STATE OF MAINE
COMMISSION ON GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS
AND ELECTION PRACTICES
135 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0135

DRAFT

Minutes of the June 9, 2026 Meeting of the
Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices
45 Memorial Circle, Augusta, Maine

Present: William Schneider, Esq., Chair; Brooke Bailey, Esq.; Colton Gross, Esq.; and Sarah LeClaire, Esq.

Staff: Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director; and Jonathan R. Bolton, Assistant Attorney General.

Commissioner Schneider convened the meeting at 11:06 a.m.

1. Request from Nirav Shah Campaign to Investigate Text Messages

Mr. Wayne said that the Ethics Commission had received a request for investigation from the Nirav Shah for Governor campaign regarding text messages sent on June 6, 2026 expressly advocating for Hannah Pingree, Troy Jackson, and Shenna Bellows in the Democratic primary election. The Shah campaign asserted that the text messages did not clearly and conspicuously state the name of the person who made or financed the expenditure for the texts. The campaign also questioned whether the people responsible for the texts should have registered and filed campaign finance reports as a PAC or filed independent expenditure reports with the Commission. The threshold for qualifying as a PAC is receiving contributions or making expenditures greater than $2,500 in a year to influence state candidate elections in Maine. The threshold for filing an independent expenditure report is spending more than $1,000 per candidate on a communication to voters advocating for or against candidates.

Prior to the meeting, Mr. Wayne connected with the treasurer for VoteRise, a PAC registered with the Federal Election Commission. The texts did not explicitly say they were paid for by VoteRise, but the texts included www.vote-rise.com in a URL within the text and concluded "– VR."

Mr. Schneider asked Mr. Bolton whether the text messages met the disclosure statement requirement. Mr. Bolton expressed concerns about having the organization's name embedded in a URL. He did not feel that made it sufficiently clear who the spender was.

Mr. Newell Augur, representing the Shah campaign, agreed the attribution was unclear. He said his estimate of the cost of the June 6 text messages puts VoteRise in the position of needing to register as a PAC and/or file an independent expenditure report with the Commission.

Mr. Dayne Lee, an attorney representing VoteRise, addressed the Commission. He explained VoteRise is a registered PAC with the Federal Election Commission (FEC). The PAC believed the references to the organization in the text were sufficient as a disclosure statement. He said VoteRise influences elections in different states. The disclosure would have been sufficient in other jurisdictions. After speaking with Mr. Wayne the previous day, the PAC will now include “Paid for by VoteRise” in future text messages in Maine. Mr. Lee said the PAC spent $702 on the first round of text messaging. It intends to send two more rounds of texts, which should cost approximately the same. He estimated that VoteRise would spend a total of roughly $2,000 on the three rounds of texts. He assured the Commission that all expenditures would be reported with the FEC and would not trigger a need to register as a PAC with the Commission.

Mr. Schneider moved to find the communications from VoteRise violated the attribution requirement and to access a $100 civil penalty. Ms. LeClaire seconded the motion.

After discussion, the Commissioners agreed to authorize an investigation to obtain expenditure documentation. Mr. Wayne said he would also like to ask VoteRise if its expenditures were made in cooperation or consultation with any of the three candidates who benefitted from the expenditure. Mr. Schneider withdrew his motion to find VoteRise in violation.

Mr. Schneider moved to authorize Commission staff to investigate the matter by requesting receipts or proof of expenditures and to investigate whether there was cooperation with the candidates. Ms. LeClaire seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-0.

Adjournment

Ms. Bailey made a motion to adjourn. Ms. LeClaire seconded. The motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 11:29 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director