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New Website Features Information About Judicial Races for Voters Statewide

COLUMBUS - The first statewide judicial voter education website - JudicialVotesCount.org - launched today to provide Ohioans with information about all of the 2015 judicial races.

The judicial voter website is one part of Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor's three-point plan to reform judicial elections in Ohio. The other aspects include moving all judicial races to odd-numbered years and to the top of the ballot and increasing the qualifications to serve as judge.

Chief Justice O'Connor has partnered with several organizations to better educate Ohioans about judges in an effort to increase meaningful voter participation. The project's partners are: the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron, which houses the website; the Ohio State Bar Association; the League of Women Voters of Ohio; the Ohio Newspaper Association; and the Ohio Association of Broadcasters.



New Website Gives Voters
Judicial Race Information

In addition to candidate profiles, the website features information about what judges do, descriptions about the duties of different courts, and brief videos of former judges explaining how the court system works.

With 2015 being an odd-numbered year, municipal court judges are up for election on Nov. 3 in Ohio. Next year, JudicialVotesCount.org will include information on candidates for the Supreme Court, appeals courts, common pleas courts, and county courts, as judges for those courts are elected in even-numbered years.

The impetus for creating the website came from a [survey](#) of 1,067 registered Ohio voters who said the biggest reason they don't vote for judges is because they don't know enough about the candidates. The survey, which was conducted in October 2014 by the Bliss Institute, focused on the drop-off in votes cast in judicial races.

In speaking out on the issue over the last three years, Chief Justice O'Connor has expressed concern that in some elections more than a quarter of the electorate skips voting for judges who are, by law, listed near the bottom of the ballot. About half of the 2014 survey respondents admitted they seldom vote in judicial elections.

"We can't expect voters to be knowledgeable about judicial candidates if we make it difficult for them to find information," Chief Justice O'Connor said. "This website provides - for the first time - a comprehensive resource to ensure voters make informed decisions based on substantive information."

"The key to keeping Ohio's judiciary strong is encouraging everyone to learn about judicial candidates so they can make informed decisions when they cast their ballots. The Ohio State Bar Association is proud to be a partner in the Judicial Votes Count effort to bring that all-important information to Ohioans," Ohio State Bar Association President John D. Holschuh Jr. said.

"The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920 to provide voters with the tools they need to participate in elections, such as nonpartisan voter guides" said Carrie Davis, executive director of LWV Ohio. "Judicial Votes Count is an outstanding new tool to empower Ohioans to cast an informed vote."

"The effective democracy requires voting, and effective voting requires good information," said John C. Green, director of the Bliss Institute and a distinguished professor in political science. "The Bliss Institute is pleased to support Judicial Votes Count to give Ohioans access to the information they need to vote - and vote effectively - in judicial elections."

"Judges affect everyone with their rulings, often profoundly," said Dennis Hetzel, executive director of the Ohio Newspaper Association. "Unfortunately, too many voters take these offices for granted, or helpful information about candidates isn't readily available. This website helps to change that situation and should be a great resource for Ohio citizens."

"The OAB appreciates Chief Justice O'Connor's leadership on this important initiative," said Christine Merritt, president of the Ohio Association of Broadcasters. "We hope that Ohio voters will use the resources available on the JudicialVotesCount.org site to become better informed about the offices and candidates on the ballot for election."

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