

West Virginia Faith Table

Democracy in Action • Faithful Democracy

Mission Statement

The West Virginia Faith Table is a diverse interfaith and multiracial grassroots organization of clergy and laity. We are united in our shared values and common goals. We are called to uphold and strengthen our country's democracy, especially civic engagement, voting rights, and fair elections. We respond to emerging issues as an integral component of a well-functioning democracy.

Involvement

2022 WV Faith Table Initial Steering Committee

Rev. Jordan Trumble, Rev. Darick Biondi, Sister Carmella Campione, Rabbi Joe Blair, Rev. Brad Davis, Loretta Young, Marian Alston, Rick Wilson, Martha Hill, BA Miskowiec, Betty Rivard, Alannah Boyle.

2022 Thought Partners and Connectors

Christian Watkins and Meg Olson -Network Lobby; Martha Hill-WVUMC Justice and Advocacy; Rabbi Victor Urecki-WVIRM; Rev. Roberta Smith-Charleston Black Ministerial Alliance; Rev. Jeff Allen-WV Council of Churches; Rev. Jenny Williams-WV ACLU and Justice and Jubilee; Sister Quincy Howard-Faithful Democracy; Dominican Sisters; Rev. Ronald English-Charleston NAACP; United Methodist Women; Deborah Coble-WV Conference UMC; Lauren Moffat; Pablo DeJesus-UU Social Justice; Rev. Lisa Garcia- Sampson-UU Justice NC; Julie Archer-WVCAG; Cecilia Bernard-DFAD; Sally Rogers-Rise Up WV; Kristen Olsen-Poor People's Campaign, Lakiesha Lloyd-Common Defense, Ted Boettner-Ohio Valley Environmental Council, Rev. David Peters, Rev. Randy Richardson - Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rev. Jack Lipphardt

Federal Legislation to Protect Democracy

The FY23 Omnibus Spending Bill included the Electoral Count Act to reform and modernize the outdated 1887 Electoral Count Act. This ensures that electoral votes tallied by Congress accurately reflect each state's public vote for president. The legislation also clarified the vice president's role as merely ceremonial in certifying the Electoral College vote.

Congress passed and President Biden signed the spending bill which included the Electoral Count Reform Act. (December 2022). Senator Manchin and Senator Capito publicly supported the electoral count measure, and voted yes for passage of the government spending bill.

Capito Votes in Favor of 2023 Government Funding, Highlights West Virginia Priorities

<https://www.capito.senate.gov/news/press-releases/capito-votes-in-favor-of-2023-government-funding-highlights-west-virginia-priorities>

Manchin Votes For FY23 Budget, Secures West Virginia Priorities, Ukraine Aid, ECA Reform | U.S. Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia

<https://www.manchin.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/manchin-votes-for-fy23-budget-secures-west-virginia-priorities-ukraine-aid-eca-reform>

Federal Advocacy

In 2022, the West Virginia Faith Table:

- Educated on issues related to preserving our American Democracy in coalition with organizations including the WV Citizen Action Group (WVCAG), Declaration for American Democracy (DFAD), West Virginias for Democracy (WV4D), Charleston Black Ministerial Alliance, Common Defense, Charleston NAACP, Greenbrier County NAACP, Race Matters of WV, WV Interfaith Refugee Ministry (WVIRM), West Virginia Council of Churches (WVCoC), Rise Up WV, WV Poor People's Campaign (WVPPC), WV Conference, United Methodist-Board of Church and Society, West Virginia American Friends Service Committee (WVAFSC), Congregation of Saint Joseph, WV United Methodist Women, Network Lobby, ACLU- Justice & Jubilee and WV Faith Leaders Network, West Virginia Civic Engagement Table (WVCET), the Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry of North Carolina (UU Justice NC).
- Ensured the faith voice is present and centered at events sponsored by partnering organizations.

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Peace in Ukraine Vigil

Organized an interfaith prayer vigil held on March 14th at 6pm at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church which included prayers and songs from faith traditions, including: Baptist, Conservative & Reform Jewish, Episcopal, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, United Methodist, and Presbyterian.

Charleston Gazette-Mail

TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2022 • A PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING NEWSPAPER

Foster reform dies again

House had no time to concur with Senate changes to bill

By JOE SEVERINO
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The only piece of major legislation aiming to make short-term changes within the state's foster care system died Saturday night with the conclusion of the 2022 West Virginia legislative session.

House Bill 4344 was just mere steps from passage. After the Senate advanced the bill with less than three hours until law-

makers adjourned sine die, the House did not have enough time to concur with the last-second changes made by Senate Finance Chairman Eric Tarr, R-Putnam. If delegates had enough time to accept Tarr's changes, the bill would have been sent to the governor's desk.

