

FOREWORD

The thirty-eight members of the Commission on the Future of the West Virginia Judicial System represent a broad spectrum of West Virginians. Some of us are attorneys, business leaders, or labor leaders. Others are leaders from the executive, legislative, or judicial branches of State government. Some head civic organizations and educational institutions. We vary by age, sex, race, educational background, politics, the area of the State we call home, and in many other ways.

Despite our differences, we are united by our concern for the citizens of West Virginia and our belief that West Virginia's court system must change to meet the demands of our changing society and to better serve the citizens of this great State.

When the Supreme Court of Appeals appointed us to serve on this landmark Commission in August 1997, we dedicated ourselves to conducting a comprehensive review of the state of West Virginia's judicial system while keeping in mind the far-reaching implications of our task. We engaged in extensive information gathering. We held nine public hearings across West Virginia; surveyed all judicial officers and court personnel; distributed exit questionnaires to petit jurors; surveyed a random sample of State Bar members; conducted a statewide public opinion poll; and accepted submissions through the mail and E-mail. We thank the many West Virginians whose thoughtful contributions broadened and enhanced the recommendations in this report.

The Commission reached consensus on the vast majority of the recommendations found in this report; the only written dissent concerns the selection of judges. Some of these recommendations are directed to the Supreme Court of Appeals, others will require legislative action, and still others will require a coordinated effort between all three branches of government.

It is our hope that this report will be much more than a scholarly overview of West Virginia's court system. The implementation of the recommendations contained within this report will help create a system of justice that is accessible to all, timely in its decision-making, fair and equal in its treatment of those who use it, and accountable to the State's citizens.

