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## Foreword

The Honorable L. A. Harris Jr.

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# FOREWARD

*The Honorable L. A. Harris, Jr.*

*“Your writing is so bad you will not be considered for Law Review and there is some question about your admittance to Law School.”*

Life is strange and ironic. In 1974 as a second year law student at the T. C. Williams School of Law at the University of Richmond, I was invited to submit an article to determine if I would be permitted to serve on the *Law Review*. A member of the *Law Review* evaluated my article and met with me. In summation he said my writing was so bad that I would not be considered for *Law Review* and there was a question about how I was even admitted to law school.

Obviously, until now I never received another invitation. In spite of this rejection, I was able to graduate in May, 1976. Since that time, from 1976 to 1979 I served as an Assistant Commonwealth’s Attorney for the County of Henrico. In 1979 I entered the private practice of law with a concentration in trial practice. My practice continued until March, 1987. Due to the sudden death of H. Albert Nance, the Commonwealth’s Attorney for the County, the judges of the Henrico County Circuit Court appointed me to serve as Commonwealth’s Attorney for the County. Fortunately in March, 1988 the General Assembly appointed me to serve as a judge on the Henrico General District Court. I served in that capacity until August 1, 1990 when I was appointed to serve as a judge on the Henrico County Circuit Court where I continue to serve. After more than thirty-five years, I am now the longest serving judge in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The lesson to learn is that rejection at some point in your life does not have to predict or dictate the future.

During my service on the bench there have been many changes and challenges. As did everyone we had the challenges of COVID. The Supreme Court of Virginia declared a Judicial Emergency which suspended jury trials. Our court was able to develop and

submit a plan to the Supreme Court of Virginia that was approved and allowed us to be one of the first courts to be able to resume jury trials. We were very fortunate to have collaborative help from our County Administrator, attorneys, and all others in the court system to allow us to accomplish this goal. Obviously trials were delayed, but we have been able to address most of the problems.

One of the most significant changes I have seen in our criminal justice system is the elimination of jury sentencing in criminal cases unless requested by the defendant. This change has resulted in many more criminal jury trials being set, which naturally affects the amount of time available for other matters. Since criminal cases must be tried within certain time limits, other cases such as civil and domestic cases have been affected. This presents a concern for the Court, attorneys and litigants that continues to be evaluated.

The cases heard during my tenure on the bench show a disturbing increase in the number of violent crimes. Many crimes are often committed by very young people. This presents a major concern for not only all involved in the criminal justice system but for society in general. Society as a whole needs to be aware of this problem and seek to develop a solution that will aid in reversing this trend.

Regardless of the time or types of cases, knowledge of the law is the foundation upon which all else is built. I have had the opportunity over the last few years to visit and lecture to various classes in the Law School. The faculty and administrators should be proud of the knowledge and enthusiasm of the students. They are very impressive. The *University of Richmond Law Review's Annual Survey of Virginia Law* and other articles provide a valuable source for judges and lawyers in Virginia. This type of publication is a great tool in helping all maintain an ongoing competence in present legal issues.

I hope my second article submitted to the *Law Review* is accepted better than my first submission. You decide.

Congratulations to the editors and staff of the *University of Richmond Law Review* for their outstanding work.