

# Office of Governmental Accountability State Elections Enforcement Commission



## *At a Glance*

*State Elections Enforcement Commission Members: Anthony J. Castagno (Chair), Salvatore Bramante (Vice Chair), Patricia Stankevicius, Stephen Penny, Michael J. Ajello*

*Executive Director and General Counsel: Michael J. Brandi*

*Organizational structure: State Elections Enforcement Commission Members; Executive Director and General Counsel; Public Campaign Financing and Compliance Unit; Campaign Disclosure and Audit Unit; Fiscal Affairs, Administration and Grant Payments Unit; Information Technology Systems and Services Unit; Investigations; Enforcement Unit.*

*Established: 1974*

*Statutory Authority: Connecticut General Statutes § 9-7a, 9-7b*

*Central Office: 20 Trinity Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-1628*

*Number of employees: 35*

*Recurring Operating Expenses: \$1,511,792.92*

*Citizens' Election Fund – Administrative Expenses: \$1,273,355.41 (Fiscal Year 2014)*

*Citizens' Election Fund – Grant Payments: \$10,214,299.28 (Fiscal Year 2014)*

## **Mission**

*The Commission was established in the post-Watergate era of 1974 as an independent agency in the executive branch of state government, to enforce and ensure compliance with laws pertaining to state and local elections, primaries and referenda. In 2005, its mission was expanded to include the administration of the Citizens' Election Program, Connecticut's public financing program. Following federal court decisions in 2010, its mission was expanded to include providing transparency and disclosure for the now unlimited independent expenditures from all persons. The Commission is comprised of 5 members, and is bi-partisan in composition. The Commission's goal is to prevent violations from occurring by ensuring that those who require advice obtain it in a timely manner and to improve and maintain the confidence of the people of Connecticut in the electoral process and the officials involved in that process.*

## **Statutory Responsibility**

The Commission's original statutory responsibility was to enforce provisions of state election laws pertaining to elections, primaries and referenda. With the passage of Public Act 05-5, the Commission's responsibilities were considerably expanded, and now include the administration of the Citizens' Election Program (the Program). The Program provides public campaign grants to qualified candidates for statewide offices and the General Assembly, who adhere to expenditure limits and other program requirements. The Commission is also charged with developing and maintaining an electronic campaign reporting system (eCRIS). With the passage of Public Acts 10-187 and 13-180, the Commission began to provide increased transparency for independent expenditures in state elections. The Commission is the state campaign finance filing repository for all campaign finance records for party committees, traditional political committees and other persons making independent expenditures in the state, independent expenditure-only political committees, and candidate committees organized for state elections. The Commission is charged with the following specific responsibilities: to conduct investigations of election complaints, review campaign finance statements filed by candidates, political parties and political committees, issue compliance advice concerning requirements of the campaign finance laws and suggest revisions to the election laws to the Connecticut General Assembly.

## **Public Service**

The Commission is part of the Office of Governmental Accountability within the executive branch of state government and serves as an impartial arbiter of complaints alleging violations of the election laws. The Commission takes a proactive approach to educate candidates, campaign officials, political parties and citizens of their rights, duties and obligations under the election laws in order to ensure voluntary compliance with the law. The Commission staff conducted individual and group workshops and training sessions during the year in the following areas: eCRIS electronic reporting, the Citizens' Election Program and campaign financing for town committees and municipal candidates.

## **Improvements/Achievements FY 2014**

### **Public Campaign Financing and Compliance Unit**

Connecticut's landmark public campaign financing program, the Citizens' Election Program was successfully administered for the 2013- 2014 election cycle, special elections in that time period and the beginning of the 2014 regular election cycle, which includes both General Assembly and statewide candidates. The Program is financed by the Citizens' Election Fund (CEF), a separate, non-lapsing fund within the state's General Fund.

This subdivision is responsible for working closely with candidates running for municipal, statewide and General Assembly offices, by providing candidates and campaign treasurers with materials and training necessary to understand Connecticut campaign finance laws and Program requirements. The elections officers work in concert with the compliance attorneys to ensure proper education and training relative to continued changes to election laws. In the past fiscal year, the elections officers assisted candidates in primary races for General Assembly and candidates in the regular election. The subdivision also operates a successful internship program, to enhance academic, professional and career development skills, while achieving program and project goals.

This unit has drafted and completed sixteen (16) opinions of counsel, three (3) Advisory Opinions, five (5) Declaratory Rulings and has published numerous handbooks, guides and other informational materials and provided trainings throughout the state. The attorneys of the subdivision assist citizens, candidates and committees with their understanding of, and participation in, the election process, including both the public financing and private financing requirements of Connecticut campaign finance laws. The attorneys and elections officers answered over 6,600 compliance questions from citizens, candidates and committee staff regarding state and local elections, referenda, fundraising and the Program. The subdivision has developed a record-keeping, research and review process designed to ensure consistent, accurate and expeditious responses. The subdivision also works closely with the Attorney General's office to assess challenges to the constitutionality of certain provisions of Connecticut campaign finance laws. The subdivision also handles the agency's media and public relations activities, Freedom of Information requests, and coordinates the Commission's legislative activities as well as acting as liaison with legislators and other executive administrative branch agencies. Agency staff has played an integral role with the Secretary of the State in various legislative proposals with GAE and Appropriations Committees.

