

PA JUDICIAL RACE OVERVIEW. NOVEMBER 4, 2025

Judicial races are often overlooked. This year is an important one for the commonwealth's legal system. The Commonwealth, Superior, and Supreme Courts hold immense power. Judges often serve for decades, and the decisions they make touch a range of critical issues that can directly affect our everyday lives.

On November 4, you will be faced with a ballot listing a number of state-wide judicial candidates and issues. You will be asked

- whether or not to retain judges on the Commonwealth, Superior, and Supreme Courts.
- to vote to fill one vacancy on Commonwealth Court and one on Superior Court.

This report is to give you a brief overview on the judicial candidates. The ranking comments come from the bipartisan Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) which reviews candidates for judicial office.

Commonwealth Court

The Commonwealth Court has nine members. Judges serve initial 10-year terms, then face a nonpartisan retention vote.

One judge is up for **retention**:

Michael Wojcik

University of Pittsburgh School of Law, JD, cum laude, 1989,
Elected a judge of the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania, 2015
Solicitor, Allegheny County, 2004-12
Solicitor to the Allegheny County Controller, 2000-04

There is one seat open on Commonwealth Court this year.

For **election**:

Democratic candidate: Stella Tsai

Tsai has served as a judge on Philadelphia's Court of Common Pleas since 2016. She was first appointed, then elected to a 10-year term the following year. She has worked across the city's criminal, civil, orphans' court, and family court divisions.

The PBA rated her as “highly recommended,” saying she has “a long and diverse legal career” with extensive trial experience in state and federal courts, and that she is respected among fellow judges and considered “enthusiastic, hard-working and fair.”

Republican candidate: Matthew Wolford

Wolford is a solo practitioner based in Erie and specializes in environmental law, though he has also worked in state government in the past.

Before starting his practice, Wolford was an attorney for the Department of Environmental Protection, and before that a deputy state attorney general and the U.S. attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Bar Association rated Wolford as “highly recommended,” noting that he has been “litigating all aspects of environmental law,” both civilly and criminally and at trial and appellate levels, for almost four decades.

Superior Court

The Superior Court has 15 members. It handles criminal and civil cases that don’t involve the government. The panel’s main role is to review lower courts’ verdicts. Judges serve initial 10-year terms, then face a nonpartisan retention vote.

One judge is up for **retention**:

Alice Dubow.

University of Pennsylvania Law School, J.D., 1984

Served on Superior Court since January, 2016

Served on the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia County, 2007-2015

Drexel University, Deputy General Counsel

City of Philadelphia, Divisional Deputy City Solicitor

One seat on Superior Court has been open since 2023.

For **election**:

Democratic candidate: Brandon P. Newman.

Elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives as a Democrat in 2010, Brandon was reelected to serve 3 more terms. He was an unsuccessful candidate for Pennsylvania Lieutenant Governor in 2014. Brandon resigned from the House on December 31, 2017 to run for and be elected as judge in Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas, Washington County, where he has served since 2018 to the present.

Neuman is “highly recommended” by the Pennsylvania Bar Association, which said his “opinions demonstrate knowledge of substantive and procedural legal issues and the ability to provide good factual backgrounds and well-developed legal arguments.”

[Editorial Note: When Brandon was a member of the state House of Representatives from 2011 to 2017 he represented District 48, our district, preceding Tim O’Neal. Brandon was a Club member during that period and served on our Legislative Committee. He is still a Club member.]

Republican candidate: Maria Battista

A Clarion County resident, Battista previously served as assistant general counsel for the Pennsylvania Departments of Health and State under former Govs. Tom Corbett, a Republican, and Tom Wolf, a Democrat.

She also was a prosecutor in Franklin and Venango Counties

In Battista’s losing 2023 bid for a Superior Court judgeship, she received the state Republican Party’s endorsement during her primary. This time around, the state party chose Ann Marie Wheatcraft, a Common Pleas judge from the Philadelphia suburbs, in its primary endorsement.

After Wheatcraft lost the primary, the state party endorsed Battista.

The Pennsylvania Bar Association did not recommend Battista because she did not participate in its rating process.

Liberal Party candidate: Daniel Wassmer

Wassmer is an attorney who has worked as an adjunct professor, run his own firm, and previously worked in the Bucks County solicitor’s office.

He has unsuccessfully run for office several times, including in 2020 for attorney general and U.S. Senate in 2022. The Pennsylvania Bar Association said Wassmer did not request a questionnaire to be evaluated.

Supreme Court

The state Supreme Court has seven members. Three are up for retention.

Once elected, justices serve 10-year terms. At the end of a term, they can either be retained or rejected in a statewide yes-or-no vote.

For **Retention**:

Christine Donohue.

- Duquesne University School of Law, J.D., 1980
- Elected Justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, 2015
- Elected Judge of the Pennsylvania Superior Court, 2007
- Pennsylvania Court of Judicial Discipline, former judge
- Pennsylvania Judicial Conduct Board, former chair and member
- Pennsylvania Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

Kevin Dougherty.

Antioch School of Law, J.D. 1987

Assistant District Attorney, Philadelphia County, 1990-95

Appointed as judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia County, 2001

Elected as judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia County 2002-2012

Retained as judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia County, 2012-15

Appointed Administrative Judge, Family Division, Philadelphia County, 2005-2014

Appointed Administrative Judge, Trial Division, Philadelphia County, 2014-2015

Elected justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, 2015

David Wecht.

Yale University, Yale Law School (J.D.), 1987.

Adjunct Professor, Duquesne University School Of Law, Pittsburgh, PA, 1997-Present.

Instructor, College of General Studies, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, 2010-Present.

Judge, Court of Common Pleas, Allegheny County, 2003-2012

Judge, Superior Court of Pennsylvania, 2012-2016.

Elected justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, 2015

All three candidates have been designated as “highly recommended” by the PBA.