

Written Public Comment (Regular June 2023 Meeting)

Conner Edwards

To:

PDC@pdc.wa.gov (PDC General E-mail)

Fred.Jarrett@pdc.wa.gov (Chair Jarrett)

Nancy.Isserlis@pdc.wa.gov (Vice-Chair Isserlis)

Allen.Hayward@pdc.wa.gov (Commissioner Hayward)

J.Leach@pdc.wa.gov (Commissioner Leach)

1) Set a date for PDC stakeholder meetings.

Back in March of 2023, Cindy Madigan of the League of Women Voters requested that the agency set up a series of meetings (including back-and-forth discussion with staff and commissioners) with PDC stakeholders to discuss current issues. As far as I can tell, this proposal has not yet been discussed or acted on at the March, April, or May meetings. It has been nearly a year since the last stakeholder meeting was held. Please discuss this at the June meeting and set dates for the stakeholder meetings. Subjects for these meetings should include the agency's 2024 legislative agenda (including but not limited to foreign contribution certification changes) and current/future rulemaking.

2) Act to clarify ambiguities relating to the employer/occupation requirement.

Back in March of 2023, the Commission voted to deny the APA Petition to repeal the employer city/state requirement, but indicated a desire to clarify the many ambiguities relating to the employer/occupation requirement at the June meeting. A discussion of these ambiguities can be found in Toby Nixon's written public comment¹, and in my own written public comment.²

Unfortunately, a discussion of this issue has not been put on the agenda for the June meeting.

Please set a time for discussion of this issue so that no formal action is needed from stakeholders to bring this issue before the Commission to clarify the confusion it presents for contributors and filers.

3) Crack down on local governments using public funds to engage in electioneering.

I am glad to see the PDC crack down on local governments that are using public funds to engage in electioneering.

The PDC should give no credence whatsoever to self-serving disclaimers such as "for information only" or "not intended to support or oppose the ballot proposition." Instead, the agency should look towards the content of the communication when determining whether or not it is intended to

¹ <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/01.04.Written%20Comment%20-%20Nixon%203%202023.pdf>

² <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/01.03.Written%20Comment%20-%20Edwards%203%202023.pdf>

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influence the results of the election. The agency should apply the same test to these publicly funded communications that it would apply to communications sent out by non-governmental entities.

The agency should look at the communication and imagine that it came from a non-governmental entity (such as an individual/PAC/business/union/etc.). If the agency determines that such a communication would qualify as “political advertising” (as defined in RCW 42.17A.005(40)), it should find that the governmental entity violated RCW 42.17A.555 and impose a penalty.

Public funds should not be used to attempt to influence the results of elections. That is properly the role of private individuals and groups.

4) **Reject agency staff’s effort to retroactively penalize Zach Zappone for following instructions given by agency staff in 2021.**

At the June meeting, agency staff³ are seeking to penalize Zach Zappone for campaign finance violations in the 2021 campaign cycle.

What is the violation that agency staff are alleging Mr. Zappone committed? Well, back in 2021, when Mr. Zappone was transferring funds from a previous campaign (for a different office) **he followed the unambiguous instructions given to filers by agency staff.** Following these instructions, Mr. Zappone disclosed the transfers from his previous campaign as a lump sum to his new campaign, as opposed to attributing each portion of the transfer to individual entities.

As far as I can tell, **this was what every filer in the state did at the time.**

Why? Well, prior to May of 2023, here were the instructions given by agency staff relating to these types of transfers:

*“When a candidate is transferring contributions left over from a previously completed election campaign to a new campaign for a different office, **those contributions that are moved to the new campaign are NOT attributed to their sources, nor do they count against the contributor’s limit for the new campaign.** The funds are simply moved as a lump sum of surplus funds to the new account.”⁴*
[emphasis added]

³ The initial complaint that started this case was filed by Glen Morgan.

See link: <https://pdc-case-tracking.s3.us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/5795/136626%20Zappone%20Zack%20Complaint.pdf>

Interestingly, Mr. Morgan did NOT allege that Mr. Zappone violated RCW 42.17A by disclosing transfers from different campaign fund as lump-sum transfers (as opposed to attributing each transfer to an individual entity) which agency staff instructed filers to do at the time (2021). **This charge appears to have been added gratuitously by agency staff for unknown reasons.**

⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20220517021527/https://www.pdc.wa.gov/rules-enforcement/guidelines-restrictions/using-contributions-different-office> WayBack Machine Internet Archive.

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Importantly, there was no warnings or disclaimers tied to this instruction.⁵ There was nothing that said: “this is just staff guidance, the Commission may disagree with staff’s interpretation of this statute if a complaint is filed against you”. There was nothing that would have prompted a reasonable person to realize that there was a latent statutory ambiguity regarding how these surplus fund transfers should have been reported.

When staff uploaded the instructions quoted above to the agency’s website (without any disclaimer), they should have been aware that filers would rely on those instructions when it came to disclosing the transfers.

Filers (including Mr. Zappone it appears) did rely on these instructions from the agency’s website when reporting surplus fund transfers. This reliance was reasonable, given the lack of disclaimer in the instructions.

Now agency staff are seeking to penalize Mr. Zappone for complying with **the very instructions that agency staff gave.**

This is fundamentally unfair. **Please do not penalize Mr. Zappone for following an unambiguous instruction from agency staff.**

5) Please read attached Joint Administrative Rules Review Committee (JARRC) petition.

If you have the time, please read the attached JAARC petition regarding the enforceability of staff guidance relating to expenditure descriptions. The first nine pages are the most relevant.

⁵Back at the October 2022 meeting, Sean Flynn presented the staff’s perspective on the role of staff guidance and as part of that presentation, he stated that “...we get questions all the time about what the law means here, what a filer should do in this case or that case and advice is given, and it’s always given with the caveat that this is staff’s advice...” Here however, there was no disclaimer that the “lump-sum” instruction was merely staff guidance and not a restatement what the statute actually required. <https://tvw.org/video/washington-state-public-disclosure-commission-2022101199/?eventID=2022101199> (See 21:35 mark)

Petition For Review of a Policy or Interpretive Statement, Guideline, or Document that is of General Applicability

Petition to JARRC per RCW 34.05.655(1)

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JUNE 13, 2023

Conner Edwards

CG.Edwards53@gmail.com – (425) 533-1677 cell

Petition For Review of a Policy or Interpretive Statement, Guideline, or Document that is of General Applicability

June 13, 2023

Introduction

On December 6, 2022, I submitted a Petition to the Joint Administrative Rules Review Committee (JARRC) to challenge the enforceability of Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) staff guidance statements relating to expenditure descriptions.

I received a denial to my Petition on February 16, 2023. In the explanation of the denial, my original petition was interpreted as arguing that a PDC complaint respondent would be subject to *automatic sanctions* as the result of the respondent's violation of a guidance statement. The explanation of the denial made it clear that a penalty against a respondent accused of violating a guidance statement would not be automatic since the respondent would first have to be fined in an adjudicative proceeding before all or part of the Commission regardless of the type of violation.

However, there is another prong under which the agency's guidance statements would qualify as a "rule" as defined in RCW 34.05.010 (16). If there is a guidance statement of a) "general applicability" that, b) **"establishes, alters, or revokes any procedure, practice, or requirement relating to agency hearings"**, it qualifies as a rule which may only be adopted following the APA's rulemaking processes set forth in RCW 34.05.

The guidance statements being issued by agency staff that relate to descriptive requirements meet this test. For background, the initial stage of the complaint adjudication process (sometimes referred to as the "categorization" stage) is an important aspect of overall adjudication process, and should be considered a "hearing" as that term is used in RCW 34.05.010(16).

During this initial stage of the enforcement process, agency staff are impermissibly using guidance statements as a stand in for the plain meaning of the term "purpose," as defined in RCW 42.17A.240(7), when the expenditure being challenged falls under one of the categories covered by their guidance statements. If the challenged expenditure falls into one of the categories covered by the guidance statement and the description does not contain the level of detail that the guidance statement deems appropriate, agency staff send a letter¹ to the respondent demanding that the respondent amend their report to include the expenditure description that staff represent as legally required under the guidance. If the respondent complies with staff demands, staff dismiss the complaint. If the respondent refuses to comply with the staff's demand, the respondent is eventually subjected to an adjudicative proceeding where they will face monetary penalties.

¹ See Attachment A for an example.

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As such, staff guidance statement relating to descriptive requirements alters the procedures, practices, and requirements of an agency hearing and should be considered a “rule” under RCW 34.05.010(16) that has not been adopted pursuant to the APA’s rulemaking process.

I want to make it clear that this petition is not intended to challenge the underlying wisdom of the challenged descriptive requirements, or even the authority of the PDC to adopt descriptive requirements as formal rules. Instead, I am challenging the ability of agency staff to unilaterally impose new requirements outside of the APA’s rulemaking process. If the Commission believes that some or all of the staff-created interpretive guidance may have some value as legal requirements, the Commission should exercise its rulemaking authority to engage in a collaborative process with the public, agency stakeholders, and agency staff, to formulate a proposal that identifies the level of detail that filers must provide when describing expenditures on form C4. Past iterations of the Commission have done exactly that to create new descriptive requirements, as evidenced in WAC 390-16-037 and WAC 390-16-205.

I urge JARRC to discuss and take action on this petition at the committee’s June 21st meeting.

Background

My name is Conner Edwards, and I am a professional campaign treasurer that works for a number of campaigns and committees in Washington State. My chief responsibility is filing timely, accurate reports with the PDC.

I am submitting this Petition because PDC staff are violating the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) by issuing “guidance” statements relating to expenditure descriptions that are being enforced by the agency in agency hearings as if they were rules, as the term “rule” is defined in RCW 34.05.010(16).

This behavior by the agency is concerning because, unlike properly adopted rules, members of the agency’s regulated community have not been afforded the opportunity to provide input on these guidance statements to the Commissioners prior to their adoption. This has the effect of stripping away from treasurers, candidates, and other interested groups the ability to participate meaningfully in the development of agency policies which affect us as part of the agency’s enforcement process.

These guidance statements have no basis whatsoever in the plain language or reasonable interpretation of RCW 42.17A or WAC 390, the bodies of law and rule respectively which the PDC enforces. These guidance statements have been invented out of whole cloth by agency staff and are not approved or even discussed by Commissioners prior to publication, despite the fact that the statutory right to interpret what constitutes a violation of RCW 42.17A is expressly delegated to the Commissioners and is expressly denied to agency staff.² In a handful of instances, these guidance statements issued by PDC staff **directly contradict** the language of properly adopted rules.

² See RCW 42.17A.110(2).

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When the audience is the public,³ PDC complaint respondents,⁴ or members of the agency's regulated community,⁵ agency staff hold their guidance statements out as **actual legal requirements**.

However, when staff are asked about the applicability of these guidance statements by those who exercise oversight of agency staff (such as Commissioners, or members of the Legislature), they characterize the guidance as mere "helpful advice".⁶ This is a telling contradiction.

The characterization of guidance statements as "helpful advice" is nothing more than a convenient after-the-fact attempt to justify their issuance and use. If these guidance statements were mere helpful advice being offered by agency staff to filers, there would be nothing for us to complain about, much less challenge.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. Staff guidance statements are not merely "helpful advice", but rather tools that agency staff apply uniformly against respondents during the complaint adjudication process to determine how the enforcement process unfolds.

