

Legislation Text

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Urging Mayor Nutter to delay closing any City libraries to allow time for further analysis of the issue, to secure alternative funding sources, and to explore operational and administrative alternatives that would allow the Free Library of Philadelphia to maintain a physical presence at all of its current locations and authorizing the Committee on Education to hold hearings regarding the proposed library branch closures and alternatives thereto.

WHEREAS, On November 6, 2008, Mayor Nutter publicly announced that eleven local branches of the Philadelphia Free Library would be closed as of January 2009 with an estimated \$8 million in savings; and

WHEREAS, Public libraries are a vital community asset and a critical government service that provide access to invaluable resources to our citizens, thereby opening up the doors of opportunity and knowledge for those who would otherwise be unable to afford it; and

WHEREAS, Libraries are especially crucial in the City of Philadelphia, where our poverty rate is over 25% and our public education system drop out rate is 45%. Libraries are one of the most important tools that we can provide our citizens and children in these battles; and

WHEREAS, Many local libraries host literacy and educational programs that supplement the efforts of the Philadelphia School District, which has been reducing its own library resources. Local libraries offer such programs as LEAP, which provides free after-school homework assistance, computer literacy training, library skills, and multicultural enrichment activities for tens of thousands of Philadelphia students; and

WHEREAS, According to a study titled, "Taxpayer Return on Investment (ROI) in Pennsylvania Public Libraries," Pennsylvania taxpayers "can be confident that their direct and indirect return on their investment in public libraries is extensive at about 5.5 to 1"; and

WHEREAS, Before the drastic decision to close library branches is implemented, Friends of the Free Library has asked the Nutter administration for time to develop a credible, long-term solution that would enable the entire existing library system to remain intact; and

WHEREAS, Other options exist, including the "hub and spoke" model proposed by the Street administration that would enable the Free Library to maintain a physical presence in all library branches throughout the City. Under this model, library hours would be adjusted according to peak usage times for each community, while maintaining full hours at the regional branch; and

WHEREAS, Other proposals, such as shifting or reducing library operating hours to reduce costs and other creative administrative adjustments have been proposed and must be vetted before these branches are shuttered; and

WHEREAS, Enacting a portion of the Mayor's plan by slowing down book procurement and making immediate administrative adjustments at the Free Library, will enable the City to achieve approximately \$3 million of the projected \$8 million in savings from the total proposed cuts to the Free Library; and

WHEREAS, Council calls upon the Nutter administration to share the key, underlying data about the libraries that has been requested by Council, the Friends of the Free Library, and other groups, and that is needed for an informed and broad-based conversation about how to achieve the necessary savings across the library system; and

WHEREAS, Council calls upon the board of the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation to pursue its mission “to develop resources in order to expand, enhance, and support the services, collections, building programs, and other activities of the Free Library of Philadelphia,” pledges to work with the board in furthering this goal, and asks the board for assistance in gathering the necessary information to study viable alternatives; and

WHEREAS, Council pledges to work with the Nutter administration to explore other options and seek alternative funding sources for the Free Library, as is currently being pursued by the Friends of the Free Library and other groups, including philanthropic support, public-private partnerships, and citizen fundraising campaigns; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the City Council of Philadelphia does hereby urge Mayor Nutter to delay closing any City libraries in order to allow time for further analysis of the issue, to secure alternative funding sources and to explore operational and administrative alternatives that would allow the Free Library of Philadelphia to maintain a physical presence at its current locations and authorizes the Committee on Education to hold hearings regarding the proposed library branch closures and alternatives thereto.