

Philadelphia Board of Ethics

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Ethics Board Files Campaign Finance Enforcement Petition Against the Friends of Maria Campaign

PHILADELPHIA – The Philadelphia Board of Ethics filed a Petition in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas against the Friends of Maria Candidate Committee, Councilwoman Maria Quiñones-Sanchez, and the treasurer of Friends of Maria (collectively “the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign”), to enforce violations of the City’s campaign finance law committed by the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign while Maria Quiñones-Sanchez was running for City Council in May 2007.

The Board’s Petition alleges that the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign violated the “single committee rule” of the City’s campaign finance law (§20-1003) by using a second political committee to make expenditures to influence candidate Quiñones-Sanchez’s election and by soliciting contributions to that second committee to help pay for those expenditures. Specifically, the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign used New Direction Philly.org, a registered political action committee (the “PAC”), to pay for full-page newspaper ads featuring Governor Rendell’s endorsement of candidate Quiñones-Sanchez. The ten full-page ads cost \$12,500.

According to the Petition, the ads were prepared and ultimately funded by the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign, but were placed in newspapers and initially paid for by the PAC at the direction of Quiñones-Sanchez’s campaign manager. In addition, the PAC agreed to pay for the Quiñones-Sanchez ads with a promise from Quiñones-Sanchez’s campaign manager that the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign would both solicit and make contributions to the PAC to reimburse it for advancing the newspaper ad expenditure, which it subsequently did.

The Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign violated the single committee rule in two ways, as explained in the Board’s Petition. First, it violated the rule by directing contributions to the PAC, rather than to the Friends of Maria. Second, it violated the rule by using the PAC to pay for the Campaign’s ad, rather than the Friends of Maria.

The ten full-page ads disclosed that they were paid for by the PAC. While this was technically accurate, the Board's Petition states that it effectively misled the public because those who read the ads would have no idea that the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign actually created, ordered and ultimately funded the ads.

In addition, the \$12,500 advance payment for the ads by the PAC constituted a contribution to the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign, according to the Petition. This \$12,500 contribution was not disclosed by the Quiñones-Sanchez Campaign in any of its campaign finance reports filed electronically with the Board, in violation of §20-1006(4) of the City's campaign finance law, and exceeded the \$10,000 contribution limit in violation of §20-1002(2) of that law. The Ethics Board administers and enforces the City's campaign finance law.

The Ethics Board is seeking a monetary penalty of \$7,500 and an order from the Court compelling the Friends of Maria Campaign Committee to file an amended campaign finance report.

The Philadelphia Board of Ethics is a five-member independent board established by ordinance, approved by Philadelphia voters in May 2006, and installed on November 27, 2006. It is charged with providing ethics training for all City employees and enforcing City campaign finance, financial disclosure and conflict of interest laws. The Ethics Board has authority to render advice, investigate complaints and issue fines.

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