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Group files ⁹⁰⁰ record request on court plan lobbying

By Kelly Wiese
kelly.wiese@molawyersmedia.com

A group advocating changes to Missouri's plan for selecting judges wants to know how actively involved the Supreme Court has been in fighting that effort.

James Harris, director of Better Courts for Missouri, filed a Sunshine Law request Wednesday with Supreme Court Chief Justice Laura Denvir Stith. Harris is seeking letters and e-mails from Stith, other judges and Supreme Court Clerk Tom Simon regarding two legislative proposals to change the Nonpartisan Court Plan.

The proposals — House Joint Resolution 10 and Senate Joint Resolution 9 — seek to make the process more open, increase the governor's

and Legislature's influence in the process and create a larger pool of finalists. Neither has reached floor debate yet, though the House proposal has cleared its two-step committee process. The session ends in mid-May.

Harris is looking for correspondence to legislators, judges, leaders in The Missouri Bar and the Missouri Association of Trial Attorneys, and individuals active in supporting the current system. His request also seeks communications regarding the sponsors, Sen. Jim Lembke, R-St. Louis County, and Rep. Stanley Cox, R-Sedalia. Plus, he seeks records on any proposals for political consultants to represent the state bar or the judiciary.

A court spokeswoman had little to say about the request so far.

"We received the request this

afternoon. We are reviewing it, and we will respond in due course," Beth Riggert said Wednesday.

Sunshine requests typically require at least a basic response within three days. In the past the court has said the process of the Appellate Judicial Commission, which recommends finalists for court vacancies to the governor, is not subject to the Sunshine Law.

"These modest changes to the Missouri Plan should not be actively opposed or supported by the judiciary using state monies," Harris said in a written statement.

Harris said he believes some judges have been lobbying legislators and state workers have worked with attorneys who oppose the proposals to change the plan.