



## Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

# News

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### **McDowell County Judge wins Judge of the Year Award**

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For immediate release

WELCH, W.Va. – Circuit Judge Booker Stephens has been named 2016 Judge of the Year by the West Virginia Association for Justice.

The award was presented to Judge Stephens, a circuit judge in the Eighth Judicial Circuit (McDowell County), by Association President Paige Flanigan and past President Anthony Majestro at its annual convention in June.

“For more than 30 years, Judge Booker Stephens has been one of the most respected judges in West Virginia. There is no judge in this state more committed to protecting access to the courts, due process, and the integrity of the rule of law than Judge Stephens. Every litigant and lawyer in his courtroom, regardless of the type of case or what side he or she is on is treated fairly and with respect,” Ms. Flanigan said in an association press release.

“Judge Stephens’ advocacy for equal justice has extended beyond the courtroom as well. He has been a state leader on public education about our courts and our civil rights, from Law Day programs for our state schools to celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Miranda Rights. He has made it a mission to educate state residents about our judicial system and the rights they have in our courtrooms.”

Judge Stephens said, “It is a tremendous honor for me to be recognized with this award. When I look over our West Virginia judiciary, I see that there are many other deserving judges who would qualify for this honor. It is humbling to receive this award, and I will continue to do my very best to stand up for the virtues of civil justice and equality under the law that the West Virginia Association for Justice and its members espouse. I thank them for this award.

“I would also like to thank my wife for her support. The success that I have had as both a lawyer and a judge is due to her many years of love and support,” said Judge Stephens, who is married to Welch attorney Gloria Stephens. They have two children.

“I also thank all of the courtroom staff who has supported me during my time on the bench. My secretary has been with me for 36 years, working for me when I was in private practice and now as a judge.”

Judge Stephens' interest in the law began when he was a teenager growing up in the small town of War.

"There were several African-American lawyers who practiced in Welch. I lived about 13 miles from there. I'd take the bus there and watch the lawyers in the courtroom. I saw what they did and the service they provided to the people who lived here. I knew that's what I wanted to do," he said.

A 1966 graduate of West Virginia State University and a 1972 graduate of Howard University School of Law, Judge Stephen's first job was in Charleston, where he was an Earl Warren Fellow with the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund. He then returned to Welch to practice law. In 1978, he was elected to represent McDowell County in the West Virginia House of Delegates, and he served through 1982. He was elected to the circuit court in 1984 and has been re-elected since then.

Judge Stephens also was named WVAJ's Judge of the Year in 1993. In 2007, the Association recognized him with its Caplan Award in recognition of his lifetime achievement and service to the practice of law, West Virginia's civil justice system and the state's legal community.

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