

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

FOR COMMISSION USE ONLY:

CASE NUMBER

C 2025-057

COMPLAINT FORM

1. **COMPLAINANT:** James Carpenter
ADDRESS: [REDACTED]
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]
TITLE: Attorney

RESPONDENT: Robert T. "Tommy" Dunn,
ADDRESS: [REDACTED]
TELEPHONE NUMBER: [REDACTED]
TITLE: Anderson Co. Council, Dist. 5; Chairman

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

Robert T. "Tommy" Dunn, Anderson County District 5 and County Council Chairman, failed to list any campaign contributions in his 2022 run. Mr. Dunn ran two highly contested races against Robert McCurry, back-to-back (2022 and 2024), with hundreds of campaign signs. In both election cycles, Mr. Dunn won by fewer than 100 votes. In his 2024 campaign, Mr. Dunn disclosed only about \$5,000 of expenditures. We believe Mr. Dunn is out of compliance with SC Ethics guidelines. This falls within a 4-year statute of limitations.

In a county of over 200,000, and with witnesses, and posted publicly on Facebook, Mr. Dunn surely was aware of the airplane advertisement over Lake Hartwell from his personal friend and County airport vendor, Mr. Scott Dunn, on a bright spring day; but he failed to disclose it.

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 James Carpenter 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
19th day of May, 2025

[REDACTED]

Notary Public for South Carolina
My Commission expires _____



[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

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STATE ETHICS COMMISSION
RECEIVED JUL 7 25 AM 11:47:1

Meghan Walker Dayson
Executive Director
State Ethics Commission
201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150
Columbia, SC 29210

Re: Complaint C2025-057

Dear Ms. Dayson:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to the referenced complaint attached to your letter dated June 2, 2025.

I would first like to call to your attention the fact that the complainant, James Carpenter, according to Anderson County records, owns no real property in the county and has no tax record for a vehicle registered in the County. This certainly suggests that Mr. Carpenter is not a citizen of Anderson County. Therefore, I do not understand how he can swear or affirm that the allegations in this complaint are true and correct to the best of his knowledge. Mr. Carpenter is an attorney with an office in Greenville, SC and he does not state whether the complaint is made by him or on behalf of a client. This leads me to the conclusion that this is politically motivated and designed for the purposes of harassment rather than possible violation of the State Ethics Act.

The first allegation of the complaint concerns contributions and expenditures for District 5 County Council election cycles for 2022 and 2024. There were no contributions or expenditures for the 2022 election cycle because there were none. I did use some signs from a previous election cycle, but I did not use "hundreds of campaign signs." For the 2024 election cycle, I did make personal contributions to my campaign totaling \$4,529.00. I have never engaged in fundraising for any of my campaigns for County Council. I also had total expenditures of \$4,529.00 to Minuteman Press for mailings to voters in County Council District 5. I have amended my filings for the 2024 election cycle to reflect these contributions and expenditures. I also used signs that I had retained from previous election cycles.

The complaint further alleges that I "surely was aware of the airplane advertisement over Lake Hartwell from his personal friend and County airport vendor, Mr. Scott Dunn." While we have the same last name, I am not related to Scott Dunn. I did not request that Mr. Dunn fly an airplane advertisement over Lake Hartwell and I did not pay Scott Dunn to do so. I did hear about this after the fact and to my knowledge it never happened again. If I neither requested or paid for this, I do not believe I "failed to disclose it."

Based upon the above response, I request that this complaint be dismissed.

Sincerely yours,



Tommy Dunn

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
IN THE MATTER OF:)
Complaint C2025-057)
James Carpenter,)
Complainant.)
Robert T. "Tommy" Dunn,)
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, June 18, 2026 at 9:30 a.m. at the Commission Hearing Room located at: 201 Executive Center Drive, Suite 150, Columbia, South Carolina 29210.

The following allegation will be heard:


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

That Robert T. "Tommy" Dunn, Anderson County Councilmember, failed to use a campaign bank account for a \$2,305.39 expenditure to Minuteman Press on May 6, 2024, 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 19th day,
of March 2026.

