

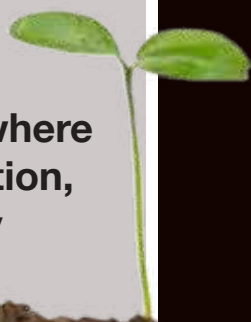
# WVSU UNDERFUNDED \$852 MILLION



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SPECIAL SECTION  
Black Policy Day:  
Get in where you  
fit in!

**ON PAGE 4:**  
Introducing  
BBG in Ghana

**ON PAGES 8-9:**  
Discover BBG's  
expanding  
focus on  
agriculture — where  
growth, innovation,  
and community  
come together.



**State government has underfunded WVSU over  
the last three decades, according to federal  
government calculations.  
The HBCU, originally a land-grant institution, looks  
toward a future of agriculture.**





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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

## WVSU's Funding Crisis — A Critical Issue for Black Policy Day and Beyond

As we delve into Black History Month and Black Policy Day (every day at the Legislature), one issue looms large for us at Black by God (BBG) — the dire underfunding of West Virginia State University (WVSU). Despite Governor Jim Justice's recent proposal of \$50 million for an agricultural lab at WVSU, this figure pales in comparison to the alarming \$852 million funding gap the university has endured over the last thirty years. This shortfall is not just a setback for WVSU; it represents a significant loss for the entire community, including the majority white student body that the university now serves.

WVSU's transformation from a predominantly Black institution to one serving a predominantly white demographic underscores the widespread impact of this funding issue. The missed opportunities for extension programs and outreach initiatives due to underfunding have had far-reaching consequences, affecting families and communities



PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY  
INVEST APPALACHIA

across West Virginia, regardless of race. The funding gap at WVSU is a glaring example of economic and educational disparities that transcend racial boundaries, affecting all who are part of or could benefit from the university's offerings.

Addressing this funding crisis is a priority for BBG, especially in the context of political literacy. It's a

matter that goes beyond historical acknowledgment; it's about rectifying a long-standing injustice that hinders the potential of an institution pivotal to the state's educational landscape. With West Virginia's significant fiscal surplus, the state legislature has an undeniable opportunity to correct this imbalance. The proposed \$50 million is a start, but it's crucial to recognize and address the full extent of the funding disparity.

In this issue, we highlight Black history and policy, it's essential to remember that the cause of WVSU is not just a Black issue but a West Virginian issue. The entire state, including its predominantly white population, stands to gain from a fully funded and flourishing WVSU. As we continue to advocate for equity and justice, let's ensure that support for WVSU remains at the forefront of our efforts, reflecting our commitment to educational equality and community development.

Respectfully,  
Crystal Good, *Publisher*

**BLACK BY GOD**  
THE WEST VIRGINIAN

February 2024  
**Embracing Our Roots,  
Shaping Our Future:  
Black By God | The  
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Celebrates Black  
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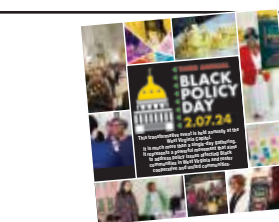
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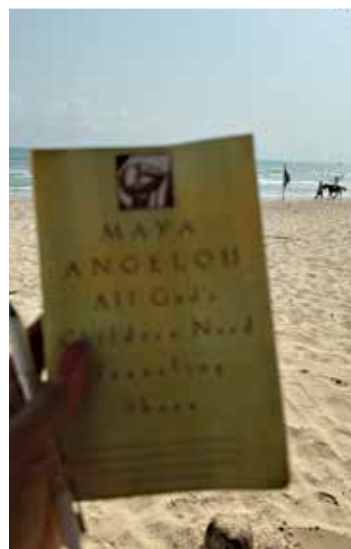


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Crystal Good and Jason Tartt, below, traveled to Accra in December. Scenes from the trip include taking in vibrant culture at Fashion Week, working with the BBG Ghana video crew, and dining at Chez Afrique. Maya Angelou's "All God's Children," which explores her experience living in Ghana in the 1960s, connected with BBG's Affrilachian focus.



INTRODUCING

# BBG GHANA

Cultural connections  
rich heritage and  
a voyage of understanding

**D**iscover the exciting news! BBG has now expanded its operations to Ghana: A story of cultural connection and new beginnings.

Black by God (BBG), in its continuous endeavor to bridge cultures and tell diverse stories, is proud to announce its expansion to Ghana. This exciting new chapter was inspired by a recent visit to the country, which revealed a profound connection between the rich heritage of Ghanaian culture and the Appalachian roots of West Virginia.

BBG founder and publisher, Crystal Good, had a memorable trip to Accra, the capital city of Ghana, and experienced the vibrant culture firsthand. She attended the Accra Fashion Week event, wearing a dress inspired by Appalachian quilts, symbolizing the fusion of these two distinct cultures, visited the markets, slave dungeons, farm land, villages and of course the gorgeous beaches and December celebration events. This trip was not just a journey across continents but a voyage of understanding and appreciating the similarities and differences between these regions.

Ghana's positivity, its streets lined with Adinkra symbols and Biblical phrases, starkly contrasted the challenges faced in West Virginia. This experience was a revelation, highlighting the need for inclusive and innovative leadership back home, similar to the transformative political movements observed in Ghana. The trip was further enriched by Jason Tartt, an international agricultural entrepreneur with operations in both West Virginia and Ghana, whose return to Ghana four years ago has had a profound



BBG Publisher visited T & T Organics' developing poultry farm in Ghana, gaining insights into agriculture's potential to link West Virginia and Ghana. This visit reinforces BBG's commitment to Black Appalachian agricultural storytelling.

impact on his life, with an intention to support Black women in agriculture across the two continents.

These experiences motivate BBG to launch a dedicated Instagram page and YouTube channel for BBG Ghana. These platforms will feature engaging content including videos of cooking segments, diaspora interviews, fashion shows, music, and cultural events to showcase the beauty and depth of Ghanaian culture. BBG Ghana aims to reach 5,000 subscribers, inviting our audience to explore and celebrate the connections between Appalachian and West African cultures.

This expansion is more than just a digital venture. It's committed to investing in Black Appalachian agricultural storytelling and fostering international connections. Crystal

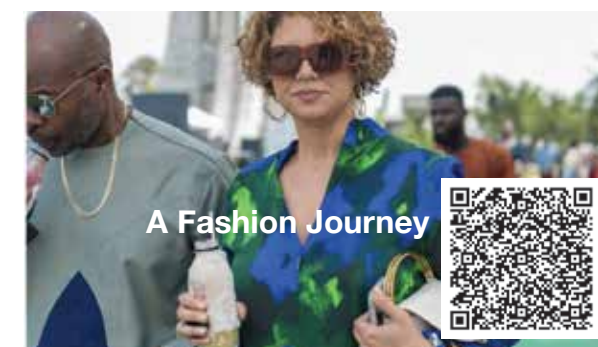
Good is also developing a personal project to establish a poultry farm in Ghana, which mirrors similar agricultural initiatives in McDowell County, West Virginia. These efforts aim to create value-added products and educational opportunities, emphasizing community and collectivism.

BBG Ghana represents a new horizon for storytelling, where the experiences of Appalachia and Africa converge, offering unique perspectives and insights. We invite our community to join us on this journey as we explore, learn, grow, and strengthen ties across continents and cultures.

Stay tuned for the official launch of BBG Ghana on our social media channels and be part of this exciting cultural adventure.

**View from the Elmina Slave Castle, Ghana:**  
A window overlooking the sea is a poignant reminder of the journey taken by countless souls. Here, history whispers tales of hope, endurance, and tragedy.

BBG GHANA STORIES ON BLACKBYGOD.ORG





See more  
about Jason  
Tartt's  
McDowell  
County farm  
on page 11



## BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN CHARLESTON



A group from Kanawha, Putnam, Mercer, Raleigh, and Monongalia counties immersed themselves in McDowell's rich tapestry of political and agricultural tales.

# A Journey to T&T Organic Farms: Celebrating Resilience in McDowell County

### By Crystal Good

A group supporting Black Policy Day recently had an enriching experience at T&T Organic Farms in McDowell County. Operated by West Virginian native and international agricultural entrepreneur Jason Tartt, the farm epitomizes the enduring spirit and rich heritage of Black Appalachians. The visit was a celebration of resilience amid the economic fluctuations of coal and population and a testament to the wealth of community spirit that transcends economic labels.

### Charleston's West Side: Addressing Food Insecurity

Back in Charleston's West Side, residents are

grappling with food insecurity, exacerbated by the closure of traditional grocery stores and the proliferation of dollar stores selling processed foods. Access to fresh produce, like lettuce, has become a logistical challenge, often involving long public transport trips. Farms like T&T Organic Farms offer a solution to this issue.

### Cooperative Economics: A Solution Rooted in History

The concept of cooperative economics, which has been a part of African-American culture since their forced arrival in the Americas, offers a practical solution to these contemporary challenges. Historically, African Americans have formed mutual aid societies and pooled resources for survival and mutual support. These practices, which began during slavery, have evolved, with freed African Americans

using these cooperative models to manage farms and purchase supplies collectively.

