

State of South Carolina

State Ethics Commission

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SEC AO2026-002

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SUBJECT: Use of Campaign Funds for Personal Vehicle Travel; Requirement to Maintain Mileage Log

SUMMARY: When a candidate, public official, or agent of either, uses a personal vehicle for travel related to campaign and/or official purposes, campaign funds may be used to reimburse the driver if an appropriately detailed mileage log is maintained.

APPLICABLE LAW:

Section 8-13-1348 provides, in relevant part:

- (A) No candidate, committee, public official, or political party may use campaign funds to defray personal expenses which are unrelated to the campaign or the office if the candidate is an officeholder nor may these funds be converted to personal use. The prohibition of this subsection does not extend to the incidental personal use of campaign materials or equipment nor to an expenditure used to defray ordinary expenses incurred in connection with an individual's duties as a holder of elective office.
- (B) The payment of reasonable and necessary travel expenses or for food and beverages consumed by the candidate or members of his immediate family while at, and in connection with, a political event are permitted.

DISCUSSION:

The State Ethics Commission's jurisdiction is limited to the applicability of the Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act of 1991 (Ethics Act). This opinion does not supersede any other statutory or regulatory restrictions or procedures which may apply to this situation. Failure to disclose relevant information may void the opinion.

Candidates and public officeholders are responsible for ensuring that campaign funds are spent only for purposes authorized by the Ethics Act. In that regard, Section 8-13-1348(A) prohibits the use of campaign funds to defray personal expenses unrelated to the campaign or, in the case of a public official, the office. Section 8-13-1348(B), in relevant part, permits the payment of “reasonable and necessary travel expenses” incurred in connection with a qualifying political event.

Typically, when a candidate or public official purchases permissible items such as postage or signage, the related invoice or receipt identifies the good or service purchased, along with the date and amount of the purchase. However, with regard to fuel used in a personal vehicle for travel related to campaign or official purposes, a receipt establishes only that fuel was purchased – not how the fuel was used.

Fuel purchased for use in a personal vehicle for campaign and/or official purposes typically enters a common fuel supply that can subsequently be consumed for any number of activities, making it impossible to discern which portion of the purchased fuel is related to the campaign or office. A mileage log allows the Commission to reliably determine what portion of a fuel expenditure is attributable to a permissible campaign or office-related purpose. The Commission therefore finds that when a candidate, public official, or agent of either, uses a personal vehicle for travel related to campaign and/or official purposes, campaign funds may be used to reimburse the driver only if an appropriately detailed mileage log is maintained.

The Commission notes that the particular form of the mileage log is less important than its substance and will be accepted in most formats provided the log contains, at a minimum, the individual driving, the date of travel, the origin and destination, the number of miles traveled, and the purpose of the travel.¹ The Commission finds that the rate of reimbursement must be the rate authorized by the Internal Revenue Service in the year the mileage is incurred. Finally, the Commission notes that a generalized monthly estimate or a recurring lump-sum is impermissible.

¹ Although no particular format is required, candidates and public officials may obtain a blank mileage log through the Commission’s website.

Candidate Campaign Mileage Log

Use this form to document vehicle travel undertaken for a campaign purpose and any related reimbursement. Record each trip separately and maintain this record for four years.

Candidate name		Office sought				
Date	Starting location	Destination	Specific campaign purpose	Beginning odometer	Ending odometer	Miles claimed
Total Miles					Reimbursement amount	