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Contact: Christa Thompson
Chair, EG Town Democratic Committee
thompsonc933@gmail.com
401.829.3573

****PRESS RELEASE****

East Greenwich Town Democratic Committee Chair files Board of Elections complaint about anonymous mailers intended to harm the candidacy of Representative Justine Caldwell

East Greenwich, RI - Christa Thompson, Chair of The East Town Democratic Committee filed a complaint with the Rhode Island Board of Elections concerning recent anonymous mailings intended to harm the candidacy of State Representative Justine Caldwell (Democrat - District 30, East Greenwich and West Greenwich.) The complaint alleges two campaign finance violations and urges the Board of Elections to investigate the violations further.

“As a committee, we are very concerned about outside, anonymous parties attempting to illegally interfere with our electoral process,” stated Thompson. “Transparency in government and elections – especially when it comes to funding of electioneering communications intended to harm a candidate – is of the utmost importance to our committee, and we hope the Board of Elections will investigate this matter further to find out who is attempting to unduly influence and corrupt the electoral process. East Greenwich and West Greenwich residents who live in District 30 deserve to know who is sending and paying for these anonymous mailers.”

Good Government is a cornerstone of the The East Greenwich Town Democratic Committee’s platform, which specifically calls for “open, transparent, and ethical local government that is accountable to all residents.”

Here is a copy of the complaint:

When Representative Caldwell first ran for office in 2018, many voters in House District 30 received stamped and labeled anonymous letters that were intended to trick voters into thinking

that Justine had written these letters. Since the letters were all labeled and mailed with a First Class stamp, we did not have any recourse, however we were very concerned that someone was trying to impersonate a public figure running for office.

On Friday, October 16, 2020, with Representative Caldwell running for re-election in District 30, another anonymous letter hit mailboxes in District 30. Again, since it was labeled and mailed with a First Class stamp, we felt there was nothing we could do to trace it back to the sender.

Then, on Friday, October 23, 2020, another anonymous postcard hit mailboxes in District 30. This time, the mailing was sent by bulk mail, and for the first time one of these anonymous mailers had an identifier that could be tracked back to the sender. The mailer was sent using United States Postal Service indicia #286, registered with the Newport, RI post office. We tracked this postal indicia back to a company called Direct Mail Manager, Inc., a mailhouse located at 800 Aquidneck Avenue, Suite 2 in Middletown, RI. The same Friday the mailings hit, we called this company at 401.487.6245 to try to get information about the sender. We spoke to the owner of the company, Holly Levine, and she confirmed that she mailed the piece but would not give us information about who instructed her to send the mailers, only saying that she would call "him" to let him know that someone is investigating this mailer.

We are not sure if the same person sent all of the above mailers, but we have reason to believe that this person broke at least one election law, and likely 2 election laws.

Infraction #1:

Section 17-25.3-1 Independent expenditures and electioneering communications for elections, section (b) states:

Any person, business entity or political action committee making independent expenditures, electioneering communications, or covered transfers shall report all such campaign finance expenditures and expenses to the board of elections, provided the total of the money so expended exceeds one thousand dollars (\$1,000) within a calendar year, to the board of elections within seven (7) days of making the expenditure.

There is reason to believe that the anonymous sender has surpassed the \$1,000 threshold within the calendar year for a few reasons. One, in order to send mail through the bulk mail entry unit, you need to send a minimum amount of 250 pieces. Between graphic design, printing costs, mailhouse set up fees and per piece fees, as well as postage costs (charged at industry standard rates), we believe this comes close to the \$1,000 threshold even if the minimum of 250 pieces was sent. If the quantity is higher and the postcards were mailed to a large amount of voters in

the district, this person has almost certainly exceeded the \$1,000 threshold when all costs are considered. We believe, since we have spoken to many East Greenwich residents who received this mailer, along with the letter cited in attachment #2, that the amount surpasses the minimum of 250 sent, and is worthy of further investigation. In addition, if the same person sent both anonymous mailers in 2020, both would count toward the cumulative amount of \$1,000.

Infraction #2:

Section 17-25.3-3 Disclaimers reads:

(a) No person, business entity or political action committee shall make or incur an independent expenditure or fund an electioneering communication for any written, typed, or other printed communication, unless such communication bears upon its face the words "Paid for by" and the name of the entity, the name of its chief executive officer or equivalent, and its principal business address. In the case of a person, business entity or political action committee making or incurring such an independent expenditure or electioneering communication, which entity is a tax-exempt organization under § 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (other than an organization described in § 501(c)(3) of such Code) or an exempt nonprofit as defined in § 17-25-3, or any subsequent corresponding internal revenue code of the United States, as amended from time to time, or an organization organized under Section 527 of said code, such communication shall also bear upon its face the words "Top Five Donors" followed by a list of the five (5) persons or entities making the largest aggregate donations to such person, business entity or political action committee during the twelve (12) month period before the date of such communication, provided that no donor shall be listed who is not required to be disclosed in a report to the board of elections by the person, business entity, or political action committee.

We are almost certain that this law has been broken by the anonymous sender. Even if the sender has stayed under the \$1,000 threshold and has not broken the law cited in our first alleged infraction, the law above clearly states that “*No person, business entity or political action committee shall make or incur an independent expenditure or fund an electioneering communication for any written, typed, or other printed communication, unless such communication bears upon its face the words "Paid for by" and the name of the entity, the name of its chief executive officer or equivalent, and its principal business address.*” While the law says that if the sender does not spend \$1,000 or more, they don’t have to report the expenditure, the above section clearly states that they at least have to add a disclaimer showing who paid for it on the mailer. There does not seem to be any exception or exemptions for those who spend under \$1,000. We believe this matter also merits further investigation.

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