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West Virginia got federal money to help foster kids succeed as adults. The state sent millions of dollars back.

For years, West Virginia has failed to connect many older foster kids with the resources they need to succeed as adults. An understaffed and overworked CPS workforce exacerbates the problem and deepens distrust in the system.



Jaiden Holt, 20, spent most of his life in the child welfare system. Just before he was 18 he was adopted, and now has a loving family he lives with in St. Albans, West Virginia. Photo by Erica Peterson / Mountain State Spotlight

by Erica Peterson for Mountain State Spotlight, www.mountainstatespotlight.com

This story was originally published by Mountain State Spotlight. Get stories like this delivered to your email inbox once a week; sign up for the free newsletter at <https://mountainstatespotlight.org/newsletter>.

When Jaiden Holt was growing up, there wasn't a whole lot in his life that made him feel good.

His biological mother lost custody of him when he was young, and he entered the child welfare system, often living with his aunt and grandmother in St. Albans. Then, when he was seven, his mother regained custody and took off for Florida with Jaiden in tow.

For the next seven years, they lived in tents and U-Haul trailers, occasionally squatting in abandoned buildings. Jaiden rarely went to school. Once, his mother left him, and he ended up living with her drug dealer for two years.

"It wasn't fun, but you just kind of learn to adapt to it," he said.

But Jaiden remembers how his first real barbershop haircut made him feel. It was modeled after a style pop star Justin Bieber was wearing at the time. Despite everything else going on in his life, that haircut made Jaiden feel untouchable.

"He had that big ol' swoosh on his hair, and I wanted that swoosh and I got that swoosh," he said, grinning. He pulled out his phone, displaying a photo of his younger self with his new haircut, brow furrowed, pouting at the camera.

A couple of years after that haircut, Jaiden was a teenager, back in West Virginia and in the foster care system. For a while, everything was temporary as he lived in child shelters, a group home and with a foster family that wasn't a good fit. By the time he was 17, things were looking up: Jaiden had found a home with people who loved him. They adopted him shortly before his 18th birthday, and he graduated from high school later that year.

But in the two years since then, he's been stuck. He wants to be a barber, cutting hair to make other people feel the way that "big ol' swoosh" had once made him feel, but he can't afford barber school. He has two young sons he needs to support, but has had no luck applying for minimum wage jobs. It's hard for Jaiden to see a very rosy future.

"Honestly, I've never been the type to have hopes and dreams about stuff," he said. "Because, even growing up, I never saw a future. I didn't expect to make it past 16, if I'm being honest."

What Jaiden didn't know is that he could have gone to barber school at any time. The federal government gives West Virginia money to help former foster kids like him afford college and trade school or pay for rent, tutoring, budgeting classes and a range of other services.

And he's not alone. For years, West Virginia's child welfare agency has been failing to connect foster kids to these services. In doing so, a Mountain State Spotlight investigation has found, state officials have been squandering a powerful opportunity to help the state's most vulnerable kids move from foster care to adulthood.

Since 2010, the state has returned nearly \$7 million for these programs to the federal government, Mountain State Spotlight's investigation found.

In all, West Virginia has returned more than a fifth of the money it received from the grant program from 2010 to 2023. The state's foster care agency has sent money back under the administrations of three previous governors, both Democratic and Republican.

Agency spokeswoman Angel Hightower acknowledged the unspent funds, but insisted that wouldn't happen under current Gov. Patrick Morrisey's administration.

"Since the new administration took office in 2025, the Department of Human Services has proactively worked to identify underutilized funds earlier in the grant process, so they can be reallocated to other programs aimed at helping foster care children as they enter adulthood, ensuring they are used effectively," she wrote in an email.

Hightower was not able to say whether the state spent all available funds for the latest grant cycle, which ended in September. She said the state's grant report was not yet due, and had not been filed.

For a generation of foster kids, the administration's commitment comes too late.

"It's ridiculous," said attorney Cathy Wallace of the wasted money. She has frequently represented foster kids as their guardian ad litem. "It's one of the most embarrassing things West Virginia can say that they do."

'Are we sending federal funds back?'
On a January day a few weeks into the



Starting Jan. 1, 2026, West Virginians can no longer use SNAP benefits to purchase sodas like Mountain Dew, shown at Kroger in South Charleston, West Virginia on Dec. 20, 2025. (Photo by Leann Ray/West Virginia Watch)

West Virginia's SNAP soda ban takes effect Jan. 1

By: Lori Kersey for West Virginia Watch, www.westvirginiawatch.com

Beginning New Year's Day, West Virginian residents who rely on the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program can no longer use their benefits to purchase soda.

The state's SNAP ban includes regular soda, diet soda and zero-calorie soda, but does not include water, milk, juice and energy drinks. The state defines soda as "any carbonated, non-alcoholic beverage that contains water, a sweetening agent, flavoring, and carbon dioxide gas to create carbonation."

The Trump administration approved West Virginia's SNAP soda ban waiver along with that of several other states this year.

The SNAP changes are one part of U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s "Make America Healthy Again" agenda. West Virginia was one of the first states in the nation to pass a sweeping ban of artificial dyes in foods sold in grocery stores and restaurants, another part of the MAHA agenda. The state also banned the use of some artificial food dyes in school lunches.

The SNAP soda ban is also part of a health initiative from Gov. Patrick Morrisey called the "Four Pillars of a Healthy West Virginia." Other pillars included prohibiting the sale of certain food dyes in the state, and the "Mountaineer Mile" challenge to walk at least a mile a day. The governor has said the changes are "long overdue."

"I'm happy now that in West Virginia, taxpayers are not going to be subsidizing soda and these sugary drinks — things that have no nutritional value and are directly linked to obesity, diabetes, a lot of other terrible health care outcomes," Morrisey said during a news conference in August.

Retailers who accept SNAP have been required to change their point of sale systems, which can cost up to thousands of dollars, Traci Nelson, president of the West Virginia Oil Marketers and Grocers Association told West Virginia Watch over the summer.

Speaking to reporters last week, West Virginia Department of Human Services Secretary Alex Mayer said the department has been working with the state retailers association and federal Department of Agriculture to prepare for the change.

"We meet with the Retailers Association regularly," Mayer said. "So, what the team has been telling me is that the retailers are on board, and that there's been progress, and that there's been no indication that they're not going to be prepared for that Jan. 1 date."

Representatives for the West Virginia Retailer's Association and the West Virginia Oil Marketers and Grocers Association did not return an email seeking comment last week.

Critics of restricting the use of SNAP benefits argue the bans may negatively impact the businesses of state retailers, particularly for retailers located along the state borders. SNAP recipients in border counties may cross state lines to purchase soda, taking business away from West Virginia retailers.

About one in six West Virginians receive SNAP benefits. The benefits equal less than \$6 per day per person, according to the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. In 2024, SNAP brought more than \$500 million in federal food benefits to about 2,200 authorized West Virginia SNAP retailers, the center said.

The state Department of Human Services told West Virginia Watch it will not enforce the ban on out-of-state soda purchases.

"SNAP applicants, and applicants for all benefit programs administered by the West Virginia Department of Human Services (DoHS), have always been required to sign the Rights & Responsibilities form," Angelica Hightower, a spokeswoman for the Department of Human Services, wrote in an email. "Soda will be designated as a non-eligible item under West Virginia's newly approved waiver, however, the [Rights and Responsibilities] form does not reference or apply to purchases made in other states."

West Virginia's SNAP waiver allows the state to restrict soda for two years, ending Dec. 31, 2027. The state may request three annual extensions after that for a total of up to five years. As part of the evaluation process, the state will collect responses to a survey about the ban next year.

West Virginia Watch is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity. West Virginia Watch maintains editorial independence. Contact Editor Leann Ray for questions: info@westvirginiawatch.com.

Concord University announces Fall 2025 Dean's List

The following students have achieved the Fall 2025 Dean's List at Concord University. The Dean's List recognizes full-time undergraduate students who were registered for a minimum of 12 Concord credit hours and have attained a grade point average of 3.5 or above at the end of the semester.

Area students named to the Dean's List include:

Canvas: Allison O'Dell, Lillian O'Dell, Riley Sharp, Travis Smith
Clendenin: Marquise Walker
Exchange: Heidi Payne
Fenwick: Savannah Mullens
Mount Nebo: Alyson Childers
Sutton: Dezirae Frazee

BOOKED



REGIONAL JAIL MUGSHOTS

BRAXTON COUNTY



Tony Darrell Blosser
Booked 12/24/25
Conspiracy to commit misdemeanor, conspiracy to commit a felony, petit larceny, breaking without entering dwelling



Dale Lee Dayton Jr.
Booked 12/28/25
Conspiracy to commit a felony, DUI, conspiracy, wanton endangerment



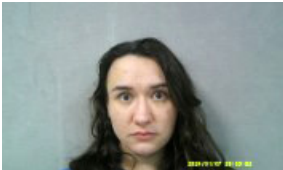
Andrew Houston Cook
Booked 12/25/25
DUI causing personal injury



Brian Evan Dye
Booked 12/22/25
Driving revoked for DUI, conspiracy to commit misdemeanor offense against state, petit larceny, no insurance, improper registration



Joshua Shane Hays
Booked 12/23/25
Solicitation of a minor, use obscene matter with intent to seduce minor



Kiella Montana Knicely
Booked 12/23/25
Petit larceny, conspiracy to commit a felony, conspiracy, entry of building other than dwelling

BRAXTON COUNTY



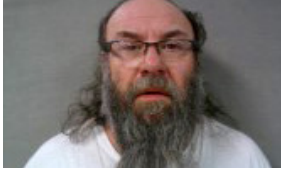
Dana David Lyons
Booked 12/22/25
Conspiracy to commit misdemeanor offense against state, possession of controlled substance, petit larceny



