

Frequently asked questions about merit retention elections

1. Why are appeals court judges and Supreme Court justices on the ballot this year?

Florida appeals court judges and Supreme Court justices are on the ballot in nonpartisan elections every six years so voters can determine whether they should stay in office. This regular vote is called “merit retention.” Their terms are staggered. This year, three Supreme Court justices (out of seven) and 15 appeals court judges (out of 61) have merit retention elections.

2. What do “Yes” and “No” votes mean?

A “Yes” vote means you want the judge or justice to stay in office. A “No” vote means you want the judge to be removed from office. The majority of voters decide.

2. Do appeals court judges and Supreme Court justices have opponents?

No. Your vote will determine whether each judge listed should stay in office. They are not running against opponents or each other.

4. How do appeals court judges and Supreme Court justices get into office?

The governor appoints them from lists submitted by Judicial Nominating Commissions, which screen candidates and make recommendations based on the merits of applicants. Newly appointed jurists go before voters for the first time within two years after appointment. If the voters retain them, they then go on the ballot again every six years.

5. Which courts are subject to merit retention elections?

The Florida Supreme Court and the five District Courts of Appeal are subject to merit retention elections. Floridians amended the state constitution to adopt this system in 1976.

6. Do appeals court judges or justices run election campaigns?

Usually they cannot campaign or even raise money. However, they can do those things if any group or individual openly urges voters to remove them from office.

7. Has any appeals court judge or Supreme Court justice been voted out of office?

No. We are fortunate in Florida to have a Judicial Qualifications Commission, which can investigate and recommend removal of judges who have violated the Canons of Judicial Ethics. Through this system, judges have been removed from office for ethical violations. For more information, visit <http://www.flcourts.org>.