

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

In the Matter of a Complaint by Donna Veach,
Berlin

File No. 2021-214

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The complainant, Donna Veach, filed this complaint pursuant to General Statutes § 9-7b. The complainant alleges various campaign finance violations by Joann Angelica-Stetson, a 2020 candidate for State Representative in Connecticut's 30th General Assembly District, who participated in the Citizens' Election Program.

After an investigation of the complaint, the Commission adopts the following findings of fact and conclusions of law:

1. On April 24, 2020, the Respondent, Joann Angelica Stetson (the "candidate"), registered her candidate committee, Joann 2020 (the "committee"), by filing SEEC Form 1 with the Commission. In that registration David DellaVecchia and Karen Jackie were named as treasurer and deputy treasurer for the committee respectively.¹
2. The candidate, the treasurer, and the deputy treasurer, agreed to participate in the Citizens' Election Program ("CEP") and acknowledged their acceptance of the program rules when they signed and filed the SEEC Form CEP 10.² The committee applied for a grant from the Citizens' Election Fund and again the candidate, treasurer, and deputy treasurer agreed to additional restrictions on qualified committees.³

Allegations

3. Complainant made the following allegations against the candidate and the committee:
(1)The Respondent failed to limit the expenditures of her candidate committee to the maximum amount allowed under C.G.S. § 9-702(c)(C).

¹ See Registration by candidate—SEEC Form 1 Joann 2020 (April 4, 2020) (establishing candidate committee for Brianna Timbro for the 28th district state representative seat).

² See Affidavit of Intent to Abide by Expenditure Limits and Other Citizens' Election Program Requirements-SEEC Form CEP 10—Joann 2020 (April 21, 2020) (reflecting agreement of candidate, treasurer and deputy treasurer to statutory and regulatory rules governing the Citizens' Election Program).

³ See Citizens' Election Program Application for Public Grant Dollars—SEEC Form CEP 15—Joann 2020 (April 21, 2020) (showing acceptance by candidate, treasurer, and deputy treasurer of additional restrictions on candidate committee's use of funds provided through Citizens' Election Program).

(2) The Respondent failed to file a declaration of excess expenditures (as required by C.G.S. § 9-712 (a)(3)).

(3) The Respondent failed to file supplemental statements until the deficit was eliminated (required by C.G.S. § 9-608 (e)(4)).

(4) On or about June 30, 2021, the Respondent, though unelected, authorized the expenditure of surplus campaign funds for the personal benefit of her Deputy Treasurer (in violation of C.G.S. § 9-608 (e)(1)(D)).

(5) The Respondent violated the terms of her CEP 10 affidavit, by certifying under oath that she intended to abide by the expenditure limits of the Citizens' Election Program.

(6) The Respondent authorized the disbursement of CEP funds unethically, using said funds to publish confidential information that was untrue at the time of publication.

(7) The Respondent made an impermissible coordinated expenditure when she coordinated with the Berlin Democratic Town Committee to disseminate a district mailer on behalf of her candidate committee, approved its contents, consented to its distribution, and permitted the costs to be characterized as an independent expenditure. C.G.S. § 9-601e.

(8) The Respondent failed to provide signed written agreements for work/services performed for which payment in excess of \$100 was made, and/or, records/invoices setting forth the nature of such work/services. State Agency Reg. Sec. 9-607-1 (a) 1, 2.

Investigation and Analysis

4. **Allegation One:** Complainant alleged that candidate and committee exceeded allowable expenditure limits.

5. After investigation the Commission determined that the committee reported an expenditure in the amount of \$6,111.00 to Dibellas in error. Bank records indicate that this transaction was in the amount of \$68.16 and the original sum of \$6,110.00 was a transcription error. The investigation determined therefore an amount substantially less than originally reported for this original transaction based on record keeping errors that significantly impacted the actual aggregate expenditures by the committee.

