

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2022 REGULAR SESSION

Committee Substitute

for

House Bill 4479

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[Originating in the Committee on Finance;

February 17, 2022]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new article,
2 designated §5B-2K-1, §5B-2K-2, §5B-2K-3, §5B-2K-4, §5B-2K-5, and §5B-2K-6, all
3 relating to establishing the Coalfield Communities Grant Facilitation Commission;
4 providing legislative findings; establishing the Commission and providing for its
5 membership and duties; providing for commission assistance from the Economic
6 Development Authority and certain institutions of higher education; authorizing the
7 Commission to provide the local match portion for local public and private entities applying
8 for grants from federal, state and private sources; providing what constitutes a public
9 purpose for eligibility for grant match; establishing a special revenue account; directing the
10 creation of a special subcommittee of the Commission to assist the Commission and grant
11 applicants with training and other technical expertise as directed by the Commission; and
12 providing for annual electronic reports to the Legislature's Joint Committee on
13 Government and Finance.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2K. COALFIELD COMMUNITIES GRANT FACILITATION COMMISSION.

§5B-2K-1. Short title.

1 This article shall be known as the Coalfield Grant Facilitation Act of 2022.

§5B-2K-2. Legislative Findings.

1 The Legislature finds that the historical coal field communities of this state that were once
2 thriving and vital parts of the state have seen decades of decline as changes in coal mining
3 technologies and mining practices and the decline in the market for coal have resulted in a steady
4 decline in the populations and economic vitality of the coal mining regions of our state; and every
5 effort made to revitalize these areas is an important and necessary component of the success
6 and advancement of the economy of this state.

7 Many funding initiatives available to these areas in the form of matching grants from
8 federal and private sources have become a significant and important opportunity for access to

9 capital to initiate revitalization, but limitations of funds to match grants and having the resources
10 to apply for and facilitate receipt of these grants has incumbered the utilization of these resources.

11 The Legislature, by enactment of this article, intends to initiate mechanisms to facilitate
12 the access to such capital, by establishing a commission to administer state funds to provide to
13 eligible local entities the required local matching portion for certain grants; and to facilitate
14 assistance to these local entities by providing access to grant writing expertise and support by
15 utilizing our state university and colleges to assist in the development of successful grant writing
16 resources for local entities to maximize their success in rebuilding their communities.

§5B-2K-3. Coalfield Community Grant Facilitation Commission created.

1 (a) The Coalfield Community Grant Facilitation Commission is hereby created as an
2 independent body corporate. The commission shall consist of 9 members, who shall be residents
3 and citizens of the state. Commission members shall be appointed by the Governor, by and with
4 the advice and consent of the Senate. The commission shall consist of the following members:

5 (1) The Executive Director of the Economic Development Authority, or his or her designee,
6 who shall serve as chairperson of the commission;

7 (2) A representative of county governments of this state;

8 (3) A representative of large municipalities of this state;

9 (4) A representative of small municipalities of this state;

10 (5) A representative of a foundation, nonprofit or other organization that provides grants
11 for public interest projects in this state and who has expertise in grant issuance or administration;

12 (6) A representative of institutions of higher education with specialized knowledge in
13 economic development;

14 (7) A representative from businesses and industries within the state; and

15 (8) Three members at large appointed from regions and counties within coalfield areas of
16 the state who have knowledge and experience in local issues, economic development or other
17 areas of expertise within the directive of the commission.

18 (b) Each member shall serve a term of five years. Of the members first appointed, three
19 shall be appointed for a term ending December 31, 2023, and three each for terms ending one
20 and two years thereafter. Commission members may be reappointed to additional terms, and
21 although their terms may have expired shall continue to serve until their successor has been
22 appointed.

23 (c) It is the duty of the commission:

24 (1) To establish a process for timely review of applications and approval of awards of funds
25 needed as a required match to receive federal, state or private grants with the goal to assure the
26 greatest possibility that a grant being applied for is received;

27 (2) To award grants of commission funds, as available, in an efficient and fair manner to
28 provide a match for local entities that would otherwise qualify for a federal, state or private grant
29 but are unable to fulfill the grant's matching fund requirements;

30 (3) To provide grant applicants with technical assistance and support; and

31 (4) To disseminate information for the purpose of educating persons and entities as to the
32 existence and functions of the commission and as to the availability of state, federal, and
33 nongovernmental resources.

34 (d) The Economic Development Authority shall assist the commission in its functions and
35 operations, including, but not limited to, providing administrative, clerical, and technical support.

36 (e) Members of the commission are not entitled to compensation for services performed
37 as members. Each member is entitled to reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred in the
38 discharge of their official duties. All expenses incurred by members shall be paid in a manner
39 consistent with guidelines of the Travel Management Office of the Department of Administration
40 and are payable solely from the funds of the Department of Commerce or from funds appropriated
41 for that purpose by the Legislature.

42 (f) No liability or obligation is incurred by the commission beyond the extent to which
43 moneys are awarded for grant acquisition facilitation.

44 (g) Members shall meet as designated and scheduled by the chairperson. The presence
45 of a majority of commission members, in person or by real-time electronic communication,
46 constitutes a quorum to conduct business at a meeting.

