

Attachment O: About U.S. Courts

Article III of the United States Constitution establishes the judicial branch as one of the three separate and distinct branches of the federal government. The other two are the legislative and executive branches.

The federal courts often are called the guardians of the Constitution because their rulings protect rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. Through fair and impartial judgments, the federal courts interpret and apply the law to resolve disputes. The courts do not make the laws. That is the responsibility of Congress. Nor do the courts have the power to enforce the laws. That is the role of the President and the many executive branch departments and agencies.

The founding fathers of the nation considered an independent federal judiciary essential to ensure fairness and equal justice for all citizens of the United States. The Constitution they drafted promotes judicial independence in two major ways. First, federal judges are appointed for life, and they can be removed from office only through impeachment and conviction by Congress of "...Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors." Second, the Constitution provides that the compensation of federal judges "shall not be diminished during their Continuance in Office," which means that neither the President nor Congress can reduce the salary of a federal judge. These two protections help an independent judiciary to decide cases free from popular passions and political influence.

Source: <<http://www.uscourts.gov/about.html>>.