



The Research Bureau

Changing the School Committee to District Representation

*Paul Matthews, Executive Director & CEO
Worcester Regional Research Bureau*

*August 23, 2023
More at www.wrrb.org*



Research Bureau Mission & Initiatives

Mission:

The Research Bureau serves the public interest of Greater Worcester by conducting independent, non-partisan research and analysis of public-policy issues to promote informed public debate and decision-making

Governed by an Executive Committee and 104 Member Board of Directors

Recent Report Topics:

- ✓ Reinventing Worcester
- ✓ Municipal Elections
- ✓ Worcester Boards & Commissions
- ✓ WRTA Ridership & Finances
- ✓ Dept. of Justice Pattern or Practice Investigations
- ✓ Residential Rents
- ✓ Schools' Governance, Planning, & Budgeting
- ✓ Food Security
- ✓ Community Preservation Act
- ✓ Broadband Access

WRRRB Resources on Municipal Election

November 2021

November 2021 — Brief 21-08



Bureau Brief— Changing the Worcester School Committee to District Representation

Currently, the City of Worcester's municipal Charter calls for the School Committee to be composed of "the mayor, who shall chair the committee and six members elected at-large." In response to a lawsuit, the City of Worcester is in the process of evaluating three potential structures for the School Committee in order to select one that would utilize district-based representation in replacing the current six At-Large seats.

This evaluation is being conducted by the City Council's Committee on Municipal and Legislative Operations, which is holding public meetings until December 1 (details below). The Subcommittee's recommendation will then go before the full City Council, and must be acted upon by December 7. As a result of the City Council's action, a Home Rule Petition will be filed with the Legislature to amend the City's Charter accordingly.

Following the Legislature's adoption of the Home Rule Petition, the City must then develop the specified voting districts – which notably will differ from the current five City Council Districts – and will be used to elect School Committee members from 2023 on. These Districts must contain approximately the same number of residents, and two of the Districts must be majority-minority, where Hispanic/Latino/a and Black residents together comprise a majority of the citizen voting age population. To achieve this, three options are under active consideration:

- Option #1: Mayor and 6 District seats (0 At-Large seats)
- Option #2: Mayor and 7 District seats + 1 At-Large seat
- Option #3: Mayor and 6 District seats + 2 At-Large seats

Given the legal deadline of December 7 for action by the City Council, and given the profound implications for the Worcester Public Schools, particularly with a Superintendent search getting underway, it is vital for the community to share input and perspective through this evaluative process.

Why is this change to the School Committee election process happening?

In February 2021, a federal voting rights lawsuit was filed challenging the School Committee election process by plaintiffs Worcester Interfaith, Inc., the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Inc., Worcester Branch; Casandra Bensahh; James Berry; Maritza Cruz; Holli Hill; Jessenia Kolaco; Nelly Medina; Ruth Rodriguez-Fay; and Delia Vega, represented by Lawyers for Civil Rights and Brown Rudnick, LLP. The suit was filed against the City of Worcester, naming the City Manager, Mayor, City Council, School Committee, Clerk, and Election Commissioners in their official capacities as defendants.

The suit cited Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, while referencing 2018 census data showing that Black and Hispanic/Latino/a residents make up more than a third of the city's population and likewise, from the 2019-2020, 60% of students in the Worcester Public Schools. The complaint is intended to address criteria used in such cases, as outlined in a September 2021 [guidance document](#) by the U.S. Department of Justice that reviews preconditions laid out by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Thornburg v. Gingles* 478 U.S. 30 (1986), as well as the "Senate

Factors" that accompanied 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act.

There is also ongoing precedent for this suit in Massachusetts, with details elsewhere in this Brief on changed elections in Lowell and Everett, as well as potential changes in Haverhill in response to such concerns raised by the Lawyers for Civil Rights.

