



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HJR 119		DATE: 3/11/2026
COMMITTEE: General Laws		
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES		
WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: AMY DECLUE		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 3:12 PM
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.		



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: ANDY BAKKER		PHONE NUMBER: 816-319-2771	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: LIBERTY ALLIANCE USA		TITLE: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 410371			
CITY: KANSAS CITY		STATE: MO	ZIP: 64141
EMAIL: andy@libertyallianceusa.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 9:42 AM	

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.
Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Members of the Committee,

Missouri's judicial selection system was created more than eighty years ago. At the time, the Missouri Plan was intended to promote merit and judicial independence. But today, the system lacks transparency and meaningful public accountability.

Judicial nominating commissions operate largely outside public view, yet they play a decisive role in determining which candidates can become judges. In practice, this structure gives significant influence to members of the legal profession while limiting the role of the public.

Missourians deserve a system where those exercising judicial authority are accountable to the people.

HJR 119 offers a clear path toward that goal by allowing Missourians to elect judges directly. Elections give voters a direct role in shaping the judiciary and provide a clear form of democratic accountability.

Across the country, states use a wide range of judicial selection systems. Many rely on judicial elections, reflecting the belief that those who exercise judicial authority should ultimately answer to the people.

Liberty Alliance USA respectfully urges the committee to support HJR 119 and all other efforts to give the people of Missouri more accountability in their Judges.

Thank you for your consideration.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: BEV EHLEN		PHONE NUMBER: 314-608-0168	
REPRESENTING: LIBERTY LINK MISSOURI		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 312			
CITY: WARRENTON		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63383
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:00 AM	
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.			



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: BYRON KEELIN		PHONE NUMBER: 314-402-0655	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: FREEDOM PRINCIPLE		TITLE: PRESIDENT	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 2			
CITY: BALLWIN		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63022
EMAIL: freedomprinciplemo@protonmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 7:37 PM	

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

The Freedom Principle expresses strong support for House Joint Resolution 119, which rightly seeks to reform Missouri’s method of judicial selection by ending the influence of unelected commissions in the appointment of our judges. For too long, key judicial appointments in Missouri have been dictated by nonpartisan judicial commissions—bodies whose members are not directly accountable to the people of Missouri. This process has enabled a small, unelected group to wield disproportionate power in determining who interprets and upholds our state’s laws, distancing the selection process from the will and oversight of the citizens.

HJR 119 addresses this issue by repealing the sections of our Constitution that require judges to be nominated by judicial commissions and instead empowers the governor to appoint judges directly. This crucial change ensures that those responsible for selecting the judiciary are ultimately answerable to voters. It aligns our judicial selection process with a fundamental democratic principle: that important government decisions should not be made by unelected associations, but by officials who are directly chosen by, and can be held responsible to, the people.

By transferring this authority from behind-closed-doors commissions to the elected governor, HJR 119 increases transparency, accountability, and public trust in our courts. It respects the right of Missourians to have greater influence over the composition of their judiciary and prevents special interests or unaccountable bodies from shaping the courts without input from citizens. I urge lawmakers and voters to support HJR 119 and take this important step toward restoring democratic integrity to Missouri’s judicial system.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: CAMELLIA PETERSON		PHONE NUMBER: 417-726-9475	
REPRESENTING: AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY		TITLE: LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 94			
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65102
EMAIL: cpeterson@afphq.org	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:35 AM	

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

On behalf of thousands of Missourians across the state, Americans for Prosperity would like to express our support for this legislation repealing the Missouri Non-Partisan Court Plan.

The Missouri Plan was adopted in 1940 with the intention of reducing corruption in judicial selection. While those goals were understandable at the time, the system has evolved in ways that now raise serious concerns about accountability and transparency.

Today, the Missouri Plan places significant power in the hands of judicial nominating commissions that are heavily influenced by members of the legal profession. In practice, this means a small group of insiders plays a decisive role in determining which individuals are allowed to advance in the judicial selection process. Voters ultimately have little meaningful influence over who serves on the bench.

Missourians expect accountability from every branch of government. Legislators answer to voters through elections. Governors answer to voters through elections. Yet under the current system, many judges reach the bench through a process that is largely insulated from direct public input.

This imbalance has led to growing concern among citizens that the system prioritizes the preferences of legal insiders over the voices of the people. Regardless of one's views on particular court decisions, the structure itself has created a perception that the judiciary operates outside the normal democratic checks and balances that apply to the other branches of government.

