

Legislation Text

File #: 190369, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Committee on Legislative Oversight to conduct hearings to examine the progress of the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation in pursuing organizational goals including expanding hours, reducing unplanned closures and delayed openings, enhancing equity in library services, promoting diversity and inclusion, and increasing transparency

WHEREAS, The Free Library of Philadelphia is one of the City's cornerstone institutions, serving a vast array of community needs at its 54 locations. The Free Library is much more than a book lender, providing a safe haven for Philadelphians of all ages and walks of life, and provides a variety of services, include support for academic studies, work-readiness and job searches, entrepreneurship, and English language learning; and

WHEREAS, The Free Library has made an organizational commitment to modernization and diversification of the services it provides, as exemplified by its 21st Century Libraries initiative, which reimagines the physical and social character of libraries for our changing world; and

WHEREAS, The Free Library has demonstrated exemplary leadership by managing the Read by 4th, a landmark collaborative effort by nearly 100 public and private organizations to boost literacy in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The Free Library nevertheless faces fundamental challenges in fulfilling its mission, including service hours, service equity, diversity and inclusion, and transparency; and

WHEREAS, Personnel and facilities issues have curtailed library hours and led to unplanned branch closures and delayed openings. Moreover, those issues have limited service disproportionately in low-income and minority neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, The Free Library has faced questions regarding diversity and inclusion for years, but only recently constituted a diversity and inclusion committee of its board, and has held only one meeting; and

WHEREAS, The Free Library relies upon substantial funding support from the City, but the Free Library and the Free Library Foundation have not consistently maintained a high level of transparency. For example, the most recent publicly available annual report for the Free Library pertains to Fiscal Year 2017; and

WHEREAS, Despite these ongoing concerns, the Mayor has nevertheless proposed a substantial increase in the City's budget allocation for the Free Library and Council has indicated its support for the proposed increase, as well as interest in exploring a further increase to expand hours; and

WHEREAS, To ensure effective stewardship of any new funding, and to ensure prompt progress towards the above-referenced organizational goals, regular status reports to Council by the Free Library and Free Library Foundation are prudent; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes the Committee

on Legislative Oversight to conduct hearings to examine the progress of the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation in pursuing organizational goals including expanding hours, reducing unplanned closures and delayed openings, enhancing equity in library services, promoting diversity and inclusion, and increasing transparency.