

MEDIA ADVISORY – June 7, 2010

Contact: Lauren Manelius
Phone: 717.214.2200

Poll Shows Pennsylvanians Favor Judicial Merit Selection

Statewide poll also reveals citizens have negative opinions about judicial elections

WHAT: Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts (PMC) and PMCAction will be releasing the results of a statewide poll on Pennsylvanians' views on a switch to merit selection for appellate court judges and on the current state of Pennsylvania's courts.

Among the results: 62 percent of respondents favor replacing the current system with merit selection, 53 percent believe that PA's system of selecting judges in statewide elections is broken and needs to be fixed. 93 percent want the opportunity to vote on whether Pennsylvania should change the way we select appellate court judges.

WHO: Lynn Marks, Executive Director, PMC & PMCAction
Representative Matt Smith, sponsor of HB 1621
Governor Tom Ridge (via conference call)
Governor Mark Schweiker
Governor Ed Rendell
Senator Jane Earll, sponsor of SB 860

WHEN: **Wednesday, June 9, 12:30 p.m.**

WHERE: Governor's Reception Room

BACKGROUND: PMC and PMCAction, along with national partners Justice at Stake, American Judicature Society, and the Committee for Economic Development—plus a diverse coalition of civic, business, religious and legal groups—are advocating for a constitutional amendment to change the way Pennsylvania selects its appellate court judges.

In this past year's Supreme Court race, two candidates raised nearly \$4.7 million, with a great deal of this money coming from lawyers, law firms and other organizations, including political parties, that frequently appear before the Supreme Court. In fact, a recent study by the American Judicature Society found that 60 percent of recent cases before the PA Supreme Court involve a lawyer, law firm or party that contributed to the election campaign of at least one of the justices.

Merit selection eliminates the problems caused by money in the judicial selection system by getting judges out of the fundraising business and eliminating expensive campaigns. It combines elements of elective and appointive systems and adds a nonpartisan citizens nominating commission to evaluate candidates and recommend a list of the most highly qualified for possible nomination. After a four year initial term, and every ten years thereafter, the judge would go before the voters in a nonpartisan retention election. Merit Selection is designed to get the most qualified, fair and impartial judges on the bench.

Changing the way we select appellate judges requires a constitutional amendment, which can only be accomplished if the people of Pennsylvania vote to do so. We hope they will get that opportunity.

Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts is a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded to improve and strengthen the justice system in Pennsylvania by reforming the judicial selection process; improving the jury system, court administration and court financing; eliminating bias; and assisting citizens in navigating the courts and the justice system, whether as litigants, jurors, or witnesses. PMCAction is an affiliated nonprofit that lobbies for court reform initiatives.