

WEST VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

2021 FEDERAL ADVOCACY AGENDA –

REBUILDING WEST VIRGINIA'S CITIES



West Virginia cities are the building blocks of good government, and centers of commerce, culture and education in the Mountain State. The West Virginia Municipal League and its 230 member cities, towns and villages will be active in advocacy to the U.S. Congress, the White House, federal agencies, and key stakeholders on important federal legislation, regulation, policy and resource issues in 2021. Rebuilding West Virginia cities from the impacts of COVID-19 and other challenges must be a top federal priority in the Biden/Harris Administration and 117th Congress. We call for robust national investment and innovative, non-partisan and common sense solutions in Washington DC in 2021, including:

- 1.) **Solid Funding for Key Domestic Appropriations that Support Local Communities:**
Congress should maintain and enhance its investment in FY2022 domestic appropriations that keep local communities strong. This should include these 10 critical areas for annual funding:
 - Increase **Appalachian Regional Commission POWER** grants for economic diversification to \$1 billion
 - Fund **HUD Community Development Block Grants** at \$3.5 billion
 - Boost **EPA Clean Water SRF** grants to \$9 billion and **Drinking Water SRF** grants to \$5 billion, and require states to provide a substantial portion of these funds to localities in the form of non-loan resources include grants and debt principal forgiveness
 - Boost **U.S. Department of Transportation** grant funding for local projects, including \$4 billion for National Infrastructure Investments (BUILD Grants), \$900 million for Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grants, and \$1 billion for a renewed “Transportation, Community, & System Preservation” (TCSP) program.
 - Fund **Economic Development Administration (EDA)** Public Works, Economic Adjustment, Assistance to Coal Communities and other grants with at least \$500 million
 - Fully fund U.S. **EPA Brownfield grants** at \$350 million, as proposed in the H.R. 4 Moving Forward Act
 - Fund **USDA Rural Development Funding** at fully authorized level of \$2.33 billion, and provide flexible funding for community broadband projects to enable “Gigabit City” deployments in West Virginia
 - Increase funding for first responders through \$500 million to the **FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant**, \$500 million for **SAFER firefighter** personnel grants, and \$250 million for **Department of Justice COPS Hiring** grants
 - Adjust National Park Service’s **Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership** eligibility criteria to make these funds accessible to cities of less than 50,000 population – which includes every WV city, who are thus barred now from this program.
 - Provide \$150 million for **National Endowment for the Arts** grants to communities and local institutions, and \$125 million for the **Historic Preservation Fund** at the National Park Service



WVML and West Virginia cities support a return to **congressionally-directed grant projects in the appropriations process**, which were part of Congress’ role from the founding of the Republic until just recently. Such “Community Project” earmarks should be focused on public-purpose projects by municipal and non-profit, under a process that is transparent, equitable, and based upon merit criteria.

2.) **A Bold Infrastructure Authorization:** America must close the massive infrastructure backlog in order to rebuild the flagging economy, particularly in areas of under-investment including West Virginia. It is time to rebuild together and get serious about \$3 trillion National Infrastructure legislation which:

- Takes an “all infrastructure” approach that includes transportation (including FAST reauthorization) along with water/sewer infrastructure, broadband and telecommunications, smart cities technologies, renewable and reliable energy, clean vehicle infrastructure, brownfields, and green infrastructure.
- Fosters innovation, sustainable and resilient approaches, and meaningful local control over infrastructure investments in our communities through more decision-making authority for Metropolitan Planning Organizations.
- West Virginia must have strong and accessible passenger rail service to connect to the broader region, and WV cities support the creation of a Regional Rail Corridor that better links passenger rail service including both Amtrak and MARC Train, through the creation of multi-state passenger rail compacts among West Virginia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio.



3.) **Support for Appalachian Innovation & Economic Diversification:** While West Virginia maintains faith and support in our traditional economic sectors, our state needs support for economic sector diversification and innovation.