### Local Efforts in Urban Agriculture

In Charleston, community leaders like City Council member Larry Moore and Bishop Robert Haley of A More Excellent Way Life Center Church are spearheading efforts to combat food deserts. They emphasize the importance of access to fresh produce for health and well-being. Dural Miller, CEO of Keep Your Faith Corporation, is transforming empty lots into urban farms, providing the community with access to fresh foods and education on healthy eating.

While challenges in food security persist, initiatives like T&T Organic Farms and local urban agriculture projects in Charleston's West Side are making significant strides in building sustainable food systems.

For more insights and a T & T Organic McDowell County farm tour, contact Crystal at Black by God. Watch the full story and find more information at Black by God.

## FEEDING OUR FUTURE

# African American Economic Development at Marshall University

## Tackling asset-poverty disparities in Appalachia

By BBG

A striking disparity in asset-poverty rates between African Americans and White Americans has been highlighted in a report from The Brookings Institution. It reveals that one in five African Americans have experienced asset poverty for three generations consecutively, a stark contrast to the situation for white Americans, where only one in a hundred faces similar challenges. This disparity is even more pronounced in areas like West Virginia, where the poverty rates for African Americans are the same or worse for whites.

Governor Jim Justice announced a \$1 million investment in the Center for Economic and Community Development during the 2023 State of State address. This funding is specifically aimed at supporting the African American community in Appalachia. This initiative, to be based at Marshall University, is designed to provide essential research and data infrastructure to assist Black businesses in West Virginia. Delegate Sean Hornbuckle, one of the few Black lawmakers in the West Virginia legislature and the current Democrat Minority Leader, played a pivotal role in bringing this idea to fruition, with support from Dr. Alan Letton of Letton Consulting.

Dr. Alan Letton, who serves as the Director and Visiting Scholar, leads the Center. The center aims to strengthen Appalachia through economic development, particularly focusing on the often-overlooked African American populations in the region. It seeks to develop research-based solutions to unique challenges these communities face, benefiting African American people and all isolated communities in Appalachia. Under Dr. Letton's leadership, the center is positioned to leverage his expertise in corporate leadership, academic research, and community development.

### Key Activities and Initiatives:

- **Cross-Disciplinary Research:** Collaborating closely with target communities to develop economic and community profiles, particularly in West Virginia. This includes partnering with WV Community Hub for a research-based listening tour.
- **Programmatic Activities:** The center will organize the Black WV Business Summit and initiate projects on entrepreneurial ecosystems in the Fairfield Community, focusing on sectors

like women's health & beauty, culinary, home maintenance, and repair.

- **Research Initiatives:** These include utilizing New Market Tax Credits for development, identifying structural barriers to economic and community development, and working on projects like West Virginia Forward/A Black West Virginia Perspective.

- **Building Community Resources & Skills:** Emphasis on project management skills for developing communities and partnerships for practical projects in neighborhoods like Fairfield in Huntington.

- **Special Topic Research Areas:** Topics include barriers to homeownership, employment, entrepreneurship, food deserts, and solar energy usage in African American communities.

- **Education and Outreach:** The 'Great Voices' series will bring influential voices to the Marshall community, with Dr. William Turner as the inaugural scholar.

The center reports to the President's Office through Toney Stroud in the Economic and Workforce Development Office at Marshall University.

The center offers a comprehensive approach to addressing economic and community development in Black Appalachia and isolated communities through research, programmatic activities, community engagement, and educational initiatives.

### Upcoming Events:

- **Black WV Business Summit:** Part of the **Bridging Innovation Conference**, April 8-11, 2024, in Huntington.
- **Fairfield Community Entrepreneurial Ecosystems Development:** Initiatives to be launched during the Bridging Innovation Conference, April 8-11, 2024.

The dates for other initiatives like cross-disciplinary research, research on the use of New Market Tax Credits, structural barriers identification, the West Virginia Forward project, community resources, skills development, and the creation of special topic research areas.

The center is located at Marshall University, One John Marshall Drive, Huntington, W.Va. Dr. Letton is contactable via phone at 304-696-2663 or 336-561-9556.

# Advocating for West Virginia's Black Farmers Through Farm Bill Reforms

It's time for West Virginia to unite, ensuring the Farm Bill feeds our bodies and nourishes our collective future.

### Opinion by Crystal Good

The food insecurity rate in West Virginia lingers around 14%. We confront a national issue at the core of our communities. As the Founder of Black By God, I am compelled to spotlight the pivotal role of the Farm Bill in addressing this crisis, especially as it pertains to our Black farmers and the broader agricultural landscape of our beloved Mountain State.

The Farm Bill, a legislative behemoth revised every five years, is more than just policy; it's a lifeline for our farmers and a blueprint for food accessibility. This bill dictates agricultural practices and determines the sustenance of programs like SNAP, which is vital for many West Virginians. But let's delve deeper – into the soil of our state, into the lives of our Black farmers who, with only 31 of 23,622 farms being Black-owned or operated in West Virginia, face a glaring underrepresentation.

Jason Tartt, a Black farmer in McDowell County, embodies the resilience and potential of our agricultural community. His mission transcends mere farming; it's about cultivating hope and nurturing a new generation of Black farmers. Tartt exemplifies how repurposing unconventional spaces can lead to agricultural productivity through initiatives like the Veterans & Heroes to Agriculture program and collaboration with the West Virginia State University Extension Service.

As we stand at the crossroads of renewing

Continued on page 20

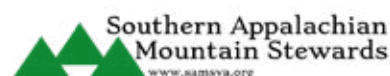


## BBG SPONSORED CONTENT

# Enhancing Air Quality Awareness in West Virginia's Black Communities



USACAMP involves the installation of small, air monitoring devices at homes or businesses throughout the region to collect data for a period of three years.



More information at  
SAMSva.org

## Local monitoring and advocacy play an important role providing information in real time

By Willie Dodson

Fine particulate matter, also known as PM 2.5, is an especially hazardous air pollutant that is associated with fossil fuel combustion, manufacturing, mining, transportation and agriculture. Exposure to high levels of PM 2.5 causes asthma attacks, pulmonary and respiratory conditions, and contributes to premature death, with these impacts hitting black and brown communities the hardest.

The EPA sets daily and annual limits on how much PM 2.5 people should be exposed to, but most communities lack official EPA monitoring stations. Now, residents of several West Virginia communities are conducting their own PM 2.5 monitoring, as part of a new program called the Upper South and Appalachia Citizen Air Monitoring Project (USACAMP).

Organized by Appalachian Voices, USACAMP involves the installation of small, air monitoring devices at homes or businesses throughout the region to collect data for a period of three years. These devices provide local air quality information that can be viewed online in real time. Appalachian Voices will produce quarterly reports summarizing PM 2.5 conditions in each USACAMP community for the duration of the project.

USACAMP is looking for more air monitor hosts in West Virginia in or near the communities of Institute and Dunbar in Kanawha County; Northfork, Keystone and Gary in McDowell County; or in between Whitesville and Arnett in the Coal River Valley. To host a monitor, you just need electricity and a wifi connection. The monitors use negligible energy and bandwidth.

If you would like to monitor air quality in your community, and you live in one of the areas listed above, contact [willie@appvoices.org](mailto:willie@appvoices.org).

Keep reading *Black By God* for a sponsored content series of articles about the USACAMP throughout 2024-2025. And visit [www.AppVoices.org](http://www.AppVoices.org) to learn more about this and other projects to advance environmental justice, public health and sustainable economies in Appalachia.





**THIRD ANNUAL**  
**BLACK POLICY DAY**  
**2.07.24**

This transformative event is held annually at the West Virginia Capitol. It is much more than a single-day gathering. It represents a powerful movement that aims to address policy issues affecting Black communities in West Virginia and foster cooperative and united communities.





## BLACK POLICY DAY OVERVIEW AND AGENDA

# Not Just a ‘Day’ at the Legislature

### Empowerment

At its core, Black Policy Day provides a platform for historically oppressed and ignored Black individuals to have their voices heard. It emphasizes the significance of unity in driving positive change and advocates for the active involvement of Black West Virginians in shaping policies that impact their lives.

### Comprehensive Engagement

The event spans two years and includes a variety of activities such as webinars, focus groups, training sessions, and culminates in a pivotal “Day” at the West Virginia state Capitol. During this Day, attendees have the opportunity to interact with policy experts and speakers who share their experiences on crucial matters affecting Black communities.

### Key Policy Issues

The issues discussed during BPD are wide-ranging and touch on various aspects of Black West Virginians’ lives. All these issues are interconnected and centered around the concept of social determinants of health.

### Social Determinants of Health

The Black Policy Agenda framework is developed through a comprehensive survey, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. It mirrors the community’s knowledge, gaps in understanding, needs, wants, and opportunities. The framework is guided by the concept of Social Determinants of Health, which recognizes that the conditions in our environments significantly impact various aspects of our lives, including where we live, learn, work, play, worship, and age.

