



FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20463

January 19, 2012

CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

ADVISORY OPINION 2011-26

Martin H. Freeman
Freeman's Meadows
9064 Falls Creek Main
Durango, CO 81301

Dear Mr. Freeman:

We are responding to your advisory opinion request concerning the application of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the "Act") and Commission regulations to your proposed activities of raising and spending funds for the purposes of identifying citizens who do not possess photographic identification in a number of States that require a citizen to present a photographic identification to register to vote or to vote, and to assist those citizens in obtaining photographic identification. The Commission concludes that your proposed actions are not covered by the Act or Commission regulations, so long as no effort is made to determine the individuals' candidate or party preferences before assisting them.

Background

The facts presented in this advisory opinion are based on your letter received on November 29, 2011.

A number of States require an individual to present photo identification when registering to vote or voting. Not all individuals who would otherwise be eligible to register to vote or vote possess photographic identifications. You intend to identify these individuals and assist them in obtaining photographic identifications. You intend to seek donations that you will use solely to fund your efforts to assist individuals in obtaining photographic identifications. You will neither solicit nor accept funds from any political candidate, political party, or political committee, or agent thereof. You will not undertake your efforts on behalf of any political candidate, political party, or political committee. You will not assist individuals whom you have helped to obtain photographic identifications in registering to vote or in voting.

Question Presented

Is your proposal to raise and spend funds to assist individuals in obtaining photographic identification, which may be used to register to vote or vote, covered by the Act and Commission regulations?

Legal Analysis and Conclusions

No, the amounts you spend, either from your own funds or from amounts donated by others, to assist individuals in obtaining photographic identifications, which they may use to register to vote or to vote, do not constitute expenditures or contributions so long as no efforts are made to determine party or candidate preferences of the individuals. Therefore these funds are not subject to the requirements of the Act and Commission regulations.¹

Under the Act and Commission regulations, persons who make expenditures are subject to a number of provisions of the Act and Commission regulations. The Act defines an “expenditure” as “any purchase, payment, distribution, loan, advance, deposit, or gift of money or anything of value, made by any person for the purpose of influencing any election for Federal office” 2 U.S.C. 431(9)(A); *see also* 11 CFR 100.111. Commission regulations expressly exempt “any cost incurred for activity designed to encourage individuals to register to vote or to vote” from the definition of “expenditure,” so long as “no effort is or has been made to determine the party or candidate preference of individuals before encouraging them to register to vote or to vote” 11 CFR 100.133.

Your proposed activities appear to be intended to encourage or assist individuals to register to vote or to vote, by making it possible for them to satisfy State laws requiring photographic identification in order to register to vote or to vote. Under the exemption cited above, the amounts you spend for these purposes will not constitute expenditures so long as no effort is made to determine the party or candidate preference of the individuals before encouraging or assisting them to register to vote or to vote. Further, because you are not a candidate for Federal office and you are not volunteering for or acting on behalf of any candidate, political party, or political committee, your activities will not implicate provisions of the Act or Commission regulations regarding candidates, political parties, political committees, corporations, or labor organizations.

Any funds you raise to engage in these activities will not constitute contributions under the Act and Commission regulations. The Act defines “contribution” as “any gift,

¹ Your advisory opinion request also asks whether chapters 95 and 96 of the Internal Revenue Code (26 U.S.C. 9001-9013 and 9031-9042) govern your proposed activities. As these statutes pertain to public funding of Presidential candidate campaigns and Presidential nominating conventions, and your proposed activities do not involve any candidates for President or any nominating conventions, nor are you a Presidential candidate, this advisory opinion does not analyze the application of these statutes.

subscription, loan, advance, or deposit of money or anything of value made by any person for the purpose of influencing any election for Federal office.” 2 U.S.C. 431(8)(A); *see also* 11 CFR 100.52(a).

You propose to raise money to fund your efforts to assist individuals in obtaining photographic identifications, and the funds you receive could constitute contributions under the Act if your proposed activities are for the purpose of influencing a Federal election. However, your proposed activities will not be performed on behalf of any candidate for Federal office or any political party, and you will not accept any funds from or solicited by a candidate or political party. Therefore, provided that you do not make any effort to determine candidate or party preference in connection with your efforts, your proposed activities will not be for the purpose of influencing any election for Federal office, and the funds you receive will not constitute contributions.

Accordingly, the Commission concludes that your proposed activities will not be subject to the requirements or limitations of the Act and Commission regulations, provided no effort is made to determine party or candidate preferences of the individuals before assisting them in obtaining photographic identifications.

This response constitutes an advisory opinion concerning the application of the Act and Commission regulations to the specific transaction or activity set forth in your request. *See* 2 U.S.C. 437f. The Commission emphasizes that, if there is a change in any of the facts or assumptions presented, and such facts or assumptions are material to a conclusion presented in this advisory opinion, then the requestor may not rely on that conclusion as support for its proposed activity. Any person involved in any specific transaction or activity which is indistinguishable in all its material aspects from the transaction or activity with respect to which this advisory opinion is rendered may rely on this advisory opinion. *See* 2 U.S.C. 437f(c)(1)(B). Please note that the analysis or conclusions in this advisory opinion may be affected by subsequent developments in the law including, but not limited to, statutes, regulations, advisory opinions, and case law.

On behalf of the Commission,

(signed)
Caroline C. Hunter
Chair