



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Declaring solidarity with and support for the #MuteRKelly campaign, a grassroots movement that seeks to remedy decades of silence surrounding the sexual abuse of young Black women and girls by denying R. Kelly a public platform within the City of Philadelphia and nationwide.

WHEREAS, R&B superstar recording artist Robert “R” Kelly has a documented 25-year history of emotionally, physically, mentally, and sexually abusing women, and notably, young Black girls; and

WHEREAS, We believe survivors; and

WHEREAS, Black girls matter; and

WHEREAS, Survivors have charged R. Kelly with abuse, statutory rape, and child pornography since the mid-1990s, both in court and in the public sphere. Nevertheless, R. Kelly’s career continued to blossom. According to consistent accounts, including many from groundbreaking and persistent *Chicago Tribune* reporter Jim DeRogatis, R. Kelly has long used his fame and fortune to prey on young Black girls as young as 13, and to silence them afterwards; and

WHEREAS, Andrea Kelly, Tiffany Hawkins, Lisa van Allen, Tracy Sampson, Patrice Jones, Kitti Jones, Montina Woods, Asante McGee, Jerhonda Pace, Lizzette Martinez, and others have bravely shared their trauma as survivors of R. Kelly, in hopes of amplifying the calls to censure the singer and hold him accountable. These women have continued to take a stand through sharing their stories of physical assault, sexual and emotional abuse, incarceration, and public shaming, even when American society has, time and time again, given the musician a pass, valuing his talent over their lives and safety; and

WHEREAS, Following Jim DeRogatis’ July 2017 *Buzzfeed* report that R. Kelly incarcerated women against their will and created a human trafficking ring, Kenyette Barnes and Oronike Odeleye aimed to prevent him from performing in their home city of Atlanta, and created the #MuteRKelly movement—a nationwide, grassroots movement led by Black women. The campaign aims to deny R. Kelly a public platform in the music industry, and since then, R. Kelly concerts in 11 cities have been cancelled; and

WHEREAS, In January 2019, Dream Hampton’s six-hour Lifetime documentary “Surviving R. Kelly,” searingly chronicled R. Kelly’s acts of sexual abuse and subsequent silencing and degradation of his victims, and raised up the voices of survivors; and

WHEREAS, Most recently, R. Kelly has reportedly been dropped by Sony’s RCA Records in a secret deal after years of the label profiting despite R. Kelly’s exploitation of Black children. While the #MuteRKelly organizers have lauded this as a victory for survivors, and all young Black women, the organizers are steadfast in their work to redress R. Kelly’s legacy of abuse and the music industry’s complicity: “We are still fighting to get his music off radio, to have his songs removed from streaming services and to get his upcoming concerts canceled. We will not stop until the community at large has completely divested itself from R. Kelly, and he can no longer use his wealth to insulate himself from the consequences of his crimes”; and

WHEREAS, #MuteRKelly lives within the larger context of the #MeToo movement, which aims to “radicalize the notion of mass healing” and create an intersectional space where survivors of sexual violence, and especially those who are Black and Brown, can build power to challenge cultures of sexual abuse, especially as they exist and persist in the music industry; and

WHEREAS, According to a 2017 Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality study, “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood,” Black girls are perceived to be more adult-like and less innocent than their white counterparts. This process of “adultification” leads to the oversexualization of young Black girls and a societal belief that they need less nurturing and less protection; and

WHEREAS, Victims of violence and abuse who are people of color, and particularly Black women, rarely receive proportionate news coverage, and are often portrayed as crime victims or crime perpetrators and blamed for their own victimization; and

WHEREAS, In supporting the #MuteRKelly movement, the Council of the City of Philadelphia makes clear that we all have a responsibility to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation, and to seek accountability when it occurs. We acknowledge the vulnerability of Black girls, and make a commitment to show up for and stand with them; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Declares solidarity with and support for the #MuteRKelly campaign, a grassroots movement that seeks to remedy decades of silence surrounding the sexual abuse of young Black women and girls by denying R. Kelly a public platform within the City of Philadelphia and nationwide.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Kenyette Barnes and Oronike Odeleye, co-founders of the #MuteRKelly movement, for their courage, leadership, and relentless activism.