

Good Afternoon,

My name is Zach Smith, Executive Chair and Treasurer of the Citizens for Ridgefield Schools PAC. I am responding to the most recent PDC complaint filed against our organization, case number 151075.

First, allow me to fully recognize and acknowledge that this is not the first complaint filed against our organization, but we take them very seriously and appreciate the opportunity to learn from them and improve our internal processes. Our organization's main purpose is to help promote the school bonds for our growing city. Unfortunately, the last six bonds have failed to reach the 60% threshold, falling just shy each time. After exhausting campaigns, we often suffer some turnover, which caused a shortage of valuable skills, namely that of a Treasurer and someone with PDC reporting experience. When we lost our Treasurer towards the beginning of this most recent campaign (January 2024), I spent a significant amount of time calling and emailing people in the area who could help, even contacting several accounting agencies. Unfortunately, no one had PDC reporting experience, so on top of my role as Executive Chair and leader of the Spring 2024 campaign, I took it upon myself to learn the PDC system, set up clearer reporting structures within our organization, and create digital folders to house all invoices, receipts, and copies of checks. Despite my best efforts, I admittedly had to make late amendments to some filings to come back into compliance.

The reason I share this is because our whole team is composed of volunteers, including myself. I have a demanding full-time job (and family) and have given this role everything I have. One recent Saturday, I spent eight hours reporting our most recent fundraiser. One reason it took so long was because our fundraiser baskets had multiple donations within them but only one person who paid for them, and the PDC reporting site is set up more for one-to-one reporting. After another one of my many calls to PDC support, I filed the fundraiser per their guidance, which was not how the system was set up but sufficed in getting our information on the site.

The previous complaint filed against our organization had to do with not reporting any C4s from the end of the last campaign (2022) to the beginning of the most recent one (2024) when I joined the Board. The challenge again was that these C4s had to be filed as part of a campaign, but the campaign did not begin in earnest until January 2024. Per guidance from PDC support, I retroactively changed the start date of the campaign to 2022 so that the newly reported C4s could be associated with the current campaign. While this solved the "starting balance" discrepancy which led to that complaint, it appears to have caused some other issues that I could not rectify within the PDC system. After spending hours trying to diagnose the problem on my side, it did appear to be a technical issue caused by the late C4 filing and change of the campaign start date. This seems to be the cause of the balance discrepancies pointed out by Ms. Pozzo and Mr. Edwards. As for failing to file the 7-day C4 pre-election, that was admittedly a gap in my knowledge.

As mentioned, we are a team of rotating volunteers, fulfilling an important duty of our election system in promoting facts about voting and details of the bond. We have had to spend a

significant amount of time answering questions from citizens who become confused through the misinformation spread by a small group of members, one of whom is Ms. Pozzo. In fact, in the lead-up to the last day to vote, I was spending a lot of my time preparing for a Public Inspection of Campaign Records at the request of Ms. Pozzo, knowing full well based on our extensive history with her that her intentions were not in earnest. After a two-hour meeting at Starbucks in which Ms. Pozzo identified herself as the only person in attendance, it was witnessed that two other people left the Starbucks with her. These people were not identified, and given the small seating area, were likely in close proximity to us during our conversation, yet another indicator that despite our best efforts to engage honestly with Ms. Pozzo and her colleagues, that honesty was not reciprocated.

Members of our organization have dedicated countless hours and energy to benefit voters with clear and accurate information. I believe that maintaining robust volunteer organizations is critical for community engagement and citizen advocacy. At times, this role can feel only suited for a professional getting paid for their services or someone without a day job. There have been times when I wished we had an integration with our bank account and the PDC site to show there is nothing hidden and that our lapses in timely reporting have more to do with the time it takes navigating technology.

Our organization firmly believes in the importance of the PDC, transparency, and doing things the right and ethical way. As Executive Chair of the Citizens for Ridgefield Schools, I have put together a plan for us to hire an official accountant and begin running ads to find a volunteer Treasurer with PDC experience to join our team. I am also putting together a packet of best practices to ensure that we are collecting all necessary information upfront from people who are donating their time or money and preventing the many hours spent (for example) tracking down employer information after a subsequent small donation made them surpass the \$250 threshold. My hope is that by memorializing this information we can avoid having lapses in knowledge when turnover naturally occurs.

I appreciate your time and role in this process and am happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Zach Smith

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zach Smith', located below the printed name.