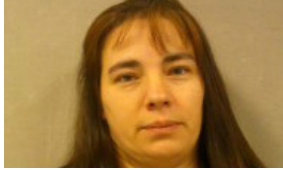
Joshua Miller
Booked 12/23/25
Entry of building other than dwelling, driving suspended, conspiracy, petit larceny, conspiracy to commit misdemeanor against state



Luis Fernando Rovelo-Salgado
Booked 12/27/25
Immigration detainer



William Stanley Uldrich II
Booked 12/22/25
Violation of protective order

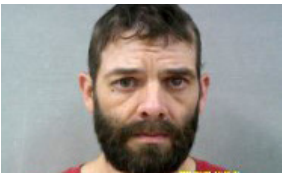


Jerri Ann Ferreebe
Booked 12/23/25
Child neglect with risk of death or injury

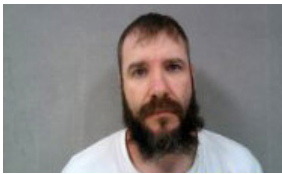


Zachary Carl Glime
Booked 12/25/25
Obstructing an officer, trespassing asked to leave

CLAY COUNTY



Justin Michael Ramsey
Booked 12/23/25
Capias



Robert Allen Brown
Booked 12/22/25
Capias

NICHOLAS COUNTY



Justin Shaw Thompson
Booked 12/23/25
DOP



Governor Patrick Morrisey Announces Plan to Include State Employee Pay Raises in 2026 Budget Request

Governor Patrick Morrisey announced today that his proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget will include pay raises for state employees, citing West Virginia’s improved financial outlook made possible by his administration’s disciplined, balanced-budget approach over the past year.

“I believe in casting a wide net,” said Governor Morrisey. “Our state employees are the ones who teach our children, fix our roads and bridges, guard our prisons, police our streets, and administer the programs thousands of West Virginians rely on. They enter public service not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of our people. They deserve to share in the positive results of our fiscal progress.”

The pay raises proposed by Governor Morrisey will apply to state employees who are funded through the general revenue budget, which includes the vast majority of state workers. This category covers teachers, State Police, corrections officers, and many other essential public servants.

Governor Morrisey’s proposed pay raise will also address critical vacancies in areas such as Corrections, Child Protective Services, and Education.

“Too often, we lose talented teachers, service personnel, and police officers to neighboring states offering higher pay,” Governor Morrisey said. “We must reverse that trend by ensuring our public servants can build their careers here in West Virginia. Keeping teachers, law enforcement, and other dedicated professionals is essential to maintaining the vital services our communities rely on.”

The plan to provide more competitive wages for state



Governor Patrick Morrisey

employees is the latest step in the administration’s broader effort to rebuild West Virginia’s economy after securing \$5.5 billion in economic development investments that will bring 5,500 jobs. The Morrisey Administration has secured additional wins, successfully championing universal licensing reciprocity to reduce barriers to work and implementing the one-stop shop permitting system to cut red tape and speed up business development. Additionally, House Bill 2014 has positioned West Virginia as one of the most attractive states in the country for data center investment, while supporting microgrids, strengthening the energy grid, lowering income taxes, and helping counties fund critical infrastructure.

OBITUARY



William Schoolcraft

William G. “Pee Wee” Schoolcraft, 76, of Duck, entered his heavenly home on Monday, December 22, 2025, at Morgantown Health Care Center.

He was born in Harrison, WV on March 27, 1949, to the late John and Lonie Boggs Schoolcraft.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his brothers, Burton Schoolcraft, Bucky Schoolcraft and Harley Junior Bailey; sisters, Gladys Huckoby, Mary Ward, Josephine Nelisher, Alma Albaugh, Nancy Loving and Jean Marcum.

Pee Wee was a man of immeasurable character. He was defined by a huge ornery heart and an unwavering sense of humor. He was a man deeply respected and loved by all who knew him. With a hard work ethic, he provided for his family. He and his wife attended Peoples Community Church at Duck. Pee Wee was married 54 years to the love of his life, Roxie. He served as a school bus driver for the Clay County Board of Education where he retired

after 31 years in 2011. He served several years in the United States Army and was stationed in Korea. In 1970, while in the Republic of Korea he mobilized and lead a rescue party operation for those trapped in a collapsed building in Inchon City. He was given a certificate for his bravery. Left to cherish his memories are his wife, Roxie Schoolcraft; three sons, Gary Schoolcraft, Terry Schoolcraft (Misty) and Jerry Schoolcraft (Christy); grandchildren, Kenzy Amick, Tyler Summers, Danielle Hill, Hunter Nicholas, Nikki Schoolcraft, Mitchell Schoolcraft, Blake Parsons, Jeremy Goodwin, Destinee Morton, Ronee Nottingham, Jarrod Schoolcraft, and Zachery Henke. He is also survived by 13 great grand-

children; his brother, Freddie Schoolcraft (Janie); sisters, Mahalia Cantrell (Randy), Linda Lambey (Richard) and Emily Duncan; and several nieces and nephews. Pee Wee’s funeral was held at 2 P.M. Saturday, December 27, 2025, at Peoples Community Church, 1702 Flat Fork Road, Duck with Pastor Kenneth Tanner officiating. Burial followed in the Chapman Cemetery, Duck. His visitation was held two hours prior to the service at the church. Arrangements by Roach Funeral Home, Gassaway, WV. Words of comfort and fond memories may be extended to the family at www.roachfuneralhome.com.

PUBLIC NOTICES

The Clay County WIC office located at 452 Main Street in Clay is open to serve the public every Monday and Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Puzzle Answers

Weekly SUDOKU

Answer

2	1	8	9	3	5	6	4	7
7	5	3	4	6	1	8	9	2
6	9	4	2	8	7	3	5	1
4	8	5	3	2	9	1	7	6
3	2	1	5	7	6	4	8	9
9	7	6	1	4	8	5	2	3
5	4	7	6	1	2	9	3	8
1	3	2	8	9	4	7	6	5
8	6	9	7	5	3	2	1	4

Super Crossword

Answers

B	A	R	B	T	Y	R	O	C	A	N	C	E	L	W	H	A	M
A	B	O	U	H	E	A	P	A	V	E	R	S	E	R	E	N	O
B	I	B	B	E	A	S	T	B	A	B	Y	S	B	R	E	A	T
S	T	U	B	E	R	P	I	S	A	O	R	E	S	T	E	S	
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C	A	T	A	B	I	G	B	A	I	L	B	O	N	D	S	M	A
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I	D	E	S	T	I	B	E	R	I	U	S	T	O	W	A	R	D
R	I	S	K	Y	A	B	B	E	S	C	O	V	E	R	L	E	T
P	O	S	I	E	S	A	B	U	S	U	P	E	R	F	A	N	S
M	A	K	E	S	A	B	E	E	L	I	N	E					
P	R	I	M	E	T	I	M	E	M	B	A	S	N	I	T	C	H
L	E	N	I	N	I	S	T	L	I	E	B	E	N	T	O	I	L
U	N	I	T	I	E	S	T	I	T	L	E	B	A	R	N	E	A
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A	M	N	E	S	I	A	U	G	L	Y	U	S	B	A	N	K	
B	O	O	G	I	E	B	O	A	R	D	E	A	R	N	A	B	A
U	L	N	A	F	E	R	G	I	E	F	L	E	D	B	O	B	O
T	E	E	S	S	T	E	E	P	S	S	E	T	S	A	W	E	B

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The Joy We Make

By Joe Mazzella

I had never been a big fan of January. By the time it rolled around the holidays were over. The Christmas decorations had been taken down. All the leftovers and extra cookies had been eaten. And all we had left was a month of short days, long nights, heavy snows, and cold bitter enough to bite into your bones. It was no longer Christmas. It was just winter.

My view of it changed, however, a few years ago. We'd had an especially heavy snow followed by a bitingly cold morning. Still I needed to shovel out our paths and clean off my cars so we could get out once the snow plows had run. As I was outside, making my way to my car, one shovelful at a time, I noticed some of my neighbors doing the same thing. We waved and chatted while we worked and even shared a smile when the sun finally broke through the clouds.

One of my neighbors tried to start her truck only to find out her battery was dead. The rest of us jumped in to help. Soon a spot was shoveled out next to her truck and my tiny car was maneuvered in so we could give her a jump start. Her engine soon roared back to life and she happily thanked us all. We all stood a bit talking while our breath smoked from our mouths. Then suddenly I heard the sound of kids laughing and making the most of the snowy day by sledding down the hill behind us. We all laughed as well when we watched them. I smiled and thought to myself, "Maybe even winter has its own unique joys. And maybe the biggest joys in life are the ones we make with each other."

In the darkness of winter always be ready to shine your light. Always be ready to share your love. Always be ready to spread your joy. Henry Van Dyke wrote: "Is not love the light of the soul?" May your soul always shine bright then. May all your days be full of joy. And may you always remember that this life is God's gift to you, but how you live it is your gift to God.

Home Country

Slim Randles

Dewey's a community project. He's our resident accident-prone guy who managed to get his dad's pickup stuck in the county's only mud hole during a six-year drought, release 300 steers from the feedlot onto the interstate, and create about a ton of tossed salad with hot oil dressing on the on ramp. Quite a few of us have scratched our heads over helping Dewey find something he could do without causing widespread destruction.

Last year, at Doc's suggestion, Dewey fixed up his dad's pickup and became what Doc later called an "entre-manure," by taking manure from feedlots and the dairy and delivering it as fertilizer to people's gardens. The problem is, no one needs fertilizer in their gardens in winter.

Bert, who keeps up on these things, suggested that Dewey look into vermiculture. He explained that this was NOT a new dish at the Italian restaurant, but rather the raising of worms and the creation of compost.

