



WOOD COUNTY DEPUTY SHERIFF'S ASSOCIATION



WOOD COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

P.O. Box 533 Parkersburg, WV 26102 • Phone: (304) 424-1702 Fax: (304) 424-1839

To Whom it may concern,

A meeting of the Wood County Deputy Sheriff's Association was held on October 10th, 2021 with 27 active members voting. Due to ongoing allegations that cannot legally be discussed at this time, members made a unanimous decision to draft a letter to the Wood County Commission stating that we can no longer support our Sheriff, Steve Stephens. Please see the attached letter.





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To Whom it may concern,

This letter is to officially inform you that after an overwhelming vote of our members, we can no longer support you, Steve Stephens, as our Sheriff.

The men and women of the Wood County Deputy Sheriffs Association (WCDSA) understand the awesome responsibility that we have as peace officers and will continue to provide the best possible law enforcement service to those who live, work, and visit our community. We are compelled to act in response to your leadership by clearly stating why we can no longer support you. We write this letter after much contemplation and discussion. We regret you have left us no choice but to take this action.

It is regretful because we are a team of dedicated professionals and taking this position goes against our nature. We also fear there will be retaliation from you, whether it is overt or subtle, and we are very concerned about the intimidation and retaliation this stance will likely bring to the association members. Prior to you taking office as the elected Sheriff, we had a vibrant culture that encompassed teamwork, leadership, professionalism, and integrity. Those cultural elements resulted in a work environment that promoted organizational and individual success. At that time our agency was well respected in the region and across the state. Deputies were happy to come to work and our culture was that of a positive and fulfilling place to work. Many of our deputies came to the Wood County Sheriff's Office from outside agencies specifically because of our reputation for being one of the best law enforcement agencies.

You have been our Sheriff for five years. During this time, you have destroyed the positive culture within our organization and developed a culture that can only be described as hostile and negative. We can best define you as a Tyrant. You exercise your power similar to that of an oppressive dictator. Deputies and supervisors are frustrated, and deeply saddened by your lack of both leadership and professionalism. The atmosphere in the office can only be described as depressing, stressful, and plagued with heavy negativity. The unprofessional and dehumanizing method in which you treat personnel at our Sheriff's Office has continued and become increasingly worse to the point that several tenured members of our agency and other staff have recently retired, resigned or are seeking other employment earlier than they wanted.

The staff of this office both male and female have had to endure tirades and fits of anger as you selectivity pick the target of the day who is then subjected to your foul language which is so blistering that many female employees have had to close their doors.

Your irrational leadership and actions in a recent barricaded suspect not only placed your safety at risk but also the safety of our fellow deputies.

We no longer have police officers wanting to lateral to our agency like in the past. Our agency has some of the best and highly experienced law enforcement officers in the area, and we are in real jeopardy of losing them.

The posts you place on Facebook are often self-promoting and meant to show you as a Sheriff that cares for the community. This is a complete farce; you in no way behave in that manner with your deputies or staff. Your image is the only thing you are concerned about, and it shows. We see you personally taking credit for the hard work and dedication of the members of this agency. We feel that those accomplishments are achieved despite your leadership, not because of your leadership.

The Wood County DSA is extremely disheartened with your refusal to hold yourself to the same standard of accountability as you would a deputy. Each of us, rightfully so and proudly, is required to sign an oath of office which we all swore to abide by. This oath consists of a promise to abide by the Code of Ethics, Ethical Values, Policies and Procedures, all while promoting and achieving the Mission and Vision of our office. Our General Orders/Policy and Procedure states ALL Sheriff's Office employees are expected to abide by these ethics. These ethics speak to keeping our private lives unsullied as an example to all, be exemplary, never act officiously or permit personal feelings, prejudices, or animosities to influence decisions. These are just a few of the expectations required of a law enforcement professional and the standard deputies are held to. You however have not held up your end by abiding by our Oath of Office, Code of Conduct, or Canons of Ethics and your continual pattern of behavior unbecoming to the office you hold has left us no choice.

A deputy would have been subjected to an internal investigation had they been accused of any inappropriate conduct or making of false statements. Your recent internal investigation into the conduct of two deputies was no more than a farce as you have been the catalyst for a caustic and corrosive atmosphere that is taking its toll of the members both sworn and non-sworn of the agency. Your administration's policy of selected discipline, or at times lack thereof is another example leading to the decay of this agency.

We respectfully request that from this point forward, if you wish or need to speak with one of our members that another member other than the chief deputy or legal counsel be present during that interaction.

In conclusion, we have been left with no other resolve than this vote of no confidence in your ability to lead this department. A copy of this open letter will be sent to the Wood County Commission as our co-employers with the request that action be taken in this matter.

To be clear, we will continue to serve our community in the best way we can with the resources we have. We will continue to hold ourselves and each other to a high standard of conduct and professionalism. We will provide the service we believe each person deserves when they call upon us.