

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Committee Substitute

for

House Bill 5480

By Delegates Hornbuckle, Hanshaw (Mr. Speaker),

Riley, Criss, Hansen, Lewis, Hamilton, Fluharty,

Rohrbach, Garcia, and Williams

[Originating in the Committee on Finance, February

25, 2026]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a
2 new article, designated §5B-2P-1, §5B-2P-2, §5B-2P-3, §5B-2P-4, §5B-2P-5, §5B-2P-6,
3 §5B-2P-7, §5B-2P-8 and §5B-2P-9, relating to establishing the West Virginia Youth
4 Summer Employment and Career Readiness Program; providing legislative findings;
5 defining terms; establishing the program; providing assistance to priority youth
6 populations; directing coordination with other state and local governmental agencies;
7 facilitating and recruiting private and public sector; providing for eligibility for participation
8 in program; encouraging solicitation of private and public moneys and grants to fund the
9 program; requiring annual reporting; granting rulemaking authority; and creating an special
10 revenue account.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

**ARTICLE 2P. WEST VIRGINIA YOUTH SUMMER EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER
READINESS PROGRAM.**

§5B-2P-1. Short title.

2 This article may be cited as the West Virginia Youth Summer Employment and Career
3 Readiness Act.

§5B-2P-2. Legislative findings and purpose.

5 The Legislature finds that early paid work experience improves educational attainment
6 and workforce outcomes; that West Virginia faces persistent workforce shortages and youth out-
7 migration; that preparing and attracting students while in high school into careers in our state can
8 be a valuable tool not only to retain our youth but to prepare them for a successful career at a
9 critical juncture in their lives; creating a summer employment program will not only help retain our
10 young citizens but provide a boost to the economic life of our state by building a workforce that will
11 incentivize businesses to locate in West Virginia; Further, that providing special recruitment efforts
12 and incentives to focus on a priority youth population made up of those placed in foster care

13 services, those whose families receive public support, and those who are justice-involved is
14 critical, as these populations often face additional barriers to transitioning into full-time paying
15 careers; Further, this program will also enhance our workforce with motivated and career ready
16 young citizens, reduce dependence on governmental assistance and services, and help carry our
17 state forward in growing economic prosperity. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to establish
18 a statewide summer employment program that provides paid work experience, career exposure,
19 and skill development through public and private partnerships, supports emerging employment
20 sections and entrepreneurship, grows our workforce, attracts new businesses looking for
21 prepared and job ready young people, and is one of the most valuable investments we can make
22 for the future of our state.

§5B-2P-3. Definitions.

- 1 (a) "Department" means the Department of Commerce;
- 2 (b) "Priority youth population" means youth who are at least fourteen and not more than
3 twenty years of age at the time of participation and who meets one or more of the following criteria:
- 4 (1) A member of a household receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or
5 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits;
- 6 (2) In foster care, formerly in foster care, or otherwise under the supervision of the
7 Department of Human Services;
- 8 (3) Justice-involved, including youth under juvenile probation, diversion, or reentry
9 supervision; or
- 10 (4) Any additional criteria established by legislative rule promulgated pursuant to the
11 provisions of this article.
- 12 (c) "Employer partner" means a private business, nonprofit organization, local or state
13 agency or government, or public agency that provides paid work placements under this program;
- 14 (d) "Matching contribution" means a monetary or documented in-kind contribution from an
15 employer partner or other non-state entity; and

16 (e) "Program" means the West Virginia Youth Summer Employment and Career
17 Readiness Program as administered by the Division of Workforce Development within the
18 Department of Commerce.

§5B-2P-4. West Virginia Youth Summer Employment and Career Readiness Program.

1 (a) *Program created.* The West Virginia Youth Summer Employment and Career
2 Readiness Program is established within the Department of Commerce's Division of Work Force
3 Development. The program shall provide youth who are at least fourteen and not more than twenty
4 years of age at the time of participation with paid summer employment, structured work-based
5 learning, and career exploration opportunities aligned with workforce needs of the State of West
6 Virginia.

