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June 4, 2025

Mayor Samantha Squailia
Squailia Committee
225 Scott Road
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Re: CPF-24-23

Dear Mayor Squailia:

This office has completed its review of certain campaign finance activity by the Committee to Elect Sam Squailia (the "Committee"). As a result of this review, we have concluded that the Committee did not comply with multiple provisions of M.G.L. c. 55, the Massachusetts campaign finance law.

1. Late Disclosure of Deposits

The campaign finance law requires political committees to file timely campaign finance reports that accurately reflect the Committee's financial activity. Mayoral candidates must disclose contributor information by e-filing deposit reports by the 5th of each month. See M.G.L. c. 55, §§ 18 and 19.

During the course of its review, OCPF concluded that the Committee failed to e-file deposit reports to disclose contributor information in a timely manner. Between July 2023 and August 2024, the Committee filed 58 deposit reports, disclosing approximately \$49,400 in contributions deposited into the Committee's bank account. However, 29 reports, totaling approximately \$36,000 in deposits, were not timely filed.

The Committee's delay in filing the required reports frustrated the public's interest in accurate and timely disclosure of campaign finance activity during the relevant periods and did not comply with M.G.L. c. 55, §§ 18 and 19. Further, the Committee should be aware that, under the campaign finance law, the failure to timely file deposit reports in the future will subject you personally to penalties of \$25 per day, up to \$5,000 for each report. See M.G.L. c. 55, § 3 and 970 CMR 2.14.

2. Corporate Contributions

During the course of the review, OCPF noted that the Committee received two corporate contributions, totaling \$1,075. Section 8 of the campaign finance law states that "...no business or professional corporation, partnership, limited liability company partnership under the laws of or doing business in the commonwealth and no officer or agent acting in behalf of any corporation mentioned in this



section, shall directly or indirectly give, pay, expend or contribute, or promise to give, pay, expend or contribute, any money or other valuable thing for the purpose of aiding, promoting or preventing the nomination or election of any person to public office, or aiding or promoting or antagonizing the interest of any political party.” In addition, that section goes on to state that “[n]o person or persons, no political committee, and no person acting under the authority of a political committee, or in its behalf, other than a political committee organized on behalf of a ballot question campaign shall solicit or receive from such corporation or such holders of stock any gift, payment, expenditure, contribution or promise to give, pay, expend or contribute for any such purpose.” M.G.L. c. 55, § 8. Accordingly, OCPF has concluded that the Committee’s receipt of corporate contributions in the amount of \$1,075 did not comply with the prohibitions of Section 8.

3. Excess Tender Type Contributions

Political committees are prohibited from accepting contributions made via money order, treasurer’s check, or other similar tender types in excess of \$100 in the aggregate from an individual in a calendar year. See M.G.L. c. 55, § 9. Candidates and committees must exercise their best efforts to determine whether contributions are legal at the time of receipt. 970 CMR 1.04(8). The Committee’s records reflect that the Committee accepted a treasurer’s check in the amount of \$150. OCPF concluded that \$50 of that contribution was in excess of the statutory limit and did not comply with Section 9.

4. Fundraising in a Public Building

Section 14 of M.G.L. c. 55, the Massachusetts campaign finance law, states, in relevant part, that “[n]o person shall in any building or part thereof occupied for state, county or municipal purposes demand, solicit or receive any payment or gift of money or other thing of value for any political purpose.”

You stated that, on April 13, 2024, your Committee hosted your Inaugural Ball at the Fitchburg Armory. Tickets were \$75 each, payable to the Committee. You stated that the vast majority of tickets were sold online, prior to the event, but that some tickets or donations, in the amount of \$175, were received at the event. The intention in selling tickets, you indicated, was not for the Committee to profit from the event but, rather, to simply cover the costs of hosting the event.

The Armory is a historic building owned by the City of Fitchburg, and it contains several city departments or service providers, including the Fitchburg Senior Center/Council on Aging, the Board of Health Outreach Department, and the Veterans Services Department. The Armory also houses privately-rented office suites or spaces, and a large function space that may be rented for private events through the Fitchburg Senior Center. As a result, the Armory appears to be a building that is at least partially occupied for a governmental purpose within the meaning of M.G.L. c. 55, § 14.

OCPF has recognized that an inaugural ball is not just campaign-related, but an event which is also civic in nature. The primary purpose of inaugural events is to celebrate the transition of government, not to benefit the candidate’s political future – even if the ball may, in addition to celebrating the transition of government, provide an incidental political benefit to the candidate. See AO-97-24. OCPF has also advised, however, that, despite the civic nature of such events, committees should not financially benefit from an inaugural ball if it is held in a building subject to the restrictions of Section 14. See id.

As the Committee's inaugural ball was a dual-purpose event – civic in nature, with ticket purchases payable to the Committee to offset the Committee's expenses relative to the event, OCPF acknowledges that the Committee may not have viewed this as a "fundraising" event, as that term is typically understood in the context of campaigns. Further, OCPF recognizes that the mixed-use nature of the Armory further complicates the analysis: private functions often occur in the building after hours, when public employees and residents seeking city services are not present and, therefore, would not be subjected to the fundraising pressures that Section 14 was enacted to prevent. In addition, the Committee took measures to prevent the receipt of funds while in the public building, by actively encouraging people to purchase their tickets in advance by mail and online, rather than purchasing at the door of the event.

OCPF recognizes that the receipt of contributions prior to the inaugural event, through the mail and online sale of tickets, for an event held in the privately-rented function hall of the Armory (after governmental offices in the building had closed), may not implicate the public concerns Section 14 was meant to address. There is no dispute, however, that some funds were received at the door of the event, while inside the Armory, which is at least partially occupied for a governmental purpose. Therefore, OCPF has determined that those contributions, in the amount of \$175, were not received in a manner consistent with M.G.L. c. 55, § 14.

After our review, OCPF concluded that the Committee's late disclosure of contributor information, and its receipt of corporate contributions, excess treasurer's check contributions, and contributions made in a public building did not comply with various provisions of the campaign finance law. To resolve this matter, your Committee has made a payment to the Commonwealth, in the amount of \$1,300, to purge the contributions identified during this review that were received in a manner that was not consistent with Chapter 55. You should be aware, as noted above, that further instances of noncompliance may result in further action by this office, which may include the imposition of civil penalties for late filing of deposit reports, or referral to the Attorney General's Office.

In accordance with a ruling by the Supervisor of Public Records, this letter and all related correspondence is a matter of public record. As such, it will be placed in the Committee's public file and a copy will be provided to the individual(s) who brought this matter to our attention, if applicable. If you have any questions regarding this or any other campaign finance matter, please do not hesitate to contact this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William C. Campbell".

William C. Campbell
Director

WCC/mc

cc: Anna R. Phillips, Treasurer