

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
RECEIVED JUL 20 '22 AM 10:52

FOR COMMISSION USE ONLY:
CASE NUMBER
c 2022-083

COMPLAINT FORM

COMPLAINANT: Michelle Shuman

RESPONDENT: Benton Blount

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]

TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]

TITLE: Private Citizen

TITLE: Greenville County Council District 19

Set forth in detail specific facts upon which you based your complaint against above-named respondent (only detailed, clear factual allegations will be considered. If additional space is needed, attach supplemental sheets).

Mr. Blount left many vendors/items off of his campaign filings. As per his Facebook posts, mailouts, news articles and campaign items seen in the community, at least the following is missing:

1. Embellishments to signs in the form of balloons, flags, & whirlygigs
See Exhibit A

2. Posts + Straps to hold large signs - see Exhibit B

3. Fire truck from SC Party Rentals - see Exhibit C

4. Cups made by Stewart Family Creations - see Exhibit D

5. Banners, decorations, inflatable, etc for Meet & Greet -
See Exhibit E

6. Letters, envelopes + postage for letters mailed @ June 21 - see Exhibit F

7. Pizza party for letter stuffing volunteers - see Exhibit F

In addition, the loans from the Kingsburgs are improperly reported.

He also has a \$27,000 Federal Income Tax in that doesn't show in any report.

If there is a finding of probable cause, the following documents become public record: the complaint, the response (if any) by respondent, and the notice of hearing. If a hearing is to be held, the final order and all exhibits become public record. If no hearing is held following a finding of probable cause, the final disposition of the matter becomes public record.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF Greenville

Personally appeared before me Michelle Shuman who, first being duly sworn, says that he/she has read and knows the contents of the above complaint and that the allegations contained therein, are true and correct to the best of his/her own knowledge, except for those matters therein based upon information and belief, and as to those he/she believes them to be true.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 15th day of July, 2022

[REDACTED]

Notary Public for South Carolina

My Commission expires 08/06/2025



[REDACTED]

Complainant Signature

SEC-7 (Revised 3/2022)

REPLY TO: 201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150, Columbia, South Carolina 29210 (803)253-4192
ELECTRONIC COPIES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED

C102form

Exhibit A Page 1



Exhibit A Page 2







Exhibit B



Exhibit C



Exhibit D Page 1

Stewart Family Creations

May 8

Working on this cup tonight.

If you don't know who Benton Blount is. Go check him out.

0:05 / 0:21

ANTON BLOWN

Let's
Build a
Bridge



Exhibit D
Page 2

Exhibit D
Page 3





Benton Blount for District 19 Greenville County Council was live.

May 27 at 9:04 PM · 🌐

I am going around to my various social media sites to play some songs and fill everyone in on whats going on these days! So come hang out if you have a few and at minimum.....tell everyone you know in Greenville, SC to vote for me June 14th for District 19 County Council!:)

