

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-406](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Under the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, as amended, federal judges and certain judicial employees must file financial disclosure reports that can be made available to the public. Federal law accounts for the potential security risks of the judiciary and authorizes the redaction of information from judicial officials' reports if the Judicial Conference, in consultation with the United States Marshals Service (USMS), finds that revealing certain information could endanger judicial officials or members of their families.

This report addresses the following for calendar years 2012 through 2016, the most recent years for which full data were available: (1) Actions taken by the Judicial Conference to ensure judicial officials file financial disclosure reports, and the number of reports filed; (2) The judiciary's compliance with procedures for responding to requests for financial disclosure reports and the number of reports released; and (3) The number of redaction requests made, the types of information requested to be redacted, and the judiciary's consistency in reporting results to Congress in a timely manner.

GAO interviewed AOUSC and USMS officials, reviewed relevant laws and guidance, and analyzed data on redaction requests.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that AOUSC develop and implement a formal process, with steps and timeframes, to better ensure that required annual reports are submitted to Congress within the following year. AOUSC concurred with the recommendation.

View [GAO-18-406](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or [goodwing@gao.gov](mailto:goodwing@gao.gov).

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## FEDERAL JUDICIARY

# The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts Should Ensure Financial Disclosure Redaction Reports Are Submitted to Congress Annually

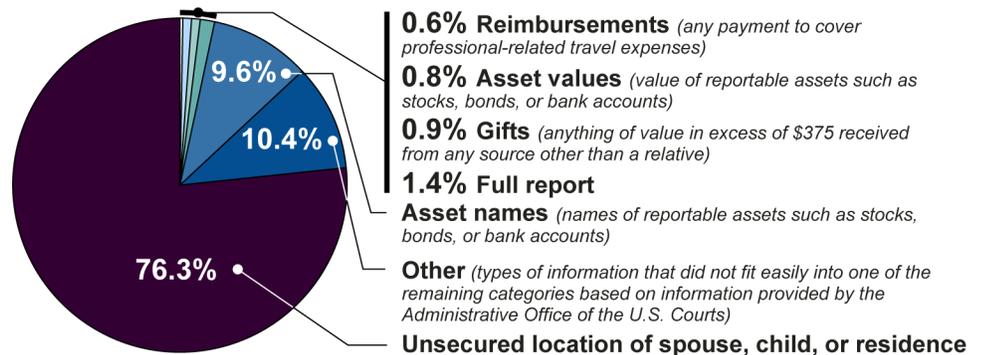
## What GAO Found

The Judicial Conference, the federal judiciary's principle policy-making body, developed an electronic filing system, guidance, and a compliance process to help ensure judicial officials file financial disclosure reports that adhere to applicable laws and regulations, and data provided by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AOUSC) show that more than 4,000 reports were required to be filed annually from 2012 through 2016. According to AOUSC officials, as of March 2018, all financial disclosure reports required to be filed from 2012 through 2016 were filed, except for one in 2015 and one in 2016. AOUSC officials are working with the filers to ensure these reports will be filed.

The Judicial Conference established procedures for responding to requests for copies of financial disclosure reports, and the number of reports released has varied. From 2012 through 2016, AOUSC annually received, on average, about 70 requests for copies of judicial officials' reports and released approximately 16,000 reports during this time. Each request can vary—from a request for a single judicial official's report to a request for multiple judicial officials' reports.

From 2012 through 2016, a small percentage of judicial officials requested redactions from their financial disclosure reports. On average, 3.2 percent of financial disclosure reports filed included a redaction request and about 85 percent of those requests were granted. Of the information requested to be redacted, about 76 percent was related to the unsecured location of a judicial official's spouse, child, or residence. AOUSC is required by federal law to submit annual reports to Congress on use of the judicial redaction authority, such as the number of reports with redactions and types of information redacted, but AOUSC has not consistently submitted the reports on an annual basis in recent years. GAO found that AOUSC does not have a formal process for preparing and submitting the reports to Congress. Implementing a more formal process, with specified steps and timeframes, would better position AOUSC to provide Congress with more timely reports.

**Types of Information Requested to be Redacted from Judicial Officials' Financial Disclosure Reports, by Percent, Calendar Years 2012 through 2016**



Source: GAO analysis of Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts data. | GAO-18-406