"It's a win-win deal, Dewey," Bert said. "You put the worms in the manure. They multiply and replenish the earth, then they leave behind rich compost. You can get more money for composted manure next spring than the raw stuff, and you'll have worms to sell to fishermen."

Dewey went out the door so fast he forgot to pay for his coffee, so we got it.

A few weeks later, Dewey was as happy as a chairman of the board of something wonderful.

He discovered that worms don't eat and reproduce as readily when they're cold, so to speed up the project, he built some worm crates, filled them with worms and manure, and spread them around. As I said, he's a community project. He has two worm bins in Steve's spare room, three in Doc's garage, two in his mother's garage, and two in the basement first-grade classroom at Pastor Jeff's Sunday school, because Sunday school just happens not to have any first graders this year.

Haven't seen Bert around lately. Been looking for him, too.

Brought to you by "Dogsled, A True Tale of the North," by Slim Randles. Amazon.com

Can You Eat Too Many Cookies at Christmas

By Dr. James Snyder

Christmas was over, and the house began to quiet down in a good way. Don't get me wrong, I love the noise when all the family is together. It is a good feeling to be with your family during this wonderful holiday season. I love the energy!

I enjoy the presents and watching the family opening theirs, but I especially love the holiday feasts prepared by The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.

There was only one time when she really messed up. That was when she had broccoli at the holiday feast. Nothing is more disgusting to me than seeing broccoli on the table. She only did it once, for which I am most grateful.

Someone might ask what my favorite item on the table was. I would reply by saying, the item that is in my mouth at the time.

This Christmas season, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage baked a truckload of cookies and shared them with friends and neighbors, who greatly appreciated them.

The only problem with The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage baking cookies is that I'm in the same house, and the smell infiltrates every room.

I can be in my office, busy on a project, when suddenly the most fascinating aroma fills the room: cookies baking in the kitchen.

There is a very strict rule in our house about cookies: I can have only one, and only if The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage gives it to me. Otherwise, it is a forbidden fruit.

Every so often, she will slip me a second cookie, and I'm so appreciative of that small gesture.

The great thing about our family coming together for Christmas dinner is that there are so many of us. With the little ones always very noisy, I try to stir up that noise as much as possible—after all, isn't that a grandfather's job?

Amid all the holiday noise, I sneak a cookie. If The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage doesn't catch me, it's okay—or so I think.

I must confess that eating these cookies is not my fault. After all, if the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage did not make so many delicious cookies, I wouldn't be tempted. In short, my eating cookies is not my fault but hers.

I've tried several times to explain this to her, but she still doesn't buy it. Her idea is that I can only have a cookie if she hands it to me.

During the holiday festivities, with all the noise, I can sneak cookies whenever I want. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is so focused on the family, especially the great-grandchildren, that I can get away with it. So, if I get away with it, it's all right. Right?

West Virginia Association of Counties assists food banks amid holiday demand

As food banks across West Virginia work to meet increased demand during the holiday season, the West Virginia Association of Counties (WVACo) is providing financial support to help ensure families, children, and seniors do not go without during a time when resources are often stretched thin.

WVACo President Greg Vandall has announced WVACo will provide direct financial support to West Virginia's two largest food banks during the holiday season.

The decision comes amid recent federal government disruptions that strained food banks and charitable organizations nationwide, leaving many families facing shortfalls in food and basic necessities.

"In this time of year, no one should go hungry," Vandall said. "Our Executive Committee felt strongly that WVACo should step forward and help meet these shortfalls here at home, in West Virginia. We're proud to support the organizations doing the heavy lifting on the ground."

WVACo will donate \$5,000 each to Mountaineer Food Bank in Gassaway and Facing Hunger Food Bank in Huntington, strengthening their ability to serve vulnerable populations across the state.

The need is real across West Virginia – and it is growing.

According to data from Feeding America and the USDA, more than 16 million children nationwide are food insecure, meaning more than one in four American children does not consistently know where their next meal is coming from. Nearly 38 percent of those served by Feeding America are under the age of 18, and almost four out of five households receiving assistance include a child.

West Virginia's aging population presents another ur-

As our family festivities began, I noticed the stash of cookies the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage had baked. The grandchildren love her cookies.

As the festivities begin, I asked The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage if I could give some cookies to the grandchildren. After all, I explained, she was too busy to do this.

I must say I caught her by surprise, and because she was busy with something else, she just said, "Okay, but remember, no cookies for you."

With a big smile on my face, I picked up a plate of cookies and took them around to the grandchildren. There was so much activity that I began eating a cookie now and then. I made sure the plate was in front of one of the grandchildren before I picked up a cookie. I think I covered my tracks pretty well.

The first grandchild I took the cookie plate to looked at me and said, "Papaw, do you want one of my cookies?" Now, how can you refuse your grandchild? I thought it was my grandparental duty to respond to my grandchild by saying, "Oh, my dear, thank you so much I appreciate that." And the cookie disappeared from the plate into my adoring mouth.

I was very cautious because when I went to one of my grandchildren, I often made sure to check where The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was and whether she was looking and in my direction. When she wasn't, it was a signal for me to get another cookie.

My only question during this festive time was: How many cookies are too many?

After the family activities were over, I relaxed with some coffee and The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage came in and sat down. She looked at me and asked, "So, how many cookies did you eat today?"

To answer that question would get me in deep trouble. Instead, I replied, "Wasn't our great-granddaughter so cute?" That was enough to distract her and get her talking about our great-granddaughter. I ducked an arrow with that.

While the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage went on and on about our great-granddaughter, I remembered a Bible verse I read in my devotions.

"Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord" (1 Chronicles 16:8-10).

No amount of trouble can rob me of rejoicing in the Lord. Everything I have is a gift from the Lord, and I'm going to appreciate it the rest of my life.

Dr. James L. Snyder lives in Ocala, FL with the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. Telephone 1-352-216-3025, e-mail jamesnsnyder51@gmail.com, website www.jamesnsnyderministries.com.

gent challenge.

Fifty-two of the state's 55 counties have a higher-than-average senior population, placing increased pressure on local food assistance networks. When medical costs are considered, an estimated 78,800 seniors in West Virginia and neighboring Kentucky are living in poverty, making food access a daily concern rather than a seasonal one.

WVACo Past President and Lewis County Commissioner Agnes Queen urged courthouse officials and county employees across the state to take the message home.

"Every county has local needs and local food pantries," Queen said. "We encourage our fellow officials and staff to consider donating locally as well. Small actions, multiplied across the state, can make a real difference."

About The West Virginia Association of Counties:

The West Virginia Association of Counties (WVACO) is the unified voice and resource hub for the elected officials serving all 55 West Virginia counties. Representing assessors, circuit clerks, county clerks, county commissioners, prosecuting attorneys, sheriffs, and other constitutional officers, WVACO champions professionalism, preservation, and protection of county government to improve services and quality of life for all West Virginians.

From advocacy at the State Capitol to educational programs and inter-county collaboration, the association works tirelessly to strengthen local government and support those on the front lines of community service throughout the Mountain State.

For more information about WVACo and its initiatives, or to learn how to support local food banks in your community, visit <http://www.wvaco.org>.

Your Ad Could Be Here!

Call us at

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THIS WEEK IN West Virginia History

Dec. 31, 1939: Larry Combs, one of the world’s leading orchestral clarinetists, was born in South Charleston. He started studying woodwinds at age 10 and was principal clarinetist for the Charleston (now West Virginia) Symphony Orchestra at age 16. He later served in the same role for symphonies in Montreal and Chicago and was inducted into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame in 2009.



Dec. 31, 2007: Sara Jane Moore was released

from prison after serving 32 years for trying to kill President Ford. Moore grew up in Charleston and later moved to California, where she joined left-wing groups and became an FBI informant. She spent part of her incarceration at the Federal Prison Camp in Alderson.



Jan. 1, 1859: Glass maker and inventor Michael Owens was born in Point Pleasant. He is considered the foremost developer of mechanical glass production.

Jan. 1, 1888: In one of

the most violent episodes of the Hatfield-McCoy Feud, Jim Vance, uncle to “Devil Anse” Hatfield, led an arson attack on the McCoy family cabin. Two of Randall McCoy’s children were killed, and his wife was beaten.



Jan. 1, 1953: Country music legend Hank Williams was found dead in his car in Oak Hill, Fayette County. He had been scheduled to perform in Charleston the previous night, but the concert was canceled due to bad weather.

Jan. 2, 2006: An explosion at the Sago Mine in Upshur County killed 12 men. Federal investigators pointed to a lightning strike as the most likely ignition source for the blast.



Jan. 3, 1856: Musician Lewis Johnson “Uncle Jack” McElwain of Webster County was born. He was the most respected fiddler in central West Virginia during his lifetime. He took part in many fiddle contests, and no one can recall him ever being beaten.

Jan. 3, 1921: The state capitol building in Charleston was destroyed by fire. The so-called

Victorian capitol, the second one in Charleston, had opened in 1887. After the fire, a temporary wood-frame building was erected in just 42 days and became known as the “pasteboard capitol.” It burned in 1927.



Jan. 4, 1897: Classes began at Montgomery Preparatory School, a state institution established to prepare students for West Virginia University. The school evolved into the West Virginia University Institute of Technology.

Jan. 5, 1810: The Virginia General Assembly recognized 20 acres of land owned by farmer and trader Thomas Buffington

at the confluence of the Guyandotte and Ohio rivers as the new village of Guyandotte.

