



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
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Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the City Council Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings to review the City's response to protests in support of ending systemic racism in policing and of the Black Lives Matter movement, and to provide residents with a forum to share their experiences and make recommendations for safer and non-discriminatory policing.

WHEREAS, In May and June of 2020, tens of thousands of Philadelphians of all races and backgrounds took to the streets to demonstrate in recognition of the Black Lives Matter movement, to highlight systemic racism in policing, and to demand policing reforms as a result of a nationwide effort for justice in the wake of police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many others in Philadelphia and across the nation; and

WHEREAS, During the course of such demonstrations, the City of Philadelphia has a duty to not only protect First Amendment rights but to also uphold public safety, preserve humanity and the public health, and ensure that responses are humane and equitable across neighborhoods and communities; and

WHEREAS, There is a pressing need to understand the range and extent of the City's authorization for use of non-lethal force, especially in light of evidence of significant physical harm and potential long-lasting trauma caused by these devices, nationally and internationally; and

WHEREAS, In at least one residential neighborhood, West Philadelphia, residents, including those who were not involved in demonstrations, were subjected to chemical agents and other non-lethal weapons deployed without public warning in ways that potentially compromised the health and welfare of children and families, especially those who are Black; and

WHEREAS, National media reported on the use of force to disperse protestors on I-676 on June 1, 2020, documenting the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and other non-lethal weapons by police against Philadelphians exercising their constitutional right to protest; and

WHEREAS, The widespread use of chemical weapons detrimentally impacts people, including those not participating in public protest, and further fractures police-community relations; and

WHEREAS, Public officials have a responsibility to ensure equity, transparency, and non-discrimination in policing across the City of Philadelphia. Residents have expressed concerns regarding disparate policing responses between Philadelphia neighborhoods. In some cases largely white vigilante mobs wielding weapons and assaulting and menacing demonstrators appeared to be treated differently than how Black neighborhoods and those protesting against racial injustice were policed; and

WHEREAS, The Kenney Administration has taken laudable affirmative steps, including the creation of a large and diverse steering committee, to listen and learn from residents to better effectively address structural violence, as well as an announcement of the intent to hire an independent consultant to assess the City's response, who will eventually issue a final report. These efforts are important steps forward as means for internal review and the amending of policies and practices; and

WHEREAS, National opinion is rapidly shifting to what Black communities have been saying for decades. In this historical moment, City Council also has a responsibility to learn and build a vision going forward. This starts with repairing the public trust around policing and increasing police accountability; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphians across the City deserve a forum to share their accounts and perspectives on what transpired during the days of civil unrest and to share their recommendations on improving the City's response; and

WHEREAS, Even before the historic demonstrations of May and June 2020, there was an immense need for a citywide truth and reconciliation process around the history of policing and institutional racism. This hearing is a first step toward a process that is needed more than ever; and

WHEREAS, Black lives matter; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes the Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings to review the City's response to protests in support of ending systemic racism in policing and of the Black Lives Matter movement, and to provide residents with a forum to share their experiences and make recommendations for safer and non-discriminatory policing.