³ PDC Webpage: Expenditures That Require Additional Disclosure. "*These types of expenditures **require** added special information...*" [emphasis added] – PDC Webpage <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/registration-reporting/candidates-committees/expenditures-debts/expenditures-require-additional-disclosure>

⁴See Attachment A: written demand from PDC enforcement staffer Tabitha Blacksmith to PDC complaint respondent Jack Burkman in PDC Case #98707. "*For your information, campaign expenditures made for political advertisements frequently **require** additional expenditure description information such as... ..run dates... for TV/radio broadcasts, ... run dates for newspaper advertisements, and date ranges and impressions for social media advertisements*" [emphasis added] – PDC Enforcement Staffer Tabitha Blacksmith

⁵See Attachment B: e-mail from PDC Deputy Director Kim Bradford in response to Conner Edwards' question on enforceability of staff guidance. "*Categories also assist the campaign in providing the **legally required information**. Again using the 'broadcast advertising' example, treasurers may not know that there is an additional **requirement** to disclose... ..dates ads are running*" [emphasis added] – Deputy Director Kim Bradford

⁶ A few examples of this contradiction:

"*...advice is given, and it's **always given with the caveat that this is staff's advice...** but nothing in how that is given is determinative of what the law or the rule means..." [emphasis added] - Sean Flynn, PDC General Counsel (October 2022 meeting of the PDC at 21:50: <https://tvw.org/video/washington-state-public-disclosure-commission-2022101199/?eventID=2022101199>)*

"*We **never suggested** that anything in the guidance when [Conner Edwards] sought clarification of that, **that the guidance alone is what is required...***" [emphasis added] – Sean Flynn, PDC General Counsel (October 2022 meeting of the PDC at 31:40: <https://tvw.org/video/washington-state-public-disclosure-commission-2022101199/?eventID=2022101199>)

"*...agency has **never asserted**, much less attempted, to enforce such guidance...*" [emphasis added] – Sean Flynn, PDC General Counsel in Agency Memo. <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/04.03.Edwards%20petitions%20response%20mem.pdf>

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As such, these guidance statements qualify as rules under both the “general applicability” element and the “establishes, alters, or revokes any procedure, practice, or requirement relating to agency hearings” prong of what constitutes a rule under RCW 34.05.010(16).

1. PDC guidance statements regarding descriptive requirements are of general applicability because they are applied uniformly to candidate committees and political committees.

An agency policy is considered of general applicability if it is applied uniformly to all members of a class.⁷

The guidance statements relating to descriptive requirements at issue here are applied uniformly to entities (candidate committees and political committees) that are required to report expenditures pursuant to RCW 42.17A.240(7). This being the case, these statements are of general applicability.

2. Initial stage of PDC complaint adjudication process is a “hearing” as that term is used in RCW 34.05.010(16) because the agency is required to render a decision based on applicable law after an opportunity for both the complainant and respondent to be heard.

Again, for a guidance statement to be considered a “rule” under RCW 34.05.010(16), it must be of general applicability, but it must also establish, alter, or revoke any procedure, practice, or requirement relating to **agency hearings**. The term “agency hearing” is not specifically defined in RCW 34.05.

When interpreting the term “agency hearing”, one should first consider the plain meaning of the word. Clearly, the term indicates that the hearing is one held by the agency, but what is a hearing?

In both the administrative and judicial context, a hearing is generally thought of as an opportunity for one or more parties to share relevant information with a decision-making authority, prior to that authority rendering a preliminary or final decision in a case, based on the information that has been provided and the relevant requirements governing the authority’s conduct.

The initial stage of the PDC complaint adjudication process has all of these hallmarks and should be considered a hearing.

Initially, the agency receives a complaint from a complainant, containing allegations of fact and citations to the law that they believe is being violated by the respondent. Upon receipt of the complaint, the agency provides a copy to the respondent and allows the respondent 14 days to respond. After analyzing the statements and allegations from both the complainant and the respondent, the agency’s Executive Director must apply the law to the facts and render a decision pursuant to his authority under WAC 390-37-060.

This process mirrors what is typically considered a hearing in the administrative/judicial context.

Agency staff would argue that this is just the initial stage of the complaint process, and it should not be considered a hearing for that reason. This argument ignored the fact that the vast majority of PDC complaints are resolved at this stage in the process. In fact, of the 496 PDC complaints that were filed in 2022 and adjudicated, 327 of them received final resolution at this initial stage.⁸ After filtering out

⁷ *Simpson Tacoma Kraft Co. v. Department of Ecology*, 119 Wn.2d 640, 648, 835 P.2d 1030 (1992)

⁸ This number includes “Case Closed with Warning”, “Case Closed with Reminder Letter”, “Case Closed with No Evidence of Violations”, “Resolved through Statement of Understanding”, “Resolved with Technical Correction”, “No Jurisdiction”, “Resolved as a Remedial Violation”, and “Resolved Through Complaint Publication Process”. It does

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complaints filed by PDC staff as part of the PDC's Group Enforcement process⁹, only a mere 10 complaints out of 215 were not resolved at the initial stage of the adjudication process and actually reached the Commission level.

One should also consider the context in which the word "agency hearing" appears in the Administrative Procedures Act. The term was used as part of an attempt to capture a broad range of government conduct which could be considered a "rule" which would then be subject to public-facing rulemaking procedures. Courts have interpreted the purpose of these rulemaking procedures: "[t]he purpose of such rule-making procedures is to ensure that members of the public can participate meaningfully in the development of agency policies which affect them. In enacting the 1988 APA, the Legislature intended to provide greater public access to administrative decision-making."¹⁰

JARRC should interpret the term "agency hearing" broadly to help effectuate the intended purpose of the Administrative Procedure Act. Interpreting the PDC's initial complaint adjudication process to be an "agency hearing" would do exactly that by subjecting policies which alter procedures and practices at these hearings to formal public rulemaking.

3. Guidance statements on descriptive requirements are being used to establish and alter procedures and practices relating to the initial stage of PDC complaint adjudication.

For a guidance statement to be considered a "rule" under RCW 34.05.010(16), it must be of general applicability, but it must also **establish, alter, or revoke any procedure, practice, or requirement** relating to an agency hearing.

The guidance statements being issued by agency staff that relate to expenditure descriptions do exactly that at a critical stage of the overall complaint adjudication process.

During this initial stage of the enforcement process, agency staff are impermissibly using guidance statements as a stand in for the plain meaning of the term "purpose," as defined in RCW 42.17A.240(7), when the expenditure being challenged falls under one of the categories covered by their guidance statements. If the challenged expenditure falls into one of the categories covered by the guidance statement and the description does not contain the level of detail that the guidance statement deems appropriate, agency staff send a letter¹¹ to the respondent demanding that the respondent amend their report to include the expenditure description that staff represent as legally required under the guidance. If the respondent complies with staff demands, staff dismiss the complaint. If the respondent refuses to comply with the staff's demand, the respondent is eventually subjected to an adjudicative proceeding where they will face the prospect of monetary penalties.

The role that these guidance statements play in the enforcement process is most clearly illustrated through a hypothetical, which is applicable to most candidate committees and political committees.

not include "Dismissed by Commission", "Dismissed with Concurrence of the Chair", or "Violation Found By Commission". See WAC 390-37-060.

⁹ Cases opened by PDC staff solely alleging a late or non-filed F1, C1, or L-series report.

¹⁰ *Simpson Tacoma Kraft Co. v. Dep't of Ecology*, 119 Wash. 2d 640, 649, 835 P.2d 1030, 1035 (1992)

¹¹ See Attachment A for an example.

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As it stands today, on June 13, 2023, there is no guidance statement that dictates the level of detail that committees must disclose when describing expenditures for postage or stamps. No guidance dictates that the specific type of postage purchased (Postcard Stamp, Forever Stamp, Bulk Rate, etc.) be disclosed. Similarly, no guidance dictates that the quantity of stamps purchased be disclosed. Instead, a filer may simply disclose the purpose of the expenditure as required by RCW 42.17A.240(7): “Postage” or “Stamps” is how most committees describe it.

Imagine that you are a candidate, and your candidate committee just disclosed a \$250 purchase of postage and reported this expenditure in a report filed with the PDC with the description “Postage”.

Imagine that a disgruntled member of the public views this report and is unhappy with your committee’s description of your purchase of postage. This individual then proceeds to file a complaint against you with the PDC, alleging that you have not properly disclosed the quantity of postage that you have purchased.

As it stands today, on June 13, 2023, that complaint would be dismissed by the agency’s Executive Director. There is no guidance on expenditure descriptions that touches the category of purchases of postages for agency staff to apply. They apply the statute only (RCW 42.17A.240(7)), determine that the purpose of the expenditure has been properly disclosed, and dismiss the complaint with a letter to both you and the complainant indicating the reasons for dismissal.¹² This is exactly the outcome that would be expected under the facts and applicable law.

Imagine now that a year goes by. You purchase another \$250 worth of postage and disclose it in a report filed with the PDC. The same member of the public views this report and is unhappy with your committee’s vague description of your purchase of postage. This same individual then proceeds to file a complaint against you with the PDC, alleging that you have not properly disclosed the quantity of postage that you have purchased. Because of how the previous complaint has been adjudicated, you anticipate that this complaint will also be dismissed.

Imagine now that, unbeknownst to you, in between the time of the first complaint and the second complaint, agency staff have issued new guidance on the subject of how purchases of postage must be disclosed. Now, the new guidance on the website reads: “for purchases of postage: disclose the quantity of the postage purchased”. Now, instead of receiving a letter from agency staff notifying you that the complaint has been dismissed, you get a completely different type of letter. This new letter is signed by a member of the agency’s enforcement team. It contains texts stating: “for your information, campaign expenditures for postage require that the quantity and type of postage purchased be disclosed,” and also “please file the necessary amended C-4 reports to provide the required expenditure descriptions for postage type and quantity in the next 14 days.” The letter also invites you to read the “Enforcement

¹² This is not mere speculation on my part. This is exactly what happened in PDC Case No. 108453 against Rep. June Robinson where a complainant challenged the respondent’s failure to disclose details of an expenditure purchasing postage: <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/rules-enforcement/enforcement/enforcement-cases/108453>

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Guide” which tells you that the complaint will be dismissed only if you accede to their demands that you amend your report to include the quantity and type of postage.¹³

In this example, I hope that you can clearly see how the creation of the guidance statement on this topic, and staff’s application of it within the enforcement process have clearly altered the procedures and practices of this initial agency hearing.

As such, I hope that you will agree with me that these statements qualify as “rules” under the “establishes, alters, or revokes any procedure, practice, or requirement relating to agency hearings” prong described in RCW 34.05.010(16).

Conclusion

In light of the above, I hope that it is clear that agency staff guidance statements relating to descriptive requirements are being used to alter the procedures, practices, and requirements of an agency hearing and should be considered a “rule” under RCW 34.05.010(16) that has not been adopted pursuant to the APA’s rulemaking process.

I urge JARRC to discuss and take action on this petition at the committee’s upcoming June 21st meeting.

¹³ This is also not mere speculation on my part. This is substantially what happened in PDC Cases No. 98589, 98610, 98702, 98707, 98732, 98734, & 95815 (2), where there were categories of expenditures that WERE covered by guidance statements. The language in this hypothetical closely mirror the demand letter sent by PDC staff in complaint 98707, which has been appended to this petition as Attachment A.

Statutory Prerequisites

(4) A petition for review of a policy or interpretive statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, under subsection (1) of this section shall:

(a) Identify the specific policy or interpretive statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, to be reviewed;

See chart on next page, specifically I am challenging the requirements in the red column.

(b) Identify the specific statute which the rule interprets or implements;

They purport to interpret RCW 42.17A.240(7).

(c) State the reasons why the petitioner believes that the policy or interpretive statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, meets the definition of a rule under RCW 34.05.010 and should have been adopted according to the procedures of this chapter;

See above Petition.

(d) Identify any known judicial action regarding the policy or interpretive statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, or statutes identified in the petition.

N/A

Attachment A

Here (highlighted in yellow) you can see an example of agency staff representing staff-created interpretive guidance to a respondent as a legal requirement, asking them to amend their reports to comply with the guidance. Non-highlighted portions of the third paragraph represent actual legal requirements under WAC 390-16-037 or WAC 390-16-205.

4:15 PM

[#98707] Burkman, Jack: Alleged violation of RCW 42.17A.240 by failing to sufficiently describe expenditures undertaken by 2019 campaign. (EY '19; Sep '21) : Washington Public D.