They never got the chance. Tarr waited until there were three days left in the session before taking up the bill in his committee. Senate Health Chair-

man Mike Maroney, R-Marshall, passed the bill out of his committee six days earlier, and before that, the House of Delegates advanced the bill out of their chamber on Feb. 23 on a 99-1 vote.

When Tarr did take up the bill, he chose to gut it. He removed the provisions giving 15% pay raises for Bureau of Social Services workers, the creation of a public information dashboard and a new centralized abuse and neglect report intake system.

Tarr left only the amendments adopted by Maroney's committee, which gave the foster care ombudsman more freedom to investigate claims, as well as an expansion of services for family court proceedings.

An amended HB 4344 still did not cross the finish line. The bill was the Legislature's third bipartisan shot in three years at beginning to reform the state's

SEE FOSTER, 13A

CHARLESTON GATHERS TO PRAY FOR UKRAINE



Prayer and songs ring out Monday evening during a vigil for Ukraine at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, on Charleston's East End. See Ukraine story, Page 2A. KENNY KEMP / Gazette-Mail

Link to Press Release:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lzPHUIEK2vriPJE1CyxQlMB3SrQOqgCppXR4lf_kR_A/edit?usp=sharing

Electoral Count Act

Advocated for needed Electoral Count reform while lifting voting rights needs and concerns. Participated with UUSJ in a zoom advocacy meeting, calling on Senator Manchin to support the Electoral Reform Count Act. Delivered letters urging support for the Electoral Reform Count to Senators Capito, Manchin, and Schumer.

Moore v. Harper

Collaborated on a webinar with Greenbrier Valley NAACP and Race Matters, WV to provide expert legal analysis related to the independent state legislature theory in the U.S. Supreme Court arguments for Moore v. Harper.

'People Over Politics Panel' Highlights Dangers of Moore v. Harper

WV & NC Activists and Legal Experts Discuss Potential for Election Chaos

On December 7, the U.S. Supreme Court heard *Moore v. Harper*, a redistricting case where North Carolina lawmakers argue state legislatures should have near absolute power to run federal elections without checks and balances from the courts. Moore could make it easier for politicians to restrict the vote, draw rigged maps, and cast doubt on election results.

The following day, the Greenbrier Chapter of the NAACP (Branch #3227) and Race Matters WV hosted a virtual forum to educate West Virginians about the dangers the case poses and its potential to throw our elections into chaos.

Former WV Secretary of State, Natalie Tennant, who is currently serving as a Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics Resident Fellow, served as the moderator. Faith leaders, community activists and legal experts from West Virginia and North Carolina provided background on the case, discussed its significance, and its impacts for voting rights and fair courts.

You can view a recording of the virtual forum at: facebook.com/racemattersingreenbriervalley

Panelists:

- Rev. Darick Biondi, Coordinator, WV Faith Table
- Atiba Ellis, Professor of Law, Marquette University
- Billy Corriher (NC), State Courts Manager, People's Parity Project
- Tyler Daye, Policy and Civic Engagement Manager, Common Cause North Carolina
- Ethan Herenstein, Counsel, Democracy Program, Brennan Center for Justice

STATE ISSUES

Unitarian Universalist Friday Action Hour

In partnership with the Unitarian Universalist Social Justice North Carolina (UU Justice NC) group, during a weekly zoom event wrote letters to WV editors and journalists lifting up excellence in journalism centered on democracy.

- Speakers. Rev. Brad Davis, Rev. Darick Bondi, Courtney Steinberg, and Marian Alston





West Side voting site is on



Martez Washington, a Charleston resident and candidate for mayor, speaks to the Kanawha County Commission Thursday night in favor of creating an early voting location at the Black Diamond Girl Scouts Center on the city's West Side.

Kanawha rebuffs GOP, defies Secretary of State's Office in unanimously approving early balloting location

By LORI KERSEY
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Over opposition from the Kanawha County Republican Executive Committee, the Kanawha County Commission voted unanimously Thursday to move ahead with a plan to put an in-person early voting site on Charleston's West Side during this year's election.

In doing so, the commission defied a legislative rule from the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office that a state election official said had the "force and effect" of law.

"I can't help but think that when a law is written, even if it's neutral on its face, and even if that law is being used for political advantage, which laws always are," Commissioner Ben Salango said, "when it's used for political advantage, and when it disenfranchises certain voters, certain minority voters, we can't follow that law."

"So, whether that law from 2010 is in place, or it's not, I think we have an absolute right to make sure that we expand community voting," Salango said. "And I'm making the motion tonight we expand community voting on the West Side."