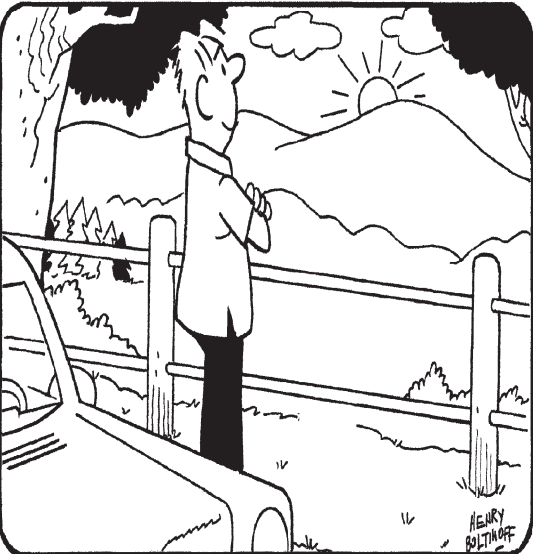
Jan. 6, 1828: Ward Hill Lamon was born in Jefferson County. Lamon was friend, law partner and unofficial bodyguard to President Abraham Lincoln. President Lincoln was assassinated when Lamon was away in Richmond on business.

Jan. 6, 1931: An underground gas explosion killed eight men at the Glen Rogers coal mine in Wyoming County—eight years after another explosion had killed 27 at the same mine.

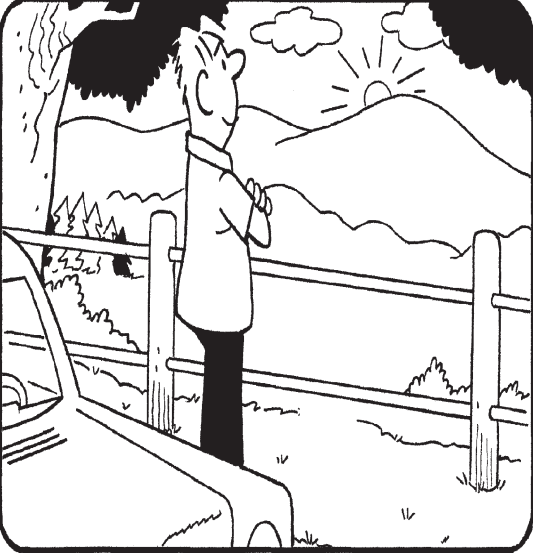
Jan. 6, 1937: Football coach Lou Holtz was born in Follansbee, Brooke County. At Notre Dame, he won his only national championship after defeating West Virginia University in the 1989 Fiesta Bowl.

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Sun is smaller. 2. Fence post is taller. 3. Headlight is different. 4. Side mirror is missing. 5. Bottom of shirt is different. 6. Tree branch is missing.

Weekly SUDOKU

		2		5		3	9	8
		9		2		4	7	
	7				4	5	1	
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		5	4	6	1		3	

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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Super Crossword CORNER TO CORNER

ACROSS

- 1 Fishhook end
9 Negate
15 “Kapow!”
19 “— Ben Adhem” (Leigh Hunt poem)
20 Whole bunch
21 Opposed (to)
22 Nevada city on I-80
23 Mild-flavored lettuce
24 Dawn’s direction
25 Common corsage flower
27 2019 buddy-cop action-comedy film
29 Leaning Tower city
31 Co-avenger with Electra
32 Wooden shoe
34 Bestow
38 Feedbag grain
39 Jaguar, e.g.
41 “It’s not — deal”
43 Guy who helps people get out of jail
48 Attila the —
49 “I pass,” in cards

- 51 Bic — Stic
52 Add up to
53 March 15, e.g.
55 Emperor before Caligula
58 In the direction of
62 Unsafe
64 Convent VIP
65 Quilt, e.g.
66 Small bouquets
68 Monkey in “Aladdin”
69 Die-hard devotees
70 What this puzzle’s solver does when filling in the upper-left to lower-right diagonal?
74 8-11 p.m., TV-wise
78 Exec’s deg.
79 Tattle
84 Old Russian revolutionary
85 German for the verb “love”
88 Sheer fabric
89 States of oneness
90 Filename display area
92 Not far at all
93 GQ or Us

- 94 Send forth
96 Some pinschers, for short
98 Completed
99 Male sibling by birth
105 Asian fusion restaurant chain
106 Taxing org.
107 French body of water
108 Like an ode
110 Marjanovic of the Rockets
112 Memory loss
116 Like eyesores
118 Citigroup alternative
121 Item for surfing on one’s stomach
125 Work for
127 Impose — on (forbid)
128 Arm bone
129 Princess Beatrice’s mom
130 Ran away
131 1967 Peter Sellers film, with “The”
132 Casual tops
133 Brines, e.g.
134 Lays (down)
135 Spin — (do like Spider-Man)

DOWN

- 1 Streisand, to friends
2 Slightly
3 Vigorous quality
4 — Gump Shrimp Company
5 Mechanical-looking dance
6 Pro vote
7 Rub roughly
8 Sight-related
9 Beach hut
10 “Selma” director
11 Lincoln loc.
12 Boohoo
13 Canadian gas choice
14 NBA star James
15 Twists to pull free
16 Sun output
17 Poker cost
18 Hardness scale inventor
26 Take in a novel, e.g.
28 Abba of Israel
30 Boohoo
33 Leg bone
35 Popular office plant
36 Building wings
37 Hitting stat
39 Bird sound

- 40 Video’s counterpart
42 Last name of the Bee Gees
44 Eight-armed creatures
45 The second Mrs. Trump
46 Actress Eve
47 Bird homes
50 Cheapen
54 Enjoy a slope
56 McEntire of country
57 Lead-in to a proposal
59 Bake-off needs
60 “As if that — enough ...”
61 Pooch sound
63 Aden citizen
65 — -de-sac
67 Composer Erik
69 Ocean floor
71 Mouth or face, slangily
72 Rescue squad VIP
73 Upscale Swiss watch brand
74 — tucked out
75 Of kidneys
76 “The Princess Bride” character
77 The Engineers’ sch.

- 80 It’s charged
81 Knotted like shoelaces
82 Huxtable mom on TV
83 Goat groups
85 Limber
86 Black, in verse
87 Honcho
90 Mambo king
91 Ricochets
95 Janitorial tool
97 Deli heroes
100 Last Greek letters
101 Actor Arnaz
102 Court filings
103 Pianists’ exercises
104 Road semi
109 Staff symbols
111 Addis —, Ethiopia
112 Be up against
113 Yard pest
114 Not any
115 Aid in crime
117 New Haven university
119 Local theater, informally
120 Door handle
122 Iron —
123 Iron —
124 Tear
126 No longer in the mil., e.g.

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THE WIDEN NEWS

The people who think alike
should vote alike.

"DUNDON"
RED ASH COAL

Where all think alike, no one
thinks very much.



November 1958

Winners Announced in "Miss Carnival Contest"



JANICE TRIPLETT

Janice Triplett was the winner of the Miss Carnival Contest. She won a bracelet which had "Widen High School" written on it. She also received a box of chocolates.

The winners for King and Queen contest, in the grade school were Frankie Donohue and Molly Dorsey.

Molly's prizes were a friendship necklace and paint-by-number set, and Frankie's prizes were a pocket knife and a Wyatt Eary Paint-by-number set.

The Hula Hoop contest was won by eight-year old Sandra Miller, a third grade student. She was presented with a "54 game" chest.

Judges for the Hula Hoop contest were, Carolyn Gibson, Virginia Reese, and William Reese.



FRANKIE DONOHUE

MOLLY DORSEY

TWENTY-THREE MAKE WHS HONOR ROLL

First Semester, First Period 1958-59	
Seventh Grade:	Mr. Stover
"A"	
T. G. Griffith	3.50
"B"	
Brenda King	3.37
Sharon Baughman	3.25
Ronald Connor	3.18
Sandra Williams	3.18
Jean Dodrill	3.00
Eighth Grade:	Mrs. Hathaway
"A"	
Sandra Henderson	3.87
Marion Gibson	3.82
Phyllis McClain	3.56
Patricia Manning	3.50
"B"	
None	
Ninth Grade:	Mr. Krise
"A"	
None	
"B"	
Kathleen Miles	3.12

Tenth Grade:	Mr. Matheny
"A"	
None	
"B"	
Virginia Nettles	3.05
Terry Shaffer	3.00
Robert Baughman	3.00
Charles Barrett	3.00
Eleventh Grade:	Mr. Leeson
"A"	
Dawne Backus	3.65
Lillie Nash	3.55
"B"	
Karen Donohue	3.38
Lora Wilson	3.00
Twelfth Grade:	Mrs. Griffith
"A"	
Ruby Lee Rapp	3.94
David Hamrick	3.88
Judy La Corte	3.56
"B"	
Rosa Gibson	3.38

May the Lord be your Way and
your Lantern, and His Love your
Staff and your Mantle, on earth
and beyond, for evermore.

In The Mail Box....

Dear Sally,

Guess what? We got the proofs of our senior pictures back last Monday. They were all good but mine, and they flattered me.

My, was I surprised at how good everyone was on trick or treat night. I haven't heard of any bus or other houses being turned over or destroyed. (Things sure are changing.) I remember one year they gave Widen a pretty hard time. I think it's just fine to have fun on Halloween, but everything has to stop somewhere. Don't you agree?

The seniors' are planning a dance real soon. Do you think you and E— can come? There probably will be a lot of people there because we haven't had one for a few weeks.

We had a nice assembly Wednesday. Mr. Elliott spoke to us. You know he is our new board member.

Because of some conflicting schedule, the Student Council lost some very good members (Five to be exact.) The seniors even gained a new president, Carol Neal.

We didn't have school Tuesday, because of the election, and I must say I didn't mind a bit.

The Journalism staff for every month, has been having its picture put in the paper. Look for mine. Our Journalism class also exchanges its school paper for papers from other schools. I think that is a very good idea. That way you see how other school papers are written. Do we get a paper from your school?

