

authorized the Baltimore City Court (for civil proceedings) and placed all of these City courts under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City (Art. IV, secs. 27, 28). In 1888, Baltimore City Circuit Court no. 2 also was placed under the Supreme Bench (Chapter 194, Acts of 1888). By constitutional amendments ratified by the voters in November 1980, the six courts of the Supreme Bench were consolidated. They became the Circuit Court for Baltimore City on January 1, 1983.

The Circuit Courts are the highest common law and equity courts of record exercising original jurisdiction within Maryland. Each has full common law and equity powers and jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases within its county, and all the additional powers and jurisdiction conferred by the Constitution and by law, except where jurisdiction has been limited or conferred exclusively upon another tribunal by law (Code Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article, sec. 1-501).

The Circuit Court is a trial court of general jurisdiction. Its jurisdiction is very broad but generally covers major civil cases and more serious criminal matters. Circuit Courts also may decide appeals from the District Court and certain administrative agencies. These courts are grouped into eight geographical circuits. The first seven circuits each contain two or more counties; the eighth consists of Baltimore City (Const., Art. IV, sec. 19).

1st Judicial Circuit: Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties.

2nd Judicial Circuit: Caroline, Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot counties.

3rd Judicial Circuit: Baltimore County and Harford County.

4th Judicial Circuit: Allegany, Garrett and Washington counties.

5th Judicial Circuit: Anne Arundel, Carroll and Howard counties.

6th Judicial Circuit: Frederick and Montgomery counties.

7th Judicial Circuit: Calvert, Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's counties.

8th Judicial Circuit: Baltimore City.

As of October 1996, there are 134 Circuit Court judges, with at least one judge for each county and at least four judges for each judicial circuit. When Baltimore City gains two Circuit Court judges in July 1997, the number of Circuit Court judges throughout the State will total 136. Unlike other Maryland courts, the Circuit Court has no chief judge. Instead, eight circuit administrative judges perform administrative duties in each of their respective circuits. Appointed by the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, circuit administrative judges are aided by county administrative judges. Within each circuit, the judge who has served longest on the court is designated chief judge of the circuit (Const., Art. IV, sec. 21).

Each Circuit Court judge is appointed by the Governor and then must stand for election. The judge's name is placed on the ballot in the first general election that occurs at least one year following the vacancy the judge was appointed to fill (Const., Art. IV, sec.5). The judge may be opposed formally by one or more qualified members of the bar, with the successful candidate being elected to a fifteen-year term (Const., Art. IV, secs. 19-26).

CONFERENCE OF CIRCUIT JUDGES

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The Conference of Circuit Judges originated as the Conference of Circuit Administrative Judges, which was formed on March 14, 1972 by rule of the Court of Appeals (Maryland Rules, Rule 1207). At that time, the Conference was composed solely of the eight administrative judges of the judicial circuits. On November 28, 1978, the Conference

was reorganized as the Conference of Circuit Judges.

The Conference of Circuit Judges meets periodically to consider and make recommendations concerning the administration of justice and the circuit courts. The Conference also may initiate complaints to the Commission on Judicial Disabilities concerning alleged judicial misconduct or disability.

The Conference consists of sixteen members. Eight are the administrative judges of the eight judicial circuits. From each of the eight judicial circuits, the judges of each circuit elect a fellow judge to represent them at the Conference. The chair is elected by the Conference for a two-year term. The Administrative Office of the Courts serves as secretariat to the Conference.