

## Five Public Restrooms for 241,330 West Virginians

By Sara Whitaker

On March 1, the Senate passed [Senate Bill 540](#), which creates a new criminal offense, punishable by up to 90 days in jail, for any person who urinates or defecates in a public place other than a public restroom.

SB 540 criminalizes something people must do to survive (and that municipalities already criminalize). What the bill fails to acknowledge is that for most West Virginians a public restroom is not an option.

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy reviewed data on city-operated public restrooms in nine of West Virginia's largest cities. See *Table 1*. Only two cities – Parkersburg and Fairmont – operate **full access restrooms** that are available to the public and open 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. (Notably, the Parkersburg restroom is located inside a police station, while the four Fairmont restrooms are port-a-johns.) In other words, across nine cities, there are five city-operated full access restrooms for 241,330 residents.

Furthermore, these nine cities offer only 24 **partial access restrooms** that are available to the public and open year-round for certain hours of the day and/or days of the week. Huntington provides only one partial access restroom for its 46,025 residents. Weirton provides one for a geographic area of 11,558 acres.

The lack of public restrooms creates an impossible situation for people who need accessible restrooms: the elderly, pregnant women, people with small children, the unhoused, people with medical conditions, and others. The current landscape gives them no choice but to break the law.

**Table 1**

### City-Operated Public Restrooms in West Virginia's Largest Cities<sup>1</sup>

City	Population	Pop. Rank	Full Access Restrooms	Partial Access Restrooms	Ratio of Residents to Restrooms	Ratio of City Acres to Restrooms
Charleston	48,018	1	0	8	6,002 to 1	2,520 to 1
Huntington	46,025	2	0	1	46,025 to 1	10,380 to 1
Morgantown	29,219	3	0	2	14,610 to 1	3,261 to 1
Parkersburg	29,403	4	1	4	5,881 to 1	1,508 to 1
Wheeling		5	<i>Wheeling City Attorney declined to provide public restroom data</i>			
Martinsburg	18,835	6	0	4	4,709 to 1	1,061 to 1
Weirton	18,813	7	0	1	18,813 to 1	11,558 to 1
Fairmont	18,209	8	4	2	3,035 to 1	917 to 1
Beckley	17,024	9	0	1	17,024 to 1	6,080 to 1
Clarksburg	15,784	10	0	1	15,784 to 1	6,214 to 1
<b>Total</b>	<b>241,330</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>24</b>	*Ratios include full and partial access restrooms	

\*A restroom is public if a person can access it without a government I.D. and without being a patron of the facility.

<sup>1</sup> **Charleston:** U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Charleston city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/charlestoncitywestvirginia#> (accessed February 12, 2023); "2023-02-09 City Public Restrooms locations times access.xlsx" provided by Kevin Baker, email message to author, February 9, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Charleston city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/charlestoncitywestvirginia#>

---

(accessed February 12, 2023); **Huntington**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Huntington city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/huntingtoncitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "City Operated Public Restrooms.xlsx" provided by Sam Ransbottom, email message to author, February 8, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Huntington city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/huntingtoncitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); **Morgantown**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Morgantown city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/morgantowncitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "City Operated Public Restrooms (01803687xA377B).xlsx" provided by Ryan Simonton, email message to author, February 10, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Morgantown city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/morgantowncitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); **Parkersburg**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Parkersburg city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/parkersburgcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "FOIA Response 02.06.23.pdf" provided by Jennifer Schoenhut, email message to author, February 6, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Parkersburg city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/parkersburgcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); **Weirton**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Weirton city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/weirtoncitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Public Restrooms Operated by The City of Weirton.pdf" provided by DeeAnn Pulliam, email message to author, February 3, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Weirton city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/weirtoncitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); **Fairmont**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Fairmont city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fairmontcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "parks.xlsx" provided by Kevin Sansalone, email message to author, February 14, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Fairmont city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/fairmontcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); **Martinsburg**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Martinsburg city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/martinsburgcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "City Operated Public Restrooms.xlsx" provided by Gena Long, email message to author, February 7, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Martinsburg city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/martinsburgcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); **Beckley**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Beckley city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/beckleycitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "Sara Whitaker FOIA Letter 2-27-23.pdf" provided by Amanda Williams, email message to author, February 28, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Beckley city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/beckleycitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); **Clarksburg**: U.S. Census Bureau, "Population Estimates, July 1 2021, (V2021) – Clarksburg city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/clarksburgcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023); "Copy of City Operated Public Restrooms.xlsx" provided by Steve Pulice, email message to author, February 9, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, "Land in Square Miles, 2020 – Clarksburg city, WV," *Quick Facts*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/clarksburgcitywestvirginia/PST045222> (accessed February 12, 2023).