

Employee Campaigning

Contact: Jennifer Caracciolo

Under Georgia Code Section 21-5-30, it is a violation of the Ethics in Government Act for state agencies to contribute, directly or indirectly, to a campaign committee, political action committee, or political organization. The government may educate voters about an issue, but it may not contribute to a campaign committee that is promoting (or opposing) the issue or a candidate or attempting to influence the voters.

A state agency includes a school district and its employees. A contribution includes gifts, subscriptions, membership, loans, forgiveness of debts, advances or deposits of money, or anything of value. A campaign committee includes an issue-oriented campaign committee or a candidate for political office. While it is clearly understood that school districts are prohibited from making direct financial contributions to a campaign committee, confusion exists regarding "indirect" contributions, which are also prohibited. Anything that is paid for, purchased or maintained with taxpayer dollars may not be used to promote (or oppose) a SPLOST/Bond Referendum, issue or candidate for political office because it may be considered a prohibited contribution. The following guidelines are recommended for school districts and school employees:

1. **Employees may only work to promote (or oppose) a SPLOST/Bond Referendum, issue or candidate for political office as private citizens on their own time.** The First Amendment absolutely guarantees everyone the right to engage in political speech. However, employees may never campaign during school hours or in their capacity as an employee after hours. This prohibits the use of an official title at any time.
2. **Only private resources can be used to promote (or oppose) a SPLOST/Bond Referendum, issue or candidate for political office.** No public fund or resources can be used to promote (or oppose) the SPLOST/Bond referendum, issue or candidate for political office. School resources include facilities, copying machines, paper, stationary, phones, audio visual equipment, computers, vehicles, and employee time.
3. **School Districts may only provide the public with objective facts about a SPLOST/Bond referendum or issue.** It is very important that the educational material not be biased and perceived by the public as campaign material.
4. **No campaign posters, literature or signs may be displayed or distributed on school property.** Employees may not wear campaign pins or stickers on school grounds or distribute campaign materials on school premises. This would include the distribution of PTA/O newsletters containing promotional (as opposed to educational) articles that are sent home with students.

When engaging in any activity regarding a SPLOST /Bond Referendum, issue or candidate for political office, ask yourself the following questions: "Am I in any way using school funds?" "Am I in any way giving the impression that the school district is biased?" These two questions and common sense should prevent most prohibited conduct. When in doubt, contact the Public Information and Communications Department.