

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

FOR COMMISSION USE ONLY:
CASE NUMBER
C 2022-128

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
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COMPLAINT FORM

COMPLAINANT: State Ethics Commission
ADDRESS: 201 Executive Center Drive
Suite 150
Columbia, SC 29210
TELEPHONE NUMBER: (803) 253-4192

RESPONDENT: George J. Edwards, III
ADDRESS: [REDACTED]
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]
TITLE: Mayor and former Councilman –
City of Abbeville

Section 8-13-1140, SC Code Ann., 1976, as amended, requires the filing of an updated Statement of Economic Interests for the previous calendar year annually thereafter prior to March 30. Records in the State Ethics Commission indicate that the Respondent was required to file the 2019 Statement of Economic Interests.

Respondent was reminded of the filing requirement by a certified letter dated June 15, 2022 as described in the attached. In addition, an email reminder was sent thirty days prior to the deadline. To date, a 2019 Statement of Economic Interests has not been received. All in violation of Section 8-13-1140, SC Code Ann., 1976, as amended.

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 Richland

Personally appeared before me Meghan L. Walker who, first being duly sworn, says that 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 her own knowledge, except for those matters therein based upon information and belief, and as to those she believes them to be true.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this
12th day of October, 2022

[REDACTED]
Meghan L. Walker, Executive Director

[REDACTED]

Notary Public for South Carolina
My Commission expires 01/22/26

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

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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
)
)
IN THE MATTER OF:)
)
Complaint C2022-128)
)
State Ethics Commission)
Complainant.)
)
George J. Edwards, III)
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 State Ethics Commission will, therefore, convene a formal hearing into the matters, 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 June 20, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. at the State Ethics 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 FILE A STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS
SECTION 8-13-1140 S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That George J. Edwards, III, Mayor and former member of Abbeville City Council, did in Richland County, fail to file a 2019 Statement of Economic Interests (SEI), in violation of Section 8-13-1140.

COUNT TWO
FAILURE TO REPORT INCOME ON STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS
SECTION 8-13-1120(A)(2) S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

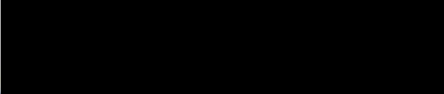
That George J. Edwards, III, Mayor and former member of Abbeville City Council, did in Richland County, fail to report Respondent's government income received from the City of Abbeville on his 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 SEIs, in violation of Section 8-13-1120(A)(2).

COUNT SIX
FAILURE TO OPEN CAMPAIGN BANK ACCOUNT
SECTION 8-13-1312, S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That George J. Edwards, III, Mayor and former member of Abbeville City Council, did in Richland County, fail to open a campaign bank account to pay for campaign expenditures in his 2020 mayoral election, in violation of Section 8-13-1312.

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.).

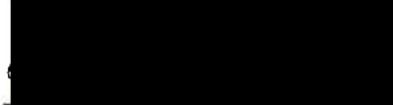
A pre-hearing conference may be scheduled prior to the hearing to allow exchange of witness lists and evidence, marking of exhibits, and disposition of motions or pleadings. In the event you fail to appear, judgment by default will be rendered against you. If there are any questions concerning the above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


Meghan Walker Dayson, Executive Director
State Ethics Commission

Dated this 28th day,
of March 2024.

Certificate of Service by Certified Mail

I hereby certify that a copy of this **NOTICE OF HEARING** was duly served on **RESPONDENT** George J. Edwards, III, 105 George Street, Abbeville, SC 29620 by depositing said **NOTICE OF HEARING** in the United States mail, Columbia, South Carolina on this 29th day of March 2024, by **CERTIFIED MAIL, E-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**, appropriate postage affixed, and a return address clearly indicated on said envelope.

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Rachael O'Bryan.

Rachael O'Bryan, Administrative Assistant
State Ethics Commission

Columbia, South Carolina

(803) 253-4192

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
IN THE MATTER OF:)
COMPLAINT C2022-128)
State Ethics Commission,)
Complainant,)
George J. Edwards, III,)
Respondent.)
_____)

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

CONSENT ORDER

This matter comes before the State Ethics Commission (Commission) by way of a Complaint filed on October 12, 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 George J. Edwards, III (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 entry of the following:

