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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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# **Task Force on Judicial Excellence Holds First Public Forum**

**Task Force to consider creation and use of judicial qualifications committee to screen potential candidates for judicial office in Cuyahoga County**

Cleveland... The Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association Task Force on Judicial Excellence will hold its first public forum at Case Western Reserve University Law School on December 1 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. This forum, the first in a series to be hosted by the Task Force on Judicial Excellence to explore current electoral practices, will address the issue of judicial qualifications for candidates seeking election in Cuyahoga County.

At a recent City Club of Cleveland Friday Forum, Cuyahoga County Republican Party Chairman Rob Frost and Cuyahoga County Democratic Party Chairman Stuart Garson both publicly endorsed the idea of a judicial qualifications committee to screen candidates seeking election to the bench in Cuyahoga County.

In response to the announced and unprecedented cooperation between the two party chairs, the Task Force will begin the process of creating a judicial qualifications committee to screen candidates, then issuing the results to the public. "Under Ohio law, one need only have six years of law practice to run for judge. In many cases that is not enough by itself to render someone qualified to run for judge" said Judge Timothy McMonagle, co-chair of the Task Force. "This is long-overdue," said Jim Robenalt, co-chair of the Task Force.

Specifically, this forum will address the following issues: composition of a qualifications committee; rules of governance of a qualifications committee; and criteria to be applied as to whether a candidate is qualified to run for the bench.

Speakers at the forum will include: Dennis Hawkins, executive director of the New York Fund for Modern Courts (New York is one of the few states that has used voluntary qualifications committees in judicial elections); Joe Frolik of The Cleveland Plain Dealer; and Jay Miller of Crain's Cleveland Business. The forum will be open to the public for comment.

"While we have many excellent judges throughout the courts system in N.E. Ohio, based on our experience, the bar association was concerned that we were not always attracting the best and the brightest candidates from within the bar to pursue a seat on the bench," said Michael Ungar, president of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association. "The two party chairmen, Frost and Garson, deserve our thanks for setting aside political partisanship to ensure only qualified individuals become judge."

To learn more about the Task Force on Judicial Excellence or to register to attend the upcoming public forum, visit [www.tfoje.org](http://www.tfoje.org).

**About the Task Force on Judicial Excellence**

Publicly launched in June 2010, the Task Force on Judicial Excellence is an initiative of the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (CMBA). It is comprised of experienced local attorneys representing a wide spectrum of practices that will study the strengths and weaknesses of the system through which Ohioans elect their judges, and then recommend improvements. The Task Force's initial efforts will be directed at gathering information and ideas. Monthly public forums will explore current electoral practices and procedures and elicit suggestions on how we can improve on them. In addition, the Task Force will review articles and studies examining state models for judicial elections from across the country and interview academic, statehouse, and civic leaders who have crafted and participated in judicial election models in other states. After collecting as many perspectives as possible, the Task Force will present recommendations for ensuring the ongoing quality and stability of this critical third branch of government. For more information, please go to [www.tfoje.org](http://www.tfoje.org).

**About the CMBA**

The Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association is a nonprofit organization, operating as a center for legal professionalism in the region and promoting the highest ethical and professionalism standards. Learn more at [www.clemetrobar.org](http://www.clemetrobar.org).

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