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**ORIGIN & FUNCTIONS**


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The Circuit Courts originated in the colonial period as County Courts. In 1775, just before the Revolutionary War, their functions were suspended. After Maryland adopted its first State Constitution in 1776, the County Courts were reopened and justices were appointed for every county in April 1777.

For the counties, the Constitution of 1851 established the Circuit Courts to succeed the County Courts (Art. IV, secs. 8, 9). The present Baltimore City Circuit Court, however, evolved out of a more complex judicial system.

From 1789 to 1816, a court of oyer and terminer and gaol delivery heard criminal cases for Baltimore City. Its jurisdiction was assumed in 1817 by the Baltimore City Court. The Constitution of 1851 provided Baltimore City with the Court of Common Pleas, the Superior Court, and the Criminal Court (Art. IV, secs. 10-13). The Circuit Court of Baltimore City was established by statute in 1853 and further mandated by the Constitution of 1864 (Chapter 122, Acts of 1853; Art. IV, secs. 31, 35). The Constitution of 1867 authorized the Baltimore City Court (for civil proceedings) and placed all of these City courts under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City (Art. IV, secs. 27, 28). In 1888, Baltimore City Circuit Court no. 2 also was placed under the Supreme Bench (Chapter 194, Acts of 1888). By constitutional amendments ratified by the voters in November 1980, the six courts of the Supreme Bench were consolidated. They became the Circuit Court for Baltimore City on January 1, 1983.

The Circuit Courts are the highest common law and equity courts of record exercising original jurisdiction within Maryland. Each has full common law and equity powers and jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases within its county, and all the additional powers and jurisdiction conferred by the Constitution and by law, except where jurisdiction has been limited or conferred exclusively upon another tribunal by law (Code Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article, sec. 1-501).

The Circuit Court is a trial court of general jurisdiction. Its jurisdiction is very broad but generally covers major civil cases and more serious criminal matters. Circuit Courts also may decide appeals from the District Court and certain administrative agencies. These courts are grouped into eight geographical circuits. The first seven circuits each contain two or more counties; the eighth consists of Baltimore City (Const., Art. IV, sec. 19).

*1st Judicial Circuit:* Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties.

*2nd Judicial Circuit:* Caroline, Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot counties.

*3rd Judicial Circuit:* Baltimore County and Harford County.

*4th Judicial Circuit:* Allegany, Garrett and Washington counties.

*5th Judicial Circuit:* Anne Arundel, Carroll and Howard counties.

*6th Judicial Circuit:* Frederick and Montgomery counties.

*7th Judicial Circuit:* Calvert, Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's counties.

*8th Judicial Circuit:* Baltimore City.

Presently, there are 125 Circuit Court judges, with at least one judge for each county and at least four judges for each judicial circuit. Unlike other Maryland courts, the Circuit Court has no chief judge. Instead, eight circuit administrative judges perform administrative duties in each of their respective circuits. Appointed by the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, circuit administrative judges are aided by county administrative judges. Within each circuit, the judge who has served longest on the court is designated chief judge of the circuit (Const., Art. IV, sec. 21).

Each Circuit Court judge is appointed by the Governor and then must stand for election. The judge's name is placed on the ballot in the first general election that occurs at least one year following the vacancy the judge was appointed to fill. The judge may be opposed formally by one or more qualified members of the bar, with the successful candidate being elected to a fifteen-year term (Const., Art. IV, secs. 19-26).