
Wisconsin Legislative Council

ACT MEMO



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April 19, 2022

2021 Wisconsin Act 265 [2021 Senate Bill 718]

Campaign Finance Law Changes

2021 Wisconsin Act 265 makes changes to campaign finance law recommended by the Wisconsin Ethics Commission. The changes take effect on January 3, 2023, and include the following:

- Expands the definition of “conduit” to permit individual conduit contributions to any committee. Under current law, conduit contributions can be made only to a candidate committee, legislative campaign committee, political party, or political action committee.
- Exempts local committees that register and file with a local filing officer from paying the required \$100 filing fee. Under the act, only those committees that are required to register and file with the Ethics Commission must pay the \$100 filing fee.
- Clarifies the general procedure and eligibility requirements for state and local candidates to claim an exemption from filing campaign finance reports. Under Act 265, incorrectly filing an exemption request is not a basis for denying ballot access. The act also increases the calendar year threshold for committees to be eligible to claim an exemption from filing campaign finance reports from \$2,000 to \$2,500 in a calendar year.
- Requires committees to report all loans they receive. Under current law, only loans in an aggregate amount or value in excess of \$20 must be reported.
- Amends the due date for the September campaign finance report from the fourth Tuesday in September to September 30.
- Clarifies the reporting requirements for entities spending \$2,500 or more in the aggregate on express advocacy during the period beginning 60 days leading up to an election.
- Modifies the periods during which contribution limits are calculated. Under the act, the period runs from January 1 until December 31 for officials elected in a general election and from July 1 until June 30 for officials elected in a spring election.
- Eliminates the requirement that a committee must report a donation made to a charitable organization or the common school fund no later than five days after the donation is made.
- Requires any express advocacy supporting or opposing a referendum to identify its source. Under current law, only express advocacy relating to a candidate must identify its source.

Effective date: January 3, 2023

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