Exhibit D
Page 4



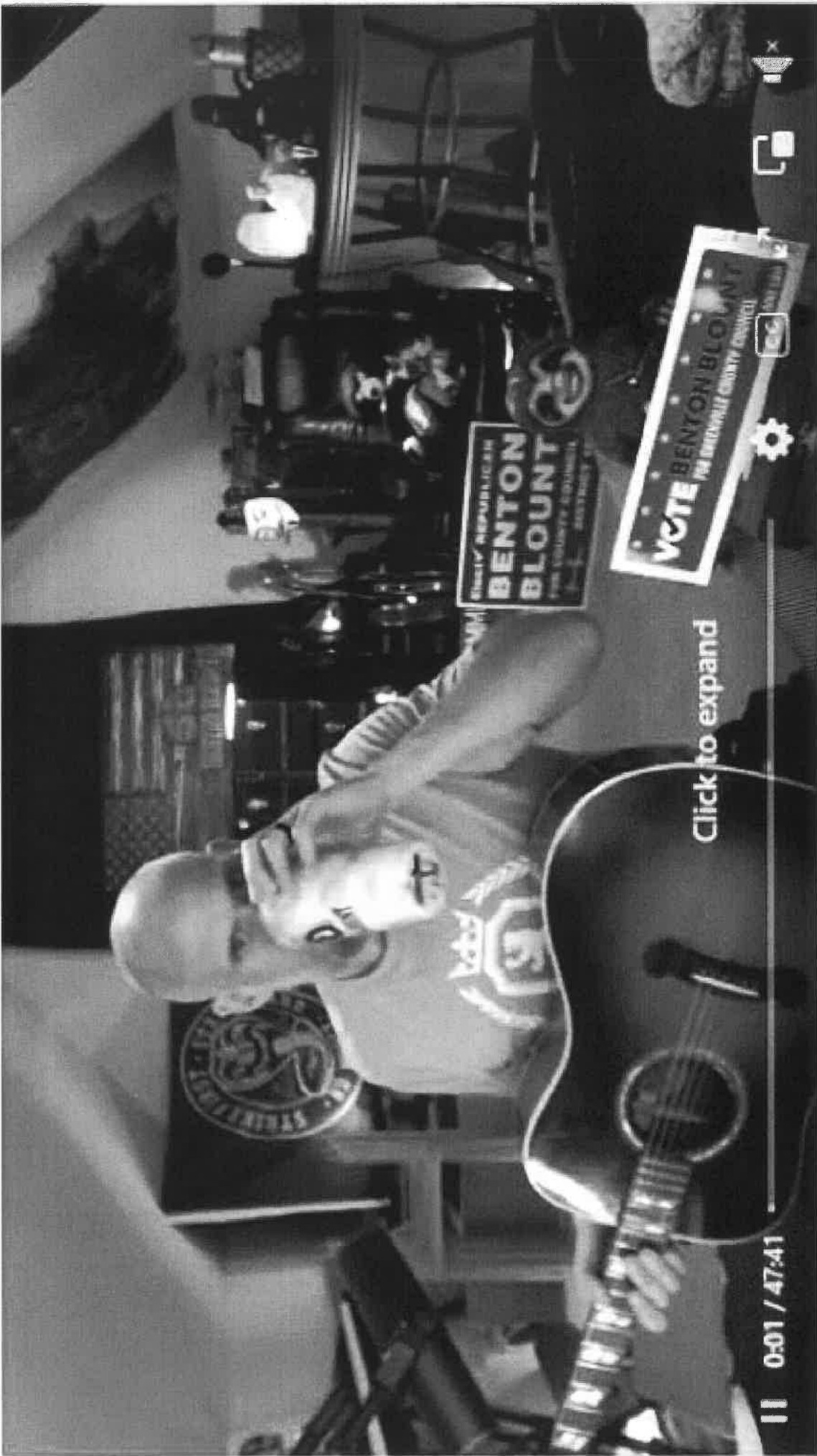


Exhibit D
Page 5

Exhibit E Page 1

Learn more

(1)



The Times' Examiner



"...can ye not discern the signs of the times?" - Jesus Christ

Wednesday, June 15, 2022 - 09:47 AM

INDEPENDENT CONSERVATIVE VOICE OF THE PALMETTO STATE

search website ...

Political

Hundreds Turn Out To Hear From County Council Candidate Benton Blount

By Terry M. Thacker

Published: 01 June 2022

Main Menu

[Political \(/political\)](#)

[SC State Politics \(/sc-state-politics\)](#)

[Religious \(/religious\)](#)

[Community \(/community\)](#)

[Education \(/education\)](#)

[Criminal \(/criminal\)](#)

[Historical \(/historical\)](#)

[Military/Veterans \(/military\)](#)

[Business \(/business\)](#)

[Financial \(/financial\)](#)

[Health \(/health\)](#)

[Science \(/science\)](#)

[Technology \(/technology\)](#)

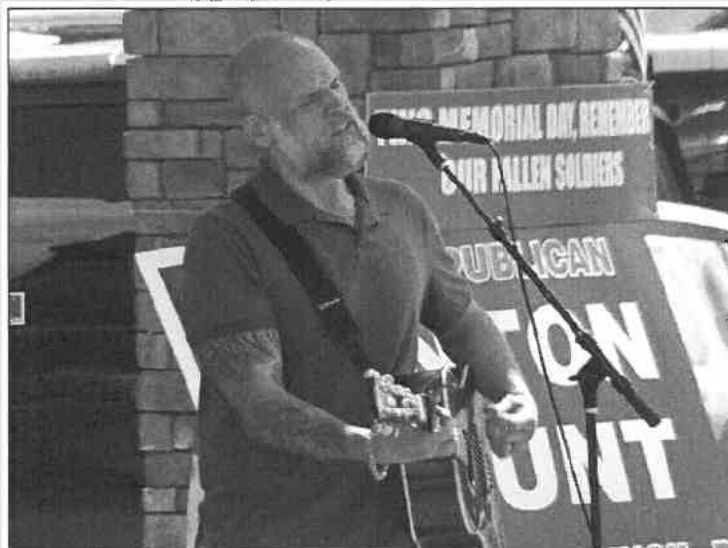
[Weather/Climate \(/weather\)](#)

[Featured Cartoons \(/cartoons\)](#)

[World News \(/world-news\)](#)

[Human Rights \(/human-rights\)](#)

[Abortion Issues \(/abortion-issues\)](#)



County Council candidate Benton Blount sings and plays guitar Monday at Trailblazer Park..