I told you I thought the Chemise dresses would go out of style, and they did. The dress most popular now is the trapeze. These dresses sure do murder a girls figure. Don't they?

Don't forget our date to go to

the Army-Navy game over Thanksgiving holidays. Mom will die when she finds out the price of the tickets.

Love,

Coed

Dear Joe,

At last I have found time to write to you again. Why haven't you been writing? I know there is something going on up there in New York all the time to write about. You are not lazy, are you? Here in Widen, school is more fun than it ever has been, but the subjects are a little harder. In English class we write compositions on some special fields every week. There is one class which I like much more than anyone; it is Journalism. We have a lot of fun and it is educational—"learning the ropes" and the publishing of a newspaper.

The week of November 10-15 is National Education Week. A lot of people have turned out to visit their children's classes and their teachers.

Some of the boys who play basketball were caught smoking and they had to run an extra hundred laps around that big gymnasium; and I don't think any of the boys would even want to smell a cigarette again.

These past weeks in November we have been getting off from school a lot. I bet the teachers are sorta angry because they are not getting to teach so much. We got off to vote but you know that none of us are old enough to vote. We got off the 11th of this month for Veterans' Day. Everyone who has studied history would remember that day.

Well I will see you when K—and you come to visit friends here in Widen. These kids will sure be glad to see you.

S'Long Podner Yul Flip

Honor Student

David Hamrick and Ruby Lee Rapp, seniors, were guests at the Rotary Club dinner, Thursday night, November 13, 1958.

Each nine weeks two students, with the highest average for that period, are chosen to attend a dinner given by the Rotary Club.

SENIOR SCOOP

Christmas card orders will be out by December 1st. If you have not ordered cards, and would like to, see one of the seniors.

The proofs of the senior pictures arrived on October 27. Most of the seniors chose their best pictures, the orders are out and are expected back before Christmas.

The senior class sponsored a rummage sale on November 15, 1958 in the Y.M.C.A. We thank all those who contributed.

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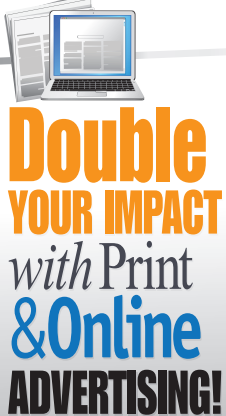
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LEGAL

Public Meeting Notice

The Clay County Board of Education will hold 2 public hearings to allow interested parties to discuss and provide input for the 2026-2027 school calendar. The first hearing will be held at Clay County High School on Tuesday, January 20, beginning at 5:30 p.m. The second hearing will be conducted at Clay County High School on Tuesday, February 6, beginning at 5:30 p.m. Anyone interested in addressing the Clay County Board of Education, at one or both meetings, should contact Mr. Philip R. Dobbins, Superintendent, at 304-587-4266, to have your name placed on the agenda or sign up in person 15 minutes prior to the start of the hearing. There will also be a public comment period on the two calendar options posted at claycountyschools.org for students, parents, and staff to provide input to the Clay County Board of Education. If you have a comment or question about the calendar options, please email them to Mr. Dobbins at claycountyschoolsystem@gmail.com .

LEGAL

(2022-C-000231 - Clay County - JOSPEPH DOW JONES)
To: JOHN K JARVIS, SALLY ANNE JARVIS, CHARLES E. BARNETT III, EMILY JO WILLIAMSON, or heirs at law, devisees, creditors, representatives, successors, assigns, all known heirs, guardians, conservators, fiduciaries, administrators, lienholders, co-owners, other parties having an undivided interest in the delinquent property, and other parties that may have an interest in the subject property.
DISTRICT OTTER MAP 9999 PARCEL 0000 0627 3001
You will take notice that JOSPEPH DOW JONES, the purchaser of the following real estate, **Cert. No. 2022-C-000231**, located in OTTER District, 3682 AC N S ELK O&G 2/3 OF 1/4 & 1/2 OF 1/3 OF 1/4, which was returned delinquent or nonentered in the name of HALL O L, and was sold by the deputy commissioner of delinquent or nonentered lands of CLAY County at the sale for the delinquent taxes on the May 4, 2023. JOSPEPH DOW JONES requests that you be notified a deed for such real estate will be made on or after March 1, 2026, as provided by law, unless before that day you redeem such real estate. The amount needed to redeem on or before February 28, 2026 will be as follows:

Amount equal to the taxes and charges due on the date of the certification, with interest, for tax year ticket number 2021 - 10050.	\$	327.25
Back tax tickets, with interest, and charges due on the date of certification for ticket number	\$	0.00
Subsequent of taxes paid on the property, with interest to for tax year 2022 - 10034.	\$	194.72
Additional taxes with interest.	\$	0.00
Auditor's Certification, Publication, and Redemption fee plus interest.	\$	224.25
Amount paid for Title Examination, notice to redeem, publication, personal service, Secretary of State with interest.	\$	755.47
Additional Statutory Fees with Interest.	\$	523.25
Total Amount Due and Payable to WV State Auditor - cashier check, money order, certified or personal check.	\$	2,024.94

You may redeem at any time before February 28, 2026 by paying the above total less any unearned interest. If the above real estate is your primary residence, you may petition the Auditor to redeem the real estate in not more than three incremental payments that equal the total amount required to redeem the real estate prior to the issuance of the deed described above.

Given under my hand December 16, 2025
Christal G. Perry
Christal G. Perry
Deputy Commissioner of Delinquent and Nonentered Lands of CLAY County, State of West Virginia
Please return this letter and payment to the
West Virginia State Auditor's Office, County Collections
Division 1900 Kanawha Boulevard East
Building 1, Room W-114
Charleston, West Virginia 25305.
Questions please call 1-888-509-6568

LEGAL

(2022-C-000232 - Clay County - JOSPEPH DOW JONES)
To: JOHN K JARVIS, SALLY ANNE JARVIS, CHARLES E. BARNETT III, EMILY JO WILLIAMSON, or heirs at law, devisees, creditors, representatives, successors, assigns, all known heirs, guardians, conservators, fiduciaries, administrators, lienholders, co-owners, other parties having an undivided interest in the delinquent property, and other parties that may have an interest in the subject property.
DISTRICT OTTER MAP 9999 PARCEL 0000 0627 3002
You will take notice that JOSPEPH DOW JONES, the purchaser of the following real estate, **Cert. No. 2022-C-000232**, located in OTTER District, 3682 AC N S ELK O&G 1/2 OF 1/3 OF 1/4 INT, which was returned delinquent or nonentered in the name of JARVIS JOHN K, and was sold by the deputy commissioner of delinquent or nonentered lands of CLAY County at the sale for the delinquent taxes on the May 4, 2023. JOSPEPH DOW JONES requests that you be notified a deed for such real estate will be made on or after March 1, 2026, as provided by law, unless before that day you redeem such real estate. The amount needed to redeem on or before February 28, 2026 will be as follows:

Amount equal to the taxes and charges due on the date of the certification, with interest, for tax year ticket number 2021 - 10289.	\$	143.84
Back tax tickets, with interest, and charges due on the date of certification for ticket number	\$	0.00
Subsequent of taxes paid on the property, with interest to for tax year 2022 - 10258.	\$	55.75
Additional taxes with interest.	\$	0.00
Auditor's Certification, Publication, and Redemption fee plus interest.	\$	224.25
Amount paid for Title Examination, notice to redeem, publication, personal service, Secretary of State with interest.	\$	755.47
Additional Statutory Fees with Interest.	\$	521.90
Total Amount Due and Payable to WV State Auditor - cashier check, money order, certified or personal check.	\$	1,701.21

You may redeem at any time before February 28, 2026 by paying the above total less any unearned interest. If the above real estate is your primary residence, you may petition the Auditor to redeem the real estate in not more than three incremental payments that equal the total amount required to redeem the real estate prior to the issuance of the deed described above.

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Please return this letter and payment to the
West Virginia State Auditor's Office, County Collections
Division 1900 Kanawha Boulevard East
Building 1, Room W-114
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GENERAC

Auditor's Public Integrity and Fraud Unit Investigation Leads to Embezzlement Conviction Involving Wetzel-Tyler Board of Health

The West Virginia State Auditor's Office announced that Marsha Ann Carse, 63, of Paden City, has entered a guilty plea to the felony offense of embezzlement in Tyler County Circuit Court, following an investigation by the Auditor's Public Integrity and Fraud Unit.

Carse's plea, entered on December 16, 2025, stems from her former employment with the Wetzel-Tyler Board of Health, where she was alleged to have embezzled \$13,701.58 from the agency between 2016 and 2022. A separate felony charge of falsifying accounts was dismissed pursuant to a plea agreement.

The Court has ordered a pre-sentence investigation and report, with sentencing scheduled for January 20, 2026, at 10 a.m. in Tyler County Circuit Court. The case is being prosecuted by Tyler County Prosecuting Attorney D. Luke Furbee.

"The Public Integrity and Fraud Unit exists to help safeguard taxpayer dollars and support local agencies in maintaining strong financial practices," Auditor Mark Hunt said. "We appreciate the cooperation of the Wetzel-Tyler Board of Health and the Tyler County Prosecutor's Office in bringing this matter to resolution."

