

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the establishment of a “Special Committee on Child Separation In Philadelphia” to investigate child separation in Philadelphia’s child welfare system and develop recommendations to ensure compliance with State child Protective Services Law to protect children and due process rights of families and prevent the unnecessary break-up of families.

WHEREAS, Separation of children from their families, even for the short-term, results in emotional and physical harm and toxic stress, disrupting a child’s brain architecture and affecting health with long-term consequences for the child, the family, and the community; and

WHEREAS, The issue of child separation from families arises in the context of municipal child welfare systems; and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania, like every jurisdiction, requires child separation only when it’s absolutely necessary; and

WHEREAS, There are situations where it is absolutely necessary to separate children from their families; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia unfortunately has the highest poverty rate of any large city in the country, and the highest child separation rate in the country-three times that of New York City and four times that of Chicago; and

WHEREAS, There is no evidence that Philadelphians are more likely than any other person in the country to abuse their children; and

WHEREAS, The 2017 edition of the National Association of Counsel for Children Redbook-a legal guide for child welfare attorneys-contains this statement from Marvin Ventrell, a former NACC executive director, “Our zeal to protect children, to be the ‘child savers’ once again, and perhaps our failure to value ‘adequate parenting’ over removal, taught us one of our biggest lessons. Our efforts can and sometimes do harm children”; and

WHEREAS, The overwhelming majority of families that are monitored and disrupted by child welfare authorities are poor and disproportionately minorities; and

WHEREAS, Poor families, and poor families of color in particular, are entitled to the same protections against government intervention as wealthy parents and children; and

WHEREAS, New York City has successfully developed and implemented reforms that have had a large positive impact on reducing child removals, and promoting child welfare and strengthening families; and

WHEREAS, A special committee should be established to investigate child separations in Philadelphia’s child welfare system, and provide recommendations to improve child welfare policy and practice in Philadelphia;

now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council hereby authorizes the establishment of a “Special Committee on Child Separation in Philadelphia,” consisting of those City Council members appointed by the Council President, to investigate child separation in Philadelphia’s child welfare system and develop recommendations to ensure compliance with State Protective Services Law to protect children and due process rights of families and prevent the unnecessary break-up of families.