



Committee of Seventy

Join us in our fight for better government

21 March 2013

The Honorable Ron Marsico
Chair, Judiciary Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
218 Ryan Office Building, P.O. Box 202105
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2105

Dear Chairman Marsico:

The Committee of Seventy is writing to urge the Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee to swiftly pass two bills to obliterate the corruption-riddled Philadelphia Traffic Court. We hope you will accept this letter and enter it into the public record of the Judiciary Committee's meeting on March 22.

The Committee of Seventy is a Philadelphia-based non-partisan organization fighting for honest government and fair elections. We strongly support permanent elimination of the Philadelphia Traffic Court. Any last minute attempts to salvage it misunderstand how deeply and irretrievably polluted the court is in the wake of the indictments of nine current and former Traffic Court judges and others.

We recognize that permanently eliminating the Traffic Court requires amending the Pennsylvania Constitution, which must be passed in two consecutive sessions of the General Assembly and then approved by voters across the state. Seventy urges the Judiciary Committee to allow Senate Bill 333 to move to the full House so that your colleagues can join the state Senate in unanimously approving the bill. Getting the constitutional amendment process underway now will help ensure that voters have the opportunity to abolish the Traffic Court at the earliest possible opportunity in 2015.

In the meantime, the ticket-fixing scandal has prompted a more immediate concern: the three Traffic Court openings on the 2013 election ballot. In our view, it is wrong-headed to elect judges to a court that is on the fast track to disappear.

This Committee has a chance to begin to phase out the Traffic Court *right now* by sending Senate Bill 334 to the full House for approval, which the state Senate has already accomplished by a unanimous vote. As we understand it, action by the House and then by Governor Corbett must happen before the General Assembly's summer recess in order to remove the three Traffic Court seats from the November 5, 2013 general election ballot.

Notwithstanding the universal outrage over the despicable culture described in two recent Traffic Court reports, 41 candidates have filed nomination petitions to seek a party's nomination in the May 21 primary election. If Senate Bill 334 is not passed in time to remove the names of the nominated candidates from the November 5 ballot, the taxpayers could potentially be stuck with the three people elected to jobs paying over \$91,000 a year per person.

We urge the Pennsylvania House not to allow this to happen. Swift passage would also give the courts plenty of time to resolve any legal challenges. This would be more difficult once people have already been elected to the Traffic Court.

The Committee of Seventy appreciates the chance to support and urge prompt action on Senate Bills 333 and 334. We look forward to hearing the results of the Committee's deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ZS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Zachary Stalberg
President and CEO