

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Supreme Court Election Sets New Fundraising Records

The money has been rolling in, and with fundraising permitted until the end of the year, more records are likely to be broken.

PHILADELPHIA (November 3, 2009) – Today is Election Day in Pennsylvania. The top of the ballot features a contest to fill one vacancy on the state Supreme Court. The candidates are Democrat Jack Panella and Republican Joan Orié Melvin. Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts (PMC) has been tracking the data via the candidates’ mandatory campaign finance reports filed with the State Department. The results are of concern to court watchers, especially in light of public opinion polls that show the public is concerned that justice is for sale to the biggest campaign contributor.

The previous record was set by current Supreme Court Justice Seamus McCaffery in 2007; he raised \$2,340,350.78* (including \$25,374.87 leftover from a 2005 campaign) in a four way race for two seats on the Supreme Court. 2007 set several records: each candidate raised over one million dollars, and the total was a new Pennsylvania record: \$7,846,478.

Combining campaign contributions as of October 19, 2009 (the end of the most recent reporting period) with a confirmed \$500,000 donation that came into Panella’s campaign just after the reporting cycle, the Panella campaign has already raised \$2,350,633.20. PMC Executive Director Lynn A. Marks noted, “We were surprised when we did the math -- Jack Panella broke previous campaign fundraising records in advance of Election Day, and the candidates can still raise money through the end of the year.”

* All figures used in this press release include in kind contributions made to a candidate’s campaign.

As of her most recent campaign finance report, Orié Melvin has raised \$733,948. The campaigns' final reports will be due February 1, 2010. PMC expects that the final fundraising numbers for both campaigns will rise significantly.

As Marks noted, "This is troubling, because the money comes from lawyers, law firms, unions, and businesses who frequently litigate in the state courts. These are not the types of records Pennsylvania should be proud of. But when you elect judges in partisan contests, the elections become more expensive, not less so."

Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts is a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to promote the reform of Pennsylvania's judicial system. www.pmconline.org.

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