



**Committee of Seventy
Written Testimony on Redistricting Reform
Senate State Government Committee
March 27, 2018**

As a century-old nonpartisan advocate for better government in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, the Committee of Seventy has become increasingly concerned about the current state of politics and governance in the Commonwealth.

The roots of our dysfunction are numerous and all must be addressed. But most urgent is the manner in which we determine our political boundaries.

Seventy has watched with dismay as successive waves of partisan map-drawing have crippled our ability to govern, turned voters even more cynical, and left our Commonwealth as a national poster child for partisan abuse.

There is no perfect solution, but action is needed. We urge this committee to consider the following:

Distrust and frustration with government span the political spectrum in Pennsylvania.

Americans' trust in government is at historic lows. According to the Pew Research Center, less than a fifth of the public trust the federal government – a precipitous drop from the nearly 80 percent during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. Across the country, trust in state and local government is higher, but Pennsylvania suffers lower marks than most. One Gallup poll found only 46 percent of Pennsylvanians have confidence in state government to handle problems, 38th in the country. Local polls confirm this sentiment. The last eight Franklin and Marshall polls, going back to March 2015, find that Pennsylvanians identify “government and politics” as the most important issue facing the state, far outdistancing schools, crime, jobs, taxes or anything else.

Discontent extends across the electorate – by geography, age, race and party – and could not have been expressed more forcefully through the 2016 presidential campaign season. That a “rigged system” holds back ordinary Americans drove political insurgencies that overwhelmed the establishment on both sides of the aisle.

Indeed, the system is rigged. And gerrymandered political boundaries carving up communities and manipulating the voting process is the most blatant example of this rigging.

A stable, efficient political system is essential for economic competitiveness and job growth.

The pace and complexity of the 21st century economy demand a nimble and responsive government. On this front, Pennsylvania continues to struggle, losing contests for new business and stunting the growth we could be unleashing.

The Commonwealth's budget impasses – both recently and in years past – are a plain symptom of the problem. They cause harmful disruptions to nonprofit services and squeeze local school districts, in



many cases compelling loans to make ends meet. Investors have reacted accordingly, downgrading our credit and costing the state millions of dollars in interest. But this cost pales in comparison to the jobs and wages forgone because it's safer for firms to set up shop elsewhere.

Recent job growth has largely been limited to the metropolitan areas – Philadelphia's Eds and Meds; Pittsburgh's burgeoning tech scene – while Pennsylvania as a whole has lost tens of thousands of manufacturing and service jobs. Meanwhile, we are set to lose at least one more congressional seat after the 2020 census, a trend that goes back a century as other states grow and we stagnate.

Managing the challenges of an evolving economy is unavoidable, but we do so in competition with other states. An unreliable system of governance is a serious handicap.

Meaningful redistricting reform offers an opportunity to demonstrate to voters that their government works and the state is open for business.

Voters should pick their elected officials, not the other way around. This was not the case after the 2010 census, and the maps showed it. The measuring stick for 2021 is whether we meet this standard.

The Committee of Seventy has held the position that Senate Bill 22 creating an independent citizens commission offers the most ambitious and promising redistricting reform in Pennsylvania. We continue to support this bill today. But we also recognize that any major legislation requires vigorous discussion and compromise among those who must pass it. So we're pleased to see the Senate State Government Committee beginning this work.

However Senate Bill 22 may change in the weeks and months ahead, Seventy firmly believes that any redistricting process must guarantee full transparency, broad public engagement and clearly-stated principles for line-drawing. The process is political, but choices over boundaries should involve input from citizens across the Commonwealth. Decisions should be vetted and made in the open. In other words, the process must be *democratic*.

This is why Seventy and others are organizing *Draw the Lines-PA*, a statewide competition to empower Pennsylvanians of all ages with digital tools to draft their own maps. The nonpartisan civic campaign launches this year and will run through 2021, allowing thousands of participants to propose maps directly to their public officials. It will also exemplify the type of open, democratic process for map-drawing we hope to see codified by the General Assembly.

Anything less will not constitute meaningful reform for a state that desperately needs it. Anything less will confirm voters' belief that government is truly broken.

Today's hearing is a start. Seventy looks forward to working with the members of this committee and the rest of the General Assembly in improving this critical part of our democracy.