General Assembly

February Session, 2026

Raised Bill No. 465

LCO No. **2812**

Referred to Committee on GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS

Introduced by:
(GAE)

AN ACT CONCERNING EXPLORATORY COMMITTEES.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Subsection (c) of section 9-604 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective January 1, 2027*):

(c) (1) The chairman of a political committee formed to support a single candidate for public office shall, not later than seven days after filing a statement of organization with the proper authority under section 9-603, send the candidate a notice, by certified mail, of such filing. If a candidate **[**(1)**]** (A) does not, within fourteen days after receiving such notice, disavow such committee, in writing, to the proper authority under section 9-603, or **[**(2)**]** (B) disavows such committee within such period, but, at any time before such disavowal, accepts funds from the committee for his campaign, such committee shall be deemed to have been authorized by such candidate and shall constitute a candidate committee for the purposes of this chapter. No candidate shall establish, agree to or assist in establishing, or give his consent or

authorization to establishing a committee other than a single candidate committee to promote his candidacy for any public office, except that a candidate may establish an exploratory committee in accordance with the provisions of subdivision (2) of this subsection. **[**The candidate**]**

(2) A candidate establishing an exploratory committee shall designate on the statement of organization for **[**the**]** such exploratory committee the type of office to which the candidate is determining whether to seek nomination or election, as follows: (A) The General Assembly, (B) a state office, or (C) any other public office. **[**The candidate may also certify on the statement of organization that the candidate will not be a candidate for the office of state representative**]** An exploratory committee shall not accept contributions in excess of five thousand dollars and, except as otherwise provided in this subdivision, shall not be established for longer than thirty days. Not later than fifteen days after a public declaration by the candidate of the candidate's intention to seek nomination or election to a particular public office, including any statement by such candidate that such candidate is determining whether to seek nomination or election to such particular public office, the candidate shall form a single candidate committee, except that in the case of a candidate establishing an exploratory committee for purposes including aiding or promoting the candidate's candidacy for nomination or election to the General Assembly or a state office, the candidate shall form a single candidate committee not later than fifteen days after the date that the treasurer of such exploratory committee is required to file a notice of intent to dissolve the committee under subsection (f) of section 9-608, as amended by this act. As used in this **[**subsection**]** subdivision, "state office" has the same meaning as provided in subsection (e) of section 9-610.

Sec. 2. Subsection (f) of section 9-608 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective January 1, 2027*):

(f) If an exploratory committee has been established by a candidate pursuant to subsection (c) of section 9-604, as amended by this act, the

treasurer of the committee shall file a notice of intent to dissolve it with the appropriate authority not later than fifteen days after the candidate's public declaration of intent to seek nomination or election to a particular public office, except that in the case of an exploratory committee established by a candidate for purposes that include aiding or promoting the candidate's candidacy for nomination or election to the General Assembly or a state office, the treasurer of the committee shall file such notice of intent to dissolve the committee not later than fifteen days after the earlier of: (1) The candidate's public declaration of intent to seek nomination or election to a particular public office, (2) the candidate's endorsement at a convention, caucus or town committee meeting, or (3) the candidate's filing of a candidacy for nomination under section 9-400 or 9-405. The treasurer shall also file a statement identifying all contributions received or expenditures made by the exploratory committee since the previous statement and the balance on hand or deficit, as the case may be. In the event of a surplus, the treasurer shall, not later than the filing of the statement, distribute the surplus to the candidate committee established pursuant to **[**said**]** section 9-604, as amended by this act, except that (A) in the case of a surplus of an exploratory committee established by a candidate who intends to be a participating candidate, as defined in section 9-703, in the Citizens' Election Program, the treasurer may distribute to the candidate committee only that portion of such surplus that is attributable to contributions that meet the criteria for qualifying contributions for the candidate committee under section 9-704 and shall distribute the remainder of such surplus to the Citizens' Election Fund established in section 9-701, and (B) in the case of a surplus of an exploratory committee established for nomination or election to an office other than the General Assembly or a state office (i) the treasurer may only distribute to the candidate committee for nomination or election to the General Assembly or state office of such candidate that portion of such surplus which is in excess of the total contributions which the exploratory committee received from lobbyists or political committees established by lobbyists, during any period in which the