Municipal and Legislative Operations Subcommittee Members:
 Councilor Khrystian E. King, Chair (At-Large)
 Councilor Candy F. Mero-Carlson (District 2)
 Councilor Kathleen M. Toomey (At-Large)

Meeting Dates:
 Thursday, November 4 at 6 PM
 WHA Gym at Great Brook Valley, 33 Freedom Way
 Wednesday, November 10 at 6 PM
 Auditorium at City View School, 80 Prospect Street
 Thursday, November 18 at 6 PM
 Auditorium at Union Hill School, 1 Chapin Street
 Monday, November 22 at 6 PM
 Belmont AME Zion Church, 55 Illinois Street
 Wednesday, December 1 at 6 PM
 Worcester Youth Center, 326 Chandler Street

Further details, including how to participate virtually, are at <http://www.worcesterma.gov/elections>

December 2022



The Research Bureau

Governing for Excellence:

Worcester Public Schools' Evolution in Governance

Report 22-10

December 2022

Research in the Public Interest

Worcester Regional Research Bureau, Inc.

390 Main Street, Suite 208, Worcester, MA 01608 • 508-799-7169 • www.wrrrb.org

May 2023

May 2023—Brief 23-05



Bureau Brief—Worcester's 2023 Election, a Primer

The Research Bureau

On Tuesday, November 7, 2023, the City of Worcester will hold an election for its major municipal offices: the City Council and the School Committee. These elections are held on odd-numbered years, and each member of the City Council and School Committee serve two-year terms. All of Worcester's election rules can be found within the [Worcester City Charter](#), which serves as Worcester's governing document, and on the website of the [Board of Election Commissioners](#).

Key Dates for the 2023 Municipal Election:

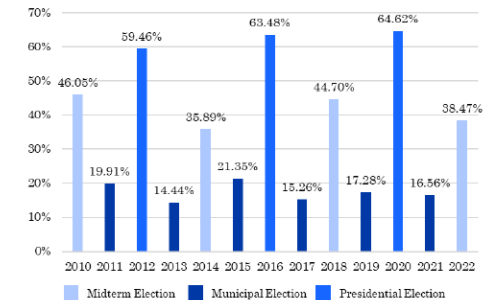
- May 30: Last day to submit nomination papers for certification of signatures.
- June 8: Last day to withdraw or object to nomination of candidates
- August 26: Last day to register to vote in preliminary election.
- September 5: Preliminary Election
- September 12: Last day to decline nomination for Mayor, Council, or School Committee
- October 28: Last day to register to vote in general election
- November 7: Municipal General Election

Worcester's City Council consists of 11 members. Six of its members are considered "at-large." Any resident of the city may vote for an "at-large" member. Five Council Members represent one of five City Council districts; residents of those districts may vote for their district's candidates for City Council. Worcester's Mayor serves as the Chair of both the City Council and the School Committee, and is the official head of the city for all ceremonial purposes. Every at-large candidate for City Council is automatically a candidate for Mayor unless they choose only to run for councilor at-large and not additionally for mayor.

Worcester's School Committee consists of nine members. As of the 2023 election, the Worcester School Committee consists of two at-large members (for whom any registered voter in the city can vote), and six district committee members (for whom any registered voter living in that district can vote). These districts, labelled "A-F," are distinct from the City Council districts. The Mayor serves as the Chair of the School

Research in the Public Interest

Turnout Percentage in November Elections Since 2010



Source: City of Worcester Election Commission, Worcester City Clerk



Changing the School Committee to District Representation

- ✓ In Feb. 2021, lawsuit filed against City from Lawyers for Civil Rights, with NAACP, Worcester Interfaith, and residents as plaintiffs
- ✓ Precedents elsewhere in Massachusetts included changed elections in Lowell and Everett, and potential changes in Haverhill
- ✓ In April 2021, City Council voted 8-2 to negotiate with plaintiffs
- ✓ In October 2021, City Council voted 8-3 to enter into a Consent Decree, or a negotiated agreement as a court order
- ✓ In November 2021, Committee on Legislative and Municipal Operations held public sessions on situation and three options
 - #1: Mayor and 6 District seats (0 At-Large seats)
 - #2: Mayor and 7 District seats + 1 At-large seat
 - #3: Mayor and 6 District seats + 2 At-Large seats



History from the WRRB Brief on Changing the School Committee

Recognizing importance and complexity of issue, WWRB released a Brief in November 2021 that provided history on the discussion within Worcester, including...

