

Judicial and Administrative Responsibilities of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

Is it appropriate for members of the Supreme Court to talk to members of the legislature?

The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has two distinct responsibilities under Pennsylvania's Constitution.

In the role most visible to the public, the seven-member Court decides cases brought before it by litigants from every corner of Pennsylvania. The Court holds periodic sessions at three locations, in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, to hear arguments in those cases. It issues several hundred rulings on appeals and capital cases each year.

In a separate role, the Supreme Court supervises and oversees the operations of the entire Pennsylvania court system. As an equal branch of government, the Court must work with the legislature and the executive branch on matters that affect the courts at every level. Matters that require the chief justice and other justices to communicate with lawmakers and executive branch leaders include the annual budget for the courts, education programs for judges and lawyers, plans for judicial capital projects, activities of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts and the work of several court-related boards and commissions.

The American Bar Association supports the principle of an independent judiciary that works effectively with the political branches of government. It encourages regular meetings among representatives from all three branches to promote interbranch communication as a way to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and confrontation on issues such as court funding and structural reform of courts.

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