

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Aging to hold public hearings to examine emergency protocols that ensure the safety of senior citizens residing in traditional community high-rises.

WHEREAS, In its special study, “65+ in the United States: 2010”, the United States Census Bureau reports that approximately 1.25 million people aged 65 and over reside in a nursing home. The Census Bureau also found that over 90% of Medicare enrollees aged 65 and over reside in the “traditional community”. Facilities of this variety are considered normal homes and apartment buildings, and are not subject to the kinds of special state and federal regulations that govern nursing facilities; and

WHEREAS, City officials in September 2018 were made aware of an issue at the Pavilion Apartment Building, located at 3901 Conshohocken Avenue. According to seniors residing at the property, Pavilion operated without power for a series of days due to an owner-related issue. Residents indicated that they were not informed of the severity of the problem, nor were they kept up to date about the progress of repairs. A number of residents also indicated that no comprehensive wellness checks were undertaken to assess the health of the building’s senior occupants. Some residents reported that they were unable to quickly leave the property due to the outage’s impact on the elevators. Thanks to the quick intervention of the Office of Emergency Management, the Department of Licenses and Inspections, and other City agencies and offices, power was restored; and

WHEREAS, The high-rise in question advertises itself as a “pet-friendly, Section 8/Tax Credit community for adults 62 /disabled.” Section 8 refers to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program created in 1974, now known as the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV). Administered in Philadelphia by the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA), the HCV is the Federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market; and

WHEREAS, On the HCV website, HUD lays out the obligations a landlord must meet in order to participate in the program: “The role of the landlord in the voucher program is to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing to a tenant at a reasonable rent. The dwelling unit must pass the program's housing quality standards and be maintained up to those standards as long as the owner receives housing assistance payments.” In particular, the dwelling unit must have “sufficient electrical sources so occupants can use essential electrical appliances,” elevators that are “working and safe,” and have operational smoke detectors; and

WHEREAS, While the power outage in question was isolated to one location, a number of high-rises within Philadelphia rent solely or predominately to seniors. The power outage raises important questions about the existence and implementation of emergency protocols in traditional community high-rises that cater to seniors, many of whom are disabled, on a fixed income, and of limited means to address unforeseen emergencies; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby authorize the Committee on Aging to hold public hearings to examine emergency protocols that ensure the safety of senior citizens residing in traditional community high-rises.

