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## Civic Federation Position Statement

September 14, 2009



### **Civic Federation Supports Legislation to Reduce Cook County Veto Override Threshold**

At a press conference on September 8, 2009, Illinois State Senator Dan Kotowski and Illinois State Representative Julie Hamos announced a renewed effort to lower the number of votes required to overturn a veto by the Cook County Board President. The Civic Federation supports their efforts to reduce the proportion to three-fifths or 11 of 17 votes.

Due to the failure of state legislation to keep up with changes to the structure of the Cook County Board of Commissioners,\* the Board requires a four-fifths supermajority—or 14 out of 17 commissioners—to overrule a presidential veto, rather than the more usual three-fifths majority required by the federal and most local governments. This gives the County Board President extraordinary power to ignore the wishes of the commissioners.

Senator Kotowski introduced Senate Bill 1868, which would lower the veto override requirement to three-fifths of the commissioners, in February 2009. The bill passed the Illinois Senate unanimously in April but stalled in the House of Representatives. Representative Hamos, the House sponsor of the bill, announced that she would be working to secure the support of her colleagues and House Speaker Michael Madigan leading up to veto session in October. Senator Kotowski also noted that he would be reintroducing his bill with an immediate effective date as Senate Bill 588.

The Civic Federation has long advocated for reducing the Cook County veto override threshold. The Cook County Cost Control Task Force Report the Federation wrote in cooperation with the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce in 2001 recommended the override vote be lowered to level the playing field between the legislative and executive branches of Cook County government.

The Civic Federation supports Senate Bills 1868 and 588 and urges House Speaker Madigan and the Illinois House of Representatives to pass one or both of them and restore balanced democracy to Cook County.

\*The four-fifths majority requirement was established in the 1870 Illinois Constitution to prevent the ten members of the Board of Commissioners from Chicago overriding a veto without support from the five suburban members. After the addition of a sixth suburban member in 1973, there was little reason to continue to impose such a stringent veto override. The current Board structure, where commissioners are elected from districts, many of which include city and suburban areas, renders any reasoning behind the 4/5ths majority requirement meaningless. For more on this subject, read "Reinventing Cook County" by former Cook County Commissioner Michael Quigley.