- ✓ Prior to Plan E Charter, School Committee had districts
 - 1895-1926 were 24 District seats - 3 members for each of 8 Wards
 - 1926 – 1950 were 10 District seats - 1 member for each of 10 Wards
- ✓ 1985 Charter Commission that created City Council Districts had two members dissent from the Commission report, citing that the consensus findings...

“continues the discriminatory at-large method of electing members of the School Committee and demonstrates inconsistency in support of District Representation”

“provides for no district representation, whatsoever, on the School Committee”



History from WRRB Brief on Changing the School Committee

- ✓ In 2011, then-Mayor Joseph O'Brien and others secured signatures to put a Non Binding Ballot Question to city voters...

Do you support changing the membership of the School Committee from its current composition of all At-Large Committee members to a combination of At-Large and District Committee members?

- ✓ In Jan. 2021, report from The Worcester Mayoral Commission on Latino Education and Advancement included...

In order to strengthen local democracy and assure a school committee that better reflects the student population, city leaders should consider alternative methods of electing and appointing school committee members. Currently, school committee members are at large as opposed to by district... We note that Latinx students comprise 42.9% of all public-school students and at present, there are no members of the school committee from this sector of the community.

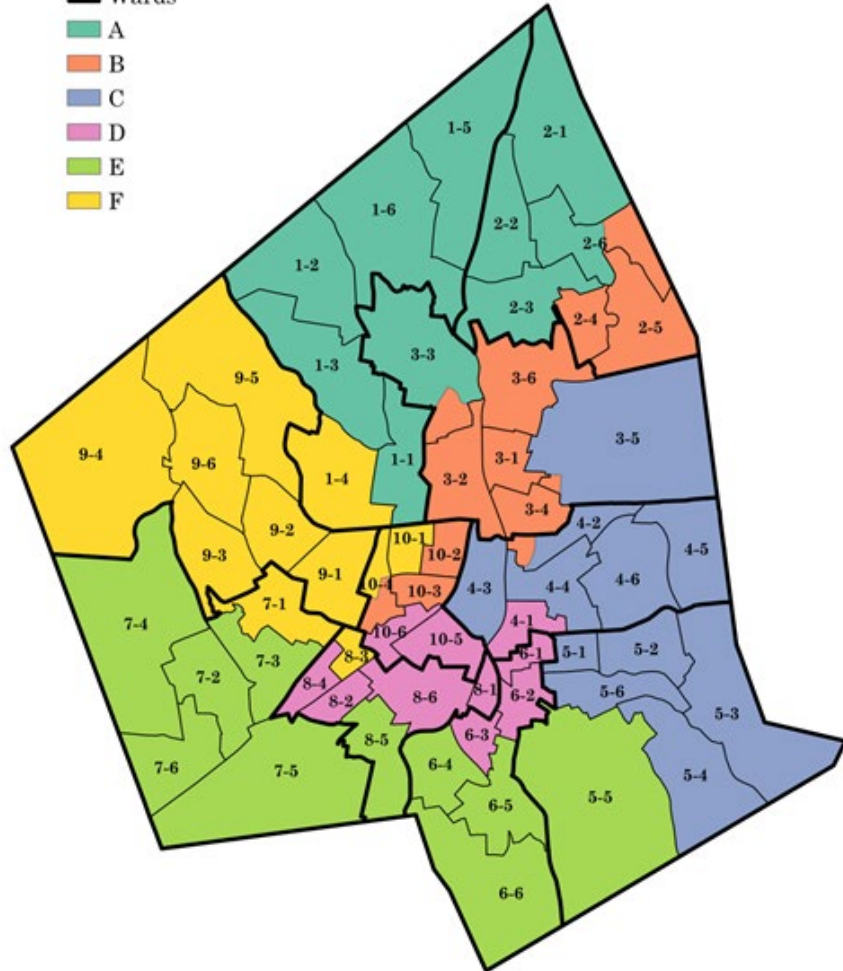


Changing the School Committee to District Representation

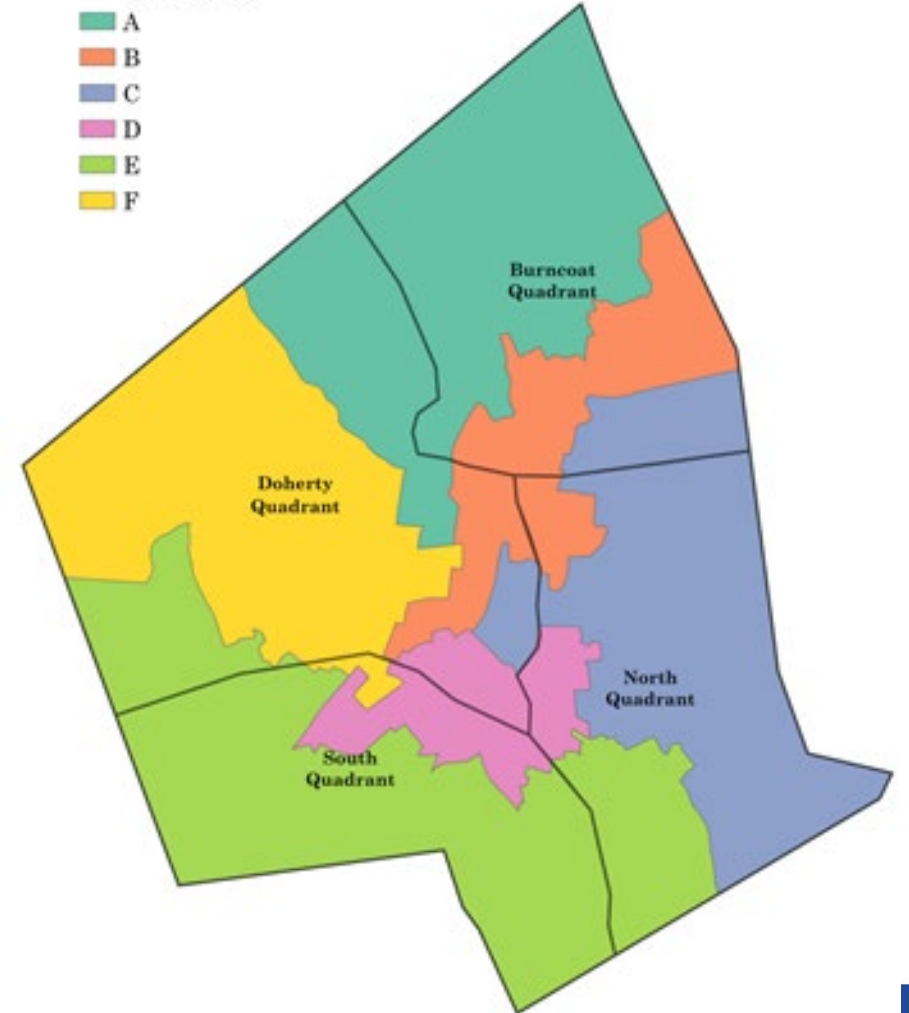
- ✓ **In Dec. 2021, the City Council voted to change School Committee to...**
 - **Six Districts**
 - **Two At-Large Seats**
 - **Mayor serves as Chair**
- ✓ **City filed legislation changing the City Charter accordingly, signed into law September 1, 2022 as Chapter 208 of the Acts of 2022**
- ✓ **City Election Commission held public meetings on new district boundaries in Feb and March 2022 to comply with consent decree**
 - **Each district within 4% of one-sixth of city population**
 - **Districts A & B are ‘majority-minority’ districts**
 - **Five precincts are ‘split precincts’ between different districts**
 - **Resulting in at least sixteen different ballots for 2023 municipal election**

