



Retention Referendums

According to the Constitution of Pennsylvania, judges who have been elected to and have served a 10-year term in office may file a declaration of candidacy for retention in office. Judges standing for retention are listed on the ballot without party designation and without opposition from other candidates. At the polls, voters choose “yes” to retain a candidate or “no” to not retain a candidate.

Seven state appellate court judges are facing retention elections this year. In the Supreme Court, Justice Thomas G. Saylor; in the Superior Court, Judges Correale F. Stevens, Joan Orié Melvin and John L. Musmanno; and in the Commonwealth Court, President Judge Bonnie Brigance Leadbetter and Judges Doris A. Smith-Ribner and Bernard L. McGinley. Also, in District 15, the Court of Common Pleas judge Katherine B.L. Platt.

Retention Election Justice; Pennsylvania Supreme Court

Thomas G. Saylor-Republican

Saylor was elected to the Supreme Court in 1997 after serving on the Superior Court, where he was elected in 1994.

Saylor has received a positive rating from the state Judicial Evaluation Commission.

“His tenure on the Supreme Court has earned him the respect of members of the bar and his fellow justices for his intellect, honesty and temperament. His well-written and well-researched opinions have generated a substantial amount of consensus among the justices,” the commission said.

Saylor drafted the lone dissent to the court’s September 2006 opinion restoring the controversial pay raises for judges. Saylor currently serves as liaison to the Supreme Court Appellate Rules Committee and the Supreme Court Orphans’ Court Rules Committee.

- Occupation: Supreme Court Justice

- BA, Virginia University
- JD, Columbia University

Retention Election Judge; Pennsylvania Superior Court

Joan Orie Melvin-Republican

Melvin generated a stir in 2006 by suing the commonwealth to have her salary reduced to its pre-pay raise level. The Commonwealth Court rejected her request, saying that judicial salaries are set by statute and cannot be adjusted. She has since announced that she is returning the difference in her salary to the state treasury.

Before her election to the Superior Court a decade ago, Melvin served as a judge in the Pittsburgh Municipal Court and the Allegheny Court of Common Pleas.

The JEC recommended her for retention. "During her term on the Superior Court, she has been involved in the disposition of more than 750 cases per year involving virtually all areas of the law. Judge Melvin is recognized for her strong analytical and writing skills, and her opinions are well reasoned and clearly written," the commission wrote.

It also praised Melvin for her commitment to the community and involvement in bar association-related educational programs.

- B.A. University of Notre Dame, 1978
- B.A. J.D. Duquesne University School of Law 1981

John L. Musmanno-Democrat

Musmanno was elected to the Superior Court in 1997 after serving as a judge of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas since 1981.

The JEC recommended Musmanno for retention, noting his involvement in programs geared toward improving the efficiency of the court and the administration of justice. The commission noted Musmanno is a member of the court's Case Management Committee, a liaison for the court's mediation program and is a member of the Court of Judicial Discipline. Musmanno also served on the Judicial Conduct Board.

“He is highly regarded for his intelligence, courteousness, fairness, judicial temperament and professionalism. Lawyers who appear before him find him well prepared, attentive and able to get to the heart of any issue,” the commission said.

- Occupation: Judge, Superior Court of Pennsylvania
- J.D. Vanderbilt Law School (assistant editor, law review)
- B.A. Washington & Jefferson College, (magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa)
- Elected, Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County (1982-1997)
- Judicial Conduct Board (2001-2005)
- Court of Judicial Discipline (2005-Present)

Correale F. Stevens-Republican

Stevens was elected to the Superior Court in 1997 after serving seven years as a Luzerne County Common Pleas Court judge. Prior to his career on the bench, Stevens served as the Luzerne County District Attorney and four terms in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

The JEC recommended Stevens for retention.

“Judge Stevens is held in high esteem throughout the legal community and is known for consistently being thoroughly prepared, polite, courteous and fair. His legal opinions are well reasoned, clearly written and demonstrate a broad knowledge of the law,” the commission said.

- Occupation: Judge, Superior Court
- J.D. Dickinson Law School (law review)
- B.A. Political Science, Penn State (National Poli Sci Honorary)
- Elected, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Luzerne County (1991)
- Elected, District Attorney of Luzerne County (1988-1991)
- Elected, PA House of Representatives (1980,1982,1984,1986)
- received Outstanding Young Pennsylvanian Award

Retention Election Judge; Commonwealth Court

Bonnie Brigance Leadbetter-Republican

Leadbetter was elected president judge of the Commonwealth Court last year and has been a member of the court since she was appointed in 1996. She was elected to a 10-year term the following year.

