



Media Contact:

Crescent Gallagher
Communications Director
304-380-3922
cgallagher@wvda.us

March 29, 2018

Commissioner Leonhardt Expresses Extreme Disappointment with Governor Vetoes

Charleston, WV - West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt released the following statement after Governor Jim Justice issued vetoes for Senate Bill 322 and House Bill 4166.

“I am extremely disappointed with the Governor’s vetoes. The Governor did not reach out to me throughout this entire process and his staff indicated there were no problems with these bills. The Governor should have reviewed these bills solely on their merits and potential savings to the tax payers of West Virginia,” Leonhardt said.

Senate Bill 322 would have provided a similar exemption other constitutional offices have on use of public funds toward legal services for the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA). Under the bill, the department would have still been required to be represented in court by the Attorney General’s office. Currently, the WVDA pays the Attorney General’s Office for any legal services outside of that representation. The bill passed the Senate 33-0-1 and the House of Delegates 97-0-2.

“We are the largest and only constitutional office without a general counsel. Not having legal assistance on staff to aid with navigating federal regulations, human resource issues, as well as crafting sensible rules costs the taxpayers of West Virginia thousands of dollars every year,” Leonhardt said.

House Bill 4166 would have allowed the WVDA to transfer up to \$1 million at the end of each fiscal year from the WVDA Farm Account to a newly created Capital Improvement Fund. The department was planning to establish a revenue source to start the process of rebuilding the laboratories at the Guthrie location. The labs are currently housed in structures built in the 1950s. These facilities test consumer products for food contamination and infectious diseases, as well as regulate pesticides and fertilizers. The bill passed the Senate 33-0-1 and the House of Delegates 96-2-2.



“The Governor has clearly shown he is willing to kick another problem down the road. The laboratories at Guthrie have been in disrepair for the last twenty years. At the same time, the department has seen a cut in \$4 million over the last five years. It will take upwards of \$50 million to repair the laboratories. House Bill 4166 was a sensible solution to start the process immediately at no cost to the tax payer. A safe, reliable food system is important to every West Virginian. I am sad the Governor failed to recognize the importance they provide to the people of our state,” Leonhardt said.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works..

