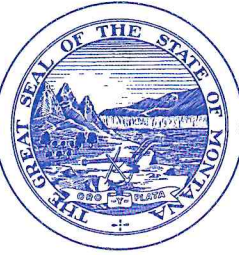


COMMISSIONER OF
POLITICAL PRACTICES



STATE OF MONTANA

CHRIS J. GALLUS
COMMISSIONER
TELEPHONE (406) 444-2942
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1209 EIGHTH AVENUE
PO BOX 202401
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May 18, 2026

Vincent Backen
427 Thomas St.
Libby, MT 59923

Subject: Complaint received May 4, 2026; Gunderson v. Backen, COPP-2026-
CFP-009

Vincent,

The enclosed complaint alleges specific violations of Montana election law under my jurisdiction as Commissioner of Political Practices (COPP). The complaint also conforms to the requirements of 44.11.106 ARM, the administrative rule regarding election complaints. For those reasons, I have accepted it for further consideration.

Pursuant to Mont. Code Ann. (MCA) § 13-37-132, I formally request that you provide a written response addressing the issues identified in this complaint. **Please provide this formal response on or before 5:00 PM on Friday, May 22, 2026.** Any response you provide is a public record that COPP posts on our website.

I will review any additional materials relevant to this complaint for any deficiencies pursuant to 44.11.106 ARM, law, and prior relevant COPP rulings, and reserve the right to dismiss the complaint upon this initial inquiry. If this occurs, I will notify you and provide a basis for the dismissal. Alternatively, I may determine that a formal investigation is warranted. If an investigation is conducted, a summary of facts and statement of findings will be prepared, and a copy will be sent to you. This generally involves a more extensive and time-consuming process, during which you may contact us for a status update.

Although 44.11.106 ARM requires complaints site the specific statute alleged to have been violated, I do not generally decline to accept complaints which misstate the particular statute when the allegation is clear. Here, the complainant sites to MCA § 13-35-225, the statutory mandate to include the required "paid for by" attribution statement. 44.11.106(4) ARM allows me to seek additional information from either the complainant or respondent in determining if a complaint should be accepted. Accordingly, COPP staff spoke with the complainant and verified he is not alleging a failure to attribute under MCA § 13-35-225 but a failure to properly report the identified materials in violation of MCA § 13-35-229.

If violations are found to have occurred and prosecution is determined to be justified, this matter will be referred to the local county attorney. The local county attorney then determines whether they will prosecute the matter or refer it back to me. MCA § 13-37-124. If returned to

me, I will either work with the responding party to settle the matter or prosecute it within their local jurisdiction in district court. Penalties, if any, are imposed based upon MCA § 13-37-128.

This letter initiates the legal process established by this office and Montana law to determine whether the allegations in the complaint are valid. Consequently, at this point, you have a duty to maintain all records currently in your possession because an investigation may indeed occur. To facilitate such an investigation, please take immediate steps to retain all such records, and begin collecting and preparing records for review. This includes documents, including computer communications (e.g. email), in your possession or the possession of any of your agents, representatives, or assigns. Communications with attorneys should be retained, as these records might need to be produced if attorney-client privilege is not involved. Your preservation of all such documents is essential and required pursuant to this request and subject to penalties provided in MCA § 45-7-207.

While I do not anticipate that you would intentionally destroy any relevant records, due to the severity of the penalty, I feel compelled to provide you with the relevant statute in this regard. See attached MCA § 45-7-207 (Tampering with or fabricating physical evidence). COPP may need to review documents connected to your activity during the prescribed period. Accordingly, MCA § 13-37-111 authorizes the Commissioner to inspect records, accounts, and books held by a candidate or political committee, administer oaths and affirmations, subpoena witnesses and compel their attendance, take evidence, and require the production of any books, papers and records that are relevant or material for the purpose of conducting an investigation.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this important matter.

Regards,



Chris J. Gallus
Commissioner of Political Practices

Montana Code Annotated 2025

TITLE 45. CRIMES

CHAPTER 7. OFFENSES AGAINST PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Part 2. Perjury and Other Falsification in Official Matters

Tampering With Or Fabricating Physical Evidence -- Penalties

45-7-207. Tampering with or fabricating physical evidence -- penalties. (1) A person commits the offense of tampering with or fabricating physical evidence if, believing that an official proceeding or investigation is pending or about to be instituted, the person:

(a) alters, destroys, conceals, or removes any record, document, or thing with purpose to impair its verity or availability in the proceeding or investigation; or

(b) makes, presents, or uses any record, document, or thing knowing it to be false and with purpose to mislead any person who is or may be engaged in the proceeding or investigation.

(2) (a) Except as provided in subsection (2)(b), a person convicted of tampering with or fabricating physical evidence shall be imprisoned in the state prison for a term not to exceed 10 years or be fined an amount not to exceed \$50,000, or both.

(b) A person convicted of tampering with or fabricating physical evidence in connection with a homicide or homicide investigation and who in so doing affected the ability of a coroner or medical examiner to determine either a cause of death or manner of death, or both, shall be imprisoned in the state prison for a term not to exceed 40 years or be fined an amount not to exceed \$100,000, or both.

History: En. 94-7-208 by Sec. 1, Ch. 513, L. 1973; R.C.M. 1947, 94-7-208; amd. Sec. 7, Ch. 198, L. 1981; amd. Sec. 1684, Ch. 56, L. 2009; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 24, L. 2025.

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