Certificate of Service by Certified Mail

I hereby certify that a copy of this **NOTICE OF HEARING** was duly served on RESPONDENT Robert T. "Tommy" Dunn, P.O. Box 8002, Anderson, SC 29622 by depositing said **NOTICE OF HEARING** in the United States mail, Columbia, South Carolina on this 23 day of March 2026, by **CERTIFIED MAIL, E-RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**, appropriate postage affixed, and a return address clearly indicated on said envelope.


Erin Caughman
State Ethics Commission

Columbia, South Carolina

(803) 253-4192

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF RICHLAND

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

IN THE MATTER OF:
COMPLAINT C2025-057

James Carpenter,
Complainant,

CONSENT ORDER

v.

Robert "Tommy" Dunn,
Respondent.

This matter comes before the State Ethics Commission (Commission) by way of a Complaint filed on January 8, 2026. Pursuant to Section 8-13-320(10)(i) of the South Carolina Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act (Ethics Act), the Complaint against Robert "Tommy" Dunn (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 elected to the Anderson County Council (Council) in 2009. Prior to the filing of the Complaint, Respondent was a candidate in the June 11, 2024 primary election and the November 5, 2024 general election.
2. On May 23, 2025, James Carpenter (Complainant) filed a complaint alleging Respondent failed to disclose campaign expenditures related to the November 5, 2024 election cycle and a prior November 8, 2022 election cycle. Specifically, the Complaint alleged Respondent "disclosed only about \$5,000 of expenditures" during the 2024 election cycle and that Respondent was therefore "out of compliance with SC Ethics guidelines."

JX #1

3. The Complaint also alleged Respondent did not disclose a campaign contribution in the form of an airplane advertisement banner, which was flown over the county by a third party prior to the June 11, 2024 primary election. According to Complainant, Respondent "surely was aware of the airplane advertisement over Lake Hartwell from his personal friend and county airport vendor, Mr. Scott Dunn, on a bright spring day; but he failed to disclose it."
4. Respondent provided a written response to Commission staff on July 7, 2025, denying he received any contributions or made any expenditures in the 2022 election cycle and stating that he reused signage from earlier campaigns for the 2022 and 2024 elections.
5. Respondent noted he made two personal contributions to his campaign in 2024, totaling \$4,529.00, and had two expenditures totaling the same amount. These expenditures were both to Minuteman Press for mailings.
6. Respondent's first personal contribution and accompanying expenditure to Minuteman Press, each \$2,305.39, were disclosed in his 2024 Pre-Election CDR.
7. Respondent's second personal contribution and accompanying expenditure to Minuteman Press, each \$2,223.61, were not initially disclosed in any CDRs, but Respondent amended his CDRs following the filing of the Complaint to include this information.
8. Regarding the airplane advertisement, Respondent stated that he did not request the advertisement, did not discuss the advertisement with Scott Dunn, did not pay Scott Dunn for the advertisement, and is not related to Scott Dunn. Rather, he "hear[d] about this after the fact and to [his] knowledge it never happened again."
9. During the investigation, Commission Investigator Reginald Gaymon interviewed Scott Dunn, owner of Heli-Plane Aviation, to determine whether Respondent requested or purchased the airplane advertisement. Scott Dunn stated he did not have any conversation with Respondent

JA # 2

- about the advertisement, and that he ran the advertisement because he wanted to support candidates whose values aligned with his own.
10. The investigation further revealed that Respondent had no campaign bank account for the 2022 election cycle. As to the 2024 election cycle, Respondent opened a campaign bank on May 23, 2024 with a \$100.00 deposit, all of which was subsequently expended on monthly bank fees. The 2024 campaign bank account was closed on February 5, 2025 with a zero balance. The account showed no other deposits.
11. A review of Respondent's CDRs revealed the aforementioned expenditures to Minuteman Press. Respondent's campaign bank account did not reflect these transactions, but invoices received from Minuteman Press confirmed the expenditures were for campaign-related mailings.
12. On February 12, 2026, Investigator Gaymon spoke with Respondent and explained the requirement to use a campaign bank account for contributions and expenditures, as well as some of the noted filing deficiencies. Respondent promptly came into compliance.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon the above 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. Respondent failed to use a campaign bank account for the campaign expenditures to Minuteman Press, in violation of Section 8-13-1312, which provides, in relevant part:

