

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia Office of the Chief Clerk Room 402, City Hall Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 250502)

RESOLUTION

Authorizing the Special Committee on Kensington to hold a hearing to examine how chronic trauma from exposure to the opioid crisis impacts children's emotional, mental, and behavioral health in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia, and to explore tools, services, and programs to support these youth.

WHEREAS, The opioid epidemic has had a devastating and deeply entrenched impact on the City of Philadelphia, with the Kensington neighborhood serving as its epicenter; and

WHEREAS, According to Drexel University's Urban Health Collaborative, 32.4% of Kensington's approximately 26,484 residents are 18 years old or younger; and

WHEREAS, For children and youth, whose brains are in a critical stage of development, frequent exposure to highly stressful experiences can result in long-lasting negative effects on their emotional, mental, and behavioral health. These experiences are commonly referred to in both medical and academic fields as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); and

WHEREAS, The CDC-Kaiser ACE Study found that long-term impacts of ACEs included increased future health risks, such as addiction, higher risks of depression, attempted suicide, and mental health disorders; and

WHEREAS, Additionally, their research concluded that children who experience four or more ACEs are 7.4 times as likely to suffer from alcoholism and 12.2 times as likely to attempt suicide. Additionally, children who experience two or more ACEs are nearly 3 times more likely to repeat a grade; and

WHEREAS, Research and data from governmental and nongovernmental sources indicate that K-12 schools are increasingly facing the emotional, mental, and behavioral health effects of the opioid crisis on students, including developmental delays, speech and language difficulties, adjustment problems, behavioral issues, high rates of inattention and hyperactivity, learning disabilities, emotional challenges, and other general health problems; and

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WHEREAS, Children and youth living in communities affected by substance use disorder (SUD) are exposed to chronic trauma, instability, and community violence, which are factors strongly associated with long-term mental and behavioral health issues. At times, these children are unaccompanied, experiencing these challenges alone without adult support; and

WHEREAS, Kensington's youth are routinely exposed to the adverse impacts of the community's ongoing opioid crisis, often encountering individuals who appear unresponsive or lifeless, stepping over human feces and discarded needles, and navigating a daily path to and from school through conditions that severely compromise their sense of safety, stability, and overall quality of life; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the traumatic experiences children face in their neighborhoods, many also endure the impacts of the opioid crisis within their own homes, where a parent or caregiver may be struggling with substance use disorder (SUD), further deepening the emotional and psychological burdens they carry; and

WHEREAS, Data from Substance Use Philly shows that the highest concentration of newborns with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), a group of conditions caused by withdrawal from substances exposed to in the womb, occurs in the 19134 ZIP code. This ZIP code, which is part of the Kensington neighborhood, is a focal point of opioid use in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Research by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that more than 50% of children born with NAS were diagnosed with a mental health condition by the time they turned five years old; and

WHEREAS, According to the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, the incidence rate of NAS in the City more than quadrupled between 2002 and 2018, increasing from 3.1 to 13.8 cases per 1,000 live births. In 2018, Philadelphia's NAS rate stood at 13.8 per 1,000 live births, nearly double the national average and four times higher than the City's rate a decade earlier; and

WHEREAS, Moreover, parental opioid misuse often impairs caregiving and the ability to form healthy attachments, while material deprivation and extended separation from parents due to incarceration, treatment, or death can further destabilize a child's emotional well-being and development; and

WHEREAS, Children of parents with opioid use disorder (OUD) are at elevated risk for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), intellectual and developmental disorders, emotional and behavioral dysregulation, and disrupted attachment relationships, all of which can hinder their psychological development and academic success; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, children in opioid-affected households often experience direct exposure to trauma including witnessing overdoses, accidentally ingesting opioids, or living in unstable environments, which contributes to mental and emotional distress and trauma; and

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WHEREAS, Educators, social workers, healthcare professionals, and residents of the 7th Councilmanic District have raised ongoing concerns about the rising number of children in Kensington experiencing emotional distress, behavioral challenges, and developmental delays as a result of the ongoing crisis; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Special Committee on Kensington to call for a public hearing to examine the impacts of the opioid crisis on children's emotional, mental, and behavioral health in Kensington, and to explore tools, services, and programs to support our youth.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the eighth day of May, 2025.

Kenyatta Johnson
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Lozada

Sponsored by: Councilmembers Lozada, Phillips, Gilmore Richardson, Jones, Brooks, Harrity, Driscoll, Bass and Ahmad