
West Virginia Women's Commission 2016 Annual Report



Jim Justice
Governor



Bill J. Crouch
Secretary

The West Virginia Women's Commission



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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.

Commissioners

Stacy North, Chair — Monongalia County
Kathleen McDermott, Vice-Chair —
Marshall 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
One vacancy

Ex-Officio Members

Kelly Petry — 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
Jacquelyn Hoppe — Division of Personnel
Julie Warren — Office of Attorney General
Staff
Julie C. Palas, J.D., Interim Executive Director
(October 2015 to present)

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 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.

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**:

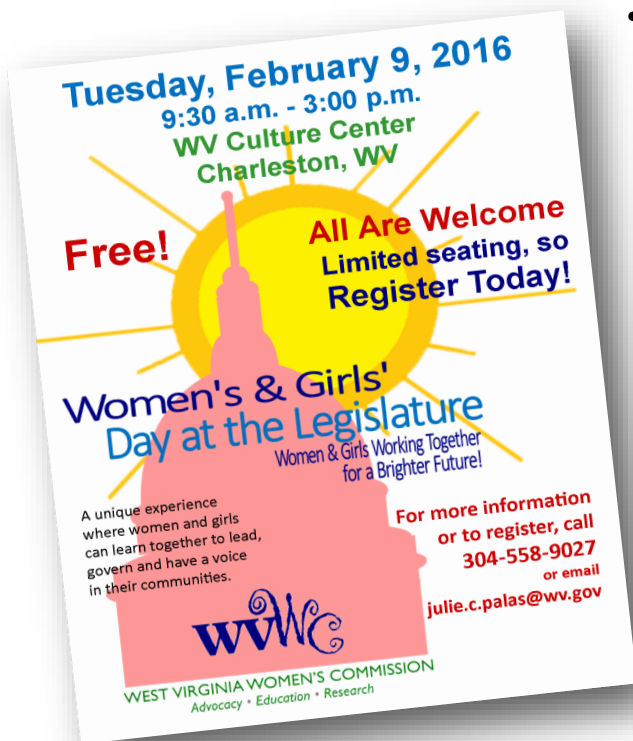
**Child Well-Being ★ Health ★ Economic Empowerment
Education ★ Violence Against Women Prevention**

— 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



Significant Accomplishments in 2016

- **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 student ambassadors and become liaisons between their schools, communities and the WVWC
- Co-sponsored ***College Dreams Ignited*** in partnership with West Virginia Reading Association on October 14, 2016 at West Virginia State University. This event:



- ◇ Created awareness of strategies for increased enrollment and degree completion as West Virginia ranks last nationally in the college going and college degree completion rate
 - ◇ Provided a forum for individuals to engage with educational providers, business leaders, and nonprofit organizations, making a ten-year commitment to increase the number of women seeking degrees
 - ◇ Presented speakers - President of Bay Path University Dr. Carol Leary, West Virginia State University President Dr. Anthony Jenkins, and Executive Director of the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs Dr. Carolyn Stuart
 - ◇ Resulted in the following success stories: a participant completed a credit evaluation to discover that graduation by Spring 2017 is realistic; another re-negotiated financial obligations to eliminate loans upon graduation; and another started her college degree and finished the first semester with a 4.0 GPA (one of two participants awarded scholarships during the event)
- 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
 - ◇ Volunteered for the WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence's Purple Gala honoring women working to eliminate domestic and sexual violence
 - ◇ Promoted services and information from Covenant House for homeless and transitional individuals, Crittenton Services for behavioral healthcare, Our Children Our Future to end child poverty, Midwives Alliance of WV services, InspireWV to increase civic participation through voter registration, Small Business Development Center resources, American Heart Association services, WV Women Work for job training in construction/manufacturing, KIDS COUNT to decrease teen pregnancy and low birth weights, and nonprofit Libera, Inc. to host listening model workshops and trainings across the state providing tools to break barriers for women who seek the freedom to reach their goals.



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, the strategic plan, and to plan for the coming year.
- **Committee Meetings** — The Commissioners, Ex-Officio Members, 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 meet once a month to discuss the operations of the Commission.

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.

GENDER EQUITY ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

West Virginia's population is approximately 1,854,300, and more than 50 percent are women. Our state legislature and state boards and commissions are not representative of that percentage. While we have made strides, women only hold 14.9% of the Legislative seats. To reflect the needs of our female citizens, more women need to be involved in the decision and policy making arena.

The WVWC believes this can be achieved by making a concerted effort to obtain gender equity on state appointed boards and commissions that have economic and political impact. This action will set the example for local communities by putting women in a position to have a positive effect on policy development to improve the lives of all West Virginians. The WVWC is requesting the Governor and the State Legislature adopt a resolution that state boards and commissions be gender balanced to the extent possible by 2025.

