

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings regarding the escape of two inmates from the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center on the evening of May 7, 2023, and the persistent, systemic issues within the Philadelphia Department of Prisons that made such an escape possible.

WHEREAS, On the evening of Sunday, May 7, 2023, at approximately 8:30 p.m., inmates Ameen Hurst and Nasir Grant escaped from the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center ("PICC"), leaving the grounds by passing through and over outer fences; and

WHEREAS, Despite three routine headcounts, the inmates' absence did not become known to staff at the facility until the afternoon of Monday, May 8, at which time the Philadelphia Department of Prisons notified the Philadelphia Police Department and held a joint press conference to share facts and solicit the help of the public in locating the escapees; and

WHEREAS, Thanks to the thorough work of the Philadelphia Police Department's Northeast Detective Division and the United States Marshals, Grant was taken back into custody on May 11 and Hurst was rearrested on May 17, and no fewer than four other people inside and outside of PICC were charged with aiding the men's escape; and

WHEREAS, To their credit, the Philadelphia Department of Prisons immediately referred this matter to its Office of Professional Compliance for investigation, including a thorough review of security tapes, staff assignments, telephone logs, and other evidence from the time leading up to the escape and the discovery of the inmates' absence; and

WHEREAS, In addition, the Mayor and Managing Director reached out to Governor Shapiro to bring in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to conduct a security and vulnerability assessment of the facility; and

WHEREAS, While the Members of City Council eagerly await the results of these investigations, they, along with members of District Council 33 Local159, the Pennsylvania Prison Society, officials of the First Judicial District, state leaders, legal advocates, and other observers, including the federal Monitor appointed as a result of *Remick v. City of Philadelphia*, have been expressing their grave concerns about prison conditions for many years; and

WHEREAS, Among these concerns, all of which have serious health and safety implications for corrections staff and inmates, the issue of staff vacancies is particularly troubling; and

WHEREAS, In Fiscal Year '17, the Department of Prisons was fully staffed, yet today, only 1,318 of 2,186 budgeted positions are filled, despite the Department's budget increasing by 11% and inmate population decreasing by 42% over that same period of time; and

WHEREAS, City Councilmembers, employees of the Department of Prisons, inmates and their families, and members of the public, especially those who live close to the prison complexes, need assurance that this vital

component of our criminal justice system is functioning the way that it should; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes the Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings regarding the escape of two inmates from the Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center on the evening of May 7, 2023, and the persistent, systemic issues within the Philadelphia Department of Prisons that made such an escape possible.