



Committee of Seventy

Clean and effective government. Fair elections. Informed citizens.

15 August 2011

The Honorable Anna C. Verna
President, Philadelphia City Council
Room 405, City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Dear President Verna:

With the first public hearing on redrawing the boundaries of City Council's ten districts scheduled for tomorrow, the Committee of Seventy urges Council to sincerely listen to public input and take its time to produce a fair and equitable redistricting plan that is as nonpolitical as possible. There is no reason to rush since the new boundaries will not go into effect until the 2015 Council elections.

Seventy commends Council for holding tomorrow's hearing, and especially for scheduling additional hearings outside of City Hall on August 31 and September 6. The hearings are a positive step towards fulfilling Council's promise in its June resolution to "hold public community based hearings" in order to "create an open and transparent opportunity for public engagement and input" in the citywide redistricting process.

However, these hearings are occurring too late to allow Council to genuinely take the public's views into account by the time the official period for redistricting ends on September 9, 2011.

Seventy is well aware that the Charter requires withholding the salaries of Council members until a redistricting ordinance is passed and approved by the mayor, or an ordinance becomes law without the mayor's approval. Council could have avoided this by beginning the redistricting process shortly after March 9, when the city's census figures were published.

Redistricting occurs only once each decade. Since the 17 Council members will ultimately receive all the salary they are owed, delay matters less than doing redistricting right for the city's 1.5 million residents. In addition to an open and transparent redistricting process, this means (1) district lines that are rationally and fairly drawn rather than manipulated to achieve a particular political outcome, and (2) a fair and equitable outcome that ensures that no one person's vote carries more weight than any other person's.

To reiterate what we said on March 10 when Seventy issued recommendations to Council to ensure transparency and public participation in redistricting, City Council has an opportunity to bring what has typically been a behind-closed-doors process out into the open.

Since enacting a redistricting ordinance will be the last and best opportunity for Council to leave its mark on the current term, we hope you will take full advantage of this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Zachary Stalberg
President and CEO