Tabatha Blacksmith replied

a year ago (Thu, 23 Sep 2021 at 9:10 AM)



To: jburkman@portvanusa.com

Hello Jack Burkman,

The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) received a complaint from Connor Edwards, which has been assigned PDC Case Number **98707**. Please reference this case number on any future communications with the PDC regarding this complaint.

The complaint alleges violations of RCW 42.17A.240 for failing to accurately disclose the expenditure descriptions for political advertisements undertaken by your 2019 campaign for Port Commissioner for the Port of Vancouver ("Campaign"). Specifically, the complaint alleged your Campaign failed to provide the required expenditure description for four Facebook ads totaling \$646.41 that were disclosed on the Post-General Election C-4 report.

For your information, campaign expenditures made for political advertisements frequently require additional expenditure description information such as the number of mail pieces printed, yard signs produced, run dates and per station breakdown for TV/radio broadcasts, run dates for newspaper advertisements, and date ranges and impressions for social media advertisements.

In reviewing the complaint allegations and the reports filed by your 2019 Campaign, staff discovered additional expenditures made for political advertisements that appear to require you to file amended C-4 reports. The C-4 reports that require amending include the 21-Day and 7-Day Pre-Primary Election C-4 reports, the Post-Primary C-4 report, and the 21-Day and 7-Day Pre-General Election C-4 reports disclosing the description information as detailed above for the following expenditures made by your Campaign to: (1) The Columbian for newspaper advertisement inserts or advertisements (# of inserts printed or advertisement run dates are required to be disclosed for each expenditure); (2) Columbia Litho for newspaper inserts, a mail piece, flyers, business cards, envelopes and letterhead (# of items printed for required to be disclosed for each expenditure); and (3) Tom Edwards for "Signs (# of signs printed or produced, and any sub-vendor information if the sign work was contracted to a third party).

- Please review the attached complaint and file the necessary amended C-4 reports to provide the required expenditure descriptions for political advertising undertaken by your 2019 Campaign by **October 7, 2021**.
- If you would like to submit a written response to the complaint allegations and/or PDC staff's request, please reply directly to this email and provide that information by **October 7, 2021**.

If you need assistance in filing the amended C-4 reports or are having trouble locating the 2019 Online Reporting of Campaign Activities (ORCA) file for your campaign, please send an email to pdcc@pdcc.wa.gov and request filer assistance.

Finally, please review our Enforcement Guide, which discusses the enforcement process, and the sections entitled "Minor violations resolved through reminder or warning" and "Remediable violations and technical corrections" in particular.

Please reply directly to this email if you have any questions so your message is routed directly to the Political Finance Officer to whom your case is assigned.

Thank you and PDC staff appreciates your attention to this matter,

Tabatha Blacksmith

wapedc.freshdesk.com/a/tickets/98707

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Re: PDC - URGENT: Conflict between WACs and ORCA guidance

PDC Support <pdcc@pdc.wa.gov>
Reply-To: PDC Support <pdcc@pdc.wa.gov>
To: cg.edwards53@gmail.com

Tue, Jul 27, 2021 at 4:04 PM

Hi Conner,

I am responding to your emails of July 22, 23, 26, and 27. We hope to consolidate this conversation here because tracking multiple requests with multiple replies is difficult.

You asked about the purpose of expenditure categories. They provide disclosure to the public and assistance for campaigns. Expenditure categories allow the public to specifically search for activity such as "broadcast advertising" and to review how much a campaign has spent categorically as well as whether or not an activity has been reported. Trying to find that information currently requires a search of the description field in which campaigns enter information in a variety of ways and to varying levels of specificity.

Categories also assist the campaign in providing the legally required information. Again using the "broadcast advertising" example, treasurers may not know that there is an additional requirement to disclose a station by station breakdown and dates ads are running. This is the same "help filers get it right" approach we have taken with other upgrades to filing systems in recent years. Categorization permits us to offer guidance to campaigns within ORCA about what details will help ensure sufficient disclosure and to eventually provide guidance when an expense might require expedited reporting (such as in the case of LMCs or IEs).

The help text you referenced for, say, robocalls matches what PDC staff routinely advise campaigns to report. Such details provide important information about the nature of the expense that, as just one consideration, help determine if the campaign paid fair market value. In the event of a complaint, we look to the campaign's good-faith effort to provide sufficient detail about its expenditures. That may be accomplished in some cases solely through the use of the description field, but the repeated mischaracterization of expenses could raise concerns about whether the campaign was providing accurate information.

The reason you are seeing more categories than the 36 which we updated this month is because, in previously established campaigns, we could not get rid of some older designations which may have been used. We recognize that this may be confusing as there may be more than one category which is applicable. We are discussing the possibility of adding DO NOT USE next to the old expenditure account categories in order to avoid confusion. Your suggestion for a descriptive list explaining the new categories is a good one and we will also discuss how best to do that.

Finally, you asked who constitutes the management team. The management team is comprised of Peter Frey Lavalley, Executive Director, Sean Flynn, General Counsel, James Gutholm, Chief Information Technology Officer, Jana Greer, Administrative Officer, Chip Beatty, Customer Service and Outreach Director, and me, Deputy Director.

Hope that helps. Thank you for being a part of our treasurer group that is working with us through these changes.

Kim Bradford

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Washington State law established email as the PDC's official means of communication as of June 7th, 2018 (RCW 42.17A.055). Filers have a duty to amend their reports within 10 days of any material changes, such as new email addresses. Please ensure your email address is up to date.

To respond, please reply to this email.

Washington Public Disclosure Commission
<http://www.pdc.wa.gov>
1.360.753.1111

Table of Descriptive Requirements for Expenditures on Form C4

See RCW 42.17A.240(7) & (12)

Requirements created by the Legislature following the process required by Article II of the Washington State Constitution	Requirements created by the Public Disclosure Commission following the process required by RCW 34.05, the Administrative Procedures Act	Purported requirements unilaterally implemented by agency staff without any basis in state law, without any basis in administrative rule, without any notice to or input from the public, and without any approval/action from the Commissioners
Requirement that, for every itemized expenditure (expenditures over \$50), filers must describe the general purpose of the expenditure in the purpose/description field. RCW 42.17A.240(7).	Requirement that, for expenditures made to vendors that include subpayments on the campaign's behalf to third parties intended to benefit the campaign, that filers must provide a breakdown of these payments and the names of the recipients in the purpose/description field. WAC 390-16-205(1)-(3).	Requirement that, for expenditures that include payments to subvendors, that filers include the full address of the subvendors. ¹ *
Requirement that, for expenditure made for soliciting or procuring signatures on an initiative or referendum petition, filers must include the electronic contact information of each person to whom an expenditure was made in the purpose/description field. RCW 42.17A.240(8).	Requirement that, for expenditures made to consultants or other agents to perform tasks such as fundraising, survey design, or campaign plan development, that filers describe those tasks in the purpose/description field. WAC 390-16-205(3).	Requirement that, for expenditures for broadcast/TV advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ² ⊕
	Requirement that, for expenditures supporting or opposing candidate(s) or ballot measure(s), that filers must identify the candidate(s) or ballot measure(s) in the purpose/description field unless already listed on the statement of organization. WAC 390-16-037(1).	Requirement that, for digital advertising, that filers provide: a) the name of the platform on which ads are appearing if specified by the campaign, and b) the run dates or "number of impressions" in the purpose/description field. ³ *
	Requirement that, for expenditures made to a candidate or political committee pursuant to an agreement or understanding of any kind regarding how the recipient will use the expenditure, that filers must describe that agreement or understanding in the purpose/description field. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for mileage reimbursement expenditures, that filers provide: a) the number of miles, b) reimbursement rate used, and c) period covered in the purpose/description field. *
	Requirement that, for expenditures made directly to vendors for GOTV phone calls or robocalls, that filers must describe the jurisdiction(s) targeted by the phone calls or robocalls. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for newspaper/periodical advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ⊕
	Requirement that, for expenditures made directly to a vendor for printing, that filers must include the printed item and the quantity purchased. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for expenditures reimbursing candidates for lost earnings, that filers provide: a) the candidate's monthly salary/wages/income, and b) the period covered in the purpose/description field.

Footnotes

<p>* Requirement described in ORCA and not on PDC website. ⊕ Requirement described on PDC website and not in ORCA. ⊖ Discrepancy exists between ORCA and PDC website guidance for this requirement: PDC website says filers must include run-dates only "if-known", which implies we don't have to try to track down that information if we don't have it, as is often the case because of poor invoice descriptions on the part of commercial advertisers.</p>	<p>4. In an e-mail sent on 9/23/21, Deputy Director Bradford clarified that we do not need to include the dimensions of the yard signs in the description field if they are 4'x8' or under. This was very positive news for us because virtually all yard signs are 4'x8' or under. On 10/5/21, I requested that the inaccurate guidance in ORCA be corrected. On 5/17/22, noticing this problem had still not been corrected, I asked if there was an estimate on fixing the guidance. I did not receive a response, but it was finally fixed sometime in early July 2022. It took nearly 9 months for the inaccurate guidance to be corrected.</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for radio advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ⊕
<p>1. This requirement is directly contradicted by WAC 390-16-205 which provides a clear example of how payments to subvendors are disclosed: by disclosing the name of the subvendor, the money paid to them, and the purpose of the payment; not the address of subvendors. Up until approximately May 2021, when the agency updated ORCA, this was how campaigns disclosed payments to subvendors. This is a frustrating requirement because we are lucky if vendors even disclose the existence of subvendors to us: the address of subvendors does not make it onto the invoices. I cannot imagine why the address of subvendors would be of any interest to the public.</p>	<p>5. This requirement is directly contradicted by WAC 390-16-037(2) which provides a clear example of how to disclose robocalls and does not require us to disclose the quantity of calls or the dates that the calls are made.</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for robocalls, that filers provide: a) the number of calls made, and b) the "period covered" in the purpose/description field. ⁵ *
<p>2. The language of this that requires us to provide run dates is contradicted by the example of how campaigns should describe payments for broadcast political advertisement contained in WAC 390-16-205, see Example C.</p>	<p>6. The list of categories that filers are being asked to choose from is lengthy, vague, and ever-changing. As of 7/2/22, there are 33 different categories in ORCA, down from the 47(1) different categories we had to choose from last year when this requirement was unilaterally implemented by agency staff over the bipartisan objections of professional campaign treasurers. It is not always clear what category we should use for certain expenditures because of category overlap/vagueness. For context, filers with the FEC only have 12 categories to choose from, which makes categorizing expenditures significantly easier. I sent an e-mail seeking guidance from agency staff on 8/4/21 on what categories we should use for certain common expenditures. Nearly a full calendar year later, I have still not received any response. I have noticed that certain categories have disappeared from the list entirely without any notice or explanation being provided to filers. Because of the confusion related to expenditure categorization, the resulting categorization data is not of high quality or particularly helpful. (I will note that in the past, there was a "chart of accounts" function in the old ORCA that somewhat resembled the new ORCA categorization field. However, unlike the new ORCA categorization field, the "chart of accounts" we put into the program was not visible to public, was not a legal requirement, and for that reason, the majority of us just ignored it.)</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for travel, that filers provide the traveler's name in the purpose/description field. ⊕
<p>3. This is another confusing requirement. An "impression" is how many times someone has seen a digital ad. Generally, this wouldn't be a static number: the number we input at the time of drafting the report would already likely be incorrect by the time we file the report if the ad is still active. Are we required to amend our reports when the number of impressions for the ad rises?</p>		Requirement that, for every expenditure, that filers must select a specific expenditure category. ⁶ *

Descriptive Requirements and the Administrative Procedures Act (APA)

Background

In June of 2021, a new version of ORCA was released, the first significant update in many years. For background, ORCA is the program that campaigns use to communicate contribution/expenditure information to the public via the filing of C3/C4 reports.

