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SEVENTY'S STATEMENT ON GOVERNOR WOLF'S CITIZENS FIRST ETHICS REFORM PLAN

PHILADELPHIA, PA – Governor Wolf's [statement of support](#) for sweeping ethics and campaign finance reform is welcomed. If advanced, this move at long last could finally bring Pennsylvania's transparency and accountability laws in line with other states.

For too long, Harrisburg has been the Wild West for campaign finance and ethics rules. The Committee of Seventy has long supported limiting the role of money in politics through gift bans for public officials, limits on contributions to candidates, and creating strong reporting requirements for candidates and donors. Like water flowing downhill, money will always seek to influence the political process, but full and frequent disclosure – and carefully-crafted limits – can help ensure special interests do not exercise outsized influence.

While we understand that some public officials may have legitimate sources of outside income, we support requiring the detailed disclosure of other sources, the type of work performed and the amount earned. This will discourage conflicts of interest and give the public more reason to trust their representatives. Strict rules and disclosure of campaign activity for those seeking public contracts, and preventing pay-to-play behavior, are also critical to ensure government integrity and the efficient use of tax dollars.

Notably, the Governor proposes a new rule to halt compensation to lawmakers and their staff until a budget is passed, intended to help avoid the harmful impasses endured in recent years. Clearly, the frequent failures to pass a budget in recent years are a symptom of chronic dysfunction in Harrisburg. So this idea deserves a thorough airing in the General Assembly to examine how it might work and to explore any possible unintended consequences.

The Committee of Seventy and others have advocated strenuously – and successfully – for similar reforms in Philadelphia. The City now has some of the most robust ethics and campaign finance rules among local governments anywhere in the country, with oversight provided by a strong, active and independent [Board of Ethics](#), as well as an [Office of the Inspector General](#) and [Chief Integrity Officer](#).



Committee of Seventy

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There is more work to do in Philadelphia as well, but the City's experience with stricter campaign and ethics rules have been decidedly encouraging.

We are pleased to see any initiative to bring further transparency and accountability to the Commonwealth, and encourage the Governor and General Assembly to use this opportunity – even in an election year – to begin meaningful discussion of the reforms needed to reach a higher level of ethical standard in government.

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The Committee of Seventy is an independent nonprofit advocate for better politics and better government in Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For more information, see www.seventy.org.