

Legislation Text

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Authorizing Council's Committees on the Disabled and Special Needs and Public Safety to hold joint public hearings investigating the barriers faced by people with serious mental health issues who are transitioning from incarceration to the Philadelphia community.

WHEREAS, United States jails and prisons house approximately 2.5 million people. Of those in the system, 95 % will be released after mostly serving 12 months or less behind bars and with significant reentry challenges. Additionally, two-thirds of the population will end up getting re-incarcerated within three years after their release; and

WHEREAS, People with psychiatric disabilities are at a disproportionately greater risk for involvement in the criminal justice system compared to the general population. While 6% of U.S. adults have a psychiatric disability, 15% of men, and 31% of women entering jails are believed to have a psychiatric disability, with illegal substance use playing a major factor in arrests; and

WHEREAS, The sudden, unpredictable nature of incarceration interferes with the maintenance of family and social relationships and the development of consistent community participation (e.g., work, school, church attendance, etc.) and ties to the community. Diminished family and social ties, and the structure provided by stable community participation, could further increase the risk of new arrests and illegal substance use, creating a vicious cycle. Innovative preventative interventions based on connecting or re-connecting people to community, including meaningful participation and family and social relationships, may not only enhance community living and participation outcomes, but also prevent further involvement in the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, Social supports have been identified as improving health outcomes, treatment compliance, quality of life, and community tenure. Individuals with mental health issues tend to have smaller and less diversified social networks. Incarceration can disrupt these bonds and create instability and weakened support systems that are crucial for successful reentry; and

WHEREAS, Stable employment has been shown to have positive economic and health outcomes. However, the labor force participation rate for persons with psychiatric disabilities has remained around 25%, the lowest rate among all disability groups. Finding employment is difficult for this population due to low educational attainment, drug addiction and social stigma. When someone is involved in the criminal justice system, they also face legal barriers and restrictions that prevent stable employment; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 80% of individuals released from prison are uninsured. Once incarcerated, most states, including Pennsylvania, terminate inmate's Medicaid benefits. While research shows that the first few weeks after release are the most critical in terms of connecting people to treatment, benefits are not always restored upon release and is a process that can take upwards of several months. It has the potential to disrupt continuity of care and delay needed treatment and resources; and

WHEREAS, The transitional process from incarceration to community is multi-dimensional and requires

collaboration from many systems. Individuals returning to the community may have multiple immediate needs, such as housing, food, clothing, substance abuse treatment and child custody issues. An inability to address all of these challenges can lead to a return to criminal activity; and

WHEREAS, Total correctional expenditures are continuing to expand, with the total annual per-inmate cost averaging more than \$31,000. With budgets already strained, it is more cost effective to help returning citizens become more productive members of society as opposed to paying for institutional care; and

WHEREAS, The Mayor's Office of Reintegration Services is looking to address these problems in the City by introducing a reentry pilot. This initiative seeks to overcome many of the significant barriers that prevent returning citizens with serious mental health issues from successfully reintegrating back into their communities; and

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Committee on the Disabled and Special Needs is hereby authorized to hold public hearings reviewing the significant barriers that prevent successful reentry into the community of returning citizens with serious mental health issues.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That in furtherance of such investigation, the Committee is hereby authorized to issue subpoenas as may be necessary or appropriate to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents to the full extent authorized under Section 2-401 of the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter.