



STATE OF MAINE
COMMISSION ON GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS
AND ELECTION PRACTICES
135 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
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Approved 6/22/2022

Minutes of the June 9, 2022 Meeting of the
Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices
45 Memorial Circle, Augusta, Maine

Present: William J. Schneider, Esq., Chair

Participating via Zoom: David R. Hastings, Esq.; Sarah LeClaire, Esq.; Dennis R. Marble; and Jonathan R. Bolton, Assistant Attorney General

Staff: Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director

Mr. Schneider convened the meeting at 1:00 p.m. The meeting was livestreamed via YouTube. The Commission considered the following item:

1. Complaint by Charles Veeder against Candidate Michael Tipping

Mr. Wayne provided background information on the complaint filed by Charles Veeder against Michael Tipping, a Maine Clean Election Act (MCEA) candidate in an opposed Democratic primary election for Senate District 8. Mr. Tipping is employed by Maine Peoples Alliance (MPA) but is currently on sabbatical. MPA has a political action committee, MPA Campaign Vote! PAC (MPA PAC), which sometimes pays for communications endorsing candidates. On May 19, 2022, MPA PAC issued mailings to support two candidates in opposed races, of which Mr. Tipping was one. MPA PAC filed an independent expenditure report for those expenditures. Mr. Wayne said Mr. Veeder is alleging that Mr. Tipping, who is a Senior Strategist for MPA, had knowledge that MPA sent out these communications and donated staff time, making this an in-kind contribution to his campaign, which would be a violation of the MCEA.

Mr. Wayne said Mr. Tipping's response to the complaint indicated he was not involved in the mailing and was taking precautions to not be involved in any communications with his employer that could affect his election.

Mr. Veeder presented that he is a retired certified public accountant, and that when doing audits there are always questions one should ask. He said the mailing raised questions that Mr. Tipping may have had help from his fellow employees. Although he did not have any direct evidence of cooperation, he was asking the Commission to make an honest assessment of the situation.

During his testimony, Mr. Tipping stated he has no connection to independent expenditures made by MPA PAC, and that they had taken steps to make sure there is never any potential conflict. He noted he has been on a sabbatical from MPA since May 2, 2022.

Ms. Amy Halsted is a co-director of MPA, and stated MPA is very aware of the election laws, and there was absolutely no coordination with Mr. Tipping or anyone from his campaign on the mailing. When Mr. Tipping started to consider a run for office, they discussed how to be in compliance with the law, and last fall signed an agreement to address these issues. The issue was also reviewed with MPA and, in the spring, all staff signed an agreement to comply with the regulations. She said they have not been notified of any mistakes in filing reports or in communications.

Ms. Bridget Surber works at MPA and is the treasurer for the MPA PAC. She stated they take compliance laws very seriously, and explained they have an all-volunteer board that conducts interviews and surveys with candidates to determine who they will endorse. She had no reports of any mistakes made with accidental contact.

The Commissioners discussed the concerns brought forth by Mr. Veeder. No clear evidence had been presented suggesting coordination took place. The candidate and his employer took clear efforts to avoid inappropriate behavior by any party in this case. They agreed that MPA is a sophisticated organization and aware of the election laws regarding independent expenditures given their many years of experience.

Mr. Schneider moved to take no further action on this complaint due to insufficient evidence to justify an investigation. Mr. Marble seconded the motion. Motion passed 4-0.

Adjournment

Mr. Marble made a motion, seconded by Ms. LeClaire to adjourn. The motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 1:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/ Jonathan Wayne
Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director