The vote came after nearly two hours of discussion with



Tresa Howell, chairwoman of the Kanawha County Republican Executive Committee, speaks to the commission Thursday night in opposition to creating the early voting area.

speakers for and against the commission's proposal to add the county's ninth community voting location in the Girl Scouts of Black Diamond Council building, at 321 Virginia St. West.

Just before the meeting, representatives from several organizations, including the Charleston NAACP, WV Citizens Action Group and the WV Faith Table held a rally in support of the West Side community vot-

ing location.

Speaking during the meeting in support of adding the location, Charleston mayor candidate Martez Washington thanked County Clerk Vera McCormick for picking a place on the West Side and asked the commission to add more in other areas of the county.

"The only thing I would ask is that we take partisanship out of this, because this is good for Kanawha County," he said.

"This isn't a Democrat or Republican matter."

Some opposed to the additional site said the short distance of about a mile between the community voting location at the Kanawha County Voter Registration Office and the Girl Scout building.

Others argued that the commission should instead put a site at Alum Creek or other

SEE VOTING, 10A

Energy royalty bills advance

By MIKE TONY
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Energy committees in both chambers of the West Virginia Legislature have approved bills that would eliminate the number of royalty owners who must own an oil or natural gas mineral tract for an operator to negotiate with to use the property.

The Legislature in 2008 passed House Bill 4268, which permitted oil and gas development within a mineral tract owned by seven or more royalty owners if the operator gets the consent of owners of at least three-fourths of the interest in the tract.

Virtually identical bills that the Senate Energy, Industry and Mining and House Energy and Manufacturing committees approved within minutes of each other Thursday afternoon would eliminate the requirement that at least seven or any specific number of royalty owners must

SEE ROYALTIES, 10A

50/50 child custody advances

By LACIE PIERSON
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The West Virginia Senate Judiciary Committee on Friday advanced a bill that would require family court judges to order that children split their time equally between their separated parents in the event a custody agreement doesn't already exist.

It's the second time in three years a bill dubbed "The Parenting Fairness Act" has made its way through the legislative process.

Lawmakers in both chambers of the Legislature adopted a similar bill in 2020, but the measure didn't make it across the finish line during the last week of the session.

If it becomes law, Senate

SEE CUSTODY, 10A

Voter Protection

With Charleston partners, held a press conference and rally in support of the West Side early voting location and testified in the hearings held by the Kanawha County Commission and the State Commission at the Secretary of State offices.

Link to Press Release
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NCvZpR_vwEYGEt1-FxsyWyXwODWF7BPM/view?usp=sharing

Voter Education

- Developed and distributed, through social media and in print, a voting toolkit, “Voting is Fundamental to Democracy,” in partnership with the Charleston NAACP, Rise Up WV, and WVCAG.

Link to toolkit :

- Absentee Voting -
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FOoJmyOoGDlkx55MO15BTwVlWYXYd1gO/view?usp=share_link
- Primary Voting -



- With statewide partners, hosted a virtual educational forum, recorded and streamed live on Facebook, explaining the four proposed amendments to the WV Constitution on the ballot for the 2022 General Election.
 - Presenters. Rev. Ron English, Karen Williams, Eli Baumwell, Fred Albert, and Rick Wilson.

Voter Engagement

Hosted a question and answer podcast on various issues and challenges facing voters in WV.

- Moderator-Rev. Darick Bondi. Speakers-Julie Archer, Sally Roberts, Marian Alston

OTHER ACTIONS

- Joined as a member of the West Virginia Civic Engagement Table (WVCET).
- Maintained an ongoing consulting relationship with Meg Olsen and Christian Watkins at Network Lobby.
- Joined in webinars concerning CRT theory, book banning, and student discipline with the West Virginians for Truth in History.
- Joined in webinars concerning health disparities, school suspensions, and critical race theory with chapters of the WV-NAACP.
- Provided resources and participated in partnering events for voter advocacy, rallies and community events in WV and in DC, including supporting the historic nomination of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson; Juneteenth celebrations; and public memorials honoring victims of mass shootings.
- Participated in spring, summer and fall events hosted by faith and community partners for voter engagement, education, and registration efforts.
- Hosted organizational strategy sessions with Ted Boettner.
- Hosted communication strategy session with Deborah Coble.
- Hosted Rev. Jenny Williams to offer updates on ACLU project, Justice & Jubilee and the WV Faith Leaders Network.
- Received a \$3000 gift from the Congregation of St. Joseph to develop a statewide communications plan.
- Received a gift from the General Board of Church and Society and the WV UMC Committee on Justice and Advocacy for promotional materials.
- Received a \$500 gift from Race Matters WV for technical assistance on the Moore v. Harper webinar.
- Received monetary gifts from several supporters.