

Infographic for Immediate Release

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How are judges elected in Pennsylvania?

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania judges are chosen in elections that occur in odd-numbered years. Some judges serve 10-year terms, while others serve for 6 years. Judges must be Pennsylvania residents and U.S. citizens, be at least 21 years-of-age and must retire no later than age 75.

The infographic below highlights information about Pennsylvania’s judicial districts, terms, elections and retention votes. [Download a high-resolution version](#) of the graphic.

How are judges elected in Pennsylvania?

PA judges are chosen in elections that occur in odd-numbered years.

Terms, elections and retention:

- APPELLATE COURTS** (10-YEAR TERMS): 1st term elected, then retention vote thereafter
- COMMON PLEAS COURTS** (10-YEAR TERMS): 1st term elected, then retention vote thereafter
- MUNICIPAL COURT** (6-YEAR TERMS): 1st term elected, then retention vote thereafter
- MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT COURTS** (6-YEAR TERMS): Always elected

Qualifications:

- PA resident and U.S. citizen
- Ages 21 - 75
- State bar member (except MDJs who must be members of the bar or pass a qualifying exam)

Court Levels:

- APPELLATE COURTS:** SUPREME COURT, SUPERIOR COURT, COMMONWEALTH COURT. The Supreme Court, Superior Court and Commonwealth Court are appellate courts with statewide authority.
- COURTS OF COMMON PLEAS:** Courts of Common Pleas are trial courts that preside over cases at the county level.
- MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT COURTS:** Magisterial district and municipal courts preside over cases at the local level.

What is a retention vote?

Judges run for retention unopposed. Their names appear on the ballot in the fall election and they are not affiliated with any political party. Voters vote "yes" to retain the judge or "no" to remove the judge.

If a jurist is not retained, the governor has the authority to appoint an interim judge with two-thirds Senate approval. The position is filled permanently in the next judicial election.

Retention votes only occur in the appellate, Courts of Common Pleas and municipal court.

Pennsylvania has **60** judicial districts (seven include two counties) that have between **one and 93** judges.

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