



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

To: Commission
From: Jonathan Wayne
Date: May 21, 2026
Re: Complaint against Bobby Charles Campaign – midgeleyexposed.com

On May 18, 2026, the Ethics Commission received a complaint against Robert “Bobby” Charles, who is running for the Republican nomination for Governor. ETH 1-11. The complaint is from Lauren LePage, the campaign manager for Ben Midgley, who is also seeking the Republican nomination.

The complaint is about a website containing negative statements about Mr. Midgley, midgeleyexposed.com. The website does not state who paid for it. The Midgley campaign believes that the Bobby Charles campaign is responsible for the website through one of its consultants. According to the Midgley campaign, the website was accessible to the public April 30 – May 7, 2026 and also since May 17th. [Midgeleyexposed.com](http://midgeleyexposed.com) contains the following disclosure statement which the Midgley campaign believes is false: “Not Paid or Authorized by Any Candidate or Candidate’s Committee.”

For your information, the URL for the website misspells Mr. Midgley’s name by mistakenly adding an extra e in [midgeley](http://midgeley.com). The site does not open for me on every try, but I have had the most luck entering <https://midgeleyexposed.com> in web browsers.

Today, the Commission staff received notice that Mr. Charles has retained a lawyer to respond to the complaint. The Commission staff expects to receive a preliminary written response from counsel, but it has not been submitted at the time of this memo.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (ETH 24-33)

Disclosure statements required for “express advocacy” communications

A “public communication” that expressly advocates the election or defeat of a candidate must state

- 1) the name and address of the person who made or financed the expenditure for the communication, and
- 2) whether the communication was authorized by a candidate, a candidate’s authorized campaign committee, or their agents.

21-A M.R.S. § 1014(1)&(2). ETH-27. The term “public communication” is defined in statute, as discussed below.

Express advocacy is a phrase that is defined in the Commission’s rules. ETH-33. The rule contains a non-exhaustive list of phrases that urge a vote for or against a candidate, such as "Jones for House of Representatives" or "Jean Smith in 2002." In addition, express advocacy includes words or slogans which are “susceptible of no reasonable interpretation other than as an appeal to vote for or against a clearly identified candidate.” 94-270 ch. 1, 10(2)(B). ETH-33.

One note about the structure of § 1014:

- Subsection 1014(1) covers public communications that are authorized by a candidate, a candidate’s authorized political committee, or their agents. Most often, these are paid for with the candidate’s own campaign funds. ETH-27
- Subsection 1014(2) covers public communications that are not authorized by a candidate, a candidate’s authorized political committee, or their agents. Typically, this would be an independent expenditure communication. ETH-27.

Disclosure statements required for non-express advocacy communications

During the weeks leading up to an election, the same disclosure statements that are required for express advocacy communications are also required for a public communication that merely names a candidate. During the 28 days before a primary election, and between Labor Day and a general election, 21-A M.R.S. § 1014(2-A) requires similar disclosure statements if a public communication names or depicts a clearly identified candidate. ETH-27. As a hypothetical example, if a Maine Governor is running for a second term in a general election and

one week before the election, a TV ad runs thanking the Governor of Maine for all her accomplishments, the TV ad would need to contain the disclosure statements – even if the ad does not explicitly advocate a vote for the Governor.

Definition of public communication

In 2025, at the suggestion of the Commission, the Legislature defined a new term “public communication,” to promote uniformity among various disclosure requirements in campaign finance law:

"Public communication" means a communication to the public by means of broadcast, cable or satellite communication; newspapers, direct mail, handbills or other printed literature; campaign signs or other outdoor advertising facilities; and prerecorded automated telephone calls or other types of general public political advertising. For the purposes of this subsection, "general public political advertising" does not include communication over the Internet, except for communications placed or promoted for a fee on another person's website, digital device, application or advertising platform.

21-A M.R.S. § 1001(4) (underlining added for emphasis). ETH-24.

Disclosure statement required for a website of a candidate, PAC, or party committee

The same disclosure statements are required for a website established by a candidate, PAC, or party committee – regardless of whether the website is a public communication (*i.e.*, placed or promoted for a fee on another person's website, digital device, application or advertising platform). 21-A M.R.S. § 1014(5-B). ETH-30.

Standard for initiating an investigation

The Commission is required to review every request to investigate an alleged violation of campaign finance law and to conduct an “investigation if the reasons stated for the request show sufficient grounds for believing that a violation may have occurred.” 21-A M.R.S. § 1003(2). ETH-25.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Midgeleyexposed.com

According to the Midgley campaign, midgleyexposed.com operated for a week during April 30 – May 7, 2026 and then was reinstated on May 17, 2026. It is a simple, one-page website consisting of five vertical sections. Commission staff has attached a color document containing the entire site (one page for each section). ETH 12-16. Mr. Midgley is criticized for being a former registered Democrat who created a woke fitness company. The June 9th primary election and voting are mentioned several times (e.g., “Primary Day is June 9, 2026. Know before you vote.”)

The midgleyexposed.com website was covered in a May 16, 2026 article of the Bangor Daily News entitled “Maine Republicans Point Fingers Over Anonymous Website Attacks.” ETH 17-21. The website currently contains the following disclosure statement:

**INDEPENDENT POLITICAL COMMENTARY
NOT PAID OR AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE
NOT ASSOCIATED WITH ENTITIES MENTIONED IN BDN.**

Complaint

The Midgley campaign states that midgley.com contains many errors and misrepresentations, such as attributing to Mr. Midgley actions taken by gym franchisees. The Midgley campaign believes that the Bobby Charles campaign is responsible for midgleyexposed.com and put a false disclosure statement on the website “Not paid for or authorized by any candidate.” Even if Mr. Charles is not responsible for the website, the Midgley campaign argues, the website is in violation because it does not state who paid for it. The Midgley campaign attributes the website to Bobby Charles for at least three reasons:

1) *Themes*. Ms. LePage says that the content of midgleyexposed.com contains a false narrative that was used directly by Mr. Charles in one of his long tirades on Facebook.

2) *Non-denial by campaign consultant*. Bobby Charles receives services from the political consulting firm of Harris Media, LLC. The firm’s website, harrismediallc.com, includes promotional statements about its proprietor, Vincent Harris, as “the man who invented the republican internet” and “a savvy digital whiz.”

