

Campaign Finance Disclosure in Municipal Elections

The Office of Campaign and Political Finance is the independent state agency that administers Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 55, the campaign finance law. OCPF receives disclosure reports from candidates for state and county office, as well as filings from political action committees, ballot question committees and state and local party committees. OCPF also receives reports from mayoral and councilor-at-large candidates in the state's five largest cities -- Boston, Cambridge, Lowell, Springfield and Worcester.

All other municipal candidates and committees file their reports with their respective city or town clerks or election commissions. OCPF works with these local officials to ensure compliance with the campaign finance law, supplying disclosure forms and candidate guides as well as providing guidance to officials, candidates and the public.

Filing Requirements

In **towns**, candidates and committees (including ballot question committees) file two campaign finance reports, due eight days before and 30 days after the election.

In **cities (and also in towns with November elections)**, three reports are usually filed, due eight days before both the preliminary and final elections and on the following Jan. 20. All candidates file before the preliminary election, even if their particular races are not on the ballot until November.

In addition to the filing requirements noted above, all candidates, including all incumbent elected officials, and all other active committees file year-end reports each Jan. 20.

Local candidates who fail to file campaign finance reports are subject to a \$10 per day fine levied by OCPF after referral by the city or town clerk or election commission.

Contributions

Statutory limits on the most common types of contributions are as follows (all limits listed are for a calendar year):

- The maximum amount an individual may donate to a **candidate** is \$500 per year. There is no limit on how much a candidate may contribute or loan to his or her own campaign for local office, but all such personal contributions must be recorded on a campaign finance report.
- A candidate may contribute up to \$100 per year in campaign funds to **another candidate**.
- Contributions to candidates from **corporations** are prohibited, as are contributions from PACs or political committees that are not organized with OCPF or local officials, such as federal PACs or those registered in another state.
- Individuals and corporations may contribute without limit to **ballot question committees**.

The name and address of any contributor of over \$50 in the aggregate per year must be disclosed on a campaign finance report. Recipients of contributions must also ask for the occupation and employer of those who give \$200 or more in a calendar year, though a contributor may decline to provide such information. Candidates and committees must maintain detailed records of all contributions, including the name and address of contributors of any amount.

Expenditures

Expenditures by all candidates and committees must comply with two standards set forth in Chapter 55:

- Expenditures must enhance the political future of the candidate or advance the principles for which a committee was founded, such as the passage of a ballot question.
- Expenditures may not be primarily for the personal use of any person, including a candidate.

Candidates and committees must maintain detailed records of all expenditures. Expenditures of more than \$50 must be itemized on a campaign finance report.

Ballot Question Committees

Committees organized to support or oppose a question on the ballot at a municipal election, such as a Proposition 2½ override or debt exclusion, must organize with the local election official prior to any financial activity. These committees file reports before and after the election and dissolve after the final determination of the question. Ballot question committees should not be confused with PACs, which are organized to support or oppose several candidates, are subject to different contribution limits and are not required to dissolve after an election.

Public Outreach

OCPF staff members are available to conduct seminars for candidates and committees in any city or town, as well as orientation sessions for new clerks or elections staff. The office also offers a seminar on the application of the campaign finance law in ballot question elections, including reporting requirements for ballot spending and the restriction on the use of public resources to influence voters. For more information, contact OCPF's Director of Public Information, Denis Kennedy, at the numbers below or by e-mail at dkennedy@cpf.state.ma.us.

Clerks and election officials are encouraged to contact OCPF if they need any further information on the campaign finance law and its application to campaigns and candidates. You may also visit our website to download forms, guides and other information.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Office of Campaign and Political Finance
One Ashburton Place, Room 411
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 727-8352 / (800) 462-OCPF
On the Web: www.mass.gov/ocpf