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CHURCH DIRECTORY



A

ALTA CHURCH OF GOD
Sunday Night Services
6:00 PM
Wednesday 7:00 PM Everyone
is welcome! **Pastor: Paul E. Young**

B

BELL CREEK COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
NO Scheduled Services
At This Time

BELL CREEK PENTECOSTAL CHURCH
Dixie
Tuesday Night 6:00 PM
Thursday Night 6:00 PM
Sunday Morning 11:00 AM
PM **Pastor: Lee Holiday**
(304) 632-1135

BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH of Adonijah.
Preaching from K.J.V. Bible
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Morning 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening 7:00 PM
Thursday Evening 7:00 PM

BETHEL COMMUNITY CHURCH, Porter Creek Road,
Bomont, WV
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Night Service
7:30 PM
Thursday Night Service
7:30 PM
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Junior Davis

BICKMORE BAPTIST CHURCH located at Bick-
more on Fola Road
Sunday School 9:45 AM
Morning Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening 6:00 PM
Wednesday evening services
7:00 PM
Pastor: Ralph D. Lane

BIG OTTER BAPTIST CHURCH OF IVYDALE
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM
Wednesday prayer service and
Bible Study 6:30 PM **Pastor:**
Danny Richardson

BIG UNION BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Service 1st,
3rd and 4th
Sundays Preaching 6:00 PM
Wednesday Night Prayer &
Bible Study 7:00 PM
2nd Sunday Communion
Service 6:00 PM
Pastor: Pete Shaffer

BLUE KNOB CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM Everyone
is Welcome!

BUFFALO VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH Sunday
School 10:00 AM Worship
Service 11:00 AM Sunday
Evening Service
6:00 PM
Radio Broadcast, Sunday
Morning 9:00 AM. WCWV
Summersville
Everyone Welcome **Pastor:**
Doug Newell IV

BURKE MEMORIAL METHODIST CHURCH in
Procious. Across Camp Creek
Bridge on the left. Preaching
Every Sunday
9:00 AM
Sunday School 10:00 AM Bible
Study every Wednesday 7:00
PM **Pastor: Jerry Chandler**

C

CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF LIZEMORE
Prayer Service and Bible Study,
Tuesday 7:00 PM Regular
Service Sunday Nights at 7:00
PM
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Pastor: Thurman Sizemore

CHURCH OF GOD BENTREE
Sangamore Rd.,Bentree, WV
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Evening Service
7:00 PM
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Come and worship the Lord
with us.
Everyone Welcome!
Pastor: Michael L. Holcomb, Sr.
CLAY COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Night Service
7:00 PM
Wednesday Night Service 7:00
PM. Everyone welcome.

CLAY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Worship 11:00 AM.
Everyone is Welcome!
Pastor: Wilma Dobbins

CLENDENIN UNITED PENTECOSTAL CHURCH
10:00 AM – Sunday School
11:00 AM – Preaching
6:00 PM
Wednesday 7:30 PM
Pastor: Fred Walker

CLIO COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Night Preaching 7:00
PM
Wednesday Worship
7:00 PM
Everyone welcome.
Pastor: George Stickland

COLD SPRINGS GOSPEL TABERNACLE, Upper Fall-
ing Rock, Clay County
Sunday Morning Worship
10:00 AM
Sunday School 11:30 AM
Sunday Evening Service
7:30 PM
Tuesday Evenings 7:30 PM
Teachings from the King
James Bible
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Darris Barker

CORNERSTONE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCH, Rt. 3, Newton
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Night Service 7:00
PM
Wednesday Prayer Service/
Discovery Clubs 7:00 PM
Pastor: Roy Huffman

E

ELK RIVER BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Saturday Night 7:00 PM
Pastor: Brace Cook

F

FAIRVIEW BAPTIST TEMPLE
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening 6:00 PM
Wednesday 7:00 PM
Pastor: Bret Wiley

FAITH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
Dutch Ridge Laurel Road
Sunday Service 6:00 PM
Tuesday Service 6:00 PM
Everyone Welcome!
Pastor: Brother B. J. Evans
Associate Pastor: Lee Roy Anderson

FAITH MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
Bomont, WV
Sunday Service 10:00 AM
and 6:00 PM
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Pastor: Nick Bird
Phone 304-548-6665

FLAT FORK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
Wednesday Prayer & Bible
Study 6:00 PM
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:30 AM
Pastor: Chris Johnson

FOLA MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM
Sunday Night Service 7:00 PM
Wednesday Adults Bible Study
& Kids for Christ 7:00 PM
Pastor: Daniel Tanner

G

GAULEY BRIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 9:45 AM
Sunday Morning Worship
11:00 AM
Junior BYF/Senior BYF
6:00 PM
Sunday Evening Worship
7:00 PM
Wednesday Bible Study
7:00 PM
Wednesday Kids/Children/
Youth 7:00 PM
GOSPEL LIGHT COMMUNITY CHURCH
Located on Rt. 119 at the mouth
of Gabe. Everyone welcome.
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday night 6:00 PM
Wednesday night 6:00 PM
Pastor: Rev. David Smith
GROVES CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday Service 10:00 AM
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Friday Service 7:00 PM
Pastor: Dean Rogers

H

HALLBURG BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday Sunday 10:30 AM
Sunday Night Preaching 6:00
PM
Pastor: Michael Jackson

HARTLAND COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
Wednesday Night Service
7:00 PM
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Night Service
6:00 PM
Pastor: Jeremy Holcomb

HORNERS FORK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Worship
6:00 PM
Wednesday Evening 7:00 PM
Wednesday Evening Youth
7:00 PM
Pastor: Joe Dawson

HOUSE OF PRAYER
Hansford Fork Rd, Maysel,
WV (off Rt. 36)
Pentecostal/Full Gospel
Sunday Morning 10:00 AM
Sunday Evening 6:00 PM
Wednesday evening 7:00 PM
Pastor: (304) 587-2996
(home), (304) 587-2703
(church)
Pastor: James R. Paxton

I

IDA BAPTIST CHURCH
Bentree
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM
Wednesday Prayer Service &
Bible Study 7:00 PM
Wednesday BYF 7:00 PM.
All ages welcome. Also
have crafts, etc., all children
welcome.
Pastor: Larry Skaggs

INDORE BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday Worship 10:00 AM
Sunday Class 11:00-12:30
Preaching Lunch
12:30-1:30 PM
Wednesday Service
6:30-7:30 PM
Everyone welcome!

IVYDALE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Worship Service 11:00
Everyone Welcome!
304-395-9990
Pastor: Freddie Elliott

J

JODIE BAPTIST CHURCH
Come Worship with Us!
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Morning Worship 11:00 AM
Evening Service 7:00 PM
Wednesday (BYF) 7:00 PM
Wednesday Night 7:00 PM

JOHNSON CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
Vineyard Ridge
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Night Service
7:00 PM
Wednesday Night 7:00 PM

JUBILEE MOUNTAIN CHURCH
103 Main Street, Clay, WV
25043
Sunday 10:00 A.M. - 12 noon
For more info call 304-587-
4779
Pastor: David Davis

L

LAUREL FORK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH of Adonijah
Sunday Morning 10:00 AM
Sunday Night 7:00 PM
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Youth Meeting 7:00 PM

LEATHERWOOD FREEWILL BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Service 7:00 PM
Wednesday Services 7:00 PM

LIBERTY ADVENT CHRISTIAN CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM
Wednesday Night: Bible
Study/Prayer Meeting and
Youth Group 7:00 PM **Pastor:**
John Barnhouse

LICKFORK BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 10:00 every
Sunday Morning
Sunday Night Services
7:00 PM
Wednesday 7:00 PM
Come worship with us!
Pastor: Herb Vance

LIGHTHOUSE BAPTIST
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Mark Dudley
Phone 304-286-5909

LITTLE LAUREL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Morning Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Worship
6:00 PM
Everyone Welcome!
Pastor: David McLaughlin

LIVING GOD WORSHIP CENTER
We invite you to come and
worship with us.
Thursday Evening 7:00 PM
Sunday Morning 10:00 AM
Pastor: Cecil Lee

LIZEMORE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
Sunday School 10-11:00 AM
Church Service 11-12 Noon
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Pastor: Robert Thomas

M

MAYSEL COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00
Sunday Night 6:00 PM
Monday Night Service
6:00 PM
Wednesday Night Prayer
Meeting/Bible Study 6:00 PM
Everyone welcome!

MAYSEL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Everyone Welcome
Pastor: Jim Hamrick

MIDDLE CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Night 6:00 PM
Wednesday Night 7:00 PM
Pastor: John Osborne

MT. OLIVE COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Preaching 7:00 PM
Wednesday Prayer Meeting

Everyone welcome!

MUD FORK CHURCH
Sunday & Jr. Worship
Service 10:00 AM Sunday
School 11:00 AM Sunday
Night 6:00 PM Wednesday
Night & Jr.

Church Service 7:00 PM
Everyone Welcome!
Pastor: Christopher Stout

N

NEBO BAPTIST CHURCH
Preaching every Sunday
Morning at 10:00 AM

Sunday School 11:00 AM
Preaching, Prayer Meeting
Wednesday at 7:30 PM

NEW ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Service 11:00 AM
Sunday Night 7:00 PM
Wednesday Night Prayer
Meeting 7:00 PM
Please join us in Praise!
Pastor: Gary Walker

NEWTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching every Sunday
11:00 AM
Pastor: Kenneth Boggs

NEWTON BAPTIST CHURCH

Adult Choir Practice Sun. 9 AM
Sunday School 9:45 AM
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday Night Service 6:00 PM
Wednesday Night Prayer Meet-

ing & Bible Study 7:00PM
Pastor: Darius Walker
Pastor Emeritus: Ron Fisher

NOAH'S ARK FULL GOSPEL CHURCH
Thursday 7:00 PM
Sunday 7:00 PM
Pastor: R.J. Mullins, Sr.

