

STATEMENT ON ETHICS ORDINANCE VOTE

August 2, 2000

Today a majority of the City Council voted to approve a long-delayed and much-debated ethics ordinance. This ordinance is intended to govern the conduct of all City of Detroit employees and elected officials.

I joined a majority of my colleagues in supporting this ordinance even though I believe it has several major flaws. Perhaps most significant among these is language mandating the Board of Ethics consist of five members of the public appointed by the Mayor with City Council's concurrence along with the City's Corporation Counsel and Director of Human Resources. The latter two individuals are mayoral appointees.

The presence of two key individuals who owe their jobs to the Mayor raises serious questions about the level of control and influence a sitting Mayor would have over this body. Could they truly be independent in investigating ethics charges leveled against the Mayor, or for that matter themselves? I believe that any Board of Ethics should be a truly independent body consisting solely of members of the public.

Unfortunately, the City Charter mandates this structure. Hopefully, a proposed Charter Amendment that Council voted to place on the November ballot will pass. That amendment would restructure the Board of Ethics, eliminating Mayoral appointees and allowing the Council and the Mayor to only appoint members of the public.

The ordinance is also vague in areas governing the use of "official duties for private gain" and does not contain language addressing city employees who receive gifts from city contractors.

I'm pleased that Council did accept an amendment I offered prohibiting family members of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, City Council, or City Clerk from serving on the Board of Ethics. But my colleagues and the Administration rejected my provision that would prevent City Contractors from serving on the Board of Ethics.

I also wonder if our ordinance will hold up to scrutiny by the State Legislature. That body is now considering a statewide ethics bill that is arguably stronger than ours.

Clearly the ordinance falls short on many fronts. Nevertheless, I voted in favor of it because. Why? Because having even a flawed ethics ordinance is better than having no ordinance at all. Council also will also have the opportunity to incorporate additional amendments at a later date, a process will encourage to ensure an Ethics Ordinance that truly delivers what it promises.