

Legislation Text

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Authorizing City Council's Committee on Public Safety to conduct public hearings to investigate the policy and accountability issues underlying the recently publicized inordinate number of injuries to arrestees as they were transported in Philadelphia's Police Wagons. Further authorizing the Committee to issue subpoenas and such other process as may be appropriate to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents in furtherance of the investigation to the full extent authorized by Section 2-401 of the Home Rule Charter.

WHEREAS, A Philadelphia Inquirer investigative report documented injuries to 20 persons who were arrested, placed in police wagons without seatbelts and, hand-cuffed behind their backs. As a consequence many of these arrestees suffered serious injuries including serious head and spinal injuries that in two instances caused permanent paralysis. It was further found that the cases reviewed by the Inquirer involved persons that for the most part had clean criminal records and whose charges were later typically dismissed; and

WHEREAS, Many of these incidents have involved the use of police vans that are not equipped with appropriate seatbelts thus posing an apparent physical risk to both the arrestee and the police officer (s); and

WHEREAS, There is speculation that the actual number of such "wagon injury" cases might be higher, since 11 of the 20 wagon injuries uncovered by the Inquirer never came to the attention of the Internal Affairs Division for investigation as is required by Police Department policy; and

WHEREAS, Since 1995, the city, has had to settle many related injury lawsuits and has paid out a total of \$2.3 million in taxpayer dollars; and

WHEREAS, It has been suggested by a former 25 year ranking veteran of the police force that the police department has practiced an unspoken tradition of taking arrestees on the so-called "nickel van ride," punishing and abusing suspects who resist arrest or otherwise anger police; and

WHEREAS, In response to these reports, the City Council applauds the Fraternal Order of Police for refusing to allow officers to be transported in police wagons lacking safety restraints and commends Police Commissioner John F. Timoney's recent ban on wagons without seat belts; and

WHEREAS, Despite the City administration responses to the immediate problem related to unsafe transport vans, there are still too many policy questions and issues of accountability that remain unanswered; now therefore

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes City Council's Committee on Public Safety to conduct public hearings to investigate the policy and accountability issues underlying the recently publicized inordinate number of injuries to arrestees as they were transported in Philadelphia's Police Wagons. Further authorizing the Committee to issue subpoenas and such other process as may be appropriate to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents in furtherance of the investigation to the full extent authorized by Section 2-401 of the Home Rule Charter.