Classified Ads Menu

[Ads List \(/ads-list\)](#)

[Categories \(/ads-](#)

SkyPoint Financial and Insurance Services is now part of

INTEGRITY

In addition to Blount and Meadows, two other candidates are running in the Republican primary – Ivan Mathena, director of business development at Paper Cutters Inc. and retired state trooper Jackie M. Clark. Other than Meadows, the other three are newcomers to politics.

▷ X

Exhibit E
Page 2



Blount's young son looks on as his father performs.

Attendees were treated to a concert by Blount, who played guitar and sang several songs, some of which he wrote. Hot dogs, sausage dogs and angus burgers were available, as well as icees and popcorn. The festive atmosphere included several inflatable bounce houses and slides for the younger attendees.

Former council member Mark Kingsbury and current councillor Joe Dill were there to show their support, as well as 4th District Congressional candidate Mark Burns, who spoke briefly to the crowd. District 19 voters will decide among these four individuals in the June 14th primary.

Letterhea



4th District Congressional candidate Mark Burns spoke briefly at Blount's campaign event.

All Tags

- Abortion
(/component/tags/tag/abortion) 75
- Political Cartoons
(/component/tags/tag/political-cartoons) 71
- Faith
(/component/tags/tag/religion) 69
- Russia
(/component/tags/tag/russia) 69
- Education
(/component/tags/tag/education) 66
- Ukraine
(/component/tags/tag/ukraine) 66
- Elections
(/component/tags/tag/elections) 56
- Pro-Life
(/component/tags/tag/pro-life) 53
- US Supreme Court
(/component/tags/tag/us-supreme-court) 44
- Right to Life
(/component/tags/tag/right-to-life) 35
- LGBTQ
(/component/tags/tag/lgbtq) 35
- SC State Politics

SkyPoint Financial and Insurance Services is now part of

INTEGRITY



Some of the 300 attendees at Blount's campaign event.

Hits: 464

[Elections \(/component/tags/tag/elections\)](#)

[Greenville County Council \(/component/tags/tag/greenville-county-council\)](#)

[Prev \(/political/9805-national-survey-voters-overwhelmingly-side-with-parents\)](#)

[Next \(/political/9783-2000-mules-special-cut-just-the-facts\)](#)

You have no rights to post comments

3 Comments (<http://www.joomla-tune.com>)

[Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [Pinterest](#) [Email](#) [G+](#)

★★★★★

Vote 5

[Rate](#)



SkyPoint Financial
Insurance Services

INTEGRITY

[LEARN MORE](#)

- [Politics \(/component/tags/tag/politics\)](#) 33
- [War \(/component/tags/tag/war\)](#) 32
- [Sports \(/component/tags/tag/sports\)](#) 31
- [Military \(/component/tags/tag/military\)](#) 30
- [COVID-19 \(/component/tags/tag/covid-19\)](#) 30
- [Roe vs. Wade \(/component/tags/tag/roe-vs-wade\)](#) 30
- [Gas Prices \(/component/tags/tag/gas-prices\)](#) 29

Exhibit
E
Page 3

Similar Articles

- [A Life-long Greenville Resident Files for County Council District 23 \(/political/9437-a-life-long-greenville-resident-files-for-county-council-district-23\)](#)
- [A Conservative Quartet Files for Office in Greenville, SC \(/political/9438-a-conservative-quartet-files-for-office-in-greenville-sc\)](#)
- [Meadows Begins Campaign for Re-election to Greenville County Council \(/political/9511-meadows-begins-campaign-for-re-](#)

- [Warren Won't Test McMaster With South Carolina Gov Rematch \(/sc-state-politics/9081-warren-won-t-test-mcmaster-with-south-carolina-gov-rematch\)](#)

**SkyPoint Financial and
Insurance Services**
is now part of

INTEGRITY

Exhibit E Page 4

Hoyt Starkey

May 30 at 10:20PM

Thanks Benton Blount & Ashley Blount for a Great Memorial Day Celebration!

