

The Sun

**Two dozen lawyers support sitting judges  
Spring primary saw attorneys bitterly divided  
CAMPAIGN 1996**

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Almost two dozen Howard County attorneys called a news conference yesterday to reinforce their support for sitting Circuit Judges Donna Hill Staton and Diane O. Leasure, saying their judicial temperament and competence should earn them election to seats on the bench.

"As attorneys, we don't necessarily like their decisions," said Columbia attorney Joel M. Abramson. "But they are hard-working, good listeners and prepared, so we are satisfied."

During the spring primary, the judicial race bitterly divided the county's legal community between the sitting judges and their challengers, District Judge Lenore R. Gelfman and attorney Jonathan Scott Smith.

At one point last spring, the local bar association was openly drawn into the fray, when it was asked by the sitting judges' campaign to request that the challengers pull some of their campaign ads off TV. The bar was so divided that it took no action.

But before yesterday, local attorneys had been much less vocal in the fall campaign season, even though the race has been just as contentious as the spring campaign.

The challengers' campaign responded yesterday by saying that plenty of local lawyers are supporting Gelfman and Smith, too.

"I would imagine there are plenty more than two dozen attorneys supporting Gelfman and Smith," said Deborah E. Dwyer, a Columbia attorney and chairwoman of the challengers' campaign. "That's hardly a large percentage of attorneys in the community."

Yesterday, the attorneys supporting the sitting judges recalled and then attempted to debunk charges the challengers have made against the judges -- such as that they are incompetent.

The attorneys said Hill Staton and Leasure are reducing the Circuit Court's backlog, are competent in dealing with all types of law and are respectful of attorneys, victims and offenders.

"Gelfman and Smith have thrown a lot of dirt on these two ladies, but none of it has stuck," said Columbia attorney Charles J. Ware.

"It's not about professing to be tough on crime," said another Columbia attorney, Richard B. Talkin. "It is extremely important to have a judge without any personal prejudice or preconceived ideas."

Columbia attorney P. Michael Nagle added: "No one has to be a hard-nose or a jerk to be a tough judge or tough on crime."

Speaking for the challengers, Dwyer said the 11th-hour news conference by the sitting judges' campaign is a sign of fear.

"They are doing a lot of last-ditch efforts, but they are falling on deaf ears. People have heard {the Gelfman-Smith} message," Dwyer said. The sitting judges "know they are not going to get the vote."

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