



J. F RANKLYN BOURNE BAR ASSOCIATION, INC.

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February 10, 2025

Delegate Luke Clippinger, Judicial Committee Chair
Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, Judicial Committee Vice Chair
100 Taylor House Office Building
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Subject: Support for Maryland House Bill 778 and Senate Bill 630

Dear Delegate Clippinger,

On behalf of the J. Franklyn Bourne Bar Association, I write to express our support for Maryland House Bill 778 and Senate Bill 630, which seek to eliminate contested judicial elections for Circuit Court judges and replace them with retention elections following gubernatorial appointment. We firmly believe this change will enhance the integrity, fairness, and stability of Maryland's judiciary.

Circuit Court judicial candidates in Maryland undergo an extensive and rigorous vetting process before being appointed by the Governor. Candidates must submit detailed applications and are subjected to interviews by multiple evaluating bodies, including the Maryland specialty bar associations, County Bar Associations, Maryland State Bar Associations, and the Maryland Trial Courts Judicial Nominating Commissions.

After this extensive review process, only the most qualified individuals are recommended to the Governor for appointment. Once appointed, these judges serve and build experience on the bench. However, under the current system, they may later face contested elections where individuals who have not undergone this thorough vetting process can challenge them for their seats. This is highly problematic, as it can result in the loss of well-qualified, carefully vetted judges to opponents who have never been screened, evaluated, or deemed fit for the judiciary. The current process could result in the election of individuals lacking the necessary legal experience, judicial temperament, or understanding of the responsibilities of the bench. The current system, therefore, undermines the very vetting process designed to ensure a highly qualified judiciary.

In addition, the process of running in a contested election requires judicial candidates to engage in political campaigning, fundraising, and public endorsements. Judges should be focused on upholding the law rather than engaging in electoral politics, which can create the perception—or even the reality—of bias in decision-making. By eliminating contested elections, HB 778 and SB 630 help preserve public confidence in the fairness and impartiality of our courts.

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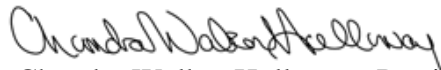
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Maryland already uses retention elections for the Maryland Court of Appeals, where judges appointed by the Governor must later receive approval from voters to remain on the bench. Extending this process to Circuit Court judges would bring consistency to Maryland's judicial selection system. This method allows the public to have a voice in the retention of judges while ensuring that only those who have been thoroughly vetted and deemed qualified through the established selection process serve in these critical roles.

Thus, the J. Franklyn Bourne Bar Association strongly supports Maryland House Bill 778 and Senate Bill 630 because they will strengthen the integrity of our judicial selection process, safeguard the judiciary from unnecessary political influence, and ensure consistency across Maryland's courts. The extensive vetting process already in place guarantees that appointed judges are well-qualified, and retention elections still provide the public with a mechanism for oversight. For these reasons, we urge the legislature to pass these bills and modernize Maryland's judicial election process.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Chandra Walker Holloway".

Chandra Walker Holloway, President

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