



# Committee of Seventy

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## **Testimony on Land Bank Legislation**

Philadelphia City Council

Committee on Public Property and Public Works

October 28, 2013

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I am Ellen Mattleman Kaplan, Vice President and Policy Director of the non-partisan Committee of Seventy. I am here today to strongly urge this Committee to maximize the enormous potential the creation of a land bank would bring to Philadelphia.

This potential will never be realized as long as district Council members have the absolute power to hold up indefinitely, or to veto entirely, the transfer of land in their districts.

Councilmanic prerogative divides one city into ten principalities, each government by its own autocrat. At worst, it invites corruption.

This land bank proposal will undoubtedly go through changes before it reaches the floor of City Council. We urge this Committee to safeguard the positive aspects of the proposal that assure more transparency, consistency and predictability in cataloging and disposing of tax-delinquent, vacant properties. We also urge preserving an appropriate role for a district Council member at the front end of the property disposition process.

It would be exceedingly disheartening to the citizens of this city – whose confidence in the performance of City Council is already quite low, according to a Pew Charitable Trust's poll taken just this past summer – if this Committee were to effectively render the land bank



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impotent by enabling district Council members to hold hostage every piece of property that goes through the land bank.

The theologian James Freeman Clarke said that a politician thinks of the next election while a statesman thinks of the next generation.

The land bank proposal gives members of City Council the opportunity to think of the next generation.

Thank you.