



Committee of Seventy

Clean and effective government. Fair elections. Informed citizens.

June 2, 2010

The Honorable William K. Greenlee
Chairman, Philadelphia City Council Committee on Law and Government
City Hall, Room 580
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107

Dear Councilman Greenlee:

The Committee of Seventy is writing in support of Bill Numbers 100334, 100335, 100342 and 100343, which are before Council's Committee on Law and Government today. We hope you will accept this letter and enter it into the public record.

The Committee of Seventy strongly supports expanding anti-discrimination clauses in city procurement contracts to prohibit contractors from discriminating, or permitting discrimination, against any person because of ancestry, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or disability.

Seventy also supports amending the City Charter to permit various forms of electronic participation in the process for bidding on city contracts, in addition to other changes in the city's procurement rules that are recommended in Bill Number 100342.

The Committee of Seventy does not pretend to be an expert in the details of municipal procurement, but we have long urged government to undertake aggressive efforts to streamline and reduce the cost of acquiring goods and services. This is consistent with our mission of fighting for efficient and effective government, particularly during hard economic times when there is even a greater imperative to use taxpayer dollars wisely.

It is also consistent with repeated concerns expressed to Seventy by current and former city officials that many of the requirements contained in Article VIII, Chapter 2 of the Charter – while well-intentioned and appropriate at the time of their writing – are unnecessarily restrictive and outdated. For example, the advent of the Internet has rendered the current text of Section 2(a), passed in 1991, obsolete. By specifying “sealed bids,” which was standard in pre-Internet bidding, the provision has prevented the city from receiving bids in electronic form.



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We note that the Mayor's Task Force on Tax Policy and Economic Competitiveness also encouraged the city to offer more electronic applications, forms and payment options in its October 2009 Report – "Thinking Beyond Today: A Path to Prosperity."

The Committee of Seventy also endorses permitting greater flexibility in developing joint purchasing agreements among city government and other state, federal, or local agencies, including schools and universities. Greater opportunities for leveraged purchasing makes sense and will inevitably lower the cost of city services.

We certainly hope these proposals are only the start of a long-term process by this committee, and Council in general, to examine the City Charter and especially the constraints it imposes in a high-tech era. As Seventy stated in its September 2009 "Tackling True Reform" report, the city must make it a priority to propel government into the 21st century.

Again, Seventy appreciates the opportunity to offer its support for the enactment of these reforms. We look forward to hearing the results of Council's deliberations.

Sincerely,

Zachary Stalberg
President and CEO