

Poll: Chicago Business Executives Concerned About City Government Ethics, Support Reform

July 12, 2016 – Chicago, IL – Today, a [poll of Chicago business executives](#) found serious concern about influence and corruption in city policies and politics. Among other opinions, there is a near-unanimous view that lobbying City Council members increases corruption, companies gain a business advantage from making political contributions, and officials pay more attention to lobbyists than to voters. Amid their concern lies support for a program that would broaden and strengthen the voices of small donors by the city raising the value of their contributions. The Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED), a nonpartisan, business-led public policy organization, commissioned the poll, which was conducted by Crain’s Custom Media.

Highlights from the [poll of 428 Chicago decision-makers](#) include the following:

- 92% thought that big campaign donors have a *great deal of* or *some* impact on increasing corruption in Chicago.
- 91% felt that companies that engage with the political process in Chicago by using paid lobbyists and making political contributions gain a business advantage.
- 92% thought that a form of crony capitalism is practiced in Chicago. (This view came after the poll defined the term as “the unhealthy relationship between some businesses and government, which can lead to favoritism in the form of tax breaks, government grants, and other incentives.”)
- 79% felt that Chicago is off on the wrong track. Only 11% felt that the city is going in the right direction, while 10% were not sure.
- 88% thought that the ethical behavior of Chicago elected and appointed officials over the past five years is a *very serious* or *somewhat serious* issue.
- 93% felt that lobbying of Chicago City Council members and other officials has a *great deal of* or *some* impact on increasing corruption.

“These findings support the notion that the well-funded have a leg up,” said Bob Kueppers, a former Deputy CEO of Deloitte and current Co-Chair of CED’s Money in Politics Subcommittee. “Fortunately, a broad array of local executives supports a change in course, which would strengthen both our economy and democracy.”

Those surveyed expressed support for the adoption of a small donor matching program, which Chicago voters overwhelmingly passed in a 2015 referendum, and which already exists in other cities. The program entails a candidate accepting restrictions on contributions and expenditures in return for a public match, usually below \$200. This helps to raise the value – and ultimately, voice – of donations by average citizens.

- Most (58%) would support a program that encourages small-dollar contributions. One-in-six (17%) would not support this type of program, while 25% were not sure.
- Nearly half (47%) felt that a small donor program would *strongly* improve or lead to *some* improvement in the quality of candidates who run for municipal office in Chicago.

“Such strong business support for this small donor match program is a significant impetus for Chicago to reach a more level playing field,” said Dan Conley, Principal of Beacon Communications, a Chicago-based public relations firm. “Passing it requires educating our community, the public, and City Council about the benefits, and clearly voicing our enthusiasm.”

“With nine out of ten Chicago business leaders believing big campaign donations and paid lobbying efforts give an unfair advantage to those willing to pay to play, the respondents clearly indicate a desire for meaningful campaign finance reform in Illinois,” said Frank Sennett, who oversaw the poll as director of Crain’s Custom Media.

The poll was conducted between May 17th – 27th. Its methodology and complete findings can be viewed [here](#).

About the Committee for Economic Development

Founded in 1942, the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board (CED) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, business-led public policy organization that delivers well-researched analysis and reasoned solutions to our nation's most critical issues. CED's work is grounded on seven core principles: sustainable capitalism, long-term economic growth, efficient fiscal and regulatory policy, competitive and open markets, a globally competitive workforce, equal economic opportunity, and nonpartisanship in the nation's interest. Learn more at www.ced.org.