



COLLINS LAW PLLC

October 30, 2024

Sent via Email Only to: <bmclaughlin@mt.gov>

Chief Justice Mike McGrath
c/o Beth McLaughlin
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Water Court Chief Water Judge Vacancy—Public Comment in Support of Applicant
Stephen R. Brown

Dear Chief Justice McGrath,

I willingly write in support of applicant Stephen (Steve) R. Brown for the Water Court Chief Water Judge vacancy position. As a former Montana Supreme Court Law Clerk and a former Water Master at the Montana Water Court I am familiar with the qualities necessary that make a “good judge.” It is my sincere belief that current Associate Water Judge (AWJ) Steve Brown has the experience, temperament, integrity, intelligence, and administrative experience that are required to be successful in the role he seeks.

I first met and know AWJ Brown from my years as a law student, prior to working with him directly at the Water Court or experiencing his work as a private practitioner. He approached his teaching responsibilities with respect for the law and the students, and importantly with kindness. He has demonstrated in his prior private practice that he is knowledgeable of a breadth of legal topics that interweave with water law. Upon working at the Montana Supreme Court, I had the experience to delve into the record of a case on appeal where AWJ Brown served as counsel to one of the parties. His representation of the party in a water dispute was memorable, even these many years later. He demonstrated passionate, knowledgeable, but measured advocacy. He has brought his wealth of experiences to the role of judge.

AWJ Brown possesses the appropriate demeanor for a judge. He is calm, thoughtful, thorough, poised, and demonstrates confidence in his decisions. He has also always shown good humor, a kind spirit, and respectful listening of others. As a managing partner of a law firm, he has demonstrated the ability to manage multiple responsibilities at once, which provides confidence that he will be a fine chief administrator of the Water Court. His written decisions in his current role as an Associate Water Judge with the Water Court show diligent research and preparation in order to render measured and careful decisions that advance water law for our state.

I believe leadership is essential for a judge. It is important to continue to further the judiciary so that it can best serve society. In his career AWJ Brown has been willing to take on challenges with efficiency and accountability. I believe he will continue to be a genuine asset to the State of Montana and continue to pursue the Water Court’s charter with great thought and responsibility in the important role as Chief Water Judge.

I do not hesitate to support AWJ Steve Brown to succeed Hon. Chief Water Judge Russ McElyea. As such, I respectfully ask that you appoint him as the Water Court's Chief Water Judge. If you should have any questions in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience. Your attention to this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely,
COLLINS LAW PLLC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrea Collins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Andrea" being more prominent than the last name "Collins".

[electronically signed]
Andrea Collins