

2025 EDITION

Opportunity Passport



**The Journey to Building the
West Virginia Miracle**

Presented By: The Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy

PREAMBLE

*Turning Potential into Progress
Across the Mountain State*



West Virginia stands on the precipice of a transformative new era—one rich with unprecedented potential. Over the next four years, we are presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine the legacy of the Mountain State, moving away from its historical struggles of government overreach and toward a future of freedom, opportunity, and prosperity.

The Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy is proud to present our **2025 Opportunity Passport**, a strategic blueprint that outlines five key policy solutions aimed at realizing the "West Virginia Miracle."

This is only the beginning. Over the coming years, the Cardinal team will unveil more than 20 forward-thinking policy initiatives designed to lay the foundation for a decade of growth and innovation.

These policy solutions are not merely bold. They are visionary.

Achieving this transformation will require a commitment to embracing innovation and empowering the great people of our state. Together, we will ensure that West Virginia becomes the most competitive state in the region—a sought-after destination to work, live, and raise a family.

2025 Policy Priorities

AT A GLANCE

ELIMINATE

Certificate of Need

REFORM

Occupational Licensing

REQUIRE

Public Sector Skills-Based Hiring

STOP

Civil Asset Forfeiture

REDUCE

Unnecessary Boards and Commissions

ABOUT THE CARDINAL INSTITUTE

Mission

Founded in 2014, the Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy, Inc. is a 501c(3) non-profit dedicated to researching, developing, and communicating effective free-market public policies for West Virginia.

CardinalInstitute.com

Vision - The West Virginia Miracle

The Cardinal Institute envisions an economic turnaround that will transform West Virginia into a beacon of prosperity and hope. For this miracle to occur, it must be built on four pillars: economic freedom, education freedom, worker freedom, and a culture of freedom encapsulated in the state's motto and founding ethos, *Montani Semper Liberi* – Mountaineers Are Always Free.

NEXT STOP...

Economic Freedom

Education Freedom

Worker Freedom

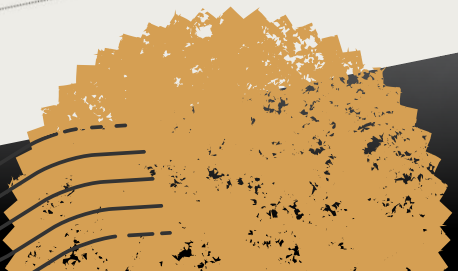
Montani Semper
Liberi



BOARDING PASS

OPPORTUNITY

Destination
The Wild & Wonderful
Mountain State





2025 POLICY PRIORITIES

ELIMINATE CERTIFICATE OF NEED

Certificate of Need (CON) requirements mandate that healthcare providers receive permission from a regulatory body to open a business, expand an existing facility, or purchase new medical equipment. Obtaining a CON is time-consuming and expensive, discouraging the creation of new clinics and hospitals because providers do not have adequate resources to navigate the process.

CON laws bolster monopolies by shielding large corporations from competition. This contributes to a rise in the prices of health care. Certain areas lack appropriate medical care because facilities aren't able to operate due to West Virginia's restrictive certificate of need program.

The citizens of this state would greatly benefit from the termination of the CON program as access to health care would spread, prices would decline, and regulatory obstacles would be demolished.

In a state with an aging, rural population, CON laws need to be revised to allow the expansion of quality health care into areas where people are historically underserved. This also includes placing attention on individuals affected by the drug crisis and mental health epidemic by opening new rehabilitation centers free from CON hurdles. Barriers in this industry are detrimental to West Virginians' well-being, and policymakers need to consider a drastic overhaul of the status quo.

REFORM OCCUPATIONAL LICENSING

Occupational licenses are government-issued "permission slips" to permit people to work in certain professions, such as cosmetology and architecture. These licenses serve as a nuisance barrier to work in most states and adversely affect those with a criminal record from pursuing certain careers.

One major improvement to licensing would be to codify universal recognition of licenses issued by other states. The energy and money required to attain one of these coveted licenses is already overbearing, so it is irrational to force proven workers to restart the process if they move to West Virginia. Moving towards universal recognition has proven to bolster state economies as individuals can smoothly integrate into the workforce without fretting about licensure status.

West Virginia has fallen short of taking legislative action to mitigate the effects of occupational licenses, the burdens of which are wide-ranging. This prevents people from working, and in turn, raises costs of services for consumers. West Virginia has also balked at implementing universal recognition.