For the May 16, 2026 article, the Bangor Daily News asked Mr. Harris about midgeleyexposed.com. Mr. Harris is attributed with saying he could not recall the site and is quoted as saying “It looks like it contains very important information conservatives need to know before they vote!” ETH 20. The Midgeley campaign asks the Commission to treat Mr. Harris’ comments as a failure to deny responsibility for the website.

Domain registration date and payee in common with reported Charles expenditure. In campaign finance reports submitted to the Commission, the Charles campaign has reported reimbursing Harris Media, LLC for a number of payments made by the consulting firm. In particular, the Charles campaign reported a March 26, 2026 expenditure of \$50 to Harris Media, described as “Reimburse Harris Media for GoDaddy.” ETH-5.

GoDaddy is a web services firm that people can use to register (*i.e.*, rent) a domain name (URL) and pay for a website to be hosted on a server. In the parlance of web services, GoDaddy acts as the “registrar” and the person who wants to create the website is the “registrant.” Often, the identity of the registrant is kept private by the registrar, as is the case with midgeleyexposed.com.

The Midgeley campaign conducted a search for the domain name midgeleyexposed.com. The search results (appendix A to the complaint, at ETH-4) seem to show that the domain midgeleyexposed.com was registered through GoDaddy on March 26, 2026.

The presence of a payment to GoDaddy dated March 26, 2026 in a Bobby Charles campaign finance report (the same date as the apparent domain registration of midgeleyexposed.com through GoDaddy) suggests to the Midgeley campaign that the Charles campaign paid for midgeleyexposed.com through its consultant Harris Media, LLC.

Ms. LePage states that “paid for by” disclosure statements in political advertising educate voters about who is influencing their votes and whether messages are approved by or independent of candidates. She argues that misleading voters about the source of a communication can materially affect how voters will assess credibility, bias, and motive.

STAFF ANALYSIS

In the opinion of the Commission staff, the reasons in Ms. LePage’s complaint show sufficient grounds for believing that a violation “may have occurred.” 21-A M.R.S. § 1003(2).

Setting aside the question of whether midgeleyexposed.com expressly advocates for Mr. Midgley's defeat, the website names a clearly identified candidate and is currently accessible to the public during the 28 days before the June 9, 2026 primary election.

The Republican primary election for Governor has seven candidates. PACs have sprung up supporting a majority of these. It is quite possible that midgeleyexposed.com was established by a candidate or a PAC, in which case it was required to include the name and address of the person who made or financed the expenditures for the website. 21-A M.R.S. § 1014(5-B).

It is also possible that midgeleyexposed.com was promoted for a fee through search engines, social media, or other platforms, in which case it qualifies as a public communication and should have included the name and address of the person who made or financed the expenditure for the communication. 21-A M.R.S. § 1014(2-A).

At the present time, the Commission has not received any response from the Charles campaign. It is premature for the staff to offer any recommendation as to whether an investigation should be focused only on the Charles campaign or more widely. At first glance, the information provided by the Midgley campaign does appear to be relevant. An investigation could turn to various sources of information:

- billing and domain registration information from GoDaddy that could be in the possession of various parties, such as GoDaddy (potentially obtainable through a subpoena), Harris Media, LLC, or the Charles campaign,
- other documents concerning websites in the possession of the Charles campaign, potentially the campaigns of other gubernatorial candidates, or Harris Media, LLC, and
- interviews of witnesses, such as Mr. Harris.

If the Commission authorizes an investigation, Commission staff would ask for discretion to use our best judgment as to the best avenues to pursue, in consultation with Commission counsel.

May 18, 2026

Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director
Maine Ethics Commission
135 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Mr. Wayne,

I am writing to request that the Maine Ethics Commission review and investigate the activities of gubernatorial candidate Robert B. Charles for potential violations of Maine campaign finance law, specifically 21-A M.R.S. §1014.

Based on publicly available information, the campaign of Robert B. Charles appears to have skirted campaign finance disclosure law, and worse purposely lied, by creating a communication that attacked one of their opponents (Benjamin Midgley) and included an incorrect financial disclosure on this negative communication. When the Charles campaign thought they had been caught they then attempted to cover-up their involvement by removing the website.

At the very least, this website is clearly intended to impact the outcome of the primary election being held on June 9, 2026 and does not identify who is responsible for the communication. Whether it came from the Campaign of Robert B. Charles, or an outside group, there is a responsibility to include a disclaimer, otherwise this is a clear attempt to influence voters without proper disclosure.

Factual Background

Robert B Charles registered as a candidate for governor on April 16, 2025, Benjamin Midgley registered on August 4, 2025.

On or before April 30, 2026 the website midgleyexposed.com was launched. The website contains lies and negative talking points aimed at candidate Ben Midgley. The disclaimer at the bottom of the website clearly says, "Independent Political Commentary, Not Paid or Authorized by Any Candidate or Candidate's Committee."

Research of the domain shows that the website was purchased from GoDaddy.com on March 26, 2026.

The 42 Day Pre-Primary Report shows an expenditure to Harris Media Group on March 26, 2026 in the amount of \$50.00. The purpose of this expense is listed as WEB – Website costs, the Explanation of Purpose states, "Reimburse Harris Media for GoDaddy."

On the morning of May 7, 2026 midgleyexposed.com was taken down, and to date has not been restored. This action was taken after social media posts about the website, and its contents were tied to the Robert B. Charles campaign.

The false narrative that is written on midgleyexposed.com has been used by directly Robert B. Charles in one of his long tirades on the social media platform Facebook.

On May 16, 2016, the Bangor Daily News published an article about this website which can be found by [clicking here](#). From the article, when the Charles campaign was asked about the website the response was “Harris said he could not recall the site, though he added, ‘It looks like it contains very important information conservatives of Maine need to know before they vote!’” One would think that if you had no responsibility for the site, it would be easy to deny the creation of it.

The material contained on this website has many factual errors and purposeful false representations including the fact that Mr. Midgley was not in charge of each franchise, he ran the parent company. Individual locations which displayed signage or promoted anything noted by this false website did so on their own without the approval or even notification of Mr. Midgley. We believe the Charles campaign is fully aware of this and put out this false material anyway to damage Mr. Midgley.

Lastly, after the Bangor Daily News article, the disclosure on the website was updated to now read: “” Independent Political Commentary. Not paid or authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee. Not associated with entities mentioned in the BDN.” A screenshot is available in the appendix.