prohibitions in subsection (e) of section 9-610 apply, and (ii) any remaining amount shall be returned to all such lobbyists and political committees established by or on behalf of lobbyists, on a prorated basis of contribution, or distributed to any charitable organization which is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, or any subsequent corresponding internal revenue code of the United States, as from time to time amended. If the candidate decides not to seek nomination or election to any office, the treasurer shall, within fifteen days after such decision, comply with the provisions of this subsection and distribute any surplus in the manner provided by this section for political committees other than those formed for ongoing political activities, except that if the surplus is from an exploratory committee established by the State Treasurer, any portion of the surplus that is received from a principal of an investment services firm or a political committee established by such firm shall be returned to such principal or committee on a prorated basis of contribution. In the event of a deficit, the treasurer shall file a statement thirty days after the decision or declaration with the proper authority and, thereafter, on the seventh day of each month following if on the last day of the previous month there was an increase or decrease in such deficit in excess of five hundred dollars from that reported on the last statement filed. The treasurer shall file supplemental statements until the deficit is eliminated. If the exploratory committee does not have a surplus or deficit, the statement filed after the candidate's declaration or decision shall be the last required statement. **[**If a candidate certifies on the statement of organization for the exploratory committee pursuant to subsection (c) of section 9-604 that the candidate will not be a candidate for the office of state representative and subsequently establishes a candidate committee for the office of state representative, the treasurer of the candidate committee shall pay to the State Treasurer, for deposit in the General Fund, an amount equal to the portion of any contribution received by said exploratory committee that exceeded two hundred fifty dollars.**]** As used in this subsection, "principal of an investment services firm" has the meaning set forth in subsection (e) of section 9-612 and

"state office" has the same meaning set forth in subsection (e) of section 9-610.

Sec. 3. Subsections (a) and (b) of section 9-611 of the general statutes are repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective January 1, 2027*):

(a) No individual shall make a contribution or contributions to, for the benefit of, or pursuant to the authorization or request of, a candidate or a committee supporting or opposing any candidate's campaign for nomination at a primary, or any candidate's campaign for election, to the office of (1) Governor, in excess of three thousand five hundred dollars; (2) Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of the State, Treasurer, Comptroller or Attorney General, in excess of two thousand dollars; (3) chief executive officer of a town, city or borough, in excess of one thousand dollars; (4) state senator or probate judge, in excess of one thousand dollars; or (5) state representative or any other office of a municipality not previously included in this subsection, in excess of two hundred fifty dollars. The limits imposed by this subsection shall be applied separately to primaries and elections.

(b) (1) No individual shall make a contribution or contributions to, or for the benefit of, an exploratory committee, in excess of **[**three hundred seventy-five dollars, if the candidate establishing the exploratory committee certifies on the statement of organization for the exploratory committee pursuant to subsection (c) of section 9-604 that the candidate will not be a candidate for the office of state representative. No individual shall make a contribution or contributions to, or for the benefit of, any exploratory committee, in excess of two hundred fifty dollars, if the candidate establishing the exploratory committee does not so certify**]** <u>two hundred fifty dollars</u>.

(2) No individual shall make a contribution or contributions to, or for the benefit of, a political committee formed by a slate of candidates in a primary for the office of justice of the peace, in excess of two hundred

147 fifty dollars.

148 Sec. 4. Subsection (e) of section 9-613 of the general statutes is
149 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective January*
150 *1, 2027*):

151 (e) No political committee organized by a business entity shall make
152 a contribution or contributions to (1) a state central committee of a
153 political party, in excess of seven thousand five hundred dollars in any
154 calendar year, (2) a town committee of any political party, in excess of
155 one thousand five hundred dollars in any calendar year, (3) an
156 exploratory committee in excess of **[**three hundred seventy-five**]** <u>two</u>
157 <u>hundred fifty</u> dollars, or (4) any other kind of political committee, in
158 excess of two thousand dollars in any calendar year.

159 Sec. 5. Subsection (b) of section 9-615 of the general statutes is
160 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective January*
161 *1, 2027*):

162 (b) No such committee shall make a contribution or contributions to,
163 or for the benefit of, an exploratory committee, in excess of **[**three
164 hundred seventy-five**]** <u>two hundred fifty</u> dollars. Any such committee
165 may make unlimited contributions to a political committee formed
166 solely to aid or promote the success or defeat of a referendum question.

167 Sec. 6. Subsections (b) and (c) of section 9-617 of the general statutes
168 are repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective*
169 *January 1, 2027*):

170 (b) (1) No state central committee shall make a contribution or
171 contributions to, for the benefit of, or pursuant to the authorization or
172 request of, a candidate or a committee supporting or opposing any
173 candidate's campaign for nomination at a primary, or any candidate's
174 campaign for election, to the office of: (A) Governor, in excess of fifty
175 thousand dollars; (B) Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of the State,
176 Treasurer, Comptroller or Attorney General, in excess of thirty-five

thousand dollars; (C) state senator, probate judge or chief executive officer of a town, city or borough, in excess of ten thousand dollars; (D) state representative, in excess of five thousand dollars; or (E) any other office of a municipality not previously included in this subsection, in excess of five thousand dollars. The limits imposed by this subdivision shall apply separately to primaries and elections.

