

# **WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE**

## **2023 REGULAR SESSION**

**Introduced**

### **Senate Bill 256**

By Senators Jeffries, Queen, Deeds, Plymale,  
Hamilton, Roberts, and Hunt

[Introduced January 17, 2023; referred  
to the Committee on Economic Development]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §31-15-3 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to  
 2 the West Virginia Economic Development Authority; creating a Small Business and  
 3 Minority Populations Economic and Workforce Development Taskforce to assist the  
 4 Director of the Economic Development Authority in developing and implementing a  
 5 procedure to address employment, labor force participation, and economic development  
 6 problems of small business and low income and minority populations of West Virginia; and  
 7 developing a pilot project that can be used as a model to promote the growth and  
 8 development of small business to increase employment and labor force participation  
 9 across West Virginia.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:*

**ARTICLE 15. WEST VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY.**

**§31-15-3. Purposes of article.**

1 (a) The purposes of this article ~~shall be~~ are to provide for the formation of a public  
 2 economic development authority to promote, assist, encourage and, in conjunction with such  
 3 banking corporations or institutions, trust companies, savings banks, building and loan  
 4 associations, insurance companies or related corporations, partnerships, foundations, nonprofit  
 5 organizations or other institutions, to develop and advance the business prosperity and economic  
 6 welfare of the State of West Virginia; to encourage and assist in the location of new business and  
 7 industry; to stimulate and assist in the expansion of all kinds of business activity which will tend to  
 8 promote the business development and maintain the economic stability of this state, provide  
 9 maximum opportunities for employment, encourage thrift and improve the standard of living of the  
 10 citizens of this state; to cooperate and act in conjunction with other organizations, public or private,  
 11 the objects of which are the promotion and advancement of industrial, commercial, tourist or  
 12 manufacturing developments in this state; to borrow moneys and to issue its bonds, notes,  
 13 commercial paper, other debt instruments and security interests as well as creating an insurance  
 14 fund for credit enhancement purposes; to furnish money and credit or credit enhancement to

15 approved industrial development agencies or enterprises in this state or for the promotion of new  
16 projects or to retain existing projects or to financially assist projects by insuring bonds, notes, loans  
17 and other instruments, including, but not limited to, the insuring of financing of working capital or  
18 the refinancing of existing debt of an enterprise, thereby establishing a source of credit and credit  
19 enhancement not otherwise available; to review state procurement policies and practices to  
20 assure that they meet federal and state requirements and that they effectively encourage  
21 meaningful participation of African-Americans and other minority persons in the process of  
22 competing for and awarding of state contracts for goods and services; to encourage the state to  
23 continue to support and expand small business incubator programs, including the program at  
24 institutions of higher education in the state; to encourage new and minority small business  
25 development; to undertake initiatives to encourage minority business ownership similar to those  
26 efforts used to encourage greater rates of business ownership among women; to assist  
27 community and economic development corporations to provide effective technical and business  
28 advisory services to small and minority-owned and -operated enterprises; to encourage industry,  
29 banks and other private businesses to hire African-Americans and other minority persons; to  
30 encourage governmental agencies and bodies and businesses to be more aggressive in  
31 establishing diversity-conscious practices as employers and for their operations; to enlist  
32 traditional and nontraditional lending institutions to be more creative and favorable to lending in  
33 minority communities and to minority persons, especially for business enterprises; to encourage  
34 small business start-up and expansion and provide funding to assist minority vendors to meet bid  
35 bonding requirements; and to encourage workforce investment boards to be accountable for  
36 educating poor and minority persons for jobs better than low-paying service jobs. These purposes  
37 are hereby declared to be public purposes for which public money may be spent and are purposes  
38 which will promote the health, safety, morals, right to gainful employment, business opportunities  
39 and general welfare of the inhabitants of the state.

40 (b)(1) It is hereby determined and declared, as a matter of legislative finding:

41 The West Virginia Forward Collaborative Report Strategy for Economic Development and  
42 Job Growth compiled jointly by West Virginia University, Marshall University and the State of West  
43 Virginia, in Section 6.2, Innovation and Business Development contains the following:

44 "Many of the challenges to small business growth in West Virginia are due to the fact that  
45 small businesses are not fully aware of the resources at their disposal to grow and succeed. In  
46 addition, there is a lack of business support services across different topics, e.g. financial  
47 forecasting and literacy resources, affordable technical business operations such as accounting,  
48 commerce, and web design, and affordable vetted legal services in general business and  
49 intellectual property (IP). Access to resources would help companies plan ahead and adapt to  
50 changing business needs".

51 (2) One of the key actions the report suggests is that West Virginia consider addressing the  
52 challenges set forth in §31-15-3(b)(1) of this code to create a one-stop resource that can map  
53 current resources and business needs, direct business to the right entities and identify vacant  
54 spaces in support resources.

55 (3) Furthermore, it is hereby determined and declared as a legislative finding that West  
56 Virginia has the lowest labor force participation rate in the nation and has had this dubious  
57 distinction since 1976. West Virginia's low labor force participation rate is one of the factors that  
58 stymies economic development and growth.

59 (4) Furthermore, the West Virginia Forward Collaborative Report Strategy for Economic  
60 Development and Job Growth compiled jointly by West Virginia University, Marshall University,  
61 and the State of West Virginia, in Section 8, Human Capital provides the following:

62 (A) West Virginia's level of educational attainment and particularly the volume of STEM  
63 graduates per year is lower than surrounding states.

64 (B) Labor force participation has been declining in West Virginia and less than half of  
65 working age people are actively seeking employment in some counties of the state.

