

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

In the Matter of a Complaint by Charles Coviello, Bridgeport

File No. 2016-050

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Complainant, Charles Coviello, originally brought this Complaint pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 9-7b, alleging that his candidate committee's treasurer, Mario Selitte, violated Connecticut's campaign finance laws. On May 17, 2017, the Commission voted to expand the investigation to include potential campaign finance violations by the Charles Coviello and name him as a Respondent. The following are the Commission's findings of fact and conclusions of law:

1. On March 31, 2016, Respondent Coviello registered a candidate committee, *Inspiring Community Change*, with the Commission. *Inspiring Community Change* was designated as the sole funding source for Respondent Coviello's candidacy for State Representative in the 124th General Assembly District in the November 16, 2016 general election and the preceding primary.
2. From March 31, 2016 until May 23, 2016, Mario Selitte was the registered treasurer of the *Inspiring Community Change* candidate committee.
3. From May 23, 2016 until July 1, 2016, Margaret A. Campbell was the registered treasurer of the *Inspiring Community Change* candidate committee.
4. On July 1, 2016, Respondent Coviello filed a complaint with the Commission alleging that Mario Selitte violated various campaign finance laws.
5. On February 2, 2017, Mario Selitte died.
6. On May 16, 2017, the Commission voted to dismiss the allegations concerning Mario Selitte, due to his death, but also voted to expand the investigation to include allegations that Respondent Coviello was serving as his own treasurer.
7. Specifically, the investigation concerned whether Respondent Coviello was collecting cash contributions and depositing them without the involvement of the treasurer.

8. General Statutes § 9-606 (d) prohibits candidates from serving as the treasurer of their own candidate committees, and provides, in pertinent part:

No person shall act as a treasurer or deputy treasurer (1) unless the person is an elector of this state, the person has paid any civil penalties or forfeitures assessed pursuant to chapters 155 to 157, inclusive, and a statement, signed by the chairman in the case of a party committee or political committee or by the candidate in the case of a candidate committee, designating the person as treasurer or deputy treasurer, has been filed in accordance with section 9-603, and (2) if such person has been convicted of or pled guilty or nolo contendere to, in a court of competent jurisdiction, any (A) felony involving fraud, forgery, larceny, embezzlement or bribery, or (B) criminal offense under this title, unless at least eight years have elapsed from the date of the conviction or plea or the completion of any sentence, whichever date is later, without a subsequent conviction of or plea to another such felony or offense. In the case of a political committee, the filing of a statement of organization by the chairman of the committee, in accordance with the provisions of section 9-605, shall constitute compliance with the filing requirements of this section. ... *A candidate shall not serve as the candidate's own treasurer or deputy treasurer, except that a candidate who is exempt from forming a candidate committee under subsection (b) of section 9-604 and has filed a certification that the candidate is financing the candidate's campaign from the candidate's own personal funds or is not receiving or expending in excess of one thousand dollars may perform the duties of a treasurer for the candidate's own campaign.*

(Emphasis added).

9. The investigation revealed that on May 12, 2016, the Coviello campaign held a fundraiser at the restaurant BBQ in Bridgeport.
10. Mario Selitte attended the BBQ event on May 12, 2016.
11. At the BBQ event on May 12, 2016, appointed solicitors of *Inspiring Community Change* collected contributions (checks and cash) as well as certification cards.
12. After the May 12, 2016 BBQ event, a solicitor made copies of the certification cards and provided the originals to Mr. Selitte.
13. After the May 12, 2016 BBQ event, Respondent Coviello took custody of the cash contributions and deposited them.

14. Although unconfirmed, Respondent Coviello contends that he took custody of the cash contributions from the May 12, 2016 event only with the knowledge and consent of Mr. Selitte.

15. Mr. Selitte perished prior to Commission investigators confirming the veracity of Mr. Coviello's account with Mr. Selitte.

16. General Statutes § 9-606 (a) provides, in pertinent part:

The treasurer of each committee shall be responsible for (1) depositing, receiving and reporting all contributions and other funds in the manner specified in section 9-608, (2) making and reporting expenditures, (3) reporting expenses incurred but not yet paid, (4) filing the statements required under section 9-608, and (5) keeping internal records of each entry made on such statements. The treasurer of each committee shall deposit contributions in the committee's designated depository not later than twenty days after receiving them.

17. While the Commission strongly encourages treasurers to physically make each deposit into a depository account themselves, a treasurer may appoint an agent to physically make deposits on his behalf. However, the treasurer remains liable for the actions of his appointed agent in that situation.

18. In this case, the Commission has been unable to independently verify whether Respondent Coviello's actions were as the agent of Mr. Selitte or not.

19. Therefore, the Commission elects to take no further action at this time, and reserves the right to resume such investigation if additional evidence becomes known to the Commission.


ORDER

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

That the Commission take no further action concerning File No. 2016-050.

It is further ordered that the post-election review of *Inspiring Community Change* be closed.

Adopted this 20th day of February, 2019 at Hartford, Connecticut.



~~Anthony J. Castagno, Chairperson~~

By Order of the Commission

Salvatore Bramante - Vice Chair