



PHILADELPHIA BAR ASSOCIATION

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Albert S. Dandridge III, Chancellor

Date: June 22, 2015

RE: Merit Selection of Appellate Judges

I am writing on behalf of the 13,000 member Philadelphia Bar Association to respectfully urge your support for House Bill 1336, which would change the way appellate court judges are selected in Pennsylvania.

This legislation would replace the current system of electing appellate court judges with a new system in which the Governor would nominate judges from a list of candidates recommended by the Appellate Court Nominating Commission, created by the legislation. The candidates would then be confirmed by the Senate and would serve initial four-year terms, followed by retention elections for 10-year terms.

The Philadelphia Bar Association so strongly believes in merit selection that support for the concept is contained in the bylaws of our organization. The Association's support for merit selection dates to 1952, when Pennsylvania was among the leaders in the discussion on merit selection. At that time, only California and Missouri had a merit selection system in place. Today, two thirds of all states have some form of merit selection and no state that has adopted merit selection has ever rescinded it. Moreover, only eight states still choose appellate court judges by election as we do in Pennsylvania.

The stakes are higher than ever. The 2015 Supreme Court election is expected to be the most expensive judicial election in Pennsylvania history, with more than \$5 million having been spent in the Primary Election. With all that money being spent, the average voter has little information from which to determine whether a candidate possesses the characteristics that make a good judge, including: knowledge of the law, integrity, judicial temperament and a devotion to the improvement of the quality of justice.

We believe that the proposed legislation strikes an appropriate balance between selecting judges based on merit rather than political and fundraising acumen, while still allowing citizens to express their opinions through retention votes. The Philadelphia Bar Association encourages the Committee to take up House Bill 1336, and respectfully requests your support. Thank you for your consideration.