Constitutional amendment could transform how Kansas appoints Supreme Court justices

BY DONIVAN BULLINS

Kansas voters may soon confront the most significant shift to the state's judicial system in nearly seven decades. A proposed constitutional amendment, set for the August 2026 ballot, would replace Kansas' long-standing merit-based system for selecting Supreme Court justices with direct, partisan

If approved, Kansas would join a small group of states that choose their highest-court judges on partisan ballots. Critics warn that such a move could draw political pressure into rulings on issues ranging from abortion and school funding to voting rights and redistricting, according to the Kansas Information Network.

"The partisan election process proposed in this resolution would shift the priorities of the justices on the Kansas Supreme Court to emphasize re-election in their decisions rather than faithfulness to the Kansas Constitution," said Mike Fonkert, deputy director of Kansas Appleseed, in Feb. 25 testimony opposing the proposed amendment.

Since 1958, Kansas has relied on a merit-based model rooted in the Supreme Court Nominating Commission, a nine-member panel created in the aftermath of the state's notorious "Triple Play" scandal.

Today, the commission is made up of five attorneys — one from each congressional district, plus a statewide chair — and four non-lawyers appointed by the governor. When a vacancy opens, the panel reviews applicants, interviews finalists, and sends three recommendations to the governor, who must make a choice within 60 days. Justices then serve six-year terms, standing for retention after their first full year.

That process grew out of public outrage in 1956. In his final days in office, outgoing governor Fred

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HOSPITAL DISTRICTS SFCO Hospital Dist '

RECREATION COMMISSIONS

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EXTENSION DISTRICT - Joint w/ Edwards County

*224.185 TIF Increment - Tax Unit 201

CLASSIFIED. 620-792-1211.

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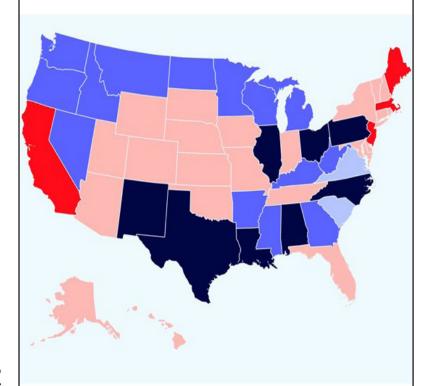
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Governor

appoints through

a nominating

commission

How State Supreme Court Justices Are Selected by State

Elected via nonpartisan election Hall resigned so that his lieutenant governor, John McCuish, could become governor and appoint him to a Supreme Court seat that had been

Governor

appoints

Justice." Voters responded swiftly, approving the 1958 constitutional amendment that removed the court from direct partisan control. The new proposal would unwind much

vacated hours earlier, according to

City Times later called the maneu-

ver "A Brazen, Raw Deal for Kansas

Humanities Kansas. The Kansas

of that system.

Elected by the

legislature

Currently, the court leans moderate, with appointees from Democratic and Republican governors, including three from Gov. Laura Kelly and one from former governor Bill Graves (R).

Elected via

partisan election

If the amendment is approved, the Nominating Commission would be dissolved, and justices would be elected statewide in partisan contests. Terms would remain six years, with staggered elections beginning in 2028:

- Positions 1–3 in 2028
- Positions 4-5 in 2030
- Positions 6–7 in 2032

Vacancies between elections would be filled through special elections under rules crafted by the Legislature.

The change would move Kansas toward a system it used from statehood through the mid-20th century, when justices ran in elections defined largely by party affiliation, says the Kansas Information Network.

Democratic lawmakers argue the push to change the appointment process stems from frustration among conservative legislators after a series of high-profile rulings on school funding, reproductive rights, and constitutional protections.

"I think we know by now money is really damaging to politics. People already hate political ads; people already hate divisiveness. To do this at the judicial level is just a broadening of our current political discourse," said Rep. Rui Xu (D-Westwood) in a recent interview. Xu pointed to Wisconsin's Supreme Court race last spring – the most expensive judicial election in U.S. history, topping \$100 million – as a cautionary example.

Some conservatives, however, say the system places too much influence in the hands of attorneys on the commission and not enough in the hands of voters.

"This is fundamentally about having a government that is more representative of its people. We shouldn't carve the Judiciary out as some special case where the people all of a sudden have little to no say," said Sen. Doug Shane (R-Louisburg) in a recent interview.

Nationwide, judicial selection systems vary widely. According to Democracy Docket:

- 26 states use a merit-based appointment system similar to Kansas.
- 24 use some form of judicial election.

• Only eight choose their Supreme Court justices through

partisan elections. Source: Democracy Docket If Kansas joins the group of states

with partisan elected judiciaries, civil-rights organizations and legal scholars say the impact could be far-reaching, bringing campaign donors, party litmus tests, and ideological pressure into judicial decision-making.

