



**Portland
City Auditor**
Chief Deputy



November 13, 2024

Sergio Zepeda
1150 NW Quimby street unit 336
Portland, OR 97209
By certified mail

Notice of Determination
Complaint No. 2024-09-RG

Dear Sergio Zepeda:

I. Introduction and Overview

On October 17, 2024, the Elections Division, within the Auditor's Office, received a complaint alleging that you and other individuals violated Portland's campaign finance law. (Ex. 1.) The complaint included a detailed spreadsheet of transactions, with information downloaded from the Oregon Elections System for Tracking and Reporting database ("ORESTAR").

Included in the complaint were transactions that you allegedly made to Rene Gonzalez (referred to collectively with his campaign committee, Rene for Portland, as "Gonzalez") on or after December 7, 2023,¹ that, individually or in the aggregate with other transactions during the election cycle, allegedly exceed the amount permitted under the City's campaign finance law and were partially refunded.

¹ December 7, 2023, signifies the date Gonzalez publicly announced his candidacy for City of Portland mayor for the November 5, 2024, General Election, and the date on which Gonzalez filed his initial Notice of Intent with the Small Donor Elections program.

1221 SW Fourth Ave, Room 310
Portland, OR 97204
reed.brodersen@portlandoregon.gov
portland.gov/auditor
503-823-2767

After receiving the complaint, the Auditor's Office conducted an investigation, as detailed below. The Auditor's Office determines you engaged in **one violation** of the City Charter's campaign finance regulations and issues you a civil penalty of **\$1,682**.

II. The Auditor's Office conducted a complete investigation of this matter.

Under City Charter, the Auditor is required to take written complaints of campaign finance violations from any person. (Charter Section 3-305(c).) Upon receipt of a complaint, the Auditor is required, by law, to do the following: examine the complaint, make any investigation necessary, issue a notification of the complaint to every person who is an object of the complaint, accept written materials supporting or opposing the complaint, and render a decision on the complaint. (Charter Section 3-305(e).)

The Auditor's Office provided the complaint in this matter to you on October 28, 2024. The Auditor's Office did not receive a response to the complaint from you. The Auditor's Office finds as follows:

1. You contributed a total of \$1,420 to Rene for Portland from November 8, 2022, through October 25, 2024, based on the following transactions in ORESTAR:
 - a. On February 27, 2024, you contributed \$350 to Rene for Portland. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 4789455.)
 - b. On May 3, 2024, you contributed \$350 to Rene for Portland. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 4923357.)
 - c. On May 22, 2024, you contributed \$350 to Rene for Portland. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 4923358.)
 - d. On June 8, 2024, you contributed \$20 to Rene for Portland. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 4934445.)
 - e. On July 16, 2024, Rene for Portland issued you a refund in the amount of \$720. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 4970538.) This refund was issued 39 days after your most recent previous contribution to Rene for Portland.
 - f. On August 16, 2024, you contributed \$350 to Rene for Portland. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 5001182.)
 - g. On October 18, 2024, you contributed \$350 to Rene for Portland. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 5103532.)
 - i. The same date, Rene for Portland issued you a refund in the amount of \$700. (ORESTAR Transaction ID: 5103547.) The \$350

contribution from October 18 was negated by the \$700 refund issued the same date because contributions refunded within seven calendar days are not considered by the Auditor's Office in the total amount contributed to a candidate's campaign. (See ARA 13.05(B).)

- ii. However, because your next most recent contribution before the refund date was August 16 (64 days prior to the refund), the other half of the \$700 refund did qualify for negating the \$350 contribution you made on August 16, 2024.

