

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

In the Matter of a Complaint by Aaron Charney, West Haven

File No. 2015-094

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Complainant alleges that the Respondent Christopher Suggs, as treasurer of the Nick Pascale for Mayor candidate committee, received impermissible in-kind contributions from a business entity. The following are the Commission's findings and conclusions.

1. Nicholas Pascale was a candidate for Mayor of West Haven in 2015.
2. At all times relevant hereto, Respondent Christopher Suggs was the treasurer of the Nick Pascale for Mayor candidate committee (the "Committee").
3. The Complainant alleges that the Committee was allowed to use West River Hall, an event hall in West Haven, at below market rent.
4. General Statutes § 9-613 (a) provides, in pertinent part, that "[n]o business entity shall make any contributions or expenditures to, or for the benefit of, any candidate's campaign for election to any public office or position subject to this chapter or for nomination at a primary for any such office or position, or to promote the defeat of any candidate for any such office or position."¹
5. The Commission has been clear that "in-kind contributions from a business entity to a candidate committee are prohibited." *In Re "Committee to Elect Romano" Commission Initiated Complaint*, File No. 2012-036.
6. The Commission has further been clear that a business is not permitted to allow a committee to use its office or event space without charging fair market value. *See In the Matter of a Complaint by Lisa Carver, New Britain*, File No. 2008-032.

¹ There are exceptions to this general prohibition including certain items donated for a tag sale and purchase of an advertisement in a program. General Statutes § 9-601a. However, none of these exceptions are applicable to the case at bar.

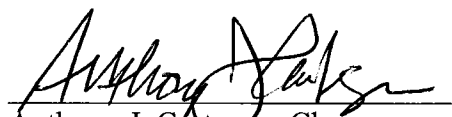
7. In this case, the Complainant alleges that on March 26, 2015, the Committee held a fundraising event at West River Hall. The Complainant further alleges that the Committee paid only \$200 for the use of the hall, when fair market value was \$675.
8. The Respondent admits that they rented the space for \$200. However, the Respondent further states that that was the fair market value for the type of event that they held.
9. The investigation into this matter confirms the Respondent's position. While the posted event rates for the West River Hall were between \$375 and \$1,795, the hall had a documented history of providing the space to civic and not-for-profit organizations for \$200 or less, especially on nights that the hall would otherwise be vacant.
10. The owner of West River Hall stated, and the evidence confirmed, that lower rates were charged in the ordinary course of business and were not dependent on the political affiliation of the organization.
11. Based upon the foregoing, the Commission finds that allegations against the Respondent are unsupported by the facts.

ORDER

The following Order is recommended on the basis of the aforementioned findings:

- 1) That the matter is dismissed.

Adopted this 21 day of June, 2017 at Hartford, Connecticut.


Anthony J. Castagno, Chairperson
By Order of the Commission