

CHANGE Illinois
Coalition for Honest and New Government Ethics

**Statement of Principles
Call to Action**

The Preamble of the Illinois State Constitution includes among other aspirational goals a pledge to “maintain a representative and orderly government.” The citizens of Illinois deserve fair, open and honest government, and, indeed, the efficient and effective conduct of our state’s business demands it.

Far too often and for far too long, corrupt public officials have trampled on our basic tenants of democracy. Decision-making rooted in political and personal gain and the resulting wasteful spending of tax dollars have eroded the public’s faith in its government and have endangered the welfare of our state and our communities.

As representatives of civic, business, professional and philanthropic organizations, we believe this is a crisis that demands the attention of all citizens. Therefore, we respectfully call upon our elected officials to begin the difficult but necessary process of transforming Illinois’ legendary culture of corruption into one that encourages, celebrates and rewards integrity, openness, electoral competition, and civic participation; and in the wake of scandals that broadcast Illinois’ ongoing political corruption across the globe, we invite all Illinoisans – regardless of party affiliation, ideology, or region -- to join us in pressing lawmakers, party leaders and other major stakeholders to do their duty.

In crisis comes opportunity, and we invite all Illinoisans’ to work to reshape Illinois government, so that it reflects our fundamental values as citizens. We must change the way we elect our public officials and require that government serve the common good. We need a different set of rules, laws and expectations so that corruption and fraud in Illinois are not only prohibited but also are actually difficult to accomplish. We need a public that is willing to speak up and demand the honest government they deserve.

Overhauling Illinois’ campaign finance system, one of the most permissive and least regulated in the country, is where the transformation must begin. Accordingly, we recommend that the General Assembly, *at a minimum*, adopt reasonable limits on individual and PAC contributions to candidates and parties; limits on fund transfers among political committees; and an aggregate limit on the amount of campaign money an individual donor can give to political committees during an election cycle. We recommend that Illinois either prohibit the use of corporate and union treasury funds for political contributions, or impose strict limits on direct contributions from corporate and union treasuries. Campaign finance limits, such as we describe, are currently in place at the federal level and in most other states.

To ensure the success of such a regulatory regime, we further recommend more complete and frequent disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures and a strengthened oversight agency with sufficient authority and resources to enforce the law, conduct random audits, and investigate and impose penalties for violations. We believe this approach will help increase election competition by reducing the enormous fundraising advantages currently enjoyed by

incumbents; reduce the power exercised by legislative leaders over rank and file members; break lawmakers' heavy reliance on large interest group donations; and encourage small donors to participate more fully in the electoral process.

We do not regard campaign finance reform as an elixir but as a point of departure in a long-term quest to create a more representative and orderly state government, responsive to the interests and needs of all its residents. We take note of proposals that would:

- End partisan gerrymandering by vesting redistricting authority in an independent, nonpartisan commission;
- Safeguard the independence and impartiality of our courts through reformed selection/retention, public campaign financing, and recusal procedures;
- Explore "Clean Money" public financing for executive and legislative races;
- Slow down the revolving door, by establishing a cooling off period between public service and lobbying;
- Improve compliance with state ethics laws, including those requiring disclosure of the economic interests of high-ranking public officials and the business activities and expenditures of registered lobbyists, by providing the agencies and administrators charged with enforcement the authority and resources needed to fulfill their responsibilities;
- Strengthen and more effectively enforce the state's open meeting and freedom of information laws; and
- Encourage informed participation in elections by providing voters with state-funded printed and online candidate guides and liberalizing, with appropriate safeguards, the state's voter registration procedures.
- Create a voter registration process that encourages participation by all qualified voters.

Although the coalition has not endorsed these reform proposals, preferring at this time to focus exclusively on campaign finance, we agree that many reform ideas should be examined in the coming months.

Experience has shown that no single reform can cure all of Illinois' ills and that even the most carefully crafted package will require thoughtful implementation, careful monitoring and vigorous enforcement. The magnitude of Illinois' challenge demands that Democrats and Republicans, those from downstate and upstate, elected officials and citizens join together to forge a new more honest and accountable political culture. And it is in that spirit that we say it is time to reject the status quo and for our elected leaders to act boldly, wisely and courageously in fashioning a system of democratic governance that is worthy of our fellow citizens' respect and confidence.