III. Determination

A. City Charter limits the amounts and sources of candidate contributions.

City Charter provides that a contributor can make and a candidate may receive only the following contributions:

- \$500 — adjusted by inflation to be \$579 for the current election cycle — from any individual or political committee other than a “Small Donor Committee”;
- Any amount from a qualified “Small Donor Committee”; and
- For candidates participating in the Small Donor Elections program (which Gonzalez is), any amount permitted by the Small Donor Elections program.²

In addition, the Auditor's Office does not consider a contribution that is refunded or declined within seven calendar days of receipt by a candidate or candidate committee in determining whether the contributor, candidate, or candidate committee has exceeded the limits set forth above.³

B. You gave an unlawful contribution, which Gonzalez failed to timely refund.

You were identified as contributing to Rene for Portland more than is permitted under Small Donor Elections program rules, and more than is permitted under the City Charter.

² City Charter Section 3-304.

³ ARA 13.05(B).

Under the rules of the Small Donor Elections program, a candidate can accept contributions of up to \$350 from individuals as either “allowable” or “matchable” contributions. The only other form of contribution that the candidate can accept from individuals is seed money, but that is capped at an aggregate of \$5,000.⁴ Gonzalez reached his seed money limit on or around May 15, 2023. All of the contributions from you were given after this date.

Gonzalez recorded in ORESTAR that you contributed more than once and in excess of \$579. The amounts that the campaign took in beyond \$350 were not allowed under Small Donors Elections program rules. Given this, to the extent the contributions exceeded \$579, they are not considered allowable amounts under Charter.

Although Gonzalez issued refunds to you, Gonzalez did not do so within the 7-day grace period that Auditor’s Office Administrative Rule 13.05(B) extends to candidates and contributors. In total, the unlawful contributions attributed to you are **\$841**.

IV. The Auditor’s Office assesses a penalty of \$1,682, which will be deposited into the City’s general fund.

The Auditor’s Office concludes that the amount of unlawful contributions is a combined total \$841.

The City Charter provides that each violation of the campaign finance provisions “shall be punishable by imposition of a civil fine which is not less than two nor more than twenty times the amount of the unlawful Contribution ... at issue.” (Charter Section 3-305.) Thus, the penalty must be between \$1,682 and \$16,820. Auditor’s Office Administrative Rule 13.05(D)(4) contains several mitigating and aggravating factors that are considered in deciding whether to set the penalty at the minimum amount or higher.

Here, the Auditor’s Office determines that a fine of **\$1,682**, or 2 times the unlawful contribution (\$841), is appropriate. The Auditor’s Office notes that this is the first violation for you in the current election cycle.

V. Payment

A penalty in the amount of **\$1,682** shall be paid to the City Auditor’s Office. Payment shall be provided to the City Auditor’s Office by **Monday, January 13, 2025**. Payment can be sent by mail or delivered to:

⁴ City Code Section 2.16.040 C.

City of Portland Auditor's Office
1221 SW 4th Ave. Rm 130
Portland, OR 97204

VI. Additional Authority and Appeals

This Notice of Determination is issued pursuant to the Auditor's authority under City Charter Section 3-305 (Implementation and Enforcement). That section sets forth the process for implementation and enforcement of the provisions of City Charter Article 3 (Campaign Finance in Candidate Elections), including the recipients' appeal rights. (See also Auditor's Office Administrative Rule 13.03(C) (requiring in part that decisions on complaints be in writing, identify whether a violation occurred, and state the basis for the decision).)

As described by City Charter Section 3-305(i) and Auditor's Office Administrative Rule ("ARA") [13.03\(D\)\(5\)-\(6\)](#), the complainant and the subjects of the complaint may seek judicial review of the decision in Multnomah County Circuit Court. In addition, the Auditor's Office may, on its own discretion or on request of an interested party, withdraw a decision for reconsideration within the earlier of 30 days from issuance of the decision or until the decision is appealed.

As set out in ARA 13.03(D)(6), decisions of the Auditor's Office can be appealed to the Circuit Court within the following timelines:

- For decisions that are not withdrawn for reconsideration, within 60 days from the issuance of a decision; and
- For decisions that are withdrawn for reconsideration, within 60 days from the issuance of the reissued decision.

Sincerely,



Reed Brodersen
Chief Deputy Auditor

CC: Seth Wooley, Complainant