Except as is required for the separation of funds and expenditures under the provisions of Section 8-13-1300(7), a candidate shall not establish more than one campaign checking account and one savings account unless federal or state law

SA #3

requires additional accounts...The candidate or a duly authorized officer of a committee must maintain the accounts in the name of the candidate or committee...Except as otherwise provided under Section 8-13-1348(C), 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 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.

3. Section 8-13-1300(17) reads:

'Independent expenditure' means:

- (a) an expenditure made directly or indirectly by a person to advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate or ballot measure; and
- (b) when taken as a whole and in context, the expenditure made by a person to influence the outcome of an elective office or ballot measure but which is not: (i) made to; (ii) controlled by; (iii) coordinated with; (iv) requested by; or (v) made upon consultation with a candidate or an agent of a candidate; or a committee or agent of a committee; or a ballot measure committee or an agent of a ballot measure committee.

4. Section 8-13-1300(33) reads:

'Coordinated with' means discussion or negotiation between a candidate or a candidate's agent and: (a) a person; (b) an agent of a person; (c) any other agent of a candidate; or (d) any combination of these concerning, but not limited to, a political communication's:

1. contents, including the specific wording of print, broadcast, or telephone communications; the message or theme of print or broadcast communications;
2. timing, including the proximity to general or primary elections, proximity to other political communications, and proximity to other campaign events;
3. location, including the proximity to other political communications, or geographical targeting, or both;
4. mode, including the medium (phone, broadcast, print, etc.) of the communication;
5. intended audience, including the demographic or political targeting, or geographical targeting; and

JX #4

6. volume, including the amount, frequency, or size of political communication.
5. Section 8-13-320(10)(1) allows the Commission to issue a civil penalty of up to \$2,000.00 for each violation of the Ethics Act.
6. 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 Section 8-13-1312 for failing to pay a \$2,305.39 expenditure to Minuteman Press from a campaign bank account.¹ As to the airplane advertisement, the Commission found no evidence that it was a contribution that must be disclosed by Respondent. Rather, the Commission finds the advertisement is properly classified as an "independent expenditure" because there was no evidence of any coordination between Scott Dunn and Respondent. The Commission further finds that mere knowledge of an independent expenditure is insufficient to constitute coordination.

Through this Consent Order, Respondent admits he used personal funds to make campaign expenditures to Minuteman Press instead of using a campaign bank account as required by the Ethics Act. In mitigation, the Commission acknowledges that this is Respondent's first Complaint before the Commission. The Commission further notes that Respondent has been cooperative with staff since the filing of the Complaint and is currently in compliance.

¹ The Commission also found probable cause to believe Respondent failed to disclose the personal contribution and subsequent expenditure to Minuteman Press, in violation of Section 8-13-1308(F). However, the Commission declines to proceed on these counts given that Respondent has since disclosed this activity.

JX#5

DISPOSITION


1. The Commission finds Respondent in violation of one (1) count of Section 8-13-1312 for failing to use a campaign bank account to make expenditures and receive contributions.
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 and orders Respondent to pay the Commission, within ninety (90) days of receipt of this Order, an administrative fee of \$200.00. The Commission declines to assess a civil penalty in light of the facts and mitigation outlined herein.


By executing this Consent Order, Respondent understands that he is confessing to a judgment of \$200.00 if 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 \$200.00 (less any monies paid) in its Judgment Rolls, without cost to the Commission.

AND IT IS SO ORDERED, THIS 18th DAY OF June, 2026.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION


F. Xavier Starks


ROBERT "TOMMY" DUNN,
RESPONDENT


SLOAN P. ELLIS,
COUNSEL FOR RESPONDENT