### Origins and Organizers

Black Policy Day originated from the groundwork laid by Black By God’s 2020 questionnaire. It evolved into a prominent event and now represents a powerful movement. The key organizers driving this initiative are Crystal Good (BBG), Katonya Hart (Partnership for Furthering Art and Education), and Dr. Shanequa Smith, an organizer with Black Voter Impact Initiative. These visionary leaders believe in the strength of shared power and are dedicated to creating inclusive spaces for marginalized groups. They envision a future where Black West Virginians can actively participate in shaping their destinies through policy change and collaborative efforts.



### The Agenda

The West Virginia Black Policy Agenda is community-rooted and community-driven—a roadmap to a thriving West Virginia where every person can live a happy, healthy life in safe and flourishing communities. It is a living document that we are continuing to refine and add policies to, based on input from BIPOC+ West Virginians.

### WE BELIEVE IN A WEST VIRGINIA THAT:

**Ensures economic dignity and opportunity for all through:**

- **Creation of a state Child Tax Credit** to increase economic security for families with children
- **A Small Business and Minority Populations Economic and Workforce Development Task Force** to empower small businesses and promote economic opportunities for minorities
- **Tax Credits for Diversity and Inclusion** to incentivize businesses to hire, promote, and develop women and minorities into leadership roles
- **Passage of the CROWN Act** which makes it illegal to discriminate based on hair texture or style
- **Reparations** to West Virginia’s African American population

**Invests in an equitable and well-funded public education system through**

- **A Youth Advisory Council for Civic**

**Engagement** to encourage civic engagement among young people

- **Increased access to high-quality early childhood education** in all communities
- **School suspension disparities among Black students are eliminated** through restorative practices, increased access to diverse educators, and investments in student support service

**Shrinks the criminal legal system through**

- **Reductions in the number of West Virginians incarcerated** in prisons and jails
- **Second Look Sentencing** to allow those with lengthy sentences to petition for reconsideration after serving a significant portion of their time
- **Reducing technical parole and probation violations** that drive overcrowded jail conditions
- **Ending the privatization of jail and prison services** that increases the financial burden on loved ones of incarcerated people
- **Investments in the reentry supports needed for those leaving the justice system to succeed** including affordable housing, access to health care, and jobs

**Builds healthy communities, housing, and environment through**

- **Giving all West Virginians access to clean drinking water**
- **Creation of a WV Community Development Equity Fund** to support equitable community development projects
- **Dilapidated Property Assessments** investing in and marking dilapidated properties

**Prioritizes the health of its people through**

- **School-based mental health supports and substance use treatment** to increase access to supports for young people
- **Enactment of West Virginia Bridge Plan** to maximize available federal dollars by instituting a Basic Health Plan option that builds on WV Medicaid’s administrative and provider networks
- **Improving Black Infant and Maternal Health** through improved data collection and increasing access to culturally-appropriate care
- **Establishment of a Minority Health Advisory Team** to improve Black health and well-being
- **Protects and expands access to Medicaid and CHIP**

**Has abundant food security through**

- **A Food Desert Produce Pilot Program** to increase access to quality, accessible, affordable food in food deserts



State government has underfunded WVSU over the last three decades, according to federal government calculations. The HBCU, originally a land-grant institution, looks toward a future of agriculture.

By Quenton King and Joe Severino

During his eighth and final State of the State address on Jan. 10, Gov. Jim Justice proposed a \$50 million investment to create a “state-of-the-art” agriculture laboratory on the campus of West Virginia State University.

Of the more than 100 land-grant universities across the United States, West Virginia State is the only one that doesn’t have a college of agriculture. WVSU President Erique Cage drew attention to this fact this past summer, calling on decision makers in Charleston to help State establish a School of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Justice’s recent announcement comes on the heels of a letter from federal government officials, who calculated that West Virginia’s state government has underfunded WVSU by at least \$852 million over the last three decades. The governor has not directly referenced this massive underfunding, which was addressed to Justice on Sept. 18.

His recent funding proposal is a start toward correcting this long, grave injustice, said the Rev. Matthew Watts, a longtime community advocate and pastor of Grace Bible Church on Charleston’s West Side. Further, Watts said, WVSU now has a special opportunity to be an economic driver in distressed communities in central and southern West Virginia, and create a future of self-sustainability.

“This could be an excellent first step to allow West Virginia State University to fully establish its land-grant and extension presence in these communities,” he said. “State has been tremendously handcuffed and restricted from fulfilling their land-grant mission because they don’t have the resources.”

This \$50 million funding, however, is no certainty. Justice’s proposal will need to be approved by lawmakers this legislative session through the general budget bill. Recent history has shown West Virginia legislators to be apathetic, and sometimes hostile, to both the issues of higher education and minorities.

West Virginians could clearly benefit from the enhanced investment in agriculture. According to federal data, West Virginia ranks 47th out of 50 U.S. states in total agricultural exports. West Virginians also consume over \$8 billion worth of food annually, but only produce about \$800 million worth of food each year, according to the

state’s agriculture office.

How did a land-great university lose its agriculture school?

Congress established the land-grant system in 1862 via the Morrill Act, recognizing the importance of educating all American citizens. Higher education was typically accessible to only the elite up until the law’s passage. Congress gave each state large tracts of land often stolen from indigenous tribes. Most states sold this land to raise funds to start schools.

The goal of the land-grant was to teach practical and technical instruction, provide a “free” education to citizens, as well as support the inclusion of liberal arts. West Virginia University was established as a land-grant school under the first Morrill Act after West Virginia became a state.

Nearly 30 years later, federal lawmakers passed the Second Morrill Act of 1890 to ensure people of color could access land-grant education, as the 1862 institutions were largely admitting only white students. Congress also enacted this legislation to address and improve tensions in former Confederate states, where slaves had been freed for less than three decades.

West Virginia Colored Institute, now known as West Virginia State University, was founded in 1891. Until then, Black students were not allowed to be taught in the same school as whites, according to the state’s constitution.

Certain benefits come with being a land-grant institution. The federal government provides competitive grants, research grants and funding for an extension’s community outreach and education. States are required to match some federal funding at a specified level. The land-grants are expected to provide a strong agriculture and vocational education.

West Virginia State University operated as the state’s second and only other land-grant institution for nearly 70 years before the state board of education voted to terminate West Virginia State University’s land-grant status in 1956.

A 1995 academic article in the Journal of Negro Education states the reason for West Virginia removing State’s land-grant designation was, ironically, integration.

The racial makeup of WVSU quickly changed following Brown v. Board in 1954. As the school’s white student population grew, policymakers decided that the 1890 land-grant designation

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WVSU from page 11

didn't meet the need.

In 1957, the legislature and governor accepted the state board of education's recommendation and transferred many of State's resources, including its land-grant responsibilities, to the predominantly white West Virginia University in Morgantown. State's agriculture school was disbanded.

It wasn't until 1991 that the state legislature voted to restore State's land-grant status. It took another ten years before the federal government officially recognized State as a land-grant school and provided the benefits that come along with that designation. However, the agriculture program did not return, leading to its status of the only land-grant institution in the country that does not have an agriculture school.

Cage, who was appointed as WVSU's president in 2022, said it's his goal to honor the school's heritage and bring a school of agriculture back to West Virginia State.

"Right now we're looking not in the rear view mirror, but we're looking out the windshield at the world ahead," said Cage. "It very much speaks to our founding our mission and founding charter, which was to teach agriculture and mechanical sciences, and to go out into communities and to help farmers and others advance their crops and other things to support the overall economy of the state."

**Black agriculture**

In some ways, that heritage is difficult to see today unless you know where to look. In 1919, an estimated 14% of farmers in the United States were Black. Recent estimates show that number is now 1%. The total amount of land owned by farmers has diminished by staggering numbers as well; just 2% of farmland in the country is Black-owned. At the same time, Black communities face tremendous food insecurity.

Jason Tartt, a Black farmer in McDowell County, is working to change the narrative of Black people in agriculture.

"We didn't have these food desert type issues going on in our communities when we were producing our own food, when we were on the land, working the land and in nature," he said.

Tartt sees the data that indicates counties in southern West Virginia — McDowell in particular — have persistently low health outcomes coupled with high poverty rates. So he believes the region is ripe for an agricultural renaissance.

"People don't have work around here," he said. "If we train people on how to farm, that's creating small businesses, which would turn around and create other small job opportunities and other ancillary opportunities."



WVSU President Ericke Cage, right, speaks to attendees at a lecture at the school's new Capitol Street location.

"It all is connected," Tartt continued. "It all can help. We can build the economy around the problems that are existing in the community."

Tartt has worked with WVSU previously on projects, and said he looks forward to the school having a school of agriculture.

"I think if we would provide the resources to HBCUs to build the education, build the awareness, do the outreach, get out into the community — especially the Black community— and let people know not only is agriculture a possibility, it can create wealth in this region," Tartt said. "I believe that State needs to be at the center of all that."

