

BEFORE THE WEST VIRGINIA ETHICS COMMISSION

IN RE:

STEPHEN L. DEWEESE,
former Sheriff of Putnam County

VCRB 2022-44

PROBABLE CAUSE ORDER

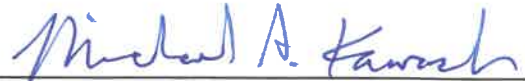
The Probable Cause Review Board, having investigated and considered the allegations set forth in VCRB 2022-44, unanimously finds that there is probable cause to believe that the Respondent, Stephen L. Deweese, ("Deweese" or "Respondent"), violated the West Virginia Governmental Ethics Act, in his public position as Sheriff of Putnam County, as follows:

Count One In 2018, the Respondent violated W. Va. Code § 6B-2-5(b) by retaining for private use a \$1,000 check sent to the Putnam County Sheriff by Scholarship Calendars for a photograph of the Putnam County Sheriff's Department staff. The photograph was used in calendars which Scholarship Calendars published and sold.

Count Two In 2019, the Respondent violated W. Va. Code § 6B-2-5(b) by retaining for private use a \$1,000 check sent to the Putnam County Sheriff by Scholarship Calendars for a photograph of the Putnam County Sheriff's Department staff. The photograph was used in calendars which Scholarship Calendars published and sold.

In accordance with W. Va. Code § 6B-2-4(g), the Commission staff is hereby **Ordered** to prepare a Statement of Charges and to schedule this matter for a public hearing to determine the truth or falsity of the charges set forth in Counts One and Two.

ENTERED: September 17, 2025



Michael A. Kawash, Chairperson
Probable Cause Review Board



Daniel J. Guida, Member
Probable Cause Review Board

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VCRB 2022-44

STATEMENT OF CHARGES

The Probable Cause Review Board of the West Virginia Ethics Commission entered an Order on September 17, 2025, finding that there is probable cause to believe that Stephen L. Deweese, the Respondent in the above-referenced Complaint, violated W. Va. Code § 6B-2-5(b) of the Ethics Act, in 2018 and 2019, when he retained for private gain of himself or others the annual \$1,000 checks sent to the Putnam County Sheriff by Scholarship Calendars for a photograph of the staff of the Putnam County Sheriff's department.

W. Va. Code § 6B-2-5(b)(1) provides:

A public official or public employee may not knowingly and intentionally use his or her office or the prestige of his or her office for his or her own private gain or that of another person. Incidental use of equipment or resources available to a public official or public employee by virtue of his or her position for personal or business purposes resulting in de minimis private gain does not constitute use of public office for private gain under this subsection. The performance of usual and customary duties associated with the office or position or the advancement of public policy goals or constituent services, without compensation, does not constitute the use of prestige of office for private gain.

W. Va. Code R. § 158-6-5 provides:

5.1. Removal - Public officials and public employees shall not remove government property from the work-place for their private benefit.

5.2. Improper Use - Public officials and public employees shall not use government property for personal projects or activities that result in private gain.

5.3 This subsection does not apply to the de minimis use of government property.

The Order directed that this Statement of Charges be prepared and that the matter be scheduled for a public hearing to determine the truth or falsity of the charges.

Jurisdiction

1. Stephen Deweese was the Sheriff of Putnam County from 2013 through 2021.

2. At all times pertinent herein, Stephen Deweese was a “public official” as defined in the Ethics Act, at W. Va. Code § 6B-1-3(j) and (k).

3. The Ethics Commission has jurisdiction over alleged violations of the West Virginia Ethics Act committed by public employees or officials, such as Stephen Deweese. W. Va. Code §§ 6B-1-1 through 6B-3-11.

Facts

4. In 2018 and 2019, the Putnam County Sheriff’s Department provided the photographs of the Department’s staff to an organization called Scholarship Calendars. Scholarship Calendars used the photograph in calendars it published and sold.

5. Scholarship Calendars annually sent a \$1,000 check to the Putnam County Sheriff. While serving as Sheriff, Deweese kept at least four of these checks from Scholarship Calendars for himself.

6. On March 7, 2024, the West Virginia Ethics Commission referred the Complaint to the prosecuting attorney appointed to investigate the matter pursuant to W. Va. Code § 6B-2-4(w)(1).

7. On December 16, 2024, Deweese entered an "Alford" plea to one count of Fraudulent Schemes in violation of W. Va. Code § 61-3-24.

8. On February 12, 2025, Deweese was sentenced to one year in jail. That sentence was suspended, and Deweese was placed on probation for one year. Deweese had been elected as county commissioner in 2021 and was serving in that position through December 2024. He agreed to resign his position as county commissioner and not to run for public office in the future. He also made restitution of \$4,000 to the Putnam County Commission for the funds he received from Scholarship Calendars as part of the criminal plea agreement.

Count One

Retaining the proceeds from the sale of an annual photograph of the county sheriff's staff for private gain in 2018.

9. The allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 8 are re-alleged and incorporated herein by reference.

10. In 2018, the Respondent violated W. Va. Code § 6B-2-5(b) by retaining for private use a \$1,000 check sent to the Putnam County Sheriff by Scholarship Calendars for a photograph of the Putnam County Sheriff's Department staff. The photograph was used in calendars which Scholarship Calendars published and sold.

Count Two

**Retaining the proceeds from the sale of an annual photograph
of the county sheriff's staff for private gain in 2019.**

11. The allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 8 are re-alleged and incorporated herein by reference.

12. In 2019, the Respondent violated W. Va. Code § 6B-2-5(b) by retaining for private use a \$1,000 check sent to the Putnam County Sheriff by Scholarship Calendars for a photograph of the Putnam County Sheriff's Department staff. The photograph was used in calendars which Scholarship Calendars published and sold.

Dated: September 19, 2025



Kimberly B. Weber
Executive Director

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IN RE:

**STEPHEN L. DEWEESE,
former Sheriff of Putnam County**

VCRB 2022-44

NOTICE OF HEARING

Notice is hereby given that the public hearing in the above-captioned matter will be held on December 16, 2025, at the offices of the West Virginia Ethics Commission, 210 Brooks Street, Third Floor Conference Room, Charleston, West Virginia, beginning at 10:00 a.m., before independent hearing examiner, Jeffrey G. Blaydes, Esq., to determine the truth or falsity of the charges set forth in the Statement of Charges issued on September 19, 2025. The hearing will be continued until completed.

Dated: September 19, 2025



Kimberly B. Weber
Executive Director

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**STEPHEN L. DEWEESE,
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VCRB 2022-44

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Kimberly B. Weber, Executive Director of the West Virginia Ethics Commission, hereby certify that I mailed a true and complete copy of the foregoing **PROBABLE CAUSE ORDER, STATEMENT OF CHARGES, and NOTICE OF HEARING** on September 19, 2025, to:

Via Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested:

Stephen L. Deweese
2018 Cross Creek Road
Buffalo, WV 25033-7456
Respondent

Via Email

Mark Hunt, Esq.
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Counsel for Respondent

Via Email and Hand Delivery:

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Counsel for Complainant



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