Disclosure

Title 21-A M.R.S. §1014 expressly requires that whenever campaign finances a public communication, the communication “must clearly and conspicuously state” whether it was authorized by the candidate and identify the person or entity that financed it. The statute applies broadly to campaign advertisements, mailers, online advertisements, signs, broadcast communications, text campaigns, and similar public political messaging. For communications not authorized by a candidate, the law goes even further, requiring an affirmative disclaimer stating: “NOT PAID FOR OR AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE.”

In this case we believe the Charles campaign aimed to deceive Maine voters and lied by using the “Independent Political Commentary, Not Paid or Authorized by Any Candidate or Candidate’s Committee” disclosure, rather than the truthful “Paid for and Authorized by Robert B. Charles Campaign.”

Statutory language is mandatory, not discretionary. The repeated use of the word “must” demonstrates legislative intent that disclosure is a legal prerequisite to lawful campaign communications. A campaign therefore cannot evade disclosure requirements by omission, concealment, or misleading attribution. If campaign funds are used, disclosure is required.

The purpose of the law is rooted in electoral transparency. Disclosure laws allow voters to know:

- who is attempting to influence their vote;
- whether a communication is coordinated with a campaign;
- whether outside entities are funding political messaging; and
- whether purportedly “independent” communications are actually campaign-controlled.

Lying about disclosure — or falsely representing who authorized or paid for a communication — undermines the entire purpose of the statute. A false disclaimer can mislead voters into believing a message came from an independent source when it was coordinated with a campaign, or vice versa. That deception can materially affect how voters assess credibility, bias, and motive.

The statute specifically recognizes concealment and misrepresentation as aggravating factors for enforcement. Under §1014(4), the Maine Ethics Commission may impose civil penalties up to 100% of the unlawful expenditure, and in determining penalties the Commission may consider “whether the public communication conceals or misrepresents the identity of the person who financed it.” Thus, intentional false disclosure is treated more seriously than a mere technical omission.

In short, Maine law requires political transparency as a condition of lawful campaign advocacy. A candidate campaign cannot legally finance political communications while concealing, omitting, or falsifying disclosure information because doing so deprives voters of material information about the source and authorization of election-related messaging and directly violates 21-A M.R.S. §1014.

I respectfully request that the Commission review these facts, launch an investigation into the March 26, 2026 expenditure paid to Harris Media for a GoDaddy, and determine whether that purchase was for the website domain midgleyexposed.com. Given the timeliness of this matter, we request that it be added to the next available agenda for the Commission.

Should the Commission choose to investigate, we strongly believe it will be determined that the campaign of Robert B. Charles purchased the domain in question and attempted to launch a negative attack against candidate Ben Midgley. Their desire to prevent a surging candidate from advancing to the Republican nomination clearly clouded their judgment. Maine’s campaign laws are in place for a reason, and should it be proven that the Charles campaign, knowingly skirted the law and lied on the website disclosure, then the Commission should take swift strong action to deter future fraudulent and deceitful activities.

Thank you for your time and for your continued work ensuring transparency and compliance in Maine elections.

Sincerely,



Lauren LePage, Campaign Manager

Midgley for Governor

Appendix A

Evidence showing purchase of midgleyexposed.com domain from GoDaddy on March 26, 2026.

WHOIS search results

Domain Information

Name	MIDGLEYEXPOSED.COM
Registry Domain ID	3080823773_DOMAIN_COM-VRSN
Registered On	2026-03-26T04:21:14Z
Expires On	2027-03-26T04:21:14Z
Updated On	2026-03-26T04:21:14Z
Domain Status	client delete prohibited client renew prohibited client transfer prohibited client update prohibited
Name Servers	NS09.DOMAINCONTROL.COM NS10.DOMAINCONTROL.COM

Registrant Contact

Name	Registration Private
Organization	Domains By Proxy, LLC
Phone	tel:+1.480.624.2599
Fax	
Email	https://www.godaddy.com/whois/results.aspx?domain=midgleyexposed.com&action=contactDomainOwner
Mailing Address	DomainsByProxy.com 100 S. Mill Ave, Suite 1600, Tempe, Arizona, 85281

Registrar Information

Name	GoDaddy.com, LLC
IANA ID	146
Abuse Contact Email	abuse@godaddy.com
Abuse Contact Phone	tel:+1.480-624-2505

DNSSEC Information

Delegation Signed	Unsigned
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Appendix B

Transaction recorded on the Bobby Charles for Maine Governor Campaign Committee 42-Day Pre-Primary Report.

Transaction Information

Transaction ID	a_01kpm4150ceprvaayp753vtp0c
Type	Expenditure
Status	Filed
Version	0
Date	March 26, 2026
Amount	\$50.00
Purpose	WEB - Website costs
Explanation of Purpose	Reimburse Harris Media for GoDaddy
Itemized	Yes
Created At	April 19, 2026 20:18

Contact Information

Verified Contact

Appendix C

Screenshot of the disclosure at the bottom of the midgleyexposed.com website.

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL COMMENTARY
NOT PAID OR AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE

Appendix D

Complete screen capture of the homepage website as saved on the internet archive "Wayback Machine" from April 30, 2026. <https://web.archive.org/web/20260430201103/https://midgleyexposed.com/>

27 YEARS A DEMOCRAT. NOW WANTS YOUR VOTE.

BEN MIDGLEY ON FULL DISPLAY.

Ben Midgley was a registered Democrat for 27 years. He registered at 18 as a Democrat, and stayed a Democrat until 2016. As CEO of Crunch Fitness Franchises, he built a "DEI-focused" gym empire that promoted pole-dancing classes and radical woke policies. Now he wants to lead Maine. Do you trust him with our schools? With our values?



WOKE GYM CEO WANTS TO RUN MAINE

OPPORTUNIST. NOT CONSERVATIVE.
27 YEARS DEMOCRAT. SWITCHED IN 2016 WHEN IT WAS CONVENIENT.

SEE THE RECORD

CONTACT

THE RECORD

THE REAL BEN MIDGLEY.

Republican primary voters deserve the truth. Ben Midgley wants conservative votes, but his record reads like a progressive playbook. 27 years as a Democrat. Built a "woke" corporate empire. Now he's rebranding himself for June 2026.

27 YEARS REGISTERED DEMOCRAT
Not a youthful mistake. Not a brief phase. 27 years of Democrat registration. Ben only switched to Republican in 2016 because he saw a power grab. Convenient timing?

