

**WENDY A. CARTWRIGHT, ESQ.
ATHENA MALLOY GROVES, ESQ.
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Bill No.: House Bill 677
Title: Orphans' Court Judges - Election
Committee: Judiciary
Hearing Date: February 14, 2024
Position: Recommend Favorable Committee Report

COMMENTS:

Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

We, the Judges of the Orphans' Court for Prince George's County, collectively in our individual capacities, offer this written testimony in support of House Bill 677.

The bill arises from one of the five recommendations of the 2021 Task Force to Study the Maryland Orphans' Courts, of which Judge Groves was a member. They are suggestions for possible improvements to the court. Recommendation No. 2 states that "[c]andidates for the judge of the Orphans' Court shall not specify a political party affiliation. . ."

According to the Annotated Code of Maryland, Election Article, § 5-203(b), a candidate for a judicial office is not required to state a party affiliation. It is unknown why candidates for the Orphans' Court, a judicial office, have not been included in that exception. This bill adds language to the statute to clearly specify that candidates for the Orphans' Court are excluded from the requirement of candidates having to state a party affiliation.

Party affiliation does not determine whether one candidate for Orphans' Court is better fit for the office than another. It has neither influence nor impact in its oversight of estate administration, opinions or rulings. It also adds further confusion to voters as to the purpose and reach of the Orphans' Court. This is an improvement to the Court long overdue.

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Therefore,

We urge a Favorable Committee Report for House Bill 677.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jason A. DeLoach, Esq.