I don't own the rights to this music.

[#letsbuildabridge](#)

[#trailblazerpark](#)

[#CountyCouncil](#)

[#district19](#)

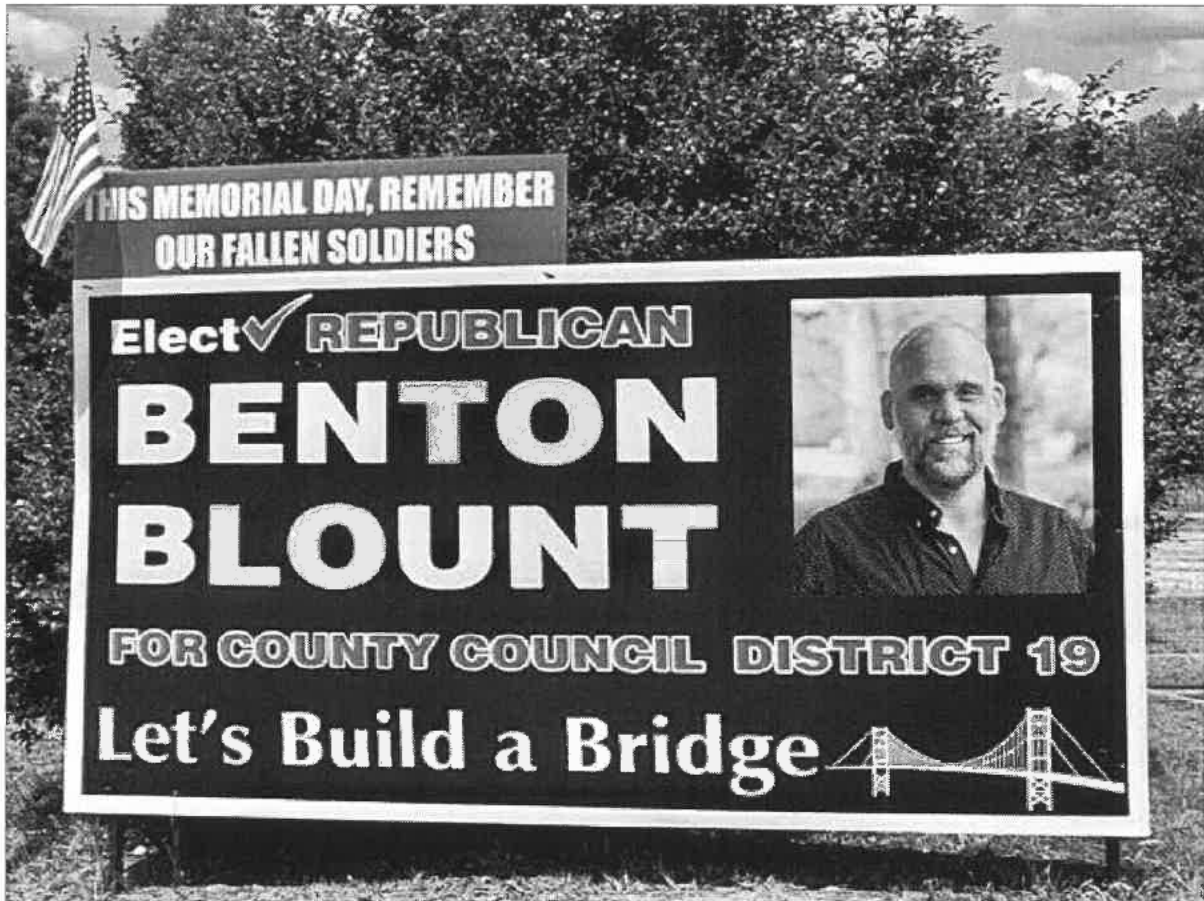


Exhibit E Page 5



Exhibit E Page 4



Exhibit E Page 7



+12



1818

2 Comments

Like

Comment

Share

Exhibit F Page 1

Benton Blount

June 20 at 10:22 a.m.

ATTENTION!!!

We have one last letter going out to voters before the run off. Since we didn't use any marketing companies, we are doing everything in house, including folding and stuffing envelopes.

So tonight we will be gathering some people together to finish these letters. If you would like to help, send me a message for info and location.

Free pizza and drinks!!!

June 28th will be here before we know it! We just have to make sure people turn back out!
Thank you!!!