47 (h) The commission shall prioritize the locations for grant funding assistance by utilizing
48 the designation of priority communities established by the “Interagency Working Group on Coal
49 and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization” established by presidential executive
50 order 14008, issued on January 21, 2021. The commission may not certify a project unless it
51 finds that the proposal is in the public interest and the grant will be used for a public purpose. For
52 purposes of this article, projects in the public interest and for a public purpose can provide private
53 benefit, if the commission, in its judgment determines that: (1) the project will enhance a local
54 community or region; (2) the granting entity for which the commission’s matching grant is being
55 used requires a public purpose for grant eligibility; and (3) the commission in its judgment
56 concludes the proposal will enhance the quality of life or services of a community or region. A
57 public purpose includes, but is not limited to, proposals that:

58 (1) Enhance economic vitality, including revitalization of structures that have public
59 purpose or benefit;

60 (2) Promote or develop an artistic or philanthropic purpose;

61 (3) Improve traditional infrastructure, such as water and wastewater treatment facilities,
62 transmission lines, transportation facilities, flood and wastewater management;

63 (4) Create or enhance telecommunications infrastructure including cellular towers, fiber
64 optic expansion and technology infrastructure;

65 (5) Promote agricultural activities and development;

66 (6) Enhance development of previously mined areas or areas previously used by the coal
67 industry and other industrial activities into uses that diversify the local economy;

68 (7) Create or expand recreational facilities, such as walking, hiking, all-terrain vehicle, bike
69 trails, picnic facilities, restrooms, boat docking and fishing piers, and athletic facilities;

70 (8) Are used for acquisition of private property for local public purposes that promote
71 economic vitality and housing development and enhancement;

72 (9) Preserve or enhance buildings that are of local historic or economic interest;

73 (10) Restore or create retail facilities, including related service, parking and transportation
74 facilities, to revitalize decaying downtown areas;

75 (11) Are the construction or expansion of other facilities that promote or enhance
76 economic development or tourism opportunities thereby promoting the general welfare of local
77 residents;

78 (12) Provide facilities and activities that provide resources for local residences that
79 enhance quality of life including, but not limited to, childcare access and public transportation;

80 (13) Provide vocational and entrepreneurial training for displaced miners and other
81 persons that have lost jobs or have been unable to find employment or business opportunities in
82 the region;

83 (14) Make investments in coal field communities housing stock removal and remediation
84 to facilitate community preservation and aesthetics; and

85 (15) Create drug and substance abuse rehabilitation programs and facilities.

86 (i) Prior to making any matching grant award, the commission may conduct a public
87 hearing to assess local public support. If a public hearing is to be held, notice of the time, place,
88 date, and purpose of the hearing shall be published in at least one newspaper in the county where
89 the proposed grant project is located at least two weeks prior to the hearing date.

90 (j) When a member of the commission must recuse himself or herself because of a
91 perceived or actual conflict of interest regarding a proposed grant assistance award, a majority of
92 the remaining members of the commission without a conflict shall be sufficient for the conduct of
93 commission business.

§5B-2K-4. Coalfield Community Grant Facilitation Special Revenue Account.

1 A special revenue fund to be known as the Coalfield Community Grant Facilitation Fund
2 is hereby created which shall consist of all moneys made available for the purposes of this article
3 and include any amounts to be deposited in the fund, including all appropriations to the fund, all
4 interest earned from investment of the fund, and any gifts, grants, or contributions received by the
5 fund. All amounts deposited in the fund shall be awarded by the commission as provided pursuant
6 to the provisions of this article to local governmental units and private and public entities for
7 purposes provided for in this article.

§5B-2K-5. Facilitation of grant submissions by higher education institutions.

1 To maximize the resources of the state and to create a resource for entities and persons
2 interested in applying for grants that need assistance with grant proposal and applications, the
3 commission shall coordinate and administer a specialized subcommittee of the commission made
4 up of representatives of West Virginia University, Marshall University, the Alliance for Economic
5 Development of Southern West Virginia, and all institutions of higher learning in the coal field
6 counties and regions of this state to provide assistance in the development of grants and grant
7 applications by persons or entities that need assistance in designing, preparing or implementing
8 a grant proposal submission to a governmental or private entity providing grants. This assistance
9 shall include:

10 (1) Training of persons to have expertise in developing, applying for, and administering
11 grants;

12 (2) Providing technical assistance to the commission on administration and facilitation of
13 grant assistance applications; and

14 (3) Any other actions or initiatives that assist the commission and promote the goals of
15 this article.

§5B-2K-6. Report to the Legislature.

1 The commission shall provide by December first of each year to the Joint Committee on
2 Government and Finance an annual electronic report that provides the following:

3 (1) A summary of grant assistance applications received and relevant statistics relating to
4 actions taken by the commission and grants awarded;

5 (2) An analysis of types of grants or public, private and nonprofit grants available but not
6 applied for that if received could be utilized to benefit coal field communities;

7 (3) Recommendations regarding appropriations to the Coalfield Community Grant
8 Facilitation Fund for the upcoming fiscal year; and

9 (4) Any recommended legislation or policy actions needed to facilitate greater receipt of
10 grant funding to coalfield communities.