

To: Judicial District 15B members

FROM JUDGE LUNSFORD LONG

When I decided to file for re-election, perceived bipartisan legislation to raise the mandatory retirement age from 72 to 75 was under discussion, and I thought it would be enacted. Unfortunately, bipartisan support for that legislation was lost, in spite of its potential budgetary and administrative benefits, and it now appears that the law will not be enacted.

I will be 71 when my term ends this December, and could serve only one year of a four-year term if I were re-elected. As a result of legislation enacted by the General Assembly, the Bar's opportunity to insure its approval of any successor-appointee has been eliminated and the Governor would have unfettered discretion in his appointment. I do not wish to risk having a replacement who does not share our Bar's values and who does not carry our Bar's approval. Therefore, I have decided not to pursue re-election; unfortunately, election laws do not allow my name to be removed from the ballot.

Since I am no longer a candidate, the Canons of Judicial Ethics do not permit me to endorse any candidate for any office but I am able to say that I know Sherri Murrell well, and I know she is well qualified to replace me. I would not have felt comfortable with my decision were this not so.

I leave this position reluctantly; to have had the privilege to be allowed to help others during some of the most difficult times of their lives has taught me great and valuable lessons about myself and about others. A lawyer does not become a Judge by being sworn in and donning a robe; it is a slow and sometimes painful process to make the transition from advocate to Jurist. At the National Judicial College, we were told it takes 7 years at least before one can truly be considered to have become a Judge; I will have been on the bench 7 years and 3 months when my term ends, and just now (after 6 ½ years), am I beginning to feel capable and comfortable in my role.

My reluctance in leaving just as I am beginning to feel competent is compounded by the fact that I will be losing my association with my colleagues Joe Buckner, Charles Anderson, Beverly Scarlett and Jay Bryan, whose friendship and professional support have been invaluable to me in my work as a Judge. And, of course, I will always miss Paige Vernon for the same reasons.

I do not plan to retire, as I believe meaningful work is essential for continued good physical and mental health. Instead, I hope to work as a Mediator and Arbitrator, so I can continue as an Emergency Judge (the rules permit retired Judges who mediate and arbitrate to serve as Emergency Judges, provided they do not practice Law). However, if there is insufficient mediation and arbitration work to keep me busy, I will happily resume the full time practice of law, which would unfortunately mean I could no longer continue as an Emergency Judge.

In any event, whether as a Mediator/Arbitrator/Emergency Judge, or as a practicing lawyer, I hope to continue to work with all of you in some capacity for many years to come. As members of Judicial District 15B, we enjoy a collegiality, professionalism, and commitment to fairness that distinguishes our legal community, and I look forward to being a part of that community again.