- WVML endorses the recent proposal for a “**Marshall Plan for Middle America**” to keep communities strong as the fossil-fuel economy continues to decline. (*see e.g.*, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/11/22/marshall-plan-middle-america-eight-mayors/ and www.sustainablebusiness.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/mp4ma_roadmap_-_final_1.pdf), and supports legislation such as the “Marshall Plan for Coal Country Act” (S. 4306) and the “Environmental Justice for All Act” (H.R. 5936) to implement these efforts.
- Federal programs should enhance support for R&D, industry and institutional partnerships, pilot initiatives and other approaches to sector diversification in Appalachia. Key sectors include downstream shale gas manufacturing and other emerging manufacturing industries, higher-end tourism and outdoor recreation, tech sector approaches including cybersecurity/cloud services/data centers, and life/health sciences.
- WVML endorses the creation by Biden Administration of the “**Task Force on Coal & Power Plant Communities**”, and requests opportunities to engage with this task force.

4.) **Resources for Healthy & Resilient Communities:** WV’s citizens and families are among the most unhealthy in the nation, and need resources & new approaches to tackle these challenges.

- The opioid crisis continues to ravage West Virginia communities, destroying families and disrupting the State’s economy. As stated by the National League of Cities, while Congress has authorized billions of dollars in federal funding to states for opioid abuse prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery services, there is a lack of clarity from Congress and the Administration on how States should use the money that has left millions of dollars in federal funding unspent. Thus, Congress and the Administration must ensure that **funds appropriated for substance abuse, treatment, prevention and recovery programs are both robust and accessible to local governments.**

- According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, West Virginia has the highest rate of pre-existing conditions among non-elderly adults (37%) of any state in the nation. Congress and the Administration must commit – with real legislative enactments – that people with **preexisting health conditions** are guaranteed equal access and as-affordable or better health insurance, that **essential medical benefits** are guaranteed, that the poor have access to **affordable health insurance**, and that resources are devoted to **population health approaches** in communities.
- West Virginia has been pounded by natural disasters including floods and storms. We call on Congress, the Department of Homeland Security, and other federal agencies to maintain resources for **pre-disaster hazard mitigation, resiliency planning, and disaster recovery**, through approaches such as the FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities (BRIC) funding, including more funding for all-hazards planning by smaller & rural cities.



5.) **Tax Incentives for Revitalization of Downtowns:** Many West Virginia cities are determined to restore grand but deteriorated downtown buildings for new economic investment and improved quality of life that can retain and attract young and entrepreneurial workers and families. Federal tax incentives for downtown rehabilitation are critical for these efforts in aging West Virginia communities. WVML calls on Congress to:



- Continue the **Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit**, and to permanently increase this credit from 20% to 30% of qualified expenses for projects costing less than \$2.5 million. Also, Congress should create greater flexibility for municipalities and nonprofit organizations to access Historic Tax Credit benefits. WVML supports legislation such as the bipartisan “HTC-GO” bills proposed in the 116th Congress (H.R. 2825/S. 2615).
- Pass the “**REHAB Act**” – Revitalizing Economies, Housing, and Business Act”, a bipartisan bill introduced in the 116th Congress (H.R. 6175) that would create federal tax credits for redeveloping heteroring and blighted buildings.
- WVML also calls for a renewal of the **New Market Tax Credit**, and for the preservation and shoring up of the 4% and 9% tax credits for private investment in affordable housing (**LIHTC**).

6.) **Support for Anchor Institutions in Communities:** The new economy in cities is being built in large part around anchor institutions including hospitals, health systems, colleges and universities, innovation districts, and other anchors. WVML urges Congress to appropriate funding for a new, \$50 million “Anchoring Neighborhoods, Communities & Housing to Opportunities for Revitalization” (ANCHOR) program to provide strategic planning grants to localities that partner with eds, meds & other anchor institutions on economic revitalization initiatives.



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