O

O'BRIEN CHRISTIAN CHURCH Sunday School
10:00 AM Preaching after
Sunday School. Wednesday
Prayer Meeting 7:00 PM
Pastor: Jason Belt

OVAPA METHODIST CHURCH
Preaching every Sunday at
9:45 PM
Sunday School 10:30 AM
Sunday School on the 2nd
Sunday is at 10:00 AM
Wednesday 7:00 PM
Phone 304-587-2955 **Pastors:**
Cindy & Roger Dunlap

OTTERLICK COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Night Service
6:00 PM
Bible Study Thursday
6:00 PM
Pastor: Gene Copen

P

PEOPLES COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Wednesday Night 7:00 PM
Sunday Night Service 7:00 PM
Take time out for Jesus, he
took time our for you. **Pastor:**
Freddie Schoolcraft

PISGAH FREEWILL BAPTIST CHURCH Sunday
School 10:00 AM Sunday
Evening Bible Study &
preaching 6:00 PM **Pastor:**
Dennis Vance

PLEASANT DALE BAPTIST CHURCH Sunday
School 10:00 AM Preaching
Sunday 11:00 AM Wednesday
night Bible Study 7:00 PM
Saturday Night Preaching
Pastor: Wayne Litton

PLEASANT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH Sunday
School 10:00 AM Preaching
11:00 AM
Sunday Evening 6:30 PM
Wednesday Night 6:30 PM
Everyone welcome.
Pastor: Wayne Smith

PROCIOS COMMUNITY CHURCH Welcomes You!
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:15 AM
Bible Study 2nd, 4th, 5th
Wednesday Night 6:30 PM
Pastor: David Walker

Q

QUEEN SHOALS F.G.C. CHURCH
Sunday Morning 10:00 AM
Sunday Night 7:00 PM
Thursday Night 7:00 PM
Everyone Welcome! **Pastor:**
Scott Means

R

RISEN LORD CATHOLIC CHURCH at Maysel Sunday
Liturgy 8:30 AM fol- lowed
by Religious Education 9:30
AM
Wednesday Liturgy 6:00 PM
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Father Matheus Ro SVD
Pastoral Associates: Father Dominijus Boak SVD

ROGERS FORK BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Saturday Prayer Meeting
7:00 PM
Sunday Worship 7:00 PM
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Delbert McKenzie

RUSH FORK COMMUNITY CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 2nd & 4th Sunday
11:00 AM
Every 1st and 3rd Sunday
Singing or Preaching
11:00 AM
Wednesday Prayer Service &
Bible Study 7:00 PM
Come see us in church.
Pastor: Harry Dobbins

S

STRANGE CREEK CHURCH
Sunday Morning 10:00 AM
Preaching 10:30 AM Sunday
School 11:00 AM Thursday
Service 7:00 PM Everyone
welcome!

T

THE AMERICAN CHAPEL AT ELKHURST
Saturday Services 7:00 PM
Sunday School 10:00 AM

Pastor: Hiram Lewis

TRINITY MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH Sunday
School 10:00 AM Preaching
11:00 AM
Sunday Worship 6:00 PM
Wednesday Night Service
7:00 PM.
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Clifford Samples

U

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF LIZEMORES
Sunday Worship 11:00 AM
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Service 6:00 PM
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Everyone welcome **Pastor:**
Don Dobbins

UNITY GOSPEL TABERNACLE
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM
Sunday Night 6:00 PM
Wednesday Prayer Service
7:00 PM
Everyone welcome!

V

VALLEY RIDGE CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Bible Study Wednesday Night
7:00 PM
Everyone is welcome to
attend.

W

WALLBACK METHODIST CHURCH Preaching 1st, 3rd,
5th Sun- days 9:45 AM
Bible Study Wednesday Eve-
ning 7:00 PM
Everyone welcome.
Pastor: Rev. Stewart Cottrell

WALNUT GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Preaching 1st & 3rd Sundays
11:00 AM
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Pastor: (304) 332-5503 **Pastor:**
Jimmy Adkins

WALNUT MEMORIAL CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 10:00 AM Thursday
Evening Service 7:30 PM
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Lester Tanner

WHITE PILGRIM METHODIST CHURCH
Preaching Sunday 9:45 AM
Sunday School 11:00 AM
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Paul Coon

WHITESTAR TABERNACLE CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Sunday Night 6:30 PM
Wednesday Night 6:30 PM
Pastor: Rev. Mike Hall

WIDEN BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Preaching 11:00 AM
Sunday Night Service
6:00 PM
Wednesday Night Service
6:00 PM
Everyone welcome!
Pastor: Randy Tinney

WINGS OF DELIVERANCE APOSTOLIC PENTECOSTAL CHURCH
Rt. 4, 1/4 miles below Maysel
on the left
Sunday Morning 10:00 AM
Sunday Night 6:00 PM
Wednesday Night 7:00 PM
Come worship the Lord with
us!
Phone: (304) 587-7410 **Pastor:**
Jerry Hanshaw



FOSTER KIDS

Continued from Page 1

2023 legislative session, state senators gathered to re-view the budget for the Department of Health and Human Resources.

Interim DHHR Secretary Dr. Jeff Coben reminded lawmakers he'd only been in the position for seven weeks. His tenure with the department would last another five months, before he returned to his duties at West Virginia University's School of Public Health.

As Coben ran through a slide presentation of the budget highlights, a slide caught the eye of Sen. Ben Queen, R-Harrison. It laid out billions of dollars the agency had received in extra COVID-era federal funding. And for several of the grants, money hadn't been spent.

"Are we sending federal funds back that we're not using?" Queen asked Coben.

"We do some, yes," Coben replied.

A month later, West Virginia sent back nearly \$5 million for two grants through the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, earmarked to help foster kids.

***"It's ridiculous. It's one of the most embarrassing things West Virginia can say that they do."* - Cathy Wallace, Attorney**

The idea behind the program, named after the late U.S. senator from Rhode Island who sponsored the legislation that created it, is to give states money to help prepare kids for adult life after foster care. One pot of money can be spent in a variety of ways to help kids learn the necessary skills to live independently. The other helps pay for post-secondary college or vocational training. The federal government covers 80% of the cost, while the state has to kick in the rest.

But frequently, West Virginia hasn't spent the money. It wasn't just that extra COVID money: The state failed to spend all of the money from Chafee grants more than half of the time between 2010 and 2023.

This isn't just a problem in West Virginia. Earlier this year, a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that 29 states returned extra pandemic funds for independent living. Twenty-five returned at least part of the extra grant for education and training. And even among the regular annual grants, the agency found that states sent back millions of dollars every year from 2018-2022.

For Jennifer Pokempner of the Youth Law Center, this unspent money doesn't indicate a lack of need; rather, that states aren't doing a good job telling kids what's available.

"It seems very clear that there's a real high need for services," she said. "And I think states would benefit from really being a lot clearer about the programs, doing more outreach."

Nowhere is that more true than in West Virginia, which for years has led the nation in the highest percentage of kids in foster care. The system has been chronically overwhelmed with shortages of social workers and foster homes, leaving kids languishing in institutions and living in hotel rooms.

Chafee is meant for kids like Jaiden Holt who need extra help to close the gaps created by years spent in the foster care system. When this money is spent wisely, it can help former foster kids build a steadier foundation for their adult lives.

Take Maria Bass. When she turned 18 after years of living in shelters, juvenile detention centers and treatment facilities, she faced long odds. But she had a trusting relationship with her state social worker, and when the worker explained Maria would be able to access additional benefits if she voluntarily extended her time in the state's custody, she agreed.

"She wants what's best for me," she said of her caseworker.

By doing so, Maria has been able to pay for her college courses toward earning a medical assistant degree at West Virginia Junior College. She has a one-bedroom apartment overlooking the Kanawha River in Charleston — money from this program covers the entire rent. And this assistance has given her the breathing room to prepare for and dream about the better life she wants to give her unborn son. He's due in February, and his crib, bouncer and playmat already fill Maria's apartment in anticipation.

"My son is not going to have the experience I had as a kid," she said fiercely. "I'm going to do way better."

But an analysis of the data West Virginia submits to the federal government shows that more often than not, kids like Maria don't get any services through the program. Between 2018 and 2023, only 13% of the kids who aged out of West Virginia's foster care system got any of these federally-funded services — far below the U.S. average of 81%. Of the West Virginia kids who did get support through this program, they got fewer individual services than U.S. kids on average.

WV kids get fewer of these federally-funded services

In a statement, a spokesperson for West Virginia's child welfare agency blamed the low participation rates on a broader lack of social services in some parts of the state. But two of the major benefits this federal money can provide are rent and education subsidies that theoretically should be available throughout the state.

Since 2023, DoHS officials say they have expanded independent living options for former foster kids.

"Increasing awareness and developing partnerships remain a priority to ensure youth understand which services are available to them," Angel Hightower wrote.

...and WV got these federally-funded services to only a small percentage of youth who aged out of foster care.

When West Virginia doesn't connect kids with these services, the state misses opportunities and the money goes unspent. And lawyers, current and former CPS workers and former foster kids say often, it all comes down to the caseworkers: whether they have enough time to spend helping older teens plan for their adult lives, and whether they've developed a close enough relationship to ensure the teenage foster kid takes their advice.

It all hinges on the caseworker

For Wyatt Pitcock, an absent Child Protective Services worker almost caused him to miss his chance to tap into the opportunities that West Virginia promises to former foster kids.

"The CPS workers honestly didn't tell me much about what would happen after I aged out," Wyatt, now 19, said. He spent several years in foster care in Braxton County. "I wanted to go to college, but I didn't think there was any way I'd be able to afford it."

Even though Wyatt was on track to graduate high school with decent grades, his CPS worker had never mentioned MODIFY: the program run by West Virginia University to help connect qualified former foster kids with money from Chafee. Referring foster kids to that program is explicitly part of the social workers' duties when managing the cases of older teenagers.

The only reason Wyatt found out about the program was through a chance encounter: his foster sister applied for help with college, and a representative came to their apartment to talk to her and their foster mom.

