

## Guidance Regarding Personal Political Activity by Sierra Club Members – December 2021

TO: Maryland Sierra Club Volunteers

FROM: Mark Posner  
Political Compliance Officer  
Maryland Sierra Club

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This memo describes the guidelines the Sierra Club has established for when Sierra Club members participate in personal political activity. The memo answers most questions that arise. Further information about specific situations may be obtained by contacting the Chapter's Compliance Officer.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. *Engaging in personal political activity, and actions to avoid*

General rule: Sierra Club members are free to act in their personal capacity to support any candidate running for public office, by acting in whatever manner is available to individuals who are not Sierra Club members (e.g., by attending a campaign event, posting on social media, volunteering for the candidate's campaign, or making a financial contribution to the campaign).

However, there are several things to keep in mind in applying this general rule.

- Personal support for candidates who have not been endorsed by the Club: In offering personal support for an unendorsed candidate, Sierra Club members may not present themselves in such a manner that a reasonable person may interpret the support as a statement of support by the Sierra Club. (A particular candidate may not be endorsed because the Club's endorsement process has not been completed, the Club decided to endorse a different candidate, or the Club decided not to endorse any candidate in the contest.)

This means that, in expressing public support for an unendorsed candidate (e.g., at a campaign event, on a campaign event announcement, or on social media), Club members should not specifically link their support to the Sierra Club. They should not wear signage such as a Sierra Club button or clothing, identify themselves in writing as a Club member or leader, or mention the Sierra Club in a speech, email, or social media posting.<sup>2</sup> They also may not use any Sierra Club resources (including the Sierra Club name, logo, letterhead, membership or mailing lists, email lists, email listservs,

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<sup>1</sup> This memo supersedes a prior, August 5, 2021 memo from the Maryland Compliance Officer on the same subject.

<sup>2</sup> In attending a campaign event to express personal support for an unendorsed candidate, a Club member certainly may mention in a small group conversation that they are a Sierra Club member, so long as there is no indication that they are attending on behalf of the Sierra Club and, if asked, clearly state that they are acting in their personal capacity and not as a representative of the Sierra Club.

mdsierra.org email address, funds, property, social media accounts, etc.) to support or assist any candidate who has not been endorsed by the Sierra Club.

In addition, there are a few Maryland Sierra Club leaders whose Club leadership role is of such prominence that their public support for an unendorsed candidate, without any outward indication or expression of their Club membership, or any suggestion of a Club endorsement, might nonetheless reasonably imply a Sierra Club endorsement. These leaders may include the Chapter Chair, Group Chairs, and the Chapter Political Chair. These leaders should exercise caution in offering any public expression of personal support for an unendorsed candidate.

- Support for a Sierra Club endorsed candidate: If a candidate has been endorsed by the Sierra Club, Club members are then free to associate their personal support with the Sierra Club (by wearing signage such as a Sierra Club button or clothing, identifying themselves in writing as a Club member or leader, or mentioning the Sierra Club in a speech, email, or social media posting). Decisions regarding the use of certain Sierra Club resources (including the Maryland Sierra Club website, email functionality, email listservs, and social media accounts) are generally made by or involve a review by the Chapter Political Chair, and also require review by the Chapter Compliance Officer.

## 2. *Personal political activity and participating in Sierra Club endorsement processes*

A Sierra Club member's support for a candidate not endorsed by the Club, or other engagement in the political process or in government, may limit the member's ability to participate in the Club's endorsement processes.

- Participation in candidate interviews, and summarizing/evaluating candidate responses to questionnaires, by Club members who have publicly expressed personal support for an unendorsed candidate: These members may not participate in candidate interviews, or in preparing summaries/evaluations of candidate questionnaire responses, for the contest in which the candidate in question is running. They also may not be involved in selecting those who conduct those activities.
- Voting on an endorsement by volunteers who have publicly expressed personal support for an unendorsed candidate: Those volunteers who are a member of a Group ExCom, the Chapter ExCom, or the Chapter Political Committee who have publicly supported an unendorsed candidate may vote on the endorsement decision for the contest in which that candidate is running, provided that the volunteer discloses their personal public support prior to the vote being conducted.
- Certain individuals may be precluded from any participation in the Club's endorsement processes for all contests appearing on the same ballot. This preclusion generally applies to federal, state, and local officeholders and candidates for federal, state, and local offices; employees of candidates and unpaid campaign leaders; party employees and officeholders; employees of elected officials; and paid lobbyists. Certain preclusions also apply to employees and volunteer leaders of other advocacy organizations.