

**Statewide Courts info from <http://www.pacourts.us/learn>**

### **Supreme Court overview**

Dating to 1684, the Supreme Court is the highest court in the Commonwealth and the oldest appellate court in the nation. The Supreme Court's administrative powers and jurisdictional responsibilities are vested with the seven-member court by the Pennsylvania State Constitution and a collection of statutes known as the Judicial Code. Administratively, the courts within the Unified Judicial System are largely responsible for organizing their own staff and dockets; however, the Supreme Court has several committees and boards responsible for writing and enforcing rules for judges, attorneys, and litigants to ensure an efficient and fair judicial review.

Annually, the seven justices receive over 3,000 requests for appellate review.

### **Most often, but not exclusively, the Court reviews:**

- Requests for discretionary appeals from the Commonwealth Court and Superior Court
- Direct Appeals from a lower court's decision, including when a sentence of death is issued
- Requests to intervene in a lower court's proceedings
- Requests to deliver a body from illegal detention

### **Superior Court overview**

The Superior Court was established in 1895. It is one of Pennsylvania's two statewide intermediate appellate courts. The Superior Court is often the final arbiter of legal disputes. The Supreme Court may grant a petition to review a decision of the Superior Court, but most petitions are denied and the ruling of the Superior Court stands. Cases are usually heard by panels of three judges sitting in Philadelphia, Harrisburg or Pittsburgh, but may also be heard *en banc* by nine judges. The Superior Court often travels to locations throughout Pennsylvania to hear cases.

### **responsible for**

- Appeals in criminal and most civil cases from the Courts of Common Pleas
- Appeals on matters involving children and families

### **Commonwealth Court overview**

The Commonwealth Court was established in 1968 and is unique to Pennsylvania. It is one of Pennsylvania's two statewide intermediate appellate courts. The Commonwealth Court is primarily responsible for matters involving state and local governments and regulatory agencies. It also acts as a trial court when lawsuits are filed by or against the Commonwealth. Cases are generally heard by panels of three judges in Philadelphia, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, although, on occasion, they may choose to hold court in other locations. Cases may also be heard by a single judge or by *en banc* panels of seven judges.

### **responsible for**

- Original civil actions brought by and against the Commonwealth
- Appeals from decisions made by state agencies and the Courts of Common Pleas