

SUBJECT: Redacting judges' addresses from financial statements filed with counties

COMMITTEE: Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Leach, Farrar, Y. Davis, Julie Johnson, Krause, Meyer, Neave, Smith, White

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Brooke Allen; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jim Allison, County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas; Alexis Tatum, Travis County Commissioners Court)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Local Government Code sec. 159.052 requires judges of statutory county courts and statutory probate courts and candidates for these offices to file an annual financial statement with either the county clerk or the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC). Under sec. 159.055(a), these statements are public records. Sec. 159.055(b) requires county clerks and the commission, upon written request, to remove the names of the filers' dependent children before the statement is made publicly available.

Government Code sec. 572.032 requires the TEC to remove the home address of judges from their financial statements before making the statements public.

DIGEST: HB 1872 would require both county clerks and the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC) to remove the home addresses of county judges and statutory probate judges, as well as candidates for these offices, from annual financial statements before the statements were made public. The bill would remove a requirement that a written request from these judges or candidates be made before the names of their dependent children were removed from the statements. Clerks would be required to remove the children's names before making a statement public. Home addresses and dependent children's names also would have to be removed from any

record that was derived from the financial statements.

Changes made by HB 1872 would apply to information in financial statements regardless of whether the statements were filed before the effective date.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1872 would give judges filing their personal financial statements with county clerks the same privacy and security protections as those who file their reports with the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC). While all judges in Texas are required to file annual financial statements, some must file with the TEC and others have the option of filing with the TEC or with the county clerk. Home addresses of judges are automatically redacted from statements filed with the TEC, but when statements are filed with county clerks, there is no such requirement.

All judges in Texas deserve to have their private addresses protected. HB 1872 would give judges filing locally and their families peace of mind, knowing that this personal information was not readily available through public financial statements. The bill would be a logical extension of the requirement that the TEC remove judges' home addresses from financial statements and the requirement that clerks remove the names of dependent children from the statements upon written request.

HB 1892 would not burden clerks, who already redact information from these forms and are required to keep the forms only for a limited time.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No concerns identified.