

Legislation Text

File #: 230037, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Committee on Children and Youth to conduct hearings to examine the state of Philadelphia's child welfare workforce.

WHEREAS, The Philadelphia Child Welfare Workforce Task Force is a collaboration of providers, including community umbrella agencies (CUAs) and advocates that convened to reevaluate workforce-related aspects of Philadelphia's child welfare system and identify opportunities for system improvements. In November 2022, the Task Force issued its report - *The State of Philadelphia's Child Welfare Workforce: Findings and Recommendations*; and

WHEREAS, In the years immediately preceding the pandemic, the child welfare workforce struggled with a turnover rate that hovered around 30 percent. In 2022, however, agencies estimated an average turnover rate of approximately 45 percent. This turnover rate is worse than the rate for early childhood educators (30 percent) and not far off from the rate for retail workers during the height of the pandemic (57.3 percent); and

WHEREAS, Through a survey of 281 child welfare workers, the Task Force identified three main causes that are negatively impacting both recruitment and retention of child welfare workers: 1) salary, rates, and other funding needs, 2) caseloads and workloads, and 3) professional development; and

WHEREAS, Many child welfare workers identify salary as the most fundamental factor driving the exodus of workers for the workforce. Simply put, the starting salaries for CUA and foster care workers is too low. The salary structure is not competitive with similar public sector positions - such as social worker positions with the Department of Human Services (DHS) or similar positions within the School District of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, the salaries for these positions are even less competitive with other fields where social work positions exist, including our regional medical institutions, such as Jefferson Health, Penn Medicine, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and AmeriHealth. What is more, many agencies now report that they are losing their highly educated and skilled social workers to fields completely unrelated to social services. Workers are frequently leaving the fields of child welfare and social work entirely, instead choosing service industry positions that offer similar pay levels without the same stress and secondary trauma that comes with working in child welfare and that also provides opportunities for advancement; and

WHEREAS, Related to the issue of uncompetitive compensation is the rate setting process. Philadelphia utilizes set rates that pay to all foster care providers, regardless of size, composition, or any other factors. Their rates are established as a per diem that they pay per child per day. For the operators, even though the majority of this per diem goes towards worker salaries and benefits, there have been dramatic increases related to the cost of doing business, such as rising costs of providing healthcare, gas and utilities, liability insurance, IT, and other basic organizational needs; and

WHEREAS, Most alarmingly, one of the agencies that operates four of the City's CUAs - Turning Points for Children - will no longer participate in the program as of mid-2023 due to an exorbitant increase in its insurance premium from \$70,000 per year to \$10 million per year; and

WHEREAS, It is clear that without addressing the underlying funding needs of providers, so they can offer a more competitive compensation package of salary and benefits, the child welfare workforce in Philadelphia will be depleted. When a worker leaves, the remaining staff must fill the gaps, with larger caseloads and stretched coverage, exacerbating both service gaps and personal stress; and

WHEREAS, High caseloads and workloads create significant risk and potentially dangerous circumstances for children and families. Workers are facing burnout, secondary trauma, and minimal work/life balance, and this workforce issue has reached crisis levels; and

WHEREAS, Documentation and record-keeping have become massive burdens for child welfare workers. The DHS scoring tool lists over 45 different items that resource care providers are responsible for documenting as a part of their annual agency evaluations and audits. Rather than relying on provider expertise to empower caseworkers to employ known social work practice skills, many social work professionals are relying on checklists to fulfill the documentation requirements outlined by DHS. The focus has become too much on quantity, and has lost sight of quality; and

WHEREAS, There are also professional development challenges within the child welfare workforce, and both the areas of training and credentialing need to be reevaluated and improved. Additionally, the referrals and on-call system need a complete overhaul to reflect the fact that the work requires 24/7 capacity and shifts, meaning many family crisis situations arise during the nighttime hours and not during regular work hours; and

WHEREAS, The child welfare industry was built on solid foundations, but after decades of underfunding and due to workforce challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the foundations are cracking. Almost 60 percent of the workforce has been in the field for more than 7 years, and the vast majority of workers cite that the top factor that has kept them in this field was “feeling like I made a difference” and “fits my personal life mission”; and

WHEREAS, Many workers are so committed to their work that they have taken on another job in order to stay in the field. Over 40 percent of child welfare workers reported taking on a second job instead of leaving the field entirely. Most of them find incredible meaning in being able to improve the lives of Philadelphia’s young people and want to incite change. But relying on individual workers’ personal convictions cannot be enough; and

WHEREAS, These social workers who are committed to this work deserve the best chance to do this work well, and that means they should not have to take on a second job, they should receive competitive pay, they should have opportunities to advance in their career, they should have manageable caseloads and workloads, and they should have enriching opportunities for professional development; and

WHEREAS, Uncompetitive compensation and benefits, high case numbers, crushing workloads, overwhelming documentation requirements, and the challenge of changing human behavior all combine to fatigue and stress a system that fails the very children and families it was created to protect. We can and must do more; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Committee on Children and Youth to conduct hearings to examine the state of Philadelphia’s child welfare workforce.