"This referendum seeks to dismantle Kansas' merit-based judicial selection system and replace it with partisan judicial elections," said Rashane Hamby, director of policy and research for ACLU Kansas, in a March 13 statement to the Kansas House. "This would inject politics into our courts, undermine judicial independence, and erode public

The Brennan Center for Justice notes that partisan judicial campaigns tend to heighten political tensions around rulings, particularly on issues like abortion access, voting rules, redistricting, and public education.

Research supports those concerns. A study in the Journal of Law and Courts found that judges selected through partisan elections, and those appointed for life, cast more party-aligned votes on controversial issues than judges chosen under nonpartisan or merit-selection systems.

Other researchers have reached similar conclusions. "[Elections] involving partisan politics lead to more ideological justices and that, among that subset, Republican affiliated justices will be the most extreme," said Alan J. Simmons, director of the Center of State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois Springfield, in the Sage Journal.

Donivan Bullins is a University of Kansas senior from Lenexa, studying political science and journalism.

1 Marketplace

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Public Notices Legals-6 (First published in the Great Bend Tribune December 13, 2025) -3t 2025 STAFFORD COUNTY LEVY SHEET The rate of levy per \$1,000 valuation of all tangible property in Stafford County for the year of 2025 CEMETERY DISTRICTS Comparison of Levies DISTRICT Value 17-1344 3.080 Valuation State General Levy Change Stafford # 1 1.500 94.508.965 1.500 Education Building 76-6b01 1.000 Peace Creek # 2 3.106 0.343 2.119 62.703 64.777 Prattsburg # 3 1.500 TOTAL: Neola # 4 CITIES Neelands # 5 0.901 0.930 24.803 24.070 Pleasant Ridge # 6 COUNTY Macksville 78.767 82.916 4.149 Eden Valley # 7 0.914 12.920 14.161 Radium 12.878 0.042 79-1946 25.610 Peace Church # 8 0.656 1.185 2.154 Road & Bridge Feldhut # 10 64.459 Stafford 71.128 6.669 Health 65-204 1.377 Farmington # 11 Point View # 12 St. John 66.118 69.140 3.022 Appraisal Cost 19-436 2.323 4.094 TOWNSHIPS Ambulance 65-6113 4.900 Fairview # 13 1.731 31.347 26.047 Solid Waste 0.893 St. Fr. Xavier # 14 0.985 CÍ. Creek 25.310 -1.694 TOTAL: 64.777 27.004 Cleveland 20.861 21.838 0.977 So. CENTRAL KS REGIONAL LIBRARY E. Coope 75-2551 12-16,102 **FIRE DISTRICTS** Empl. Benefits W. Cooper 21.063 22.683 1.620 0.098 -0.814 1.864 Douglas 18.490 17.676 19-3610 4.258 TOTAL: 1.160 Fairview Farmington 28.312 29.073 0.761 0.979 0.906 Twp. Gen 15-104 Hayes Lincoln 23.216 STAFFORD COUNTY HOSPITAL DISTRICT CITIES (3rd cls) Total Ohio 28.640 29.267 0.627 24.070 24.070 0.455 1.001 24.874 25 329 Macksville 80.437 2.479 82.916 Putnam Radium TOWNSHIPS Rose Valley 20.117 21.584 1.467 79-1962 68-518C 2-1318 Total Seward 14.161 14.161 20.657 21.143 N. Seward 29.416 8.759 24.130 26.047 64.929 3.998 71.128 20.136 S. Seward 26.217 5.074 Byron 25.310 69.140 Stafford 20.984 21.503 0.519 Cl. Creek 0.000 25.310 St John 65.935 3.205 St. John 1.277 2.930 11.306 35.734 30.618 31 895 10.532 21 838 E. Cooper 3.304 16.025 18.955 39.038 Union RECREATION York 12.546 12.670 0.124 W. Coope 3.143 19.540 22.683 General Empl. Ben. Total 17.676 39.589 1.240 16.436 COMMISSION 12-1927 12-1928 Douglas SCHOOL DISTRICTS 4.794 Fairview USD 310 - Joint w/Reno 58.312 60.124 1.812 Farmingtor 6.003 23.070 29.073 **USD 350** 3.000 0.760 3.760 54.081 52.826 1.232 2.818 7.496 4.581 USD 351 1 000 1.000 3.000 50.008 Lincoln 15.992 20.573 3.000 USD 351 46.285 47.677 1.392 Ohio 11.455 17.812 29.267 **USD 428** 7.683 1.982 9.665 50.646 Putnam USD 355 Joint w/Barton USD 401 - Joint w/Rice 55.552 39.259 -16.293 Richland 3.438 15.384 18.822 USD 428 - Joint w/Barton 44.524 42.949 -1.575 Rose Valley 2.727 18.857 21.584 EXTENSION DISTRICT 2-623 27.150 USD 438 - Joint w/Pratt 21 Central Ext. Dist.-Joint w/Edwards Co 2.53 S. Seward 2.549 23.668 26.217 **CEMETERY DISTRICTS** Stafford 1.915 19.588 21.503 31.895 St. John Peace Creek # 2 3.007 3.106 0.099 Union 4.215 14.740 18.955 Prattsburg # 3 - Joint w/Edwards Neola # 4 York 0.335 0.343 0.008 7.177 12.670 Neelands # 5 -0.114 1.015 0.901 Pleasant Ridge # 6 0.89 0.930 0.04 Bond & Int. Empl. Ben. 12-16,102 General Library Eden Valley # CITIES Peace Church # 8 0.586 0.656 0.07 Hudson 24.070 24.070 Trinity #9 1.095 1.185 0.090 Macksville 80 437 2.479 82.916 0.068 Radium 12.920 14.161 12.920 Farmington # 11 3.798 4.094 0.296 Seward 14.161 0.796 1.731 Point View # 12-Joint w/Pawnee 0.679 0.117 Stafford 64 929 2.201 3 998 3.205 69.140 St. John 65.935 St. Fr. Xavier # 14 -0.221FIRE DISTRICTS 4.091 Cap. Outlay 72-53,115 Supp. Gen. 72-5147 23.058 Stafford Dist. # 1 4.258 0.167 General Bond & Int. SCHOOL DISTRICTS 72-5142 Total