ELDER CARE

West Virginia has the second highest per capita percentage of elders in the country. The West Virginia Women's Commission completed a survey of women in the state and found that elder care is a more urgent need than child care. Women are the primary caregivers in our state. While accessibility and affordability for child care remains a constant challenge, elder care is an even larger problem. Solutions for working women who need to arrange for these services are very difficult to attain. Elder care services vary widely by county and are difficult to locate.

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. Currently, we have many assisted living and personal care facilities, but they are prohibitively expensive for many seniors and their families.

The WVWC requests that a legislative committee be appointed to consider possible legislation that could coordinate current services and programs 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 place where it is safe to grow up and safe to grow old.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION

Economic hardship for women in West Virginia is still very high because of a multitude of problems. According to *The Status of Women in West Virginia, 2015: Highlights*, by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, women in West Virginia are less likely to be a part of the labor force (ranked 51), less likely to have a college degree (ranked 51), and less likely to hold a management or professional position (ranked 39). West Virginia's women are more likely to live in poverty (ranked 43) and have a larger wage gap between men and women (ranked 50).

These factors present significant impediments to the economic security of not only women, but our entire state. The WVWC is advocating a variety of ways to improve the position of women in West Virginia. Through collaboration with the Department of Education (DoE), Girls Programs, and local communities, girls will be encouraged to participate in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, Mathematics) programs in school. The WVWC proposes programs that will encourage women to take up nontraditional jobs as they pay more money. Enhanced strategies to partner programs like West Virginia Women Work with the DoE, Department of Transportation, and our state colleges and technical schools will enhance opportunities and outcomes. To that end, we are advocating for a grant administrator position in the Governor's Office to research grant possibilities and coordinate collaborative programs with state agencies.

Many women (and men) work part time and although many professions, such as nursing, pay well for weekend work and overtime, if they are laid off, they are not eligible for unemployment. This can be an undue hardship for families that rely on this income. The WVWC would like to see a study conducted 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.

The WVWC continues its efforts through the College Dreams Ignited program to help adult women overcome barriers when seeking a college degree. Consider the following:

- Traditional age students are less than 20% of total college student populations in the United States.
- Traditional age students who receive the PROMISE Scholarship tend to leave West Virginia upon graduation, and when they leave, the recipient is not required to pay back the scholarship.
- Non-traditional age women students make up 55% of the total college population followed by non-traditional age men at 25%.
- Non-traditional age students tend to pursue majors in critical shortage areas in the West Virginia workforce such as education, medicine and business.
- Non-traditional aged students tend to graduate and stay in West Virginia.

Based on this information, when the PROMISE Scholarship program is reviewed, the WVWC suggests the criteria include a stipulation of an obligation to stay in West Virginia for a certain number of years or else the student must pay back the scholarship, and to allow non-traditional age students who have been out of school for more than two years be eligible for the PROMISE scholarship program.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Ending violence against women in our state continues to be a priority for the WVWC. In West Virginia, many women are affected by domestic violence and sexual assault regardless of their economic status, sexual orientation, age, gender, nationality or religion. The West Virginia Center Against Domestic Violence (WVCADV) reports that more than 600 women, children and men access their services daily in West Virginia. Women, survivors, and victims continue to suffer due to the lack of awareness, inadequate support and poor legislation. The ongoing need for professional training and education for community members, service providers and legislative members on the severity of domestic violence and sexual assault is a priority for the WVWC. There are 14 shelters that struggle to provide services. The Women's Commission supports continued funding for Rape and Domestic Violence Shelters and training programs for first responders and hospital personnel to maintain their skills when dealing with survivors of assault.

Domestic Violence in West Virginia

- On any given day, licensed domestic violence programs in West Virginia provide services to nearly 500 women, children and men.
- Every nine minutes, a call is made to a domestic violence hotline in West Virginia.
- One-third of homicides in West Virginia are related to domestic violence.

Sexual Assault in West Virginia

- One out of every nine adult women, or about 85,000 adult women in West Virginia, has been the victim of forcible sexual assault sometime in her lifetime.
- One in six sexual assaults are reported to law enforcement.
- Two-thirds of all sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim, not a stranger.

West Virginia, like the rest of the country, is currently dealing with the alarming problem of human trafficking. To address this growing problem, law enforcement approach needs to reflect an understanding of the dynamics of sexual slavery, forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. The approaches of law enforcement and the judicial system to dealing with prostitution need to be changed to address the underlying physical, emotional and economic effect of this growing problem. This is a problem that deserves legislative attention. A committee should be established to investigate not only the depth and breadth of the problem, but possible solutions for our state. Last year, HB4489 was not passed before the end of the session. The West Virginia Women's Commission requests that HB4489 be adopted as written to protect victims of human trafficking.

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