

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
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STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

FOR COMMISSION USE ONLY:
CASE NUMBER
C 2023-095

COMPLAINT FORM

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

RESPONDENT: Stephen Peterson
ADDRESS: [REDACTED]
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]
TITLE: Candidate – City of Hartsville Mayor

Section 8-13-1308, S.C. Code Ann., 1976, as amended, requires candidates to file Campaign Disclosures within ten (10) days of receiving or expending \$500; fifteen (15) days prior to each election; within ten (10) days of the end of each quarter; and a final report when the campaign account is closed. In addition, certified campaign reports detailing campaign contributions and expenditures must contain the total of contributions accepted, the name and address of each person making a contribution, the total expenditures made by or on behalf of the candidate or committee, and the name and address of each person to whom an expenditure is made from campaign funds. Pursuant to Section 8-13-1362 and Regulation 52-504 (C), the Pre-Election and quarterly report are required even when there have been no contributions or expenditures. Records of the State Ethics Commission indicate that an Initial Campaign Disclosure was due no later than August 26, 2021 and a Pre-Election Campaign Disclosure was due between October 13, 2021 and October 21, 2021.

Respondent was reminded of the filing requirements by letters dated June 10, 2022, July 7, 2022, October 7, 2022, and November 4, 2022 as described in the attached. To date, a properly completed Initial Campaign Disclosure and Pre-Election Campaign Disclosure have not been received. All in violation of Section 8-13-1308(A), Section 8-13-1308(D)(1), and Section 8-13-1308 (F), S.C. 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 Walker Dayson 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
26th day of JULY, 2023

[REDACTED]
Meghan Walker Dayson, 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 C2023-095)
State Ethics Commission)
Complainant.)
Stephen Peterson)
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 FILE AN INITIAL CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE REPORT
SECTION 8-13-1308(A), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Stephen Peterson, Candidate for Mayor of Hartsville, did in Richland County, fail to file a 2021 Initial Campaign Disclosure Report (CDR) after the receipt or expenditure of a \$500 aggregate, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(A).

COUNT TWO
FAILURE TO FILE A PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE REPORT
SECTION 8-13-1308(D)(1), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Stephen Peterson, Candidate for Mayor of Hartsville, did in Richland County, fail to

file a 2021 Pre-Election CDR, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(D)(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 27th day,
of November 2023.

Certificate of Service by Certified Mail

I hereby certify that a copy of this **NOTICE OF HEARING** was duly served on the RESPONDENT Stephen Peterson, 126 Railroad Avenue, Lamar, SC 29069 by depositing said **NOTICE OF HEARING** in the United States mail, Columbia, South Carolina on this 27th day of November 2023, by **CERTIFIED MAIL, E-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**, appropriate postage affixed, and a return address clearly indicated on said envelope.



Columbia, South Carolina

Rachael O'Bryan, Administrative Assistant
State Ethics Commission (803) 253-4192

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|-------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA |) | |
| COUNTY OF RICHLAND |) | BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION |
| |) | |
| IN THE MATTER OF: |) | |
| |) | |
| Complaint C2023-095 |) | |
| |) | |
| State Ethics Commission |) | AMENDED |
| Complainant. |) | NOTICE OF HEARING |
| |) | |
| Stephen Peterson |) | |
| Respondent. |) | |
| _____ |) | |

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, February 20, 2025 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 FILE AN INITIAL CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE REPORT
SECTION 8-13-1308(A), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Stephen Peterson, Candidate for Mayor of Hartsville, did in Richland County, fail to file a 2021 Initial Campaign Disclosure Report (CDR) after the receipt or expenditure of a \$500 aggregate, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(A).


COUNT TWO
FAILURE TO FILE A PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE REPORT
SECTION 8-13-1308(D)(1), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

That Stephen Peterson, Candidate for Mayor of Hartsville, did in Richland County, fail to

file a 2021 Pre-Election CDR, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(D)(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 13th day,
of November 2024.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
IN THE MATTER OF:)
COMPLAINT C2023-095)
State Ethics Commission,)
Complainant,)
Stephen Peterson,)
Respondent.)

