

Senate Bill 553—A Bill to amend and reenact §30-42-7 and §30-42-9 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to transfer of contractor licenses; and providing for the transfer of a license to a contractor's qualifying immediate family member.

Referred to the Committee on the Workforce.

By Senator Woelfel:

Senate Bill 554—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section, designated §18-9A-27, relating to public school support; establishing an enrollment stabilizer mechanism within the public school support plan; providing for additional enrollment stability protections for rural counties; and providing for rulemaking.

Referred to the Committee on Education; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Woelfel:

Senate Bill 555—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section, designated §18-9A-27, relating to public school support; establishing the Essential Personnel Bridge Grant Program; defining terms; establishing eligibility for grant awards; setting grant application procedures; providing criteria for awards of grants; limiting use of grant funds; requiring reporting by the Department of Education; and providing for rulemaking by the state board.

Referred to the Committee on Education; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Martin:

Senate Bill 556—A Bill to amend and reenact §33-6-29 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to modifying the priority of insurance coverage for drivers of certain vehicles to make consistent with federal law.

Referred to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Chapman:

Senate Bill 557—A Bill to amend and reenact §49-2-802 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to body-worn cameras; requiring Child Protective Services workers to attempt to wear body-worn cameras during investigations; requiring workers to obtain consent to use body worn cameras; permitting workers to refrain from using cameras in specific circumstances; requiring audio and video to be maintained for specified time frame; and stating that audio and video file is part of the confidential child welfare record.

Referred to the Committee on Health and Human Resources; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Taylor:

Senate Bill 558—A Bill to amend and reenact §17C-12-7 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended; and to amend the code by adding four new sections, designated §17C-12-7a, §17C-12-7b, §17C-12-7c, and §17C-12-7d, relating to school bus safety; establishing the Protect Our Children at the Bus Stop Act; clarifying that penalties apply only to passing a stopped school bus displaying activated stop arm signals and red warning lights while receiving or discharging school children; creating an aggravated offense classified as reckless driving; imposing mandatory minimum jail sentences; requiring completion of a driver education safety course; providing for insurance notification and surcharge eligibility; authorizing civil stop-arm camera enforcement with registered owner liability; providing for administrative adjudication; establishing felony thresholds for repeat aggravated offenses; authorizing automatic license plate suspension for repeat civil violations; requiring reporting to the Legislature; and dedicating revenues to school bus safety initiatives.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Senator Taylor:

Senate Bill 559—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new article, designated §60-11-1, §60-11-2, §60-11-3, §60-11-4, §60-11-5, §60-11-6, §60-11-7, §60-11-8, §60-11-9, §60-11-10, §60-11-11, §60-11-12, and §60-11-13, relating to creating the Protecting Children from Illegal Vapes Act; providing a short title and legislative purpose; defining terms; giving the Alcohol Beverage Control Administration regulatory authority; requiring a license to sell, distribute, or offer vapor products in this state; creating a product registry; restricting sales;

permitting inspections and enforcement; creating administrative and criminal penalties; permitting rulemaking; preempting local ordinances; and setting an effective date.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Helton:

Senate Bill 560—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new article, designated §12-3B-1, §12-3B-2, §12-3B-3, §12-3B-4, §12-3B-5, §12-3B-6, §12-3B-7, and §12-3B-8, relating to creating the Financial Accountability Stable Token Act for financing and state payments; authorizing the use of qualifying stable tokens for payments to state vendors and contractors; establishing eligibility and reserve requirements; providing for administration and oversight by the State Treasurer; providing for rulemaking and reporting; and providing for severability.

Referred to the Committee on Banking and Insurance; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Azinger:

Senate Bill 561—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section, designated §35-1-14, relating to disaffiliation from religious denominations and generally relating to property of religious organizations; requiring a two-thirds vote of the membership for disaffiliation; establishing classes of property for purposes of disaffiliation; treating each separately deeded parcel of real property as a distinct unit for Class A purposes; providing that a local religious organization that disaffiliates from a parent religious denomination or conference may retain ownership of each parcel of real property (Class A) if more than 50 percent of the costs for acquiring and improving that specific parcel were raised locally by or from the organization, subject to reimbursement of investments made by the parent religious denomination or conference; providing for ownership of chattel and personal property (Class B) based on the purchaser; providing for pro-rata ownership of intangible property (Class C) based on sources of funds over a two-year lookback period; providing a catch-all provision for classification of property by a court, mediator, or arbitrator; establishing a burden of proof on the parent religious denomination or conference; requiring the parent religious denomination or conference to provide accounting within a specified timeline; and providing for severability and application to affiliations entered into or reaffirmed on or after the effective date.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Senators Chapman and Deeds:

Senate Bill 562—A Bill to amend and reenact the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section, designated §9-5-34, relating to establishing a Food Is Medicine Program under Medicaid; authorizing coverage of nutrition supports through the state Medicaid program; prioritizing local food producers when available; providing for implementation; and setting an effective date.