BENTON BLOUNT
GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL DISTRICT 19

1 CANVA BACK TRAIL GREENVILLE, SC 29617
BENTONBLOUNTFORCOUNTYCOUNCIL@GMAIL.COM



District 19

First off, I have to say thank you to every person who voted for me in the primary! The outpouring of support was more than I had ever anticipated! It has been a pleasure to meet so many of you, while visiting your homes or businesses, being introduced to you in restaurants or greeting you and your family on the Swamp Rabbit Trail. From my campaign signs being placed in your yards, to your doors opening when knocked upon, to the countless minutes you have listened to me vocalize my political views and aspirations for District 19, you have supported me, and I feel blessed beyond measure.

Due to the incredible amount of strain that Covid Mandates placed on families, the last thing I wanted to do was follow it up with a desperate plea for contributions to my campaign. So, we decided to take the road less traveled and simply work with the money that God provided, through people who were able and eager to help. Don't get me wrong, I understand the significant value of fundraising, but this seat for me is about giving to the community, not taking.

To put what you, the citizens of District 19 helped make possible, here are the compelling stats to our campaign approach, in comparison to other candidates. Up to now our campaign spent less than 5% of the estimated \$100,000 paid out by other campaigns. We had Zero fundraisers, Zero radio ads, Zero TV commercials, Zero talk show radio spots, Zero targeted political endorsements, Zero demeaning mailouts, and Zero negative social media attacks. Despite this unconventional choice, we led Election Day with the greatest number of votes!

We didn't need a PR team because we had hundreds of people utilizing social media and their cell phones. Most campaigns generally focus on individuals such as investors, shareholders, business partners, etc., but my focus is on YOU, The People of District 19.

On Thursday, June 28th I NEED YOUR HELP! I will be in a runoff with Chairman of County Council, Willis Meadows. If you voted for me in the Primary Election, I am asking for your time once more. If you voted for another candidate but are not happy with the direction our district is heading, I would implore you to take a moment and let me elaborate on my political views. If you are in agreement with my beliefs, I would humbly ask that you return to your precinct and vote for me in this runoff election on June 28th.

MY VIEWS:

My views are simple. I believe we live in the greatest country this world has ever seen. Our Constitution was written by men inspired by God for a government to abide by and protect the citizens freedoms. Just like gas prices I believe our government taxes us all too much.

NATIONALLY:

FREEDOM OF SPEECH - After being kicked off a National tour with ZZ Top's, Billy Gibbons for simply wearing a MAGA hat to vote in the midterms of 2018, I quickly realized how devastating it can be when you are punished for openly supporting your political beliefs. Combine that with the constant censorship and banning I received on social media, even trying to campaign for this seat, it paints a terrifying picture of how losing our freedom to speak freely can quickly fall into a totalitarian nightmare.

2ND AMENDMENT - "Shall not be infringed." That was added for a very specific reason.

I am **PRO LIFE** and **I BELIEVE IN LIMITED GOVERNMENT**

LOCALLY | FOR OUR FUTURE

On a local level, I believe that County Council has missed opportunity to improve the district's quality of life.

"LET'S BUILD A BRIDGE" - This campaign slogan became the talking point of almost every candidate in District 19, which indicates that voters feel passionately about this matter. The community doesn't need a bridge built 10 years from now on a "promise" by a housing developer. We need a multiple source funded, well architected, dependable, safe, and aesthetic symbol of our commitment to making Highway 253 a smooth route for drivers as well as the Swamp Rabbit Trail, properly lifted and put on display for everyone to take notice of what a benefit and investment it would be for our District and County!

"WATER TOWERS" - As many of the mill towns around Greenville have seen recent renovations, the towers that often mark their location send a signal of an area forgotten or under appreciated. In forming a public/private initiative with the help of local artist, we could revitalize those water towers and bring the skyline to life with murals of the old mills sites which would show homage to our past and recognize the future.

"WE NEED MORE PARKS, NOT MORE APARTMENTS!" - The massive amounts of multi-tenant housing being hurled into District 19 is a major concern for our citizens. Zoning has become a crucial topic that needs to be addressed for the betterment of our community. My opponent, Councilman Meadows recently voted in favor of hundreds of new apartments being developed in our area, indicating that there is nothing that County Council can do to stop more apartment developments because properties have been zone for these developments for decades. It is my first campaign promise that I will not vote to allow new zoning for apartments.

I will be seeking out locations where we can build new community parks.

Our roads are also of major concern. Studies have shown that our streets are not at all adequate to handle the heavy volume of traffic. From the beginning I will ask our highway department, how can we make the roads easier to traverse. We taxpayers fund for maintenance and repair of roads, despite the neglected conditions of District 19's thoroughfares.