This new version of ORCA had an updated interface for entering expenditures. As part of this new interface, the program requested that we provide additional details for certain types of expenditures that *we had never previously been asked to disclose and that no statute or administrative rule required us to disclose*. Some of these requests were very odd, asking us to disclose things like the address of sub-vendors, the dimensions of yard signs, or the number of “impressions” for digital ads.¹

Shortly after seeing this new guidance, I reached out to agency staff to try to determine if this new non-RCW/WAC based guidance was either: a) just a mere suggestion for filers on what to include in the description field, or b) ostensibly a new legal requirement that campaigns could conceivably be fined or otherwise penalized for failing to comply with.

If the answer was the former (just a mere suggestion) that wouldn't be problematic at all; agencies can suggest whatever they'd like to suggest. If the answer was the latter (ostensibly a new legal requirement) that would be problematic because state agencies are required to go through the APA's rulemaking process to implement new legal requirements and that process had not been followed. I looked through old agency agendas, meeting minutes, and listened to recordings of previous meetings. Not only had the APA's formal rulemaking process not been followed, I could find no evidence of *any* notice to the public, outreach to agency stakeholders, or even any discussion or approval from the Commissioners on the updated guidance.

Looking for Answers

After a series of lengthy/frustrating e-mail conversations with agency staff, my question was not answered. I filed a series of complaints with the sole intention of testing the agency to see how it would respond to a complaint alleging a violation of this non-RCW/WAC based guidance.² In response, the agency requested that the respondents update their reports to comply with the new non-RCW/WAC based guidance. After the respondents updated their reports, the agency dismissed the complaints as “requests for technical correction”. In essence, when the agency decides to treat a complaint as a “request for technical correction”, they are asking the respondent to correct some action the agency perceives as being violative. If the respondent does not take the corrective action suggested by the agency, they are subjected to an investigation which can lead to fines and other forms of administrative

¹ Even today, fully 12 months after the new guidance on descriptive requirements was put into ORCA, much of this guidance can only be found by ORCA users and not folks who use the agency's website to research requirements. See website: <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/registration-reporting/candidates-committees/expenditures-debts/expenditures-require-additional-disclosure>

² See PDC Case No. 98589, 98610, 98702, 98707, 98732, 98734, & 95815 (2).

sanctions. Contrast this to a complaint alleging some action that the agency did not perceive to be violative: it would be dismissed as “frivolous or unfounded” as outlined in WAC 390-37-060(1)(a).

So, seemingly, the question had finally been answered: the new non-RCW/WAC based guidance was not a mere suggestion to filers but rather something that the agency viewed as a legally enforceable requirement; albeit a requirement the violation of which did not materially harm the public interest.³

This was concerning because, per RCW 42.17A.110, it is the appointed Commissioners who are empowered to adopt, modify, and rescind rules, following the APA’s rulemaking process. This statute specifically prevents staff from exercising this power.⁴

What is a “rule” anyways?

“Rule” is a term of art defined in RCW 34.05.010(16), the Administrative Procedures Act. Under that statute, “rule” is defined to mean, in relevant part: “any agency order, directive, or regulation of general applicability (a) the violation of which subjects a person to a penalty or administrative sanction;...”.

In other words, a requirement does not have to be in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) in order to be considered a rule; it is a rule if it meets the definition of “rule” contained in RCW 34.05.010(16).⁵ If a requirement meets the APA’s definition of a rule, the agency must follow the APA’s rulemaking process; if the agency fails to follow that process, the rule is invalid.⁶ The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that members of the public can meaningfully participate in the development of agency requirements that affect them.⁷ While the APA’s process may seem bureaucratic, it has several important components, such as a) notice to the public, b) solicitation of public comment, c) consideration of public comment, and d) debate/approval by the agency’s governing body.

The Takeaway

Based on the agency’s conduct in adjudicating complaints alleging violation of the non-RCW/WAC based guidance, it appears that this guidance is not a mere suggestion for filers. Instead, this guidance meets the definition of a “rule” as defined in the APA. Because the agency failed to follow the APA’s rulemaking process (including notice to the public, solicitation of public comment, consideration of

³ Not “materially harm[ing] the public interest” is a statutory prerequisite for resolving a complaint as a technical correction. See RCW 42.17A.005(52).

⁴ See RCW 42.17A.110(2).

⁵ ***“If a regulation falls within the statutory definition of a rule, it is treated as a rule.”*** Hunter v. Univ. of Washington, 101 Wash. App. 283, 289, 2 P.3d 1022, 1026 (2000).

⁶ ***“The APA provides that in a proceeding involving review of a rule: the court shall declare the rule invalid ... if it finds that [the rule] ... was adopted without compliance with statutory rule-making procedures.... RCW 34.05.570(2)(c). Rule-making procedures under the APA involve providing the public with both notice of the proposed rule and an opportunity to comment on the proposal at a public rule-making hearing. See RCW 34.05.320; RCW 34.05.325.”*** Simpson Tacoma Kraft Co. v. Dep’t of Ecology, 119 Wash. 2d 640, 648–49, 835 P.2d 1030, 1035 (1992).

⁷ ***“The purpose of such rule-making procedures is to ensure that members of the public can participate meaningfully in the development of agency policies which affect them. Andersen, 64 Wash.L.Rev. at 791. In enacting the 1988 APA, the Legislature intended to provide greater public access to administrative decisionmaking. See RCW 34.05.001.”*** Simpson Tacoma Kraft Co. v. Dep’t of Ecology, 119 Wash. 2d 640, 649, 835 P.2d 1030, 1035 (1992)

public comment, debate/approval by the agency's governing body, etc.) the rules would appear to be invalid and unenforceable.

Why am I making such a big deal about such a small thing?

First, I would argue that that's how many negative practices are started, particularly those involving government agencies. The negative practice starts out as a "small thing" and then, when it goes unchallenged, it grows and grows. Eventually, what started out as a "small thing" has become an accepted custom. The adoption of new requirements without notice/outreach to the public is negative because it prevents the community affected by the requirements from participating in their development.

Second, for those of us that must comply with descriptive requirements, this isn't a small thing at all. Very frequently, it is one or two pieces of information for descriptive requirements that we are lacking that turns a relatively straightforward reporting period into an absolute nightmare. This is especially the case when missing small bits of information for multiple clients. As I believe Kurt Young has mentioned at many meetings over the past year when discussing audits, commercial advertisers frequently leave detailed information off their invoices, and we must attempt to track this information down, which is time consuming and frustrating.

Third, on a substantive level, it makes no sense to require us to provide such a great level of detail for expenditures. My best guess is that the number of people statewide who are interested in this level of detail likely number in the mid to high dozens. For those few with such an intense interest, these details (and more) are available to them through the robust commercial advertiser inspection statute.⁸ By and large however, voters are far more interested in who contributes what to campaigns, as opposed to the precise details of the campaign expenditures.

Finally, these descriptive requirements are a smorgasbord for people who enjoy filing PDC complaints for insignificant reasons. Per the *agency's own position in adjudication of complaints against filers who fail to follow the non-RCW/WAC based guidance*, this type of violation "does not materially harm the public interest". If the violation of a requirement does not materially harm the public interest, why should it be a requirement in the first place?

Questions (Response Requested)

To remove any doubt surrounding this set of non-RCW/WAC based guidance and how the agency views this guidance, I am requesting a response to the following questions.

- 1) Are filers legally required to follow the non-RCW/WAC based guidance highlighted in red on the attached "Table of Descriptive Requirements"? Put differently, could we potentially be fined or face other administrative sanctions for failing to include this level of detail on reports or failing

⁸ See RCW 42.17A.345. See also, PDC Declaratory Order 9. Interestingly, in Footnote 1, it says that commercial advertisers were originally required to file regular reports with the Commission about the details of political advertising that they sold until that was changed in 1975. If the PDC believes that it is so important for such a high level of detail to be communicated to the public regarding expenditures, the agency ought to consider requesting that the original statutory language be re-adopted when drafting its 2023 agency request legislation. Link: https://www.pdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/DECL_9.pdf

to amend the reports to include this level of detail when requested by the agency in response to a PDC complaint?

- 2) If the answer to Question 1 is “yes”, on what grounds does this guidance not constitute a “rule”, as defined in RCW 34.05.010(16), that the agency would have to follow the APA’s rulemaking process to lawfully implement? Please cite to relevant statutes/rules/caselaw if applicable.

Conclusion

At its core, the idea that any agency can unilaterally implement new requirements without any basis in state law, without any basis in duly adopted administrative rule, without any notice to or input from the public, and without any approval/action from the agency’s governing body is unreasonable.

Both the agency and the public at large can benefit from the APA’s rulemaking process that includes such important features as notice to the public, outreach to stakeholders, and discussion amongst the Commissioners before any final approval.

Previous iterations of this Commission have followed the APA’s rulemaking process for instituting new descriptive requirements. The current iteration of this Commission should follow this wise tradition. To state the obvious, the Commission doesn’t even have to act on any feedback it receives from the agency’s regulated community before adopting new descriptive requirements. But the agency should at least be willing to hear us out.

As always, if anyone reading this believes that I have gotten my facts wrong or thinks my analysis is off, I encourage you to please reach out to me and say so, identifying with specificity what you believe to be incorrect. However, based on everything I have seen/heard/read, I don’t believe that to be the case.

Best,

Conner Edwards
Campaign Treasurer
(425) 533-1677 cell

PS. Interestingly, the APA foresaw that some agencies may try to use “a statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent” in place of an appropriately adopted rule. To that end, they created a process by which members of the public may petition the Legislature’s Joint Administrative Rules Review Committee (JARRC) to “determine whether the statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, is being used as a rule that has not been adopted in accordance with all provisions of law.” See RCW 34.05.655(1).

PPS. In the past, when the PDC has offered official guidance to the public, it has done so through the use of an Official Interpretation or Declaratory Order. When the agency has done these things, they have been put before the Commissioners for discussion/approval. Also, the agency typically notes these things on the meeting agendas so the public, if they wanted to, could provide comment on them. For these reasons, this seems to be the superior way for the agency to modify guidance to the regulated community.

In WAC 390-05-120 (the only section of the WAC that clearly sets forth the powers of a member of the agency's staff), it says that the Executive Director has the power to "[r]esearch, develop, and draft policy positions, administrative rules, interpretations and advisory options **for presentation to the commission.**" [emphasis added]. To me, this suggests that neither the Executive Director nor any other members of the staff have the ability to unilaterally change agency policy positions or interpretations, and that any proposed changes must be approved by the Commission. From everything I've been able to see, that didn't happen, but it should have.