In 2021, a bill supporting universal recognition passed the West Virginia House of Delegates but did not become law before the conclusion of the session. Nevertheless, the benefits of making the

interstate transfer of licenses an uncomplicated process would be extraordinary as the labor pool would expand, the economy would be stimulated, and services would be provided more cheaply and abundantly.

West Virginia, with a depleted labor force and declining population, would greatly benefit from marketing its recognition of out-of-state licenses to recruit skilled professionals to the Mountain State.

REQUIRE SKILLS-BASED HIRING FOR PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS

Hiring practices need to place greater emphasis on candidates' skills and experiences. Employers overlook talented, productive workers when they include unnecessary degree requirements on applications. Skills-based hiring not only encourages a wider applicant pool but also broadens the range of opportunities for those who lack a college degree. Likewise, employers benefit from attracting knowledgeable candidates who can display their desired qualities rather than their credentials.

Public sector jobs can be the frontrunner in sponsoring competency-based hiring. Too many job applications for public sector duties still mandate four-year undergraduate degrees in West Virginia. This eliminates the ability for certain passionate and accomplished individuals to apply because they have not completed a college education. The Mountain State lacks a strong labor force, and archaic criteria like degree requirements are one reason people remain unemployed or underemployed.

Additionally, there are proven benefits to prioritizing skills over diplomas – in certain professions – especially if the person has industry-specific experience. Veterans, former stay-at-home parents, and underprivileged youth are just some groups that may lack the resources to attain a college degree but still have the aptitude to meaningfully contribute to a state agency. If the public sector emphasizes hard and soft skills, then West Virginians who have been historically sidelined from working would feel empowered to explore new career opportunities. This groundbreaking improvement in hiring may inspire the private sector to follow suit, transforming West Virginia into a beacon of hope for worker freedom.

STOP LEGALIZED THEFT BY ENDING CIVIL ASSET FORFEITURE

Civil asset forfeiture criminalizes personal property, including cars, houses, and money, suspected of being involved in criminal activity. An unrestrained interpretation of this procedure puts the security of private property in jeopardy as citizens must navigate the court system to retrieve their property – even if they have not been convicted of any wrongdoing.

Additionally, civil forfeiture serves as the glue of the cozy relationship between law enforcement and state government: forfeited assets are used to fund police departments and sheriff's offices, which incentivizes the immoral practice of policing for profit. Even though material property serves as the defendant in many civil forfeiture cases, the scheme violates the Constitution, undercuts the justice system, and invalidates the principle of "innocent until proven guilty." Stripping people of their possessions without legal justification is draconian, which is why the framework of civil asset forfeiture should be abolished.

The Mountain State has received lackluster ratings from watchdog groups concerning civil forfeiture laws. Striking down the practice is especially important in West Virginia because law enforcement departments that lack funding may be more inclined to abuse civil asset forfeiture to chase money at the expense of innocent citizens.

State statutes place an inadequate burden of proof on the government, while individuals with a valid connection to the detained property must prove their guiltlessness. All earnings are appropriated to law enforcement and equity-sharing funds with federal agencies. West Virginia lawmakers need to take action to eliminate this groundless and damaging tactic in favor of mandating a criminal conviction before asset forfeiture. Eliminating this practice secures the civil liberties and fundamental property rights of the accused, mitigates corrupt policing, and strengthens respect for the criminal justice system in West Virginia.

REDUCE UNNECESSARY BOARDS & COMMISSIONS

Consolidating, restructuring, or outright abolishing certain boards and commissions can be a useful step in creating a smaller, more restrained government. These reforms can also prevent ongoing organizational flaws associated with red tape and political inertia. Implementing a process to analyze existing groups can deliver valuable information for policymakers to accurately assess the bureaucratic state within West Virginia.

West Virginia would be well-served to pass legislation calling for an independent committee to review the performance of boards and commissions regularly. The state could follow the example set by Iowa in 2023 and 2024 in reorganizing, consolidating, and eliminating executive branch agencies, as well as other boards and commissions.

Related boards would be consolidated to enhance services, and outdated boards would be terminated with their responsibilities undertaken by another agency or eliminated. Certain boards and commissions mandated by federal law and legislative actions would need to be preserved, but categorizing other groups from most to least important after an extensive review would illustrate where administrative overhauls should be focused.

Trimming the bureaucracy will allow for better use of taxpayer funding, a reduction in resource mismanagement, increased accountability of these agencies to legislative oversight, and protection of the rights of citizens.





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