

For Immediate Release:

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### PMC: Orie Melvin Case Demands Swift Action and Long Term Reform

Philadelphia (January 10, 2012) 6 Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts (PMC) today called for swift action following the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review's [report](#) that Supreme Court Justice Joan Orie Melvin is the target of a grand jury investigation focused on the improper use of judicial and legislative staff for her election campaigns.

PMC first called on Justice Orie Melvin to temporarily step down from the bench. PMC Executive Director Lynn A. Marks explained, "All citizens, including judges are presumed innocent until proven guilty, but judges and especially supreme court justices should not be permitted to judge others while under the cloud of such a serious investigation."

Should Justice Orie Melvin not voluntarily step down, PMC called on the Supreme Court to temporarily suspend her. The Supreme Court has suspended judges facing misconduct charges, criminal investigations, or even allegations of wrongdoing. As Marks explained, "judges must be held to a higher standard because of the great power entrusted to them by the public and because our courts are only effective when the people have confidence in them."

PMC acknowledged that suspending a sitting Supreme Court Justice before charges of misconduct or criminal charges have been filed is a serious action that will deprive the Supreme Court of its full complement of justices. However, the Supreme Court must act to protect the integrity of the Court and to safeguard the public trust.

Calling the grand jury investigation an indictment of the judicial election system, PMC then urged the state legislature to amend the constitution to end the election of appellate judges. "Judicial elections require candidates to campaign, politick, and fundraise, eliminating the distinction between them and politicians. Judicial elections are designed to pick the best campaigners and fundraisers. We need a system that is designed to get the most qualified, fair and impartial judges on the bench," explained PMC Deputy Director Shira J. Goodman.

[Legislation](#) is pending to amend the constitution to implement a Merit Selection system for selecting appellate court judges. Merit Selection is a hybrid system that combines elements of appointive and elective systems and introduces a nonpartisan citizens nominating commission to evaluate potential candidates for the appellate courts. "Merit Selection," explained Goodman "gets judges out of the campaign and fundraising business."

Amending the constitution is a lengthy process that culminates in a public referendum. "PMC calls on the legislature to begin the process and give the people of Pennsylvania the opportunity to decide whether there is a better way to select appellate judges," said Goodman.

*[Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts](#) is a statewide nonpartisan court reform organization.*

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