

Ohio 2024 Supreme Court

**JOSEPH
DETERS**

REPUBLICAN • INCUMBENT



**MELODY
STEWART**

DEMOCRAT • INCUMBENT

Three out of the seven seats on the Ohio Supreme Court are up for election on November 5. The Court is composed of [four Republican and three Democratic justices](#). In an unusual situation, two incumbents are vying for the same seat: Justice Joseph Deters, a Republican appointed to the Supreme Court in 2023, is challenging Justice Melody Stewart, an incumbent and a Democrat, for a six-year term. He opted to challenge her rather than run for his own seat, which had only two years remaining in the term.

The Ohio Supreme Court decides questions of state law that can have a significant impact. Some recent highlights:

- [Redistricting maps](#) governing state House and Senate seats and Congressional seats in ways that favor Republican candidates have already come before the Ohio Supreme Court several times. Ohio voters will decide on a [constitutional amendment](#) this November that would create an independent redistricting process. If the measure passes, redistricting is expected to [come before](#) the Ohio Supreme Court again.
- The Court allowed the “[Reproductive Freedom](#)” amendment initiative to remain on the ballot in response to [efforts](#) to have it removed. Now that the constitutional protections for abortion access have gone into effect, the Court is expected to face legal disputes as abortion opponents seek to [reduce or weaken](#) the impact of the new amendment.
- A group of school districts is suing the state over the use of [vouchers](#) to fund private schools, saying the program is harming public education. The suit is before the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas and is expected to eventually [reach the Ohio Supreme Court](#).

To help you decide how to vote in this election, we’ve assembled background about the candidates’ education and previous work experience, along with public statements and publicized endorsements, to indicate how they might rule on key issues in the future.

THE ISSUES

JOSEPH DETERS

joedeters.com

Joseph Deters earned both his [undergraduate and law degrees](#) from the University of Cincinnati. He worked as an assistant prosecutor in Hamilton County for six years before winning a race for Hamilton County Prosecutor, a position he held from 1992-1999 and 2005-2023. Between those stints, he served as the Ohio Treasurer for two terms, in 1998 and 2002. As the county prosecutor he [established](#) the first drug court in Ohio and the first victim/witness advocate program in Hamilton County. In 2023, Gov. Mike DeWine appointed Deters to the Ohio Supreme Court, making him the first Supreme Court justice in 30 years to join the Court [without prior judicial](#) experience.

MELODY STEWART

stewartforohiosupremecourt.com

Melody Stewart [earned](#) her bachelor’s degree from the University of Cincinnati, a law degree from Cleveland State University College of Law, and a doctorate from Case Western Reserve University. She worked as a [civil defense litigator](#) for Cleveland and East Cleveland, then [became](#) an adjunct instructor and assistant dean at Cleveland State Law School, eventually joining the faculty as a full-time law professor. She was [elected three times](#) to the Eighth District Court of Appeals, serving as the court’s [Administrative Judge](#) in 2013. In 2018, she was elected to the Ohio Supreme Court, becoming the first Black woman elected to the high court.

- **On abortion**, as a prosecutor he promised to [prosecute](#) anyone who violated a state abortion ban after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. “I was elected to enforce the laws of the state of Ohio.” When the Court ordered the Ohio Ballot Board to rewrite part of the ballot language for the state’s “Reproductive Freedom” amendment, he wrote the [minority opinion](#) arguing that the Board’s language “did not mislead, deceive or defraud voters.”
- **On how judges should set bail**, Deters, then a prosecutor, [challenged](#) an Ohio Supreme Court decision that found excessive money bail to be unconstitutional. He was also [an originator](#) of the successful constitutional amendment requiring judges to consider public safety, alongside flight risk, when setting bail.
- **On redistricting**, in the most recent ruling over redrawn Statehouse maps, Deters [joined a majority opinion](#) dismissing three lawsuits by voting rights groups in the face of [bipartisan passage](#) of new legislative maps. The decision kept in place districts that [give Republicans](#) an advantage.
- **On guns**, he [wrote](#) “The weapon is not the issue, it’s the person pulling the trigger. We stop gun violence by taking the violent criminals we arrest off our streets as long as possible.”
- **On public records**, he joined the majority in deciding that [the cost](#) of sending Gov. Mike DeWine’s security detail to the Super Bowl in California is not a public record. The expense records were privileged, according to the [majority decision](#), because of security concerns.
- **On food safety**, in a personal injury lawsuit, Deters wrote the majority opinion, ruling that a restaurant [was not negligent](#) in allowing chicken bones in boneless chicken wings, and dismissing the suit.

Deters’ [endorsements](#) include the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, Ohio Business Roundtable, Ohio Farm Bureau, NFIB, and Ohio Society of CPAs, along with [Ohio Right to Life](#) and the [Ohio Republican Party](#).

- **On abortion**, she has not stated a position. In the dispute over ballot language for Ohio’s “Reproductive Freedom” amendment, she sided with the majority, ordering the Ohio Ballot Board to rewrite part of the ballot language. She wrote in a [separate opinion](#) that the Board was wrong to use “politically charged” language to describe the proposed amendment.
- **On how judges should set bail**, she ruled with the majority that [excessive monetary bail](#) is unconstitutional, noting that judges could already hold someone in jail pre-trial if evidence showed the person was a threat to public safety.
- **On redistricting**, she [authored](#) the first of several opinions striking down Republican-drawn House and Senate seats, saying the maps amounted to unconstitutional gerrymandering. She later referred to her efforts as standing “[firm for our democracy](#).”
- **On guns**, she [joined](#) the Court’s majority in dismissing a challenge to a Columbus city ordinance that banned “bump stocks,” which can turn rifles into rapid-fire assault weapons.
- **On public records**, Stewart [joined the dissent](#) in a case about the cost of sending Gov. Mike DeWine’s security detail to the Super Bowl, saying the information is a public record. The DeWine administration’s contention that revealing such information would raise security concerns was “more than a stretch,” according to [the opinion](#) she signed.
- **On food safety**, she [joined](#) the dissenting opinion in a personal injury suit. The majority ruled that a restaurant was not negligent in allowing chicken bones in boneless chicken wings. The dissenters called the decision “[utter jabberwocky](#),” and said that a jury should have been allowed to decide whether the restaurant was negligent.

Stewart’s [endorsements](#) include Ohio AFL-CIO, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio, Sierra Club Ohio, Cincinnati Women’s Political Caucus, Cleveland Stonewall Democrats, UAW Region 2B, and Ohio Nurses Assoc.

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