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## **Court Reform Backers Present Plan to Senate**

### **Legal experts, attorneys, and grassroots activists all urge passage of Senate Joint Resolution 9 (SJR 9)**

***“We need to continue the dialogue regarding judicial selection taking place in Missouri now because the process is broken.”***

*--James Harris, Executive Director, Better Courts for Missouri--*

(Jefferson City, MO) – Today, James Harris, Executive Director for Better Courts for Missouri (BCM), along with State Senator Jim Lembke (R-St. Louis), Dan Pero, President of the American Justice Partnership Foundation, Prof. Stephen Ware, University of Kansas School of Law, Prof. William Eckhardt, University of Missouri–Kansas City, Bev Ehlen, President, Missouri Chapter of Concerned Women for America, Janet Engelbach, Legislative Director for Missouri’s Eagle Forum, and Thomas M. Walsh, Esquire, urged Senate leaders to pass a measure that would allow all Missourians the opportunity to decide whether they wanted more transparency in the state’s judicial selection system. The hearing was held in the Missouri Senate today in the State Capitol. SJR 9 is similar to House Joint Resolution 10 (HJR 10) which had a hearing in the Missouri House of Representatives last week.

Sen. Jim Lembke is the sponsor of SJR 9 and presented the Joint Resolution to the Senate Governmental Accountability and Fiscal Oversight Committee. Sen. Lembke adamantly stated that the resolution was necessary in order to ensure that the Judiciary was accountable to the citizens of Missouri. “For too long, our judiciary has been a ‘good old boys’ network,” noted Lembke. “It is time that the average Missourian has their voice heard in the very important process of choosing our state’s top judges.”

BCM’s Executive Director, James Harris, expressed, “We need to continue the dialogue regarding judicial selection taking place in Missouri now because the process is broken. The trial attorneys continue to control the judicial selection process. They have created a niche business for themselves - by presenting their cases before the very same judges they are appointing to the bench, donating to their campaigns – they are a “special interest” group, looking out only for themselves, not the common good of all Missourians.”

Several other individuals testified regarding the necessity of SJR 9:

- Prof. Eckhardt, a Professor of Law at the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law and a retired Army Colonel (JAG), gave a history of the Missouri Plan as well as the rationale as to why changes are needed at this time;
- Professor Ware of the University of Kansas School of Law also gave testimony as to what is happening in state judicial systems around the nation and characterized SJR 9 as a moderate reform that would bring Missouri closer to the national mainstream;
- St. Louis attorney Thomas M. Walsh spoke of the great influence that special interest groups have in the judicial selection process and the need for reform;
- Bev Ehlen, President of the Missouri chapter of Concerned Women for America, Janet Engelbach, Legislative Director for Missouri's Eagle Forum, and Dan Pero, President of the American Justice Partnership Foundation, all spoke of the importance of this measure to ensure that the public does not continue to become disenchanted and lose faith in the nation's system of justice.

***To schedule an interview with James Harris, Executive Director for Better Courts for Missouri, [www.newmoplan.com](http://www.newmoplan.com), contact Elizabeth Ray, [eray@crcpublicrelations.com](mailto:eray@crcpublicrelations.com), at 703-683-5004, ext. 130.***

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