"Can Wyatt get this stuff too?" Wyatt remembers his foster mom asking. The answer was yes, and the worker helped him fill out the forms.

Now, Wyatt is a sophomore at WVU. He's majoring in social work and hopes someday he can help kids like

him.

"My CPS worker was very absent whenever I was in the system," he said. "I want to get into the system and try to make it a little better. I know I'm only one person, but I'm hoping that one person can make a difference."

But over the past few years, even the most diligent and well-meaning social workers have found it difficult to spend adequate time with all of the foster children assigned to them.

Many workers have said their average caseload was in the 30s, and some have reported having as many as 50 cases at a time. And because of the way the state calculates cases, each case often has multiple children. That high caseload has been attributed to high vacancy rates among CPS workers combined with large numbers of children in the system.

In the past two years, the state has added more positions and reported progress in filling vacancies: as of October, 7.5% of the allotted CPS positions were vacant, down from more than 27% in 2023.

But as recently as 2024, agency officials noted that simply filling the vacancies wouldn't be enough to achieve the target caseload of 10 cases per worker. If the remaining vacancies were filled today, West Virginia would still need dozens more workers to reach that goal. A state spokesperson didn't answer a question about what the current average caseload is for social workers.

Earlier this year, Mountain State Spotlight revealed that state officials fall far short of giving foster kids the mental health care they need, and that the state is increasingly putting the burden of children's needs onto grandparents without providing adequate help for those families. We also reported that, despite years of talk about the problem, the state still struggles to hire and retain child welfare workers.

Last month, a federal audit found severe deficiencies in the way CPS workers investigate child abuse, problems the state agency attributed to the longstanding crisis of overly-burdened workers with high caseloads.

After kids enter West Virginia's custody, these same out-of-control caseloads often mean CPS workers have no time to spend on seemingly less urgent tasks, like creating a plan with all kids older than 14 to help them work toward independence.

"Transition planning is a vital part of the youth's case plan," West Virginia's Foster Care Policy reads. "The plan must be specific for the youth and contain information that will assist the youth in their successful transition to adulthood."

***"My CPS worker was very absent whenever I was in the system. I want to get into the system and try to make it a little better. I know I'm only one person, but I'm hoping that one person can make a difference."* - Wyatt Pitcock, former foster child**

Part of that is working with the foster kid to identify the skills they need to learn, and crucially, whether any of these services can be paid for using Chafee funds from the federal government.

"I think the whole thing is rushed," said a current CPS worker in Southern West Virginia who didn't want to be named in fear of retribution from agency officials. "I think because the caseloads are so huge and there are other cases that may be a little more serious, I don't think the time that's taken is appropriate."

Some of the current and former workers interviewed for this story said they had never done transition plans with 14-year-olds. And even workers who were familiar with transition plans said they were unaware of some of the federally-funded services available for these youth.

Until recently, Amie Andersen was a CPS worker in McDowell County. She said more than half of the kids she worked with were teenagers.

She thought back to one of her most memorable cases: "I've never met a more intelligent teenage boy," she said. He entered foster care as a teenager, and they put him in a temporary shelter. As Andersen tried to find him a more permanent placement, he told her his plan for adulthood was to live out of his car.

"Had I known there were more resources there for him that I could have plugged into for him early on, I think he wouldn't have had to struggle so hard," she said.

Amanda Barnett was able to benefit from Chafee funds at a young age: when she was 16, after a variety of failed placements, the state moved her into her own apartment in Putnam County.

"This child isn't working in group homes, she's not working in foster care, she's not working here, she's not working there, she can't go home to her family, what else do we have left?" Amanda said of what she believed were her social worker's thoughts at the time.

This wasn't a semi-independent option, like many run by nonprofits around the state to help older foster kids ease into their independence. It was her own apartment, where she lived by herself. She didn't have a driver's license or a car. And with no other support, problems emerged. Amanda said she had a tendency to spend too much of her stipend at the local Dollar General, which was one of the only places she could walk to. Eventually, her CPS worker found alcohol in her apartment.

"They didn't like the way that I was handling things," she said. "But I mean, I'm a 16-year-old. You give a 16-year-old their own apartment, there's going to be a lot of problems — especially a 16-year-old that's been in the state's custody for the last five years."

The whole experience left her with the sense that she didn't have any control over her life, and no one cared. Now 23, she looks back on that time and marvels at how unprepared she was.

"They taught me nothing," she said of her CPS workers. "I figured that out all by myself, in the sense of what to do, how to live, how to exist."

There are strings attached.

Many former foster kids talk about the lack of control they felt while in the system. So, maybe it shouldn't be surprising that for many, their first act as an adult is to take that control back.

When kids in foster care turn 18, they have an option to voluntarily extend their state custody. While foster kids are eligible for Chafee services starting at age 14, some of the most significant benefits, including subsidized rent and money for college, are for older kids. By choosing to stay involved in the system, a young adult can unlock those benefits.

But advocates in every corner of West Virginia said it's rare they can convince a kid to sign up.

For 28 years, L. Scott Briscoe has represented thousands of kids in Boone County in court as their guardian ad litem. And as each kid gets closer to their 18th birthday, he's tried to get them to consider opting in to more support.

He said of those thousands of kids, only two have agreed.

"I've made the pitch in every possible way to every 17-year-old that I know. I try to dangle that carrot of money in front of them," Briscoe said. "I have tried in so many ways to explain the opportunities for education, housing, vocational training, money in their pockets. But time after time after time, every single kid says to me, 'I don't want it. There are strings attached.'"

These agreements are sometimes referred to as "extended foster care" or even "signing yourself back into the system." But in reality, it's not the same as foster



Illustration by Brenda Pinnell / Mountain State Spotlight

care for children. Instead, this program is a safety net for young adults. In return for agreeing to stay out of trouble with the law, and to hold down a part-time job or pursue a degree or vocational certificate, former foster kids can get several years of benefits. And in theory, West Virginia gets several more years of checking in with these kids and trying to set them on a path for future success.

"The problem is, it takes a huge paradigm shift on the part of the child to recognize what they're being offered. Because their experience has been in the system where everything has been taken away from them," said Layne Diehl, an attorney in Martinsburg. "I think they just truly do not believe what you're telling them. They just don't buy it. They think you're lying to them."

Advocates around the state and country say that with clearer explanations of the benefits — as well as the ways the extended foster care program differs from traditional foster care — more kids might be willing to remain involved with the system as young adults and take advantage of the federal funding.

This support could have really helped Orion Flynn, who lives in Huntington. He aged out of the system in 2023 after more than a decade bouncing among treatment centers, group homes, temporary shelters and short-term foster families.

Looking back on his experience two years later, he has a laundry list of the skills he wished he had been able to learn before he aged out of care: cooking, laundry, doing taxes, applying for jobs.

"Various life skills that are small, but whenever you stack them all together, it just makes life a little harder not knowing them," he said.

He said he was interested in learning more about what his options were for independent living support once he turned 18. But when he asked his CPS worker about it, he said she explained that he would probably have to start out in more of a group home setting, before moving into his own apartment.

But Orion had been to group homes before.

"You were treated like a number on a sheet a lot of times. I didn't want to experience that again," he said. "Seeing how that was presented as my only option for getting any help after foster care, I kind of stopped pursuing it."

Filling in the gaps

When these youth aren't properly supported, the effects can be seen in towns and cities across West Virginia.

In Charleston, Traci Strickland runs the Kanawha Valley Collective, a nonprofit that helps people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

"This year we have seen more people directly aging out of foster care," Strickland said. "Within the past month, I've had three calls directly related to people who have just aged out of foster care."

It doesn't have to be like this. But experts say convincing more former foster kids to accept help and support after age 18 will likely involve a reimagining of the program, as well as its requirements.

Other states have tried various approaches. In Illinois, for example, youth generally remain in the state's custody until they're 21. In Washington State, lawmakers increased participation rates for kids over 18 when they removed a requirement, which still exists in West Virginia, for youth to work or be in school to keep getting help.

Outside of the child welfare system, nonprofits have seen success in reaching former foster kids who want nothing else to do with the state. Many programs have placed an emphasis on mentorship, helping foster kids and former foster kids develop trusting relationships with adults, who can then offer advice and support.

At the FPC Hope Center in Charleston, director Kyla Nichols said their services aren't so different from what the state provides with federal funding. But most of the kids she works with chose not to extend their custody.

"I think they're more willing to seek services through programs like Hope Center because they're voluntary," she said. "They know they have a say, they can access as many or as little services as they choose."

Whether kids get support through federal funding while they're in West Virginia's child welfare system or through places like Hope Center afterwards, advocates agree there's a sweet spot. It's easier to help a kid before they've experienced homelessness, struggled with substance abuse or been incarcerated, rather than after.

"I'm old enough now where I'm seeing a lot of my old clients are now parents and are back in the system too," attorney Cathy Wallace said. "This is one of the tools that we have that can help break that cycle: giving them an education and giving them opportunities when they didn't have it before and giving them a support system to allow them to do that. And if we're not going to be able to provide that, then I think it hurts our ultimate mission of breaking the cycle and raising children who could be productive citizens."

In St. Albans, Jaiden Holt has a new mission: to try to figure out how to unlock the funding for barber school that he should be entitled to as a former foster kid.

"I still want to go, it's just about figuring that stuff out," he said.

He's heard from a worker who can help him apply for the program, and his mom is going to help him navigate the process. And he's allowing himself to dream — just a little — about what the future might hold. Like that someday he'll own his own business with a barbershop in the front and a lounge in the back.

"Then you gotta call it 'Chop It Up,'" he joked. "Get it? Cause, like in the back you're chopping it up."

He hopes it's not too late.

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