

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Council Committee on Fiscal Stability and Intergovernmental Cooperation to hold hearings in order to fully examine and analyze the current and future financial condition of the School District of Philadelphia and to receive testimony from Mayor John F. Street and the Board of Education on proposed plans to stabilize the funding base of the School District to prevent fiscal insolvency, avoid a possible state takeover and insure a quality education for Philadelphia's public school children.

WHEREAS, The Philadelphia Board of Education approved a preliminary spending plan on March 31, 2000 which totals \$1.64 billion -- reflecting a 7.1% increase in spending with \$45 million in new money earmarked for new programs, but with no money dedicated for increased teacher salaries; and

WHEREAS, The spending plan approved by the Board of Education has a cumulative deficit of \$204 million and recent news articles have projected that the deficit could be as high as \$300 million; and

WHEREAS, A 1996 Perks Reutter study estimated that \$765 million was needed for capital and maintenance expenditures to simply raise public school facilities to a minimum standard; and

WHEREAS, The low starting salaries for teachers in the Philadelphia School System are ranked 59th out of the sixty-one nearby school districts, and recently the Philadelphia School District faced a severe teacher shortage which resulted in a temporary waiver of the residency requirement and other recruitment incentives; and

WHEREAS, The contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers expires in August and Mayor Street has repeatedly stated that the teachers "deserve a fair contract;" and

WHEREAS, Mayor John F. Street has been hosting public meetings throughout the City at each of the school clusters and has stressed at each meeting that the schools will run out of money by next year without an increase in state aid, and the Mayor has been quoted in numerous articles as stating that the "plan is to let the schools run out of money;" and

WHEREAS, While warning that the public schools will run out of money and demanding that Harrisburg fix this funding crisis, Mayor Street states that he does not support a tax increase, that he will not allow educational programs to be cut, and that the teachers union deserves a "fair contract whether we have the money or not;" and

WHEREAS, Mayor Street has also stated his support for an additional \$4 million for school bus attendants, increasing the number of school crossing guards, and supporting school uniforms while also stating that the City and School District should pay for these uniforms; and

WHEREAS, In April of 1998, the State enacted legislation which authorizes the takeover of the Philadelphia School District by a state-controlled five-member School Reform Commission if the District fails to adopt a valid budget; and

WHEREAS, This state takeover legislation was in direct response to a prior threat by Superintendent Hornbeck to close the schools early if no new money was forthcoming from Harrisburg; and

WHEREAS, Yesterday, the Ridge Administration requested \$1 million from the General Assembly in a supplemental appropriation in order to prepare for a possible takeover of the Philadelphia School District; and

WHEREAS, The overall quality and fiscal health of the public school system is essential to the economic health and long-term viability of the City; and

WHEREAS, Given the large projected deficit in the proposed spending plan, the upcoming teacher contract negotiations and the ramifications for the City and the City's 212,000 school children if the State were to authorize a "takeover" of the public school system, a comprehensive review of the fiscal pressures facing the School District and a thorough analysis of strategies to restore the system to fiscal health is required; now therefore

Resolved, By the Council of the City of Philadelphia, That the Committee on Fiscal Stability and Intergovernmental Cooperation is authorized to hold hearings in order to fully examine and analyze the current and future financial condition of the School District of Philadelphia and to receive testimony from Mayor John F. Street and the Board of Education on proposed plans to stabilize the funding base of the School District to prevent fiscal insolvency, avoid a possible state takeover and insure a quality education for Philadelphia's public school children.