

- SUBJECT:** Removing home addresses from personal financial statements
- COMMITTEE:** General Investigating and Ethics — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — S. Davis, Moody, Capriglione, Nevárez, Price, Shine, Turner
0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Bill Lauderback, Lower Colorado River Authority)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kelley Shannon, Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas; Donnis Baggett, Texas Press Association)
- BACKGROUND:** Government Code, sec. 572.021 requires a state officer, a partisan or independent candidate for elected office, and a state party chair to file verified financial statements with the Texas Ethics Commission.

Sec. 572.032 requires the commission to redact the home address of a judge or justice from financial statements before allowing the public to view them.
- DIGEST:** HB 776 would require the Texas Ethics Commission to remove the home address from a financial statement filed by any individual before allowing the public to view it or making it publicly available on the commission's website.

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, 2017, and would apply to financial statements filed before, on, or after that date.
- SUPPORTERS SAY:** HB 776 would extend an existing safety precaution afforded to the judicial branch of government to other elected officials by requiring that their personal home addresses not be made public in financial statements.

The bill would provide elected officials and their families peace of mind knowing that their home addresses were not readily available to those who may wish to harm them. This is especially important given today's highly charged political climate and the level of scrutiny officials face. Although the public does have a right to pertinent information about elected officials, this right must be weighed against the safety of public officials and their families.

The personal financial statement is not used to determine the legitimacy of a candidate's residency. Other means of verifying residency exist that do not require making a home address public, such as the requirement that candidates provide proof of residency or their voter registration information to participate in a party primary in Texas.

While HB 776 would redact an official's home address from the "home address" and "interest in real property" sections of the personal financial statement, the description and value of the property if sold would remain publicly available. This information would be sufficient to understand an official's property interests.

The bill would not unduly hinder identification of officials with common names because a home address is not the sole means of differentiating between individuals, and it is the prerogative of these officials to identify themselves to the public.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 776 unnecessarily would require the redaction of home addresses from financial statements filed by elected officials. When individuals choose to run for public office, they are asking for the public's trust and subjecting themselves to public scrutiny. Officials make this decision knowing the risks of being a public figure. Safety concerns are not reason enough to prevent disclosure of personal information such as a home address.

The bill could violate the right of the public to know relevant information about who officials are and where they live. It is not unusual for a person

who lives outside a district to run for office there, and it is up to the public and the press to confirm the legitimacy of where a candidate may claim residency.

HB 776 would redact an official's home address from both the "home address" and "interest in real property" sections of the personal financial statement. This effectively would conceal information on a property treated as a home address by an official, such as specific location, size, and potential value. The public needs this information to understand potential conflicts of interest that could influence an official's decision making.

The bill also could make it more difficult to resolve matters of common names. When an individual with a common name runs for office, knowledge of the person's home address can often help identify exactly who the person is.