Table of Descriptive Requirements for Expenditures on Form C4

See RCW 42.17A.240(7) & (12)

Requirements created by the Legislature following the process required by Article II of the Washington State Constitution	Requirements created by the Public Disclosure Commission following the process required by RCW 34.05, the Administrative Procedures Act	Purported requirements unilaterally implemented by agency staff without any basis in state law, without any basis in administrative rule, without any notice to or input from the public, and without any approval/action from the Commissioners
Requirement that, for every itemized expenditure (expenditures over \$50), filers must describe the general purpose of the expenditure in the purpose/description field. RCW 42.17A.240(7).	Requirement that, for expenditures made to vendors that include subpayments on the campaign's behalf to third parties intended to benefit the campaign, that filers must provide a breakdown of these payments and the names of the recipients in the purpose/description field. WAC 390-16-205(1)-(3).	Requirement that, for expenditures that include payments to subvendors, that filers include the full address of the subvendors. ¹ *
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	Requirement that, for expenditures supporting or opposing candidate(s) or ballot measure(s), that filers must identify the candidate(s) or ballot measure(s) in the purpose/description field unless already listed on the statement of organization. WAC 390-16-037(1).	Requirement that, for digital advertising, that filers provide: a) the name of the platform on which ads are appearing if specified by the campaign, and b) the run dates or "number of impressions" in the purpose/description field. ³ *
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	Requirement that, for expenditures made directly to vendors for GOTV phone calls or robocalls, that filers must describe the jurisdiction(s) targeted by the phone calls or robocalls. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for newspaper/periodical advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ^o
	Requirement that, for expenditures made directly to a vendor for printing, that filers must include the printed item and the quantity purchased. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for expenditures reimbursing candidates for lost earnings, that filers provide: a) the candidate's monthly salary/wages/income, and b) the period covered in the purpose/description field.
Footnotes		Requirement that, for expenditures for the printing of yard signs, that filers provide the sizes of the yard signs purchased in the purpose/description field. ⁴ *
<p>* Requirement described in ORCA and not on PDC website. ^o Requirement described on PDC website and not in ORCA. ^o Discrepancy exists between ORCA and PDC website guidance for this requirement: PDC website says filers must include run-dates only "if-known", which implies we don't have to try to track down that information if we don't have it, as is often the case because of poor invoice descriptions on the part of commercial advertisers.</p>	<p>4. In an e-mail sent on 9/23/21, Deputy Director Bradford clarified that we do not need to include the dimensions of the yard signs in the description field if they are 4'x8' or under. This was very positive news for us because virtually all yard signs are 4'x8' or under. On 10/5/21, I requested that the inaccurate guidance in ORCA be corrected. On 5/17/22, noticing this problem had still not been corrected, I asked if there was an estimate on fixing the guidance. I did not receive a response, but it was finally fixed sometime in early July 2022. It took nearly 9 months for the inaccurate guidance to be corrected.</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for radio advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ^o
<p>1. This requirement is directly contradicted by WAC 390-16-205 which provides a clear example of how payments to subvendors are disclosed: by disclosing the name of the subvendor, the money paid to them, and the purpose of the payment; not the address of subvendors. Up until approximately May 2021, when the agency updated ORCA, this was how campaigns disclosed payments to subvendors. This is a frustrating requirement because we are lucky if vendors even disclose the existence of subvendors to us: the address of subvendors does not make it onto the invoices. I cannot imagine why the address of subvendors would be of any interest to the public.</p>	<p>5. This requirement is directly contradicted by WAC 390-16-037(2) which provides a clear example of how to disclose robocalls and does not require us to disclose the quantity of calls or the dates that the calls are made.</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for robocalls, that filers provide: a) the number of calls made, and b) the "period covered" in the purpose/description field. ³ *
<p>2. The language of this that requires us to provide run dates is contradicted by the example of how campaigns should describe payments for broadcast political advertisement contained in WAC 390-16-205, see Example C.</p>	<p>6. The list of categories that filers are being asked to choose from is lengthy, vague, and ever-changing. As of 7/2/22, there are 33 different categories in ORCA, down from the 47(!) different categories we had to choose from last year when this requirement was unilaterally implemented by agency staff over the bipartisan objections of professional campaign treasurers. It is not always clear what category we should use for certain expenditures because of category overlap/vagueness. For context, filers with the FEC only have 12 categories to choose from, which makes categorizing expenditures significantly easier. I sent an e-mail seeking guidance from agency staff on 8/4/21 on what categories we should use for certain common expenditures. Nearly a full calendar year later, I have still not received any response. I have noticed that certain categories have disappeared from the list entirely without any notice or explanation being provided to filers. Because of the confusion related to expenditure categorization, the resulting categorization data is not of high quality or particularly helpful. (I will note that in the past, there was a "chart of accounts" function in the old ORCA that somewhat resembled the new ORCA categorization field. However, unlike the new ORCA categorization field, the "chart of accounts" we put into the program was not visible to public, was not a legal requirement, and for that reason, the majority of us just ignored it.)</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for travel, that filers provide the traveler's name in the purpose/description field. ^o
<p>3. This is another confusing requirement. An "impression" is how many times someone has seen a digital ad. Generally, this wouldn't be a static number: the number we input at the time of drafting the report would already likely be incorrect by the time we file the report if the ad is still active. Are we required to amend our reports when the number of impressions for the ad rises?</p>		Requirement that, for every expenditure, that filers must select a specific expenditure category. ^o *

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON**

In re:

CONNER EDWARDS,
Petitioner.

No: _____

PETITION FOR DECLARATORY
ORDER

Conner Edwards, a professional campaign treasurer, petitions the Public Disclosure Commission (“Commission” or “PDC” or “Agency”) for a binding declaratory order, under RCW 34.05.240 and WAC 390-12-250, to resolve present uncertainty regarding application of RCW 42.17A (“Fair Campaign Practices Act” or “FCPA”) and WAC 390.

BACKGROUND OF PETITION AND RELEVANT FACTS

Introduction

On or around June of 2021, agency staff at the PDC began communicating new guidance to filers relating to how filers describe expenditures on form C4. This new guidance requested that filers provide additional details surrounding certain types of expenditures that agency staff had not previously requested filers provide. In some instances, this guidance directly contradicted relevant provisions of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) covering the same subject matter.

No change in state law or administrative rule necessitated this change in guidance. The Commissioners did not approve this change. Agency stakeholders were not informed that this change was contemplated, nor were they provided an opportunity to provide feedback regarding this change prior to its implementation.

Previous iterations of the Commission have followed the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) rulemaking process for instituting new descriptive requirements.¹ Among other things, this rulemaking process involves: a) informing stakeholders of the contemplated regulatory change, b) providing stakeholders with an opportunity to comment on that change, and c) submitting the proposal to the agency's governing body for approval after consideration of comments received.

Confused by this new guidance that had no basis in state law or administrative rule, I reached out to agency staff to try to get an answer to this question: *was this new guidance just a mere suggestion for filers, or was this new guidance an agency directive that filers would be fined (or face other administrative sanctions) for violating?*

After sending dozens of e-mails back and forth with agency staff, my question was not answered. Over the last 13 months, I have brought up my concerns with this new agency guidance and its applicability in written or spoken testimony at no less than 7 meetings of the PDC. I have also briefly brought up these concerns in meetings with 4 of the 5 Commissioners. To date, I have received no substantive response from the agency that would answer my question.

All of my informal efforts to obtain an answer to this question have completely failed. Having exhausted my informal options, I now submit this Petition for Declaratory Order in the hope that the Commissioners will provide the clear, straightforward answer I have been seeking for over a year.

Agency Guidance

This petition deals heavily with the subject of agency guidance: advice that the agency offers to the public on how to comply with the FCPA. That being the case, it is important to understand the three broad groupings of guidance provided by the PDC.

1. "Plain English" Guidance

This type of guidance is the translation of highly legalistic statutory language into words that people can easily understand. The vast majority of guidance that the agency offers to filers is this type.

¹ See WAC 390-16-037, WAC 390-16-205.

2. Official Commission Interpretive Guidance

This type of guidance is an official expression of the Commission's interpretation on the meaning and applicability of provisions of the FCPA. This type of guidance typically takes the form of Commission Interpretations² or Declaratory Orders.³

There is an established process for the adoption of official Commission interpretive guidance. Consistent with the authority delegated to the Executive Director by rule⁴, agency staff draft a proposed Commission Interpretation or Declaratory Order for presentation to the Commission. Following a presentation by staff, Commissioners have an opportunity to suggest edits to the draft and either accept or reject the proposal. These presentations are noted on the agency's official agendas, so members of the public are aware that the change is being considered and have an opportunity to provide input to the Commissioners before the change is finalized.

3. Staff-Created Interpretive Guidance

This type of guidance is what agency staff claim to be an interpretation of what a particular statute requires. In reality however, this type of guidance appears to a pseudo-legislative expression of what agency staff would prefer a statute to require. I say this because staff-created interpretive guidance, especially as it relates to descriptive requirements, is not based on the plain language of the FCPA or even interpretations of the FCPA as understood by any of the interpretive canons of statutory construction.

This type of guidance, as it relates to descriptive requirements, is concerning to treasurers for a number of reasons. First, compliance with this guidance is an administrative headache for us, as tracking down the precise details of expenditures often involves repeated, time-consuming outreach to third parties. Second, this type of guidance asks us to disclose details of strategic campaign spending decisions beyond that which we believe is legally required. Third, this type of guidance is developed without notice to or input from the public or agency stakeholders. Fourth, this type of guidance is not discussed or

² See RCW 34.05.230.

³ See RCW 34.05.240.

⁴ See WAC 390-05-120.

approved by the Commission. Fifth, we are often not notified that there is new staff-created interpretive guidance and often don't notice this new guidance until many months after the guidance has gone into effect. Sixth, we are unsure whether or not we can be penalized for violating this interpretive guidance if we are otherwise in compliance with RCW 42.17A or WAC 390. Finally, it is not clear that agency staff may issue interpretation of FCPA statutes to begin with, in light of the FCPA's restrictions on the delegation of power to staff and the Commission's limited grant of authority to agency staff to act on the Commission's behalf.

PETITION FOR DECLARATORY ORDER PREREQUISITES

Uncertainty necessitating resolution exists - RCW 34.05.240 (1)(a)

I work as a professional campaign treasurer. In that role, I am responsible for drafting and filing C4s with the PDC on behalf of candidate/political committees. I am unclear on what level of detail I am legally obligated to provide for certain types of expenditures under the FCPA. I have made repeated attempts to reach out to agency staff to resolve this uncertainty. In essence, agency staff respond by saying that the agency "could" find a violation based solely on a violation of staff interpretive guidance. "Could" used in the context of a future event implies an uncertainty. That is the very uncertainty I am hoping to resolve by requesting a declaratory order.

For reference, the current list of staff-created interpretive guidance as it relates to descriptive requirements is attached to this petition as Exhibit A.

There is actual controversy arising from the uncertainty such that a declaratory order will not be merely an advisory opinion – RCW 34.05.240 (1)(b)

Filers are unclear as to what level of detail we are legally obligated to provide when describing the "purpose" of expenditures on form C4. Candidate/political committees and campaign treasurers would generally prefer to disclose as few details as possible about expenditures on form C4 while still remaining compliant with RCW 42.17A and WAC 390. For candidate/political committees, this is usually because they don't want to disclose strategic campaign spending decisions to opponents unless that disclosure is required by law. For campaign treasurers, it is because tracking down information relating to the precise nature of expenditures is a time-consuming administrative nightmare, particularly for pre-election reports

where treasurers are only afforded 24 hours from the end of the reporting period to prepare and file the required C4. Having to track down precise details about expenditures that treasurers may not be legally obligated to report unnecessarily increases the amount of time it takes to prepare draft C4 reports for each campaign the treasurer serves. Since there is such a limited number of hours for preparing these reports, this uncertainty has the effect of limiting the number of clients that campaign treasurers would otherwise choose to take on.⁵ This reduces the potential net income of campaign treasurers.

That the uncertainty adversely affects the petitioner - RCW 34.05.240 (1)(c)

See above. As a campaign treasurer, I currently spend time tracking down and reporting precise details about expenditures that may not legally need to be reported. Additionally, because of the current tight 24-hour turnaround that campaign treasurers currently have to file pre-election C4 reports, the amount of time spent per client tracking down precise details relating to expenditures limits the overall number of clients that I would otherwise choose to take on.

That the adverse effect of uncertainty on the petitioner outweighs any adverse effects on others or on the general public that may likely arise from the order requested - RCW 34.05.240 (1)(c)

Under the present circumstances, issuing a declaratory order on one or both of the questions presented would have no adverse effect on others or the general public. On the contrary, it would clarify the reach of the FCPA, and provide useful guidance to agency staff and Washington-

⁵ Two other professional campaign treasurers offered comments relating to this point at the August 25, 2022. Regular Meeting of the PDC. Link: <https://tvw.org/video/Public-Disclosure-Commission-2022081063/?eventID=2022081063>

Abbot Taylor: *“As some other treasurers have attested to, **there are four days out of the year that determine how many clients I can take on.** And those 4 days are those 24-hour turnarounds on those C4s. **There is only so much, so many accounts you can reconcile and C4s you can whip through in a 24-hour period.**”* (2:49:32 – 2:50:00)

Janet Miller: *“I think the timelines offered right now [for C4 reporting] are really almost impossible. Last election cycle I literally pulled two all-nighters to make sure that I was able to get my C4s in within the 24-hour period. It’s not, it can’t be done well, let’s put it that way. And what we want is reports to get in and we want them to be on time and we want them to be correct, and a 24-hour turnaround time for those is untenable.”* (10:44 – 11:20)

based campaigns/political committees. It may highlight a need for rulemaking or the issuance of an official Commission interpretation on the subject of descriptive requirements.

