

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION**

In the Matter of a Complaint by Steven A. Taccogna, Stratford

File No. 2021-146

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The Complainant, an elector in the Town of Stratford, made this complaint pursuant to General Statutes §9-7b. Complainant alleged several irregularities involving the *Stratford Democratic Town Committee*, *Stephanie for Mayor* candidate committee, *Voices for Stratford PAC*, and *Stephanie for Stratford* candidate committee. These alleged irregularities include possible illegal business entity contributions and “straw contributions.” Complainant also alleges use of a business loan to fund the *Stephanie for Stratford* candidate committee.

1. Steven A. Taccogna (hereinafter “Complainant”) filed a complaint with the Commission alleging “straw contributions” and funneling of “straw contributions” by Gus Curcio and his associates to *Stratford Democratic Town Committee* (“*SDTC*”), *Stephanie for Mayor*, *Voices for Stratford PAC* (“*VFS PAC*”), and *Stephanie for Stratford*. The complaint also alleges possible Paycheck Protection Program (“PPP”) loan fraud due to a loan from a business to the *Stephanie for Stratford* candidate committee.
2. Steven A. Taccogna’s complaint centered on potential “straw contribution” violations. Among these allegations were:
  - Gus Curcio directly or through associates funneled money into the *Stephanie for Mayor* candidate committee. Alleged associates who gave contributions were: Cheryl Schede, Shaun Moffatt, Louise Korbelt, Audry Longo, Ronald Fitelson, Bernadette Fitelson, Stephen Kirby, Sandra Pariseau, Nicole Pariseau, Sherri LaConte, Carlos Silva, Danielle Caciopoli, Erich Diedermyer, Dustyn Harris, Angela Silano, and Kent Walberg.
  - While the Complainant served as treasurer for *SDTC*, he received a check from Louise Korbelt for \$500 that he deemed suspicious because Stephanie Philips, who was then the chairwoman of the *SDTC*, handed him the check and told him to deposit it immediately. In hindsight, the Complainant believed this individual was being used to channel “straw contributions” through.
  - In 2019, while Stephanie Philips was serving as chairwoman of the *SDTC* she also served as deputy treasurer of *VFS PAC*, Complainant alleges Ms. Philips approached *SDTC* members to accept funds from her so they could make contributions to *VFS PAC*. After those *SDTC* members declined, Complaint further alleges Ms. Philips informed those members that she would simply find another way to get these funds to *VFS PAC*. Complaint alleges there were several suspicious contributions after this.

3. Additionally, the Complainant alleges that during the 2020 *Stephanie for Stratford* candidate committee, Stephanie Philips illegally used \$40,000 she received in a PPP loan, which was for a business she owned called SLR Group Inc., to loan her candidate committee. Complainant stated, “this is in violation of the revised rules included in the Consolidation Appropriations Act 2021 under Division M, Title III, Section 319.”
4. The Commission opened a lengthy and in-depth investigation into the Complainant’s allegations to determine if there were any violations of campaign finance laws by Stephanie Philips, Gus Curcio, and others listed. Making and knowingly receiving a “straw contribution” would constitute illegal practices under General Statutes §9-622 (7) and (10). Furthermore, no business entity can contribute to a candidate’s campaign under §9-613.

**Allegation One: Alleged “Straw Contributions”**

5. At all times relevant hereto, *Stratford Democratic Town Committee* is an ongoing political committee registered with the State Election Enforcement Commission.
6. At all times relevant hereto, *Stephanie for Mayor* was a candidate committee for Stephanie Philips registered in the Town of Stratford to make expenditures concerning the November 7, 2017 election. On or about February 7, 2017, the committee registered with the Town of Stratford Town Clerk.
7. At all times relevant hereto, *Voices for Stratford PAC* was a durational political slate committee registered in the Town of Stratford to make expenditures concerning the November 11, 2019 election. On or about July 24, 2019, the committee registered with the Town of Stratford Town Clerk.
8. At all times relevant hereto, *Stephanie for Stratford* was a candidate committee for Stephanie Philips registered in the Town of Stratford to make expenditures concerning the November 2, 2021 election. On or about July 9, 2021, the committee registered with the Town of Stratford Town Clerk.
9. General Statutes § 9-622 provides, in pertinent part, that the following persons shall be guilty of an illegal practice:

(7) Any person who, directly or indirectly, individually or through another person, makes a payment or promise of payment to a treasurer in a name other than the person's own, and any treasurer who knowingly receives a payment or promise of payment, or enters or causes the same to be entered in the person's accounts in any other

name than that of the person by whom such payment or promise of payment is made;

....