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I hereby certify the above is a correct listing of the tax levies for Stafford County, Kansas for the year 2025.

Lisa A. Weber, Stafford County Clerk

26.090

19.683

12.714

15.035

22.991

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Home Co - Reno

Home Co - Barton

Home Co - Barton

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Home Co - Pratt

USD 349

USD 350

USD 355

USD 438

Public Notices

Legals-1

2025)3t IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF BARTON COUNTY, KANSAS Glenda R. Zimmerman, Deceased, Case No. BT-2025-

PR-000108

(First published in the Great Bend Tribune on December 06,

NOTICE OF HEARING

THE STATE OF KANSAS TO ALL PERSONS CONCERNED:

You are notified that a Petition has been filed in this Court by Rodger Love, son and one of the heirs of Glenda R. Zimmerman,

deceased, requesting:
Descent be determined of the following described real estate situated in Great Bend, Barton

Undivided one-half interest in Lot Twenty (20), in Block Thirty-seven (37), in the City of Great Bend, Kansas, according to the recorded corrected and Supplemental Subdivisional Plat of Blocks Thirty-seven (37) and Sixty (60), in said City of Great Bend, Kansas, (Commonly described as 2500 McBride Way, Great Bend, Kansas)

Lot Six (6), in Block Twelve (12), Parkview Heights Addition to the City of Great Bend, Kansas, according to the recorded Plat thereof, Barton County, Kansas. (Commonly described as 2124 Pawnee Road, Great Bend, Kansas)
The South 59.00 feet to Lot

4 in the Resurvey of Block Five of Meyer's Addition to the City of Great Bend, Kansas, accord ing to the Northeast Quarter of Section Twenty-nine (29), Township Nineteen (19) South Range Thirteen (13) West of the Sixth Principal Meridian, Barton County, Kansas. described as 2105 Jefferson Street, Great Bend, Kansas)

ned by decedent at the time of death. And that such property and all personal property and other Kansas real estate owned by the decedent at the time of death be assigned pursuant to the terms of the "Valid Settlement Agreement" dated Novem ber 26, 2025.

You are required to file your written defenses to the Petition on or before January 5, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. in the District Court in Barton County, County, Kan sas, at which time and place the cause will be heard. Should you fail to file your written defens judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon the Petition.

60.124

54.081

52.826 47.677

60.150

42.949

50.988

9.066

19.436

CLASSIFIED. 620-792-1211.

Rodger Love, Petitioner

Mark D. Calcara WATKINS CALCARA, CHTD. 1321 Main Street - Suite 300 P.O. Drawer 1110 (620) 792-8231 Fax (620) 792-2775 Attornevs for Petitione

Public Notices

Legals-1 (First published in the Great Bend Tribune on November 29,

2025)3t

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF BARTON COUNTY, KANSAS

In the Matter of the Adoption of A.J.S. and T.M.S., minors, Case No. BT-2025-AD-07

NOTICE

THE STATE OF KANSAS TO: Michael William Lewis Sanderson and all other interested

You are hereby notified that a

Petition for Adoption has been filed in this Court by James David Pierce-Anderson step-father and proposed adoptive parent of A.J.S. and T.M.S., minor children praying that the Petition be granted and that the Petitioner be allowed to adopt the minor children as his own and for other just and equitable relief.

You shall file any written defenses on or before the 12th day of January, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. in the District Court, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, at which time said cause shall be heard Failure to do so shall result in the claim being forever barred.

JAMES DAVID PIERCE-AN-Petitioner

DONALD E. REIF. JR. Kansas Supreme Court Number 13792 P.O. Box 28 106 North Main Hoisington, Kansas 67544 (620)-653-2187 Attorney for Petitione



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