How the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Operates

About the Pa. Supreme Court Justices:
- There are seven justices – including a Chief Justice
- Justices serve 10-year terms, up to age 75
- The justice with the longest continuous service on the court automatically becomes Chief Justice.

The Pa. Supreme Court:
- It is the highest court in the Commonwealth
- The court meets in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Harrisburg
- Receives and considers over 1684 it’s the oldest appellate court in North America
- Receives and considers over 2,000 requests for review annually

What are a few of the court’s administrative duties?
- Supervise the entire Pennsylvania Unified Judicial System
- Make procedural rules for administration of justice in the courts
- Regulate the practice of law, including admission to the bar and attorney discipline.

How a case gets to the Pa. Supreme Court:
1. Primarily hears appeals from Commonwealth and Superior Courts, but also hears direct appeals such as death penalty cases
2. Can consider any case pending in a lower court of “immediate public importance”
3. At its own discretion, the court will grant an appeal upon approval of three justices.

What happens once a case is selected for review?
1. Parties make arguments: Justices review briefs and usually hear oral arguments
2. Justices write opinions:
   - **Majority opinion**
     - shared by more than half of Court and becomes the Court’s decision
   - **Dissenting opinions**
     - opinions that disagree with the disposition of the case
   - **Concurring opinions**
     - agree with result but not necessarily the rationale
3. Court issues decision: The Court hands down a decision within defined timelines after the oral argument (or submission of a case).