

REFRESHING OUR
MISSION AND VISION

page 3

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
ACROSS THE STATE

page 5

IMPACT BY
THE NUMBERS

page 7

A Year of Growth & Change

Annual Report

2023



WEST VIRGINIA CENTER ON
BUDGET & POLICY

Letter from the Executive Director



FRIENDS OF THE WVCBP,

2023 was a year of growth and change at the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. We welcomed new staff, moved to a new office space, and ratified a refreshed mission and vision that better reflects our organizational evolution in recent years.

This year we also worked to better center our values of working hand in hand with community members and those most impacted by the policy issues on which we focus. We embarked on a new partnership with a Black-led grassroots organization, the Black Voter Impact Initiative, to pivot our research efforts to focus on the needs and priorities directly identified by West Virginia communities—particularly those in historically marginalized populations. We prioritized research and advocacy projects that incorporated robust listening and co-created policy solutions. For the first time, we published pieces authored by currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, as they know best what it would take to fix our broken criminal legal system. And we hosted a first-of-its-kind community-centered convening on Black infant and maternal health, where those impacted by pregnancy complications and loss came together with health professionals, advocates, and lawmakers to chart a brighter course forward.

The WVCBP has shifted to a longer, humbler approach that recognizes the need to support those who are on the ground building power in order to achieve our vision of a prosperous West Virginia where everyone has a meaningful opportunity to thrive.

2023 was also a challenging year. After six years of successfully fighting off attacks against the revenue that funds vital public services, the state enacted a sweeping reduction in the personal income tax that overwhelmingly benefited West Virginia's wealthiest households. Legislation was also passed to shift rising health insurance costs onto public employees, which is likely to exacerbate agency staffing shortages and vacancies. The consequences of these decisions are already clear, with repeated years of flat budgets eroding funding for public education, higher education, and public health; public employees paid among the lowest salaries of any state as their health insurance premiums spike; and shortfalls in Medicaid and child care subsidy programs. The WVCBP will continue to educate the public about the consequences of these decisions and fight additional efforts to erode and eliminate the personal income tax and corporate taxes, which fund the services that help all our people thrive.

The WVCBP's staff and board of directors are deeply grateful to our partners, supporters, funders, and all West Virginians who are joining us on the journey to pursue a bold, prosperous, and equitable vision for all our people.

Kelly Allen

Kelly Allen
Executive Director

Throughout 2023, the WVCBP's staff and board worked through an ongoing refinement process to develop a multiyear strategic framework for the organization. As part of that process, we determined that while our mission and vision are similar to those established at the time of our founding, our values and the ways we approach the work have somewhat evolved.

Given this organizational growth, we developed and ratified a refreshed mission, vision, and values that we are thrilled to share.

MISSION

The WVCBP works to advance public policies that increase opportunity and eliminate inequities through credible and accessible research and community-rooted advocacy.

VISION

A prosperous West Virginia where everyone has a meaningful opportunity to thrive with equitable access to health care, education, jobs, housing, and safe communities.

We are working towards a West Virginia that has:



Strong public institutions and schools that have the resources necessary to fulfill their missions, supported by a fair tax code where everyone contributes their share;



An equitable and diversified economy with well-paying dignified jobs, strong workers' rights, and robust supports to ensure no one has to choose between work and caring for a family;



Safe, sustainable communities: clean air and water, a criminal law system centered on second chances and decarceration, accessible and affordable health care, and the publicly shared resources needed for families and communities to thrive; and



A government and policymaking system where **those most impacted by decisions are at the table.**

Refreshing Our Mission and Vision

OUR MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

Hope Scholarship Reduces Resources for Public Schools, Lacks Necessary Oversight

The Costs of Police Overtime in Charleston

The High Costs of Cheap Food: Eating in West Virginia Prisons



Moving Upstream: Improving Child Welfare in West Virginia Requires Addressing Root Causes of Hardship

How Tax Cuts for the Rich Trumped Public Investments: The West Virginia Fiscal Year 2024 Budget



State of Working West Virginia 2023: The State of the Unemployed and Those Outside the Labor Force

THE COSTS OF POLICE OVERTIME IN CHARLESTON



The WVCCBP expanded its criminal law reform research to include local policies that drive mass incarceration. In August 2023, the Center published *The Costs of Police Overtime in Charleston*, which found that Charleston police officers claimed 78,004 hours of overtime in Fiscal Year 2023 at a

cost of nearly \$3 million dollars to the city. The report showed that between 2020 and 2023, officers claimed thousands more overtime hours than the previous year. During the same period, officers increased enforcement of low-level offenses—more than doubling the number of citations handed out for charges like trespassing, being in a park after hours, or driving with expired registration.

