



WEST VIRGINIA WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Annual Report 2024



West Virginia Women's Commission

Jill Upson, Executive Director

2024

The West Virginia Women's Commission

The West Virginia Women's Commission was created by the West Virginia Legislature in 1977 to advocate for women and educate on issues relating to women. As an office of the West Virginia Department of Human Services (DoHS), the Commission 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 Commission's goals and projects. Seven state department heads, or designated representatives, advise and support the Commission as ex officio members. Commission meetings are held quarterly and are open to the public.

Our Vision: West Virginia women and girls will prosper and have social, economic, and political equality.

Our Mission: Elevating the power and potential of West Virginia women and girls.

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Governor-Appointed Commissioners

Kenyatta Grant, Chair (Kanawha County)
 Michelle Barnes-Russell (Berkeley County)
 Belinda Biafore (Fayette County)
 Elizabeth Critch (Monongalia County)
 Leah Glover (Kanawha County)
 Kameron Miller (Kanawha County)
 Beth Redden (Raleigh County)
 Sierra Sovine (Kanawha County)
 Samantha Willis (Kanawha County)
 Beth Wolfe (Putnam County)

Ex Officio Members

Vacant – West Virginia Department of Education
 Angela Sundstrom – West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission
 Tia Welch – West Virginia Human Rights Commission
 Rae Bates – West Virginia Departments of Health, Health Facilities, and Human Services
 Callie Saunders (alt. Joan Webb) - WV Division of Labor
 Bobbie Wisniewski – West Virginia Division of Personnel
 Candace Kraus – Office of the Attorney General

Duties of the West Virginia Women’s Commission, per W. Va. Code §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.

Operations

- **Quarterly Meetings** — The Commission holds four quarterly meetings to discuss the business of the Commission and promote issues of importance to women. Notice of these public meetings is filed with the West Virginia Secretary of State’s Office, 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 and strategic plan.
- **Committee Meetings** — The Commissioners, ex officio members, members of the public, and staff meet to plan programs, publications and make recommendations to the Commission for approval.
- **Executive Director** — Coordinates the activities of the Commission and the day-to-day operations of the Commission.

Accomplishments in 2024

• Hosted virtual community “Talk and Tea” events with guest subject matter experts who discussed a variety of topics such as West Virginia’s Birth to Three Program, women in transportation, and higher education.

• Presented Women’s & Girls’ Day at the Legislature where the 2024 theme was: "Girls Who Dream Become Women with Vision: Giving Voice to the Next Generation". This year saw the



largest participation ever with over 230 women and girls attending the all-day event. The commission facilitated meetings with legislators and House and Senate session visits.

• Celebrated Women’s History Month and received a proclamation from Governor Jim Justice honoring West Virginia Women’s History Month.



- Participated in a menopause awareness roundtable event with Oscar Award-winning actress Halle Berry. Executive Director Jill Upson spoke about this important women’s issue and was pleased to advocate on behalf of federal legislation to improve women’s healthcare.



- Celebrated the Legacy of Women Awards, a biennial event that honors West Virginia women in the following categories: Arts, Business, Education, Government and Public Service, Labor, Sports, Mountaineer Spirit, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion and Lifetime Achievement.



- Continued to provide administrative support for the State of West Virginia’s Suffragist Memorial Committee, which is charged with creating a memorial on the State Capitol grounds honoring West Virginians whose efforts helped guarantee a women’s right to vote in the United States.

West Virginia Women's Commission
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