



# Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

# News

Administrative Office  
1900 Kanawha Blvd., East  
Bldg. 1, Room, E-316  
Charleston, West Virginia 25305  
(304) 340-2305 Jennifer Bundy  
(304) 340-2306 April Harless  
(304) 558-1212 FAX  
Web Site: [www.courtswv.gov](http://www.courtswv.gov)  
Facebook: [wvjudiciary](https://www.facebook.com/wvjudiciary)  
Twitter: [WVCourts](https://twitter.com/WVCourts)  
SmugMug: <https://www.courts.smugmug.com>  
Email: [Jennifer.Bundy@courtwv.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Bundy@courtwv.gov)  
Email: [April.Harless@courtswv.gov](mailto:April.Harless@courtswv.gov)

---

## Supreme Court Announces Addition of Civility Pledge to Lawyer's Oath

For immediate release Monday, May 17, 2021

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Chief Justice Evan Jenkins today signed an order provisionally adopting and releasing for public comment the addition of a civility pledge to the oath lawyers take when they are admitted to the practice of law. All five Supreme Court Justices; Tom Scarr, President of the West Virginia State Bar; and Jason Pizatella, President of the West Virginia Board of Law Examiners, then took the oath, which was administered by Supreme Court Clerk Edythe Gaiser.

The new language is available for public comment for 30 days, after which the Supreme Court will review the comments and decide on final adoption. The oath with the new language underlined is as follows:

“I do solemnly swear or affirm that: I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of West Virginia; that I will honestly demean myself in the practice of law; that I will conduct myself with integrity, dignity and civility and show respect toward judges, court staff, clients, fellow professionals and all other persons; and to the best of my ability, execute my office of attorney-at-law; so help me God.”

“West Virginians are known for being very polite,” said Chief Justice Jenkins. “Today the Supreme Court is taking the important step of proactively promoting civility in the legal profession in West Virginia.

“In every lawyer’s life, one of the most significant moments is when he or she is admitted to the practice of law. There is an oath of admission each new attorney takes. West Virginia today is updating that oath,” said Chief Justice Jenkins. “Less than half of the states in the country have updated their oath with language to add civility. It’s a teachable moment for every new attorney in West Virginia. It’s a day they will always remember. It’s an oath we expect them to follow.

“Thanks to our constitutional form of government, people rely on the courts to settle disputes in a peaceful manner. There is no better place to demonstrate that civility than in the judges and attorneys who work in the court,” said Chief Justice Jenkins.

“One of the hallmarks of the new Supreme Court has been a deep commitment to civility, a deep commitment to the rule of law and a deep commitment to treat each other and everyone who appears before us with respect and civility and fairness,” said Justice Beth Walker. “Updating the

lawyer's oath is "good for lawyers. It's good for us as we work with each other. It's good for judges and especially it's good for West Virginians."

Justice Tim Armstead said, "As I think back over my legal career, the overwhelming impression I have had of other attorneys is not how well they argued a case or how successful they are but how they treated the opposing side, the clients, the individual jurors and witnesses, the people they come into contact with as part of their professional career. It's an incredibly important principle we need to stress to new lawyers joining the Bar – the importance of civility."

Justice John Hutchison said, "Lawyers are required to zealously advocate for their clients. Part of zealously advocating does not mean a scorched-earth policy in terms of the parties on the other side. We have an obligation to be civil to each other."

Justice Bill Wooton said adding the new language to the oath "should not be seen as a sign that civility is declining within our profession; rather, it should be seen as a celebration of the civility that has always been a hallmark of the legal profession and, likewise, a celebration of the role of lawyers as leaders in the community throughout this state.

"At a time when political discourse is increasingly acerbic and a great many human interactions are devoid of the civility that is common in our profession, hopefully this highlighting of civility within the Bar will serve as a useful example," Justice Wooton said.

The West Virginia State Bar supports the Supreme Court's action to update the oath. Bar President Scarr said, "This is an important issue for all of us. We don't have any grand illusions that changing the oath will automatically change behavior of lawyers or anyone else in society, but it is an important first step. It is a reminder to lawyers that, while they have to zealously represent clients, they have an obligation to the system, the system of justice."

The order putting the new oath out for public comment is on the Supreme Court's website <http://www.courtswv.gov/legal-community/requests-for-comment.html>. Comments must be filed in writing with the Office of the Clerk, Supreme Court of Appeals, State Capitol Rm E-317, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25305.

##