

We are calling on the General Assembly to dismiss the current effort to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to change the way we elect appellate court judges and justices in the Commonwealth.

FULL LETTER TEXT BELOW

January 15, 2021

Members of the General Assembly,

We, the undersigned, would like to express our vehement opposition to the current effort to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to change the way we elect appellate court judges and justices in the Commonwealth.

The negative implications of this legislation are of great concern. First, this effort is the largest attempt to disenfranchise Pennsylvanians in the history of our Commonwealth. Second, this is a massive threat to the independence of our Judiciary.

Currently, Pennsylvanians have the right to elect and hold accountable all thirty-one appellate court judges and justices (seven Supreme Court, fifteen Superior Court, nine Commonwealth Court). This amendment eviscerates that right by muting their voice but for only three of the thirty-one appellate courts judges and justices (one Supreme Court, one Superior Court, one Commonwealth Court.) As a result, millions of Pennsylvanians are disenfranchised. No longer will our voices be heard by all judges running for an office possessing statewide jurisdiction. No longer will voters be able to hold appellate court judges accountable for their actions and decisions through retention elections.

Additionally, our Judiciary is a co-equal branch of government whose independence is a core tenet of our Democracy. That independence is enshrined in both the U.S. and Pennsylvania Constitutions. Electing appellate judges from districts gerrymandered by the General Assembly will make those judges increasingly beholden to partisan politics instead of the United States Constitution, Pennsylvania Constitution, and the laws of the Commonwealth. Judges are not legislators whose job is to represent a specific community and should not be encouraged to care more or less about a case based on the region from which it arises. Judges should be free of influence from local biases and prejudices – their fidelity is to the law of the entire Commonwealth, and they should not be encouraged to consider how a specific regional judicial district would respond to a certain ruling.

Our diverse and growing opposition, representing over a million members, requests in the strongest terms that this constitutional amendment does not get consideration in either chamber. Defeating this is one of our highest priorities for the 2021-22 legislative session.

Sincerely,

Darrin Kelly, Allegheny-Fayette Labor Council, President  
Kenneth J. Broadbent, Steamfitters Local 449, Business Manager  
Dennis L. Martire, LIUNA, VP and Mid-Atlantic Regional Manager  
Bobby "Mac" McAuliffe, United Steelworkers, District Director

Deborah Gross, Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts, President and CEO  
Joe Gusler, Central PA Building & Construction Trades Council  
Ralph Sicuro, Pittsburgh Firemen Local 1, President  
Rich Askey, PSEA, President  
JT Pennington, PA Professional Firefighters, President  
James T. Kunz Jr., IUOE 66, Business Manager  
Richard Bloomingdale, PA AFL-CIO, President  
Patrick Eiding, Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO, President  
Paul Lagnese, Pennsylvania Association for Justice, President  
Dave Henderson, AFSCME Council 13, Executive Director  
Wendell Young IV, UFCW Local 1776, President  
Ali Kronley, United Home Care Workers of Pennsylvania, Director  
Samuel Jones, Restaurant Opportunities Center of Pennsylvania (ROC), Director  
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Bonnie Chang, Bucks Voices, Chair  
Antoinette Kraus, Pennsylvania Health Access Network, Executive Director  
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Joseph Ashdale, Int'l Union of Painters & Allied Trades District Council #21, Business Manager  
Ashley McBride, For Our Future Action Fund, State Director  
Nancy Kleinberg, Indivisible: Narberth and Beyond, Founder  
Sue Caskey, Progressive Montco, Chair  
Alisha Hoffman-Mirilovich, Action Together NEPA, President  
Matthew Yarnell, SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania, President  
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Jennifer Rafanan Kennedy, Pittsburgh United/PA United, Executive Director  
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Nancy Nguyen and Mohan Seshadri, Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance, Co-Executive Directors  
Gloria Gilman, Philly Neighborhood Networks, Chair  
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Veronica Coptis, Center for Coalfield Justice, Executive Director  
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