This legislation moves Missouri toward a model more consistent with the federal system of judicial selection. Under the federal model, judges are nominated by elected officials and confirmed by elected representatives, ensuring the people have a voice in the process through the officials they choose at the ballot box.

That structure preserves judicial independence while also reinforcing democratic accountability. The people ultimately retain influence through their elected representatives, rather than through a process dominated by unelected commissions.

Missourians deserve a judiciary that is both independent and accountable. Reforming the Missouri Court Plan is an important step toward restoring that balance and strengthening public confidence in our courts.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: CAROL JONES		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/10/2026 10:33 PM
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I support HJR 119 - This bill streamlines appointments by centering responsibility on the governor, increasing accountability to voters. It enhances voter control over local judicial selection, cleans up redundant constitutional language, and addresses perceptions of an insulated judiciary that lacks direct democratic input.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: CHARLES KNIGHT		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 11:39 AM
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Yes. I support.

We need direct appointments for judges. Citizens need to have input for these very important positions.

No more behind closed doors.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: CLIF		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 11:52 PM
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TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: CYNDIA HAGGARD		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 10:26 PM	
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.			

The MO Court Plan is atrocious. Allowing the MO Bar to pick candidates for our two highest courts, supreme and appellate, is why we have liberal courts. We need to move to the federal model where the governor appoints and the Senate ratifies.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: GERI THWING		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 6:56 AM	
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I would like to ensure judges are picked by the people, not a select few, behind closed doors



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: JACQUIE THORSTENSEN		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:		SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: KIMBERLY KUHNS		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 11:30 AM

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

Reforming the Missouri Court Plan would ensure greater transparency and public accountability in judicial selection. Judges should ultimately answer to the people of Missouri and reflect the values of the communities they serve.

It is difficult to understand the rationale behind some recent court rulings, and as a voter it is very frustrating to see decisions that appear to run counter to conservative values. Unfortunately, this concern is tied to the judicial selection process itself. The current system allows special interests to play a role in determining which names are submitted to serve as judges.

When that occurs, the process risks prioritizing insider influence over the values of the citizens of Missouri. If the courts are to maintain public trust, the selection process must be reexamined and revised so that the judiciary—and its rulings—better reflect the values and expectations of the people it serves.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: MARY HILL		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/10/2026 4:09 PM
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I support Rep. LOYs HJR 119



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: OSCAR HARRELL		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 7:23 PM
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: PATRICIA KNIGHT		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 11:02 AM
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I strongly support!

Eliminate commissions - let's have direct appointments and citizen input.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: RAY MCCARTY		PHONE NUMBER: 573-634-2246	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF MISSOURI		TITLE: PRESIDENT/CEO	
ADDRESS: 3234 W TRUMAN BLVD			
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65109
EMAIL: rmccarty@aimo.com	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 2:18 PM	

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Associated Industries of Missouri supports allowing the Governor to appoint judges with the advice and consent of the Senate.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: RICHARD MICHAEL FRANCO		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/10/2026 11:41 PM
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.		

It is time to reform the Missouri Court Plan. While intended to remove influence from the Pendergast machine many decades ago, it has become a means for the state bar association to dominate the judicial process, effectively allowing trial attorneys to pick their own judges.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: SAMUEL H. LEE		PHONE NUMBER: 314-368-4242	
REPRESENTING: CAMPAIGN LIFE MISSOURI		TITLE: DIRECTOR	
ADDRESS: P.O. BOX 142585			
CITY: SAINT LOUIS		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63114
EMAIL: samuelhlee@mindspring.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 11:39 AM	

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Alexander Hamilton argued in The Federalist #76 that the President should have the power to nominate judges, while the Senate should be charged with providing “advice and consent” to confirm them. This system, he argued, combines executive preference with legislative checks to ensure merit-based appointments, preventing favoritism and corruption.

Hamilton argued that a single nominator (the President) with the approval of a diverse body (the Senate) is superior to having appointments made by a large assembly (too much factionalism) or a single person with no oversight (potential for favoritism).

The Senate’s power, Hamilton said, “would be an excellent check upon a spirit of favoritism in the President, and would tend greatly to prevent the appointment of unfit characters from State prejudice, from family connection, from personal attachment, or from a view to popularity.”

Hamilton added that a President “who had himself the sole disposition of offices, would be governed much more by his private inclinations and interests, than when he was bound to submit the propriety of his choice to the discussion and determination of a different and independent body, and that body an entire branch of the legislature. The possibility of rejection would be a strong motive to care in proposing.”