7 (b) *Grant placements.* In awarding grants and approving placements, the Department
8 shall direct funding across all regions of the state and shall emphasize training and exposure to
9 employment opportunities that include apprenticeships, internships, and paid employment
10 experiences that prepare participating youth for emerging and essential job growth sectors.

11 (c) *Program design.* The Department shall facilitate work experiences that shall
12 emphasize:

13 (1) High-demand and emerging industries identified through labor market data and
14 workforce development plans;

15 (2) Opportunities that provide foundational skills for long-term employment and career
16 advancement;

17 (3) Public service opportunities that provide participating youth with the chance to assist
18 and improve their local community and be exposed to the rewards and benefits of public service;

19 (4) Exposure to entrepreneurship, self-employment, and small business development,
20 including skills relevant to starting and operating a business; and

21 (5) Career pathways that align with regional economic development strategies.

22 (d) Coordination. The Department shall work with the Department of Education and
23 individual county school boards to identify the types of training opportunities currently being
24 provided, and the Division of Labor, and economic development partners to identify emerging job
25 growth trends and to communicate those trends to employers and program participants. The
26 Department shall actively engage with employers, industry associations, public and private
27 educational institutions, and economic development partners to identify current and projected
28 employment trends and to inform, recruit and encourage participating employers to offer
29 placements aligned with those trends.

30 (d) Participation. In administering the program, the Department shall provide equal access
31 to all eligible youth, but will provide additional outreach, training support, and placement strategies
32 that expand access to employment opportunities for priority youth populations.

§5B-2P-5. Employer partnerships and matching requirements.

1 Program funds shall be awarded through state grants to private and public employer
2 partners. Each employer partner shall provide contributions toward participant wages,
3 supervision, training, or related costs. The Department shall establish by legislative rule, minimum
4 matching requirements, eligibility, valuation of in-kind contributions, and criteria for waivers or
5 reductions for small employers or nonprofit agencies and organizations.

§5B-2P-6. Eligible activities and participant protections.

1 (a) Program funds may be used for wage subsidies, payroll-related costs, training,
2 transportation, equipment, supportive services, and reasonable administrative expenses.

3 (b) Youth participants shall be paid not less than the applicable minimum wage.

4 (c) Participation in the program may not displace existing employees or reduce wages or
5 hours of current workers.

§5B-2P-7. Reporting and accountability.

1 The Department shall submit an annual report to the Governor and the Joint Committee on
2 Government and Finance detailing participant outcomes, expenditures, and leveraged matching
3 contributions.

§5B-2P-8. Rulemaking authority.

1 The Department shall propose legislative rules in accordance with §29A-3-1 et seq. and
2 may propose any emergency rules necessary to effectuate the provisions of this article.

§5B-2P-9. Funding.

1 (a) The Department may receive private and public grants and donations, and
2 appropriations from the Legislature. All moneys collected shall be deposited in a special account
3 in the State Treasury to be known as the West Virginia Youth Summer Employment and Career
4 Readiness Account which is hereby created and administered by the Secretary of the Department
5 of Commerce. Expenditures from the fund shall be for the purposes set forth in this article and are
6 not authorized from collections but are to be made only in accordance with the appropriation by the
7 Legislature and in accordance with the provisions of §12-3-1 et seq. and upon fulfillment of the
8 provisions of §11B-2-1 et seq.: *Provided*, That for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2026 and June
9 30, 2027, expenditures are authorized from collections rather than pursuant to appropriation by
10 the Legislature.

11 (b) The Department shall make applications for any available federal, public, non-profit or
12 private grants and donations in support of this program. The Department may, if it is a condition of
13 such grant or donation condition, direct it toward any portion of a priority youth population to which
14 the grant or donation is directed.