CEO OF "DEI-FOCUSED" CRUNCH FITNESS FRANCHISES
Under Midgley's direction, Crunch Fitness Franchises marketed itself as a "DEI-focused" and offered pole-dancing classes. This is the corporate culture he built and celebrated.

WHAT ABOUT OUR SCHOOLS?
If Midgley promoted radical woke leftist policies in his gyms, what will he allow in Maine schools? Conservative parents deserve answers before June 9th.

"27 YEARS A DEMOCRAT. WOKE GYM CEO. NOW WANTS CONSERVATIVE VOTES."

WOKE INC. AT THE CORE

CORPORATE WOKEISM.

Midgley's gym chain, Crunch Fitness Franchises is built around "DEI-focused" corporate America. Now he wants to bring that same progressive corporate mindset to Augusta. Maybe Maine needs a CEO, but do Mainers really need a woke CEO? Maine conservatives need to know what they're actually voting for.

POLE-DANCING CLASSES

Under Midgley's leadership, Crunch Fitness Franchises offered pole-dancing fitness classes. This is the "fitness culture" he promoted while CEO.

"DEI-FOCUSED"

Crunch's entire brand is built on progressive messaging. This is the same woke corporate language that has been leaching into the schools for years.

"NOT LOOKING FOR A JOB"

Midgley talks about how he is not looking for a job. Perhaps power and scaled influence in the Governor's office is more his route. Is this the leadership Maine Republicans want?

SCORE

SEE HIM IN HIS OWN WORDS.

Judge for yourself. Does Midgley sound like a conservative leader, or a progressive CEO looking for his next opportunity?



THE EVIDENCE

Midgley talks about building Crunch Fitness into a billion-dollar empire based on a "DEI-focused" work environment.

Maine Republicans: Is this the voice you want representing conservative values in Augusta?

Primary Day is June 9, 2026. Know before you vote.

THE MIDGLEY SCORECARD



MAINE GOVERNOR 2026

27 YEARS A DEMOCRAT. NOW RUNNING AS A REPUBLICAN.

CATEGORY	THE RECORD	SCORE
POLITICAL HISTORY	27 YEARS AS A DEMOCRAT Registered Democrat from 1988 to 2015	F
CORPORATE RECORD	BUILT A WOKE CORPORATE EMPIRE Promoted DEI, ESG, and radical leftist policies	F
POLITICAL CONVENIENCE	SWITCHED PARTIES WHEN IT GOT CONVENIENT Became a Republican after building his liberal brand	F
WOKE AGENDA	SUPPORTS RADICAL LEFTIST POLICIES From open borders to gender ideology	F
MAINE FIRST?	MAINE COMES LAST More focused on his brand than the people of Maine	F

DON'T BE FOOLED. CHECK THE RECORD. **DECIDE FOR YOURSELF.**

SPEAK UP

MAINE REPUBLICANS DESERVE THE TRUTH.

Share this information with fellow Republican voters. The June 9, 2026 primary will decide who represents conservative values in Maine. Make sure you know who Ben Midgley really is before you vote.

CHECK BEN OUT

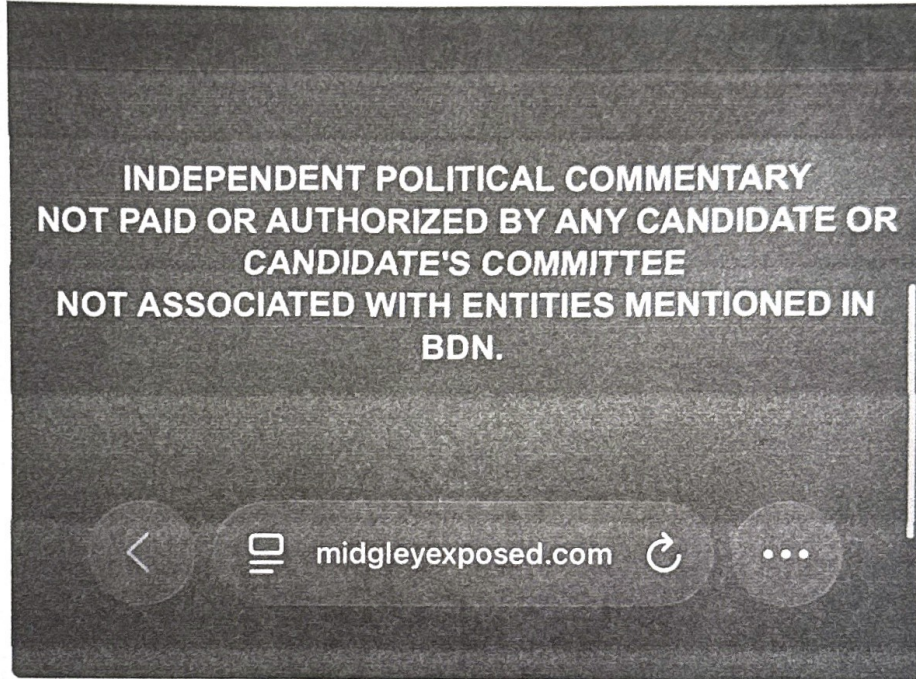
SHARE ON FACEBOOK

SHARE ON X

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL COMMENTARY
NOT PAID OR AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE

Appendix D

Screenshot of the updated disclosure at the bottom of the midgleyexposed.com website.




BEN MIDGLEY THE RECORD WOKE CEO SCORECARD SPEAK UP

27 YEARS A DEMOCRAT. NOW WANTS YOUR VOTE.

BEN MIDGLEY ON FULL DISPLAY.

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SEE THE RECORD **CONTACT**



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OPPORTUNIST. NOT CONSERVATIVE.
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If Midgley promoted radical woke leftist policies in his gyms, what will he allow in Maine schools? Conservative parents deserve answers before June 9th.

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WOKE CEO

SCORECARD

SPEAK UP

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BEN MIDGLEY

SPEAK UP

SCORECARD

WOKE CEO

THE RECORD

SCORE

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Maine Republicans: Is this the voice you want representing conservative values in August?

Primary Day is June 9, 2026. Know before you vote.



