

Frequently asked questions about Philadelphia's Campaign Finance Law

1. What is City elective office?

Under the City Campaign Finance Law, City elective office consists of the offices of the Mayor, District Attorney, City Controller, Sheriff, City Commissioner, and City Council.

2. Who is a candidate for purposes of the City Campaign Finance Law?

Under the City Campaign Finance Law, a candidate is defined as an individual who: (i) files nomination papers or petitions for City elective office; or (ii) publicly announces his or her candidacy for City elective office.

3. What are the limits on contributions to candidates for City elective office?

Per Calendar Year	To a Candidate's Political Committee*	To a Candidate's Litigation Fund Committee	To a Candidate's or Former Candidate's Transition & Inauguration Committee
From an Individual	\$3,100	\$3,100	\$3,100
From a Political Committee, partnership, or sole proprietorship	\$12,600	\$12,600	\$12,600

*Or to the political committee of a former candidate for City office, if the committee is carrying debt incurred to influence the outcome of a covered election.

Note: The limits are adjusted every four years to account for inflation. The limits will next be adjusted in January of 2024.

4. What are the rules regarding contributions received by an individual before he or she becomes a candidate?

Once an individual becomes a candidate under the City Campaign Finance Law, he or she may not spend excess pre-candidacy contributions to influence his or her election. An "excess pre-candidacy contribution" is the portion of a pre-candidacy contribution to a political committee that, had it been made to a candidate for City elective office, would have been in excess of the contribution limits.

You can find more information about how to account for and handle excess pre-candidacy contributions in Subpart J of [Board Regulation No. 1](#).

5. How should a campaign handle checks made from joint checking accounts?

A contribution check from a joint checking account is attributable to the joint account holder who signs the check. If both account holders sign the check, the contribution is apportioned evenly between them.

Example 1: District Attorney Candidate A receives a check from the joint account of John and Jane Smith. The check is for \$1,000 and is signed by both John and Jane. John and Jane have each made a contribution of \$500 to Candidate A.

Example 2: Controller Candidate A receives a check from the joint account of John and Jane Smith. The check is for \$1,000 and is only signed by John. Because only John signed the check, he has made a contribution of \$1,000 to Candidate A.

6. Is there a limit on the amount that a candidate may spend from his or her personal resources on his or her campaign?

No. Note, however, that if a candidate contributes \$250,000 or more of his or her own personal resources to his or her own campaign, the contribution limits for all candidates for that City elective office double. The limits do not double for contributions to a candidate's litigation fund committee or transition and inauguration committee.

7. When is a contribution received by a candidate's campaign?

A contribution is considered received on the date of its acceptance. As a general rule, the date of acceptance of a contribution is the date that the contribution comes into the possession of a candidate's campaign.

Mailbox: If a contribution is delivered to a mailbox, the date that the contribution is accepted is the date on which the candidate's campaign finds the contribution in the mailbox.

Credit Card: If a contribution is made by credit card through a website, the date that the contribution is accepted is the date on which the contributor submits his or her credit card information on the website.

8. Who must file campaign finance reports with the Board of Ethics?

- Candidates for City elective office.
- Political committees that make direct or in-kind contributions to Candidates for City elective office.
- Political committees or other persons that make expenditures to influence a City election.

Due dates for reports and more information about when a particular person needs to file can be found [here](#).

9. What is an expenditure to influence a City covered election?

- Any direct contribution to a candidate for City elective office;
- Any expenditure that is coordinated with a candidate for City elective office and is therefore an in-kind contribution to the candidate;
- Any independent expenditure promoting or opposing a candidate for City elective office; or
- Any expenditure for a publicly-distributed electioneering communication, which is any broadcast, cable, radio, print, Internet, or satellite communication that: (a) promotes, attacks, supports, or opposes a candidate; or (b) within 50 days of a covered election, names, refers to, includes, or depicts a candidate in that covered election.

10. How do I file campaign finance reports?

All filings with the Board of Ethics must be submitted electronically.

In order to file a report electronically with the Board of Ethics, a person must set up a filing account by going to this link: <https://apps.phila.gov/campaign-finance/auth/>.

You can use the system to simultaneously file with the Board and the City Commissioners. If you need to file with the Department of State, you can either print out a paper copy of the report or export the report into text files for electronic submission.

Filing a campaign finance report with the Board of Ethics does not satisfy the requirement under the Pennsylvania Election Code to file reports with the City Commissioners or the Pennsylvania Department of State. For questions about the Pennsylvania Election Code, please call either the City Commissioners at 215-686-3469 or the Department of State at 717-787-1512.

11. What information does a person include in a campaign finance report filed with the Board?

Most reports filed with the Board require the filer to disclose any contributions received, expenditures made, and debts incurred or existing during the reporting period.

If a filer's aggregate receipts, expenditures, or liabilities did not exceed \$250 for a filing cycle, the filer may submit a campaign finance statement rather than a full campaign finance report.

A 24 hour report filed by a **candidate committee** should only disclose contributions that total \$500 or more from a single source. A 24 hour report filed by a **political committee** or other person should only disclose independent expenditures that total \$500 or more, or debts incurred for such expenditures.

12. Are judicial candidates required to file campaign finance reports with the Board of Ethics?

In general, judicial candidates are not required to file campaign finance reports with the Board of Ethics. A judicial candidate committee, however, must electronically file a campaign finance report with the Board of Ethics for any reporting cycle in which the committee makes an expenditure or incurs debt to influence a City election, which includes contributions made to a candidate for City elective office. The reporting cycles and due dates are available [here](#).

13. Are there rules about how candidates may use political committees and checking accounts?

Yes. As a general rule, a candidate's campaign may use no more than one political committee and one checking account for the City elective office the candidate is seeking. All contributions for that office must be deposited into the candidate political committee's checking account. All expenditures for that office, including payments for debt incurred to influence a covered election, must be made from the candidate political committee's checking account.

A candidate may establish a separate litigation fund committee to receive contributions and make expenditures to pay professional fees incurred in defense of a civil, criminal, or administrative proceeding arising directly out of the conduct of the candidate's campaign or the candidate's participation in the election.

A candidate (or a former candidate) may establish a separate transition and inauguration committee to receive contributions and make expenditures to pay expenses for that candidate's transition or inauguration into City elective office.

14. How is the City Campaign Finance Law enforced and what are possible penalties for violations?

The Board of Ethics is authorized to enforce the City Campaign Finance Law by either filing an action in court or through an administrative adjudication. The maximum penalty for most violations of the Campaign Finance Law is \$2,000.

The penalty for acceptance of an excess contribution is three times the excess portion or \$2,000, whichever is less, but no penalty is assessed if the candidate returns the excess within 15 days of receipt and so notifies the Board of Ethics.

The penalty for the late filing of a campaign finance report is \$250, and each day after the due date is a separate violation. The maximum penalty is \$2,000 for the first 30 days late, plus \$1,000 for each additional 30-day period or part thereof.

15. Where can I find more information about the City Campaign Finance Law?

The Board provides a [checklist](#) for those starting a campaign for City Elective Office. In addition, [Board Regulation 1](#) provides a detailed interpretation of the City Campaign Finance Law.

More information regarding the City Campaign Finance Law is available on the Board's website. You can also contact the Board at campaign.finance@phila.gov or 215-686-9450.