

The DC Circuit Court of Appeals: Q & A

What is the DC Circuit Court of Appeals?

The DC Circuit Court of Appeals, like other circuit courts, hears appeals from the federal district courts. The DC Circuit Court of Appeals, however, has a broader purview than other circuit courts because it has jurisdiction over a wide range of federal law, including numerous federal agency decisions. The DC Circuit Court yields tremendous power over cases that impact everyone across the country, and as such, is considered the nation's second highest court.

Why is the DC Circuit Court of Appeals important?

The US Supreme Court may be the highest court, but it takes less than 100 cases per year, compared with the thousands of cases heard by circuit courts around the country. The circuit courts are in many cases the final decision makers of important legal issues. The DC Circuit Court yields more power than other circuit courts due to the nature of cases this circuit hears—including highly sensitive and important issues such as national security, gun safety measures, food safety, labor law, election law, and clean air regulations. Individuals across every circuit are affected by the decisions made by the DC Circuit Court.

Given that DC Circuit Court judges make such far-reaching decisions that that impact our health and safety, it is particularly essential that this powerful court is fully functioning with qualified judges that respect our constitutional rights, including civil rights and individual liberties.

How many judges sit on the DC Circuit Court of Appeals?

There are 11 seats on the DC Circuit Court of Appeals. When a judge announces her/his retirement or move to another position (such as to a seat on the US Supreme Court), a vacancy is created. Currently, there are 8 active judges sitting on this court. Although the DC Circuit Court can continue to hear cases with vacant seats, justice delayed is justice denied.

Despite arguments to the contrary, the Judicial Conference of the United States, which oversees the federal courts, believes that an 11-seat court is the appropriate size for this circuit court to deal with the unique nature of this court's cases. A full complement of judges is critical to ensuring a timely hearing of these important cases.