



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION  
Washington, DC 20463

March 8, 2002

CERTIFIED MAIL  
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

ADVISORY OPINION 2002-02

Eric Gally  
7239 Grinnell Drive  
Rockville, MD 20855

Dear Mr. Gally:

This responds to your letter dated December 24, 2001, as supplemented by information received on January 9 and February 1, 2002, requesting an advisory opinion concerning the application of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended ("the Act"), and Commission regulations to the preemption of a State law regulating contribution solicitation activity by lobbyists.

### ***Background***

You are a regulated lobbyist in the State of Maryland. You intend to engage in fundraising activities on behalf of a Congressional candidate who is currently a member of the Maryland General Assembly. A Maryland statute prohibits regulated lobbyists from actively fundraising on behalf of members of the Maryland General Assembly (as well as other specified State officers or candidates for the Assembly or those other State offices). You are concerned specifically with the provisions that would prohibit you from (i) soliciting or transmitting a political contribution to a member of the General Assembly from any person, including a political committee; and (ii) serving on a fundraising committee or political committee of a candidate who is a member of the General Assembly. See Md. Code Ann., State Gov't § 15-714(d)(1)(i) and (ii) (2001).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 15-714 states as follows:

§ 15-714 Certain regulated lobbyists -- Restriction on campaign contributions.

(a) Definitions. -- In this section, "candidate", "contribution", and "political committee" have the meanings provided in Article 33, § 1-101 of the Code.

(Maryland law does not prohibit individual contributions from lobbyists.) You explain that staff counsel for the Maryland State Ethics Commission has interpreted these restrictions to mean that regulated lobbyists may not actively fund-raise on behalf of a candidate for U.S. Congress if that candidate happens to be a sitting member of the Maryland General Assembly. In addition, the Maryland State Ethics Commission, in an informal consideration of the application of the prohibition in section 15-714 on solicitation and transmittal of contributions by a regulated lobbyist to such a candidate, concluded that the prohibition applies.

Specifically, you intend to solicit contributions for State Senator Christopher Van Hollen, Jr. who is a candidate in the Democratic primary for the U.S. House of Representatives in Maryland's Eighth Congressional District. You will be engaged in two activities. First, you will hold a private fundraiser for the candidate in your home. You will invite friends and family members to attend the event and the attendees will make contributions, in the form of checks, to Mr. Van Hollen's principal campaign committee. Second, besides holding the actual event, you will solicit another group of friends, family members, and associates to make contributions to the principal campaign committee.

Since you intend to raise funds on behalf of a Congressional candidate who is a member of the General Assembly, you ask whether the Act and Commission regulations preempt the application of the particular provisions to your proposed activities.

### ***Act and Commission Regulations***

The Act states that its provisions and the rules prescribed under the Act "supersede and preempt any provision of State law with respect to election to Federal

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(b) Applicability. -- This section applies only to a regulated lobbyist described in § 15-701 (a)(1), (2), (3), or (4) of this subtitle.

(c) Applicable time period. -- The restrictions in this section apply from the starting date of the regulated lobbyist's registration to the end of the calendar year in which the registration period ends.

(d) Restrictions on activities. -- (1) A regulated lobbyist who is subject to this section or a person acting on behalf of the regulated lobbyist may not, for the benefit of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, or member of the General Assembly, or candidate for election to the office of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, or member of the General Assembly, engage in the following activities:

- (i) soliciting or transmitting a political contribution from any person, including a political committee;
- (ii) serving on a fund-raising committee or a political committee;
- (iii) acting as a treasurer for a candidate or official or as treasurer or chairman of a political committee;
- (iv) organizing or establishing a political committee for the purpose of soliciting or transmitting contributions from any person; or
- (v) forwarding tickets for fund-raising activities, or other solicitations for political contributions, to a potential contributor.

