

THE GIST

State Question 845 would change the rules for Oklahoma's 15-member Judicial Nominating Commission, which reviews candidates for certain judicial vacancies. It would update geographic representation to use current congressional districts and remove limits on how many commissioners can be attorneys, have immediate family members who practice law, or belong to the same political party. It would also change commissioners' term lengths, allow members to serve up to 12 consecutive years, and adjust how the commission's three at-large members are chosen. These changes would take effect as current seats open up or become vacant.

State Question 845
would change the rules for who
can serve on Oklahoma's Judicial
Nominating Commission and
how its members are selected.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Oklahoma Legislature passed House Joint Resolution 1024 during the 2026 Legislative Session, which created SQ 845. This measure would change the rules governing the make-up of the Judicial Nominating Commission (JNC).

The JNC was created in 1967 through SQ 447. Voters approved these judicial reforms following a major bribery scandal involving the Oklahoma Supreme Court. The goal was to add a screening step between politics and appointments to the state's top courts.

The JNC serves to nominate candidates for certain judicial positions in the state of Oklahoma for the governor to appoint. These positions include vacancies in the Supreme Court of Oklahoma, the Court of Criminal Appeals, the Court of Civil Appeals. If a District or Associate District Judgeship becomes vacant outside of a normal election cycle, the JNC will provide nominations to the governor to appoint.

Under the current rules, the JNC has 15 members: six are appointed by the governor, six are appointed by the Oklahoma Bar Association, one is appointed by the Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, one is appointed by the Senate President Pro Tempore, and one is appointed by other JNC members. The six members appointed by the governor and six members appointed by the Oklahoma Bar Association are required to represent different geographical areas of the state, with at least one member from each group representing each congressional district. The three remaining members serve at-large. The members appointed by the governor and the Oklahoma Bar Association serve six-year terms and can serve up to two non-consecutive terms. The at-large members appointed by the Speaker, President Pro tem, and the other JNC members serve two year terms that cannot be consecutive.

Of the six members appointed by the governor, no more than three can belong to any one political party. Of the three at-large members, no more than two can belong to any one political party. Except for the members chosen by the Oklahoma Bar Association, no other members of the JNC can be an attorney. In 2010, voters approved SQ 752, which created the two at-large positions appointed by the House and Senate leaders. It also created the requirement that all members not appointed by the Oklahoma Bar Association cannot have an immediate family member who is an attorney. This was to help reduce conflicts of interest.

WHAT SQ 845 WOULD CHANGE

- Removes requirements that appointed JNC members be from different political parties
- Removes restrictions on politicians appointing lawyers or people related to lawyers to the JNC (this includes out of state lawyers)
- Modernizes geographic representation requirements to be in line with modern congressional districts
- Allows JNC members to serve consecutive terms, up to a total of 12 years

CURRENT LAW	SQ 845 PROPOSED CHANGES
Governor & At-Large Appointees • Cannot be lawyers • Cannot have immediate family member who is a lawyer	Governor & At-Large Appointees • CAN be lawyers • CAN have immediate family member who is a lawyer
Party Affiliation • No more than 3 appointees by the governor can be from one party • No more than 2 at-large members from one party • No restrictions for members elected by Oklahoma Bar Association	Party Affiliation • All appointees CAN be from one party
Term Limits • Terms cannot be consecutive for any member	Term Limits • All members CAN serve consecutive terms

SUPPORTERS SAY...



The changes will allow more lawyers to serve on the commission.



Changes to term limits will allow people with institutional knowledge to stay on.



The changes to geographic requirements will align with modern-day congressional districts.

OPPONENTS SAY...



The changes will likely make the JNC more partisan, leading to a potentially more polarized court system.



The removal of restrictions around attorneys and their families could open the door for conflicts of interest.



The current safeguards exist to prevent judicial corruption, which has happened before in Oklahoma.

BALLOT LANGUAGE



This measure amends article 7-B, section 3 of the Oklahoma Constitution, changing the Judicial Nominating Commission's structure. Currently appointments are based on congressional districts as constituted in 1967. If approved, appointments to the fifteen-member Commission will be as follows: 1) Governor appoints six members, including one from each congressional district as of the time of their appointment; 2) the Oklahoma Bar Association appoints six members, including one from each congressional district as of the date of selection; and 3) no less than eight members select three at-large members. The measure will permit any number of the commissioners to be licensed attorneys in Oklahoma or another state. The prohibition against immediate family members from practicing law will be removed. The measure changes terms so that at-large commissioners would serve a two-year term, and all other commissioners would serve a six-year term. Additionally, it removes restrictions on political party membership for members appointed by the Governor and at-large members. The measure also permits a commissioner to succeed himself or herself. Vacancies will be filled in the same manner as a commissioner is appointed or selected for the remainder of the relevant term. This measure will not have a fiscal impact.

SHALL THE PROPOSAL BE APPROVED?

FOR THE PROPOSAL – YES; AGAINST THE PROPOSAL – NO

A "YES" vote is a vote in favor of this measure. A "NO" vote is a vote against this measure.



ELECTION DEADLINES

VOTER REGISTRATION DEADLINE

- Postmarked or Delivered by October 9, 2026

ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUEST DEADLINE

- Received by October 19, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

ABSENTEE BALLOT SUBMISSION DEADLINE

- Mailed ballots must be received by November 3, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.
- Hand delivered ballots must be received by November 2, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

EARLY VOTING

- Wednesday, October 28, 2026: 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Thursday, October 29, 2026: 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Friday, October 30, 2026: 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, October 31, 2026: 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

DAY OF ELECTION

- Tuesday, November 3, 2026: 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Visit the Oklahoma Voter Portal at okvoterportal.okelections.us for your voting information, including polling location.