Petition clearly states the question the declaratory order is to answer – WAC 390-12-250

(1)(a)

See below section, entitled “Questions Presented”.

Petition provides a statement of facts which raise the question – WAC 390-12-250 (1)(b)

See above section, entitled “Background of Petition and Relevant Facts”. See also the current list of staff-created interpretive guidance as it relates to descriptive requirements, attached to this petition as Exhibit A.

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. May the Executive Director (or their designee) issue their own interpretations of what the FCPA requires without approval from the Commission, in spite of the FCPA’s restrictions on the powers of the Executive Director and the Commission’s non-delegation of the power to issue interpretations?
2. Does the violation of staff-created interpretative guidance relating to descriptive requirements constitute a violation of the FCPA even though the guidance has no basis in state law or administrative rule?

REQUESTED DECLARATORY ORDER

I request a declaratory order stating that: 1) the Executive Director (or their designee) may not issue interpretive guidance without approval from the Commission, and 2) that the violation of staff-created interpretive guidance relating to descriptive requirements does not constitute a violation of the FCPA.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Executive Director (or their designee) may not issue interpretive guidance without approval from the Commission.**

In 1972, the Public Disclosure Commission was created when voters overwhelmingly approved Initiative 276. Pursuant to the language of that initiative, the agency is governed by a 5-member board of individuals (“Commissioners”) who are appointed by the Governor with the consent of the Washington State Senate.

The initiative assigned several responsibilities and powers to the Commissioners.⁶ One of these powers was the ability to appoint an Executive Director to assist the Commission in carrying out its duties.⁷

The framers of the initiative, seeking to retain most of the agency’s power with the Commissioners, limited the powers of the Executive Director in several important ways. First, the Executive Director was prohibited from adopting, amending, or rescinding rules.⁸ That power could only be exercised by the Commissioners. Second, the Executive Director was prohibited from exercising the power to determine that a violation of the FCPA had occurred.⁹ That power could also only be exercised by the Commissioners.

Finally, the Executive Director was only allowed to perform such duties and have such powers as the Commission specifically delegated.¹⁰ All other responsibilities and powers were retained with the Commissioners. Consistent with this statutory authority, the Commissioners specifically delegated certain powers to the Executive Director via rule.¹¹ This rule also allowed the Executive Director to delegate this authority to their subordinates as needed and appropriate.¹²

Relevant to the discussion today, the Commission granted the Executive Director the power to: “**research, develop, and draft** policy positions, administrative rules, **interpretations** and advisory options **for presentation to the commission**” [emphasis added]. This language indicates that the Executive Director may not act unilaterally to issue interpretations of FCPA requirements.

⁶ RCW 42.17A.105, RCW 42.17A.110.

⁷ RCW 42.17A.110(2).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ WAC 390-05-210.

¹² *Id.*

Rather, the Executive Director may only research, develop, and draft interpretations for presentation to the Commission; it is the Commissioners' prerogative to adopt, modify or reject a proposed interpretation.

To date, the Commission has not issued an interpretation of what constitutes "purpose of each expenditure" as that language is used in RCW 42.17A.240(7), the provision of the FCPA most at issue in this Petition.¹³

2. The violation of staff-created interpretive guidance, as it relates to descriptive requirements, does not constitute a violation of the FCPA.

Assuming, *arguendo*, that the Commission answers the above question by saying the Executive Director *does* have the ability to unilaterally issue their own interpretations of FCPA requirements, a more important question remains: does the violation of these interpretations constitute a violation of the FCPA? For purposes of this petition, I am asking the question only in the narrow context of staff interpretations as they relate to descriptive requirements.

The Commission should issue an order to clarify that violation of current staff-created interpretive guidance is not a violation of the FCPA, because there is no reasonable basis for staff's interpretation of what the FCPA requires as it relates to the term "purpose of each expenditure" described in RCW 42.17A.240(7). A complete list of staff-created interpretive guidance, as it exists today, is attached as Exhibit A. This guidance purports to interpret RCW 42.17A.240(7), the statute most at issue in this petition.

That statute reads, in relevant part: "[e]ach report required under RCW 42.17A.235 (1) through (4)¹⁴... shall disclose the following... [t]he name and address of each person to whom an expenditure was made in the aggregate amount of more than fifty dollars during the period covered by this report, the amount, date, and **purpose of each expenditure**, and the total sum of all expenditures." [emphasis added]

¹³ See list of all Commission Interpretations: https://www.pdc.wa.gov/rules-enforcement/guidelines-restrictions?combine=&field_type_of_guideline_target_id_1=85

¹⁴ This language references form C4.

The Britannica Dictionary defines purpose as meaning: “the reason why something is done or used : the aim or intention of something.” This is the plain meaning of the word “purpose”, and that term is not defined elsewhere in the FCPA. The FCPA’s use of the broad term “purpose” can be contrasted with language contained elsewhere in the FCPA, such as RCW 42.17A.345 (a.k.a. “Commercial Advertiser Statute”) that requires commercial advertisers to maintain and make available upon request a description of “[the] **exact nature and extent of the services rendered**”.¹⁵ [emphasis added]

If you read RCW 42.17A.240(7) carefully, you will notice that it makes no mention of requiring filers to provide the number of “impressions” for digital ad purchases, or the name of the traveler for travel-related campaign expenditures, or the precise methodology used by filers to calculate mileage reimbursements, or any of the other purported requirements listed as staff-created interpretive guidance in Exhibit A. Neither do WAC 390-16-037 or WAC 390-16-205 (administrative rules adopted lawfully under the APA relating to RCW 42.17A.240(7)) make any mention of these requirements.

That being the case, on what basis are agency staff requesting that filers disclose these details? Agency staff insist that their guidance on descriptive requirements is their interpretation of what RCW 42.17A.240(7) requires.

And how did agency staff arrive at these interpretations? It’s not entirely clear. No canon of statutory interpretation applied to RCW 42.17A.240(7) could reasonably lead to the guidance that agency staff have generated. I don’t have a definitive answer. However, from my conversations with agency staff, it appears that agency staff seem to interpret RCW 42.17A.240(7) as providing them with a broad, pseudo-legislative grant of authority to generate whatever interpretation of “purpose of each expenditure” they want, whenever they want, as long as they are willing to claim these details are of interest to the public or the agency.

Agency staff may try to dispute this claim and point to one statute and two administrative rules as being a basis for some of the interpretive guidance they have created. These arguments are easily debunked.

¹⁵ RCW 42.17A.345(1)(b)

Staff-created Interpretive Guidance on Run Dates

First, staff may claim that their interpretive guidance requesting filers provide the run date for certain forms of political advertising (such as digital ads, robocalls, newspaper ads) in the “purpose” field on form C4 is because of the requirement contained in RCW 42.17A.305(1)(e).

This claim is based on a misreading of what that statute requires. RCW 42.17A.305 describes the reporting obligations of entities that make electioneering communications, and not entities that sponsor political advertising generally.

At first glance, the term “electioneering communication” would appear to be synonymous with political advertising based on its plain meaning, but “electioneering communication” is actually a FCPA term of art that is defined in RCW 42.17A.005(21). Per RCW 42.17A.005(21)(b)(viii), **any** expenditure made by an authorized committee of a candidate for state, local, or judicial office is explicitly **not** considered an electioneering communication. This means that normal political advertising sponsored by a candidate committee is NOT an electioneering communication, and is not governed by the requirements of RCW 42.17A.305(1)(e).

Furthermore, the statute requires that the sponsor of electioneering communications report the run date on a form developed by the Commission for the disclosure of independent expenditures/electioneering communications and this form is designated as form C6, not form C4. Form C4 is the form relating to the “purpose” statute at question here.¹⁶ Candidate authorized committees are not required to file C6 forms when they make expenditures for candidate political advertising.

Put simply, RCW 42.17A.305(1)(e) requires *only* sponsors of electioneering communications to disclose the run dates of their ads and it is *only* required that this information be disclosed on form C6, not form C4. As such, this statute provides no basis for agency staff requesting that filers disclose run dates of political advertising expenditures on form C4.

Staff-created Interpretive Guidance on Quantities

Next, staff may claim that their guidance requesting filers provide quantities for certain types of expenditures (such as robocalls, numbers of “impressions” for digital advertisements, or miles

¹⁶ WAC 390-16-060.

traveled for mileage reimbursements) is based on WAC 390-16-037. Specifically, they may point to “Example B” in that rule as a basis for requesting filers to disclose quantities for certain expenditures.

Of course, the language in “Example B” requiring quantities specifically reads: “if an expenditure is made directly to a vendor **for printing.**” [emphasis added] In the only other example provided in the rule, which pertains to robocalls, the number of robocalls was not disclosed in the purpose field, suggesting disclosure of quantities is not a requirement generally and is only a requirement as it relates to printing. It is important to note that the example in WAC 390-16-037 of how to properly disclose details relating to robocalls in the purpose field explicitly and directly contradicts the staff-created interpretive guidance on the same subject. The staff interpretive guidance requests we disclose the run dates and quantities of robocalls for robocall expenditures, but the example provided in rule shows that those details need not be disclosed.

As such, agency staff have no basis under WAC 390-16-037 for requesting that filers provide quantities for expenditures (except for printed items, which is a requirement).

Staff-created Interpretive Guidance on Subvendors

Finally, staff may claim that their guidance requesting filers provide addresses of subvendors is based on WAC 390-16-205. Specifically, the language in WAC 390-16-205 states that expenditures made by vendors to other vendors (subvendors) that benefit the candidate or committee making the expenditure shall be reported: “as if made or incurred by the candidate or committee directly”.

But what does that mean exactly? Should each payment to subvendors be reported with a separate address for the subvendor? The rule answers that question with a definitive “no” by providing a clear example of how filers should disclose payments to subvendors. The expenditure is listed as a single line item, and in the description field, the filer provides an item-by-item breakdown with the cost associated with each item.

Not only is this method of reporting consistent with the example provided in WAC 390-16-205, but it is also consistent with guidance that the agency has previously offered to filers who use ORCA.¹⁷

As such, agency staff has no basis under the FCPA for requesting that filers provide the address of subvendors.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Commission should enter a declaratory order that the agency's Executive Director (or their designee) may not issue their own interpretations of what the FCPA requires, absent approval from the Commission. Furthermore, the Commission should enter a declaratory order that the violation of staff-created interpretive guidance, as it relates to descriptive requirements, does not constitute a violation of the FCPA as the interpretive guidance has no basis in RCW 42.17A.240(7) or relevant administrative rules.

In the event the Commission does believe there is some merit in requiring filers to comply with current staff-created interpretive guidance,¹⁹ the Commission should engage in rulemaking to codify this guidance as a formal requirement in the Washington Administrative Code. RCW 42.17A.240(12) provides a broad grant of authority to the Commission to require filers to

¹⁷ See archived PDC manual for candidates circa 2015: <http://web.archive.org/web/20151016133540/http://www.pdc.wa.gov/archive/filerassistance/manuals/pdf/2015/2015.Man.StCan.pdf> (See pg. 57-58 as numbered in PDF, pgs. 49-50 as numbered in manual: note how addresses for subvendors "XYZ Print Co." and "My Mailhouse" are not provided.)

¹⁸ On a substantive level, I want to note that filers are almost never told the addresses for subvendors, and we are lucky if we are even notified of the existence of subvendors for certain types of expenditures. I simply cannot imagine why the addresses of subvendors (as opposed to just their identity like we have always provided), would be of interest to the public. If they want to find the address of the subvendor, why don't they just Google it like we have to? Up until recently, we have never been requested to provide the address of subvendors and the world hasn't fallen apart. Who in the agency came up with this and why? Why wasn't the Commission consulted about this? Why weren't filers given an opportunity to comment on this change?