Finally, the only thing I have heard my opponent say about me personally is that I am not as qualified as he is and that I "Don't have what it takes." To that I think back on the words I first heard from my grandfather: "God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called".

David wasn't qualified to take on Goliath. He was laughed at, even as he walked into face what most thought to be certain death. Then with a simple stone, did what those "qualified" couldn't.

Moses wasn't qualified to be a leader and couldn't speak properly. His weakness was transformed into the one of the most powerful, "qualified" voices the World has ever heard.

And almost 16 years ago, a man with little experience, stepped out of his comfort zone to become something that some thought he wasn't qualified for. He believed in himself, defied their claims, and became Councilman Willis Meadows. So, am I "unqualified"? Maybe! But, if I am, I would say that puts me in great company!

June 28th, I am ready to stand up for you, the citizens of District 19. I am prepared to lead this community with strength and conviction, and with everything I have. I will leave no stone unturned, and no secret locked away in Council Chambers. You are truly County Council! I would simply be the person delivering your message. Thank you for the time and consideration. If you are able to vote in the runoff election on June 28th, please consider voting for me as I hope to soon help District 19 move into a place where everyone feels that they have a voice and that it is always heard!

Yours Truly,



Benton Blount

P.S. Please ask friends & family to vote Tuesday June 28th. Let's continue to make this a remarkable Grassroots Campaign.

PAID FOR BY BENTON BLOUNT FOR COUNTY COUNCIL

Greenville County Council District 19 (/filing/offices-elections/office/71511) Edit

Reports (/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/reports) Finances (/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/finances/contributions)

Contributors (/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/contributors) Vendors (/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/vendors)

Elections (/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/elections)

Pre-Election (Primary) Report 2022

Filing Period: 4/1/2022 - 5/25/2022

Election Date: Jun 14, 2022

Election Type: Primary

Viewing Version: Amendment 2

Create PDF

Status: Submitted

Deadline: May 30, 2022

Showing 16 entries.

Expenditure Total: \$2,233.07

| Date ↓ | Paid To | Amount | Mailing Address | Description | Alerts |
|------------|---|----------|--|---|--------|
| 05/25/2... | City of Travelers Rest (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$400.00 | 125 Trailblazer Dr , Travelers Rest, SC 29690 | Meet & Greet Venue Rental | |
| 05/24/2... | Vista Print (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$133.43 | 275 Wyman Street, Waltham, MA 02451 | Campaign Merch | |
| 05/24/2... | Canva (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$25.98 | 75 East Santa Clara Street, San Jose, CA 95113 | Canva - Digital Marketing for Campaign \$12.99 per Month (May/June) | |
| 05/13/2... | Polytuff (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$550.00 | 9048 Old White Horse Road , Greenville , SC 29617 | Campaign Signs | |
| 05/13/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$1.25 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? No description | |

| | | | | |
|------------|--|----------|--|---|
| 05/13/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$3.38 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 05/12/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$3.48 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 05/07/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$4.97 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 05/06/2... | Vista Print (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$270.82 | 275 Wyman Street, Waltham, MA 02451 | Vista Print - Bumper Stickers / Pens |
| 05/06/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$3.48 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 05/06/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$1.25 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 05/06/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$1.94 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 05/06/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$0.78 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 05/06/2... | PayPal (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$1.21 | 2211 North First Street, San Jose, CA 95131 | ? |
| 04/26/2... | Polytuff (/filing/offices- elections/office/... | \$800.00 | 9048 Old White Horse Road , Greenville , SC 29617 | Campaign Signs |

Contact

House Filers

(803) 734-3114

SC House Website (<https://www.scstatehouse.gov/CommitteeInfo/houseethics.php>)

Senate Filers

(803) 212-6410

SC Senate Website (<https://www.scstatehouse.gov/CommitteeInfo/senateethics.php>)

Local and Statewide Filers

(803) 253-4192

SC Ethics Commission Website (<https://ethics.sc.gov/>)

Greenville County Council District 19 (/filing/offices-elections/office/71511) Edit

[Reports \(/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/reports\)](#) [Finances \(/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/finances/contributions\)](#)
[Contributors \(/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/contributors\)](#) [Vendors \(/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/vendors\)](#)
[Elections \(/filing/offices-elections/office/71511/elections\)](#)

Initial Report 2022

Filing Period: 3/29/2022 - 3/29/2022

Election Date: Jun 14, 2022

Election Type: Primary

Viewing Version: Original Report

Create PDF

Status: Submitted

Deadline: April 8, 2022

Showing 3 entries.

