

Legislation Text

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Calling on the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, Philadelphia Sheriff's Office, Office of the City Controller and the Managing Directors Office to conduct a joint evaluation of the City's current witness relocation and protection programs.

WHEREAS, Witness protection and relocation programs are designed to provide protection to persons who are cooperating with law enforcement as witnesses to homicides and other violent crimes; and

WHEREAS, A witness who is relocated is removed from the established "danger area" to a "safe area," ideally without loss of income or a lower standard of living; and

WHEREAS, These programs, which can be administered by federal, state, and local governments, relocate witnesses and their families to available housing units with the assistance of government funding; and

WHEREAS, The Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office administers a \$1.2 million witness relocation program funded by the Pennsylvania state budget. The Philadelphia DA's Office receives funding from the state program, in addition to City funding, and acts as liaison when witness protection or relocation is required, creating a plan for relocation, including transportation, school changes, and transfer of public assistance; and

WHEREAS, With rising incidents of homicides and violent crime in Philadelphia, including 562 homicides in 2021, there is an urgent need for significant expansion of witness relocation services and an evaluation of how those services are provided and administered; and

WHEREAS, It is in the City's best interest to have all relevant agencies participate in an effort to explore the feasibility of having a wider array of witness protection and relocation options available to encourage witness participation in trials and ensure the protection of those witnesses and the public; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby calls on the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, Philadelphia Sheriff's Office, Office of the City Controller and the Managing Directors Office to conduct a joint evaluation of the City's current witness relocation and protection programs.