

Pennsylvania 2025 Supreme Court

CANDIDATES

NAACP



CHRISTINE
DONOHUE



KEVIN
DOUGHERTY



DAVID
WECHT

A Nonpartisan Guide to the 2025 Pennsylvania Supreme Court Retention Election

Three seats on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court are up for a retention election on November 4. A retention election is simple: Voters are asked to vote Yes or No as to whether to give each justice another ten-year term. The Court has seven justices; currently five are Democrats, and two are Republicans. The three justices up for re-election are all Democrats. If at least two of the justices fail to win retention, that could shift majority control. Both parties have been [preparing](#) for a hard-fought election.

The Court decides questions of state law that can have significant impact. In recent years, among other decisions the Court ruled [that](#) warrantless searches are not justified if they are based solely on the smell of cannabis; [that](#) citizens have a right to vote by provisional ballot if their mail-in ballot is disqualified for a failure to return it in the required secrecy envelope; and [that](#) the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects people from being forced to hand over their digital passwords.

To help you understand this election, we've assembled background on the justices' written opinions and votes in key cases before the Court, along with their public statements, education, and previous work experience, to indicate how they might rule on key issues in the future.

CHRISTINE DONOHUE donohue2025.com	KEVIN DOUGHERTY retaindougherty.com	DAVID WECHT davidwecht.com
• On abortion, Donohue wrote, “the Pennsylvania Constitution secures the fundamental right to reproductive autonomy.” And that “includes a right to decide whether to have an abortion or to carry a pregnancy to term.” • On education, she agreed that a lower court should hold a trial on whether state officials are failing to adequately and equitably fund public education. • On gun policy, in a dispute over a city’s restriction on the location of gun ranges, Donohue wrote that “engaging in firearms proficiency training on... private residential property is not covered” in “the Second Amendment.”	• On abortion, Dougherty agreed that a lower court must hear a challenge to a law that limited the use of Medicaid funding to cover abortions. He has not indicated whether the Pennsylvania Constitution guarantees a fundamental right to abortion. • On education, he wrote that the Court had a clear duty to consider whether Pennsylvania citizens’ Constitutional rights to “a proper public education” are being violated by inadequate funding. • On gun policy, Dougherty wrote that a city’s restriction on the location of gun ranges is “consistent with the Nation’s historical tradition of firearm regulation” and “outside the Second Amendment’s unqualified command.”	• On abortion, Wecht wrote that women have a “right to reproductive autonomy.” “The Pennsylvania Constitution’s ERA did away with the antiquated and misogynistic notion that a woman has no say over what happens to her own body.” • On education, he ordered a lower court to hold a trial on whether state officials are failing to adequately and equitably fund public education. He saw validity in the claim that “distribution of state funds results in widespread deprivations in economically disadvantaged districts,” limiting “the resources necessary to attain a constitutionally adequate education.”

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• On LGBTQ rights, Donohue wrote, “As judges we must educate ourselves on all LGBT issues, including the insidious nature of crimes directed at members of the LGBT community.” • On marijuana, Donohue agreed that given medical marijuana’s legal status in Pennsylvania, the smell of marijuana cannot be the sole reason for a warrantless vehicle search. She also agreed that people under court supervision should be allowed to use medical marijuana. • On redistricting, she agreed that the state legislature’s 2011 redistricting plan was an unconstitutional gerrymander. • On voting, Donohue ruled that when a voter’s mail-in ballot is rejected because of a disqualifying mistake, that voter must still be allowed to cast a provisional ballot on election day. • On voting, she opposed a ruling throwing out mail-in ballots that didn’t have the correct date.	• On LGBTQ rights, about the decision allowing same-sex couples to adopt children in PA, Dougherty said, “We have hundreds of thousands of children sitting in out-of-home placement, wishing they had a permanent and loving family. That one decision permitted many, many, many, many, many children to find loving homes. That’s phenomenal, the impact of one decision.” • On marijuana, he agreed that people under court supervision should be allowed to use medical marijuana. • On mental health issues in the justice system, he said, “We don’t have to lock people up because they have mental illness or because they are different. We need to be able to find out what the root cause is and divert them, particularly veterans. I’m a strong supporter of veteran courts.” • On redistricting, Dougherty agreed that the state legislature’s 2011 redistricting plan was an unconstitutional gerrymander. • On voting, he agreed that when a voter’s mail-in ballot is rejected, that voter’s provisional ballot must still be counted.	• On gun policy, Wecht agreed that a city’s restriction on the location of gun ranges is “consistent with the Nation’s historical tradition of firearm regulation.” • On LGBTQ rights, he is a “firm believer in equality” and was “personally thrilled” when same-sex marriage was legalized. • On marijuana, Wecht agreed that given medical marijuana’s legal status in Pennsylvania, the smell of marijuana cannot be the sole reason for a warrantless vehicle search. He also agreed that people under court supervision should be allowed to use medical marijuana. • On redistricting, he agreed that the state legislature’s 2011 redistricting plan was an unconstitutional gerrymander. • On voting, Wecht opposed a decision allowing a voter’s election-day provisional ballot to be counted when that voter’s mail-in ballot had a disqualifying mistake, such as failure to place a returned ballot in a secrecy envelope.
Christine Donohue was elected to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2015. She earned her bachelor’s degree from East Stroudsburg University, and her law degree from Duquesne University School of Law. She was in private law practice for 27 years at a civil trial lawyer and litigator. She was elected judge of the Pennsylvania Superior Court in 2007.	Kevin Dougherty was elected to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2015. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Temple University, and his law degree from Antioch School of Law. An assistant district attorney in Phila. County from 1990 to 1995 and then in private law practice, he served from 2001 to 2015 in the Phila. County Court of Common Pleas.	David Wecht was elected to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2015. He earned his bachelor’s degree in history and political science from Yale University and his law degree from Yale Law School. He was in private law practice from 1989 to 2003, and then was a judge in the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas until 2012. He was elected judge of the Pennsylvania Superior Court in 2012.
Area of personal interest: With increasing difficulty for young trial attorneys to get training in basic advocacy skills, she initiated an “effort” by trial judges and lawyers to afford young lawyers opportunities to gain courtroom experience, especially presenting cases to civil juries.”	Area of personal interest: He supports having “a conversation about autism in our courts.” “If your behaviors are something you can’t control because of a neurological complexity, then maybe I [as a judge] should be a little more sensitive to that if I want to do the right thing.”	Area of personal interest: In light of his concern about anti-Semitism, he says we should not “eliminate or place incursions on the First Amendment.... It’s critical that we never in this country give government the power to pick and choose which speech is preferred. The remedy for hate speech is more speech.”

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