
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 7246

AN ACT CONCERNING MODIFICATIONS TO CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS AND STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION AUTHORITY.

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BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

This bill makes various changes to the state's campaign finance laws as described in the section-by-section analysis below.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025, except the provisions on contribution and expenditure exemptions are effective upon passage (§§ 10 & 11).

§ 1 — CAMPAIGN FINANCE DEFINITIONS

Makes related changes to the state campaign finance law's definitions of the terms "organization expenditure" and "solicit" regarding the sharing of content created by a candidate committee or on behalf of a candidate

Organization Expenditure

By law, organization expenditures are made by legislative caucus, legislative leadership, or party committees to benefit candidates or their committees. Under existing law, organization expenditures may be made to prepare, display, or distribute a party candidate listing. The bill specifies that this includes: (1) electronically sharing, posting, or forwarding of content created by a candidate committee or another committee on behalf of a candidate; (2) using personal email lists or existing e-mail accounts used for these activities; and (3) other de minimus activities that may or may not be related to fundraising.

Under existing law, a "party candidate listing" is a communication that (1) lists the name or names of candidates for election; (2) is distributed through public advertising (e.g., cable television, newspapers, or similar media), direct mail, telephone, electronic mail, publicly accessible Internet sites, or personal delivery; and (3) is made to promote the success or defeat of a candidate or slate of candidates seeking nomination or election, or to aid or promote the success or defeat of a referendum question or a political party. The communication may not be a solicitation for or on behalf of a candidate committee.

Solicit

The state's campaign finance law generally regulates when and how committees may solicit contributions for public office, and requires

filing certain information relating to soliciting activities. Under existing law, to “solicit” is to (1) request contributions; (2) participate in fundraising activities for a committee; (3) serve as a committee’s chairperson, treasurer, or deputy treasurer; or (4) establish political committees for the sole purpose of obtaining contributions.

It generally does not include (1) making permitted contributions, (2) informing a person about a candidate’s or public official’s position, (3) providing notice about a candidate’s activities or contact information, (4) serving as a party committee member or officer as allowed by law, and (5) attending a fundraiser.

The bill additionally exempts electronically sharing a link to a fundraising website or an invitation to a fundraising event by a legislative caucus, legislative leadership, or a party committee.

§§ 2 & 3 — DISCLAIMER REQUIREMENTS

Modifies disclaimer requirements for certain political communications and advertisements by (1) modifying who must be listed in the disclaimer for certain committees, (2) generally applying them to text messages, and (3) removing certain requirements to include an audio disclaimer for video communications or advertisements

Disclaimer Requirements (§ 2)

Under state law, any written, typed, or printed communication (including online) from committees that promotes a candidate’s success or defeat, promotes or opposes a political party, or solicits funds for a political party or a committee generally must include certain information. The disclaimer must include the words (1) “paid for by” followed by a specified individual name or address depending on the approving entity and (2) “approved by” followed by the candidate’s name.

Current law specifies that all committees, other than party committees, must list the committee’s and the treasurer’s names after “paid for by.” The bill eliminates the requirement that the treasurer be listed. In doing so, it requires these committees to list only the committee’s name, as is the case for party committees under existing law.

Similarly, under current law, political committees formed solely to promote the success or defeat of a referendum question must disclose the name of its treasurer in any written, typed, or printed communication promoting the referendum's success or defeat. The bill removes the requirement to include the treasurer's name but maintains existing law's requirement to include the name of the committee making the expenditure.

Text Messages (§ 2)

The bill extends existing law's disclaimer requirements for written, typed, or printed communications to include text messages. It also specifies that for text messages, displaying the required disclaimer in the initial text message or including a link in the message to a website where the disclaimer appears satisfies the requirement.

Television and Internet Video (§§ 2 & 3)

Current law generally requires that television or internet video advertising by a candidate or exploratory committee that promotes the success or defeat of a candidate include a disclaimer at the end of the advertisement. The bill requires that this disclaimer occur during the advertisement instead of at the end.

It also eliminates the requirement that the advertisement include the candidate's voice and a simultaneous, personal audio message, in the following form: "I am (candidate's name) and I approved this message." Existing law, unchanged by the bill, requires the advertisement to include, for at least four seconds, a clearly (1) identifiable photo or similar image of the candidate making the expenditure and (2) readable printed statement identifying the candidate and indicating that he or she has approved the advertising. The advertisement must also include the candidate's name and image in the advertisement's narrative before its end.

Similarly, under current law, independent expenditures (see below) for video broadcasts by television, satellite, or internet must contain both an audio and a written message (1) stating that "This message was paid for by (person making the communication) and made independent

of any candidate or political party” and (2) in certain cases, listing the five largest donors to the person making the expenditure in the past 12 months. The bill eliminates the requirement for the broadcast to include an audio message but maintains the written statement requirement. (An “independent expenditure” is an expenditure made without the consent, coordination, or consultation of a (1) candidate or candidate’s agent, (2) candidate committee, (3) political committee, or (4) party committee (CGS § 9-601c).)