Changing the School Committee to District Representation

- Voting Precincts
- ▭ Wards
- A
- B
- C
- D
- E
- F



- Public Schools
- Quadrants
- A
- B
- C
- D
- E
- F



Candidates on the Ballot for the New School Committee Structure

SCHOOL COMMITTEE AT-LARGE		
LAURA B. CLANCEY	SCHOOL COMMITTEE - AT LARGE	2 WESTPORT CIR
MAUREEN F. BINIENDA	SCHOOL COMMITTEE - AT LARGE	18 CHESTNUT HILL LN
SUSAN M. MAILMAN	SCHOOL COMMITTEE - AT LARGE	24 HOLDEN ST
TRACY O'CONNELL NOVICK	SCHOOL COMMITTEE - AT LARGE	135 OLEAN ST
DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE		
MOLLY O. MCCULLOUGH	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT A	5 HOCKANUM WAY
VANESSA ZULEYMA ALVAREZ	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT B	109 AUSTIN ST
DIANNA BIANCHERIA	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT C	8 VENTURA RD
JERMOH V. KAMARA	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT C	7 PORTER ST
ALEJANDRO GUARDIOLA	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT D	122 STERLING ST
KATHLEEN L. ROY	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT E	7 KEEN ST
JOHN PATRICK REED	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT E	4 COLUMBUS ST
NELLY MEDINA	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT E	34 LAKESIDE AVE
JERMAINE LAMONT JOHNSON	SCHOOL COMMITTEE DISTRICT F	36 ZENITH DR
POSTED MAY 31, 2023		