THE MIDGLEY SCORECARD
27 YEARS A DEMOCRAT, NOW RUNNING AS A REPUBLICAN

MAINE CONVICTION 2026

CATEGORY	THE RECORD	SCORE
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 MAINE FIRST?	MAINE COMES LAST More focused on his brand than the people of Maine	F

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BEN MIDGLEY

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SPEAK UP

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CHECK BEN OUT

SHARE ON FACEBOOK

SHARE ON X

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NOT PAID OR AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE
NOT ASSOCIATED WITH ENTITIES MENTIONED IN BDN.**



Maine Republicans point fingers over anonymous website attacks

by **Benjamin Kail**
May 16, 2026

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Republican gubernatorial candidate Ben Midgley shakes hands with a supporter at an event featuring Vice President JD Vance at the Bangor International Airport on Thursday. Credit: Linda Coan O’Kresik / BDN

Politics

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Listen now:
Maine Republicans point fingers over anonymous website attacks
 About 4 Minutes

1x

Everlit

A website that targeted former fitness executive Ben Midgley has raised questions and sparked talk of potential ethics complaints as Republicans jockey for an edge in their fight to replace outgoing Gov. Janet Mills.

Midgley's team believes midgleyexposed.com has Bobby Charles' fingerprints on it, likening it to a site that attacked former Maine Senate Majority Leader Garrett Mason using false information before the Charles campaign **took it down in March**. But Charles' camp denies that, emphasizing that the former federal official hasn't been shy about bashing rivals publicly.

The dustup marks the latest round of **bitter infighting** among Republicans seeking the Blaine House. Charles has **aggressively gone after rivals** who have more money and ads on the air in recent weeks following **increased criticism** from several opponents, both online and in TV debates he skipped.

Under state law, campaigns "must clearly and conspicuously" disclose when they authorize any communication that advocates for or against a specific candidate. Websites tied to campaigns or political action committees must make clear who financed them, as Charles' campaign did with the anti-Mason site. The Midgley campaign teased a possible ethics complaint.

"It's difficult to be the chief executive and law enforcer if you're a law breaker on ethics rules," Brent Littlefield, a Republican strategist on Midgley's team, said in a Friday comment pointed at Charles.

But Charles' campaign gestures to a site **registered last August** featuring a similar name, bobbycharlesexposed.com and disclaimer identical to one on the site going after Midgley: "Independent political commentary not paid for or authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee."

Registered through GoDaddy, midgleyexposed.com was up from late March until at least April 30. On the same day it was registered — March 26 — the Charles campaign paid strategist Vincent Harris \$50, financial reports show. That's the same amount the campaign has previously paid GoDaddy, where the site attacking Mason was also registered.

Harris said he could not recall the site, though he added, “It looks like it contains very important information conservatives of Maine need to know before they vote!”

Charles has often used social media and **artificial intelligence-generated content** to mock Midgley, Mason and entrepreneur Jonathan Bush as the “Three Amigos” and “never-Trumpers” seeking to upend his grassroots-driven bid that’s led early primary polls.

Echoing several of Charles’ public critiques, the site highlights Midgley’s 25-plus years as a Democrat and accuses him of trying to rebrand from a “woke” CEO to a Republican. It claims that Crunch Fitness locations “under Midgley’s leadership” offered pole dancing classes and says he only became a Republican for a “power grab.”

Midgley this week **posted a video** shrugging off the attacks as unserious. He has acknowledged **being a former Democrat** and said a party leader should strive for a big tent, noting that former Gov. Paul LePage and presidents Donald Trump and Ronald Reagan had history as Democrats.

“There is not a woke bone in this body,” Midgley said. “They are confusing the company I ran as CEO with the actions of another company.”

Real estate executive David Jones, a frequent Charles critic, shared bobbycharlesexposed.com on Facebook in March while noting it wasn’t tied to his campaign. Jones and Midgley **recently formed a ranked-choice alliance**, encouraging voters to pick each other second in the June 9 primary.

Jones’ campaign said Friday it hasn’t created “any website against any other candidates.” A Democratic source said Friday that the party wasn’t behind any of the sites targeting Republicans. A **site** that went live in April spotlighting the Republican background of independent state **Sen. Rick Bennett** made clear it was paid for by the state party.

And a spokesman for Maine Dream Inc., a political group supporting Bush, said the group had “nothing to do with these sites or their creation.”

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

May 18, 2026

By Email and Regular Mail

Robert B. Charles
PO Box 130
Bangor, ME 04402

Re: Complaint by Ben Midgeley Campaign

Dear Mr. Charles,

This letter is to notify you that the Maine Ethics Commission received a complaint that your campaign for Governor paid for a website attacking a primary election opponent that contains false disclosure statements concerning who paid for and authorized the website. This letter requests that a representative from your campaign respond to the complaint by participating in a Commission meeting on May 27, 2026 in person or by Zoom and by submitting a preliminary written response before the meeting.

Complaint. The complaint was filed today by Lauren LePage, manager of Ben Midgeley's campaign. Mr. Midgeley is your opponent for the Republican nomination for Governor in the June 9, 2026 primary election. Ms. LePage states your campaign paid for the creation of a website (midgeleyexposed.com) attacking Mr. Midgeley that falsely states "Not Paid or Authorized by Any Candidate or Candidate's Committee." She says the website was accessible to the public April 30 - May 7, 2026, and has been operational since yesterday.

Required disclosure statements. A public communication that expressly advocates the election or defeat of a candidate must state the name and address of the person who made or financed the expenditure for the communication. The communication must also state whether it was authorized by a candidate, a candidate's authorized campaign committee, or their agents. 21-A M.R.S. § 1014(1)&(2). During the last 28 days before a primary election, the same disclosure statements are required if the communication names or depicts a clearly identified candidate. 21-A M.R.S. § 1014(2-A) & (5-B).

Your opportunity to respond. The Commission is required to give expedited consideration to the complaint. 21-A M.R.S. § 1002(1). The Commission will consider the complaint at its meeting on May 27, 2026. The meeting will be held in the Commission's office at 45 Memorial Circle in Augusta, Maine. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. *The Commission staff requests that a representative from your campaign participate in the May 27th meeting in person or by zoom.*

OFFICE LOCATED AT: 45 MEMORIAL CIRCLE, AUGUSTA, MAINE
WEBSITE: WWW.MAINE.GOV/ETHICS

PHONE: (207) 287-4179

FAX: (207) 287-**ETH-22**

Robert B. Charles

Page 2

May 18, 2026

The Commission staff also requests the Charles campaign respond in writing to the complaint prior to the May 27, 2026 meeting with some preliminary information. Along with anything else the Charles campaign would like the Commission to know, please address:

- (1) did the Charles campaign pay for any costs connected to midgeleyexposed.com, and
- (2) if not, please identify the specific web domain registration the Charles campaign paid for with \$50 on March 26, 2026.

