

VIA EMAIL

May 28, 2025

Ms. Tabitha Townsend
Public Disclosure Commission
711 Capitol Way S., Suite 206
Olympia, WA 98504
pdcc@pdcc.wa.gov

Re: PDC Case Number 171035

Dear Ms. Townsend:

I write on behalf of my client, Building a Stronger Washington Sponsored by Western States Regional Council of Carpenters (“BASWA”), in response to the attached complaint filed by Mr. Conner Edwards (PDC Case Number 171035) alleging violations of RCW 42.17A.235 and 42.17A.240 for failing to (1) report payments made to our law firm for legal services related to an earlier complaint filed by Mr. Edwards, (2) file monthly C-4 reports for the months of December 2024 and January, February, and March of 2024, and (3) report payments made to BASWA’s treasurer, Antonio Acosta, for professional treasurer services.

The legal and reporting services provided to BASWA were not intended to be in-kind contributions. Payments for these services were made by the committee’s sponsor, the Western States Regional Council of Carpenters (“WSRCC”). Under federal tax law, administrative payments by a committee’s sponsor are not considered campaign activity, and under both federal campaign finance law and that of many other states, payments for administrative expenses, including legal and reporting services, are exempt from the definition of “contribution.”¹ The committee’s sponsor issued these payments pursuant to its normal practice for political committees. Because the committee’s sponsor did not intend to make contributions to the committee by paying for legal and administrative services, BASWA will be reimbursing WSRCC for those payments. Specifically, BASWA will report debts owed to WSRCC for its initial payment of those expenses.

We are in the process of determining which reports need to be amended and the specific amounts to be included on the reports as most invoices were below the \$1,000 threshold for debt reporting. This is a priority and we will get the report(s) amended as soon as possible.

¹ See 26 C.F.R. § 1.527-6(b)(1)(i); 11 C.F.R. § 114.1(a)(2)(iii); Cal. Code Regs., tit. 2, § 18215(c)(16); Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 16-911(B)(9).

Ms. Tabitha Townsend
May 28, 2025
Page 2

With regard to the monthly reports, no reports have been filed since November 2024 because the committee has not participated in any elections since the November 5, 2024 general election and has not received contributions or made expenditures in excess of \$750.

Lastly, Mr. Acosta is not a professional treasurer and is an employee of WSRCC. The time spent by Mr. Acosta in his capacity as treasurer of BASWA is minimal, so the monthly value of the time spent is well below the debt reporting threshold. Accordingly, BASWA will disclose the payments to WSRCC for Mr. Acosta's and other employees' time when those payments are made.

Because there should only be a minimal number of outstanding debts that should have been disclosed on BASWA's reports, and those debts are for routine administrative expenses unrelated to actual campaign activity affecting elections, we believe the late disclosure resulted in minimal harm to public disclosure. Because the late disclosure was inadvertent, we respectfully request that you close the matter without taking any further action. If the Commission feels that some action is warranted, we believe a warning letter would be sufficient.

Please let us know if you have any questions or if there is any additional information we can provide.

Sincerely,



Emily Andrews

Counsel to Building a Stronger Washington Sponsored by Western States Regional Council of Carpenters

Respondent Name
Building A Stronger Washington
Complainant Name
Conner Edwards
Complaint Description
Conner Edwards reported via the portal (Wed, 16 Apr 2025 at 11:30 AM) See attached complaint.
What impact does the alleged violation(s) have on the public?
See complaint.
List of attached evidence or contact information where evidence may be found
See complaint and also PDC website.
List of potential witnesses with contact information to reach them
See complaint and also PDC website.
Certification (Complainant)
I certify (or declare) under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that information provided with this complaint is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Complaint Against: Building a Stronger Washington**Submitted:** 4/16/2025**Notice to Respondent Due By:** 4/26/2025 per WAC 390-37-050(1)**90 Day Initial Hearing Deadline:** 7/15/2025 per RCW 42.17A.755(3)**Statutes Violated:** RCW 42.17A.235, .240**Background****Washington State's Campaign Finance Disclosure Law**

One of the primary purposes of the public disclosure law is to provide citizens of this state, and especially voters, with the means for becoming informed about the financing of political campaigns.¹ The public disclosure law was enacted through voter approval of Initiative 276 in 1972.

State law requires candidates and committees that register under full reporting to submit regular reports of financial activity. Those reports are filed on schedules outlined on the PDC's key reporting dates calendar.²

Violations

This respondent utilized a law firm to provide a response to an earlier PDC complaint. See link: <https://pdc-case-tracking.s3-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/7559/164506%20Building%20a%20Stronger%20Washington%20Sponsored%20by%20Western%20States%20Regional%20Council%20of%20Carpenters%20Response.pdf>

However, this organization has not filed any C4s in January, February, or March of 2025 to show an expenditure/in-kind contribution/debt to a law firm for the legal work.

Additionally, no C4 for December (of 2024) has been filed either.

Additionally, since this organization's treasurer (Antonio Acosta) appears to work for a professional compliance firm, it appears that no expenditure/in-kind contribution/debt to the professional compliance firm has been reported either. Who has been paying the organization's treasurer? Or if no-one has been paying, it would be an unreported in-kind contribution.

Conclusion

I urge the PDC staff to take quick action and resolve the noncompliance identified in this complaint.

Best,

/s/

Conner Edwards
(425) 533-1677 cell

¹ <https://pdc.wa.gov/registration-reporting/candidates-committees/registration-reporting-basics>

² <https://pdc.wa.gov/registration-reporting/candidates-committees/registration-reporting-basics/key-dates-2024>

Notice to Respondent

I apologize to you for any inconvenience caused by this complaint. The chance that you will actually be fined for the violations identified above is extremely small because the agency is averse to doing the work necessary to bring cases to hearings. Most likely this case – and any future cases against you – will simply be dismissed by staff.

This complaint is one of over one thousand complaints that I have filed to highlight and ultimately fix the significant shortcomings associated with the agency responsible for administering our state's campaign finance laws.

What are these shortcomings?

Overcomplicated and outdated requirements that are difficult to understand and comply with. Failure to properly educate the regulated community about the tasks they must perform to remain in compliance with applicable requirements and avoid complaints. Failure of the agency to send regular reminders to filers about pending deadlines. A failure to proactively enforce applicable requirements which enables the complaint system to become weaponized. Non-intuitive, non-user friendly, and buggy reporting software. Failure to meaningfully enforce core requirements. Failure to follow the best operating practices of other neighboring campaign finance agencies. An agency leadership structure that largely disregards stakeholder input and is slow to identify and resolve major agency deficiencies.

I believe that the best way to motivate the agency to address these problems is by filing a large number of complaints so that the agency's problems become impossible to ignore.

Slowly (too slowly) this strategy is starting to yield concrete and beneficial changes. You can read about these changes here: <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/why-one-man-filed-800-campaign-finance-complaints-against-wa-candidates/>

If you believe that the agency could have done something different to help you proactively avoid the issues identified in this complaint, I hope that you will consider including it in your response. The agency, and the public, can benefit from your perspective and feedback.

**“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”
— Mahatma Gandhi**