

ELECTION CODE

TITLE 15. REGULATING POLITICAL FUNDS AND CAMPAIGNS

CHAPTER 251. GENERAL PROVISIONS

SUBCHAPTER A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

Sec. 251.001. DEFINITIONS. In this title:

(1) "Candidate" means a person who knowingly and willingly takes affirmative action for the purpose of gaining nomination or election to public office or for the purpose of satisfying financial obligations incurred by the person in connection with the campaign for nomination or election. Examples of affirmative action include:

(A) the filing of a campaign treasurer appointment, except that the filing does not constitute candidacy or an announcement of candidacy for purposes of the automatic resignation provisions of Article XVI, Section 65, or Article XI, Section 11, of the Texas Constitution;

(B) the filing of an application for a place on a ballot;

(C) the filing of an application for nomination by convention;

(D) the filing of a declaration of intent to become an independent candidate or a declaration of write-in candidacy;

(E) the making of a public announcement of a definite intent to run for public office in a particular election, regardless of whether the specific office is mentioned in the announcement;

(F) before a public announcement of intent, the making of a statement of definite intent to run for public office and the soliciting of support by letter or other mode of communication;

(G) the soliciting or accepting of a campaign contribution or the making of a campaign expenditure; and

(H) the seeking of the nomination of an executive committee of a political party to fill a vacancy.

(2) "Contribution" means a direct or indirect transfer of money, goods, services, or any other thing of value and includes an agreement made or other obligation incurred, whether legally enforceable or not, to make a transfer. The term includes a loan or extension of credit, other than those expressly excluded by this subdivision, and a guarantee of a loan or extension of credit, including a loan described by this subdivision. The term does not include:

(A) a loan made in the due course of business by a corporation that is legally engaged in the business of lending money and that has conducted the business continuously for more than one year before the loan is made; or

(B) an expenditure required to be reported under Section 305.006(b), Government Code.

(3) "Campaign contribution" means a contribution to a candidate or political committee that is offered or given with the intent that it be used in connection with a campaign for elective office or on a measure. Whether a contribution is made before, during, or after an election does not affect its status as a campaign contribution.

(4) "Officeholder contribution" means a contribution to an officeholder or political committee that is offered or given with the intent that it be used to defray expenses that:

(A) are incurred by the officeholder in performing a duty or engaging in an activity in connection with the office; and

(B) are not reimbursable with public money.

(5) "Political contribution" means a campaign contribution or an officeholder contribution.

(6) "Expenditure" means a payment of money or any other thing of value and includes an agreement made or other obligation incurred, whether legally enforceable or not, to make a payment.

(7) "Campaign expenditure" means an expenditure made by any person in connection with a campaign for an elective office or on a measure. Whether an expenditure is made before, during, or after an election does not affect its status as a campaign

expenditure.

(8) "Direct campaign expenditure" means a campaign expenditure that does not constitute a campaign contribution by the person making the expenditure. A campaign expenditure does not constitute a contribution by the person making the expenditure to a candidate or officeholder if the expenditure is made without the prior consent or approval of the candidate or officeholder on whose behalf the expenditure is made. A campaign expenditure made in connection with a measure does not constitute a contribution by the person making the expenditure if it is not made as a political contribution to a political committee supporting or opposing the measure.

(9) "Officeholder expenditure" means an expenditure made by any person to defray expenses that:

(A) are incurred by an officeholder in performing a duty or engaging in an activity in connection with the office; and

(B) are not reimbursable with public money.

(10) "Political expenditure" means a campaign expenditure or an officeholder expenditure.

(11) "Reportable activity" means a political contribution, political expenditure, or other activity required to be reported under this title.

(12) "Political committee" means two or more persons acting in concert with a principal purpose of accepting political contributions or making political expenditures. The term does not include a group composed exclusively of two or more individual filers or political committees required to file reports under this title who make reportable expenditures for a joint activity.

(13) "Specific-purpose committee" means a political committee that does not have among its principal purposes those of a general-purpose committee but does have among its principal purposes:

(A) supporting or opposing one or more:

(i) candidates, all of whom are identified and are seeking offices that are known; or

(ii) measures, all of which are identified;

(B) assisting one or more officeholders, all of whom are identified; or

(C) supporting or opposing only one candidate who is unidentified or who is seeking an office that is unknown.

(14) "General-purpose committee" means a political committee that has among its principal purposes:

(A) supporting or opposing:

(i) two or more candidates who are unidentified or are seeking offices that are unknown; or

(ii) one or more measures that are unidentified; or

(B) assisting two or more officeholders who are unidentified.