(10) Any person who solicits, makes or receives a contribution that is otherwise prohibited by any provision of this chapter;

10. Commission investigators interviewed Gus Curcio who invoked his Fifth Amendment rights.

11. Commission investigators discovered “straw contributions” after interviewing Louise Korbel. She admitted her son, Dean Moccia, on three separate occasions provided her cash and asked her to write a check from her personal account to political committees. These instances were:

- \$650 in June 2017 to *Stephanie for Mayor*.
- \$500 in July 2018 to the *SDTC*.
- \$1,000 in September 2019 to *VFS PAC*.

Ms. Korbel recalled her son Mr. Moccia told her that he did not have a personal checking account and could not use a business check for political contributions. Commission investigators also learned that Mr. Moccia passed away on February 26, 2020.

12. Commission investigators interviewed other named individuals in the complaint and could not discover any other “straw contributions.”

13. As enumerated in § 9-7b-48 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies provides:

In its determination of the amount of the civil penalty to be imposed, the Commission shall consider, among other mitigating or aggravating circumstances:

- (1) the gravity of the act or omission;
- (2) the amount necessary to insure immediate and continued compliance;
- (3) the previous history of similar acts or omissions; and
- (4) whether the person has shown good faith in attempting to comply with the applicable provisions of the General Statutes.

Regs., Conn. State Agencies § 9-7b-48. The Commission possesses the authority to set the punishment it metes out to individuals who violate the statutes under its authority. While the maximum penalty available under the enabling statute is \$2,000 per offense, the Commission also has the authority to set a lesser penalty where circumstances call for such leniency.

14. An individual giving in the name of another, or making a "straw contribution", is one of the most serious violations that the Commission considers. *See In re SEEC Initiated Investigation of Steve Obsitnik for Connecticut*, File No. 2018-050A, *In re Contributions to John Scott 2016*, File No. 2016-035, *In re Grant Verification of Contributions by Garrett Moore, Jr.*, File No. 2014-017; *In the Matter of Cusano Campaign Solicitors, Commission Initiated*, File No. 2008-148
15. Given Mr. Moccia's influence over Ms. Korbel his elderly mother, the Commission will take no further action on this matter.
16. The remaining allegations that the Commission was unable to substantiate regarding "straw contributions" shall be dismissed.

#### **Allegation Two: Use of a federal PPP Loan**

17. General Statutes §9-613 provides:

(a) No 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. No business entity shall make any other contributions or expenditures to promote the success or defeat of any political party, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section. No business entity shall establish more than one political committee. A political committee shall be deemed to have been established by a business entity if the initial disbursement or contribution to the committee is made under subsection (b) of this section or by an officer, director, owner, limited or general partner or holder of stock constituting five per cent or more of the total outstanding stock of any class of the business entity.

18. General Statutes § 9-601a provides in pertinent part:

(a) As used in this chapter and sections 9-700 to 9-716, inclusive, "contribution" means:

(l) Any gift, subscription, **loan**, advance, payment or deposit of money or anything of value, **made for the purpose of influencing the** nomination for election, or **election, of any person** or for the purpose of aiding or promoting the success or defeat of any referendum question or on behalf of any political party; (Emphasis added.)

19. SLR Group Inc. is a business entity as defined under General Statutes §9-601 (8).
20. Commission investigators interviewed Stephanie Philips and she denied any wrongdoing. Ms. Philips provided banking information regarding SLR Group Inc.'s PPP loan. The Commission's investigation determined that there was not a loan from a business in violation of General Statutes §9-613. *Stephanie For Stratford's* July 10<sup>th</sup> financial disclosure report does not report any loans but does report personal funds from the candidate totaling \$44,000. Whether or not paying these federal PPP loan funds from her business to herself was proper is not within Commission's jurisdiction.
21. Based on the above-referenced findings and conclusions, Complainant's allegations were unsubstantiated after investigation and therefore this matter shall be dismissed.

**ORDER**

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

The Commission takes no further action against Louise Korbel in Allegation One; the Commission dismisses the allegations against the other named individuals in Allegation One; and, the Commission dismisses Allegation Two.

Adopted this 10<sup>th</sup> day of February 2023 at Hartford, Connecticut by vote of the Commission.



Commissioner STEPHEN T. PERRY  
By Order of the Commission