Remedying any errors. Because midgeleyexposed.com is operating within the 28 days before the primary election and clearly identifies Mr. Midgeley, it appears the website is legally required to state who paid for it and whether a candidate, their authorized political committee, or their agents authorized the website. 21-A M.R.S. § 1014(2-A). If the Charles campaign paid for domain name, hosting, or design costs for midgeleyexposed.com, Commission staff suggests fixing the inaccurate disclosure statements immediately to reduce any enforcement outcome that could result from the complaint.

If you have any questions, please contact me at Jonathan.Wayne@maine.gov or (207) 287-4179.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Wayne
Executive Director

By email

cc: Joel Stetkis, Chair of Bobby for Maine

Lauren LePage, Campaign Manager for Ben Midgeley

21-A M.R.S. § 1001. Definitions

As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

1. Commission. “Commission” means the Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices established under Title 1, section 1002.

1-A. Caucus political action committee. “Caucus political action committee” means a political action committee designated under section 1053-C to promote the election of nominees of a political party to the Senate or the House of Representatives.

2. Election. “Election” means any primary, general or special election for state or county office or municipal office in a municipality subject to Title 30-A, section 2502, subsection 1 and any referendum, including a municipal referendum in a municipality subject to Title 30-A, section 2502, subsection 2.

3. Person. “Person” means an individual, committee, firm, partnership, corporation, association or organization.

4. Public communication. “Public communication” means a communication to the public by means of broadcast, cable or satellite communication; newspapers, direct mail, handbills or other printed literature; campaign signs or other outdoor advertising facilities; and prerecorded automated telephone calls or other types of general public political advertising. For the purposes of this subsection, “general public political advertising” does not include communication over the Internet, except for communications placed or promoted for a fee on another person’s website, digital device, application or advertising platform.

21-A M.R.S. § 1003. Investigations by commission

1. Investigations. The commission may undertake audits and investigations to determine whether a person has violated this chapter, chapter 14 or the rules of the commission. For this purpose, the commission may subpoena witnesses and records whether located within or without the State and take evidence under oath. A person or entity that fails to obey the lawful subpoena of the commission or to testify before it under oath must be punished by the Superior Court for contempt upon application by the Attorney General on behalf of the commission. The Attorney General may apply on behalf of the commission to the Superior Court or to a court of another state to enforce compliance with a subpoena issued to a nonresident person. Service of any subpoena issued by the commission may be accomplished by:

- A.** Delivering a duly executed copy of the notice to the person to be served or to a partner or to any officer or agent authorized by appointment or by law to receive service of process on behalf of that person;
- B.** Delivering a duly executed copy of the notice to the principal place of business in this State of the person to be served; or
- C.** Mailing by registered or certified mail a duly executed copy of the notice, addressed to the person to be served, to the person's principal place of business.

2. Investigations requested. A person may apply in writing to the commission requesting an investigation as described in subsection 1. The commission shall review the application and shall make the investigation if the reasons stated for the request show sufficient grounds for believing that a violation may have occurred.

2-A. Confidentiality. [PL 2001, c. 535, §1 (RP).]

3. State Auditor. The State Auditor shall assist the commission in making investigations and in other phases of the commission's duties under this chapter, as requested by the commission, and has all necessary powers to carry out these responsibilities.

3-A. Confidential records. Investigative working papers of the commission are confidential, except that the commission may disclose them to the subject of the audit or investigation, other entities as necessary for the conduct of an audit or investigation and law enforcement and other agencies for purposes of reporting, investigating or prosecuting a criminal or civil violation. For purposes of this subsection, "investigative working papers" means documents, records and other printed or electronic information in the following limited categories that are acquired, prepared or maintained by the commission during the conduct of an audit, investigation or other enforcement matter:

- A.** Financial information not normally available to the public;
- B.** Information that, if disclosed, would reveal sensitive political or campaign information belonging to a party committee, political action committee, ballot question committee, candidate or candidate's political committee, or other person who is the

subject of an audit, investigation or other enforcement matter, even if the information is in the possession of a vendor or 3rd party;

C. Information or records subject to a privilege against discovery or use as evidence; and

D. Intra-agency or interagency communications related to an audit or investigation, including any record of an interview, meeting or examination.

The commission may disclose investigative working papers or discuss them at a public meeting, except for the information or records subject to a privilege against discovery or use as evidence, if the information or record is relevant to a memorandum or interim or final report by the commission staff or a decision by the commission concerning an audit, investigation or other enforcement matter. A memorandum or report on the audit or investigation prepared by staff for the commission may be disclosed at the time it is submitted to the commission, as long as the subject of the audit or investigation has an opportunity to review it first to identify material that the subject of the audit or investigation considers privileged or confidential under some other provision of law.

4. Attorney General. Upon the request of the commission, the Attorney General shall aid in any investigation, provide advice, examine any witnesses before the commission or otherwise assist the commission in the performance of its duties. The commission shall refer any apparent violations of this chapter to the Attorney General for prosecution.

21-A M.R.S. § § 1014. Publication or distribution of political public communications

1. Authorized by candidate. Whenever a person makes an expenditure to finance a public communication expressly advocating the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate, the public communication, if authorized by a candidate, a candidate's authorized political committee or a candidate's or a candidate's authorized political committee's agents, must clearly and conspicuously state that the public communication has been so authorized and must clearly state the name and address of the person who made or financed the expenditure for the public communication. A public communication financed by a candidate or the candidate's committee is not required to state the address of the candidate or committee that financed the public communication. If a public communication that is financed by someone other than the candidate or the candidate's authorized committee is broadcast by radio, only the city and state of the address of the person who financed the public communication must be stated.

2. Not authorized by candidate. If a public communication described in subsection 1 is not authorized by a candidate, a candidate's authorized political committee or a candidate's or a candidate's authorized political committee's agents, the public communication must clearly and conspicuously state that the public communication is not authorized by any candidate and state the name and address of the person who made or financed the expenditure for the public communication, except that a public communication broadcast by radio is only required to state the city and state of the address of the person that financed the public communication. If the public communication is in written form, the public communication must contain at the bottom of the public communication in print that is no smaller in size than 12-point bold print, Times New Roman font, the words "NOT PAID FOR OR AUTHORIZED BY ANY CANDIDATE."