(15) "Out-of-state political committee" means a political committee that:

(A) makes political expenditures outside this state; and

(B) in the 12 months immediately preceding the making of a political expenditure by the committee inside this state (other than an expenditure made in connection with a campaign for a federal office or made for a federal officeholder), makes 80 percent or more of the committee's total political expenditures in any combination of elections outside this state and federal offices not voted on in this state.

(16) "Political advertising" means a communication supporting or opposing a candidate for nomination or election to a public office or office of a political party, a political party, a public officer, or a measure that:

(A) in return for consideration, is published in a newspaper, magazine, or other periodical or is broadcast by radio or television; or

(B) appears:

(i) in a pamphlet, circular, flier, billboard or other sign, bumper sticker, or similar form of written communication; or

(ii) on an Internet website.

(17) "Campaign communication" means a written or oral

communication relating to a campaign for nomination or election to public office or office of a political party or to a campaign on a measure.

(18) "Labor organization" means an agency, committee, or any other organization in which employees participate that exists for the purpose, in whole or in part, of dealing with employers concerning grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours of employment, or conditions of work.

(19) "Measure" means a question or proposal submitted in an election for an expression of the voters' will and includes the circulation and submission of a petition to determine whether a question or proposal is required to be submitted in an election for an expression of the voters' will.

(20) "Commission" means the Texas Ethics Commission.

(21) "In-kind contribution" means a contribution of goods, services, or any other thing of value that is not money, and includes an agreement made or other obligation incurred, whether legally enforceable or not, to make the contribution. The term does not include a direct campaign expenditure.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987; Acts 1991, 72nd Leg., ch. 304, Sec. 5.01, eff. Jan. 1, 1992; Acts 2003, 78th Leg., ch. 249, Sec. 2.01, eff. Sept. 1, 2003.

Amended by:

Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1127 (H.B. [2586](#)), Sec. 1, eff. September 1, 2019.

Sec. 251.0015. COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATE. For purposes of Section [251.001\(8\)](#), communication between a person and a candidate, officeholder, or candidate's or officeholder's agent is not evidence that the person obtained the candidate's or officeholder's consent or approval for a campaign expenditure made after the communication by the person on behalf of the candidate or officeholder unless the communication establishes that:

(1) the expenditure is incurred at the request or suggestion of the candidate, officeholder, or candidate's or officeholder's agent;

(2) the candidate, officeholder, or candidate's or

officeholder's agent is materially involved in decisions regarding the creation, production, or distribution of a campaign communication related to the expenditure; or

(3) the candidate, officeholder, or candidate's or officeholder's agent shares information about the candidate's or officeholder's plans or needs that is:

(A) material to the creation, production, or distribution of a campaign communication related to the expenditure; and

(B) not available to the public.

Added by Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1127 (H.B. 2586), Sec. 2, eff. September 1, 2019.

Sec. 251.0016. COMMON VENDOR. A person using the same vendor as a candidate, officeholder, or political committee established or controlled by a candidate or officeholder is not acting in concert with the candidate, officeholder, or committee to make a campaign expenditure unless the person makes the expenditure using information from the vendor about the campaign plans or needs of the candidate, officeholder, or committee that is:

(1) material to the expenditure; and

(2) not available to the public.

Added by Acts 2019, 86th Leg., R.S., Ch. 1127 (H.B. 2586), Sec. 2, eff. September 1, 2019.

Sec. 251.002. OFFICEHOLDERS COVERED. (a) The provisions of this title applicable to an officeholder apply only to a person who holds an elective public office and to the secretary of state.

(b) For purposes of this title, a state officer-elect or a member-elect of the legislature is considered an officeholder beginning on the day after the date of the general or special election at which the officer-elect or member-elect was elected. This subsection does not relieve a state officer-elect or member-elect of the legislature of any reporting requirements the person may have as a candidate under this title.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987.

Sec. 251.003. PROHIBITION OF DOCUMENT FILING FEE. A charge may not be made for filing a document required to be filed under this title.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987.

Sec. 251.004. VENUE. (a) Venue for a criminal offense prescribed by this title is in the county of residence of the defendant, unless the defendant is not a Texas resident, in which case venue is in Travis County.

(b) Venue for the recovery of delinquent civil penalties imposed by the commission under this title is in Travis County.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987; Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 1134, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1997.

Sec. 251.005. OUT-OF-STATE COMMITTEES EXCLUDED. (a) An out-of-state political committee is not subject to Chapter 252 or 254, except as provided by Subsection (b), (c), or (d).

