

TEXAS ETHICS COMMISSION
CHAPTER 159, LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE
FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BY COUNTY OFFICERS
AND EMPLOYEES



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Promoting Public Confidence in Government

TEXAS ETHICS COMMISSION

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FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BY COUNTY OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES

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**CHAPTER 159. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BY
COUNTY OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES**

SUBCHAPTER A. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BY CERTAIN COUNTY OFFICERS

Sec. 159.001. APPLICABILITY OF SUBCHAPTER. This subchapter applies only to:

- (1) a county officer or candidate for a county office of a county with a population of 100,000 or more; or
- (2) a justice of the peace or a candidate for the office of justice of the peace of a county with a population of 125,000 or more.

Sec. 159.002. DEFINITION. In this subchapter, "county officer" means a county judge, county commissioner, or county attorney.

Sec. 159.003. FINANCIAL STATEMENT REQUIRED.

(a) A county officer, candidate for a county office, justice of the peace, or candidate for the office of justice of the peace shall file a financial statement as required by this subchapter.

(b) The statement must:

- (1) be filed with the county clerk of the county in which the officer, justice, or candidate resides; and
- (2) comply with Sections 572.022 and 572.023, Government Code, and with any order of the commissioners court of the county requiring additional disclosures.

(c) The statement may be filed with the county clerk by electronic mail. The county clerk may prescribe the manner and format for filing by electronic mail.

Sec. 159.004. FILING DATES; TIMELINESS OF FILING.

(a) A county officer or justice of the peace shall file the financial statement required by this subchapter within the time prescribed by Section 572.026, Government Code. A candidate for office as a county officer or justice of the peace shall file the financial statement required by this subchapter within the time prescribed by Section 572.027, Government Code.

(b) Except as provided in Subsection (e), the timeliness of the filing is governed by Section 572.029, Government Code.

(c) A county officer or justice of the peace may request the county clerk to grant an extension of time of not more than 60 days for filing the statement. The county clerk shall grant the request if it is received before the filing deadline or if a timely filing or request for extension is prevented because of physical or mental incapacity. The county clerk may not grant more than one extension to a person in one year except for good cause shown.

(d) The county clerk may not grant an extension to a candidate for office as a county officer or justice of the peace.

(e) A person is considered to have timely filed a financial statement under this subchapter if:

(1) the statement is personally delivered not later than 5 p.m. of the last day for filing the statement; or

(2) the county clerk with whom the statement is required to be filed has adopted rules and procedures to provide for the electronic filing of the statement and the statement is electronically filed in accordance with those rules and procedures not later than midnight of the last day for filing the statement.

(f) A county clerk may adopt rules and procedures under this section relating only to the manner in which a person must electronically file a financial statement and the required format of an electronically filed statement.

Sec. 159.005. PREPARATION OF FORMS.

(a) The county clerk may:

(1) design a form to be used for filing the financial statement required by this subchapter; or

(2) require that a form designed by the Texas Ethics Commission under Chapter 572, Government Code, be used for filing the financial statement.

(b) The county clerk shall mail or, at the request of the person required to file under this subchapter, send by electronic mail, the form to each person required to file under this subchapter within the time prescribed by Section 572.030(c), Government Code.

Sec. 159.006. DUPLICATE STATEMENTS. If a person has filed a financial statement under one provision of this subchapter covering the preceding calendar year, the person is not required to file a financial statement required under another provision of this subchapter to cover that same year if, before the deadline for filing the statement under the other provision, the person notifies the county clerk in writing that the person has already filed a financial statement under this subchapter to cover that year.

Sec. 159.007. PUBLIC ACCESS TO STATEMENTS.

(a) Financial statements filed under this subchapter are public records. The county clerk shall maintain the statements in separate alphabetical files and in a manner that is accessible to the public during regular office hours.

(b) During the one-year period following the date of filing of a financial statement, each time a person, other than the county clerk or an employee of the county clerk who is acting on official business, requests to see the financial statement, the county clerk shall place in the file a statement of the person's name and address, whom the person represents, and the date of the request. The county clerk shall retain that statement in the file for one year after the date the requested financial statement is filed.

(c) The county clerk may, and on notification from a former county officer, justice of the peace, or candidate shall, destroy any financial statements filed by the officer, justice, or candidate two years after the date the person ceases to be an officer, justice, or candidate, as applicable.

Sec. 159.0071. NOTIFICATION TO PROSECUTING ATTORNEY. The county clerk of each county in which a person is required to file a financial statement under this chapter

shall maintain a list of the county officers, candidates for county office, justices of the peace, and candidates for the office of justice of the peace required to file the financial statement. Not later than the 10th day after each applicable filing deadline, the county clerk shall provide to the county attorney or criminal district attorney a copy of the list showing for each county officer, candidate for county office, justice of the peace, and candidate for justice of the peace:

(1) whether the officer, justice, or candidate timely filed a financial statement as required by this subchapter;

(2) whether the officer, justice, or candidate timely requested and was granted an extension of time to file as provided for by Section 159.004 and the new due date for each such officer, justice, or candidate; or

(3) whether the officer, justice, or candidate did not timely file a financial statement or receive an extension of time.