(2) This section does not prohibit a regulated lobbyist from:

- (i) making a personal political contribution;
- (ii) informing any entity of a position taken by a candidate or official; or
- (iii) engaging in other activities not specifically prohibited under paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(3) This section does not apply to a regulated lobbyist who is a candidate with respect to the regulated lobbyist's own campaign.

office.” 2 U.S.C. §453; 11 CFR 108.7(a). The House committee that approved this provision explained its meaning in sweeping terms, stating that it is intended “to make certain that the Federal law is construed to occupy the field with respect to elections to Federal office and that the Federal law will be the sole authority under which such elections will be regulated.” *H.R. Rep. No. 93-1239, 93d Cong., 2d Sess. 10 (1974)*. According to the Conference Committee report on the 1974 Amendments to the Act, “Federal law occupies the field with respect to criminal sanctions relating to limitations on campaign expenditures, the sources of campaign funds used in Federal races, the conduct of Federal campaigns, and similar offenses, but does not affect the States' rights” as to other election related conduct such as voter fraud and ballot theft. *H.R. Rep. No. 93-1438, 93d Cong., 2d Sess. 69 (1974)*. The Conference report also states that Federal law occupies the field with respect to reporting and disclosure of political contributions to and expenditures by Federal candidates and political committees, but does not affect State laws as to the manner of qualifying as a candidate, or the dates and places of elections. *Id. at 100-101.*<sup>2</sup>

When the Commission promulgated regulations at 11 CFR 108.7 to clarify and explain the scope of the Act’s preemption of State law, it stated that the regulations follow section 453 and that, specifically, Federal law supersedes State law with respect to the organization and registration of political committees supporting Federal candidates, disclosure of receipts and expenditures by Federal candidates and political committees, and the limitations on contributions and expenditures regarding Federal candidates and political committees. *Federal Election Commission Regulations, Explanation and Justification, House Document No. 95-44, at 51*; 11 CFR 108.7(b). The regulations provide that the Act does not supersede State laws concerning the manner of qualification as a candidate or political party organization, dates and places of elections, voter registration, voting fraud and similar offenses, or candidates' personal financial disclosure. 11 CFR 108.7(c). The Commission explained that these “types of electoral matters are interests of the states and are not covered in the Act.” *House Document No. 95-44, at 51. See Advisory Opinions 2001-19, 2001-12, 2000-23 and 1999-12.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The reference to *criminal* sanctions is of only limited significance since, as amended in 1976, violations of the Act may result in either criminal or civil sanctions, or both. The House report should thus be read as reflecting Congress’ intent that the Act would occupy the field of Federal election campaign financing, both under the language of 2 U.S.C. §453 and under an identical Federal preemption amendment to the criminal code in 1974. Although the statement at p. 69 of the Conference report referred to substantive criminal provisions of Title 18 that were repealed in 1976, they were, in virtually all respects, renumbered and relocated in Title 2. For example, the contribution limits formerly in 18 U.S.C. §608 became 2 U.S.C. §441a(a), and the corporate prohibitions in 18 U.S.C. §610 became 2 U.S.C. §441b. The disclosure provisions were already in Title 2 and were explicitly covered by the discussion cited above at pp. 100-101 of the Conference Report.

<sup>3</sup> In past opinions, the Commission has summarized the legislative history of 2 U.S.C. §453 as showing that “the central aim of the clause is to provide a comprehensive, uniform Federal scheme that is the sole source of regulation of campaign financing . . . for election to Federal office.” *Advisory Opinions 2001-19, 2001-12, 2000-23 and 1999-12.*

### ***Analysis***

With respect to Federal campaigns, the cited Maryland Code provisions do not regulate those areas reserved for the States in the legislative history and regulations discussed above. Subsections (d)(1)(i) and (ii) prohibit regulated lobbyists from soliciting or transmitting campaign donations to members of the General Assembly, or administering or directing those activities. In that respect, if the State of Maryland applied those subsections to your proposed activities, it would be regulating activity in an area reserved solely for coverage by Federal law; i.e., the sources of funds used in Federal races. Additionally, to the extent that your fundraising activities may be construed by the State of Maryland as “serving on a fund-raising committee or a political committee,” subsection (d)(1)(ii) would also regulate the conduct of a Federal campaign with respect to its organization, another area reserved for Federal coverage. The coverage of these areas is demonstrated in the provisions of the Act and regulations.

