

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Public Health and Human Services and the Committee Children and Youth to conduct joint hearings to investigate the organizational and systemic failures that led to the return of three girls to their sexually abusive father, who resumed the abuse after their return.

WHEREAS, On October 14, 2021, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Turning Points for Children, a child welfare agency retained by Philadelphia's Department of Human Services (DHS), had agreed to pay \$6 million to three sisters after the organization had returned them to their abusive father; and

WHEREAS, The girls had been repeatedly physically and sexually abused by their father and others for years. The horrors persisted until June 2015, when child services removed the girls from his custody, and he was barred from seeing them. In 2016 Turning Points allowed two of the girls to return to their father's custody for unknown reasons as they were returned to him despite him having open criminal charges, no fixed address, and no source of income; and

WHEREAS, Turning Points caseworkers reportedly conceded having limited knowledge about the extent of the abuse that followed the girls from home to home, according to the complaint. The victims' attorney indicated that at least five caseworkers and two supervisors had been involved in the girls' case, which may have led to serious mistakes, including misinterpreting the father's criminal record and failing to conduct a court-ordered psychosexual evaluation of him; and

WHEREAS, In 2017, child welfare advocates at the Philadelphia Children's Alliance learned the full extent of the man's brutality during an interview with the children. According to court records the father was convicted in 2018 of numerous charges related to the abuse; and

WHEREAS, Formed in 2008, Turning Points for Children provides supportive services to children in the city's foster-care system. In recent years, Turning Points has broadened its footprint to include four city-funded "community umbrella agencies" providing family services to 17,000 people across the city; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, a network of community umbrella agencies was established for the purpose of providing child welfare services to more than 10,000 children a year. In the network's first evaluation, DHS ranked Turning Points among the three poorest performing child-care contractors in the network. In the years following Turning Points' four umbrella agencies have showed signs of improvement and received mixed "competent" and "proficient" marks; and

WHEREAS, According to contract data, Turning Points received \$54 million in funding through the Philadelphia Department of Human Services in fiscal year 2020; and

WHEREAS, On October 18th, 2021, the Philadelphia Inquirer reported of an additional youth residential facility in Montgomery County that had also been involved in the incident, Carson Valley Children's Aid, and that an additional \$4.6 million settlement was reached. Carson Valley Children's Aid also operates under contracts with DHS, further revealing an unsettling pattern; and

WHEREAS, DHS's mission is to provide and promote safety, permanency, and well-being for children and youth at risk of abuse, neglect, and delinquency. The children in this incident were failed by the adults meant to protect them. In order to ensure the safety of the vulnerable children of Philadelphia, it is imperative to investigate the systematic failures that occurred so that they are immediately rectified and our children safe; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, This Council hereby authorizes the Committee on Public Health and Human Services and the Committee Children and Youth to conduct joint hearings to investigate and examine the organizational and systemic failures that led to the return of three girls to their sexually abusive father, who resumed the abuse after their return