



Walker, Beth

From: Walker, Beth
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2017 12:20 PM
To: Loughry, Allen; Davis, Robin; Workman, Margaret; Ketchum, Menis
Subject: Proposal

Colleagues,

As indicated during our meeting on Monday, I strongly believe that we need to develop a definite plan to restore the reputation of the Court. As a practical matter, many steps have already been taken to curb spending and improve accountability and transparency (removal of Canterbury, new procurement process, enforcement of spending authority limitation, new organizational chart, etc.).

To that end, I have drafted the following proposed public statement by the Court. I think it would be optimal if the statement would go out before the next round of FOIA responses are finalized. As expressed during the meeting, I think it is crucial that we publicly (and unanimously, in my opinion), take responsibility and commit to future action. This is a discussion draft. I welcome all comments, suggestions, criticisms, etc. I understand that Justice Ketchum has limited access to email right now and I am not suggesting that this be rushed.

Thanks for your consideration of this proposal.

Proposed Statement by Supreme Court of Appeals (Draft 12/13/17)

In recent weeks, there has been tremendous media coverage of expenditures by the Supreme Court. West Virginia taxpayers are justifiably concerned about spending relating to the offices of the Justices and other items. We unanimously agree that the expenditures over the past decade were ill-advised, excessive and in many instances needed greater oversight. The Court is resolved to making sure this kind of spending never happens again. The people of West Virginia rightfully demand and deserve this action and it is one of our highest priorities.

The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia is responsible for fairly administering justice for the people of our state. It is the role of the Court to oversee the entire judicial branch of government to ensure that this obligation is met. The judicial branch includes nearly 1500 employees including circuit judges in every county, family court judges, magistrates, circuit clerks, probation officers and the staffs in each of these offices. Simply stated, the West Virginia Supreme Court administers a large and very important branch of government – the judiciary.

The administration of the judicial branch of government is the job of the Supreme Court and the buck stops with us. As such, we take full responsibility for the expenditures in question and pledge to the citizens of this state to correct the issues related to oversight, procurement and personnel. Every Justice is firmly committed to regaining and maintaining the public's trust.

Starting in January of 2017, the Court started to correct the issues that contributed to unreasonable use of taxpayers' money. First, the Court made notable personnel changes by hiring a new Court Administrator. Since then we have instituted significant cost-saving and accountability measures and other procedures to enhance efficiency and transparency. Looking ahead, the Court will work closely with the legislature and executive branch as appropriate under the Constitution to continue to improve its administration of the Court system.