



Campaign Finance Handbook

CHAPTER 13: ELECTRONIC FILING OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE REPORTS

Overview

The Secretary of State's Office is required to develop a method of accepting campaign finance reports by electronic means of transmission for political committees required to file with the Secretary of State's Office. The latest, electronic filing application launched in 2020 and allows county boards of elections to provide their political committees transparency and ease of filing at the county level, as well. In developing the electronic filing system, the Office sought to provide multiple methods of electronic filing to maximize the ability of all entities to take part. The system was developed to allow greater flexibility by providing both (1) large campaign operations the ability to use off-the-shelf or custom-made campaign software to manage tens of thousands of records, and (2) small committees with only dozens of records the ability to easily file their respective reports electronically. Since January 1, 2001, all entities under the auditing authority of the Secretary of State have had the ability to electronically file their campaign finance reports. Today, all entities under the auditing authority of the county boards of elections have the ability to electronically file their campaign finance reports.

Who Must File Electronically

Statewide candidate committees, the campaign committees of candidates for member of the General Assembly, statewide PACs and PCEs, state political parties, and legislative campaign funds must file electronically at the Secretary of State's Office. A county political party must file its State Candidate Fund electronically with the Secretary of State. Additionally, a county political party must file its Restricted Fund electronically *if* the party has accepted *any* gifts from a corporation or labor organization into the Restricted Fund.

Local candidates, local PACs, and local PCEs are permitted to file their campaign finance reports electronically with their county board of elections.

Committees that are required to file their reports electronically are required to follow the same statutory report filing deadlines to which all committees are subject.

[R.C. 3517.10, 3517.106](#)



Filing Electronically with the Secretary of State's Office

There are two methods for a committee to file its campaign finance reports electronically in compliance with [R.C. 3517.106](#):

- Direct entry online filing; and
- Data file upload.

Most entities will use the direct entry online filing method. The data file upload method of filing requires greater than average technical knowledge because the user must understand file formatting to successfully submit a report. This chapter will largely address the direct entry online filing system. Information is available on the Secretary of State's [website](#) on use of the data file upload process.

Direct Entry Online Filing

Committees using the direct entry online filing system will key contributions, expenditures, and other transactions directly into screens accessible from the Secretary of State's [website](#). Data may be keyed into the committee's report at any time and from any location having internet access. Keyed data is not "submitted" until the committee enters and completes the submit process through the cover page screen of the online filing system.

The direct entry online filing system includes several features designed to assist campaigns in the management of data and compliance with state law and agency rules. A few examples of these features include:

- Address book. This feature saves each contribution and each expenditure in separate address books, allowing the entity to be quickly added at later transactions.
- PAC number lookup. This feature allows a user to lookup the proper name and registration number of any active PAC registered with the Secretary of State.
- Cover page calculation. When a user intends to submit a report, the only cover page information needed will be the balance brought forward (line 1). After entering this figure, the user clicks a button and the remaining cover page line item totals are automatically calculated based on the transaction information entered.



- Pre-audit checks. At any time before submission of a report, a user can have the system “audit” entries on that report. Items such as missing employer information or the receipt of a cash contribution exceeding \$100 are part of this “audit” function.
- Easy to read printed version. A user can create and print the contents of any report – whether submitted or pending –to review the entries.

Filing Electronically with the Board of Elections

Political committees that file with their local board of elections may file electronically using [BOe-file](#). This online filing method allows the committee to key contributions, expenditures, and other transactions directly into screens accessible from [BOe-file](#). Data may be keyed into the committee’s report at any time and from any location having Internet access. Keyed data is not “submitted” until the committee enters and completes the submit report process through the cover page screen in [BOe-file](#).

BOe-file allows the committee to manage data and compliance with state law and agency rules. The [BOe-file Learning Center](#) provides step by step user guides for:

- How to create an account;
- How to file a Designation of Treasurer;
- Updating the Designation of Treasurer; and
- Creating, submitting, and amending campaign finance reports.

Additionally, BOe-file provides the county boards of elections campaign finance resources and the ability to review and print committee filings for examination.

Checks and Receipts

Committees filing electronically must continue to submit copies of canceled checks or paid receipts for all expenditures greater than \$25. Expenditure verification may be uploaded as a PDF attachment to electronically filed reports, hand delivered, or mailed to the filing location, or state level filers may email their supporting PDF attachments to CFforms@OhioSoS.gov.

Unlike the filing of reports, which must be received at the filing location by 4 p.m., mailed copies of canceled checks and paid receipts are considered timely filed so long as they are postmarked by the filing deadline.

[R.C. 3517.10; OAC 111:2-5-03](#)



Amendments

Users can easily file amendments to reports via the online filing systems by opening the report as originally filed and making the modifications necessary to make the report complete. After making the edits or other changes, the user proceeds through the submit process via the cover page and the amendment is filed.

Candidate Campaign Committee Notice of Hardship

A campaign committee may request to file reports by paper if electronic filing would constitute a hardship for the candidate or committee. The campaign committee makes the request by filing [Form 31-DD, Electronic Filing Notice of Hardship](#). The committee must file a new form for each report that must be filed electronically. A committee may not file a paper report before filing the form with the Secretary of State's Office.

Once this form is filed, the campaign committee may file the report on paper and pay a fee covering the cost of having the data entered. A paper report filed under the Notice of Hardship must be received at the Secretary of State's Office no later than the applicable deadline set forth in [R.C. 3517.10](#). The paper report should not be filed at the county board of elections.

When the report is filed, it must also include a check or money order made payable to the Ohio Secretary of State for the fee to offset the data entry costs. Please see in [OAC 111:2-5-04](#) for the formula to determine the amount of the fee prescribed in [R.C. 3517.106\(L\)](#) is found.

Candidates for statewide office whose campaign committees have \$25,000 or more in expenditures during the reporting period may not file this form.

Electioneering Communications

All electioneering communication reports are filed electronically with the Secretary of State's Office. The Office has prescribed an electronic-only method of filing electioneering communication reports. Upon filing [Form 31-EC, Notice of Intent to Make Electioneering Communication Disbursements](#), the person or entity filing the Notice will be assigned access credentials for use of the online filing system. Because the timing and content of electioneering communication reporting differs greatly from the disclosure requirements for political entities, the online filing system is customized for reporting this activity.

[R.C. 3517.1011](#)