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Colorado Statutes/Colorado Revised Statutes /TITLE 1 ELECTIONS/ELECTION CAMPAIGN REGULATIONS/ARTICLE 45 FAIR CAMPAIGN PRACTICES ACT/1-45-117. State and political subdivisions - limitations on contributions.

1-45-117. State and political subdivisions - limitations on contributions.

(1) (a) (I) No agency, department, board, division, bureau, commission, or council of the state or any political subdivision thereof shall make any contribution in campaigns involving the nomination, retention, or election of any person to any public office, nor shall any such entity expend any public moneys from any source, or make any contributions, to urge electors to vote in favor of or against any:

(A) State-wide ballot issue that has been submitted for the purpose of having a title designated and fixed pursuant to section [1-40-106](#) (1) or that has had a title designated and fixed pursuant to that section;

(B) Local ballot issue that has been submitted for the purpose of having a title fixed pursuant to section [31-11-111](#) or that has had a title fixed pursuant to that section;

(C) Referred measure, as defined in section [1-1-104](#) (34.5);

(D) Measure for the recall of any officer that has been certified by the appropriate election official for submission to the electors for their approval or rejection.

(II) However, a member or employee of any such agency, department, board, division, bureau, commission, or council may respond to questions about any such issue described in subparagraph (I) of this paragraph (a) if the member, employee, or public entity has not solicited the question. A member or employee of any such agency, department, board, division, bureau, commission, or council who has policy-making responsibilities may expend not more than fifty dollars of public moneys in the form of letters, telephone calls, or other activities incidental to expressing his or her opinion on any such issue described in subparagraph (I) of this paragraph (a).

(b) (I) Nothing in this subsection (1) shall be construed as prohibiting an agency, department, board, division, bureau, commission, or council of the state, or any political subdivision thereof from expending public moneys or making contributions to dispense a factual summary, which shall include arguments both for and against the proposal, on any issue of official concern before the electorate in the jurisdiction. Such summary shall not contain a conclusion or opinion in favor of or against any particular issue. As used herein, an issue of official concern shall be limited to issues that will appear on an election ballot in the jurisdiction.

(II) Nothing in this subsection (1) shall be construed to prevent an elected official from expressing a personal opinion on any issue.

(III) Nothing in this subsection (1) shall be construed as prohibiting an agency, department, board, division, bureau, commission, or council of the state or any political subdivision thereof from:

(A) Passing a resolution or taking a position of advocacy on any issue described in subparagraph (I) of paragraph (a) of this subsection (1); or

(B) Reporting the passage of or distributing such resolution through established, customary means, other than paid advertising, by which information about other proceedings of such agency, department, board, division, bureau, or council of the state or any political subdivision thereof is regularly provided to the public.

(C) Nothing in this subsection (1) shall be construed as prohibiting a member or an employee of an agency, department, board, division, bureau, commission, or council of the state or any political subdivision thereof from expending personal funds, making contributions, or using personal time to urge electors to vote in favor of or against any issue described in subparagraph (I) of paragraph (a) of this subsection (1).

(2) The provisions of subsection (1) of this section shall not apply to:

(a) An official residence furnished or paid for by the state or a political subdivision;

(b) Security officers who are required to accompany a candidate or the candidate's family;

(c) Publicly owned motor vehicles provided for the use of the chief executive of the state or a political subdivision;

(d) Publicly owned aircraft provided for the use of the chief executive of the state or of a political subdivision or the executive's family for security purposes; except that, if such use is, in whole or in part, for campaign purposes, the expenses relating to the campaign shall be reported and reimbursed pursuant to subsection (3) of this section.

(3) If any candidate who is also an incumbent inadvertently or unavoidably makes any expenditure which involves campaign expenses and official expenses, such expenditures shall be deemed a campaign expense only, unless the candidate, not more than ten working days after the such expenditure, files with the appropriate officer such information as the secretary of state may by rule require in order to differentiate between campaign expenses and official expenses. Such information shall be set forth on a form provided by the appropriate officer. In the event that public moneys have been expended for campaign expenses and for official expenses, the candidate shall reimburse the state or political subdivision for the amount of money spent on campaign expenses.

(4) Any violation of this section shall be subject to the sanctions authorized in section [1-45-113](#) or any appropriate order or relief, including injunctive relief or a restraining order to enjoin the continuance of the violation.

Source: Initiated 96: Entire article R&RE, effective upon proclamation of the Governor, January 15, 1997. **L. 2002:** (4) added, p. 280, § 1, effective August 7.

Editor's note: This section was contained in an article that was repealed and reenacted in 1996. Provisions of this section, as it existed in 1996, are similar to those contained in 1-45-116 as said section existed in 1995, the year prior to the repeal and reenactment of this article.

ANNOTATION

Annotator's note. Since § [1-45-117](#) is similar to § [1-45-116](#) as it existed prior to the 1997 repeal and reenactment of this article, relevant cases construing that provision have been included in the annotations to this section.

The purpose of this section is to prohibit the state government and its officials from spending public funds to influence the outcome of campaigns for political office or ballot issues. *Colo. Common Cause v. Coffman*, 85 P.3d 551 (Colo. App. 2003), *aff'd*, 102 P.3d 999 (Colo. 2004).

