



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Senator John Unger to Become Berkeley County Magistrate

For immediate release

MARTINSBURG, W.Va. – State Senator John R. Unger, II, has been appointed Magistrate in Berkeley County, effective August 21.

Twenty-Third Judicial Circuit (Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan Counties) Chief Circuit Judge Michael D. Lorensen appointed Senator Unger on Tuesday, August 10. Senator Unger, who will resign from the Senate to take the judicial branch position, will fill the vacancy left by the resignation of Magistrate Richard Stephens, which is effective August 20. Governor Jim Justice has appointed Magistrate Stephens to the Family Court Judge position left vacant by the retirement of Judge David Greenberg.

“Senator Unger will bring a wealth of problem-solving skills and experience to our magistrate court,” Judge Lorensen said. “In addition to his legislative experience, Senator Unger has demonstrated principled leadership in our community as well as a wide variety of experiences which will aid in his understanding of the problems confronted by litigants before the magistrate court.”

Berkeley County and West Virginia have high numbers of drug overdose deaths. “The judicial system is being proactive in identifying and working within the confines of the law on these problems, which are getting worse because of the pandemic,” Senator Unger said. “The courts are responding to the needs of the population. I don’t know anybody who hasn’t been affected by addiction or trauma.”

“Nobody gets closer to the people than a magistrate. The magistrates are the first line of defense. It’s the people’s court,” Senator Unger said. “Courts are there to help people solve problems by using the law. I want to join a team where I think I can do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.”

Senator Unger said he has worked in the field of drug addiction recovery for many years and has worked with drug courts and day report centers in several counties, including Boone County, which was the state’s first Family Treatment Court. He is founder and currently president of GRaCE (Greater Recovery and Community Empowerment, Inc.) and is president of West Virginia Recovery Coach Academy.

“My first priority will be the magistrate court,” Senator Unger said.

He has been a member of the West Virginia Senate since he was elected in 1998. He has served as majority leader and been chairman of the Select Committee on Children and Poverty, the Committee on Children and Families, the Select Committee on Redistricting (2011), the Joint Legislative Commission on Water Resources, and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. He also has served as vice-chairman of several committees.

He has a bachelor's degree from West Virginia University, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and was an Albert Lee Strum Scholar and a Harry S. Truman Foundation Scholar. He has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He also received a Marshall Memorial Fellowship in 2001. He has a master's degree in divinity from the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and is working toward a doctorate there.

He has attended numerous continuing education programs in theology, government economics, leadership, and law at, among others, Harvard University, the University of Hong Kong, the Council of State Governments, and the Southern Legislative Council. He worked with Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India, in 1990.

He is the founder and past director of West Virginia Campus Compact, founder and past president of West Virginia Trade Development Council, former deputy director of disaster services in Berkeley County, and a former regional coordinator of EVAK Search and Rescue Team. He worked as Non-Governmental Organization-National Guard Liaison Coordinator in 2001 and 2002. He has held several positions in the homeland security, humanitarian relief, and communications fields. From 1998 to 2008, he hosted a live public affairs radio show in the Eastern Panhandle.

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