The report revealed that the Charleston Police Department employs two to three times more officers than similarly sized Appalachian cities. If Charleston staffed its police department at the same rate as Huntington, WV, the city could save \$9.7 million per year. The report concluded that every dollar city government spends on overtime or excess policing is a dollar that is not spent preventing the challenges and harms that police are asked to address.

MOVING UPSTREAM: IMPROVING CHILD WELFARE IN WEST VIRGINIA REQUIRES ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF HARDSHIP



Summer research fellow Veronica Witikko collaborated with executive director Kelly Allen to author a groundbreaking report on West Virginia's child welfare crisis titled *Moving Upstream: Improving Child Welfare in West Virginia Requires Addressing Root Causes of Hardship*. The research revealed that

West Virginia places four times as many children in foster care as the nation on average. And while policymakers have largely focused on children once they are already in foster care, Witikko and Allen's research found that the key to addressing our overreliance on foster care is prioritizing economic supports for biological families before they are in crisis. The report showed the broad harms in restricting safety net supports like TANF and Medicaid for families and the importance of enacting economic supports like the Child Tax Credit in the state.

Community Engagement Across the State

PROACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE BLACK INFANT AND MATERNAL HEALTH

In early 2023, we worked with our Black Policy Day partners to help establish a Black infant and maternal health working group after researchers and community partners expressed challenges accessing data and making inroads with policymakers. The working group brings together impacted persons, advocates, state agency officials, and medical professionals to push for stronger data and develop proactive policy recommendations.

The working group culminated in an October convening, where advocates and community members met in person over the course of two days. We dove deeper into the data, created space for people to share their personal experiences, and went to the West Virginia Legislature to bring this knowledge and power—as well as policy recommendations—to key decisionmakers. Through this effort, the working group was able to get four proactive pieces of legislation introduced that addressed the lack of access to data and services pertaining to infant and maternal health. While most legislation did not make it across the finish line this year, important groundwork was laid to continue making progress on this community-identified priority. ■

IN-PERSON SUMMER POLICY INSTITUTE RETURNS

After three years of convening virtually, the eighth annual Summer Policy Institute returned to a face-to-face event in 2023. Over the last weekend in July, a group of 32 West Virginians gathered at Fairmont State University to learn, network, and develop policy pitches addressing some of the most significant issues facing our state. We were pleased to welcome participants back in-person to learn more about working with data, navigating different levers of power, sharing their personal stories, and developing strategies for building coalitions through community outreach.

As it has for the past five years, SPI 2023 culminated with issue-based teams delivering policy pitches that they developed over the course of the weekend with support from policy experts and community advocates. But the event operated a bit differently than in previous years. In the past, our programming has largely focused on giving participants tools for how to pursue statewide policy change and teams were asked to focus on developing a particular policy solution that they might take to the state legislature. In 2023, working under our "People-Powered Policy" theme, teams were instead asked to identify policy problems and to develop potential organizing and outreach plans geared toward addressing the issue at one of several levels of government. This new approach allowed us to focus more on building a framework for groups to pursue grassroots organizing strategies that pay particular attention to involving people who are most impacted by systemic inequities. ■



"My experience at SPI was truly amazing, as it opened my eyes to the processes involved in making policy change. Prior to this, I never fully understood the potential I had to contribute to positive change in West Virginia. I had never set foot in the legislature, attended a town hall meeting, or even contacted any of my local representatives. Through SPI, I learned about the power of civic engagement and how my voice can make a difference via People Powered Policy. This newfound knowledge has inspired me to become an active participant in shaping the future of my community and being an advocate for change."

— SPI PARTICIPANT AND WVCCBP SUMMER FELLOW, TERI CASTLE

AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF WEST VIRGINIANS IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

Each of the WVCCBP's criminal law publication begins with the insights and experiences of those most impacted by the system. But in 2023, we deepened our commitment to this value by inviting impacted people to tell their own stories.

