



Minutes of the April 18, 2024 Meeting of the
Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices
45 Memorial Circle, Augusta, Maine

Present via Zoom: William Schneider, Esq., Chair; Dennis Marble; Sarah LeClaire, Esq. and David Hastings, Esq.

Staff: Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director; and Jonathan R. Bolton, Assistant Attorney General
Commissioner Schneider convened the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

1. Complaint – Referendum in Boothbay and Boothbay Harbor

Maine’s ballot question committee (BQC) statute was amended in October 2023 to require campaign finance filings with the Commission for referenda in municipalities with populations of less than 15,000. BQCs must register and file with the Commission if they receive contributions or make expenditures exceeding \$5,000 to influence a referendum.

Mr. Wayne explained that Boothbay Harbor resident Denise Griffin filed an April 11, 2024 complaint with the Commission concerning lawn signs and advertisements in the Boothbay Register newspaper by *Citizens for a Bright Future for the Boothbay Region* (“Bright Future”) promoting passage of a school building referendum. Ms. Griffin’s complaint asked whether Bright Future should have registered and filed campaign finance reports with the Commission.

Mr. Wayne described preliminary investigative steps taken by the Commission staff, including contacting the newspaper and people in the community who signed an open letter in the Boothbay Register. This led to an email to the Commission from a local business owner and investor, Paul Coulombe, who acknowledged involvement in the pro-referendum communications.

Mr. Toby McGrath, representing Mr. Coulombe, addressed the Commission. He had not been involved in the advertising but was told by his client that the spending had not exceeded the \$5,000 threshold for BQC registration and reporting. He stated Mr. Coulombe was not aware of the 2023 law change.

Mr. Hastings commented that if another member of the Bright Future group had made some of the expenditures, perhaps the group exceeded \$5,000 which required BQC registration.

Commissioner Schneider moved to authorize Commission staff to conduct an investigation of the complaint. Mr. Marble seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-0. In response to a question from Mr. McGrath, the Commission confirmed it was within the discretion of the Commission staff whether to investigate other groups financially involved in the referendum.

Mr. Hastings made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Marble seconded. The motion passed 4-0. The meeting was adjourned at 2:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director