

FROM THE CHIEF

Tim Armstead

Chief Justice
The West Virginia Supreme Court



TAKING LAWS TO HERBERT HOOVER

During the time that I have had the honor to serve on the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, it has been evident to me that my fellow justices and I share an important goal — to ensure that our courts are open, transparent and accessible to our citizens. A crucial aspect of this goal is ensuring that students throughout West Virginia have a greater understanding of how our courts work, and the way in which all our citizens may look to our courts to protect their Constitutional rights as citizens, obtain justice and seek legal redress from harm.

One important tool the Supreme Court has utilized to share the court system's work has been through our longest-running civics education program, LAWS (Legal Advancement for West Virginia Students). LAWS was developed in 1998 as a way for the Supreme

Court to teach high school students about the judicial system and the appellate system in particular. For LAWS, the Supreme Court holds an argument docket outside of the Capitol a couple of times a year and invites area high school students to attend. The Intermediate Court of Appeals has recently begun a similar program, called ICA On-Campus, in which the Intermediate Court hears oral arguments on college campuses throughout the state.

Prior to the arguments in the LAWS program, local attorneys or circuit judges visit classrooms to help students understand the court processes and the cases they will hear. Those students then attend the arguments for the case or cases they have studied. After the argument is over, the students have an opportunity to talk to the attorneys who argued the cases. Often, the justices also eat lunch

with the students so we can talk with them informally about how our Court operates.

The Supreme Court Clerk chooses the cases for the LAWS docket and tries to pick cases that appeal to high school students because they involve interesting facts or legal issues. During the arguments, the justices often also ask additional questions to promote a more informal back-and-forth with attorneys and to make the hearings more interesting and understandable to non-lawyers.

More than 7,000 students across 37 counties have taken part in LAWS since it was established. When I previously served as chief justice in 2020, we had planned to hold LAWS in Braxton County, where I attended high school. That visit was postponed because of COVID, but we were able to hold LAWS there in 2022. This year,

PHOTOS BY ALEX WILSON, COURTESY OF THE SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS OF WEST VIRGINIA.



Chief Justice Tim Armstead spoke to students as he and the other four Supreme Court Justices answered questions during a lunch break at Herbert Hoover High School on March 13, 2024. The court heard arguments at the school and invited students from several Kanawha County high schools to attend as part of the Legal Advancement for West Virginia Students (LAWS) program.

the location of our Spring LAWS visit also had a very special meaning to our Court and to me in particular. In March, we heard oral arguments at the newly completed Herbert Hoover High School in Elkview.

This new high school is a testament to the resiliency of the citizens of West Virginia. I will never forget the damage left by the June 2016 flood in many areas of our



The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia heard arguments in the Herbert Hoover High School auditorium on March 13, 2024. Students from several Kanawha County high schools were invited to study the cases ahead of time and then attend the arguments as part of the court's Legal Advancement for West Virginia Students (LAWS) program. Photo by Alex Wilson, courtesy of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia.

State, particularly Kanawha, Nicholas and Greenbrier counties, including the loss of 23 of our fellow West Virginians. The fast-rising and fast-moving water from the normally placid Elk River covered the Elkview and Clendenin areas, where I have lived much of my life. When it receded, in addition to the loss of life and destruction of homes, it left mud, muck and debris in countless homes and businesses. The damage at Herbert Hoover High School — the heart of the community — rendered the building unusable; and, for the next seven years, students attended school in portable units.

As West Virginians have done time and time again, our people worked together to recover from the devastation. Neighbors helped neighbors. Friendships were forged.



Justice John Hutchison spoke to students on the lunch break during the Legal Advancement for West Virginia Students (LAWS) program at Herbert Hoover High School on March 13, 2024.

Federal, state and local government allocated cleanup and rebuilding funds, and many donated time and money and inspired others to help. It took years of hard work, but the Elk River community rebounded. The August 2023 opening of the new Herbert Hoover High School was a celebration of perseverance and thanksgiving for the whole community.

The new Herbert Hoover High School provided an ideal location for the LAWS program and our oral arguments. We heard arguments in four cases in the school's auditorium, then lawyers debriefed the students in the gym across the hall. We all had lunch in the cafeteria next to the auditorium. Herbert Hoover student leaders

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served as guides, greeters and sound technicians. Nearly 200 students from Capital High School, Sissonville High School and Roane County High School joined Herbert Hoover students for the event. The JROTC students from Capital High School performed the presentation of the colors.

Students usually ask insightful questions during the LAWS program, and this term's program was no exception. The students asked the attorneys about the cases, as well as talked with the justices about how cases progress through the legal system, how to become a lawyer and how to become a Supreme Court Justice.

Our Supreme Court strongly believes that allowing students to see, in person, how the judiciary works is good for everyone, not only for those students who want to become lawyers. Listening to the questions we ask and how the attorneys answer those questions shows how seriously we take each case and, we hope, instills a proper respect for the fairness of the process.

The LAWS program would not be possible without the help of principals, teachers, students, court staff and the attorneys who volunteer to talk to students before and after the oral arguments and to argue their cases at various locations throughout the State. The camaraderie

the attorneys display, even though they are on opposing sides of a case, is always encouraging to see and is an excellent example to the students of how disagreements can be handled in a civil manner.

I want to thank Herbert Hoover High School Principal Mike Kelly and his staff and students for their warm welcome and all of the time and effort they put into making the program a success. I would also like to thank the teachers and administrators from the participating schools as well as all the students who participated for their attention and interest in the cases and in the work we do. I hope we inspired at least a few young West Virginians to pursue a legal career or a career in public service.

Sharing the work of our legal system with the young people of our State is a goal in which I hope members of the Bar throughout West Virginia will join. Attorneys throughout West Virginia often support their local schools by sponsoring events and speaking to classes on career days. I encourage those of you who have not joined in this effort to do so this year. Lawyers traditionally have been leaders in their communities, and I hope we will all join in serving as role models for community service and civility for future generations. **WVL**