

Position-The Missouri Plan for Selection of Judges
Updated September 2025

OUR POSITION

The Missouri Plan, the system for selecting judges to serve on the state's Supreme Court, its three Courts of Appeal, and the local courts of its three largest population centers, must be retained by the voters of Missouri to preserve fairness in selection of judges and to protect the independence of the judiciary.

OUR REASONS

The Missouri Plan has built-in safeguards to protect the independence of the judiciary from the corrupting influence of money and partisan politics.

A non-partisan judicial commission reviews applications for an open judgeship and identifies three candidates. The review process includes evaluation of candidates' background, education, competency, experience and temperament. Candidates' political parties are disregarded. The Governor then must act within 60 days to select one of the three to fill the opening. The person selected serves an initial term of one year, and succeeding terms between 4 and 12 years, depending on the court. After each term of a judge's service, information about the judge's record is compiled and made available to voters, and the voters decide whether to retain or remove the judge in a non-partisan general election.

To inhibit the possibility of control of the judicial commission by entrenchment of a political party or trial lawyers, lawyers on the commission are from different areas of the state, they are elected by their local peers and they are limited to one six-year term. Also, non-lawyers on the commission are from different areas of the state and serve for six-year staggered terms, and the judges who chair the panels serve for a single two-year term. This makes it very difficult for one faction to control any judicial appointment.

OUR ADVOCACY POINTS

The Missouri Plan is admired by legal experts nationwide because it protects the independence of the judiciary. Any attempt to change the method of appointing judges that would infuse the influence of money or partisan politics into the process should be rejected by Missouri voters.