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

CONSENT ORDER

This matter comes before the State Ethics Commission (Commission) by way of a Complaint filed on July 26, 2023. Pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i) of the South Carolina Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act (Ethics Act), the Complaint against Stephen Peterson (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 Mayor of the City of Hartsville (City) in a November 2, 2021 election.
2. On August 16, 2021, Respondent filed a Statement of Intention of Candidacy and paid a \$324.48 filing fee to the City.
3. Respondent failed to file an Initial Campaign Disclosure Report (CDR) on or before August 26, 2021.
4. Respondent failed to file a Pre-Election CDR prior to the November 2, 2021 election.
5. On November 4, 2022, after multiple attempts to send certified notice, the Commission sent Respondent notice of his failure to file an Initial CDR and a Pre-Election CDR via first-class mail with tracking. The letter was sent to the address Respondent provided on his Statement of Intention of Candidacy.
6. According to the United States Postal Service, the first-class letter was delivered on November 8,

JX #1

2022 at 4:03 p.m.

7. Following the filing of the Complaint, the Commission's investigation revealed Respondent no longer had access to the address or telephone number he provided on his Statement of Intention of Candidacy.
8. On September 19, 2023, a Commission investigator met with Respondent to hand-deliver the Complaint and cover letter.
9. On September 26, 2023, Respondent filed his required CDRs with the assistance of Commission staff and is now in compliance.

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 "candidate" pursuant to Section 8-13-1300(4). Therefore, the Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction.
2. Section 8-13-1308 provides, in relevant part:
 - (A) Upon receipt or expenditure of campaign contributions or the making of independent expenditures totaling an accumulated aggregate of five hundred dollars or more, a candidate . . . must file an initial certified campaign report within ten days of these initial receipts or expenditures. However, a candidate who does not receive or expend campaign contributions totaling an accumulated aggregate of five hundred dollars or more must file an initial certified campaign report fifteen days before an election.
...
 - (D) (1) At least fifteen days before an election, a certified campaign report must be filed showing contributions of more than one hundred dollars and expenditures to or by the candidate or committee for the period ending twenty days before the election. The candidate or committee must maintain a current list during the period before the election commencing at the beginning of the calendar quarter of the election of all contributions of more than one hundred dollars and expenditures. The list must be open to public inspection upon request.
3. Section 8-13-1510(A) provides, in relevant part:

. . . a person required to file a report or statement under this chapter who files a late 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

JX #2

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.

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 8-13-1308(A) for failing to file an Initial CDR and one (1) count of violating Section 8-13-1308(D)(1) for failing to file a 2021 Pre-Election CDR. Through this Consent Order, Respondent admits he violated the Ethics Act as described herein. In mitigation, Respondent states he did not receive the Commission’s correspondence because he received a new telephone number and moved multiple times since filing his Statement of Intention of Candidacy. Additionally, Respondent asserts this was his first run for office and that he was confused with the filing requirements. Further, the Commission acknowledges that Respondent filed his required reports within ten (10) days of receiving the hand-delivered Complaint.

DISPOSITION

1. The Commission finds Respondent in violation of one (1) count of 8-13-1308(A) and one (1) count of Section 8-13-1308(D)(1).
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 Public Reprimand and orders Respondent to pay the Commission, within one (1) year from receipt of this Order, a late-filing penalty of \$200.00 (\$100.00 per report) and an administrative fee of \$500.00, for a total of \$700.00.

By executing this Consent Order, Respondent understands that he is confessing to a judgment

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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 20th DAY OF October 2024. *JW*
23rd DAY OF January 2025. *JW*
STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

[Redacted Signature]

STEPHEN PETERSON
RESPONDENT

[Redacted Signature]

F. XAVIER STARKES, CHAIR