

**Committee of Seventy
Statement on HB 722 Amendment
April 11, 2018**

Trust in government is at all-time lows. As polls have made clear, voters' concern over the health of our democracy spans both the political spectrum and the Commonwealth.

The House State Government Committee decided this morning to pass an amendment gutting a redistricting reform bill that had attracted 109 co-sponsors—more than half of the House. This hastily called meeting, featuring no public comment and on a straight party-line vote, was a case study in what's gone deeply wrong in Harrisburg.

The Committee of Seventy believes strongly that it matters a great deal who holds the pen in the redistricting process, one of the core acts that determine how well our democracy functions. We agree, as some suggested in the wake of recent court rulings, that the pen shouldn't be held by the courts.

But this action in the House shows vividly why the pen shouldn't be held firmly by our lawmakers, either. With so much power at stake, it is unsurprising that self-interest overtakes the people's interests.

That's why Seventy has long supported an independent commission of citizens to draw political maps. We live in an era when computing power and big data have unleashed the undemocratic distortions of gerrymandering. But here's the good news: Those accessible digital tools also make it possible and practical for the people to have a greater voice in how they are represented.

This begins with the power to determine their own political boundaries. House Bill 722—the bill gutted by today's amendment—originally proposed that both congressional and General Assembly maps be drawn by an 11-member, fully independent commission of citizens.

That is one model, but variations on that idea exist and demand to be considered.

Instead, the amendment passed today concentrates even more power in the hands of party leaders to determine both congressional and state legislative boundaries. That moves in exactly the wrong direction.

Across the Commonwealth, thousands of citizens have been clamoring to draw the lines that determine how they will be represented. They want more voice in the process, not less. More transparency, not less.

Who exactly is calling for politicians to tighten their grip on that pen—except those politicians themselves?



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There is much to debate around the various redistricting reforms currently proposed in the General Assembly. We share the concern of many that the process belongs to the people, and not outside experts appointed by the Court. The PA Supreme Court's decision to strike down the 2011 congressional maps was the right one—because politicians overreached. But the process that unfolded in the following weeks lacked transparency, public input or any semblance of democratic standards.

We all agree that we shouldn't let that happen again. The way to do that is more citizen engagement, not less. Towards this end, we look forward to working with state lawmakers in the months ahead.