Criminal legal reform summer research fellow, Teri Castle, wanted to research the effects of prison food, based on her own experiences behind bars. The result was the September 2023 report, *The High Costs of Cheap Food: Eating in West Virginia Prisons*, an exploration of how prison food harms incarcerated people, the companies who profit from selling it, and how state government is complicit. Teri's guest blog about parenting from prison, *Motherhood Behind Bars*, brought to life the challenges and joys of connecting with her daughter during her 16 years of incarceration. In the fall of 2023, Brent Radabaugh, a man serving a life sentence at Huttonsville prison, authored the guest blog, *A View of End-of-Life Care, From Behind Bars*, about his work as a prison hospice worker. Brent showed us how compassion and caring persist – even in the face of serious illness and death. ■

Publications

STAFF



Kelly Allen
Executive Director



Renee Alves
Communications and Development Manager



Teri Castle
Criminal Legal Reform Summer Research Fellow



Seth DiStefano
Policy Outreach Director



Alex Gallo
Community Engagement Coordinator



Sean O'Leary
Senior Policy Analyst



Rhonda Rogombe
Health and Safety Net Policy Analyst



Krysta Rexrode Wolfe
Operations and Event Coordinator



Sara Whitaker
Criminal Legal Policy Analyst



Veronica Witikko
Child Welfare Summer Research Fellow

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE TEAM

The WVCBP was thrilled to welcome two new staff members to the team in 2023.

While Alex Gallo worked with the WVCBP in 2022 as a part-time independent contractor, we were excited to add her to our team as our community engagement coordinator in early 2023. Alex has deep experience in community engagement and organizing that has allowed the WVCBP to expand our outreach capacity regarding the safety net and tax and budget issues. Alex also plays a critical role in supporting our organizational and community partners to build leadership and ensure our research and advocacy priorities are rooted in the needs of West Virginia communities.

Krysta Rexrode Wolfe joined the WVCBP as our operations and events coordinator in October. Previously, Krysta had served the state by leading faith communities in Morgantown and Charleston. Bringing a decade of administrative experience to the team, Krysta helps ensure the WVCBP's day to day operations run without a hitch. In addition, she is responsible for planning and executing two of the organization's major events—our Summer Policy Institute and annual fundraiser. Her thoughtfulness and creativity have allowed her to successfully transform and expand both events in her first year with the WVCBP.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Marshall University

Dr. Karen Kunz, Vice Chair
West Virginia University

Renate Pore, Treasurer
Retired Public Health Professional and Health Care Activist

Carrie M. Staton, Secretary
Northern WV Brownfield Assistance Center

Jim White
Concord University

LaKeisha Barron-Brown
Inroads, Author, and Community Advocate

Yvonne S. Lee
Kanawha County Communities in Schools

Jim McKay
TEAM for West Virginia Children and Prevent Child Abuse WV

Sherri McKinney
SEIU District 1199

Brian Stanley
Painters and Allied Trades Union IUPAT DC53

Rick Wilson
American Friends Service Committee

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

4,915 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

4,034 NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS

4,158 X FOLLOWERS

50 PUBLICATIONS

4 FACT SHEETS

40 BLOG POSTS

3 BRIEFS

3 REPORTS

174 MEDIA MENTIONS

EXPENDITURES*



GENERAL PROGRAM

\$915,053

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE

\$39,816

FUNDRAISING

\$4,987

**Preliminary figures*

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



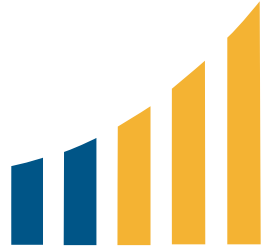
FUNDERS

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy thankfully acknowledges the following foundations and organizations who financially contributed to its work in 2023:

- Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
- Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation
- Stoneman Family Foundation
- The Just Trust
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- Economic Policy Institute
- Pallottine Foundation of Huntington
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- ACLU of West Virginia
- American Friends Service Committee – Charleston
- Community Education Group
- Fairness West Virginia
- National Association of Social Workers – West Virginia Chapter
- Planned Parenthood South Atlantic
- UFCW Local 400
- West Virginia Association of Counties
- West Virginia Citizen Action Education Fund
- West Virginia Council of Churches
- West Virginia Education Association
- West Virginians for Affordable Health Care

COALITIONS

- Call to Action for Racial Equality
- Food for All
- Health Care for All WV
- Legislative Action Team for Children and Families
- Paid Leave Works for WV
- Race Matters
- West Virginia Criminal Law Reform Coalition
- West Virginia Tax and Budget Coalition
- West Virginians Together for Medicaid
- WV United



WEST VIRGINIA CENTER ON
BUDGET & POLICY

Data-driven policies. Shared prosperity.



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