

Coalition for Impartial Justice

600 Nicollet Avenue • Suite 380 • Minneapolis, MN 55402-1039

February 19, 2010



The Honorable Jim Abeler
203 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Abeler:

The Citizens League urges your support in the effort to pass HF224 (Simon) and SF70 (Rest), which would put needed changes on the 2010 ballot to preserve the integrity and impartiality of Minnesota's courts by reforming the way judges are selected and elected.

States with partisan judicial elections are seeing those contests devolve into big-money battles featuring vicious attack ads. Concern that the scales of justice might be tilted by campaign contributions and political pressure has sparked an increased interest across the nation in preserving an impartial judiciary.

A poll conducted in 2008 by Decision Resources Ltd. shows that the public thinks there is a problem and supports the proposed changes:

- 78% of voters believe judicial candidates making pledges to political parties or other special interests on political issues threaten the fairness of the courts.
- 75% believe judicial fundraising is a threat to the fairness of the judiciary.
- 74% of Minnesota voters support merit selection with retention elections, with only 16% opposed.

The public understands that paying for judges to make political promises is like paying referees for a particular outcome before a football game. Whether or not a decision is truly effected, the perception is enough to damage trust in our judicial system. In addition, this legislation and a positive vote from the public in November 2010 would do much more than limit the possibility of big-money, negative campaigns. The proposed reforms would also offer improvements over the current system in the following areas:

- The evaluation and information available on judicial performance.
- The information available for voters to decide whether to retain a sitting judge.

The Citizens League is part of the Coalition for Impartial Justice. The Coalition is made up of a variety of groups from across the political spectrum that are united in their support of HF224/SF70. We urge you to support this legislation.

Sincerely,

Executive Director
Citizens League

Amicus
Center of the American Experiment
Citizens League
Common Cause Minnesota
Council on Crime and Justice
Disability Law Center
Growth and Justice
Hennepin County Bar Association
Joint Religious Legislative Coalition
League of Women Voters Minnesota
Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance
Minnesota AFL-CIO
Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
Minnesota Second Chance Coalition
Minnesota State Bar Association
Minnesotans for Impartial Courts
O'Connor Judicial Selection Initiative
180 Degrees, Inc.
Take Action Minnesota
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