



City of Philadelphia

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

Legislation Text

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Formally apologizing for the heinous acts of abuse and torture perpetuated against inmates at Holmesburg Prison during the 1950's - 1970's.

WHEREAS, Philadelphia's Holmesburg Prison was operated by the Pennsylvania Department of Prisons between 1896 and 1995 in the Holmesburg section of the City; and

WHEREAS, Between the 1950's and 1970's, Dr. Albert Kligman, a Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, worked at the prison and conducted numerous unethical and reprehensible experiments on mostly Black inmates; and

WHEREAS, The inmates were exposed and subjected to pharmaceuticals, viruses, fungus, asbestos, LSD, and components of the chemical weapon of war Agent Orange; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Kligman worked in conjunction with the U.S. Army to conduct experiments on more than three hundred inmates with mind-control drugs and potential "skin-hardeners" that could be used in warfare to protect against a chemical weapon attack; and

WHEREAS, Inmates were deceived into participating in these studies with inaccurate documents that did not disclose the horrendous details of potential chemical exposure, horrific side effects, unethical dosages amounts that exceeded any recommended levels, asbestos injections and other unspeakable acts; and

WHEREAS, Participants in these studies experienced side effects for weeks after the experiments. Inmates would complain about continued bitter side effects that would leave both physical and emotional scars for decades to come; and

WHEREAS, The damage, abuse, and torture perpetuated against inmates at the Holmesburg prison must not only be recognized, but be atoned for; and

WHEREAS, The Council of the City of Philadelphia formally condemns the actions of Dr. Albert Kligman at the Holmesburg Prison; and

WHEREAS, The despicable treatment of prisoners at the Holmesburg Prison during the 1950's-1970's should be deeply reflected upon and the continuance of medical racism in our society should be deeply examined and pushed back upon; and

WHEREAS, On October 6, 2022, James Kenney, The Mayor of Philadelphia, formally apologized on behalf of the City of Philadelphia for the experiments conducted at Holmesburg Prison. This Council should be in accordance with City leadership and also offer an official apology on behalf of its members; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby Formally apologizes

for the heinous acts of abuse and torture perpetuated against inmates at Holmesburg Prison during the 1950's - 1970's.