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## **SB 129 - Sponsor Statement**

### **ELECTION PAMPHLET INFORMATION RE JUDGES**

**“An Act relating to information on judicial officers provided in election pamphlets.”**

The State of Alaska constitutional framers established a three-part judicial merit selection and retention system. The first selection phase is conducted by the Alaska Judicial Council who screens and nominates judicial applicants based on the candidate’s moral character, professional competence, and legal experience. The second phase incorporates political considerations of the process as the Alaska governor appoints from the list provided by the Alaska Judicial Council. Finally, Alaska state voters determine whether a judicial officer will remain on the bench during retention elections. It is this critical third phase that reflects the constitutional framers belief that the judiciary maintain accountability to the electorate.

In addition to screening judicial applicants, the Judicial Council also conducts extensive performance evaluations, interviews, public hearings, and surveys to assess judicial integrity, temperament, diligence, impartiality, legal ability, and administrative skills. Based upon their research the council will decide if they will recommend a judicial officer’s retention to the public, and they publish their findings in the Alaska Official Election Pamphlet. However, the extent of information provided to the public in the election pamphlet is limited to modest biographical summaries, simple yes or no recommendations, and reference tables of surveys.

Given the wealth of public information collected by the Judicial Council, it is the goal of this proposed legislation to increase the information readily available to the public to foster informed and knowledgeable voters in terms of judicial retention elections. This legislation will require the election pamphlet to include additional information concerning judicial officers’ education, area of primary practice, elected or political offices held by the justice, organization membership, and clients and employers of members of the judicial officers’ household.

The three-part judicial merit selection and retention system provides the best balance between judicial merit and accountability to the electorate. The success of this system is based upon the extensive research conducted by the Judicial Council to not only select judges but to provide the electorate critical information to make informed decisions regarding judicial retention.

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