Contribution Total: \$1,000.00

| Date ↓ | Contributor | Amount | Mailing Address | Occupation | Description | Alerts |
|-----------|---|----------|--|---------------|-------------|--------|
| 03/29/... | Mark Kingsbury (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$500.00 | 12 Blanche Road , Greenville, SC 29617 | Agent | | |
| 03/29/... | Alex Kingsbury (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$300.00 | 435 N Barton Rd, Taylors, SC 29687 | Land | | |
| 03/29/... | Daniel Kingsbury (/filing/offices-elections/office/... | \$200.00 | 106 Willenhall Lane, Greenville, SC 29611 | Self Employed | | |

Needs further explanation - per KR - put w/ complaint

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
IN THE MATTER OF:)
Complaint C2022-083)
Michelle Shuman)
Complainant.)
Benton Blount)
Respondent.)

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

NOTICE OF HEARING

The State Ethics Commission has determined that there is probable cause pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, in the above-captioned complaint. The Commission will convene a formal hearing into the matter in accordance with Section 8-13-320(10)(i) & (j), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, and State Ethics Commission Regulations, S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 52-707 (1997 Cum. Supp.) on Thursday, August 15, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. at the Commission Hearing Room located at: 201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150, Columbia, South Carolina 29210.

The following allegations will be heard:

COUNT ONE
FAILURE TO REPORT CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS
SECTION 8-13-1308(F)(1), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Benton Blount, candidate for Greenville County Council, did in Richland County, fail to report two (2) campaign contributions of \$100.00 or less, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(F)(1).

COUNT TWO
FAILURE TO REPORT CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS
SECTION 8-13-1308(F)(1), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Benton Blount, candidate for Greenville County Council, did in Richland County, fail

to report five (5) campaign contributions over \$100.00, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(F)(1).

COUNT THREE
FAILURE TO TIMELY DEPOSIT CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS
SECTION 8-13-1312, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Benton Blount, candidate for Greenville County Council, did in Richland County, fail to deposit nine (9) campaign contributions within ten (10) days of receipt, in violation of Section 8-13-1312.

COUNT FOUR
FAILURE TO MAKE EXPENDITURE THROUGH CAMPAIGN ACCOUNT
SECTION 8-13-1312, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Benton Blount, candidate for Greenville County Council, did in Richland County, fail to make seven (7) campaign expenditures through his campaign bank account, in violation of Section 8-13-1312.

COUNT FIVE
FAILURE TO REPORT IN KIND CONTRIBUTION
SECTION 8-13-1308(F)(1), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Benton Blount, candidate for Greenville County Council, did in Richland County, fail to report an in-kind contribution of a bounce house at a May 31, 2022 campaign event, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(F)(1).

COUNT SIX
FAILURE TO REPORT IN KIND CONTRIBUTION
SECTION 8-13-1308(F)(1), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Benton Blount, candidate for Greenville County Council, did in Richland County, fail to report an in-kind contribution of a pizza party/campaign mail out event, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(F)(1).

You have the right to be represented by counsel, the right to call and examine witnesses, the right to introduce exhibits, and the right to cross-examine opposing witnesses. This hearing

will be open to the public as required by Section 8-13-320(10)(j), Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended. The procedures to be followed are set forth in the Administrative Procedures Act, Section 1-23-10, et seq., Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, the State Ethics Act, Section 8-13-100, et seq., Code of Laws, South Carolina, 1976, as amended, and State Ethics Commission Regulations, S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 52-707 (1997 Cum. Supp.).

A pre-hearing conference may be scheduled prior to the hearing to allow exchange of witness lists and evidence, marking of exhibits, and disposition of motions or pleadings. In the event you fail to appear, judgment by default will be rendered against you. If there are any questions concerning the above notice or hearing times, please contact the State Ethics Commission.



Meghan Walker Dayson, Executive Director
State Ethics Commission

Dated this 16th day,
of May 2024.

Certificate of Service by Certified Mail

I hereby certify that a copy of this **NOTICE OF HEARING** was duly served on the RESPONDENT Benton Blount, 3 Canvassback Trail, Greenville, SC 29617 by depositing said **NOTICE OF HEARING** in the United States mail, Columbia, South Carolina on this 17th day of September 2023, by CERTIFIED MAIL, E-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED, appropriate postage affixed, and a return address clearly indicated on said envelope.