(2) No state central committee shall make a contribution or contributions in any one calendar year to, or for the benefit of (A) a legislative caucus committee or legislative leadership committee, in excess of ten thousand dollars, or (B) any other political committee, other than an exploratory committee or a committee formed solely to aid or promote the success or defeat of a referendum question, in excess of two thousand five hundred dollars. No state central committee shall make contributions in excess of **[**three hundred seventy-five**]** <u>two hundred fifty</u> dollars to an exploratory committee.

(c) (1) No town committee shall make a contribution or contributions to, for the benefit of, or pursuant to the authorization or request of, a candidate or a committee supporting or opposing any candidate's campaign for nomination at a primary, or any candidate's campaign for election, to the office of: (A) Governor, in excess of seven thousand five hundred dollars; (B) Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of the State, Treasurer, Comptroller or Attorney General, in excess of five thousand dollars; (C) state senator, in excess of five thousand dollars; (D) state representative, probate judge or chief executive officer of a town, city or borough, in excess of three thousand dollars; or (E) any other office of a municipality not previously included in this subsection, in excess of one thousand five hundred dollars. The limits imposed by this subdivision shall apply separately to primaries and elections.

(2) No town committee shall make a contribution or contributions in any one calendar year to, or for the benefit of (A) a legislative caucus committee or legislative leadership committee, in excess of two thousand dollars, or (B) any other political committee, other than an

exploratory committee or a committee formed solely to aid or promote the success or defeat of a referendum question, in excess of one thousand five hundred dollars. No town committee shall make contributions in excess of **[**three hundred seventy-five**]** two hundred fifty dollars to an exploratory committee.

Sec. 7. Subsection (a) of section 9-618 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective January 1, 2027*):

(a) A political committee organized for ongoing political activities may make unlimited contributions to, or for the benefit of, any national committee of a political party; or a committee of a candidate for federal or out-of-state office. Except as provided in subdivision (3) of subsection (d) of this section, no such political committee shall make a contribution or contributions in excess of two thousand dollars to another political committee in any calendar year. No political committee organized for ongoing political activities shall make a contribution in excess of **[**three hundred seventy-five**]** two hundred fifty dollars to an exploratory committee. If such an ongoing committee is established by an organization or a business entity, its contributions shall be subject to the limits imposed by sections 9-613 to 9-615, inclusive, as amended by this act. A political committee organized for ongoing political activities may make contributions to a charitable organization which is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, as from time to time amended, or make memorial contributions.

Sec. 8. Subsection (a) of section 9-619 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective January 1, 2027*):

(a) No political committee established for a single primary or election shall make contributions to a national committee, or a committee of a candidate for federal or out-of-state office. If such a political committee is established by an organization or a business entity, its contributions

240 shall also be subject to the limitations imposed by sections 9-613 to 9-
241 615, inclusive, as amended by this act. Except as provided in subdivision
242 (2) of subsection (d) of this section, no political committee formed for a
243 single election or primary shall, with respect to such election or primary
244 make a contribution or contributions in excess of two thousand dollars
245 to another political committee, provided no such political committee
246 shall make a contribution in excess of **[**three hundred seventy-five**]** two
247 hundred fifty dollars to an exploratory committee.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	*January 1, 2027*	9-604(c)
Sec. 2	*January 1, 2027*	9-608(f)
Sec. 3	*January 1, 2027*	9-611(a) and (b)
Sec. 4	*January 1, 2027*	9-613(e)
Sec. 5	*January 1, 2027*	9-615(b)
Sec. 6	*January 1, 2027*	9-617(b) and (c)
Sec. 7	*January 1, 2027*	9-618(a)
Sec. 8	*January 1, 2027*	9-619(a)

Statement of Purpose:

To (1) restrict exploratory committees to not more than thirty days of operation, (2) cap the maximum contribution to exploratory committees at two hundred fifty dollars, (3) limit the total amount of contributions exploratory committees may receive to five thousand dollars apiece, and (4) provide that, if a candidate makes any statement that such candidate is exploring a run for a particular office, such statement triggers the requirement to convert an exploratory committee into a candidate committee.

[Proposed deletions are enclosed in brackets. Proposed additions are indicated by underline, except that when the entire text of a bill or resolution or a section of a bill or resolution is new, it is not underlined.]