2-A. Other public communications. Whenever a person makes an expenditure to finance a public communication that names or depicts a clearly identified candidate and that is disseminated during the 28 days, including election day, before a primary election, during the 35 days, including election day, before a special election or during the period of time from Labor Day to the election day for a general election, the public communication must state the name and address of the person who made or financed the public communication and a statement that the public communication was or was not authorized by the candidate, except that a public communication broadcast by radio is only required to state the city and state of the address of the person that financed the public communication. The disclosure is not required if the public communication was not made for the purpose of influencing the candidate's nomination for election or election.

2-B. Top 3 funders; independent expenditures. A public communication that is funded by an entity making an independent expenditure as defined in section 1019-B, subsection 1 must conspicuously include the following statement:

“The top 3 funders of (name of entity that made the independent expenditure) are (names of top 3 funders).”

The information required by this subsection may appear simultaneously with any statement required by subsection 2 or 2-A. A public communication that contains a visual aspect must include the statement in written text. A public communication that does not contain a visual aspect must include an audible statement. This statement is required only for public communications made through broadcast, cable or satellite systems; Internet audio and video programming; direct mail; or newspaper or other periodical publications.

A broadcast, cable or satellite television communication or Internet video communication must include both an audible and a written statement. For a broadcast, cable or satellite television communication or Internet video communication 60 seconds or less in duration, the audible statement may be omitted.

The top funders named in the required statement consist of the funders providing the highest dollar amount of funding to the entity making the independent expenditure since the day following the most recent general election day.

A. For purposes of this subsection, “funder” includes:

- (1)** Any entity that has made a contribution as defined in section 1052, subsection 3 to the entity making the independent expenditure since the day following the most recent general election day; and
- (2)** Any entity that has given a gift, subscription, loan, advance or deposit of money or anything of value, except for transactions in which a fair value is given in return, since the day following the most recent general election day.

B. If funders have given equal amounts, creating a tie in the ranking of the top 3 funders, the tie must be broken by naming the tying funders in chronological order of the receipt of funding until 3 funders are included in the statement. If the chronological order cannot be discerned, the entity making the independent expenditure may choose which of the tying funders to include in the statement. A public communication may not be required to include the names of more than 3 funders.

C. The statement required under this subsection is not required to include the name of any funder who has provided less than \$1,000 to the entity making the independent expenditure since the day following the most recent general election day.

D. If only one or 2 funders must be included pursuant to this subsection, the public communication must identify the number of funders as “top funder” or “top 2 funders” as appropriate. If there are no funders required to be included under this subsection, no statement is required.

E. When compiling the list of top funders, an entity making an independent expenditure may disregard any funds that the entity can show were used for purposes unrelated to the candidate mentioned in the public communication on the basis that

funds were either spent in the order received or were strictly segregated in other accounts.

F. The statement required under this subsection is not required in any public communication consisting of an audio broadcast of 60 seconds or less or a print communication of 20 square inches or less.

G. If the list of funders changes during the period in which a recurring public communication is aired or published, the statement appearing in the public communication must be updated at the time that any additional payments are made for that public communication.

H. The commission may establish by routine technical rule, adopted in accordance with Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A, forms and procedures for ensuring compliance with this subsection. Rules adopted pursuant to this paragraph must ensure that the information required by this subsection is effectively conveyed for a sufficient duration and in a sufficient font size or screen size when applicable without undue burden on the ability of the entity to make the public communication. The rules must also provide an exemption for types of public communications for which the required statement would be impossible or impose an unusual hardship due to the unique format or medium of the public communication.

3. Broadcasting prohibited without disclosure. Except as provided in subsection 5-C, paragraph C, a person operating a broadcast, cable or satellite system within this State may not broadcast any public communication, as described in subsections 1 to 2-A, without an oral or written visual announcement of each disclosure required by this section.

3-A. In-kind contributions of printed materials. A candidate, political committee or political action committee shall report on the campaign finance report as a contribution to the candidate, political committee or political action committee any contributions of in-kind printed materials to be used in the support of a candidate or in the support or defeat of a ballot question. Any in-kind contributions of printed materials used or distributed by a candidate, political committee or political action committee must include the name or title of that candidate, political committee or political action committee as the authorizing agent for the printing and distribution of the in-kind contribution.

3-B. Newspapers. Except as provided in subsection 5-C, paragraph C, a newspaper may not publish a public communication described in subsections 1 to 2-A without including each disclosure required by this section. For purposes of this subsection, "newspaper" includes any printed material intended for general circulation or to be read by the general public, including a version of the newspaper displayed on a website owned or operated by the newspaper. When necessary, a newspaper may seek the advice of the commission regarding whether or not a communication requires the disclosure.

4. Enforcement. A violation of this section may result in a civil penalty of no more than 100% of the amount of the expenditure in violation, except that a violation of subsection

5-C may result in a civil penalty of no more than 500% of the amount of the expenditure in violation and except that an expenditure for yard signs lacking the required information may result in a maximum civil penalty of \$200. In assessing a civil penalty, the commission shall consider, among other things, how widely the public communication was disseminated, whether the violation was intentional, whether the violation occurred as the result of an error by a printer or other paid vendor and whether the public communication conceals or misrepresents the identity of the person who financed it. If the person who financed the public communication or who committed the violation corrects the violation within 10 days after receiving notification of the violation from the commission by adding the missing information to the public communication, the commission may, except for a violation of subsection 5-C, decide to assess no civil penalty.

5. Telephone calls. [2025, ch. 224, § 7 (RP).]

5-A. Text messages. Text messages sent with the assistance of mass distribution technology that is paid for by a person must clearly and conspicuously state the name of the person who made or financed the expenditure if:

- A.** The text message expressly advocates the election or defeat of a candidate; or
- B.** The text message contains a link to a website that expressly advocates the election or defeat of a candidate.

5-B. Websites of candidate or political committee. A website or other Internet application available to the general public that is established by a party committee or a person that is required to register with the commission as a candidate or political action committee and that expressly advocates for the election or defeat of a candidate or that names a clearly identified candidate during the 28 days, including election day, before a primary election, during the 35 days, including election day, before a special election or during the period of time from Labor Day to the election day for a general election must state the name and address of the person who made or financed the expenditure for the website or other Internet application and state that the website or other Internet application was or was not authorized by the candidate.

