

Legislation Text

File #: 240031, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development to conduct a hearing on the City of Philadelphia's capacity to prepare individuals of all educational backgrounds for careers in the growing life sciences industry, with a focus on the cell and gene therapy subsector.

WHEREAS, The life sciences industry encompasses businesses and organizations whose work is centered on the study of living things. It includes a diverse array of fields like biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and medical research. One of the most dynamic sectors in this industry is cell and gene therapy, where companies are making cutting-edge discoveries that can cure congenital blindness and certain forms of cancer; and

WHEREAS, Life sciences is a rapidly expanding industry in the City of Philadelphia with millions of square feet of lab space expected to open in the next two years. Additionally, the Philadelphia region has received more than \$8 billion in venture capital funding since 2021 and one billion per year from the National Institute of Health; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia is nationally recognized as the #5 city for life sciences, jumping four spots since 2021, and was named the 6th best market for life sciences research talent in 2023; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia was ranked the #2 among 14 cell and gene therapy hubs in the United States and is home to the first FDA-approved cell therapy and the first FDA-approved gene therapy; and

WHEREAS, Despite market turbulence, this industry is expected to continue growing. Major development like 3201 Cuthbert (projected to be the city's largest life sciences research lab facility) and Hilco's Bellwether District (designed to include dozens of life sciences companies) are both actively under construction, while the Schuylkill Biotech Campus is in the final planning stages; and

WHEREAS, Mature cell and gene companies that receive FDA approval offer jobs at all educational levels, including employment opportunities such as manufacturing and lab tech positions that pay a living wage (\$18-\$23/ hour) and only require a high school diploma; and

WHEREAS, There has been a 94% growth in the cell and gene therapy workforce; and

WHEREAS, Many life sciences companies are located in areas immediately next to or accessible via public transit from high-poverty and high-unemployment neighborhoods such as Southwest Philadelphia and Kensington; and

WHEREAS, The training program designed and implemented by the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative, Wistar Institute, Iovance, the Chamber of Commerce and Philadelphia Works graduated its inaugural class in 2023 and demonstrated that we can train and place candidates with a high school diploma into lab tech jobs in a life sciences company; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia already contains the building blocks to create a robust workforce ecosystem. The

School District of Philadelphia just completed a strategic plan that heavily emphasizes STEM education and Career and Technical Education. At the same time, the Community College of Philadelphia, the Commerce Department and several workforce development nonprofits have programs to prepare high school graduates, as well as individuals who have completed higher education, for jobs in life sciences; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia was also the recipient of a \$23M grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Good Jobs Challenge, to create a workforce ecosystem in a number of industries including life sciences; and

WHEREAS, Despite all of these organizations assets, Philadelphia's current adult workforce system only has the capacity to graduate a few hundred job seekers from life sciences training programs each year; and

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia must urgently expand its training capacity today so that its most vulnerable citizens are ready to compete for life sciences jobs that are projected to come online in three to five years; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development to conduct a hearing to identify solutions to ensure that the citizens of Philadelphia are prepared to apply for jobs and succeed in careers within the life sciences industry and the cell and gene therapy subsector.