The proposed \$50 million is a step toward establishing an agriculture school, said Cage. The funding will be earmarked toward construction of a new agriculture facility. Cage said the existing space at WVSU is limited, so the future agriculture school will need to be housed in a brand-new facility.

**The many facets of 21st century agriculture**

Agricultural experts and farmers have ideas about what programs a future agriculture school at WVSU could offer students, and how the school can help grow the next generation.

It's important to remember that agriculture is more than farming, said Vanessa García Polanco, co-director of policy campaigns at National Young Farmers Coalition and others interviewed for this story, especially as the resource-intensive sector tries to address climate change.

In addition to fields like soil and water sciences, agrichology, and even social sciences, García Polanco said there's a growing need for people

with agriculture backgrounds to enter other fields, particularly in roles at the USDA.

"We're seeing a focus on food system education for climate mitigation; we need more agricultural professionals in natural resource services," García Polanco said.

Farming itself doesn't always pay the bills, said Maria Russo, who started Sistermoon Farm in Jefferson County with her sister in 2020. Finding themselves in their hometown during the COVID-19 pandemic, they felt the disconnection that many others experienced.

"In a lot of ways, the kind of traditional forms of agriculture, and especially the regenerative small-scale farming that we do, it does not make enough money," said Russo.

Russo said she and her sister have turned toward "agritourism." This work encourages people to visit their farm for experiences, which helps generate a different stream of income for their farm. She said this is something that more family-owned farms are going to have to do to survive in the years to come.

"I think the key here is getting creative about ways that young people can make viable futures in agriculture," said Russo. This approach has been successful in the past, and there is an opportunity now to repeat and grow these different avenues for agriculture.

The National Young Farmers Coalition conducts a survey of young and BIPOC farmers every five years. García Polanco says the top challenges identified in the most recent survey were land affordability and access.

Addressing that goes beyond WVSU. But reclaiming land, and making it easier for people

to purchase land, is a vital part of repairing the damage that's been done in West Virginia.

"People need access back to the land because the land is a part of our healing, whether you're in a Black community or just West Virginia as a whole, or Central Appalachia has a whole I should say, because the whole place has just been left for dead, you know?" said Tartt. "And I think when the community realizes the possibilities — that we can not only make money, but build a foundation for our young people. It's a heck of an opportunity."

**Investing in people, and the land**

To get an agriculture school over the finish line, it mostly comes down to resources and infrastructure. Cage said beyond the need for a physical space, the school will need funding for teachers and specialized equipment. They'll also need to go through the procedural hoops of getting approval from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

But beyond this layer of government procedure lies real, dying communities that desperately need an infusion of resources, said Rev. Watts.

While Justice and the Legislature shower private corporations with hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to open operations in border counties, Southern and Central West Virginia hasn't received this same attention.

In the Southern West Virginia coalfields especially, a successful opening of a Fortune 500 company like Nucor or Berkshire Hathaway will never be possible due to the current infrastructure, where drinking water and sewage systems struggle to function.

Watts points to the realities of the workforce in West Virginia. A WVU official recently stated that 98% of the businesses in West Virginia are small or new start-ups, with 50% of the state's workforce employed by a small business. He said the state's leadership should have been investing these hundreds of millions into growing small businesses, including agricultural operations in the coalfields like Tartt's.

Referencing the \$852 million of underfunding, Watts said it's clear how distressed communities in Southern and Central West Virginia have been harmed by the state's abandoning of WVSU's land-grant mission.

"The real injured parties are the people that live on the land," said Watts. "Their communities are trapped in a cycle of poverty, dependency and dysfunction. They're not getting the investment, technical assistance, youth development, family development, economic development-type initiatives and services that they should have been getting."

Watts said that the intentions of the Morrill Acts



PHOTO BY LINSEY BLANKENSHIP FOR YES! MEDIA



**ABOVE:** Jason Tartt surveys an orchard on his 335-acre property in Valls Creek, West Virginia. Tartt co-founded the McDowell County Farms cooperative in 2014, modeling shared prosperity through sustainable farming practices and community education and proving central Appalachia's potential for fruit tree production.



**Read the article:  
A Peoples Prosperity**

**LEFT:** People attend an agritourism event at Sistermoon Farm.

were to find solutions to the challenges facing the people who live on the land. They are to be heard and listened to. What's occurred in the past is done, but Watts said that the events of the past few years have created a significant opportunity to transform the economy of the region and "recalibrate" the land-grant.

He's called for the state to commit resources beyond the \$50 million investment, ensuring the new agriculture school can continue to grow into future decades.

Despite the odds, "West Virginia State University

has a 132-year track record of graduating students who replenish the labor force and are a part of the economic fabric of the greater Kanawha Valley and Southern West Virginia," said Watts.

At the end of the day, these are resources that WVSU and the people of Southern and Central West Virginia are owed.

"So the track record is proven, right?" said Watts. "And if you pay them the money that they're owed, then that money would be reinvested back in the university, back in the community, and back in the people."



BLACK POLICY DAY

# GET IN WHERE YOU FIT IN

**1** **Wear a Black by God or Black Voter Impact Initiative Tee**

Show your support for the “Get in Where You Fit In” campaign with these t-shirts

Visit: [blackbygod.shop](https://blackbygod.shop)

**2** **Social Media Sensation**

Be a social media champ and spread the word about the campaign’s goals and events

**3** **Word-of-Mouth Wizard**

Let’s talk about Black Policy Day (BPD) and Black Policy Agenda (BPA) with friends and fam

**4** **Stay in the Loop**

Follow BBG and BVII for all the latest updates, events, and actions.

**5** **Local Tour Explorer**

Join the campaign’s events in your neighborhood to support and learn more

**6** **Interims, the Interactive Forum**

Engage in exciting discussions on civic engagement and policies

**7** **Webinars for Wisdom**

Tune into webinars to become a BBG and BVII expert. The next webinar is Feb. 20.

See past webinars at: [blackpolicydaywv.org/#web](https://blackpolicydaywv.org/#web)

**8** **Host the Action**

Organize a “Get in Where You Fit In” community meetup and get talking

**9** **Join the Engagement Committee**

Make a difference by joining the Building Civic Engagement through Black Policy Day Committees around the social determinants of health

## Are you ready to dive into the world of civic engagement?

Explore the power of social media, the joy of supporting Black-owned businesses, and the thrill of attending town hall meetings. From virtual webinars to lively local tours, we’ll show you how to stay informed and engaged year-round. So, whether you’re enthusiastic about policy advocacy, voting rights, or building inclusive communities, this list is for you. Let’s embark on this exciting journey together, igniting positive change and making our voices heard in the democratic process!

**10** **Power of the Ballot**  
Register to vote and shape your future in local and national elections

Register online: [ovr.sos.wv.gov/](https://ovr.sos.wv.gov/)

**11** **Community Changemaker**  
Volunteer with local organizations to drive positive change

**12** **Contact Your VIPs**  
Reach out to elected officials and share your

opinions for a better tomorrow

**13** **Peaceful Protest Pro**  
Join protests and be a voice for important issues and change

**14** **Support Black-Owned Biz**  
Boost your community by backing Black entrepreneurs

**15** **Town Hall Explorer**  
Attend town hall meetings — let leaders hear your voice

**16** **Educate and Elevate**  
Share resources on civic engagement and social justice

**17** **Voting Duo**  
Team up and bring a friend to the voting booth for a stronger democracy

**18** **Civil Discourse Champ**  
Have respectful conversations, even with different views

**19** **Youth Empowerment**  
Inspire young ones to join civic engagement activities

**20** **Run for the Challenge**  
Make change from within ... run for local office

**21** **Community Project Pro**  
Volunteer for projects promoting equality and inclusivity

**22** **Workshop Warrior**  
Attend workshops for civic engagement and policy advocacy

**23** **Advocate with Dollars**  
Support social justice through donations to advocacy organizations

**24** **Vote Smarts**  
Educate others about voting and its impact on society

**25** **Stay Engaged, Always**  
Civic engagement is a year-round adventure for lasting impact

Civic engagement can be both impactful and enjoyable!

BLACK WEST VIRGINIA ELECTED OFFICIALS

# Politics at the Local Level

By Kim Felix

Election season is in full swing as the 2024 presidential race appears to be a repeat of the 2020 match up with both Trump and Biden seemingly leading the Republican and Democratic, respectively. West Virginians took to the ballot box to prove once again that politics at the local level is where they are focused on creating change. The 2023 off-year election cycle was ripe with firsts, including the election of a handful of Black mayors all around the state.



In Oak Hill, residents made history and elected their first African American mayor. **Mr. Charles Briscoe** defeated incumbent Mayor Danny Wright in the 2023 municipal election. This history-making race brought the new politician to the forefront in addressing community issues and adding diversity to Oak Hill’s city council roster. Briscoe shared that he plans to listen to residents’ concerns and serve as a conduit between residents and city council members.



Wellsburg voters elected their first African American council member, **Mr. Daniel L. Dudley**, to be their mayor. Dudley was appointed interim mayor after former Mayor Sue Simonetti announced she would not seek re-election. As interim, Dudley’s community engagement won him the mayoral seat. A first for Wellsburg, Dudley has plans to revitalize the community and is open to hearing suggestions from its residents. Dudley has already laid out a plan for shared spaces promoting community use.