¹⁹ It is worth pointing out that filer compliance with staff-created interpretive guidance as it relates to descriptive requirements is low to practically non-existent depending on the individual piece of guidance. For instance, virtually no-one complies with the guidance that, for describing in-kind contributions, filers should include the full address of the vendor that the in-kind contribution was purchased from (as opposed to simply disclosing the address of the in-kind contributor). I think this non-compliance can be attributed to four things: 1) staff only created this guidance sometime in the last 12 months, 2) staff did not send out a notice to filers that they had created this guidance, 3) this new agency guidance contradicts old agency guidance, and 4) filers feel the voters wouldn't have the slightest bit of interest in this information.

provide additional information beyond that which must be disclosed by statute on form C4. There is only one major restriction on the exercise of this authority: the requirement must be instituted via rule, following the APA's rulemaking process. Past iterations of the Commission have used this rulemaking process to impose new descriptive requirements on filers.²⁰

The procedures required by the APA's rulemaking process (which requires outreach to the public, opportunity for interested parties to provide comment on proposed requirements, and discussion/approval by those who govern the agency) has been described by some as bureaucratic. The bureaucracy associated with the APA's rulemaking process is intended to ensure that members of the public can meaningfully participate in the development of agency requirements which affect them. This bureaucracy is a feature, not a glitch, of the APA's rulemaking process.

If the Commission believes that some or all of the staff-created interpretive guidance may have some value as legal requirements, the Commission should exercise its rulemaking authority to engage in a collaborative process with the public, agency stakeholders, and agency staff, to formulate a proposal that definitively identifies the level of detail that filers must provide when describing expenditures on form C4. To provide the Commission with this option, an APA Petition to initiate rulemaking on this subject will be filed concurrently with this Petition for Declaratory Order.

In the event the Commission declines to answer the questions posed in this Petition for Declaratory Order and also declines to codify staff-created interpretive guidance into rule, I intend to draw the conclusion that the staff-created interpretive guidance relating to descriptive requirements is only a mere suggestion to filers, and that violation of this interpretive guidance does not constitute a violation of the FCPA.

If, following final agency action on these petitions, anyone from the agency believes that conclusion to be incorrect, I request that they inform me of the reason(s) why they believe that to be the case by e-mailing me directly at CG.Edwards53@gmail.com.

²⁰ See WAC 390-16-037, WAC 390-16-205.

DATE: September 9, 2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Conner Edwards". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Conner Edwards
Campaign Treasurer

Exhibit A: Current Staff-created Interpretive Guidance (9/9/22)

This is a list of current staff-created interpretive guidance, issued unilaterally by agency staff without any basis in state law, without any basis in administrative rule, without any input from the public, and without any approval/action from the Commissioners.

1. Requirement that, for expenditures that include payments to subvendors, that filers include the full address of the subvendors.
2. Requirement that, for expenditures for broadcast/TV advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field.
3. Requirement that, for digital advertising, that filers provide: a) the name of the platform on which ads are appearing if specified by the campaign, and b) the run dates or "number of impressions" in the purpose/description field.
4. Requirement that, for mileage reimbursement expenditures, that filers provide: a) the number of miles, b) reimbursement rate used, and c) period covered in the purpose/description field.
5. Requirement that, for newspaper/periodical advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field.
6. Requirement that, for expenditures reimbursing candidates for lost earnings, that filers provide: a) the candidate's monthly salary/wages/income, and b) the period covered in the purpose/description field.
7. Requirement that, for expenditures for radio advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field.
8. Requirement that, for expenditures for robocalls, that filers provide: a) the number of calls made, and b) the "period covered" in the purpose/description field.
9. Requirement that, for expenditures for travel, that filers provide the traveler's name in the purpose/description field.
10. Requirement that, for every expenditure, that filers must select a specific expenditure category.

Petition For Review of a Policy or Interpretive Statement, Guideline, or Document that is of General Applicability

Introduction

My name is Conner Edwards, and I am a campaign treasurer that works for a number of campaigns and committees in Washington State. I am submitting this Petition because I believe the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) is violating the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) by issuing “guidance” statements that are being enforced by the agency as if they were rules as defined in RCW 34.05.010(16).

This is concerning because, unlike properly adopted rules, members of the agency’s regulated community have not been afforded the opportunity to provide input on these “guidance documents” to the Commissioners prior to their adoption. This has the effect of stripping away from us the ability to participate meaningfully in the development of agency policies which affect us.

In an effort to correct this issue and restore our ability to participate in the development of agency policies which affect us, I recently filed three Petitions with the PDC: 1) a Petition to Convert Interpretive and Policy Statement into Rule (per RCW 34.05.230), 2) a Rulemaking Petition (per RCW 34.05.330), and 3) a Petition For Declaratory Order (per RCW 34.05.240). All these petitions had the same aim: to either a) convince the agency to initiate formal rulemaking and allow members of the regulated community to participate in the development of the rules, or b) convince the agency to admit that these “guidance statements” were unenforceable against filers.

The agency denied all these petitions. Having exhausted all of my options to correct this issue with the agency, I am now appealing to JAARC, which appears to deal extensively with these types of issues.

Background

In June of 2021, a new version of ORCA was released, the first significant update in many years. For background, ORCA is the program that campaigns use to communicate contribution/expenditure information to the public via the filing of C3/C4 reports.

This new version of ORCA had an updated interface for entering expenditures. As part of this new interface, the program requested that we provide additional details for certain types of expenditures that *we had never previously been asked to disclose and that no statute or administrative rule required us to disclose*. Some of these requests were very odd, asking us to disclose things like the address of sub-vendors, the dimensions of yard signs, or the number of “impressions” for digital ads.¹

Shortly after seeing this new guidance, I reached out to agency staff to try to determine if this new non-RCW/WAC based guidance was either: a) just a mere suggestion for filers on what to include in the

¹ Even today, over 18 months after the new guidance on descriptive requirements was put into ORCA, much of this guidance can only be found by ORCA users and not folks who use the agency’s website to research requirements. See website: <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/registration-reporting/candidates-committees/expenditures-debts/expenditures-require-additional-disclosure>

description field, or b) ostensibly a new legal requirement that campaigns could conceivably be fined or otherwise penalized for failing to comply with.

If the answer was the former (just a mere suggestion) that wouldn't be problematic at all; agencies can suggest whatever they'd like to suggest. If the answer was the latter (ostensibly a new legal requirement) that would be problematic because state agencies are required to go through the APA's rulemaking process to implement new legal requirements and that process had not been followed. I looked through old agency agendas, meeting minutes, and listened to recordings of previous meetings. Not only had the APA's formal rulemaking process not been followed, I could find no evidence of *any* notice to the public, outreach to agency stakeholders, or even any discussion or approval from the Commissioners on the updated guidance.

Looking for Answers

After a series of lengthy/frustrating e-mail conversations with agency staff, my question was not answered. I filed a series of complaints with the sole intention of testing the agency to see how it would respond to a complaint alleging a violation of this non-RCW/WAC based guidance.² In response, the agency demanded that the respondents update their reports to comply with the new non-RCW/WAC based guidance.³ After the respondents updated their reports, the agency dismissed the complaints as "requests for technical correction". In essence, when the agency decides to treat a complaint as a "request for technical correction", they are asking the respondent to correct some action the agency perceives as being violative. If the respondent does not take the corrective action suggested by the agency, they are subjected to an investigation which can lead to fines and other forms of administrative sanctions. Contrast this to a complaint alleging some action that the agency did not perceive to be violative: it would be dismissed as "frivolous or unfounded" as outlined in WAC 390-37-060(1)(a).

So, seemingly, the question had finally been answered: the new non-RCW/WAC based guidance was not a mere suggestion to filers but rather something that the agency viewed as a legally enforceable requirement; albeit a requirement the violation of which did not materially harm the public interest.⁴

This was concerning because, per RCW 42.17A.110, it is the appointed Commissioners who are empowered to adopt, modify, and rescind rules, following the APA's rulemaking process. This statute specifically prevents staff from exercising this power.⁵

What is a "rule" anyways?

"Rule" is a term of art defined in RCW 34.05.010(16), the Administrative Procedures Act. Under that statute, "rule" is defined to mean, in relevant part: "any agency order, directive, or regulation of general applicability (a) the violation of which subjects a person to a penalty or administrative sanction;...".

In other words, a requirement does not have to be in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) in order to be considered a rule; it is a rule if it meets the definition of "rule" contained in RCW

² See PDC Case No. 98589, 98610, 98702, 98707, 98732, 98734, & 95815 (2).

³ An example of this demand (obtained by a public record request) is attached as Attachment A.

⁴ Not "materially harm[ing] the public interest" is a statutory prerequisite for resolving a complaint as a technical correction. See RCW 42.17A.005(52).

⁵ See RCW 42.17A.110(2).

34.05.010(16).⁶ If a requirement meets the APA's definition of a rule, the agency must follow the APA's rulemaking process; if the agency fails to follow that process, the rule is invalid.⁷ The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that members of the public can meaningfully participate in the development of agency requirements that affect them.⁸ While the APA's process may seem bureaucratic, it has several important components, such as a) notice to the public, b) solicitation of public comment, c) consideration of public comment, and d) debate/approval by the agency's governing body.

The Takeaway

Based on the agency's conduct in adjudicating complaints alleging violation of the non-RCW/WAC based guidance, it appears that this guidance is not a mere suggestion for filers. Instead, this guidance meets the definition of a "rule" as defined in the APA. Because the agency failed to follow the APA's rulemaking process (including notice to the public, solicitation of public comment, consideration of public comment, debate/approval by the agency's governing body, etc.) the rules would appear to be invalid and unenforceable.

Why am I making such a big deal about such a small thing?

First, I would argue that that's how many negative practices are started, particularly those involving government agencies. The negative practice starts out as a "small thing" and then, when it goes unchallenged, it grows and grows. Eventually, what started out as a "small thing" has become an accepted custom. The adoption of new requirements without notice/outreach to the public is negative because it prevents the community affected by the requirements from participating in their development.

Second, for those of us that must comply with descriptive requirements, this isn't a small thing at all. Very frequently, it is one or two pieces of information for descriptive requirements that we are lacking that turns a relatively straightforward reporting period into an absolute nightmare. This is especially the case when missing small bits of information for multiple clients. Vendors frequently leave detailed information off their invoices, and we must attempt to track this information down, which is time consuming and frustrating.

Third, on a substantive level, it makes no sense to require us to provide such a great level of detail for expenditures. My best guess is that the number of people statewide who are interested in this level of detail likely number in the mid to high dozens. For those few with such an intense interest, these details

⁶*"If a regulation falls within the statutory definition of a rule, it is treated as a rule."* Hunter v. Univ. of Washington, 101 Wash. App. 283, 289, 2 P.3d 1022, 1026 (2000).

⁷*"The APA provides that in a proceeding involving review of a rule: the court shall declare the rule invalid ... if it finds that [the rule] ... was adopted without compliance with statutory rule-making procedures.... RCW 34.05.570(2)(c). Rule-making procedures under the APA involve providing the public with both notice of the proposed rule and an opportunity to comment on the proposal at a public rule-making hearing. See RCW 34.05.320; RCW 34.05.325."* Simpson Tacoma Kraft Co. v. Dep't of Ecology, 119 Wash. 2d 640, 648-49, 835 P.2d 1030, 1035 (1992).

⁸*"The purpose of such rule-making procedures is to ensure that members of the public can participate meaningfully in the development of agency policies which affect them. Andersen, 64 Wash.L.Rev. at 791. In enacting the 1988 APA, the Legislature intended to provide greater public access to administrative decisionmaking. See RCW 34.05.001."* Simpson Tacoma Kraft Co. v. Dep't of Ecology, 119 Wash. 2d 640, 649, 835 P.2d 1030, 1035 (1992)

(and more) are available to them through the robust commercial advertiser inspection statute.⁹ By and large however, voters are far more interested in who contributes what to campaigns, as opposed to the precise details of the campaign expenditures.

