



DARA LINDENBAUM, CHAIR

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20463

Written Testimony of Dara Lindenbaum
Chair, Federal Election Commission

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Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak about the Federal Election Commission (FEC). As the newest member of the FEC, and this year’s Chair, I’m delighted to share our agency’s critical work, achievements, challenges, and the path forward.

The core mission of the FEC is to protect the integrity of federal campaign finance by ensuring transparency and fair enforcement of federal campaign finance laws. No more than three of the FEC’s six commissioners may be affiliated with the same political party. Because four votes are necessary to approve most agency actions, we must cross party lines to find common ground on issues ranging from staffing levels, budget priorities, regulatory language, and enforcement matters.

Through the latter part of 2019 and almost all of 2020, the FEC lacked a quorum. When a quorum was reinstated in December of 2020, the FEC faced an overwhelming backlog of enforcement matters. As Chair in 2021, Commissioner Broussard prioritized churning through the backlog and got the buy-in from other Commissioners and agency staff to accomplish the task. The next year, Commissioner Dickerson in his chair year also prioritized processing the enforcement backlog. Because of their leadership, and the work of Commissioners and agency staff, I took the gavel this January with no meaningful enforcement backlog, allowing me to focus my chair year on ensuring the FEC is a modern, functioning, agency.

Today, I’d like to share some of the many improvements and changes we have made this year and highlight some of our lesser-known but mission-critical programs. I am proud that after years of internal handwringing and external frustrations, we successfully revamped our audit processes. My office teamed up with Commissioner Trainor’s office resulting in a process that strikes the appropriate balance between efficiency, procedural protections for audited committees, transparency, and encouraging voluntary compliance with the law. It passed unanimously.

In April of this year, after several inquiries by this Committee and a GAO 2020 recommendation, we approved an updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Justice (DOJ) to promote the enforcement of the federal campaign finance laws.

This MOU, which supersedes the last one approved in 1977, establishes the guidelines for the FEC and DOJ to share information and advance the missions of both agencies.

We have two new open public comment periods. The first is a Notice of Availability of a Petition for Rulemaking surrounding the fraudulent misrepresentation of campaign authority through artificial intelligence in campaign ads. I hope that we will receive robust comments surrounding our jurisdiction and authority to regulate in this space as well as recommendations on how to do so. The second is a comment period that Commissioner Dickerson and I launched last week to identify ways to improve our filing systems and the usability of our website ahead of the 2024 elections.

Improving our hiring and personnel processes has been one of my highest priorities. On the personnel committee, Commissioner Trainor and I timely approve hiring vacancies and use our experience from the private sector to speed up staff hiring and find new recruitment streams so that we don't miss out on talented candidates. As we seek to further improve our hiring processes, when a candidate withdraws from consideration after the initial hiring rounds, we require that the staff inquire as to why and relay that information to us. This information will help us understand if we are losing candidates because our hiring takes too long, the salary is insufficient, or if there is something else that may improve our recruitment and retention.

Succession planning is also a paramount concern. As a small agency, we face significant challenges in the continuity of operations in the event of vacancies in certain senior level positions. This is a paramount concern because many of our senior staff members are eligible for retirement. To begin to address this issue, Commissioner Trainor proposed a cross-training initiative within one of our critical divisions, which has proven to be highly successful. Despite limited training budgets, we are exploring cost-effective ways to expand staff skillsets, improve morale, and bolster our agency's capabilities.

Finally, the FEC's educational opportunities aimed at promoting voluntary compliance with campaign finance laws continue to be a success. Our Information Division has excelled in creating engaging, cost-effective, educational programs for the regulated community, consistently receiving high praise for their exceptional presentations.

I want to emphasize that providing assistance to candidates and political committees is a critical component of our efforts to promote voluntary compliance with campaign finance laws. Our dedicated Information Division plays a pivotal role in this regard, having answered over 7,000 calls so far in 2023, each filled with substantive questions about campaign finance rules and regulations, often from callers with limited resources to hire lawyers and other experts. In addition, our Reports Analysis Division diligently responds to inquiries from political committees, addressing their often intricate reporting questions. The patient and dedicated staff in these divisions ensure that those engaging in the political process have access to the information and guidance they need to navigate the complexities of campaign finance laws and maintain compliance.

Of course, significant challenges remain that require additional funding. Historically, the FEC has not asked for or received sufficient funding to keep pace with inflation or the rapidly increasing volume of transactions reported. This has put us in a dire situation with increasingly outdated and vulnerable IT systems as the volume of transactions continues to increase. In 2022

we advocated for a meaningful increase in funding for Fiscal Year 2023 to allow our agency to begin meeting these challenges. Our recent successes with hiring and beginning long overdue upgrades to our IT infrastructure are due in large part to our increased appropriation from Congress in Fiscal Year 2023. With continued investment in future appropriations, we can continue to build our workforce and fortify our IT systems in the face of ever-increasing spending on federal elections.

I have had the privilege of sitting in on staff meetings across the agency over the past few months to acknowledge and thank our staff for their work, and I have been consistently impressed by their professionalism and dedication. Despite working with antiquated systems and limited resources, our staff continue to bring energy and creativity every day to further our mission. From our enterprise architecture and operational support team finding innovative ways to process and view campaign finance reports to our alternative dispute resolution team developing a remarkable case-tracking tool to our attorneys keeping up to speed with the rapidly changing legal landscape, our staff work diligently to support the FEC's mission of ensuring transparency, compliance, and fair enforcement of the federal campaign finance laws.

I look forward to taking your questions.