STATEMENTS OF FACT

1. Respondent served has served on the Abbeville City Council since 2018.
2. Respondent failed to timely file a Pre-Election Campaign Disclosure Report (CDR) prior to his 2018 election.
3. Respondent timely filed a 2018 Statement of Economic Interests (SEI), but failed to timely file a 2019 SEI.
4. Respondent filed a 2020 SEI on April 7, 2020, but failed to timely file a 2021 SEI or a 2022 SEI.
5. In a June 15, 2022 certified letter, the Commission notified Respondent of his failure to timely file the 2018 Pre-Election CDR and SEIs from 2019-2022.
6. According to the United States Postal Service (USPS), the certified letter was delivered to Respondent's address of record on June 17, 2022 at 1:57 p.m.
7. The same day he received the letter, Respondent logged into the Commission's electronic filing

system and filed his 2018 Pre-Election CDR and SEIs from 2021-2022. Respondent still did not file a 2019 SEI. In addition, Respondent did not report any sources of income in his SEIs from 2020-2022.

8. On June 27, 2022, late-filing penalties began to accrue at \$10.00 per day with regard to the 2019 SEI.
9. On July 7, 2022, late-filing penalties began to accrue at \$100.00 per day with regard to the 2019 SEI.
10. Following the filing of the complaint, a Commission investigator contacted Respondent and assisted him with filing his 2019 SEI and disclosing sources of government income on the relevant SEIs. At that time, Respondent informed the Commission investigator that he spent personal funds in furtherance of an election in 2018 and 2020, but that he failed to open a campaign bank account.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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

1. At all times relevant, Respondent was a “public official” pursuant to Section 8-13-100(27) and a “candidate” pursuant to Section 8-13-1300(4). Therefore, the Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction.
2. Section 8-13-1140 provides, in relevant part:

A person required to file a [SEI] under this chapter annually shall file . . . an updated statement for the previous calendar year, no later than noon on March 30 . . .
3. Section 8-13-1120(A)(2) of the Act requires public officials to report, in part:

the source, type, and amount or value of income, not to include tax refunds, of substantial monetary value received from a governmental entity by the filer
4. 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 . . .

5. Section 8-13-1510(A) provides:

Except as otherwise specifically provided in this chapter, a person required to file a report or statement under this chapter who files a late statement or report or fails to file a required statement or report must be assessed a civil penalty as follows: (1) a fine of one hundred dollars if the statement or report is not filed within five days after the established deadline provided by law in this chapter; and (2) after notice has been given by certified or registered mail that a required statement or report has not been filed, a fine of ten dollars per calendar day for the first ten days after notice has been given, and one hundred dollars for each additional calendar day in which the required statement or report is not filed, not exceeding five thousand dollars.

6. 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.

7. 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 8-13-1140 for failing to file a 2019 SEI; one (1) count of violating Section 8-13-1120(A)(2) for failing to report government income on his SEIs; and one (1) count of violating Section 8-13-1312 for failing to open a campaign bank account. Through this Consent Order, Respondent admits he violated the Ethics Act as outlined herein. In mitigation, Respondent states that after he received the Commission’s June 15, 2022 correspondence, he logged in to the Commission’s electronic filing system and believed that he had filed all necessary reports. Respondent was unaware that his 2019 SEI remained unfiled. Respondent further states that he believed he was not required to open a campaign bank account if he was spending only personal funds. Respondent states that other members of Council told him this during his election cycle. Respondent states he came into compliance with regard to all required reports as soon as he realized there was an issue and apologizes to the Commission for any oversight.

DISPOSITION

1. The Commission finds Respondent in violation of one (1) count of Section 8-13-1140, one (1) count of Section 8-13-1120(A)(2), and one (1) count of 8-13-1312.
2. The Commission adopts the Statements of Fact, Conclusions of Law, Discussion, and Disposition as agreed upon by the Respondent.

THEREFORE, the Commission hereby issues this written warning to Respondent, and orders Respondent to pay the Commission, within six (6) months from receipt of this Order, a reduced late-filing penalty of \$200.00 and an administrative fee of \$500.00, for a total of \$700.00. In light of the Respondent's attempt at corrective action immediately after his receipt of the Commission's June 15, 2022 correspondence, the Commission declines to assess any civil penalty.

By executing this Consent Order, Respondent understands that he is not only admitting to a violation of the Ethics Act, but also confessing to a judgment of \$700.00 in the event he does not make payment as provided for in this Order, in which case the Commission shall file a Judgment against Respondent with the County Clerk of Court in Respondent's last known County of residence, who shall enter this Order in the amount of \$700.00 (less any money paid) in its Judgment Rolls, without cost to the Commission.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED THIS 9th DAY OF June 2024.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION



SCOTT E. FRICK, CHAIR



GEORGE J. EDWARDS, III
RESPONDENT