



# City of Philadelphia

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

## Legislation Text

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Honoring Philadelphia's Living Legends Brian Pollitt, William Dade, Owen Gowans, III, Theodore Hicks, Carl Riley, Gabriel Hart, and Catherine Hicks for their generation-defining contributions to African American History in Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Brian Pollitt is the current leader of the Transport Workers Union Local 234, SEPTA's largest union. It is fitting that within 100 years of the Philadelphia Transit Company going on strike for the promotion of eight African American's, SEPTA's union is led by an African American. On August 1, 1944, white employees of the Philadelphia Transit Company (PTC) launched a strike to protest the company's decision to promote eight black workers to the position of trolley driver, a job previously reserved for white men. As the U.S. prepared to enter World War II in the 1940s, Philadelphia quickly became one of the country's largest war production sources. As many as 600,000 workers relied on the PTC to get to their workplaces, including many factories. The strike threatened the entire city's ability to function and severely affected critical wartime production. The strike grew to include over 6,000 workers, prevented nearly two million people from traveling, and cost businesses almost \$1 million per day. On the strike's third day, President Roosevelt authorized the War Department to take control of the PTC. Two days later, 5,000 U.S. Army troops moved into Philadelphia to prevent uprisings and protect PTC employees who crossed the picket line. Despite the military presence, the confrontation resulted in at least 13 acts of racial violence, including several non-fatal shootings. After more than a week, the strike ended when PTC employees facing threats of termination, loss of draft deferments, and ineligibility for unemployment benefits chose to return to work without achieving their goal of blocking black workers' opportunity for advancement. By September 1944, the PTC's first black trolley drivers were on duty; and

WHEREAS, William Dade, Owen Gowans, III, Theodore Hicks, and Carl Riley are four of the pioneers who desegregated Girard College in Philadelphia. In addition, Gabriel Hart, a proud graduate of Girard College, is currently a Constituent Services Representative to 4th District Councilmember Curtis Jones, Jr., and is doing incredible work for the citizens of West and Northwest Philadelphia. In 1954, the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* declared that racially segregated public schools were no longer legal. This decision marked the beginning of an almost 15-year-long struggle for the racial integration of Girard College that culminated with the admission of black students in 1968. Girard College was still a white-only institution in 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and it did not integrate following the decision. When a Philadelphia solicitor and councilman filed a lawsuit on behalf of six black boys who were denied admission in 1955, Girard College replaced its publicly affiliated City Board Trusts with 13 privately appointed trustees, effectively making the school a private institution. As such, it could legally continue to reject black applicants. Girard College's refusal to voluntarily integrate inspired a movement led primarily by Cecil B. Moore, a Philadelphia lawyer, councilman, and NAACP chapter leader. In 1968, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a ruling that Girard College must accept black students. The first black students attended the school in September of that year; and

WHEREAS, Catherine Hicks is the current President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization founded by W.E.B. DuBois. The Philadelphia Negro, written by W.E. B. DuBois, is a sociological and epidemiological study of African

Americans living in Philadelphia. Published in 1899, with the intent of identifying social problems present in the African American community, it was the first sociological case study of a black community in the United States. It focuses on the 7th Ward in Philadelphia, which was the central Seventh Ward, which encompassed the area from Spruce to South Street and from Seventh Street to the Schuylkill River. In order to collect survey data, Du Bois and his wife moved into the 7th Ward of Philadelphia; he then distributed the survey in impoverished quarters on Saint Mary Street from 1896 to 1897. With his only appointed assistant, Isabel Eaton, DuBois employed "archival research, descriptive statistics, and questionnaires." These surveys entailed questions about occupations, health, education, and religious, social, and family life. While conducting a door-to-door examination of the ward, Du Bois and Eaton were able to collect more than 5,000 personal interviews. This survey data included the vital statistics of black individuals within the city, information about their places of birth, occupation, health, ages, sex, etc.; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby honors Philadelphia's Living Legends Brian Pollitt, William Dade, Owen Gowans, III, Theodore Hicks, Carl Riley, Gabriel Hart, and Catherine Hicks for their generation defining contributions to African American History in Philadelphia

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this Resolution be presented to these Living Legends as a sign of the admiration and respect of this legislative body.