Sec. 159.008. CRIMINAL PENALTY.

(a) A county officer, candidate for county office, justice of the peace, or candidate for the office of justice of the peace commits an offense if the officer, justice, or candidate knowingly fails to file a financial statement as required by this subchapter.

(b) An offense under this section is a Class B misdemeanor.

(c) It is a defense to prosecution under this section that the officer, justice, or candidate did not receive copies of the financial statement form required to be mailed to the officer, justice, or candidate by this subchapter.

Sec. 159.009. VENUE. An offense under this subchapter, including perjury, may be prosecuted in any county in which it may be prosecuted under the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Sec. 159.010. CIVIL PENALTY.

(a) A person who determines that a person required to file a financial statement under this subchapter has failed to do so may notify in writing:

(1) the county attorney or criminal district attorney; or

(2) the district attorney, if the person required to file the statement is the county attorney.

(b) On receipt of a written notice under Subsection (a), the county attorney, district attorney, or criminal district attorney shall determine from any available evidence whether the person to whom the notice relates has failed to file a statement. On making that determination, the county attorney, district attorney, or criminal district attorney shall immediately mail by certified mail a notice of the determination to the person responsible for filing the statement.

(c) If the person responsible for filing the statement fails to file the statement before the 30th day after the person receives the notice under Subsection (b), the person is civilly liable to the county for an amount not to exceed \$1,000.

(d) A penalty paid under this section shall be deposited to the credit of the general fund of the county.

(e) This section is cumulative of any other available sanctions for late filings of statements.

SUBCHAPTER B. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BY OTHER COUNTY OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES

Sec. 159.031. COUNTY COVERED BY SUBCHAPTER. This subchapter applies only to a county with a population of 125,000 or more.

Sec. 159.032. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "County officer" means a sheriff, county tax assessor-collector, county clerk, district clerk, county treasurer, county auditor, or county purchasing agent. The term does not include a county officer as defined by Section 159.002.

(2) "Precinct officer" means a constable.

(3) "County judicial officer" means a justice of the peace or a master, magistrate, or referee appointed by a justice of the peace.

(4) "County employee" does not include a person covered by Subdivision (1), (2), or (3).

Sec. 159.033. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE REPORTING SYSTEM.

(a) The commissioners court of the county may adopt by order a financial disclosure reporting system for county officers, precinct officers, county judicial officers, candidates for those offices, and county employees.

(b) The commissioners court shall prescribe the items required to be reported and the times the report is due.

(c) If reporting is required, the commissioners court may restrict the reporting requirement to a limited part of county employees if all employees with similar jobs are required to report.

Sec. 159.034. FILING REQUIREMENT.

(a) The commissioners court may require the report to be filed with the clerk of the commissioners court, the county auditor, or any other county officer. However, the commissioners court may require the report to be filed with the county clerk or other elected county officer only if the county clerk or elected county officer consents to the imposition of that duty.

(b) The commissioners court may not require records filed under this subchapter to be maintained for more than one year and may require the authority with whom the records are filed to destroy the records after one year.

(c) A person required by order of the commissioners court to file a report under this subchapter is considered to have complied with the order if the person files with the authority prescribed by the commissioners court a report that complies with the requirements of Chapter 572, Government Code.

(d) A report filed under this subchapter may be filed by electronic mail. The authority with whom the report is filed may prescribe the manner and format for filing by electronic mail.

Sec. 159.0341. TIMELINESS OF FILING.

(a) A person is considered to have timely filed a report under this subchapter if:

(1) the report is filed in accordance with Section 572.029, Government Code;

(2) the report is personally delivered not later than 5 p.m. of the last day for filing the report; or

(3) the officer with whom the report is required to be filed has adopted rules and procedures to provide for the electronic filing of the report and the report is electronically filed in accordance with those rules and procedures not later than midnight of the last day for filing the report.

(b) An officer with whom a report is required to be filed under this subchapter may adopt rules and procedures under this section relating only to the manner in which a person must electronically file a report and the required format of an electronically filed report.

Sec. 159.035. CIVIL PENALTY.

(a) If a report is determined to be late, the person responsible for filing the report is civilly liable to the county for \$100. The county attorney or the district or criminal district attorney with civil jurisdiction may not initiate suit for the penalty until the 10th day after the date a notice concerning the late report is mailed to the person. If the report is filed and the penalty is paid before the 10th day after the date of the mailing, the authority with whom the report is filed shall notify the county attorney or the district or criminal district attorney, and the civil suit under this section may not be initiated.

