

PRESS RELEASE FROM CHIEF JUSTICE KAREN R. BAKER

On December 10, 2024, five members of the Arkansas Supreme Court voted to enter into an employment agreement with Marty Sullivan, Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts (the “AOC”). The agreement between Sullivan and Associate Justices Rhonda Wood, Shawn Womack, Barbara Webb, and Cody Hiland, along with former Chief Justice Kemp, purports to provide Sullivan with employment for eight years ending on December 31, 2032, totaling approximately 1.6 million dollars.

However, as my predecessor explained at the outset of his term as Chief Justice, under my constitutional authority and duty as Chief Justice as set forth in Amendment 80 of the Arkansas Constitution, I will not recognize any attempts to override, change, or otherwise impair the administrative authority of the Chief Justice or any attempts to establish or exercise any alleged authority of associate justices over administrative matters. Arkansas statutory law is clear that the Chief Justice is entrusted with the sole authority to nominate a Director of the AOC. *See* Ark. Code Ann. § 16-10-102(a)(1)-(2).

When Chief Justice Kemp was elected, he nominated Sullivan to serve as the Director of the AOC. I was elected to serve as the Chief Justice beginning January 1, 2025. Therefore, as the duly sworn Chief Justice, Arkansas law authorizes me to nominate a Director of the AOC. However, shortly before I was slated to become the Chief Justice, five members of this court attempted to commandeer my authority by executing the agreement which provides that Sullivan will remain the Director of the AOC for the duration of my term.

It is no secret that growing pains are part and parcel of any post-election transition. The citizens of Arkansas voted and elections have consequences. I intend to do the job that the people elected me to do.

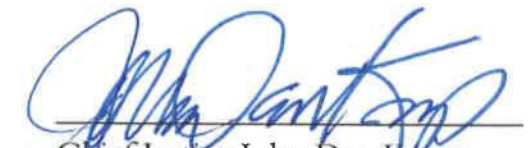
**STATEMENT OF CHIEF JUSTICE JOHN DAN KEMP
TO ASSOCIATE JUSTICES**

The citizens of Arkansas benefit from a supreme court that demonstrates continuity, stability, and consistency. Our judiciary must state a clearly articulated mission, must set forth values of efficient operation, and must present a unified message to all Arkansans.

Before this court is a motion made by Associate Justice Courtney Goodson, who seeks to establish a new rule whereby the Supreme Court of Arkansas would exercise control over administrative matters by a 4-person majority vote. This motion can only be understood as an effort to impair the constitutional authority of the Chief Justice. This proposed rule, if implemented, would result in unnecessary delays that impede the administration of justice. Further, this scheme sends a message of conflict and uncertainty to the Arkansas judiciary.

Under my constitutional authority and duty as Chief Justice as set forth in Amendment 80 of the Arkansas Constitution, and as chairperson of all conferences and meetings of the court, I will not recognize a motion that attempts to (a) override, change, or otherwise impair the administrative authority of the Chief Justice, (b) direct the Chief Justice in his exercise of administrative authority, or (c) establish or exercise any alleged authority of associate justices over administrative matters. Such a motion usurps the constitutional authority of the Chief Justice granted by the Arkansas Constitution. I will not recognize a second to the motion. I object to any vote on any motion made by an associate justice on these administrative matters. I conclude that the efficient administration of the judiciary requires the Chief Justice to exercise authority unencumbered by controversy that comes with seven court members seeking to administer the court by a majority vote.

I hereby rule that a vote on such motion by the associate justices on administrative matters or administrative authority is invalid, null, and void. If, over my objection, the associate justices vote on such matters, then, as Chief Justice, I will enter an order contravening that vote and will declare it invalid, null, and void. The order will be filed in the Clerk's office of the Arkansas Supreme Court, and it shall be a public record. This statement shall be attached to my order and shall also be made a public record.



Chief Justice John Dan Kemp
Feb. 15, 2017

Date