5-C. Use of synthetic media. Whenever a public communication that requires a disclosure under subsections 1, 2, 2-A or 2-B contains synthetic media, the public communication must include, in addition to any other required disclosure, the words “THIS COMMUNICATION CONTAINS AUDIO, VIDEO AND/OR IMAGES THAT HAVE BEEN MANIPULATED OR ALTERED.” The commission shall adopt rules regarding the manner, size and placement of the disclosure required under this subsection. Rules adopted pursuant to this subsection are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

- A.** For purposes of this subsection, “synthetic media” means an image, an audio recording or a video recording depicting a candidate’s appearance, speech or conduct that:

- (1) In a manner that is likely to deceive a reasonable person, depicts the candidate saying or doing something that the candidate did not say or do; or
- (2) Has been manipulated or altered in a manner that is likely to provide a reasonable person with a materially different understanding or impression of the candidate's appearance, action or speech than a reasonable person would have from an unaltered, original version of the image, audio recording or video recording.

B. For purposes of this subsection, "synthetic media" does not include:

- (1) An image, an audio recording or a video recording depicting a candidate's appearance, speech or conduct that has been modified to improve audio, video or image clarity, to add captions or to highlight a specific section of the image, audio recording or video recording as long as the modification does not create a materially different understanding or impression of the candidate's appearance, action or speech than a reasonable person would have from an unaltered, original version of the image, audio recording or video recording; or
- (2) Satire or parody.

C. A person operating a broadcast, cable or satellite system within the State that broadcasts a public communication does not violate this subsection and a newspaper that publishes a public communication does not violate this subsection unless the broadcaster broadcasts or newspaper publishes a paid public communication with actual knowledge that the public communication contains synthetic media. The broadcaster's or newspaper's receipt of an allegation made by a 3rd party that a public communication contains synthetic media does not, by itself, constitute actual knowledge by the broadcaster or newspaper that the public communication contains synthetic media. For purposes of this paragraph, "newspaper" has the same meaning as in subsection 3-B.

D. The commission shall notify the Office of the Attorney General if a person who is in violation of this subsection does not cease violating this subsection after being notified of the violation by the commission or if the commission is unable for any reason to notify a person that the person is in violation of this subsection. The Attorney General may bring a civil action in the Superior Court of Kennebec County for injunctive or other appropriate equitable relief requiring the person to comply with this subsection. An action under this paragraph may be combined with an action under section 1004-B for the purposes of the enforcement of penalties assessed by the commission. If the Attorney General prevails in an action under this paragraph, the court may award to the Attorney General the costs of the action together with reasonable attorney's fees as determined by the court.

E. This subsection may not be construed to prohibit or limit any other cause of action that a person may have against a person who violates this subsection.

6. Exclusions. The requirements of this section do not apply to:

- A.** Handbills or other literature produced and distributed at a cost not exceeding \$100 and prepared by one or more individuals who are not required to register or file campaign finance reports with the commission and who are acting independently of and without authorization by a candidate, candidate's authorized campaign committee, party committee, political action committee or ballot question committee or an agent of a candidate, candidate's authorized campaign committee, party committee, political action committee or ballot question committee;
- B.** Campaign signs produced and distributed at a cost not exceeding \$100, paid for by one or more individuals who are not required to register or file campaign finance reports with the commission and who are acting independently of and without authorization by a candidate, candidate's authorized campaign committee, party committee, political action committee or ballot question committee or an agent of a candidate, candidate's authorized campaign committee, party committee, political action committee or ballot question committee;
- C.** Internet and e-mail activities costing less than \$100, as excluded by rule of the commission, paid for by one or more individuals who are not required to register or file campaign finance reports with the commission and who are acting independently of and without authorization by a candidate, candidate's authorized campaign committee, party committee, political action committee or ballot question committee or an agent of a candidate, candidate's authorized campaign committee, party committee, political action committee or ballot question committee;
- D.** Public communications in which the name or address of the person who made or authorized the expenditure for the public communication would be so small as to be illegible or infeasible, including public communications on items such as ashtrays, badges and badge holders, balloons, campaign buttons, clothing, coasters, combs, emery boards, envelopes, erasers, glasses, key rings, letter openers, matchbooks, nail files, noisemakers, paper and plastic cups, pencils, pens, plastic tableware, 12-inch or shorter rulers, swizzle sticks, tickets to fundraisers and similar items determined by the commission to be too small and unnecessary for the disclosures required by this section and in electronic media advertisements where compliance with this section would be impractical due to size or character limitations;
- E.** Campaign signs that are financed by the candidate or candidate's authorized committee and that clearly identify the name of the candidate and are lettered or printed individually by hand;
- F.** Prerecorded automated telephone calls paid for by the candidate that use the candidate's voice in the telephone call and that are made in support of that candidate; and
- G.** Telephone surveys that meet generally accepted standards for polling research and that are not conducted for the purpose of influencing the voting position of call recipients.

Ethics Commission Rules

94-270 C.M.R. Chapter 1

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SECTION 10. REPORTS OF INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES

1. General. Any person, party committee, political committee or political action committee that makes any independent expenditure in excess of \$ 250 per candidate in an election must file a report with the Commission according to this section.

2. Definitions. For purposes of this section, the following phrases are defined as follows:

A. "Clearly identified," with respect to a candidate, has the same meaning as in 21-A M.R.S. § 1012(1).

B. "Expressly advocate" means any public communication that

(1) uses phrases such as "vote for the Governor," "reelect your Representative," "support the Democratic nominee," "cast your ballot for the Republican challenger for Senate District 1," "Jones for House of Representatives," "Jean Smith in 2002," "vote Pro-Life" or "vote Pro-Choice" accompanied by a listing of clearly identified candidates described as Pro-Life or Pro-Choice, "vote against Old Woody," "defeat" accompanied by a picture of one or more candidate(s), "reject the incumbent," or public communications of campaign slogan(s) or individual word(s), which in context can have no other reasonable meaning than to urge the election or defeat of one or more clearly identified candidate(s), such as posters, bumper stickers, advertisements, etc. which say "Pick Berry," "Harris in 2000," "Murphy/Stevens" or "Canavan!"; or

(2) is susceptible of no reasonable interpretation other than as an appeal to vote for or against a clearly identified candidate.

...