



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Chief Justice Workman announces changes in Juvenile Justice Commission membership

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JULIAN, W.Va. – Supreme Court Chief Justice Margaret Workman today announced the appointment of Twenty-Ninth Judicial Circuit (Putnam County) Judge Phillip M. Stowers as Chairman of the Juvenile Justice Commission. Judge Stowers replaces Ninth Judicial Circuit (Mercer County) Judge Omar Aboulhosn. Judge Aboulhosn has resigned as a circuit court judge and Commission chairman in order to accept an appointment as U.S. Magistrate in the Southern District of West Virginia. He will step down as circuit judge on Dec. 31 and become a federal magistrate on Jan. 1. She also announced the appointment of Seventh Judicial Circuit (Logan County) Judge Eric H. O’Briant as a member of the Commission.

“Judge Aboulhosn has been an outstanding circuit judge. He has provided great leadership as chairman of the Supreme Court’s Juvenile Justice Commission and in improving juvenile justice law in general,” Chief Justice Workman said.

“We in the judiciary are very grateful, very grateful for your tireless dedication,” she told Judge Aboulhosn. “You have no idea how much your work and your devotion will be missed.”

Judge Aboulhosn said, “This is the part of the job I will miss the most, juvenile justice. This is the part of the where the judge sees the impact of their decisions.”

Chief Justice Workman said that in the year he has been on the Commission, Judge Stowers “has already been a great asset to the Juvenile Justice Commission. I’m sure he will continue to bring the same visionary leadership as Judge Aboulhosn.

“Judge O’Briant is one of the most experienced judges in West Virginia. The knowledge he has gained in twenty-eight years on the bench will be invaluable to the Commission’s work,” Chief Justice Workman said.

Chief Justice Workman made the announcement just before the quarterly meeting of the Commission at the Donald R. Kuhn Juvenile Center in Boone County. The Commission toured the facility and held its meeting in the gymnasium.

Chief Justice Workman established the Commission in 2011 in large part because of concern with events at the West Virginia Industrial Home for Youth in Salem, and

process issues within the state's juvenile justice system. The commission's membership is made up of representatives of the three branches of government, community leaders, private citizens who work with juveniles, and the state Department of Education. The commission meets quarterly to discuss problems and progress concerning incarcerated and adjudicated juveniles in West Virginia. Members also assist Supreme Court Juvenile Justice Director Cindy Largent Hill in juvenile facility visits.

"I don't think I have ever seen a group of harder working or more dedicated people than the members of this group," Chief Justice Workman said. "It was our goal from the Commission's inception for it to be a forum where representatives of all three branches of government, as well as private citizens who work with juveniles and the state Department of Education could be heard and could work cooperatively to seek solutions."

As a result of the Commission's work, the system for housing juveniles in West Virginia has been re-evaluated, redesigned and is being monitored. The Commission bases its work on the belief that more effective rehabilitation services for juveniles is humanitarian, saves public money, and ensures public safety. The Supreme Court made a commitment in 2011 to work with the other branches of government to provide juveniles the best possible treatment and rehabilitation in a safe environment, and it continues to focus on that commitment.

The Governor's Intergovernmental Taskforce on Juvenile Justice and the Pew Charitable Trusts, which initiated 2015 juvenile justice reform legislation, built upon work begun by the Court's Commission. The Governor used the model of the Court Commission to bring together leaders from the three branches of government and other professionals. A Juvenile Justice Reform Commission is now codified with specific goals and membership.

Other members of the Supreme Court's Juvenile Justice Commission are:

- Circuit Judge Gary Johnson of the Twenty-Eighth Judicial Circuit (Nicholas County), also Chairman of the Court Improvement Program Board;
- Circuit Judge J. Lewis Marks, Jr., of the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit (Harrison County);
- Circuit Judge Joanna Tabit of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit (Kanawha County)
- Professor Megan Annitto, Assistant Professor, Charlotte School of Law, former director, Center of Law and Public Service at West Virginia University College of Law;
- Jefferson County Magistrate Gail C. Boober;
- Former State Delegate Barbara Hatfield, (D-Kanawha);
- Dr. Michael Martirano, Superintendent of Schools, State of West Virginia, represented by Deputy Superintendent Cindy Daniel, and Special Assistant to the Associate State Superintendent Jacob Green;
- Sam Hickman (Kanawha County), Chief Executive Officer, National Association of Social Workers, West Virginia Chapter;
- Attorney Jane Moran (Mingo County), original member of the Juvenile Justice Committee in the 1980s and current member of the Court Improvement Program Board;
- The Rev. Rue Thompson (Upshur County), Director for State Facilities, Holy Rosary Parish;

- The Rev. Matthew Watts, President and CEO of Hope Community Development Association and senior pastor of Grace Bible Church in Charleston;
- Supreme Court Administrative Director Steve Canterbury, former Executive Director of the Regional Jail and Correctional Facility Authority (in that capacity he directed construction of several correctional facilities); and
- Nikki Tennis, Director of Children's Services, Supreme Court of Appeals.

Biographies of circuit judges are available on the West Virginia Judiciary website at: <http://www.courtswv.gov/public-resources/press/circuitJudgesMasterList.html>.