6. After investigation, the Commission finds that the committee did not exceed expenditures based on corrections for record keeping errors. The amount of expenditures by the committee were therefore within permissible limits.
7. Allegation One is dismissed as it was not supported by the facts after investigation.
8. Allegation Two: Complainant alleged that the candidate and committee failed to file a declaration of excess expenditures.
9. After investigation, the Commission finds that the committee did not make excess expenditures. Therefore, a declaration of excess expenditures was not required of the committee,
10. Allegation Two is dismissed as it was not supported by the facts after investigation.
11. Allegation Three: Complainant alleged that the candidate and committee failed to file supplemental statements until the deficit was eliminated.
12. The Commission is in the course of performing an in-depth review of the expenditures of the candidate committee after the committee 's selection in the random audit lottery conducted following the 2020 election cycle.
13. The Commission declines to take further action regarding Allegation Three in light of its pending audit and review of the candidate committee .
14. Allegation Four: The candidate authorized expenditures of committee funds for the personal benefit of the deputy treasurer.
15. After investigation, the Commission finds that the committee disclosed an expenditure in the amount of June 30, 2021 in the amount of \$774.76.
16. Pursuant to General Statutes § 9-608 (e) (G) following an election can, exclusive to any payments that have been rendered pursuant to a written service agreement, can make a payment to a treasurer for services to the candidate committee, provided such payment does not exceed one thousand dollars.
17. The Commission determines that the June 30, 2021 in the amount of \$774.76 payment of surplus funds to the deputy treasurer was permissible pursuant to General Statutes § 9-608 (e) (G).
18. Allegation Four is dismissed as it was not supported by the facts or the law after investigation.

19. Allegation Five: The Complainant alleged that the candidate violated the terms of the CEP 10 affidavit by failing to abide by the expenditure limits of the Citizens' Election Program.
20. After investigation, the Commission finds that the committee, after adjusting for the record keeping errors detailed above, did not exceed expenditure limits for candidates for State Representative participating in the CEP.
21. Allegation Five is dismissed as it was not supported by the facts after investigation.
22. Allegation Six: Complainant alleged that the candidate authorized the disbursement of CEP funds "unethically" and included as evidence to campaign advertisements from the candidate committee that were according to Complainant "untrue at the time of publication."
23. After investigation, the Commission determines that the two advertisements were permissible expenditures in support of the candidate's campaign. *See* General Statutes § 9-607. The Commission further finds the advertisements each contained the necessary disclaimers as required by General Statutes § 9-621.
24. Because the advertisements that are subject to Allegation Six, satisfy the campaign finance requirements as to supporting the committee's candidate for election and containing the required disclaimer, the Commission dismisses this allegation as it fails as a matter of law.⁴
25. Allegation Seven: Complainant alleged that the candidate and committee made an impermissible expenditure with a party committee in violation of campaign finance laws.
26. Complainant provided a post card promoting the candidate pertaining to Allegation Seven that included the disclaimer: *Paid for by Berlin Democratic Town Committee Richard Price Treasurer. Approved by Joann Stetson.*
27. After investigation, the Commission finds that the Berlin Democratic Town Committee provided its attribution as well as approval by the candidate on the post card. A party committee can make an organization expenditure to benefit a candidate participating candidate.⁵
28. Allegation Eight: Complainant alleged that the candidate and committee did not provide signed written agreements for work or services performed for which payment in excess of \$100.00 was made setting out the actual work performed.

⁴ The Commission declines to make a judgment as to the truth or veracity of these campaign advertisements.

⁵ *See* General Statutes §§ 9-601a(b)(4) and (16), 9-702; Regs., Conn. State Agencies § 9-706-2(b)(8).

29. The Commission is in the course of performing an in-depth review of the expenditures of the candidate committee after the committee's selection in the random audit lottery conducted following the 2020 election cycle.


30. The Commission declines to take further action regarding Allegation Eight in light of its pending audit and review of the candidate committee .

ORDER

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

The Commission dismisses allegations One, Two, Four, Five, Six and Seven. The Commission takes no action regarding Allegations Three and Eight, pending the outcome of its audit and review of the committee.

Adopted this 15th day of February, 2023 at Hartford, Connecticut by vote of the Commission.



Stephen T. Murray
Commissioner
By Order of the Commission