This section must be strictly construed. It is an established principle that statutes regarding the use of public funds to influence the outcome of elections are strictly construed. *Coffman v. Colo. Common Cause*, 102 P.3d 999 (Colo. 2004).

Moneys in fund administered by the Colorado compensation insurance authority that consisted primarily of premiums paid into the fund by employers constituted "public moneys" for purposes of this section. *Denver Area Labor Fed'n v. Buckley*, 924 P.2d 524 (Colo. 1996).

While the term "public moneys" is not defined, the all-inclusive language "from any source" indicates that the general assembly intended an expansive definition of the phrase. Thus, the term "public moneys" may not be construed to refer only to sums realized from the imposition of taxes. *Denver Area Labor Fed'n v. Buckley*, 924 P.2d 524 (Colo. 1996).

Although moneys collected by the political subdivision were not derived from state-imposed sales, use, property, or income taxes, those moneys may be spent by the political subdivision only for authorized public purposes. The general assembly has in essence declared that the expenditure of moneys in the fund for purposes prohibited by this section are not authorized expenditures for public purposes. *Denver Area Labor Fed'n v. Buckley*, 924 P.2d 524 (Colo. 1996).

This section prohibits the use of "public moneys from any source," not the use of "public funds". The general assembly thus selected a phrase not previously construed in seeking to limit the expenditure of funds by various governmental entities for certain purposes. *Denver Area Labor Fed'n v. Buckley*, 924 P.2d 524 (Colo. 1996).

This section tends to promote public confidence in government by prohibiting the use of moneys authorized for expenditure by political subdivisions for specified public purposes to advance the personal viewpoint of one group over another. A political subdivision's use of moneys that were authorized for expenditure for the benefit of an insured to oppose the passage of an amendment proposed by an insured is the type of conduct the general assembly intended to prohibit by the enactment of this section. *Denver Area Labor Fed'n v. Buckley*, 924 P.2d 524 (Colo. 1996).

What is of "official concern" to school district board of education is to be determined by reference to the official powers and duties delegated by the general assembly in the school laws. *Mountain States Legal Found. v. Denver Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 459 F. Supp. 357 (D. Colo. 1978).

A matter of official concern is one which at the very least involves questions which come before the officials for an official decision. *Campbell v. Joint Dist. 28-J*, 704 F.2d 501 (10th Cir. 1983).

Proposed constitutional amendment not of official concern. A proposed amendment to the state constitution on a general election ballot is not a matter of official concern. *Campbell v. Joint Dist. 28-J*, 704 F.2d 501 (10th Cir. 1983).

Not determined solely by board. The characterization of a campaign issue as being of "official concern" is not a judgment which can be made solely by the board of education; such an interpretation of this section would give unlimited discretion to the school board to use school funds and school facilities whenever it suited the personal preference of the majority of the members. *Mountain States Legal Found. v. Denver Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 459 F. Supp. 357 (D. Colo. 1978).

This section allows an employee with policy-making responsibility to expend public funds up to the \$50 limit in expressing an opinion about a pending ballot issue. *Regents of the Univ. of Colo. v. Meyer*, 899 P.2d 316 (Colo. App. 1995).

Paid staff time is a contribution in kind for purposes of this section. Time spent by the state treasurer's

staff during work hours on a non-volunteer basis preparing and disseminating press releases expressing the state treasurer's opposition to a statewide ballot issue therefore violated this section to the extent that the value of that time exceeded \$50. *Coffman v. Colo. Common Cause*, 102 P.3d 999 (Colo. 2004).

State treasurer's press conference and press releases opposing a statewide ballot issue violated this section. The press releases were not balanced factual summaries of the ballot issue and were not resolutions because they were not formal expressions of a voting body. The state treasurer expended more than \$50 in preparing the press releases and was not permitted to expend more than that to take a position of advocacy. *Colo. Common Cause v. Coffman*, 85 P.3d 551 (Colo. App. 2003), *aff'd*, 102 P.3d 999 (Colo. 2004).

Public school payroll deduction system for teachers' union dues, a portion of which was given by the union to a political action committee, did not constitute a "contribution in kind" because it did not support a specific "issue" or "candidate" that the political action committee supported or opposed during the time that the district made the payroll deductions. *Mountain States v. Secretary of State*, 946 P.2d 586 (Colo. App. 1997) (decided under law in effect prior to 1997 amendment).

Brochure mailed by metropolitan districts explaining proposed improvements violated this section. The brochure, when read in its entirety, did not present arguments for and against the issue. In fact, it took a position exclusively in favor of the issue, presented no contrary arguments, and expressly advocated the passage of the bond initiative that was titled only days after the mailing of the brochure. Thus, it urged voters to vote for the initiative. *Skruch v. Highlands Ranch Metro. Dists.*, 107 P.3d 1140 (Colo. App. 2004).

Although brochure did not mention ballot initiative by name, administrative law judge appropriately concluded that the language of this section does not require that level of specificity. The section prohibits "the urging of electors to vote a certain way." *Skruch v. Highlands Ranch Metro. Dists.*, 107 P.3d 1140 (Colo. App. 2004).

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