

Office of Governmental Accountability State Elections Enforcement Commission



At a Glance

State Elections Enforcement Commission Members - Anthony J. Castagno (Chair), Joan Jenkins (Vice Chair), Stephen F. Cashman, Patricia Stankevicius

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 and 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 - 36

Recurring operating expenses - \$1,436,088.38 (Fiscal Year 2013)

Citizens' Election Fund – Administrative Expenses - \$1,404,021.54 (Fiscal Year 2013)

Citizens' Election Fund – Grant Payments - \$9,585,007.31 (Fiscal Year 2013)

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 and, in 2005, its mission was expanded to include the administration of the Citizens' Election Program, Connecticut's public financing program. 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). The Commission is the state campaign finance filing repository for all campaign finance records for party committees, political committees and candidate committees organized for state elections. The Commission is charged with the specific responsibility 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 Municipal Campaign Financing.

Improvements/Achievements 2012-2013

Public Campaign Financing and Compliance Unit

Connecticut's landmark public campaign financing program, the Citizens' Election Program (the Program) was successfully administered for the 2012 election cycle for General Assembly candidates, with over 270 grants awarded. 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 34 candidates in primary races for General Assembly and 381 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 17 opinions of counsel 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 6,000 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 continued the development and enhancement of the many applications designed and supported at the Commission. The Committee Tracking System has been continually improved and updated to streamline the workflow process. The unit continues to make significant improvements to the eCRIS system. Additional reports have been developed

for the Grant Application Review process. Enhancements have been made to our comprehensive search functions, allowing users to search the system and provides them with many ways to view the data, including searches for documents, committees, disbursements, receipts and summary totals. In addition to the direct entry of electronic data, there is continued improvement to the data entry module for eCRIS, which allows paper filers' data to be received and entered into the system, providing comprehensive access to all disclosure filings. eCRIS trainings have been given including classes with hands-on instruction, help guides and detailed documentation. Training continues to be a top priority, as more users are moving from paper filings to the eCRIS system.

Fiscal Affairs, Administration and Grant Payments Unit

In fiscal year 2013, the SEEC issued 239 grants for a sum of \$9,585,007.31.

Investigations and Enforcement Unit

The Commission investigated 234 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 \$57,749.63 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 Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 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 201 cases during the fiscal year. Of the 201 closed cases, 129 were newly docketed cases and 72 were from prior years. 70 resulted in monetary penal sanctions (late filing fees, civil penalties or forfeitures), 31 resulted in reprimands or orders to comply, 54 were dismissed with finding of no violation, 10 resulted in compliance with no further action taken, 3 were withdrawn by the complainants and 29 were administratively closed for lack of sufficient evidence to investigate. There were 142 additional complaints that remained open at the close of the fiscal year.