§ 4 — SEEC AUDITS

Reduces the maximum percentage of candidate committees SEEC may audit after an election or primary from 50% to 30%

State law authorizes the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) to audit candidate committees after elections and primaries for compliance with campaign finance laws. The bill reduces, from 50% to 30%, the maximum percentage of candidate committees that SEEC may audit as determined by a weighted lottery system.

§§ 5 & 6 — SEEC AUTHORITY

Subjects SEEC declaratory rulings, advisory opinions, and guidance documents to certain restrictions or oversight requirements

Existing law generally authorizes SEEC to oversee and advise on state campaign finance laws. The bill explicitly requires SEEC to issue declaratory rulings under the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act. It also restricts SEEC from issuing declaratory rulings or advisory opinions on the Citizen’s Election Program (CEP) within 180 days of a state election. Under the bill, this restriction must not be construed to limit SEEC’s ability to provide general guidance or clarification on the program.

The bill also subjects SEEC’s guidance documents on campaign finance and CEP laws to certain approval requirements. Starting July 1, 2025, any new or revised SEEC guidance must be submitted to the Government Administration and Elections Committee along with a summary of any changes in the law that the commission is seeking to clarify.

The committee must hold a public hearing within 30 days after the

guidance's submission and may reject any guidance by a majority vote. If the committee fails to approve or reject the guidance within those 30 days, it is deemed approved and SEEC may issue and publish it.

§§ 7 & 8 — CEP QUALIFYING CONTRIBUTIONS

Makes various changes regarding CEP grants, including procedures for returning and reviewing non-qualifying contributions and modifying grant application requirements

Return of Qualifying Contributions (§ 7)

By law and unchanged by the bill, a contribution is not a qualifying contribution (QC) if (1) it is from a principal of a state contractor or prospective state contractor, (2) it is less than five dollars, (3) the contributor does not provide his or her full name and address, (4) it is from an out-of-state resident to a candidate for statewide office and exceeds the applicable limit on out-of-state contributions, or (5) the contributor is under age 12.

If a candidate committee receives a contribution that does not meet the QC criteria, current law authorizes the committee's treasurer to either (1) return it to the contributor or (2) submit it to SEEC for deposit in the Citizens' Election Fund (CEF, which funds the CEP).

The bill instead generally requires treasurers to return contributions that do not qualify if they were (1) received from state contractor principals, out-of-state residents, or underage children or (2) for less than five dollars. If the contribution is for five dollars or more and from a contributor who did not provide his or her full name and address, the treasurer must return the contribution, if practicable, or transmit it to SEEC for deposit in the CEF.

Grant Applications (§ 8)

Under existing law, candidates seeking a CEP grant must file an application with SEEC and provide a written certification of certain information, including that the applicant has complied with the law's requirements for returning non-qualifying contributions. The committee must also submit a cumulative itemized accounting of all funds received, expenditures made, and expenses incurred but not yet paid, as of three days before the application's filing date.

The bill instead requires applicants to certify they have (1) whenever practicable, returned contributions of five dollars or more from a person who did not include their name and address; (2) taken reasonable efforts to return all other non-qualifying contributions; and (3) transmitted any excess contributions to the CEF.

SEEC Review of Grant Application (§ 8)

For QCs submitted to SEEC as part of a CEP grant application, the bill requires the commission to (1) notify the candidate committee about any contribution that does not meet the QC criteria and (2) return any non-qualifying contributions to the committee. Under the bill, SEEC must also cite the applicable statutory reason for its determination. The bill also establishes a presumption that all information on a contribution certification form is accurate, and the presumption may only be rebutted by proof based on the commission's prior investigative findings.

The bill prohibits the commission from disqualifying a contribution because the (1) residential and billing addresses associated with the contribution do not match or (2) contribution was made in response to an electronically shared link to a fundraising website or fundraising event invitation.

Under state law, when the commission approves a CEP grant application, it must notify the state comptroller and the qualifying candidate committee about the total grant amount to be received. Generally, committees who apply 71 days or more before an election receive a full grant, while those that apply later receive a percentage of the full grant based on when they apply.

The bill requires the commission, when it notifies the comptroller, to ensure and advise him that the qualified candidate committee is only entitled to the full grant if the committee has submitted (1) an affirmation, as part of its written certification, that the committee received the required QCs at least 71 days before the election and (2) a cumulative itemized accounting that demonstrates the committee reasonably believes the certification to be accurate (see above).

§ 9 — LIVESTREAM OF COMMISSION MEETINGS

Requires SEEC to livestream its meetings

The bill requires all SEEC meetings, noticed under the Freedom of Information Act, to be livestreamed on an internet website included in the meeting's notice. The website may not require any member of the public to (1) create an account to access the site or (2) take action to reconnect to the meeting if the commission goes into executive session. The bill specifies that this does not require broadcasting an executive session of the commission.