Situated on the Kanawha River, Chesapeake saw its first female Black mayor in **Mayor Melissa Hill**. The progressive 56-year-old IT consultant expressed her desire to revitalize the town by focusing on community restoration. In a town of 9.6% African Americans, one of its core industries centered around the Chesapeake



and Ohio Railway. Hill is focused on attracting grants and land resources to enhance facilities for seniors and the youth. Hill comes from a family of public service as her father was a former Chesapeake police officer. Her belief in inclusivity and growth allows Chesapeake to forge new historical firsts.



**Mayor Beverly White** made history by serving as the first Black woman on the city council, a position she held for 16 years in a city she has lived in her entire life. She made history yet again in 2019 when she was elected as the first Black Mayor in the City of Lewisburg. Mayor Beverly White has been blazing trails ever since. Lewisburg was named the most inclusive city by *WV Living* in 2021. Home to the Carnegie Hall arts, cultural, and educational center, Mayor White’s vision, dedication to public service, and community involvement have proven that diversity and inclusion add richness to one’s quality of life that would likely not otherwise exist.

*All mayors will be honored at the 2024 Black Policy Day event at the Capitol building in Charleston, W.Va., on Feb. 7, 2024, in a ceremony recognizing Black politicians’ contributions to public service.*



## DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIORS AND ABSENTEEISM

# Solution lies in evidence-based supports, not more discipline

By BBG

Eighty-seven percent of public schools nationwide report that the pandemic has negatively impacted student socio-emotional development. School officials around the country cited classroom disruptions and tardiness as the most frequent illicit behaviors increasing after the pandemic. Seventy-two percent of schools report that absenteeism has increased compared with prior to the pandemic.

Teachers are asking for more support and rightly so. At the same time, we must balance behavioral issues with what we know about classroom disruptions, which are often a symptom of larger challenges our children are facing, which can include trauma, communications barriers, learning limitations, or other underlying needs.

Moreover, making sure students are in the classroom — not suspended or removed from the classroom to an alternative setting — is key to student achievement. Research shows that missing school takes a toll on grades, test performance, and graduation rates, all of which are linked to labor market prospects, health, and criminal legal system involvement.

Data shows that students thrive in environments that have robust and effective social, emotional, and behavioral support. Relying on a disciplinary response to behavioral



## WHAT IS THE CROWN ACT?

The CROWN Act, which stands for “Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair”, has been passed in 24 states to provide legal protection against hair-based discrimination at work and school.

Black and brown people — especially Black women — regularly face discrimination in schools and the workplace based on the texture and style of their hair.

Recent data from the West Virginia Department of Education shows that Black students are suspended at twice the rate of their white peers, in some cases due to hair-based discrimination.

CROWN Act legislation does not interfere with OSHA standards. or workplace safety rules.



**24** States have passed the CROWN Act

**2/3** of Black women have changed their hair for a job interview

**20%** of Black women 25-34 report they've been sent home from work because of their hair

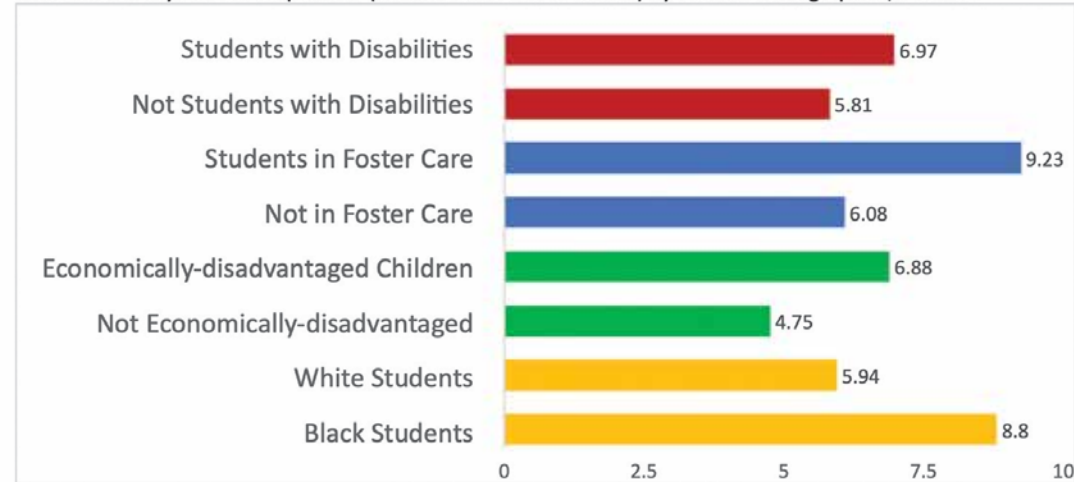
**2.5x** Black women's hair is 2.5 times more likely to be perceived as unprofessional

Citations can be found at [bit.ly/WVCrownAct](https://bit.ly/WVCrownAct)



### Vulnerable Students Are More Likely to Lose Instructional Days to Suspension Than Their Peers

Instructional days lost to suspension (in-school and out-of-school) by various demographics, SY 2022



Source: West Virginia Department of Education SY22 Discipline Data in Review

### SOLUTIONS from page 15

issues and absenteeism can unintentionally exacerbate the issues, particularly when that response involves loss of credits, suspension, or policing. Additionally, interventions that increase discipline will disproportionately impact Black students, foster care youth, students with disabilities and low-income students, as these groups are already overrepresented in encounters with the state's school discipline system.

It is clear that our students and school professionals need more support. But rather than increasing discipline and time out of the classroom — either via suspension or alternate learning environment — policymakers in West Virginia can champion evidence-based supports that we know work, including:

- More robust investments in student support services and expansions of school-based mental health supports. According to the most recent data available, at least 10 school districts do not have a single social worker and several do not have a school psychologist. In the school districts that do have some support staff, they are typically serving far more students than the recommended ratios and often have to serve multiple schools, meaning many schools only have access to them part-time.

- Programs that equip staff to serve students in the school setting like trauma-informed care trainings, adoption of restorative practices, and increased support for Communities in Schools (CIS); and

- Policymakers must recognize that disruptive behaviors and absenteeism are often a result of underlying challenges and stresses. Programs

like SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), free and reduced school lunches, Medicaid, and others that enhance family economic security and access to health supports and mental health and substance use treatment for the whole family are critical to protect and expand.

Additionally, lawmakers considering policies that would remove more students from the classroom or increase discipline must ask themselves the following questions:

- How will we ensure any new policy would avoid worsening the disparate impact of discipline on vulnerable students?
- How will we address the inevitable learning loss that occurs when students are out of the classroom and ensure they can catch up when they return to their regular class?
- Why do students need an alternative setting for mental and behavioral supports rather than resourcing schools to make sure they are widely available in a state where so many kids are dealing with complex issues?



**READ: West Virginia's Black Lawmakers on BlackbyGod.org**

## SUPPORTING BLACK POLICY

### Alpha Kappa Alpha's Electorate Impact: Celebrating elected members and voter advocacy in West Virginia

The West Virginia Cluster of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated will held its annual AKA Day at the Capitol in conjunction with Black Policy Day Feb. 7. The AKA national office charges each chapter to formulate a local Connection and Social Action Committee that implements national social advocacy through the “Advocate for Social Justice Initiative.” Chapters in West Virginia plan collaborative activities like Soar to the Polls, candidate forums, educational sessions and GOVT registration drives. The primary focus of all AKA activities is promoting voter engagement.

During the Black Policy Day, the members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. will have breakfast with the elected officials, be introduced in the House Gallery and be presented with a Proclamation by Minority Leader Delegate Sean Hornbuckle. Additional activities include participating in a Unity Circle with members of the Divine Nine, community group such as the NAACP and The Poor People's Campaign. Members will attend education sessions, meet

with their delegates and provide GOTV tabling that highlights AKA initiatives.

With voter engagement being a national priority, AKA members are encouraged to run for political office. West Virginia has several members of Alpha Kappa Alpha who have been elected to serve their communities: Anitra Hamilton is currently a delegate from Monongalia County in the West Virginia Legislature, Sandra Clemonts is a City Council Member in Huntington. Jennifer Pharr serves the Charleston City Council as an at Large Member, Marie Redd was the first black woman elected to the West Virginia Senate. Together they represent their constituents well. AKA's “Soar” and advocate for social justice throughout West Virginia while providing service to all mankind. While celebrating a rich history of social justice activism that helped with collaboration to put Kamela Harris in the office of the United States Vice President, AKA's continue to promote societal change that promotes equality, justice and fairness for all.