(b) A penalty paid under this section shall be deposited to the credit of the general fund of the county.

Sec. 159.036. CRIMINAL PENALTY.

(a) An officer, candidate, or employee required to file a report by an order adopted under this subchapter commits an offense if the person knowingly fails to file the report as required by the order.

(b) An offense under this section is a Class B misdemeanor.

(c) It is a defense to prosecution under this section that the person has filed the required report and paid a civil penalty as provided by this subchapter.

SUBCHAPTER C. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE BY COUNTY JUDICIAL OFFICERS

Sec. 159.051. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "Commission" means the Texas Ethics Commission.

(2) "County judicial officer" means the judge of a statutory county court or statutory probate court.

Sec. 159.052. FILING REQUIREMENT.

(a) A county judicial officer or a candidate for office as a county judicial officer shall file with the county clerk or the commission a financial statement that complies with Sections 572.022 and 572.023, Government Code.

(b) A county judicial officer or candidate who files a financial statement with the commission shall file with the county clerk a document stating that the officer or candidate is filing the financial statement with the commission. The document must be filed by the deadline for filing the financial statement.

(c) A financial statement filed with the county clerk may be filed by electronic mail. The county clerk may prescribe the manner and format for filing by electronic mail under this subsection.

Sec. 159.053. FILING DATES; TIMELINESS OF FILING.

(a) A county judicial officer shall file the financial statement required by this subchapter within the time prescribed by Section 572.026, Government Code. A candidate for office as a county judicial officer shall file the financial statement required by this subchapter within the time prescribed by Section 572.027, Government Code.

(b) Except as provided in Subsection (c), the timeliness of the filing is governed by Section 572.029, Government Code.

(c) A person is considered to have timely filed a financial statement under this subchapter if:

(1) the statement is personally delivered not later than 5 p.m. of the last day for filing the statement; or

(2) the county clerk with whom the statement is required to be filed has adopted rules and procedures to provide for the electronic filing of the statement and the statement is electronically filed in accordance with those rules and procedures not later than midnight of the last day for filing the statement.

Sec. 159.054. PREPARATION OF FORMS.

(a) The county clerk may:

(1) design a form to be used for filing the financial statement required by this subchapter; or

(2) require that a form designed by the commission under Chapter 572, Government Code, be used for filing the financial statement.

(b) The county clerk shall make paper and electronic copies of the form available to each person required to file under this subchapter within the time prescribed by Section 572.030(c), Government Code.

[Section 159.055, Local Government Code, as amended, is effective May 23, 2019.]

Sec. 159.055. PUBLIC ACCESS TO STATEMENTS.

(a) Except as provided by Subsection (b), a financial statement filed under this subchapter or a document filed under Section 159.052(b) is a public record. The county clerk or the commission shall maintain the financial statements or documents in a manner that is accessible to the public during regular business hours.

(b) ~~The [On the written request of a county judicial officer or candidate, the]~~ county clerk or the commission shall remove the officer's or candidate's home address and the names of the officer's or candidate's dependent children from the officer's or candidate's financial statement and any county or commission record derived from the financial statement before the statement or record is made available to a member of the public.

(c) Until the first anniversary of the date a financial statement is filed, each time a person requests to see the financial statement, excluding the county clerk or an employee of the county clerk or the commission, acting on official business, the county clerk or the commission shall place in the file a statement of the person's name and address, whom the person represents,

and the date of the request. The county clerk or the commission shall maintain that statement in the file until the first anniversary of the date the financial statement is filed.

(d) After the second anniversary of the date a person ceases to be a county judicial officer, the county clerk or the commission may and on notification from the former officer shall destroy each financial statement filed by the officer.

Sec. 159.056. FAILURE TO FILE; CRIMINAL PENALTY.

(a) A person commits an offense if the person:

(1) is a county judicial officer or a candidate for office as a county judicial officer; and

(2) knowingly fails to file a financial statement as required by this subchapter.

(b) An offense under this section is a Class B misdemeanor.

SUBCHAPTER D. PROTECTION FOR JUDICIAL OFFICERS

Sec. 159.071. OMISSION OF ADDRESS.

(a) In this section:

(1) "County attorney" means a county attorney whose jurisdiction includes any criminal law or child protective services matter.

(2) "State judge" has the meaning assigned by Section 13.0021, Election Code.

(b) On receiving notice from the Office of Court Administration of the Texas Judicial System of a county attorney 's or state judge 's qualifications for office or on receipt of a written request from a county attorney, state judge, spouse of a county attorney or state judge, or candidate for the office of county attorney or state judge, the county clerk shall remove or redact the residence address of the county attorney, state judge, spouse of a county attorney or state judge, or candidate for the office of county attorney or state judge from any report filed under this chapter by the county attorney, state judge, or candidate before the statement is made available to a member of the public.