



February 6, 2025

RE: HB778 / SB630 – Circuit Court Judges – Selection and Retention Elections

Position: Support

Dear Chair Smith, Chair Clippinger, and Committee Members:

As a member of the Judiciary's Workgroup on Judicial Selections, I fully support the proposed Constitutional Amendment set forth in HB778/SB630. These bills reflect the Workgroup's recommendation for Circuit Court judges to be subject to retention elections in the same manner as our Appellate Court justices and judges.

It is important to note that this is just one part of the Workgroup's recommendations. The Workgroup completed a comprehensive examination of methods of selecting and retaining qualified trial judges that are used throughout the country over a 22-month period. Other recommendations included reforms for Judicial Nominating Commissions so that the vetting process is fair and transparent, and implementation of other accountability and transparency measures for the selection and retention of qualified judges through Gubernatorial appointment and vetting. The Workgroup focused on recommending processes to identify highly qualified, impartial, independent, and trustworthy judges. The recommendations are data driven and research based.

The Workgroup designed the proposed reforms to safeguard judicial independence; ensure public accountability; recruit high quality judges; deliver a diverse judiciary; maintain public trust and confidence; include public education and participation in the process and consider safety and security concerns for members of the bench.

I encourage each of you to review the Workgroup's report and the academic research and public testimony included in the Appendix to the report. I support all the Workgroup recommendations, including use of retention elections for Circuit Court judges, instead of the current system that allows non-vetted candidates to appear on the ballot in contested judicial elections. Selection and recruitment of highly qualified judges should not be politicized.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kurt L. Schmoke
President
University of Baltimore