## Zeta Phi Beta

### Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated

- Founded January 16, 1920
- Founded at Howard University
- Five Founders
- 104 Years Old

### Programmatic Thrust: The Extraordinary Power of S.H.E. (Social, Health, and Economic Justice)

#### Zeta in West Virginia

- Established in 1929
- 5 Active Chapters in WV
- Theta Zeta, Bluefield
- Tau Iota Zeta, Morgantown
- Alpha Alpha Xi Zeta, Charleston
- Eta Omicron, WVU
- Iota Phi, Fairmont State Univ.
- Iota Beta, WVSU (Fall 2024)



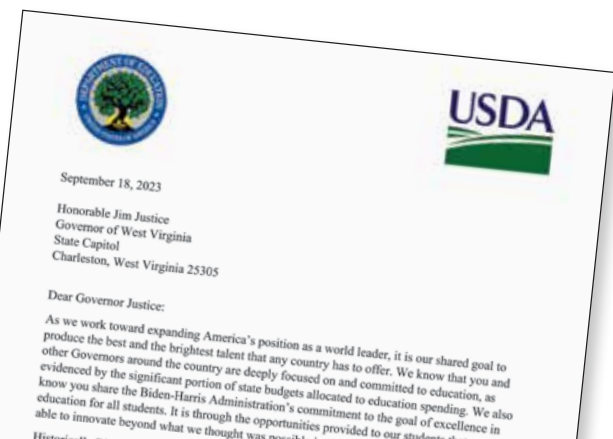
### Kappa Alpha Psi Alumni Call on Legislative Leadership to Include Money in Budget to Compensate WVSU

Miguel Cardona, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, and Tomas Vilsack, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture sent a letter to each of 16 governors. The letter from the Secretaries to West Virginia's Governor, Jim Justice (copy attached) reads, in part, “The Second Morrill Act of 1890 required that states choosing to open a second land-grant institution to serve Black students, provide an equitable distribution of funds between their 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions.

The members of the Charleston Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, sent a letter calling upon leadership in the West Virginia Legislature to take immediate appropriate actions to include \$300 million in the Legislature's response to the proposed budget submitted by Governor Jim Justice.

They requested this amount to be considered as an installment payment to West Virginia State University (WVSU) toward the amount

Secretaries Vilsack and Cardona indicated the State of West Virginia owes to WVSU. Also, that given the announcement that West Virginia finished the last fiscal year with a \$1.7 billion dollar surplus, and the years of underfunding to WVSU, the amount of this requested installment payment does not seem unreasonable.







2023 Impact Report for Black By God (BBG)

BBG is poised to continue its growth in 2024, furthering its mission as a community-led news organization. The focus will be on enhancing online marketing strategies, organizing impactful events, and establishing metrics to measure BBG’s influence in media and storytelling.

CHALLENGES	SUCCESSES			Strategic Developments for 2024
BBG faced the crucial task of ensuring financial sustainability and expanding its audience reach. Critical efforts included enhancing advertising and sponsorship programs, focusing on reader revenue, and securing significant grants for future stability.	<b>Content Impact and Diversity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ BBG excelled in publishing original content that spotlighted the Black Experience in Appalachia.</li><li>❖ Top stories included <b>"Melungeon Heritage,"</b> exploring mixed ancestry; <b>"We Still Matter,"</b> highlighting social justice issues in Hazelton; and <b>"The Food Principle,"</b> showcasing local farmer Jason Tartt Sr. These narratives underscored BBG’s dedication to representing varied voices and enriching understanding of diverse experiences.</li></ul>	<b>Audience Engagement and Reach</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Successfully reached isolated and Black communities, with an estimated <b>10 readers per print issue.</b></li><li>❖ Gained a substantial digital following with <b>5,000 weekly newsletter readers</b>, a 38% open rate (nearly double the average), over <b>9,300 social media followers</b>, and consistent website traffic.</li></ul>	<b>Team and Collaborative Efforts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ As the founder and publisher of Black By God (BBG), Crystal Good spearheaded a diverse team comprising individuals from various backgrounds, including BIPOC, LGBTQ+, re-entry, and other contract workers. This team, rich in regional perspectives and experiences, played a pivotal role in bringing a wide range of voices and narratives to BBG’s platform.</li><li>❖ Notable partnerships with Indie Graf, Tiny News, and Vantage Ventures enhance BBG’s technological and strategic capabilities.</li></ul>	



Donate!



Top row, from left: Pastor Matthew J. Watts, Leslie Dean, Katonya Hart, Pam Nixon, Crystal Good, Sally Roberts. Bottom row, from left, Delegates Shawn Fluharty, Mike Pushkin, Anitra Hamilton, Hollis Lewis, Sean Hornbuckle.

### W.Va. Acknowledges Feb. 3, 1865 as its Authentic Freedom Day, Honoring True Emancipation Story

On Feb. 2, 2024, a momentous event at the West Virginia Capitol marked a significant milestone in the state’s history. House Minority Leader Del. Sean Hornbuckle presented a proclamation declaring Feb.3, 1865, as Freedom Day, commemorating the emancipation of enslaved individuals on this date in 1865. This proclamation is part of Black By God’s initiative advocating for “West Virginia’s Authentic Freedom Day: A Call for Governor Justice’s Accountability to Genuine History,” highlighting the importance of acknowledging the state’s full history.

The proclamation ceremony, held on the eve of Freedom Day, gathered diverse community members, historians, delegates, and policymakers, united in their commitment to honoring West Virginia’s rich and complex history.



Read the story and proclamation on BBG website

### SISTERS REVIEW ‘KING COAL’



Sisters with West Virginia roots Zuri, above, left, and Zeah each review “King Coal.”

### ‘King Coal’: A Deep Dive into my Appalachian Legacy

By Zeah Loren Edmonds

Ever watched a film that just grabs you by the heart and takes you on a journey? That’s exactly what Elaine McMillion Sheldon’s “King Coal” does. It’s like stepping into a lush, green time capsule in the heart of Appalachia, where the story of coal isn’t just about rocks but about the soul of West Virginia.

Picture this: the southern panhandle of “West By God Virginia”, where coal isn’t just a mineral, but a character in its own right. The film spins tales of a merciless King ruling over a land rich in resources but struggling with its identity.

Coal, the black gold of the 20th century, was Appalachia’s bread and butter. I was struck by a stat I read, “In 2021, West Virginia produced 14% of U.S. coal” — that’s huge, right? But despite all this, the local folks, the true heart of these coal towns, see very little of this wealth.

And here’s where “King Coal” gets personal for me. My Granddaddy George was

a coal miner. He swapped his chef’s hat and gardener’s gloves for a miner’s helmet. But like many others, he paid the price with his health, falling victim to Black Lung disease at just 37.

The film touches on the hardships of these miners but misses delving into the racial aspect. Being a Black coal miner like Granddaddy George came with its own set of challenges. It’s a part of our history that’s often overshadowed but so important to remember.

“King Coal” is visually stunning and poetic. There’s this one scene where a tattoo artist inks a miner’s story onto skin — it’s powerful stuff. It captures the danger, the blasts, the rockfalls — the everyday risks these miners faced.

But it’s not just about the miners. The documentary highlights the environmental toll of coal mining too. Yet, it doesn’t dive deep enough into the scars left on our beautiful West Virginia landscapes by

Continued on page 22

### Experiencing ‘King Coal’ at the Denver Film Festival

By Zuri Leigh

The new film, directed by Elaine McMillion Sheldon, ran for one hour and twenty minutes and I was captivated the whole time. Everything from the cinematography, to the sound design, to the two little ladies with outstanding charisma ticked all the boxes for a thrilling documentary. I had no idea what to expect when the Denver Film Festival came back around this year. They always introduce some amazing media programming from all over the world. I really went in with my eyes closed but once they were open, I was hooked.

Coming from West Virginia I knew I had to see this film. I was excited to see it on the program for the Denver Film Festival. I wouldn’t say it’s rare, but it was definitely a nice surprise to see some representation on the big screen for my wild and

wonderful home state. I was proud to go and support such a win for Appalachia. I felt quite emotional, because I knew I was one of the few folks in the theater from West Virginia who truly knew the history and yet I was taken by how alluring and captivating the story was.

“King Coal” showed us the beautiful yet tragic connection between nature and human life. Nothing can be created without something first being destroyed and I was quickly reminded of this truth while watching the film. Through the eyes of the two main little girls you learn about how coal is formed from plant debris, heat, pressure and time. Not only do we see this from a scientific point of view, but we get an intense look into the dark history of mining and how destructive it is. Many families dealt with race relations, not

Continued on page 22



### King Coal dates

- Feb. 8:** Athena Cinema, Athens, Ohio
- Feb. 9:** Ming Hsieh Hall at WVU
- Feb.16:** West Edge Factory, Huntington
- Feb. 19:** Fairmont State University
- Feb. 22:** Warren Wilson College, Asheville, N.C.
- Feb. 23:** The Appalachian Theatre, Boone, N.C.
- Feb. 25, 27:** Sedona International Film Festival, Sedona, Ariz.
- March 1:** Eckerd College Environmental Film Festival, St. Petersburg Fla.
- March 27:** Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.
- March 28:** Bright Lights Cinema Series, Boston, Mass.
- April 2:** ETSU, Johnson City, Tenn.
- April 4:** Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y.
- April 10:** The Living Arts & Science Center, Lexington, Ky.
- April 11:** Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.
- April 11-13:** Redfish Film Festival, Panama City, Fla.
- April 19:** Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.