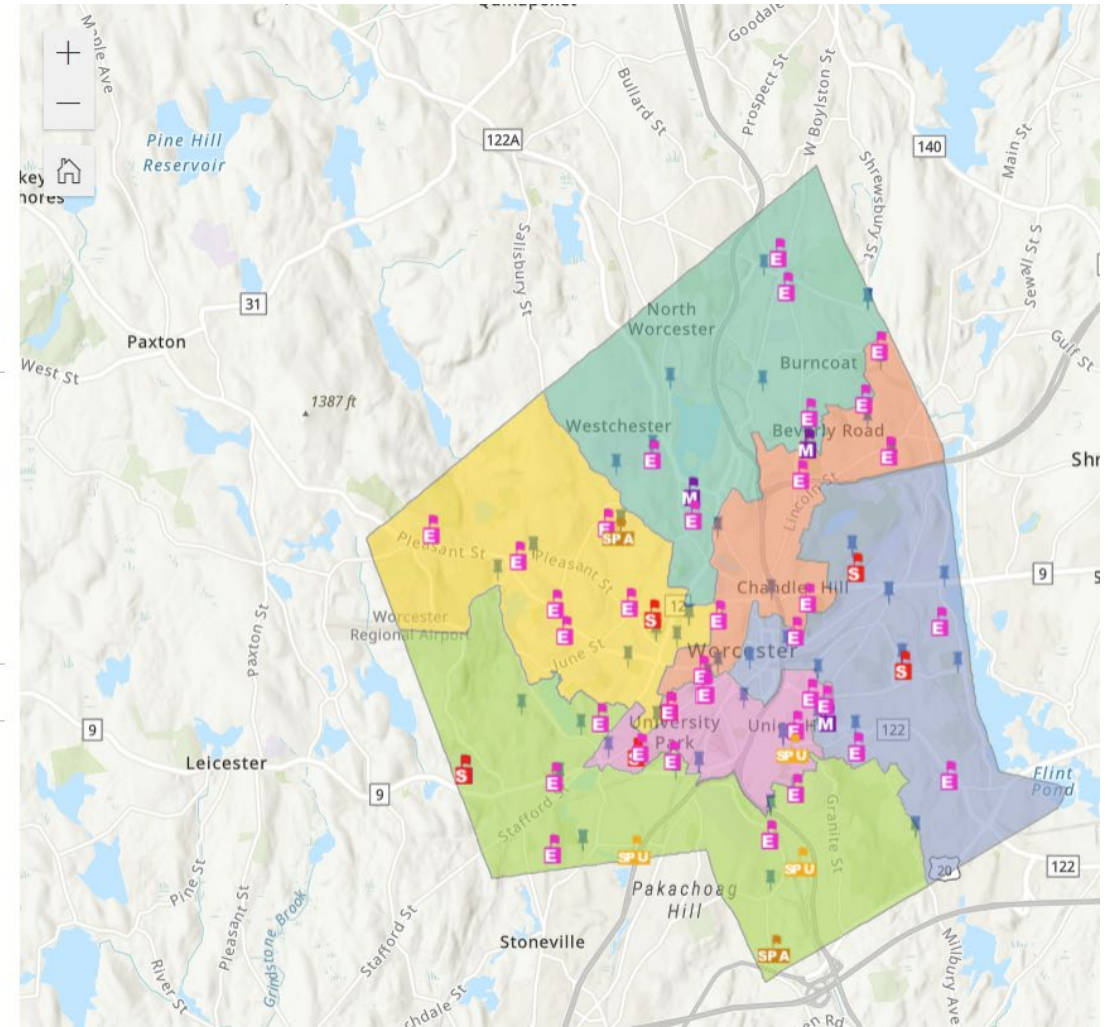
Further Resources at www.wrrb.org

Layers

- ▼ Schools Layers ...
 - School Committee Members ...
 - Worcester Public Schools ...
 - School Committee Districts ...
 - Public Schools Quadrants ...

- ▼ Voting Layers ...
 - Polling Locations ...
 - Voting Precincts ...
 - Wards ...
 - City Council Districts ...

- ▶ Locate Yourself Layers ...



<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d115ec38ba61424c90f61bd0b0f1a1a4>



Further Resources from City of Worcester

<https://www.worcesterma.gov/elections>

2023 School Committee District Election Process

The Board of Election Commissioners will host several voter informational meetings with the Human Rights Commission for the purpose of explaining the 2023 School Committee District election process. The City Clerk will also present updates on the 2023 Municipal Election Process.

- Wednesday, August 9 at 5:30 p.m. – Esther Howland Chamber, 455 Main St., Worcester
- Wednesday, September 13 at 5:30 p.m. – Levi Lincoln Chamber, 455 Main St., Worcester
- Wednesday, October 4 at 5:30 p.m. – Levi Lincoln Chamber, 455 Main St., Worcester

[JOINT MEETINGS SCHEDULE](#)

[SPANISH](#)

[VIETNAMESE](#)



Upcoming Municipal Election Forums

The WRRB has a longstanding practice of hosting municipal election forums with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Worcester Telegram and Gazette, and Worcester Education Collaborative, hosted by Mechanics Hall. In light of the shift to district representation on the School Committee, another such forum has been added to our schedule this year. Please come to these forums or watch online!

- **Wednesday, Sept 27 at 7PM – Candidates for At-Large School Committee**
- **Wednesday, Oct 4 at 7PM – Candidates for Contested School Committee Seats**
- **Wednesday, Oct 11 at 7PM – Candidates for At-Large City Council**
- **Wednesday, Oct 18 at 7PM – Candidates for Contested District Council Seats**
- **Wednesday, Oct 25 at 7PM – Candidates for Mayor**