Referred to the Committee on Health and Human Resources; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Rucker:

Senate Bill 563—A Bill to repeal §5F-2-8, §11B-1-8, §49-10-101, §49-10-102, and §49-10-103 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to repeal of provisions of code that exempt Department of Transportation, Tax Division, and Bureau for Social Services from Division of Personnel.

Referred to the Committee on Government Organization.

By Senator Willis:

Senate Bill 564—A Bill to amend and reenact §11-13JJ-4 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to modifying the requirements for volunteer firefighters to qualify for the volunteer firefighter tax credit.

Referred to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Chapman:

Senate Bill 565—A Bill to amend and reenact §5-16-7, §33-15-4u, §33-16-3ff, §33-24-7u, §33-25-8r, and §33-25A-8u of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to requiring the Public Employees Insurance Agency and other health insurance providers to provide payment parity for the same services provided between behavioral health, mental health, and medical and surgical health care providers; setting forth providers eligible for parity payment; providing requirements for claim submission; prohibiting insurer from reducing reimbursement paid to physician; and setting forth an effective date.

Referred to the Committee on Health and Human Resources; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Chapman:

Senate Bill 566—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new section, designated §3-1-18a, relating to imposing a limit of three terms on certain officials elected to public office in the state.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Senator Rucker:

Senate Bill 567—A Bill to amend and reenact §18-31-7 and §18-31-8 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to the Hope Scholarship Program; prohibiting a county board or charter school governing board from charging any fees to a Hope Scholarship student for any extracurricular program-related services; and modifying the academic achievement requirement for Hope Scholarship students choosing an individualized instructional program and choosing to be assessed through a review of the student's academic work.

Referred to the Select Committee on School Choice.

By Senators Takubo, Oliverio, Deeds, and Hamilton:

Senate Bill 568—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new article, designated §33-64-1, relating to requiring health benefit plan coverage; creating the Oral Health and Cancer Rights Act; requiring coverage for medically necessary dental procedures that result from cancer treatment; explaining scope of procedures covered as a result of certain cancer treatments; requiring use of specific billing identifier; and setting an effective date.

Referred to the Committee on Health and Human Resources; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senator Azinger:

Senate Bill 569—A Bill to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding a new article, designated §46A-6O-1, §46A-6O-2, §46A-6O-3, §46A-6O-4, §46A-6O-5, §46A-6O-

6, §46A-6O-7, §46A-6O-8, §46A-6O-9, §46A-6O-10, and §46A-6O-11, relating to creating the Transparency in Financial Services Act; providing a short title; defining terms; prohibiting a bank from taking adverse actions against a person under certain circumstances; setting exceptions; creating legal remedies; creating a cause of action for bad-faith claims; creating rules of construction; making this article severable; and setting an effective date.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary; and then to the Committee on Finance.

By Senators Smith (Mr. President) and Woelfel (By Request of the Executive):

Senate Bill 570—A Bill making a supplementary appropriation of public moneys out of the Treasury from the balance of federal moneys remaining unappropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, to the Department of Health, Central Office, fund 8802, fiscal year 2026, organization 0506, by supplementing and amending the appropriations for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026.

Referred to the Committee on Finance.

By Senators Smith (Mr. President) and Woelfel (By Request of the Executive):

Senate Bill 571—A Bill to amend and reenact §18-2-7a, §30-3-12, and §30-14-10 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended; and to amend the code by adding a new section, designated §5A-3-3d, relating to making certain changes consistent with the State of West Virginia's commitments to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services in West Virginia's Rural Health Transformation Program; exempting implementation of the program from purchasing restrictions; adopting the Presidential Fitness Test; requiring the Board of Medicine and Board of Osteopathic Medicine to require the completion of continuing medical education credits in nutrition; and providing rule-making authority.

Referred to the Committee on Health and Human Resources; and then to the Committee on Government Organization.

By Senator Thorne:

Senate Bill 572—A Bill to amend and reenact §3-1-28 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to providing for a program allowing election official trainees to be appointed as election officials.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Senator Takubo:

Senate Joint Resolution 16—Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the State of West Virginia, amending section four, article VII thereof, relating to preventing any individual from serving in the office of Secretary of State, Auditor, State Treasurer, Commissioner of Agriculture, or Attorney General for more than three consecutive terms; numbering and designating such proposed amendment; and providing a summarized statement of the purpose of such proposed amendment.

Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary; and then to the Committee on Finance.

Senator Smith (Mr. President) offered the following resolution:

Senate Resolution 9—Designating January 22, 2026, as Tucker County Day at the Legislature.

Which, under the rules, lies over one day.

