



# Campaign Finance Disclosure

## *Understanding information available to citizens*

- Political candidates raise and spend money to run for public office. Campaign finance laws regulate how much can be given, how it can be spent, and when and how it must be reported.
- Louisiana law requires candidates to report publicly who gave them money and how it was spent. This is called financial disclosure. Citizens interested in learning who has contributed to candidates or elected officials in Louisiana can find this information at [www.ethics.state.la.us](http://www.ethics.state.la.us).

### 1. Why is financial disclosure important?

Financial disclosures show citizens where the money comes from, how money is being spent by candidates and who is spending on behalf of a candidate. Knowing who gives money to a candidate and how candidates spend the money gives the public some idea of where loyalties might lie.

For example, there are concerns that if a special interest group or individual contributes a lot of money to an elected official, the official may do favors for that group or person.



### 2. What are expenditures and contributions?

Expenditures and contributions are defined in the law.

**Contributions** are payments given to support or oppose a candidate for an elected office. For example, people may contribute to their favorite candidate for governor or to a certain political party.

**Expenditures** are payments made to support or oppose a candidate for an elected office. Examples of a campaign expenditure include money spent on commercial air time, yard signs and bumper stickers.

### 3. Who must disclose campaign finances?

Three types of people or organizations must file disclosure reports under Louisiana law:

- Political committees, such as political action committees (PACs), which are created expressly to support or oppose candidates or ballot initiatives
- All candidates for public office, with exceptions for offices in non-parishwide districts with 35,000 or fewer people. Those lower level candidates who do not receive contributions from a single source over \$200 or exceed \$5,000 in expenditures do not have to file.
- An individual, corporation or other group who makes independent campaign-related expenditures of more than \$500.



Q: How much can a citizen donate to a campaign, and what information must the donor disclose?

A: A person may contribute \$5,000 per election for major statewide offices as well as supreme court and courts of appeal judgeships. A person may contribute \$2,500 per election for district offices, which include legislators, certain local government positions and district court judges. The donor's name, address and amount donated will be public. A person cannot give more than \$100 per year in cash to a candidate; other contributions can be made by check or credit card.

#### 4. What information must be disclosed by the candidate?

A campaign finance report must include:

- Contact information (name and phone number) for the person completing the report.
- Information about the candidate, including name, address and office sought.
- All **contributions** received within a certain period of time. The report must list the amount given and the name and address of each person who made a contribution. Contributions includes “in-kind” donations that have value to the campaign even though they are not money, such as campaign buttons, hats, office space or equipment for campaign headquarters. Candidates can lend or give themselves unlimited amounts of money for a campaign, but it must be reported.
- All **expenditures** made within a certain period of time. The report must list the amount spent, the person or company it was paid to and the purpose of the expenditure. Expenditures can include money spent by an advertising agency, a public relations firm or an agent for a political committee.

Q: What other information about public officials is available to citizens on the state ethics website?

A: Income disclosure. Income reports show how people in government make their money each year. Some work only in government, so they receive no outside income. Others, such as legislators, may work in government part time and have other jobs, like being a teacher, doctor or lawyer.

Lobbyist disclosure. Lobbyist reports show how lobbyists spend money on government officials and employees. These reports show if lobbyists are buying meals or drinks for people in government and the client they are working for.

#### 5. How are disclosure reports filed?

Currently, most reports can be filed electronically, mailed, e-mailed, hand-delivered or faxed. Depending on the specific public official or candidate, the report may be required to be filed electronically or mailed in.

Currently, candidates for major and district offices are required to file electronically if they have received contributions or make expenditures in excess of \$25,000. Beginning January 2012, all candidates for major and district offices will be required to file electronically.

Political action committees who receive contributions or make expenditures in excess of \$50,000 during the calendar year are required to file electronically.

#### 6. How can citizens find financial disclosure reports?

You should know that candidates file multiple reports covering different time periods and various reporting requirements. You may need to review several reports on one public official in order to understand the full picture of his or her campaign finances. Depending on the office sought, a candidate may be required to file a scanned or electronic report. The state ethics board website offers search engines for both types. A local candidate, for instance, could potentially file either a scanned or electronic report, so it's important to check both. Electronic reports are easier to search for detailed information compared to the scanned reports.

#### Good to Know!

Federal law regulates campaign finance disclosures for candidates for federal offices, including president and seats in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. To check disclosures of money contributed to federal candidates, political committees and party organizations, see the website of the Federal Election Commission at [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).

