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Hon. John DiSanto, Chair  
Fred Sembach, Executive Director  
State Senate Government Committee  
Senate Box 203015  
168 Main Capital Building  
Harrisburg PA 17120

Re: Opposition to House Bill 196

Dear Senator DiSanto and Mr. Sembach:

It is an honor as the new CEO of Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts to submit PMC's position in opposition to H.B. 196, a Joint Resolution proposing integrated amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to organize judicial elections by multiple districts and further providing for residency requirements. Under this bill, the State would be broken into nine Commonwealth Court districts, 15 Superior Court districts and seven Supreme Court districts.

PMC strongly believes that partisan elections are damaging to the integrity of the judiciary for the reasons spelled out in our support of HB 111. Placing judicial candidates in the same position as legislators – presenting their positions on issues and securing funding from people who support those issues -- is not only unproductive, it contravenes the standards we expect them to meet while serving us as judges.

HB 196 would not only retain those harmful partisan elections but would render them even more pernicious. Of principal concern here is the magnification of appellate justices and judges feeling obligated to represent the interests of those who voted for them and/or funded their campaigns, and not to bring an independent mindset to the adjudication of statewide issues.

Appellate court judges have been elected on a statewide basis to consider cases of statewide impact. Their ability to function in that way, to remain committed to the rule of law, will be impacted by their having to keep one eye on their local voting base in order to remain on the bench.

Regional elections would also limit voters to electing one judicial candidate from their respective regional districts for our appellate courts. These regional elections would, thereby, disenfranchise voters by eliminating their ability to select the full panel of judges issuing decisions of statewide impact and importance.

Additionally, regional selection will make it more unlikely that minority candidates will be elected to the appellate courts. A diversity of opinion based not on diversity of geography but on diversity of background such as race, gender, and ethnicity, is extremely critical to the dispensing of fair and impartial justice. PMC urges you to vote against HB 196, the continuation and exacerbation of politicized, money-fueled partisan elections, and this attempt to undermine the rule of law in our Commonwealth.

I look forward to further discussions with you on this topic. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [dgross@pmconline.org](mailto:dgross@pmconline.org) or 1-610-563-3598.

Sincerely,

*Deborah R. Gross*

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