BEHIND THE SCENES



Je'Dah Madison recorded a love song to her state.

‘Wild and Wonderful’ song and video an appreciation of home

Je'Dah Madison's "Wild and Wonderful" is a heart-felt love song to West Virginia, exploring her decision to stay and create her life here. She writes, "It took me a long time to appreciate where I came from ... the mountains and the beauty here, friends and family, and the community. ... this place will always feel like home."

The RiffRaff Arts Collective, based in Princeton, West Virginia, released a "Behind the Scenes" docushort for this work. "An Inside

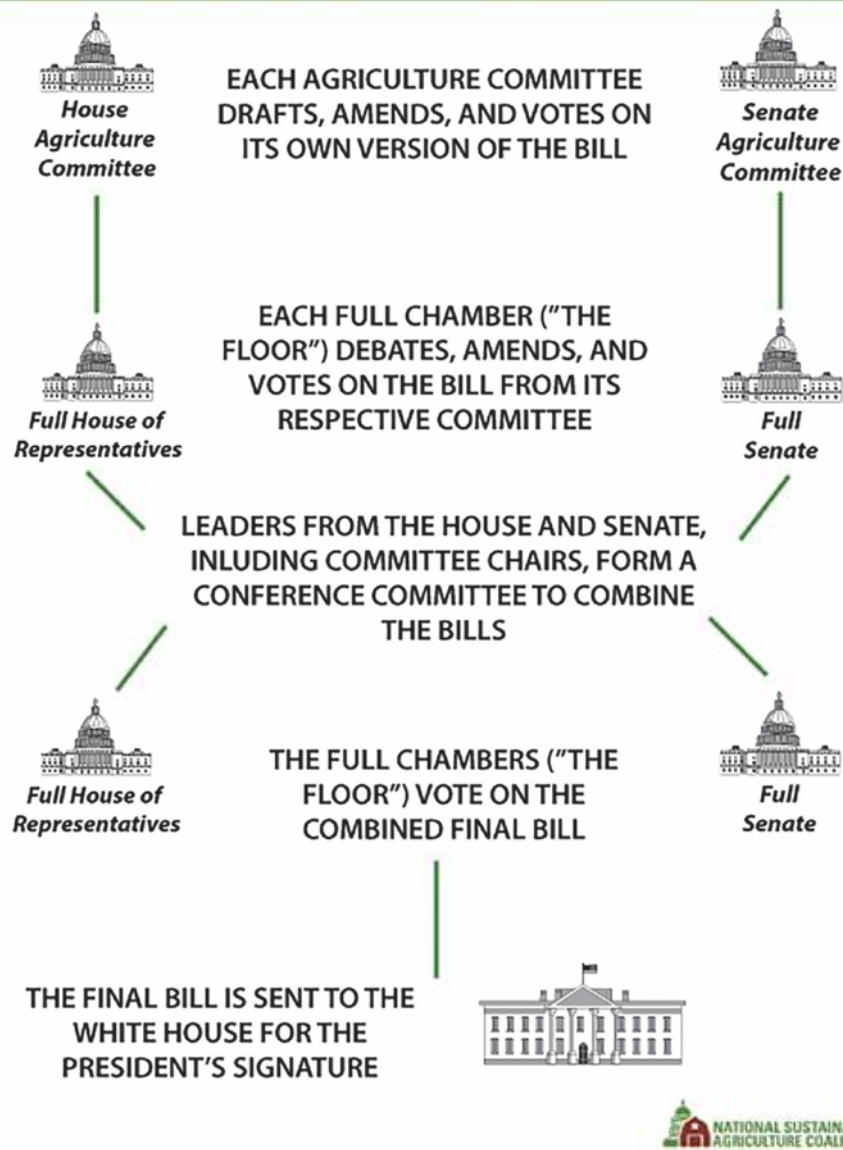
Look," is part of our "We Need to Talk" series. Featuring Je'Dah Madison and other voices, it dives into the varied layers of our relationship with this place we call home.

This is the third docushort in the "We Need to Talk" series; it takes a personal, inside look at the creation of the music video "Wild and Wonderful." Hear from the songwriter and actors about the inspiration behind the song, and the meaning and purpose behind the video.

Watch the Behind the Scenes Video



The Path to a New Farm Bill



FARM BILL from page 7

the Farm Bill, it's imperative that our voices reach the halls of Congress. We must advocate for a Farm Bill that champions nutrition security, fairness in SNAP, and sustainable food systems. These reforms are not just policy changes; they are essential steps to ensure no West Virginian, regardless of color, faces the pangs of hunger.

Let's remember the recent strides in the West Virginia Legislature with Senate Bills 292 and 162, aimed at combating food insecurity. However, juxtaposed against these progressive steps are debates over unnecessary measures like photo IDs on SNAP cards, which risk overshadowing the

true potential of the federal Farm Bill as a game-changer in our fight against hunger.

In a state rich in agricultural resources, it's paradoxical that our educational institutions become battlegrounds against hunger. This is where the Farm Bill can genuinely make a difference. By focusing on federal policies that effectively address hunger and poverty, we can shape a future free from food insecurity.

The Farm Bill's impact is far-reaching, influencing everything from what crops we grow to the sustainability of our farming practices. It's time for West Virginia to unite, ensuring the Farm Bill feeds our bodies and nourishes our collective future.

Can you pass this voter literacy test?

The State of Louisiana

Literacy Test (This test is to be given to anyone who cannot prove a fifth grade education.)

Do what you are told to do in each statement, nothing more, nothing less. Be careful as one wrong answer denotes failure of the test. You have 10 minutes to complete the test.

1. Draw a line around the number or letter of this sentence.
2. Draw a line under the last word in this line.
3. Cross out the longest word in this line.
4. Draw a line around the shortest word in this line.
5. Circle the first, first letter of the alphabet in this line.
6. In the space below draw three circles, one inside (engulfed by) the other.

7. Above the letter X make a small cross.
8. Draw a line through the letter below that comes earliest in the alphabet.

Z V S B D M K I T P H C

9. Draw a line through the two letters below that come last in the alphabet.

Z V B D M K T P H S Y C

10. In the first circle below write the last letter of the first word beginning with "L".



11. Cross out the number necessary, when making the number below one million.

10000000000

12. Draw a line from circle 2 to circle 5 that will pass below circle 2 and above circle 4.



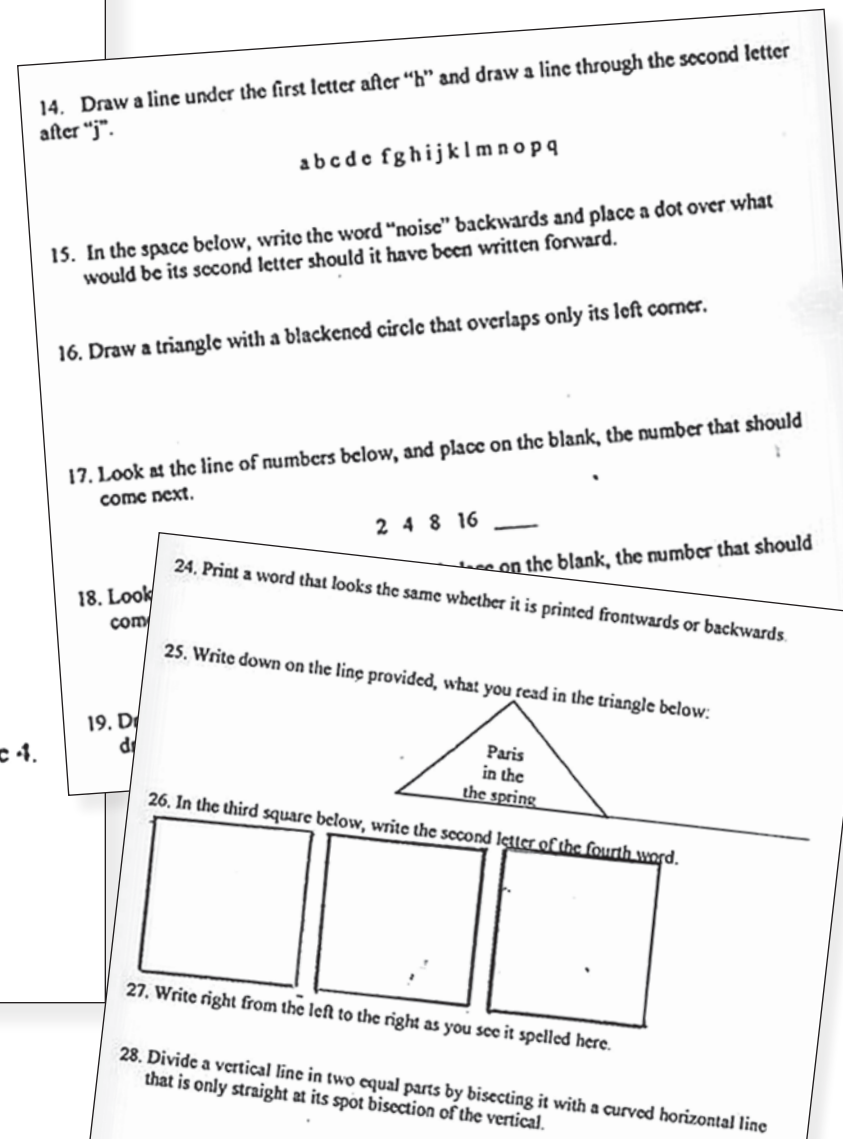
13. In the line below cross out each number that is more than 20 but less than 30

31 16 48 29 53 47 22 37 98 26 20 25

In post-Civil War West Virginia, the political landscape, marked by intense struggles over voting rights, differed from much of the South as it didn't implement the notorious voter literacy tests, a tool for disenfranchising African Americans and poor whites. Despite this, the state faced its challenges: pro-union Republicans restricted former Confederates from voting and holding office, and secret societies like the Ku Klux Klan targeted African Americans, gaining voting rights. This complex period in West Virginia's history, avoiding literacy tests yet grappling with other forms of discrimination, leads us to ponder: Can you pass the test that so many faced in this American civil rights era?



