

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Children and Youth to hold hearings on the impact of sonic devices on young people on public property.

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia manages public recreation centers and parks for residents, particularly young people, to build community and participate in recreational and social opportunities - the enjoyment of which is essential to youth development, and has been shown to reduce violence and promote well-being; and

WHEREAS, It is a core principle, articulated by the National Recreation and Park Association, that our public spaces should be equally accessible and available to all people regardless of income level, ethnicity, gender, ability, or age; and

WHEREAS, In 2012, the Department of Parks and Recreation began installing sonic devices commonly marketed as “Mosquitos” in public parks and recreational centers in an effort to prevent vandalism. These devices emit high-frequency sounds between the hours of 10:00pm and 6:00am, which are audible to young people as well as some adults both at the sites and potentially on adjacent streets and sidewalks. To date, at least thirty-three sonic devices have been installed in approximately thirty-three parks and recreation centers; and

WHEREAS, The primary manufacturer of the “Mosquito” is a Vancouver-based company that told media outlets that its product is intended for private property, which public parks and recreation centers are not, and is targeted directly at youth between the ages of 13 and 25; and

WHEREAS, The company justifies its intentional targeting by purporting: “Youth commit more criminal code offences, such as assaults, robbery and homicides, than adults... Many crimes go unreported every year, and they often result from youth gang activity and loitering.” Such comments come out of deeply offensive stereotypes and inaccurate biases against youth that have been debunked by psychologists and criminologists; and

WHEREAS, Health regulators warn that lengthy exposure to sonic noises is known to cause dizziness, headache, nausea and impairment in those most impacted by the sound. Research from the German Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health indicates that small children and infants are especially at risk to the harms of extended high frequency exposure; and

WHEREAS, According to the Department of Parks and Recreation, at least one device had to be adjusted after a local media outlet documented complaints that the sounds went beyond the intended boundaries; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, the United Nations (“UN”) Committee on the Rights of the Child called on the United Kingdom to prohibit the use of sonic devices targeted at young people. The Committee found that the use of sonic devices infringed on international principles and human rights such as freedom of movement and

peaceful assembly. It is also found that sonic devices violate an individual's right to physical integrity under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights; and

WHEREAS, Vancouver school systems removed the devices in 2012 due to human rights and policy concerns about the device. At least two American cities have banned these devices based on discrimination and ethical grounds. In Washington D.C., local lawmakers banned Mosquito devices after members of the National Youth Rights Association (NYRA) filed a complaint with the District of Columbia Office of Human Rights alleging the device was discriminatory against youth and illegal. Similarly, following the NYRA's campaign in Hastings, Minnesota, the Department of Parks and Recreation Commission banned sonic devices for ethical reasons; and

WHEREAS, Despite this information, the Department of Parks and Recreation has determined that sonic devices will remain in Philadelphia public parks indefinitely; and

WHEREAS, As Philadelphia considers the use of these devices, it is important to fully consider and weigh their impact as well as manage any issues or concerns in a non-discriminatory way; and

WHEREAS, Any City-level conversations and initiatives to preserve safe and welcoming public recreational centers and parks or to prevent vandalism and crime must thoughtfully engage young people as fellow problem solvers and key stakeholders; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes the Committee on Children and Youth to hold hearings on the impact of sonic devices on young people on public property.