



# Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

## News

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### **Judge Johnson to attend launch of new program**

For immediate release

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Twenty-Eighth Judicial Circuit (Nicholas County) Judge Gary Johnson will attend “A New Era in the West Virginia Child Welfare System,” an event marking a shift in the state’s response to vulnerable children, Oct. 7-8, at Embassy Suites in Charleston.

The two-day conference will be hosted by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources and Casey Family Programs. It will showcase DHHR’s new initiatives to prevent unnecessary removal of children from their homes and to help children thrive in their communities and schools: the Three Branch Institute and Safe at Home WV. National presenters will talk about understanding childhood trauma, monitoring children’s psychotropic medications, and developing community-based systems of care.

Then-Supreme Court Chief Justice Brent D. Benjamin appointed Judge Johnson and Cindy Largent-Hill, Director of the Court’s Juvenile Justice Commission, as the judicial representatives to the Three Branch Leadership Team in 2013. The Three Branch Institute on Child Social and Emotional Well-Being – named for its collaborative make-up of representatives from the judicial, executive, and legislative branches – met regularly over the past two years both in West Virginia and across the country to improve social and emotional well-being for children in foster care. West Virginia was one of seven states to participate in the Institute, hosted by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the National Conference of State Legislatures, Casey Family Programs, the National Center for State Courts, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (<http://www.nga.org/cms/home/nga-center-for-best-practices/meeting--webcast-materials/page-ehsw-meetings-webcasts/col2-content/main-content-list/three-branch-institute-on-child.html>).

Inspired by the Three Branch Institute, the Safe at Home WV project is being implemented in October by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources’ Bureau for Children and Families in eleven counties: Berkeley, Boone, Cabell, Jefferson, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Mason, Morgan, Putnam, and Wayne. The

program is scheduled to expand statewide over the next two years. The program focuses on children ages 12-17 and their families. The goals are to reduce reliance on foster care/congregate care (group placements) and to prevent re-entries into the foster care system; reduce the number of children in higher-cost placements out-of-state; step down youth in congregate care and/or reunify them with their families and home communities; and keep youth in their own communities when possible. Key partners include child welfare, courts, schools, probation, behavioral health, services and supports. For more information about Safe at Home WV, visit <http://www.wvdhhr.org/bcf/safe/>.

Judge Johnson has served as chairman of the West Virginia Court Improvement Program Oversight Board since 2001. He also is a member of the Supreme Court's Juvenile Justice Commission, the 2014 Governor's Intergovernmental Task Force on Juvenile Justice, and the Commission to Study the Residential Placement of Children. As Chairman of the Court Improvement Program, he helped establish the first West Virginia University College of Law class on children and the law.

For these efforts Judge Johnson has received numerous awards and citations. In 1999 he was declared an "Angel in Adoption" by the United States Congress and the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. In 2009 he received the Alliance for Children's West Virginia Leader for Children Award; the Commissioner's Award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth and Families; and a Purple Ribbon Award from the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. He also is a recipient of the 1998 Protection of Children Award from the Nicholas County Family Resource Network and Nicholas/Webster Foster Parent Association, the 2008 Extra Mile Award from the West Virginia Children's Justice Task Force, and the 2013 Steward of Unity Award from the West Virginia Child Care Association.

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