### **Campaign Disclosure and Audit Unit**

The unit's activities continued to focus on the implementation of Public Acts 05-5, 06-137, 07-1 and 08-2 concerning campaign disclosure requirements, as well as the Citizens' Election Program. The unit serves as the filing repository for party committees, political committees and candidate committees registered for statewide or General Assembly offices. The unit is responsible for receiving and processing the paper campaign disclosure filings and for scanning them into the eCRIS Document Search System.

This past year, staff reviewed qualifying contribution documentation for both exploratory committees and candidate committees for the General Assembly. In addition, Audit staff conducted post-election audits of all statewide and randomly selected General Assembly committees. The unit prepares Audit reports that are presented to the Commission for consideration.

The unit is also responsible for gathering information from state agencies concerning contractors barred from making campaign contributions. We receive electronic submissions from state agencies each month and verify any additions or deletions to those lists.

### **Information Technology Systems and Services Unit**

The IT unit successfully implemented major changes to the financial disclosure forms impacting our eCRIS application. These changes resulted in redesign of several screens as well as reports. The upload template was also revised to accommodate these changes and improvements to the upload process were implemented. The eCRIS application continues to gain the confidence of our users as the number of users filing financial reports using eCRIS application increased by 20%. Based on our users' feedback, we implemented significant changes to the Committee Tracking System (CTS) interface. We also developed and implemented additional functionality to facilitate audit tracking function via CTS. The Audit Tracking functionality offers streamlined work flow to provide productivity gains in Grant Application Review process. We continued to make enhancements to our comprehensive search functions, allowing users to search the system and provide them with many ways to view the data, including searches for documents, committees, disbursements, receipts and summary totals. We also implemented changes to the Indexing application to accommodate receipt and public disclosure of Independent Expenditure reports. The eCRIS Helpdesk IT staff continued to provide 24x7 support and successfully handled over 1,500 contacts (including holidays and weekends) during the fiscal year. In collaboration with the Public Financing and Audit and Disclosure units, we successfully trained approximately 150 officers representing candidate, town and political committees. We continued to make enhancements to our website content to improve the user experience and satisfaction. We also successfully upgraded the Commission's inventory of Scanner/Printer/Copier/Fax machines. The PDF fillable financial disclosures forms were also successfully updated and made available to our user community due to the changes in the forms. We continued to provide support and maintenance for State Contractors Contribution Ban, Laserfiche and SEEC Support applications. We also completed a comprehensive review and analysis of our existing hardware for servers and Storage Area Network (SAN). Based on this review an upgrade and migration plan has been developed and approved to meet the growing needs of our users and the Commission. As a first step towards the execution of this plan, the IT unit has procured necessary hardware to upgrade and update our SAN capabilities.

### **Fiscal Affairs, Administration and Grant Payments Unit**

In fiscal year 2014, the SEEC issued 57 grants for a sum of \$10,214,299.28, which includes four grants in two special elections and grants issued before July 1 for the November 2014 regular election.

### **Investigations and Enforcement Unit**

The Commission investigated 126 new cases that were either docketed as a result of a sworn complaint or from a decision by the Commission to initiate a case investigation on its own motion. These investigations run a full gamut of election issues, including matters of election administration, the process of voting, campaign finance laws and the Citizens' Election Program. The case investigations do *not* include a number of complaints that are filed which allege facts that, even if accepted as true, would not have constituted violations of state election law. The unit collected \$90,049.92 in late filing fees, civil penalties and forfeitures for violations of election laws, which were deposited in the General Fund.

## **Information Reported as Required by State Statute**

Pursuant to General Statutes § 9-7a (c), the Commission is required to provide the following information concerning its activities:

Of the 234 new complaints docketed during this fiscal year, the following municipalities had more than one complaint:

Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Bristol, Columbia, Glastonbury, Hamden, Hartford, New Britain, New Milford, Simsbury, Stamford, Storrs, Waterbury, Wilton, Winsted.

SEEC closed a total of 123 cases during the fiscal year. Of the 123 closed cases, 9 were newly docketed cases and 114 were from prior years. 23 resulted in monetary penal sanctions (late filing fees, civil penalties or forfeitures), 34 resulted in reprimands or orders to comply, 44 were dismissed with finding of no violation, 10 resulted in compliance with no further action taken, 3 were withdrawn by the complainants and 99 were administratively closed for lack of sufficient evidence to investigate. There were 134 additional complaints that remained open at the close of the fiscal year.