Finally, these descriptive requirements are a smorgasbord for people who enjoy filing PDC complaints for insignificant reasons. Per the *agency's own position in adjudication of complaints against filers who fail to follow the non-RCW/WAC based guidance*, this type of violation "does not materially harm the public interest". If the violation of a requirement does not materially harm the public interest, why should it be a requirement in the first place?

Conclusion

At its core, the idea that any agency can unilaterally implement new requirements without any basis in state law, without any basis in duly adopted administrative rule, without any notice to or input from the public, and without any approval/action from the agency's governing body is unreasonable.

Both the agency and the public at large can benefit from the APA's rulemaking process that includes such important features as notice to the public, outreach to stakeholders, and discussion amongst the Commissioners before any final approval.

Agency staff have taken the position that it would be impossible to adequately catalog in WAC all of the details that would be required for filers to meet their obligations under state law. This is absolute nonsense. The staff-created guidance on the subject of descriptive requirements effectively do exactly that: these guidance statements are phrased like rules are and implemented as if they were rules during the enforcement process. There is no reason why the agency could not have implemented their "guidance" as requirements following the proper rulemaking process.

Previous iterations of the Commission have followed the APA's rulemaking process for instituting new descriptive requirements. The current iteration of the Commission should follow this wise tradition. To state the obvious, the Commission doesn't even have to act on any feedback it receives from the agency's regulated community before adopting new descriptive requirements. But the agency should at least be willing to hear us out.

Treasurers, and other members of the agency's regulated community deserve to be informed of pending, contemplated changes to agency legal requirements and to participate in the development of these requirements. We are being denied that opportunity.

For the foregoing reasons, JAARC should enter a finding that the PDC is using a guidance document in the place of a rule.

Best,

Conner Edwards
Campaign Treasurer
(425) 533-1677 cell

⁹ See RCW 42.17A.345. See also, PDC Declaratory Order 9.

Statutory Prerequisites

(4) A petition for review of a policy or interpretive statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, under subsection (1) of this section shall:

(a) Identify the specific policy or interpretative statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, to be reviewed;

See chart on next page, specifically I am challenging the requirements in the red column.

(b) Identify the specific statute which the rule interprets or implements;

They purport to interpret RCW 42.17A.240(7).

(c) State the reasons why the petitioner believes that the policy or interpretive statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, meets the definition of a rule under RCW 34.05.010 and should have been adopted according to the procedures of this chapter;

See above reasons on page 1-4.

(d) Identify any known judicial action regarding the policy or interpretive statement, guideline, or document that is of general applicability, or its equivalent, or statutes identified in the petition.

N/A

Table of Descriptive Requirements for Expenditures on Form C4

See RCW 42.17A.240(7) & (12)

Requirements created by the Legislature following the process required by Article II of the Washington State Constitution	Requirements created by the Public Disclosure Commission following the process required by RCW 34.05, the Administrative Procedures Act	Purported requirements unilaterally implemented by agency staff without any basis in state law, without any basis in administrative rule, without any notice to or input from the public, and without any approval/action from the Commissioners
Requirement that, for every itemized expenditure (expenditures over \$50), filers must describe the general purpose of the expenditure in the purpose/description field. RCW 42.17A.240(7).	Requirement that, for expenditures made to vendors that include subpayments on the campaign's behalf to third parties intended to benefit the campaign, that filers must provide a breakdown of these payments and the names of the recipients in the purpose/description field. WAC 390-16-205(1)-(3).	Requirement that, for expenditures that include payments to subvendors, that filers include the full address of the subvendors. ¹ *
Requirement that, for expenditure made for soliciting or procuring signatures on an initiative or referendum petition, filers must include the electronic contact information of each person to whom an expenditure was made in the purpose/description field. RCW 42.17A.240(8).	Requirement that, for expenditures made to consultants or other agents to perform tasks such as fundraising, survey design, or campaign plan development, that filers describe those tasks in the purpose/description field. WAC 390-16-205(3).	Requirement that, for expenditures for broadcast/TV advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ² ◊
	Requirement that, for expenditures supporting or opposing candidate(s) or ballot measure(s), that filers must identify the candidate(s) or ballot measure(s) in the purpose/description field unless already listed on the statement of organization. WAC 390-16-037(1).	Requirement that, for digital advertising, that filers provide: a) the name of the platform on which ads are appearing if specified by the campaign, and b) the run dates or "number of impressions" in the purpose/description field. ³ *
	Requirement that, for expenditures made to a candidate or political committee pursuant to an agreement or understanding of any kind regarding how the recipient will use the expenditure, that filers must describe that agreement or understanding in the purpose/description field. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for mileage reimbursement expenditures, that filers provide: a) the number of miles, b) reimbursement rate used, and c) period covered in the purpose/description field. *
	Requirement that, for expenditures made directly to vendors for GOTV phone calls or robocalls, that filers must describe the jurisdiction(s) targeted by the phone calls or robocalls. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for newspaper/periodical advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ◊
	Requirement that, for expenditures made directly to a vendor for printing, that filers must include the printed item and the quantity purchased. WAC 390-16-037(2).	Requirement that, for expenditures reimbursing candidates for lost earnings, that filers provide: a) the candidate's monthly salary/wages/income, and b) the period covered in the purpose/description field.
Footnotes		Requirement that, for expenditures for the printing of yard signs, that filers provide the sizes of the yard signs purchased in the purpose/description field. ⁴ *
<p>* Requirement described in ORCA and not on PDC website. ◊ Requirement described on PDC website and not in ORCA. ◉ Discrepancy exists between ORCA and PDC website guidance for this requirement: PDC website says filers must include run-dates only "if-known", which implies we don't have to try to track down that information if we don't have it, as is often the case because of poor invoice descriptions on the part of commercial advertisers.</p>	<p>4. In an e-mail sent on 9/23/21, Deputy Director Bradford clarified that we do not need to include the dimensions of the yard signs in the description field if they are 4'x8' or under. This was very positive news for us because virtually all yard signs are 4'x8' or under. On 10/5/21, I requested that the inaccurate guidance in ORCA be corrected. On 5/17/22, noticing this problem had still not been corrected, I asked if there was an estimate on fixing the guidance. I did not receive a response, but it was finally fixed sometime in early July 2022. It took nearly 9 months for the inaccurate guidance to be corrected.</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for radio advertising, that filers provide the dates that the ads are running in the purpose/description field. ◊
<p>1. This requirement is directly contradicted by WAC 390-16-205 which provides a clear example of how payments to subvendors are disclosed: by disclosing the name of the subvendor, the money paid to them, and the purpose of the payment; not the address of subvendors. Up until approximately May 2021, when the agency updated ORCA, this was how campaigns disclosed payments to subvendors. This is a frustrating requirement because we are lucky if vendors even disclose the existence of subvendors to us: the address of subvendors does not make it onto the invoices. I cannot imagine why the address of subvendors would be of any interest to the public.</p>	<p>5. This requirement is directly contradicted by WAC 390-16-037(2) which provides a clear example of how to disclose robocalls and does not require us to disclose the quantity of calls or the dates that the calls are made.</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for robocalls, that filers provide: a) the number of calls made, and b) the "period covered" in the purpose/description field. ⁵ *
<p>2. The language of this that requires us to provide run dates is contradicted by the example of how campaigns should describe payments for broadcast political advertisement contained in WAC 390-16-205, see Example C.</p>	<p>6. The list of categories that filers are being asked to choose from is lengthy, vague, and ever-changing. As of 7/2/22, there are 33 different categories in ORCA, down from the 47(!) different categories we had to choose from last year when this requirement was unilaterally implemented by agency staff over the bipartisan objections of professional campaign treasurers. It is not always clear what category we should use for certain expenditures because of category overlap/vagueness. For context, filers with the FEC only have 12 categories to choose from, which makes categorizing expenditures significantly easier. I sent an e-mail seeking guidance from agency staff on 8/4/21 on what categories we should use for certain common expenditures. Nearly a full calendar year later, I have still not received any response. I have noticed that certain categories have disappeared from the list entirely without any notice or explanation being provided to filers. Because of the confusion related to expenditure categorization, the resulting categorization data is not of high quality or particularly helpful. (I will note that in the past, there was a "chart of accounts" function in the old ORCA that somewhat resembled the new ORCA categorization field. However, unlike the new ORCA categorization field, the "chart of accounts" we put into the program was not visible to public, was not a legal requirement, and for that reason, the majority of us just ignored it.)</p>	Requirement that, for expenditures for travel, that filers provide the traveler's name in the purpose/description field. ◊
<p>3. This is another confusing requirement. An "impression" is how many times someone has seen a digital ad. Generally, this wouldn't be a static number: the number we input at the time of drafting the report would already likely be incorrect by the time we file the report if the ad is still active. Are we required to amend our reports when the number of impressions for the ad rises?</p>		Requirement that, for every expenditure, that filers must select a specific expenditure category. ⁶ *

Attachment A

Here (highlighted in yellow) you can see an example of agency staff representing staff-created interpretive guidance to a respondent as a legal requirement, asking them to amend their reports to comply with the guidance. Non-highlighted portions of the third paragraph represent actual legal requirements under WAC 390-16-037 or WAC 390-16-205.

4:15 PM [#98707] Burkman, Jack: Alleged violation of RCW 42.17A.240 by failing to sufficiently describe expenditures undertaken by 2019 campaign. (EY '19; Sep '21) : Washington Public D.

Tabatha Blacksmith replied

a year ago (Thu, 23 Sep 2021 at 9:10 AM)



To: jburkman@portvanusa.com

Hello Jack Burkman,

The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) received a complaint from Connor Edwards, which has been assigned PDC Case Number **98707**. Please reference this case number on any future communications with the PDC regarding this complaint.

The complaint alleges violations of RCW 42.17A.240 for failing to accurately disclose the expenditure descriptions for political advertisements undertaken by your 2019 campaign for Port Commissioner for the Port of Vancouver ("Campaign"). Specifically, the complaint alleged your Campaign failed to provide the required expenditure description for four Facebook ads totaling \$646.41 that were disclosed on the Post-General Election C-4 report.

For your information, campaign expenditures made for political advertisements frequently require additional expenditure description information such as the number of mail pieces printed, yard signs produced, run dates and per station breakdown for TV/radio broadcasts, run dates for newspaper advertisements, and date ranges and impressions for social media advertisements.

In reviewing the complaint allegations and the reports filed by your 2019 Campaign, staff discovered additional expenditures made for political advertisements that appear to require you to file amended C-4 reports. The C-4 reports that require amending include the 21-Day and 7-Day Pre-Primary Election C-4 reports, the Post-Primary C-4 report, and the 21-Day and 7-Day Pre-General Election C-4 reports disclosing the description information as detailed above for the following expenditures made by your Campaign to: (1) The Columbian for newspaper advertisement inserts or advertisements (# of inserts printed or advertisement run dates are required to be disclosed for each expenditure); (2) Columbia Litho for newspaper inserts, a mail piece, flyers, business cards, envelopes and letterhead (# of items printed for required to be disclosed for each expenditure); and (3) Tom Edwards for "Signs (# of signs printed or produced, and any sub-vendor information if the sign work was contracted to a third party).

- Please review the attached complaint and file the necessary amended C-4 reports to provide the required expenditure descriptions for political advertising undertaken by your 2019 Campaign by **October 7, 2021**.
- If you would like to submit a written response to the complaint allegations and/or PDC staff's request, please reply directly to this email and provide that information by **October 7, 2021**.

If you need assistance in filing the amended C-4 reports or are having trouble locating the 2019 Online Reporting of Campaign Activities (ORCA) file for your campaign, please send an email to pdcc@pdcc.wa.gov and request filer assistance.

Finally, please review our Enforcement Guide, which discusses the enforcement process, and the sections entitled "Minor violations resolved through reminder or warning" and "Remediable violations and technical corrections" in particular.

Please reply directly to this email if you have any questions so your message is routed directly to the Political Finance Officer to whom your case is assigned.

Thank you and PDC staff appreciates your attention to this matter,

Tabatha Blacksmith

pdcc.freshdesk.com/a/tickets/98707

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