

# Help Choosing a PA JUDGE



*Judges play important roles in our lives. "Judges direct decisions about traffic court, bail, sentencing, probation, Family court, custody, juvenile justice, police accountability, housing, eviction, and civil rights."*

*But it's hard to find the information you need to choose a candidate. Judges have special election rules. They can't make pledges or promises on cases or issues that may come before the court. And in some races, they can "cross-file" as both a Democrat and Republican. In other cases, like retention questions, no party is listed. See the resources below to help you make an informed decision about judicial candidates.*

*Sources for this graphic: [PACourts.us](http://PACourts.us), [PMOnline.org](http://PMOnline.org), [LWVPGH PACourts](http://LWVPGH PACourts), and [VEEEMPittsburgh](http://VEEEMPittsburgh)*



## QUALIFICATIONS and ELIGIBILITY

All judges must be **citizens and district residents for one year** prior to election and must be members of the **Pennsylvania Bar** (except for Magisterial District Judges, who instead are required to pass an exam).

Judges follow strict standards of conduct.  
**General Ethics Guidelines**

Judicial candidate qualifications and more on this [LWVPGH.org](http://LWVPGH.org) web page with 3-minute videos by the **Allegheny County Common Pleas** candidates themselves.



## BAR RATINGS

Bar Associations are nonpartisan professional organizations that evaluate and provide ratings of their members. Candidates complete questionnaires that *you can view with information like:*

Legal and courtroom experience, reputation for integrity and fairness, community involvement, ongoing educational and professional activities.

See the candidate ratings and to view their questionnaires, *just click on the candidate's name:*

- [Allegheny County Bar Association](http://Allegheny County Bar Association)
- [PA Bar Association](http://PA Bar Association)



## MORE INFORMATION

- **Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts- [PMOnline](http://PMOnline)** includes background information, questionnaires, ratings, and FAQ's.
- **[Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org)**- LWV website with candidate's names, and biographical info, including links to campaign websites and social media accounts. ([Vote411.org/es](http://Vote411.org/es))
- **Public campaign finance records**
- **Endorsements**- Many issue-based organizations endorse candidates. Search for "candidate name" and "endorsements".



## RETENTION? YES OR NO

- Judges in the **Common Pleas and statewide Appellate Courts** are elected for **10-year terms** in competitive, **partisan elections**.
- After a judge's first term, their seat does not come open for a competitive race.
- Instead they can file for "**retention**" for **another ten year term**.
- When judges run for retention, voters will have a **yes/no ballot** option on retaining the incumbent judge, rather than a choice of candidates. *It is extremely rare for judges to be removed on a retention vote.*



## WHAT JUDGES CAN and CANNOT DO

When campaigning for election, Judges must follow these rules:

They **cannot** make pledges or promises with respect to cases, controversies, or issues **that are likely to come before the Court**.

They **can** talk about **some** personal views on legal, political, or other issues.

They **cannot personally** solicit or accept funds.

Their **campaign committees** can raise funds.

**Do Your Research! CLAIM YOUR POWER! VOTE to Elect Judges and VOTE on Retention!**