

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Joint Committees on Housing, Neighborhood Development, and the Homeless and Licenses and Inspections to hold public hearings to examine the conditions of rental housing, rental code enforcement, and the need for rental repairs throughout the City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Approximately fifty-five percent of Philadelphia's total housing units were built before 1950 and 72 percent were built before 1960; and

WHEREAS, Unlike many large cities in the United States, Philadelphia has plenty of houses to support its population. However, an estimated forty-one percent of Philadelphia's rental housing is still in need of repairs, often dangerously so; and

WHEREAS, Half of Philadelphians are renters and thousands of these Philadelphia renters are living in dangerous conditions. Renters are living every day in homes with lead, mold, decay, animal infestations, leaking and caving roofs, doors without secure locks, and other unsafe conditions; and

WHEREAS, For homeowners, the City of Philadelphia has taken tremendous strides by investing in loan and subsidy programs for owner-occupied home repairs. These programs, including Basic Systems Repair; Built to Last; Restore, Repair, Renew; and the Adaptive Modifications Program, and are national models; and

WHEREAS, The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has, similarly, made huge investments in repairing homes statewide with the passage of the 2022 Whole-Home Repair Program, which provides state funding for home repairs in every county in Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, For rental units, the City of Philadelphia, through the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation, has also recently launched its first program, the Rental Improvement Fund, which provides forgivable loans for small landlords to repair rental properties; and

WHEREAS, Despite these tremendous efforts targeted at owner-occupied home repairs and critical first steps toward funding rental improvements, rental housing repair has not received the attention it demands; and

WHEREAS, The condition of most rental units in Philadelphia remains largely unmonitored by the City. Unlike many other major cities, Philadelphia has no program for regularly inspecting rental properties. As a result, only about 7% of the City's rental units get inspected each year; and

WHEREAS, The Joint Task Force on Regulatory Reform for the Department of Licenses and Inspections, created in 2023 by City Council and the Mayor, heard concerns from stakeholders and made recommendations to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I), including empowering L&I to hold repeat violators of the Philadelphia code accountable; and

WHEREAS, Landlords are required to obtain rental licenses through L&I to operate rental units, but there is no inspection process required for rental licenses, so rentals go entirely uninspected until a formal complaint is

filed; and

WHEREAS, In 2020, it was estimated that 45% of all rental properties, representing 30% of Philadelphia's rental units, were unlicensed; and

WHEREAS, Enforcement of the property maintenance code, also known as the rental code, is challenging and often places a burden on small landlords who struggle to comply with regulations and who often do not receive follow-up inspections when requested. At the same time, many tenants and their neighbors are at risk because of living in rental units that go willingly unrepaired by bad actors; and

WHEREAS, The Philadelphia City Council is committed to developing a City where both homeowners and renters have access to safe housing and effective code enforcement processes. City Council is also committed to supporting and working together with homeowners, landlords, and enforcement stakeholders in collective efforts to reach this goal; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Authorizes the Joint Committees on Housing, Neighborhood Development, and the Homeless and Licenses and Inspections to hold public hearings to examine the conditions of rental housing, rental code enforcement, and the need for rental repairs throughout the City of Philadelphia.