

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 230799, **Version:** 0

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Congratulating and recognizing Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout for the grand opening of their Neighborhood Food Market in West Philadelphia and for their transformative work with Philadelphia's youth.

WHEREAS, Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout (YEAH Philly) is a Black-led, community-based nonprofit that works with teens and young adults in West and Southwest Philadelphia who have been impacted by violence. With a focus on those labeled as having "violent histories", YEAH Philly acknowledges teens and young adults as the experts of their own lives and prioritizes pushing back against oppressive systems and addressing structural barriers that often lead to violence; and

WHEREAS, YEAH Philly was founded in 2018 by Kendra Van de Water and James Aye, who both saw a dire need for stronger youth support systems in Philadelphia. Initially growing out of volunteer workshops at neighborhood recreation centers, YEAH Philly now owns its own West Philly rowhome and provides over 500 youth per year with a safe and authentic hangout space and opportunities to change the course of their lives; and

WHEREAS, YEAH Philly emerged to address the crises that young people face in Philadelphia today. Young people in Philadelphia feel abandoned, unheard, and uncared for. They feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods, and they seek safe, free community spaces for activities, friends, love, and support; and

WHEREAS, Instead of finding these spaces, young people too often fall under the control of the juvenile justice system, which has failed to adequately serve them. Overcrowding, underfunding, poor staffing, and harmful and abusive practices plague juvenile detention centers that serve a system already fraught with deep structural issues; and

WHEREAS, The current moment requires that we reshape our juvenile justice system into something that better serves our youth and addresses the causes of violence in our city. In the endeavor to build a more just Philadelphia, YEAH Philly has been a critical source of youth-centered action, wisdom, and hope for transformative change; and

WHEREAS, YEAH Philly has achieved life-changing success by engaging youth in a way that makes them feel heard, loved, and empowered with agency over their lives and communities. In this way, YEAH Philly is both an impressive direct service provider and an important vehicle for local and state-level policy change; and

WHEREAS, YEAH Philly's inspiring approach to policy advocacy is deeply rooted in the needs and participation of their community, and it is genuinely led by their teens and young adult members. By intentionally standing independent from outside systems and focusing primarily on Black liberation, YEAH Philly seeks to directly address racism and the root causes of violence. Their approach engages youth to become their own leaders, creating powerful networks of solidarity and mutual self-determination. YEAH Philly breaks the status quo to ensure they are fierce advocates for young people to get the lives they want and deserve; and

WHEREAS, YEAH Philly organizes teens and young adults to address complex and systemic issues that

impact their communities. Through advocacy and direct action, teens actively create community-driven solutions related to police brutality, restorative justice, voter suppression, internet access, healthcare, and Black mental health providers; and

WHEREAS, YEAH Philly's youth have already achieved impressive policy and advocacy victories. Working with legislators in Harrisburg, YEAH organizers changed the rules to make it easier for young people to get access to their birth certificates and other legal documents. YEAH Philly has also organized extensively to change the juvenile court and probation systems in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Beyond just advocacy, YEAH Philly has created a wide range of programs and services that are designed to support, educate, empower, and inspire the youth they work for and with. In each of these programs, they expertly knit together practical youth opportunities with the needs of their neighborhoods, creating transformative programs that foster community solidarity and self-determination; and

WHEREAS, YEAH Philly's latest initiative, its Neighborhood Food Market, held its grand opening on October 13th, 2023, at 5257 Walton Avenue. The Neighborhood Food Market provides free, high-quality groceries to families in West and Southwest Philadelphia, creating an invaluable resource for food insecure neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, The Neighborhood Food Market, as the first free grocery store in Philadelphia, is a groundbreaking accomplishment. Completely run by teens and young adult members of YEAH Philly, it not only provides food but also critical employment and leadership skills to its workers; and

WHEREAS, The Neighborhood Food Market is a striking example of what a better, mutually-supportive Philadelphia can look like; and

WHEREAS, The Neighborhood Food Market is just the most recent testament to YEAH Philly's mission and the importance of their work. As such, we commend YEAH Philly for four years of important, youth-centered work and for helping to imagine a more just Philadelphia; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Congratulates and recognizes Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout for the grand opening of their Neighborhood Food Market in West Philadelphia and for their transformative work with Philadelphia's youth.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be presented to Kendra Van de Water and James Aye to evidence the respect and recognition given by this legislative body.