66 (5) That report identifies four likely drivers that explain the trends identified in §31-15-

67 3(b)(4) of this code:

68 (A) Among neighboring states, West Virginia has the highest percentage of its population  
69 with a disability (22 percent);

70 (B) West Virginia has the lowest percentage of women participating in the labor force (51  
71 percent) across the United States;

72 (C) There is a mismatch between labor supply and demand according to employers;

73 (D) The opioid crisis has affected the ability of large portions of the population to participate  
74 in the job market; and

75 (E) Large waves of out-migration over the past three years have further contributed to a  
76 shrinking population and cohort pool.

77 (6) That report makes the following observations:

78 (A) Ongoing efforts exist to address those challenges across the state, specifically in  
79 relation to increasing workforce participation.

80 (B) There may be an opportunity to consolidate these efforts under one umbrella that  
81 channels resources into a human capital priority for the state in a more coordinated manner.

82 (C) A taskforce could bring together the education providers, major employers, and  
83 existing institutions working within the human capital space across West Virginia to identify and  
84 launch an integrated effort that addresses existing challenges to the labor force.

85 (7) Furthermore, it is hereby determined and declared as a legislative finding that the 2014  
86 Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the companion 2016 West Virginia State  
87 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, require the creation on the Legislative Joint  
88 Commission on Workforce Investment for Economic Development, the State Workforce  
89 Investment Board, the Workforce Interagency Collaborative Team, and local workforce  
90 development board that requires up to 51 percent of the state and local workforce development  
91 board membership to be from private employers, government agencies, and nonprofit  
92 organizations to provide the framework and structure for a comprehensive, seamless, integrated

93 workforce investment and development system to support small business growth and  
94 development, increase labor force participation and address employment challenges of low  
95 income and minority populations.

96 (c) In order to more effectively address the purposes of this article, there is hereby created  
97 and established the Small Business and Minority Populations Economic and Workforce Taskforce  
98 to assist the Director of the Economic Development Authority to develop and implement a  
99 procedure to address employment, labor force participation, and economic development problems  
100 of small businesses, disadvantaged and minority populations of West Virginia and to increase  
101 small business growth and development and to improve labor force participation as recommended  
102 in the West Virginia Forward Collaborative Report. The Small Business and Minority Populations  
103 Economic and Workforce Development Taskforce consists of the following:

104 (1) The Executive Director of the West Virginia Economic Development Authority, or his or  
105 her designee;

106 (2) The Executive Director of the West Virginia Governor's Workforce Investment Division,  
107 or his or her designee;

108 (3) The Executive Director of the West Virginia Development Office, or his or her designee;

109 (4) The Executive Director of the West Virginia Small Business Development Office, or his  
110 or her designee;

111 (5) The Executive Director of the West Virginia Housing Development Fund;

112 (6) The Director of the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs, or his or her designee;

113 (7) The President of West Virginia University, or his or her designee;

114 (8) The President of Marshall University, or his or her designee;

115 (9) The President of a local community and technical college, or his or her designee;

116 (10) Two small business owners, one of which is a minority business owner; and

117 (11) The Executive Director of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce, or his or her  
118 designee.

119 (d) The taskforce shall:

120 (1) Provide technical assistance, consultation, and support that may be requested by the  
121 Executive Director of the West Virginia Economic Development Authority;

122 (2) Provide consultation, technical assistance, and support to local communities in the  
123 development of their small business and minority economic and workforce development plans;

124 (3) Provide technical assistance, consultation, and support to local communities in the  
125 execution of their plans;

126 (4) Provide support to local communities in identifying resources to support their plans;

127 (5) Work with state executives to ensure that existing legislation targeting vulnerable  
128 communities is effectively executed;

129 (6) Create a one stop that maps current resources and business needs, direct businesses  
130 to the right entities and identify vacant space in support resources;

131 (7) Bring together education providers, major employees, and existing institutions working  
132 within the human capital space across West Virginia to identify and launch an integrated effort that  
133 addresses existing challenges to the labor force that will increase labor force participation; and

134 (8) Develop a model project that can be used as a model to promote small business growth  
135 and development to address employment, labor force participation, and economic development  
136 challenges of low income and minority population across West Virginia.

137 (e) Members of the Small and Minority Economic Workforce Development Taskforce are  
138 not entitled to compensation for service on the advisory team, but may be reimbursed by the West  
139 Virginia Economic Development Authority for all reasonable and necessary expenses actually  
140 incurred in the performance of their duties in a manner consistent with guidelines of the travel  
141 management office of the Department of Administration or its successor.

142 (f) The Small and Minority Economic Workforce Development Taskforce shall be divided  
143 into work groups as needed and the work group will solicit input from appropriate individuals from  
144 state government, education, private sectors, and community representatives. The workgroups

145 will include:

146 (1) Small Business and Minority Business Work Group;

147 (2) Workforce Development System Improvement Work Group; and

148 (3) Labor Force Participation Improvement Work Group.

149 (g) The Small and Minority Economic Workforce Development Taskforce effectiveness will

150 be measured by the following metrics:

151 (1) The number of small businesses that expand;

152 (2) The reduction in small business failures;

153 (3) The number of new small business and minority business start-ups;

154 (4) The overall increase in labor force participation; and

155 (5) The increase in labor force participation among youth, African-Americans and women.

156 (h) The Minority Economic Development Taskforce shall meet at least once each quarter

157 and conduct all meetings in accordance with the Open Governmental Meetings Proceedings Act

158 pursuant to §6-9A-1 et seq., of this code.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to create a Small Business and Minority Populations Economic and Workforce Development Taskforce to assist the Director of the Economic Development Authority in developing and implementing a procedure to address employment and economic development problems of small business, low income and minority populations of West Virginia.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.