Follow the QR code above to Slate.com for all pages of the test.





## EMPOWERING SENIOR LIFE IN WEST VIRGINIA

### A Call for Innovation in Elder Care

With Kinumi, online coaches and concierges offer support and advice

By Crystal Good

In West Virginia, where nearly one-third of our population is over 50 — a figure set to rise to 38% by 2030 — the imperative for innovative elder care is more crucial than ever. This is particularly vital for our Black community, where life expectancy is distressingly low, especially in areas like Charleston’s West Side.

My family’s journey with Kinumi, an elder care service, shed light on the transformative potential of such innovative models. After my father grappled with the loss of his wife, ongoing health issues, and my brother’s continued struggle with substance abuse, Kinumi’s intervention was a lifeline. They offered more than care; they provided a new sense of independence for my father until his passing and were an invaluable support for me as a caregiver.

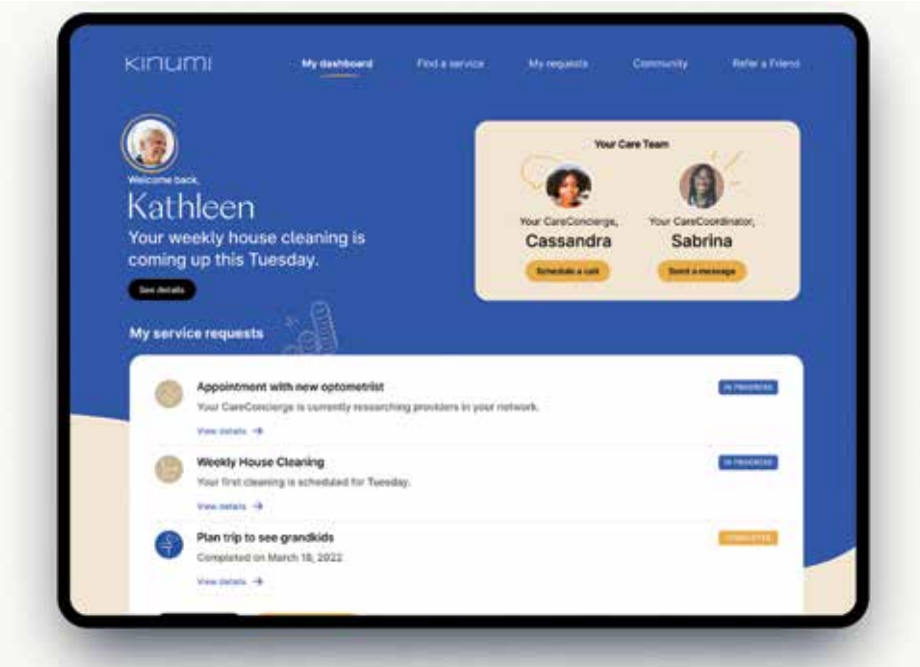
The power of our senior community in West Virginia is evident. We see it in the impactful advocacy of groups like the AARP’s “Red Coat Army,” whose legislative efforts have led to significant strides in senior-focused policies. This year, for instance, we’ve seen the passage of the Social Security Benefit Exemption and the Senior Citizen Property Tax Credit, aiming to alleviate the financial burden on over 50,000 senior households. These bills stand as testaments to the influence and vitality of our senior population.

Yet, many in the Black community are struggling

to reach senior status. For those who do, there’s often a need for more variety and engagement in their lives. Kinumi’s approach, offering engaging webinars and tech skill-building sessions, exemplifies innovative care that can revolutionize senior living. It’s about longevity and enriching the later years with new skills and connections.

Our state’s aging services can learn much from Kinumi’s model. Adopting holistic, competency-enhancing approaches can revolutionize elder care in West Virginia. We can transform senior living, ensuring that our elderly don’t just survive but thrive, equipped with the tools and support they need.

As we continue to champion our seniors in the legislature and beyond, let’s embrace innovative care models that ensure our seniors, especially in the Black community, live their golden years with dignity, joy, and a sense of ongoing purpose. The



Kinumi is a digital hub for successful aging: connecting families with the experts and resources to empower independent living and create more time for joy.

time is ripe for West Virginia to lead the way in elder care innovation, proving that our senior years can be as dynamic and empowering as any other stage of life.

Find out more at [kinumi.com](https://kinumi.com)

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things like blast mining.

What truly shines through in “King Coal” is the pride of the West Virginian community. It’s a celebration of resilience and legacy. I grew up in Charleston, West Virginia, and I can tell you, the sense of community here is something else. This film captures that spirit — the festivals, the parades, the deep-rooted connections.

The documentary wraps up with a scene that’s a mix of mourning and celebration — like a phoenix rising from the ashes. It’s a tribute to those who’ve given their lives to the mines, leaving a legacy that’s woven into the very fabric of our communities.

So, “King Coal” isn’t just a film about coal. It’s a story about people, about struggles, and most importantly, about leaving a mark that outlasts even the toughest of rocks.

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being paid what they were worth, starting a union, health issues, injuries and in some cases loss of life.

That being said, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. I saw the lightning bugs as a representation of this in the film. I hadn’t seen them in so long and the moment I saw them fluttering on screen I felt a sense of nostalgia. Appalachia is such a magical place and I am beyond happy people get a chance to see it on such a big scale. Some of my favorite shots were of the wildlife. It was an absolutely breathtaking view. I remember walking around Kanawha State Forest in elementary school and being

mesmerized by the birds to the point where I began whistling like a Cardinal. I soon realized I had a talent for it, and to find out all of the sounds from the film were done by breath artist Shodekeh Talifero, rounded out my experience.

When the film came to a close I really wanted to know if there were any Mountaineers in the audience so I made a little announcement. To my surprise the people I was sitting next to raised their hands. We met up in the lobby and shared our excitement. We exchanged last names. I was pleased to find out they knew my grandfather, and we had gone to the same high school. It was a lovely way to end my viewing experience.



## BBGTECH

Coming soon: BBG Tech! This new category on our website will delve into the world of technology through a mix of original and curated content. It is set to launch as a monthly newsletter in March 2024.

BBG Tech aims to offer a diverse range of content. Our focus areas include higher education opportunities in West Virginia’s tech sector, with special attention to cyber security, broadband and connectivity, AI education, tech tool sharing, job openings, scholarship information, and camp opportunities for young people. Stay tuned for more updates and



## ONLINE AND INBOX

BBG leverages a multimedia platform that prioritizes web and social media, with an e-newsletter, print publication, SMS alerts, and events to make our news more accessible.

## COMMUNITY LED NEWS

We seek to center Black stories and life in all their manifestations in West Virginia and Appalachia. Our name, Black By God, was inspired by the expression “West by God Virginia,” a phrase whose origins are unknown but which has been used to represent the state and its people.

## WHO WE ARE

BLACKBYGOD.ORG



## FOLK REPORTING

Citizens from diverse communities can participate in the Folk Reporters Program. With a focus on Black and intersectional issues, the program democratizes news at the local level, fostering community engagement and amplifying voices. The program combines Folk art with journalism, providing underrepresented communities a platform and promoting transparency in government.



# Kinumi

## Your family partner for successful aging

Kinumi is your dedicated support and community  
for navigating older adulthood.



KINUMI is for active older adults, looking to age on their own terms.  
We offer a personal concierge service, helping active agers achieve the  
health and lifestyle goals that matter most to them.

Live  
Healthy



Kinumi is your personal coach  
for optimal physical, mental,  
and emotional health.

Stay  
Active



From exploring new hobbies to  
getting involved in your community,  
enriching experiences and  
connections await.

Be  
Present



Make these years grand with more  
quality time and connection with  
friends and family.

## Enter a new age with us

We're helping active agers live with ease, have more  
fun, and stay on top of their health.

When you join Kinumi, you're connected to a  
greater network of people and resources to enjoy  
life to the fullest.



Kinumi  
kinumi.com