



October 11, 2022

**For Immediate Release:**

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The Illinois Judges Association (IJA) issued a Declaration of Judicial Independence today aimed at keeping politics out of America's court system ahead of the November 8 General Election.

The single-page document – which so far has been co-signed by 18 bar associations and legal groups from across Illinois – states that the “court system can only function if it is viewed as impartial, which means that judges make decisions based solely upon the facts and the law.”

The IJA – which represents 1,250 sitting and retired judges in Illinois – warns that judges have increasingly become the focus of politically driven attacks, which threaten to underscore the importance of judicial independence.

“These attacks – often bolstered by ideologues or well-funded special interest groups – threaten the legitimacy of the judicial branch and erode public confidence in judge’s ability to render impartial outcomes,” said IJA President and Illinois Appellate Justice Eileen O’Neill Burke. “These partisan-driven agendas are designed to intimidate judges for their role as neutral arbitrators of the law.”

“Our goal is to educate voters that an independent judiciary is essential to the rule of law and central to maintaining the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances guaranteed by our Constitution,” said Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA) President Rory T. Weiler. “Judges interpret the law and the Constitution and must exercise their independence to have the authority to make fair and competent decisions and to serve the public without political pressure, interference or threats.”

The IJA and judicial independence supporters will promote the Declaration to educate voters leading up to the general election. The IJA has also produced a video it plans to feature and share on social media. You can view the video [here](#).

“Because the independence of the judiciary protects all of us and our rights, it is vital that no improper influence can tip the scales of justice against someone,” said Chicago Bar Association (CBA) President Timothy Tomasik. “We stand with the Illinois Judges

Association in representing a broad-based coalition that stands together in fighting to defend judicial independence as a means of safeguarding democracy and protecting the rights of all our citizens.”

The IJA encourages voters to learn more about judges – including the qualifications of judicial candidates and judges seeking retention – who will appear on the ballot by viewing the [ISBA’s Judicial Evaluations and Ratings](#) and the [CBA’s Judicial Voting Guide](#).

**The following groups have co-signed the IJA’s Declaration of Judicial Independence:**

Advocates Society

American Board of Trial Advocates Illinois

Arab American Bar Association of Illinois

Black Women Lawyers’ Association of Greater Chicago

Chicago Bar Association

Decalogue Society of Lawyers

DuPage County Bar Association

Hellenic Bar Association of Illinois

Hellenic Judges Association of Illinois

Hispanic Lawyers Association of Chicago

Illinois Defense Counsel

Illinois Judicial Council

Illinois Latino Judges Association

Illinois State Bar Association

Jewish Judges Association of Illinois

Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago

Northwest Suburban Bar Association

Women’s Bar Association of Illinois



## **Judicial Independence Declaration**

A basic principle that defines the United States of America is that we are all entitled to equal treatment under the law. The judiciary's primary function is to protect the rights of all people.

The court system can only function if it is viewed as impartial, that means making decisions based solely upon the facts and the law.

There are headline grabbing incidents of judges being threatened at all levels of the judiciary. The incidents are happening more frequently. It is based upon a political agenda or those seeking retaliation for adverse or unpopular rulings.

Judges are called upon to make decisions on controversial and hotly contested matters. We make these decisions because we have been given a position of trust in our communities. The voters should be able to determine whether we retain that position of trust based upon whether our rulings are fair and based upon the evidence, not whether we adhere to anyone's political ideology.

Our democracy encourages discussion, debate and scrutiny. The right to appeal an adverse ruling ensures decisions are proper and lawful.

On the ballot in November, judges on each level of court system will be on the ballot. Members of the state supreme court, the state appellate court, and the circuit court will be seeking retention.

Voters should evaluate judges based on their integrity, professionalism, temperament, fairness and impartiality. The Illinois Judges Association along with the undersigned represent a broad-based coalition that stand together in fighting to defend judicial independence as a means of safeguarding democracy and protecting the rights of our citizens.