§ 9 — APPOINTMENT OF SEEC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Creates a legislative advice and consent process for the SEEC executive director position, including filling any vacancies

Under current law, SEEC may hire employees needed to administer the state's campaign finance laws, including its executive director. The bill establishes a legislative appointment process for the executive director position, including when it is vacant.

Under the bill, by April 1, 2027, and every four years after that, the commission must appoint a person to serve at their pleasure for up to a four-year term, unless reappointed for additional terms. The appointment must be approved by either the Senate or the House of Representatives.

SEEC must submit a nomination for the executive director position to either legislative chamber by February 1, 2027, and then every four years after that. The chamber must immediately refer the nomination to the Government Administration and Elections Committee, which must report, by resolution, on the nomination within 30 days after its referral to the committee.

The legislative chamber must either confirm or reject the nomination through a resolution. If approved, the nominee must take office on April 1 of the year his or her appointment was submitted. If the legislative chamber fails to act on the nomination by that date, the nominee is deemed confirmed and immediately takes office.

If the legislative chamber rejects the nominee before April 1, or if the

position becomes vacant during the regular legislative session, the commission must submit a nominee within 60 days after the rejection or vacancy occurring, as applicable. The legislative body receiving the referral must follow the regular appointment process for approving the nominee, except the committee resolution must be made within 30 legislative days instead of calendar days as under the initial process.

If the nominee is confirmed by a resolution within 60 calendar days after the submission, he or she serves at the commission's pleasure, but for no longer than the original appointment's remaining term of office. If the legislative body rejects the nomination within that period, SEEC must generally submit a new nomination within 30 days of the rejection. As is the case for the initial appointment, if the legislative chamber fails to act on the nomination by the deadline, the nominee is deemed confirmed.

If a nomination is submitted less than 60 days before the General Assembly's constitutionally required adjournment date and the legislative chamber does not act on the nomination, or if a vacancy occurs while the legislature is not in session, then the commission may fill the position until the sixth Wednesday of the next regular legislative session. At the beginning of that session, SEEC must submit a nominee, and the legislature must follow the process outlined above for when a vacancy has occurred during a regular session.

The bill prohibits someone who was nominated and rejected by the legislature from serving as executive director during the legislative term in which he or she was rejected.

§§ 10 & 11 — CONTRIBUTION AND EXPENDITURE EXEMPTIONS

Increases the amount an individual or group may spend on certain events for invitations, food, and beverages without being subject to certain campaign finance requirements

Generally, state law subjects "expenditures" and "contributions" by candidate, party, and political committees to campaign finance reporting requirements, with certain exemptions.

These exemptions include certain amounts spent by an individual on behalf of any candidate or committee for invitations, food, and

beverages served at the individual's residence or a community room in the facility in which they reside. The invitation, food, and beverage may be provided on behalf of a candidate committee, regardless of CEP participation, and party, political, or slate committees.

Under current law, the exempted amount for an individual may not exceed \$400 for a single event and \$800 for the calendar year or a single election. Current law also exempts up to \$800 for any event hosted by two or more individuals, subject to the cumulative total noted above if one of the individuals owns or resides at the residential premises.

The bill increases the maximum for a single event by \$100, to \$500. It also increases the cumulative maximum and the maximum for joint events by \$200, to \$1,000.

§ 12 — SPENDING OF RESTITUTION TO COMMITTEE

Limits the period of time over which a committee may spend payments it receives for court-ordered restitution of campaign funds to a period equal to the time it took the committee to raise those funds

The bill requires that if a person is ordered by a court to pay restitution for funds originally raised by a committee, any restitution paid may not be spent by the committee immediately and instead must be spent over a period of time equal to the time it took to raise those funds. (It is unclear how this would be implemented in practice.)

BACKGROUND

Related Bills

SB 515 (File 478), favorably reported by the Government Oversight Committee, makes changes to the inflationary adjustment procedures for QCs.

sSB 1405 (File 489), favorably reported by the Government Oversight Committee, makes very similar changes regarding campaign finance definitions and exemptions, political advertisements, SEEC audits and authority, and SEEC executive director appointments.

sSB 1407 (File 491), favorably reported by the Government Oversight Committee, makes changes to the procedures for auditing candidate

committees after an election or primary.

sHB 7089 (File 512), favorably reported by the Government Oversight Committee, makes changes to the inflationary adjustment procedures for QCs and amends the definitions of the terms “organization expenditure” and “solicit.”

sHB 7222, favorably reported by the Government Administration and Elections Committee, makes changes to the inflationary adjustment procedures for QCs, and amends the definitions of the terms “organization expenditure” and “solicit.”

COMMITTEE ACTION

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 13 Nay 6 (03/26/2025)