In provisions on prohibited contributions, the Act and Commission regulations directly address issues pertaining to the solicitation of contributions and who may solicit contributions. For example, the Act and regulations state that it shall be unlawful for any person to solicit a contribution from a foreign national or “knowingly to solicit” a contribution from a Federal contractor. 2 U.S.C. §§441e(a) and 441c(a)(2); 11 CFR 110.4(a)(2) and 115.2(c). The Act also addresses solicitations with respect to the exceptions to the prohibition on corporate contributions, restricting the class of persons that may be solicited for contributions to separate segregated funds (SSFs). *See* 2 U.S.C. §441b(b)(4); 11 CFR Part 114. An example within the corporate solicitation context, as to a prohibited solicitor, is the restriction on what trade association may solicit SSF contributions from the executive and administrative personnel of a member corporation that belongs to a number of trade associations, where the Act and regulations provide that only the one trade association receiving prior authorization for the calendar year from that member corporation may solicit such personnel during the year. 2 U.S.C. §44b(b)(4)(D); 11 CFR 114.8(c) and (d). The Act and regulations also cover your proposed solicitation activities by application of two exceptions to the definition of “contribution.” They specifically exempt (i) an individual’s unpaid volunteer services to a candidate’s campaign; and (ii) an individual’s volunteer services in providing use of his residence for candidate-related activity and paying the cost of invitations, food, and beverages (up to \$1,000 per election) in connection with the use of the volunteer’s residence. 2 U.S.C. §431(8)(B)(i) and (ii); 11 CFR 100.7(b)(3), (4), and (6).

The Act and regulations address the transmittal of contributions. The regulations speak to the issue of who may transmit contributions in prescribing what entity may collect and transmit contributions to an SSF, and in providing, outside the SSF collecting agent context, that entities prohibited by the Act from making contributions and expenditures are also prohibited from acting as a conduit for contributions earmarked to candidates or their authorized committees. 11 CFR 102.6(b)(1) and 110.6(b)(2)(ii). In addition, the Act and regulations set the time period in which a person receiving a contribution for a political committee must transmit it to the committee. 2 U.S.C. §432(b); 11 CFR 102.8.

The foregoing examples demonstrate that the subjects of solicitation and transmittal of contributions for Federal campaigns are within the field occupied by Federal law. The application, to your proposed activities on behalf of a Congressional candidate who is a General Assembly member, of the described Maryland Code prohibitions on solicitation or transmittal by regulated lobbyists is preempted by the provisions of the Act and Commission regulations.

As indicated above, subsection (d)(1)(ii) pertains to the organization of political committees, as well as to the solicitation and transmittal of contributions. The Act and regulations provide requirements as to the organizational framework in which a Federal political committee must conduct its operations. For example, they address this subject by requiring committees to have a treasurer and a custodian of records. 2 U.S.C. §§432(a) and 433(b)(3) and (4); 11 CFR 102.2(a)(1)(iii) and (iv), and 102.7. More particularly as to who may serve on such committees, the regulations prohibit participation by foreign nationals in the decision-making process of a political committee with regard to its election-related activities. 11 CFR 110.4(a)(3). Thus, it is clear that the organization of a Federal candidate's political committee with respect to its personnel is within the field occupied by Federal law. Therefore, in addition to the basis for preemption discussed above, the provisions of the Act and Commission regulations preempt the application of subsection (d)(1)(ii) to your proposed activities as they pertain to the organization of a political committee of a Congressional candidate who is a General Assembly member.

Based on the foregoing, the Commission concludes that the Act and Commission regulations preempt the application of section 15-714(d)(1)(i) and (ii) of the State Government Article of the Maryland Code to your proposed activities.

This response constitutes an advisory opinion concerning the application of the Act, or regulations prescribed by the Commission, to the specific transaction or activity set forth in your request. *See* 2 U.S.C. §437f.

Sincerely,

(signed)

David M. Mason  
Chairman

Enclosures (AOs 2001-19, 2001-12, 2000-23, and 1999-12)