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**House Bill 269 – Maryland Public Ethics Law – Financial Disclosure Statements - State
Officials of and Candidates to be State Officials of the Judicial Branch**

Testimony Before the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

The State Ethics Commission provides testimony in support of House Bill 269. This is the State Ethics Commission's one departmental proposal this year. This legislation preserves transparency while also increasing government efficiency and security for financial disclosure filers by ensuring the most direct notification process for judicial officials and candidates for judicial office. This legislation eliminates an administrative burden for both the Administrative Office of the Courts and the State Ethics Commission. This legislation does not have any fiscal impact for either State agency.

This bill clarifies that the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) administers the financial disclosure provisions and public records inspection provisions of the Public Ethics Law for judicial officials and candidates to be judicial officials. State officials of the Judicial Branch file financial disclosure forms electronically through a system maintained and administered by the Judiciary. The State Ethics Commission does not have access to that filing system at all and has no authority over judicial officials.

Currently, the Public Ethics Law requires AOC to forward copies of all financial disclosure statements that judicial officials file on their system to the State Ethics Commission. The proposed legislation seeks to have this requirement removed from the law. When AOC sends copies of the judicial officials' statements to the Commission's office, they are sent as PDF files and stored on our computer system. The State Ethics Commission has received two requests to inspect a judicial official's financial disclosure statement since 2019 according to our inspection records. It is duplicative to have the records at two agencies. The State Ethics Commission does not have the same ability to directly notify a judicial official of a public inspection of their financial disclosure statement. The Judiciary is in the best position to establish both procedures for public inspection of these financial disclosure statements and provide prompt notification to State officials and candidates of the Judicial Branch if their forms are reviewed.

This proposed legislation is good for government efficiency, prompt notification of inspection of records to the filer, and has no fiscal impact on any agency. The Commission thanks the Committee for its consideration of this departmental legislation and seeks a favorable report.