This is the federal model for the nomination and appointment of judges, and the people of Missouri should have an opportunity, by amending our state Constitution, to decide whether to adopt this model in our own state.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SUZANNE KATSEV		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/10/2026 4:10 PM	
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I think think that the people should have a greater part in selection of the Supreme Court judges for Missouri



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: TERRY MILLER		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/10/2026 4:25 PM
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8101 Drennan Ln



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: ABIGAIL HERNDON		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 7:59 PM
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This is another attack on the constitution and a affront to our government 3 branch system. The legislative branch wants more power and this a massive political over reach on their part. This would destroy our checks and balances system, that is the judicial branch. It is vital that the court system stay non partisan and allow to do its job without interference from politicians. It's called the People's court not Politicians court for a reason. Missouri's Non-Partisan Court Plan was created and voted by the citizens of Missouri and reaffirmed with another vote when legislators tried repealing two years after it was added to our constitution. Respect the people and our power.



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: ANDY BRISCOE		PHONE NUMBER:	
REPRESENTING: THE MISSOURI BAR		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: 326 MONROE			
CITY: JC		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65109
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: ANNETTE NOWAKOWSKI		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 9:14 PM
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Continue the present system of nonpartisan court plan for st. Louis. Allowing the governor to appoint directly gives too much power to the governor. A committee composed of some attorneys is more fair because the candidate is being reviewed by peers who have more understanding of the judicial process. When I am voting for retention I look at what the bar associations say about the candidates because their lawyers regularly appear before these judges. I trust their opinions more than the governor.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. A.C. "HONEST ABE" DIENOFF		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: STATE PUBLIC ADVOCACY		TITLE: STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 1935			
CITY: O'FALLON		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63366
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: DAVID J KLARICH		PHONE NUMBER: 314-560-1616
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI CIRCUIT JUDGES' ASSOCIATION		TITLE: ATTORNEY
ADDRESS: 438 GATEFORD DRIVE		
CITY: BALLWIN		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 63021
EMAIL: dklarich@sbcglobal.net	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 3/10/2026 9:46 PM
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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: ERIC D. JENNINGS		PHONE NUMBER: 573-526-4726	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: JUDICIAL CONFERENCE OF MISSOURI		TITLE: GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COUNSEL	
ADDRESS: 207 WEST HIGH STREET			
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65102
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: JONATHAN SCHMID		PHONE NUMBER: 314-652-3114	
REPRESENTING: AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF MISSOURI		TITLE: POLICY COUNSEL	
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CITY: ST. LOUIS		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63101
EMAIL: jschmid@aclu-mo.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:40 PM	
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MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HJR 119		DATE: 3/11/2026	
COMMITTEE: General Laws			
TESTIFYING: <input type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: KORTNIE HUDDLESTON		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 11:20 PM	

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I'm in strong opposition to House Joint Resolution No. 119. This resolution is a deceptive attempt to dismantle Missouri's Nonpartisan Court Plan and replace it with a system of unchecked gubernatorial patronage. From a progressive perspective, this bill represents a direct assault on judicial fairness, diversity, and the fundamental principle of an independent judiciary.

The current Missouri Plan, while not perfect, was enacted over 80 years ago to end the corrupting influence of political bosses on our courts. It uses bipartisan commissions to ensure that judges are selected based on their qualifications and merit, not their political connections. HJR 119 seeks to repeal the core of this plan, Sections 25(a) through 25(d), and strip away the nominating commissions entirely. By giving the governor sole power to appoint judges with only "advice and consent" of the senate, this resolution transforms our judiciary into another arm of the executive branch.

This shift is profoundly dangerous. It would allow a single governor to pack the courts with political allies and ideological loyalists, regardless of their experience or temperament. For voters in St. Louis and Jackson County, this means losing their voice in a system designed to produce fair and impartial judges. For the rest of the state, the resolution rewrites existing law to allow the governor's appointment system to spread, replacing the current nonpartisan selection with overtly political appointments. The change in the ballot language from "nonpartisan plan" to "appointment by the governor" is a telling admission of what this resolution truly does: it ends nonpartisan selection and makes judicial selection a purely political transaction.

The elimination of Section 25(d) and the judicial commissions is the core of the problem. These commissions, comprised of both lawyers and non-lawyers, were designed to ensure a check on executive power. They were created to prevent the very outcome this bill guarantees: a judiciary that reflects the politics of the governor's mansion rather than the diversity and values of Missouri. Stripping away this independent body removes the public's safeguard against cronyism.

