

OHIO CAMPAIGN FINANCE HANDBOOK

CHAPTER 11: ELECTRONIC FILING
OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE REPORTS

ELECTRONIC FILING OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE REPORTS

Overview

The secretary of state's office is required by statute to develop one or more methods of accepting campaign finance reports by electronic means of transmission. In developing an electronic filing system, the office sought to provide multiple methods of electronic filing in order to maximize the ability of all entities to take part. The system was developed to allow greater flexibility by providing large campaign operations the ability to use off-the-shelf or custom-made campaign software to manage tens of thousands of records, and those 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 option of electronically filing their campaign finance reports.

Who Must File Electronically

The requirement to file electronically at the secretary of state's office applies to 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. 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 not required to file with the secretary of state's office or permitted to file their campaign finance reports electronically.

Committees (campaign, PAC, PCE, etc.) 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

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. The direct entry online filing method will be used by most entities. The data file upload method of filing requires greater than average technical knowledge because the user must have a fairly in-depth understanding of data mapping and file formatting to successfully submit a report. This chapter will primarily address the direct entry online filing system. Information is available at the end of this chapter on use of the data file upload process.

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 direct entry 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 subsequent transactions.
- » PAC number lookup. This feature allows a user to lookup the proper name and registration number of any active PAC on file 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 prior to or at submission of a report, a user can click a button to 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 – in order to review the entries.

Checks and Receipts

Committees filing electronically must continue to submit paper copies of canceled checks or paid receipts for all expenditures greater than \$25. Unlike the filing of reports, submitting copies of canceled checks and paid receipts is timely so long as they are postmarked by the filing deadline.

[R.C. 3517.10; OAC 111-6-03]

Amendments

Amendments are easily completed via the online filing system by the user 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

If the filing of a committee's campaign finance report by electronic means would constitute a hardship for the candidate or committee, the candidate or committee may request, through a secretary of state prescribed form, to file reports by paper copy.

The purpose of this form is to permit candidates whose campaign committees are subject to the electronic filing requirements in *R.C. 3517.106* to affirm that filing their campaign finance reports by electronic means would constitute a hardship for the candidate or committee. *Form 31-DD, Electronic Filing Notice of Hardship* must be filed for each report subject to the requirement to file the report by electronic means. It is to be filed with the secretary of state's office prior to the filing of the report covered.

Once this form is filed, the campaign committee is permitted to 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 be accompanied by a check or money order made payable to the Ohio Secretary of State for the fee to offset the data entry costs. The formula to determine the amount of the fee prescribed in *R.C. 3517.106 (L)* is listed on the form.

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 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 of political entities such as candidates or parties, the online filing system is customized for reporting this activity.