



City of Philadelphia

City Council
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Legislation Text

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Authorizing Council's Committee on Public Safety to investigate and hold public hearings reviewing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole and its practices in Philadelphia, including the assignment, workload and experience of agents; the use of GPS for offender tracking; and the establishment of a workgroup solely focused on Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, The defined mission of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (the Board) is to protect the safety of the public, address the needs of crime victims, improve county adult probation and parole services and assist in the fair administration of justice by ensuring the custody, control, and treatment of offenders under the jurisdiction of the Board; and

WHEREAS, The Board has the legal responsibility to parole, recommit for violations of parole, and discharge from parole offenders sentenced to two years or more. The Board also supervises offenders placed on special probation or special parole as requested by the Court of Common Pleas; and

WHEREAS, The Board's goal to protect the safety of the public is accomplished through effective parole decisions and proper supervision and management of offenders who are returning to their communities. Successful reentry of an offender can reduce the likelihood that offenders will victimize anyone else and ultimately return to prison; and

WHEREAS, According the Board's most recent monthly publication, which was released on April 9, 2013, the Philadelphia District had a parole and probation population of 10,490 individuals under the supervision of 130 agents of the Board; and

WHEREAS, The Public Safety Committee held an investigatory hearing on April 12, 2013. The witness list included three retired State Probation and Parole Agents; Michael C. Potteiger, Chairman of the Pennsylvania Parole Board; Charles Hoyt, Deputy Chief Probation Officer, Philadelphia Adult Probation & Parole; and Charles Junod, Assistant Managing Director and the Director of Philadelphia's Criminal Justice Coordination and Prison Population Unit; and

WHEREAS, The retired agents established that their goal was the successful reentry of assigned supervisees, however, high numbers in Philadelphia require increased desk time and reduced field time. Therefore, agents are unable to develop a network around the offender to help them achieve success. Additionally, they testified that Philadelphia is historically understaffed, agents use it to first gain a position with the Board and then transfer out to another district at the first opportunity; and

WHEREAS, Chairman Potteiger testified that the current caseload ratio of agents to offenders is 1:74, however, in Philadelphia that ratio is 1:81. This ratio does not explain how the caseload is distributed amongst agents, the grade of supervision required and is well above the best practice ratio recommended by the American Probation and Parole Association; and

WHEREAS, The most recent workload reports from the Board show a decrease in agents assigned to

Philadelphia. Additionally, Philadelphia based offenders comprise one-third of the Board's statewide Most Wanted list of absconders. The committee needs to examine caseload ratio of agents to offenders as well as agent training, retention and transfer policies of the Board and their impact on Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The Board has a \$300,000 FY'14 state budget request for global positioning system (GPS) equipment to allow the Board to supervise parolees who need electronic monitoring. The effectiveness of GPS monitoring of offenders must be examined and its impact on safety; and

WHEREAS, Chairman Potteiger stated in his testimony a willingness to construct a workgroup to focus on the issues and concerns of Philadelphia relating to the Board. We need to explore the need, feasibility and potential makeup of such a workgroup; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Committee on Public Safety is hereby authorized to hold public hearings reviewing the effectiveness and efficacy of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole and its readiness to protect the safety of the citizens of Philadelphia.

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.