

**STATE OF MINNESOTA  
CAMPAIGN FINANCE AND PUBLIC DISCLOSURE BOARD**

**PROBABLE CAUSE  
DETERMINATION**

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPLAINT OF DONNA BERGSTROM REGARDING BARBARA CROW

On January 22, 2024, the Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board received a complaint submitted by Donna Bergstrom regarding Barbara Crow, who is the chair of the St. Louis County (03) DFL. The St. Louis County (03) DFL (20704) is a political party unit registered with the Board.

The complaint alleged that Ms. Crow provided a falsified name, mailing address, email address, and phone number, when registering to attend a fundraiser by the 3B House District RPM. The 3B House District RPM (20805) is also a political party unit registered with the Board. The complaint alleged that Ms. Crow registered for the event online by paying \$100 with the name "Susan Johnson" using the address of the Cook County DFL's post office box and an incorrect email address and phone number. The complaint alleged that Ms. Crow attended the event, introduced herself as "Susan Johnson," and wore a name tag with the name "Susan Johnson" at the event. The complaint alleged that Ms. Crow's actions violated Minnesota Statutes section 10A.15, which requires the treasurer of a political party unit that receives a contribution of over \$20 to record the name and address of each contributor.

On February 5, 2024, the Board chair determined that the complaint did not state a prima facie violation of Minnesota Statutes section 10A.15 as alleged in the complaint, but did state a prima facie violation of Minnesota Statutes section 10A.29. Minnesota Statutes section 10A.29 provides that an individual may not circumvent the disclosure requirements of Chapter 10A.

On February 18, 2024, Ms. Crow provided a response to the Board. Ms. Crow admitted the allegations. Ms. Crow stated "...I did provide a false name (Susan Johnson) and incorrect address because I was worried about my personal safety." Ms. Crow further stated that she didn't think of her actions as violating campaign finance law, but rather she was just "buying a ticket to an event." Ms. Crow stated that she is disappointed in herself and did not intend to hide information from the Board. In her response, she stated "I humbly apologize to the Board for this violation. If the organizers had not caught my subterfuge, this could have been much worse, and for that, I'm grateful." The Board considered this matter at its meeting on March 8, 2024. Ms. Bergstrom appeared before the Board via Webex.

**Analysis**

When the Board chair makes a finding that a complaint raises a prima facie violation, the full Board then must determine whether probable cause exists to believe an alleged violation that warrants an investigation has occurred. Minn. Stat. § 10A.022, subd. 3 (d). A probable cause determination is not a complete examination of the evidence on both sides of the issue. Rather, it is a determination of whether a complaint raises sufficient questions of fact which, if true, would result in the finding of a violation.

If the Board finds that probable cause exists, the Board is required to determine whether the alleged violation warrants a formal investigation, considering the type and magnitude of the alleged violation, the knowledge of the respondents, any benefit to be gained from a formal investigation, the availability of Board resources, and whether the violation has been remedied. Minn. R. 4525.0210, subp. 5. If the Board finds that probable cause exists but does not order a formal investigation, the Board is required to either dismiss the complaint or order a staff review. Minn. R. 4525.0210, subp. 6.

Minnesota Statutes section 10A.29 provides that “[a]n individual or association that attempts to circumvent this chapter by redirecting a contribution through, or making a contribution on behalf of, another individual or association is guilty of a gross misdemeanor and subject to a civil penalty imposed by the board of up to \$3,000.” Ms. Crow has admitted the allegations in the complaint and expressed remorse for her actions. There is probable cause to believe that Ms. Crow violated Minnesota Statutes section 10A.29 by making a contribution using another person’s name and address.

In determining whether a formal investigation is warranted, the Board must consider a variety of factors.<sup>1</sup> Circumvention is a serious violation of campaign finance law and Ms. Crow’s actions inconvenienced the 3B House District RPM. However, the party unit was ultimately able to obtain Ms. Crow’s name and address. The contribution from Ms. Crow was not an attempt to circumvent any contribution limit. Ms. Crow’s contribution was relatively small and therefore was not required to be itemized within any report filed with the Board, she is remorseful, and she is unlikely to commit a similar violation in the future. Because Ms. Crow has admitted the allegations, there is little if anything to be gained by conducting a formal investigation. Considering those factors, the Board concludes that a formal investigation is not warranted.

**Order:**

1. Although probable cause exists to believe that Ms. Crow made a contribution under a false name and address in violation of Minnesota Statutes section 10A.29, a formal investigation is not warranted.
2. The Board’s executive director is directed to initiate a staff review regarding the allegations contained in the complaint pursuant to Minnesota Rules 4525.0320 for the purpose of concluding the investigation by conciliation agreement with Ms. Crow. If the investigation cannot be resolved by conciliation agreement, the executive director is directed to prepare findings to resolve this matter.

/s/ David Asp  
David Asp, Chair  
Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board

Date: March 8, 2024

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<sup>1</sup> [Minn. R. 4525.0210, subp. 5.](#)