Senator Grady offered the following resolution:

Senate Resolution 10—Recognizing the Day of the Bible at the Capitol.

Which, under the rules, lies over one day.

Senator Rucker offered the following resolution:

Senate Resolution 11—Congratulating the State Government Affairs Council on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.

Which, under the rules, lies over one day.

The Senate proceeded to the seventh order of business.

Senate Resolution 8, Congratulating Anthony "Tony" Deal on being named Agent of Year.

On unfinished business, coming up in regular order, was reported by the Clerk.

At the request of Senator Oliverio, unanimous consent being granted, reference of the resolution to a committee was dispensed with, and it was taken up for immediate consideration and adopted.

The Senate proceeded to the tenth order of business.

Com. Sub. for Senate Bill 15, Protecting coal and gas minerals from carbon capture practices.

On first reading, coming up in regular order, was read a first time and ordered to second reading.

Senate Bill 66, Modifying classes of state of preparedness declared by Governor or Legislature.

On first reading, coming up in regular order, was read a first time and ordered to second reading.

Com. Sub. for Senate Bill 137, Modifying parole eligibility for crime of second degree murder and voluntary manslaughter.

On first reading, coming up in regular order, was read a first time and ordered to second reading.

Com. Sub. for Senate Bill 207, Clarifying sheriff's compensation for collection of taxes.

On first reading, coming up in regular order, was read a first time and ordered to second reading.

The Senate proceeded to the twelfth order of business.

Remarks were made by Senators Chapman, Phillips, and Woelfel.

The Senate proceeded to the thirteenth order of business.

At the request of Senator Martin, unanimous consent being granted, leaves of absence for the day were granted Senators Rucker and Willis.

Under the provisions of Rule 15 of the Rules of the Senate, the following senators were added as co-sponsors to the following bills and resolutions on January 20, 2026:

Senate Bill 4: Senator Willis;

Senate Bill 17: Senator Hart;

Senate Bill 19: Senator Thorne;

Senate Bill 23: Senators Thorne and Hart;

Senate Bill 42: Senator Hart;

Senate Bill 50: Senator Hart;

Senate Bill 61: Senator Thorne;

Senate Bill 82: Senator Hart;

Senate Bill 84: Senator Rucker;

Senate Bill 104: Senator Phillips;

Senate Bill 158: Senator Thorne;

Senate Bill 201: Senator Oliverio;

Senate Bill 207: Senator Hamilton;

Senate Bill 228: Senator Oliverio;

Senate Bill 396: Senator Z. Maynard;

Senate Bill 408: Senator Thorne;

Senate Bill 420: Senator Bartlett;

Senate Bill 436: Senators Oliverio and Garcia;

Senate Bill 445: Senator Oliverio;

Senate Bill 447: Senators Z. Maynard and Oliverio;

Senate Bill 458: Senator Oliverio;

Senate Bill 478: Senator Thorne;
Senate Bill 514: Senator Rose;
Senate Bill 515: Senator Woelfel;
Senate Bill 516: Senators Phillips and Woelfel;
Senate Bill 517: Senator Woelfel;
Senate Bill 525: Senator Rucker;
Senate Bill 526: Senator Woelfel;
Senate Bill 540: Senators Rucker and Phillips;
Senate Bill 544: Senator Rucker;
Senate Bill 545: Senator Rucker;
Senate Bill 546: Senator Rucker;
Senate Bill 547: Senator Rucker;
Senate Bill 548: Senator Woelfel;
Senate Joint Resolution 11: Senator Oliverio;
Senate Joint Resolution 14: Senator Oliverio;
Senate Concurrent Resolution 2: Senators Z. Maynard and Willis;

And,

Senate Resolution 6: Senator Roberts.

Pending announcement of meetings of standing committees of the Senate,

On motion of Senator Martin, at 11:23 a.m., the Senate adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, January 22, 2026, at 11 a.m.

SENATE CALENDAR

**Thursday, January 22, 2026
11:00 AM**

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- S. R. 9 - Designating January 22, 2026, Tucker County Day at Legislature
- S. R. 10 - Recognizing Day of the Bible at Capitol
- S. R. 11 - Congratulating State Government Affairs Council on its 50th anniversary

SECOND READING

- Com. Sub. for S. B. 15 - Protecting coal and gas minerals from carbon capture practices
- S. B. 66 - Modifying classes of state of preparedness declared by Governor or Legislature
- Com. Sub. for S. B. 137 - Modifying parole eligibility for crime of second degree murder and voluntary manslaughter
- Com. Sub. for S. B. 207 - Clarifying sheriff's compensation for collection of taxes

ANNOUNCED SENATE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Regular Session 2026

Thursday, January 22, 2026

10 a.m.	Education	(Room 451M)
10 a.m.	Government Organization	(Room 208W)