Progressives understand that justice must be blind. It must also be accessible and reflective of the communities it serves. The current plan, for all its flaws, has historically led to a more diverse bench than purely political systems. HJR 119 threatens to undo that progress, slamming the door on qualified judges who may not have the right political connections.

This resolution is a solution in search of a problem. Its only purpose is to concentrate power in the hands of one person and one party, undermining the public's trust in a fair and impartial legal system.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote "no" on HJR 119 and protect the integrity of Missouri's courts.



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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TESTIFYING: <input type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL DREYER		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 11:19 PM	

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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL SUDEKUM		PHONE NUMBER: 573-635-5215	
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MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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COMMITTEE: General Laws			
TESTIFYING: <input type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: RANDY SCHERR		PHONE NUMBER: 573-636-6200	
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MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HJR 119		DATE: 3/11/2026	
COMMITTEE: General Laws			
TESTIFYING: <input type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SARAH BERRY		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
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CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 12:52 PM	
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HJR 119 proposes to amend the Missouri Constitution by repealing key provisions of Article V governing the nonpartisan judicial selection system commonly known as the Missouri Plan.

The resolution removes the constitutional requirement that judicial vacancies be filled from nominees submitted by nonpartisan judicial commissions. Under current law, these commissions evaluate applicants and provide the governor with a list of qualified nominees.

The governor must appoint one of those nominees.

HJR 119 eliminates this screening mechanism and replaces it with direct gubernatorial appointment subject only to Senate confirmation.

The nonpartisan commission system was adopted to protect judicial independence by insulating the selection of judges from ordinary partisan political processes. Removing the commission requirement concentrates the power of judicial selection within the executive and legislative branches.

The judiciary is designed to function as an independent branch capable of reviewing and, when necessary, invalidating actions taken by the political branches of government. Structural changes that increase political control over judicial selection raise legitimate concerns regarding the long-term independence of the courts.

HJR 119 would also repeal the constitutional provisions establishing the composition and structure of judicial commissions. Eliminating these provisions removes the institutional framework intended to ensure that judicial candidates are evaluated on professional qualifications and judicial temperament before appointment.

Because this proposal amends the Missouri Constitution, the structural changes it creates would be difficult to reverse once adopted.

For these reasons, the General Assembly should carefully consider the long-standing purpose of Missouri's nonpartisan judicial selection system and the role it plays in maintaining public confidence in an independent judiciary.

Members of the General Assembly are respectfully placed on notice that HJR 119 would significantly increase political influence over judicial selection and fundamentally alter the constitutional structure

designed to protect judicial independence in Missouri.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: THOMAS J. BENOIST		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 3/11/2026 5:48 PM	

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My name is TJ Benoist, and I am submitting testimony in opposition to legislation that would dismantle Missouri's Nonpartisan Court Plan.

To understand why this system exists, we must remember the moment in Missouri history that created it. The Missouri Plan was born out of one of the darkest periods of political corruption in our state's history. In the early twentieth century, political machines dominated Missouri politics, particularly in Kansas City under the control of Tom Pendergast. Judges were not selected because of their qualifications or commitment to the rule of law. They were selected because they were loyal to the political machine that put them on the ballot.

Missourians responded to that crisis with reform. In 1940, voters adopted the Nonpartisan Court Plan to restore public trust in the judiciary. The system created a merit-based process in which joint lawyer-lay person commissions evaluate judicial applicants based on qualifications, experience, and integrity. The governor then appoints from a list of qualified nominees, and the public retains the ultimate authority through retention elections.

This system strikes an important balance. It ensures that the governor plays a role in judicial appointments while preventing any single political actor from controlling the process. The nominating commissions serve as a safeguard, ensuring that every candidate presented to the governor has been vetted for their professional qualifications, integrity, and commitment to the rule of law.

The proposals before this committee would remove that safeguard and allow the governor to appoint judges without the independent screening process that Missourians put in place nearly a century ago. That change would concentrate significant power in a single office and eliminate the merit-based filter that has helped keep politics from dominating judicial selection.

The purpose of the Missouri Plan was to ensure that judges are chosen first for their qualifications, not their political loyalty. The nominating commissions are not obstacles to democracy. They are a guardrail that protects the independence and credibility of our courts.

Missouri's court plan has served our state well for decades and has become a model for other states seeking to balance democratic accountability with judicial independence.

The question before this committee is not simply about changing a selection process. It is about whether Missouri will preserve a system designed to protect the integrity of the judiciary or move

toward one where judicial appointments are concentrated in a single political office.

For those reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to reject these bills and preserve Missouri's Nonpartisan Court Plan.

Thank you for your time and consideration.