(b) If an out-of-state committee decides to file a campaign treasurer appointment under Chapter 252, at the time the appointment is filed the committee becomes subject to this title to the same extent as a political committee that is not an out-of-state committee.

(c) If an out-of-state committee performs an activity that removes the committee from out-of-state status as defined by Section 251.001(15), the committee becomes subject to this title to the same extent as a political committee that is not an out-of-state committee.

(d) An out-of-state political committee that does not file a campaign treasurer appointment shall comply with Section 254.1581.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987; Acts 2003, 78th Leg., ch. 249, Sec. 2.02, eff. Sept. 1, 2003.

Sec. 251.006. FEDERAL OFFICE EXCLUDED. (a) Except as provided by Subsection (b), this title does not apply to a candidate for an office of the federal government.

(b) A candidate for an elective office of the federal government shall file with the commission a copy of each document relating to the candidacy that is required to be filed under federal law. The document shall be filed within the same period in which it is required to be filed under the federal law.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987; Acts 1993, 73rd Leg., ch. 107, Sec. 3.01, eff. Aug. 30, 1993; Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 864, Sec. 236, eff. Sept. 1, 1997.

Sec. 251.007. TIMELINESS OF ACTION BY MAIL. When this title requires a notice, report, or other document or paper to be delivered, submitted, or filed within a specified period or before a specified deadline, a delivery, submission, or filing by first-class United States mail or common or contract carrier is timely, except as otherwise provided by this title, if:

(1) it is properly addressed with postage or handling charges prepaid; and

(2) it bears a post office cancellation mark or a receipt mark of a common or contract carrier indicating a time within the period or before the deadline, or if the person required to take the action furnishes satisfactory proof that it was deposited in the mail or with a common or contract carrier within the period or before the deadline.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987.

Sec. 251.008. CERTAIN POLITICAL CLUB MEETINGS EXCLUDED.

(a) An expense incurred in connection with the conduct of a meeting of an organization or club affiliated with a political party at which a candidate for an office regularly filled at the general election for state and county officers, or a person holding that office, appears before the members of the organization or club is not considered to be a political contribution or political expenditure if no political contributions are made to or solicited for the candidate or officeholder at the meeting.

(b) In this section, an organization or club is affiliated with a political party if it:

(1) supports the nominees of that political party but does not support any candidate seeking the party's nomination for an office over any other candidate seeking that nomination; and

(2) is recognized by the political party as an auxiliary of the party.

Added by Acts 1989, 71st Leg., ch. 422, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1989.

Amended by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., ch. 752, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1995.

Sec. 251.009. LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS CONTRIBUTION OR EXPENDITURE NOT CONSIDERED TO BE OFFICEHOLDER CONTRIBUTION OR EXPENDITURE. A contribution to or expenditure by a legislative caucus, as defined by Section [253.0341](#), is not considered to be an officeholder contribution or officeholder expenditure for purposes of this title.

Added by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., ch. 43, Sec. 4, eff. Aug. 28, 1995.

SUBCHAPTER B. DUTIES OF COMMISSION

Sec. 251.032. FORMS. In addition to furnishing samples of the appropriate forms to the authorities having administrative duties under this title, the commission shall furnish the forms to each political party's state executive committee and county chair of each county executive committee.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987; Acts 1993, 73rd Leg., ch. 107, Sec. 3.03, eff. Aug. 30, 1993; Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 864, Sec. 237, eff. Sept. 1, 1997.

Sec. 251.033. NOTIFICATION OF DEADLINE FOR FILING REPORTS.

(a) The commission shall notify each person responsible for filing a report with the commission under Subchapters C through F, Chapter [254](#), of the deadline for filing a report, except that notice of the deadline is not required for a political committee involved in an election other than a primary election or the general election for state and county officers. Notification under this subsection may be sent by electronic mail.

(b) If the commission is unable to notify a person of a

deadline after two attempts, the commission is not required to make any further attempts to notify the person of that deadline or any future deadlines until the person has notified the commission of the person's current address or electronic mail address.

(c) Chapter [552](#), Government Code, does not apply to a notification under this section sent by electronic mail.

Amended by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 899, Sec. 1, eff. Sept. 1, 1987; Acts 1993, 73rd Leg., ch. 107, Sec. 3.04, eff. Aug. 30, 1993.

Amended by:

Acts 2009, 81st Leg., R.S., Ch. 996 (H.B. [3922](#)), Sec. 1, eff. June 19, 2009.