Prior to her career on the bench, Leadbetter served as an assistant district attorney, assistant United States attorney, counsel to an insurance company, judge pro tempore of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, and had a private practice.

The JEC recommended her for retention, noting her involvement in the legal community and participation in Continuing Legal Education events.

“Judge Leadbetter is recognized for her high level of legal ability, sound judgment, courteous manner and appropriate judicial temperament. Her well-reasoned and well-written opinions reflect her thorough understanding of the facts and trial court record under review,” the commission wrote.

- Occupation: President Judge, Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania
- University of Pittsburgh School of Law, JD
- Rice University, BA
- 11 years as a judge
- first woman to be President Judge of Commonwealth Court
- 10 years as a state and federal prosecutor
- 15 years private practice of law

Bernard L. McGinley-Democrat

McGinley is in his second term on the Commonwealth Court, having been elected in 1987 and retained in 1997. Prior to his service in the court of appeals, McGinley was an Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas judge and an assistant district attorney.

McGinley was also commissioned second lieutenant in the Army Reserve Medical Corps in 1970 and achieved the rank of captain.

The JEC recommended McGinley for retention, noting his favorable judicial temperament.

“Judge McGinley’s written opinions address a broad spectrum of legal issues and are well reasoned and demonstrate a clear understanding of the facts and applicable law. He treats lawyers fairly and courteously and is held in the highest regard for his legal knowledge and analytical abilities,” the commission wrote.

- Occupation: Judge, Commonwealth Court of PA
- Juris Doctorate, University of Pittsburgh 1970
- U.S. Army Reserve, Captain, Honorably Discharged 1976
- Assistant District Attorney, Allegheny County, 1971-75

- Allegheny County Board of Viewers, Chair 1975-80
- Allegheny County Common Pleas Judge 1982-88
- Commonwealth Court Judge 1988 - present

Doris A. Smith-Ribner-Democrat

Smith-Ribner was elected to the Commonwealth Court in 1987 and was retained for a second 10-year term in 1997.

Prior to her election to the appeals court, Smith-Ribner served as a judge of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas from 1984 to 1986 and as solicitor for the Allegheny County Controller's Office from 1980 to 1984.

The JEC recommended Smith-Ribner for retention, noting that she has served for 13 years as a member of the Pennsylvania Judicial Auditing Agency including five years as chairwoman. The commission also noted that Smith-Ribner also has an interest in the mentoring of young lawyers.

Smith-Ribner created a nationwide judicial externship-clerkship program that places law students in clerkships with federal and state judges around the United States.

"Judge Smith-Ribner is held in high esteem by her judicial colleagues and the court's staff. Her character and integrity are of the utmost quality, and she is devoted to deciding the issues presented to her court quickly and efficiently," the commission wrote.

- Occupation: Judge - Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania - elected 1987
- Pittsburgh University School of Law - J.D. Law Degree - 1972
- Appointed to the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas by the Governor of PA in 1984
- Private law practice (civil and criminal litigation in state and federal courts)
Served as Solicitor to the Allegheny County Controller (5 years)
- Served as Hearing Committee Member - PA Supreme Court Disciplinary Board (4 years)
- Participated in many community and civic organizations, including Friends Indeed, Inc., youth mentoring program
- Pittsburgh University School of Law "Outstanding Alumna Award"

**Retention Election Judge; Court of Common Pleas;
District 15**

Katherine B.L. Platt - Republican

Judge Platt is a lifelong resident of Chester County. She received her B.A. degree from Sarah Lawrence College in 1972 and her J.D. degree from Villanova University School of Law.

Judge Platt's earliest legal experience while still in law school was in public interest law. After graduating from law school, she maintained a general law practice concentrating in family law, real estate and commercial lending transactions.

From 1980 through 1993 she served as a Hearing Officer for support cases in the domestic relations division, conducting hearings and deciding spousal and child support cases.

Judge Platt was elected to the Court of Common Pleas of Chester County in November 1997, taking her oath of office in January 1998. She initially handled civil and criminal trials and is currently assigned to Family Court and Orphans Court.