

SB 80- Judicial Party Designation
State Senators Jerry C. Cirino & Gavarone
Senate Local Government & Elections Committee

March 2, 2021

Chairwoman Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee. Thank you for the opportunity for Senator Gavarone and myself to provide sponsor testimony on behalf of Senate Bill 80.

Currently, as you all may know, Ohio operates on a quasi-nomination system for judicial nominees in which judges are nominated in a partisan primary while elected in a nonpartisan general election. This has been the process in Ohio since the General Assembly voted to implement nonpartisan judicial elections in 1910: 110 years ago. This legislative change had an immediate impact, as turnout in Ohio Supreme Court elections dropped by more than 20% between the years 1910 and 1920.¹

While the process of nominating and electing judges has tried to remain impartial and nonpartisan, the reality is that it is far from that. Currently, judicial nominees appear at party events, in advertisements, and in party-specific slate cards. More importantly, special interest groups in recent years have spent millions of dollars on various advertisements for judicial candidates across the political spectrum. This half-baked system has resulted in confusion for voters throughout the state of Ohio as they are unsure which judicial candidates represent their core values. In a 2014 study done by the University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, 65% of respondents stated that it would be either "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful" to have a party designation with the candidates name.²

This bill will require Supreme Court and district court of appeals judicial candidates to appear on the general election ballots with their party designations. In doing so, this legislation would have Ohio join several other states in which judges are elected in partisan elections for these judicial positions.

Senator Gavarone and I believe that Senate Bill 80 is sound policy that removes a great deal of confusion for the voter. As elected officials, we should be encouraging more people to be involved in races that directly involve their everyday lives, and I believe this legislation does that. We encourage this committee's support, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹Hall, K. (1984). Progressive Reform and the Decline of Democratic Accountability: The Popular Election of State Supreme Court Judges, 1850-1920. *American Bar Foundation Research Journal*, 9(2), 345-369. Retrieved January 27, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/828264>

² <http://www.uakron.edu/dotAsset/f119f1fd-14ed-45e6-95ac-5fc6636e8634.pdf>

