



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

File #: 211026, Version: 0

Authorizing the Special Committee on Gun Violence Prevention to conduct hearings to examine our national youth mental health crisis and its role in the ongoing epidemic of gun violence.

WHEREAS, On Tuesday, December 7, the U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek H. Murthy, released an advisory warning that young people are facing devastating mental health effects as a result of the challenges experienced by their generation, including the coronavirus pandemic; and

WHEREAS, The report observed that the pandemic intensified mental health issues that were already widespread by the spring of 2020. There were significant increases in self-reports of depression and anxiety along with more emergency room visits for mental health issues; and

WHEREAS, In early 2021 in the United States, emergency room visits for suicide attempts rose 51 percent for adolescent girls as compared to the same period in 2019. Globally, depression and anxiety doubled during the pandemic, with 25 percent of youth experiencing depressive symptoms and 20 percent suffering anxiety symptoms; and

WHEREAS, The pandemic is not the only stressor causing the children of this generation anguish. They are also living in a country experiencing a gun violence epidemic, a reckoning on racial justice, a climate emergency and a divisive political landscape, which are all taking a toll on young Americans' mental health at a time when it was already in decline; and

WHEREAS, Adolescent brain chemistry and relationships with friends and family play a role, the report noted, as does a fast-paced media culture, which can leave some young minds feeling helpless. Often the blame for adolescent distress is often attributed to social media, but screen time alone has not been found to account for the crisis. Instead, it has been found that social media and other online activities amplify an adolescent's existing mental state, causing some young people to feel more distress and others to experience enhanced feelings of connection; and

WHEREAS, The Surgeon General's advisory is one of the growing number of calls for action around adolescent mental health. In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Children's Hospital Association joined to declare a national emergency in youth mental health; and

WHEREAS, Across the country there is a shortage of child specialists who can assess conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression and eating disorders. In 2019, a group of U.S. lawmakers issued a report, "Ring the Alarm," focusing on a suicide crisis among Black adolescents, a group that historically has seen relatively low rates of suicide; and

WHEREAS, The Ring the Alarm report noted suicide death rate among Black youth was increasing faster than that of any other racial/ethnic group, with Black youth under 13 years being twice as likely to die by suicide as their White counterparts. Meanwhile, they are significantly less likely to receive care for depression-a major

risk factor for suicide. There are existing barriers to treatment, such as pervasive structural inequities, social determinants of health, stigma and mistrust of healthcare providers creating daunting barriers to treatment; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia faces an ongoing trend of rapidly rising gun violence. As of December 13, 2021, Philadelphia has already suffered 529 homicides, mostly committed with firearms, which is a 13% increase from the same time in 2020 and a 68% increase over the same time in 2019; and

WHEREAS, Currently in Philadelphia, the need for trauma counselors far outpaces the supply of counselors due to the spike in gun violence. According to the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia, an organization that provides counseling services to people impacted by violence, as of June 2021 there were 174 people on the waitlist to receive services, compared to about 30 people at the same time in 2020; and

WHEREAS, As instances of gun violence continues to rise, it is imperative that Philadelphia works to understand and identify how to help the focus to shift from acknowledging mental health problems at their onset to preventing them in the first place; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, This Council hereby authorizes the Special Committee on Gun Violence Prevention to conduct hearings to examine youth mental health crisis and its role in the ongoing epidemic of gun violence.