Rachael O'Bryan, Administrative Assistant

State Ethics Commission

(803) 253-4192

Columbia, South Carolina

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
 COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
)
 IN THE MATTER OF:)
 COMPLAINT C2022-083)
)
 Michelle Shuman,)
 Complainant,)
)
 Benton Blount,)
 Respondent.)
 _____)

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

CONSENT ORDER

This matter comes before the State Ethics Commission (Commission) by way of a Complaint filed on June 20, 2022. Pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i) of the South Carolina Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act (Ethics Act), the Complaint against Benton Blount (Respondent) was considered by the Commission and probable cause was found to warrant an evidentiary hearing. Prior to the call of the case, Respondent agreed to the following:

STATEMENTS OF FACT

1. Respondent was a candidate for Greenville County Council in a June 14, 2022 primary election and a November 8, 2022 general election.
2. Prior to the filing of the Complaint, Respondent filed multiple Campaign Disclosure Reports (CDRs) disclosing contributions and expenditures.
3. Following the filing of the Complaint, the Commission’s investigation revealed that Respondent failed to deposit nine (9) contributions totaling \$3,552.26 into his campaign bank account within ten (10) days of receipt and that he made seven (7) campaign expenditures totaling \$904.38 from a personal bank account.¹

¹ The Complaint also alleged that Respondent failed to disclose a federal tax lien on his CDRs. However, the Commission did not find probable cause to believe this conduct violated the Ethics Act.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon the Statements of Fact, the Commission concludes, as a matter of law:

1. At all times relevant, Respondent a candidate pursuant to Section 8-13-1300(4). Therefore, the Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction.

2. Section 8-13-1312 provides, in relevant part:

. . . expenses paid on behalf of a candidate or committee must be drawn from the campaign account and issued on a check signed by the candidate or a duly authorized officer of a committee. All contributions received by the candidate or committee, directly or indirectly, must be deposited in the campaign account by the candidate or committee within ten days after receipt. All contributions received by an agent of a candidate or committee ~~within~~ *SEF* must be forwarded to the candidate or committee not later than five days after receipt . . .

3. Section 8-13-320(10)(l) allows the Commission to issue a civil penalty of up to \$2,000 for each violation of the Ethics Act.

4. Section 8-13-130 allows the Commission to “levy an enforcement or administrative fee on a person who is in violation” of the Ethics Act.

DISCUSSION

The Commission found probable cause to charge Respondent with one (1) count of violating Section 8-13-1312 for failing to deposit nine (9) campaign contributions within ten (10) days of receipt and one (1) count of violating Section 8-13-1312 for failing to make seven (7) campaign expenditures through his campaign bank account.²

Through this Consent Order, Respondent acknowledges he violated the Ethics Act as described herein. In mitigation, Respondent states he began caring for his sick mother in the Summer of 2022 and that his wife stepped in to assist with recordkeeping and filing the CDRs.

² The Commission also found probable cause to charge Respondent with four (4) counts of violating Section 8-13-1308(F) for failing to report campaign contributions and expenditures. As the Respondent has since disclosed these contributions and expenditures, the Commission declines to proceed as to these counts.

Respondent further stated this was his first run for office and that he and his wife were unaccustomed to the filing requirements.

DISPOSITION

1. The Commission hereby finds Respondent in violation of the Ethics Act as set forth herein.
2. The Commission hereby adopts the Statements of Fact, Conclusions of Law, Discussion, and Disposition as agreed upon by the Respondent.

THEREFORE, the Commission hereby issues a Public Reprimand and orders the Respondent to pay the Commission, within six (6) months from receipt of this Order, a reduced civil penalty of \$300.00 and an administrative fee of \$650.00, for a total of \$950.00. Given the mitigation herein, the Commission declines to assess additional civil penalties.

By executing this Consent Order, Respondent understands that he is not only admitting to violations of the Ethics Act, but also confessing to a judgment of \$950.00 (less any money paid to the Commission) in the event he does not make full and timely payment as provided for in this Order. In that event, the Commission shall file a Judgment against Respondent in the Clerk of Court's Office in the County of Respondent's last known residence. Upon said filing, the Clerk of Court shall enter this Order in the amount of \$950.00 (less any money paid to the Commission) in its Judgment Rolls, without cost to the Commission.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED THIS 14th DAY OF September 2024.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION



SCOTT E. FRICK, CHAIR



BENTON BLOUNT
RESPONDENT