Contacting the Bureau

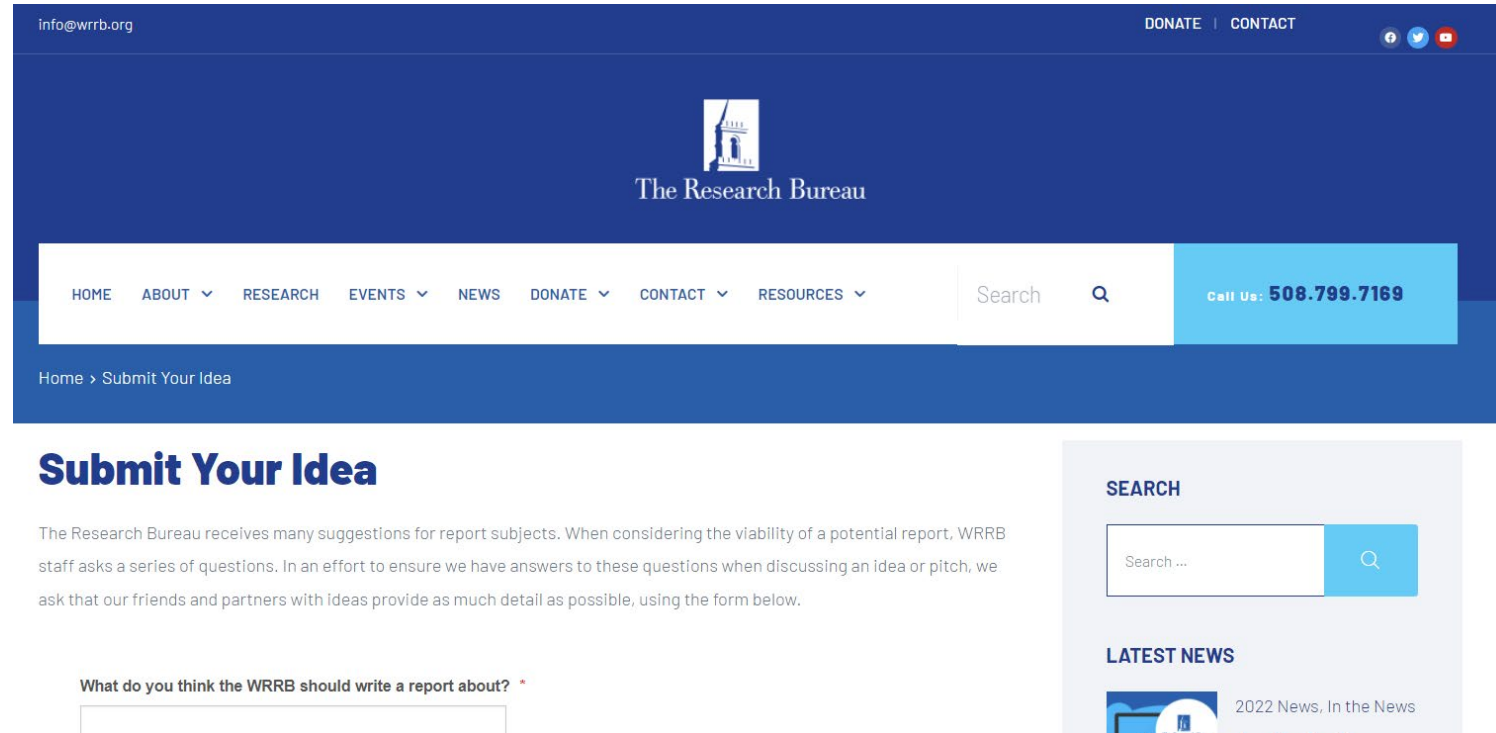
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*Executive Director & CEO
Paul Matthews at pmatthews@wrrb.org*



The screenshot shows the website for The Research Bureau. The header includes the email address info@wrrb.org, links for DONATE and CONTACT, and social media icons. The main navigation menu includes HOME, ABOUT, RESEARCH, EVENTS, NEWS, DONATE, CONTACT, and RESOURCES. A search bar is present with a magnifying glass icon and a call to action: Call Us: 508.799.7169. The breadcrumb trail shows Home > Submit Your Idea. The main content area is titled "Submit Your Idea" and contains the following text: "The Research Bureau receives many suggestions for report subjects. When considering the viability of a potential report, WRRB staff asks a series of questions. In an effort to ensure we have answers to these questions when discussing an idea or pitch, we ask that our friends and partners with ideas provide as much detail as possible, using the form below." Below this text is a form field with the label "What do you think the WRRB should write a report about? *". To the right of the main content, there is a sidebar with a "SEARCH" section containing a search input field and a magnifying glass icon, and a "LATEST NEWS" section with a thumbnail and the text "2022 News, In the News".