

New Arrivals

Karen is a 28-year employee with the State of WV, starting her career with DHHR in the then Central Office Accounts Payable section. She has worked in various other DHHR offices throughout her state tenure, as well as for other agencies, holding such titles as Office Assistant, Accounting Technician, Administrative Services Assistant, Administrative Services Manager, and HR Generalist. She served as the Office Manager for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and the Assistant Director of HR for the Division of Corrections. She most recently worked in the HR Department for the Division of Administrative Services under the Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety, now known as the Department of Homeland Security.

Karen currently lives in Cross Lanes, WV and is mommy to three dogs and two cats. She absolutely loves animals of all kinds and used to volunteer at the Kanawha-Charleston Humane Association shelter on Greenbrier St. in Charleston. She has one step-daughter, who blessed her with a sweet grand-baby. In her spare time, Karen is a "Jeep Girl" who loves to hit the mud out on the trails. She is an admin of one Jeep Club and belongs to several others.



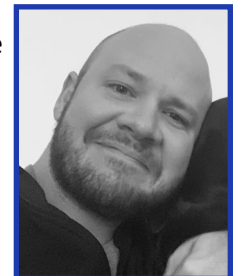
Haley Russell began working as the WV Human Right Commission's Docket Clerk in January of 2024. She graduated from West Virginia State University in 2018, with a Bachelor's in Criminal Justice and a Minor in Psychology. While working for the WV Bureau of Social Services from 2020-2022, she completed her Master's in Cybersecurity through the University of Charleston. She enjoys reading, playing video games, and traveling.



Montana Saunders graduated from the University of Phoenix with a Bachelor of Science in Business with a concentration in Finance in 2015, and received a Masters of Management in 2018. She began work as an employment program associate with Workforce, and recently transferred to the Human Rights Commission as an Investigator I. Her goals are making a positive impact on what the commission does for the community.



Mark Bates worked for several years in the WV Department of Homeland Security as an EEO Investigator for the Division of Corrections. He is currently finishing his Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice through West Virginia State University. Mark is excited to be a new part of the team for the West Virginia Human Rights Commission. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his Labrador (Anniston) whom he adopted from Saint Mary's Correctional Center after she was unable to keep her excitement at bay during service dog school. Though Annie failed her service dog certification, she has become Mark's best buddy.



Women's and Girl's Day



The West Virginia Women's Commission held their annual Women's and Girl's Day event on March 5, 2024, at the West Virginia Cultural Center. This annual event brings women and girls from across the state to learn about state government, leadership opportunities, and networking.

Pictured are Director Tia Welch, Cheryl Vance and Montana Saunders who had the honor of attending this one day event.

Black Policy Day at the Capitol

The 3rd Annual Black Policy Day was held at the Capitol on February 7, 2024. Black Policy Day was established in 2022 by Crystal Good (Black By God), Katonya Hart (Partnerships for the Arts & Education), and Dr. Shanequa Smith (WV Black Voter Impact Initiative) who shared a vision of creating space for historically oppressed and ignored groups to amplify their stories and participate in the policymaking process.



Lead Investigator Trained for Training

On March 13 and 14th, James Spenia, Investigator III, attended a virtual EEOC class titled "Train the Trainer." As a result of his successful completion of the course, Mr. Spenia is now certified by the EEOC to train investigators on how to conduct investigations into allegations of employment discrimination.

Deaf Awareness Day

On February 28th, 2024, the West Virginia Human Rights Commission (WVHRC) was invited to participate in Deaf Awareness Day at the Capitol building. The WVHRC's Director Tia Welch, Investigator II Carissa Phillips, and Docket Clerk Haley Russell, attended the event. As we were surrounded by individuals communicating through sign language, we felt a deep sense of inclusivity and appreciation for the abundance of non-verbal communication. As we walked around the event area, engaging with various exhibits, we gained valuable insights into the challenges and triumphs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, gaining a deeper understanding and respect for their experiences. As we sat in the crowd in the Upper Rotunda and watched the performances by Shoals Elementary and the WV School of the Deaf and Blind, we became immersed by the vibrant expressions of the students who were performing. For us, Deaf Awareness Day was a beneficial experience that not only taught us who we are advocating for, but one where we all came together to amplify the voices of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.



Basics of Fair Housing Training in San Francisco

Beginning January 30, 2024, through February 1, 2024, Joe Saunders and Kim Jones, Housing Investigators with WVHRC attended Basics of Fair Housing training in San Francisco, CA. In attendance were 28 people from state and local housing agencies out of AR, CA, CO, FL, IN, KY, MD, MT, NE, NJ, NY, OH, TN, TX, WA, and WV.

The training was conducted through the National Fair Housing Academy by Jeffrey Mays aka The Bow Tie Guy, Micheal D. Mitchell, Esq., and Keenya Robertson, Esq. It was an exciting and informative three-day training session that provided new information and perspectives on the Fair Housing Laws and the impact that it has on the lives of residents.

The training session provided a venue for state and local agencies to collaborate and discuss emerging issues and trends that impact housing laws. It was a unique learning opportunity to obtain different viewpoints and investigative strategies for the advancement of fair housing for all that are served within our communities.

Valentine's Day 2024

Love and Happiness fills the air at the West Virginia Human Rights Commission. Staff were treated to cupcakes and enjoyed a time of fellowship to recognize the day of Love. " Valentine's Day is recognized every year as a day to celebrate love and friendship.

Black History Month Observed

During this year's Black History Month observation in February, Our HRC Team reflected on the struggles and triumphs of African Americans throughout history, highlighting individuals and events that have played significant roles in the nation's development. Black History Month is also a time to celebrate the rich cultural heritage and achievements of the Black community. Each day we highlighted and raised awareness about Black history historians and its importance.

Executive Director Speaks at Lunch & Learn

On March 12, 2024, West Virginia Human Rights Commission Executive Director Tia L. Welch was a guest speaker for the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC), virtual Lunch & Learn series. Director Welch provided a presentation on "Becoming a Servant. Leader without Losing Yourself."

During the presentation Welch discussed the importance of servant being "first" in servant leader, styles and challenges of leadership, and the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. A big thanks to Executive Director Chad Lassister, PHRC and his team for the invitation.

Celebrating the Life of Col. Que

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Quewanncoii Casanova Stephens, 79, passed away surrounded by the love of family, friends, and mentees on January 30, 2024. Stephens dedicated 23 years of his life as an Army Officer, serving in elite units. He served two tours in Vietnam and was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. Stephens was the recipient of numerous military decorations. After military retirement, "COL Que's leadership was recognized by two Governors (Caperton and Manchin) to serve in critical positions such as Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission (1980-1994). A champion of diversity, he was a Governor's Civil Rights Day Honoree in 2008.

Stephens was a member of numerous organizations dedicated to service including life membership in Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated, Rotary, International, and numerous Veteran organizations. He was inducted into the WVSU ROTC Hall of Fame and WVSU Sports Hall of Fame for his 35 years of dedicated service to the "Yellow Jacket Nation" as an assistant football coach, photographer, and mentor to countless students, football players, and ROTC cadets.

COL Que was known for his love of photography, singing, and working with youth. He loved serving as Deacon at First Baptist Church in Charleston, WV, where he was also in charge of the photo ministry and sang in the mass choir. One of his greatest loves was serving as a member of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Male Chorus where he sang bass. "Col. Que" lived a full life, traveling the world and remained a person concerned about the welfare of others, always encouraging them to take care of themselves.

