Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title:	Calling on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to pass comprehensive legislation providing sustainable relief to an overburdened system and to protect children held at the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center by recognizing time spent as time served.				
Sponsors:	Councilmember Jones, Councilmember Gauthier, Councilmember Vaughn, Councilmember Driscoll, Councilmember Lozada, Councilmember Bass, Councilmember Harrity, Councilmember Phillips, Councilmember Brooks, Councilmember Gilmore Richardson, Councilmember Thomas				
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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result	Tally
11/30/2023	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED		
11/16/2023	0	CITY COUNCIL	Introduced and Ordered Placed On Next Week's Final Passage Calendar		

Calling on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to pass comprehensive legislation providing sustainable relief to an overburdened system and to protect children held at the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center by recognizing time spent as time served.

WHEREAS, The Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJSC) is a temporary holding facility for youth accused of crimes in Philadelphia. The PJJSC opened in December of 2012, and was designed to provide youth being held at the request of the Courts with a variety of services like education, individual and group counseling, social services, medical services, and recreational programming. While a noble goal, Philadelphia's crime epidemic has caused extreme overcrowding issues that have caused dire consequences; and

WHEREAS, While issues with the PJJSC have been well documented, things have only been exacerbated by overcrowding since the COVID-19 pandemic. In October of 2022, 20 PJJSC staffers were injured trying to break-up a fight between two youth being held; and

WHEREAS, In 2022, City Council unanimously passed Resolution No. 220853 which urged the Philadelphia Law Department to file a lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in an effort to have youth moved to state custody. When a young person is adjudicated delinquent and sentenced to state custody, the Commonwealth is obligated to pick up those children. In November of 2022, The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court ordered that the Department of Human Services move 15 youth to state custody, and in July, they were ordered to remove 26 more. But, throughout the year, the PJJSC with its 184 person capacity has seen levels of youth reaching 230 in June; and

WHEREAS, In October of 2023, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported disturbing and vile conditions that young people living in the PJJSC are subjected to. Many of the young people are being held on probation or house arrest violations, and as a result they have missed out on critical education because classrooms are full. Kids are

constantly getting into fights as tempers flare, and are then crammed into cells that are over capacity, some being forced to sleep on the floor or on benches. Access to showers and bathrooms are limited, and overall these youth are living in decrepit conditions; and

WHEREAS, In addition to the overcrowding issues in Philadelphia, juvenile holding facilities are overcrowded all over the state, leading to delays in released youth to state custody. Because time spent at the Juvenile Justice Services Center does not count towards a sentence, this leads to sentences being extended for six months, eight months, and in some cases even a year; and
WHEREAS, While the state has suggested numerous unacceptable proposals such as housing youth in adult facilities like Curren-Fromhold Correctional Facility, State Correctional Institution-Phoenix, and even a facility in Texas, The Pennsylvania General Assembly has the power to create change in the lives of young people; and

WHEREAS, By making time spent in the PJJSC eligible to count towards a sentence, youth will not be incarcerated any longer than they need to be and will be able to return to safer and more stable environments sooner. This current situation is not the solution, and the General Assembly must take an active role in addressing this crisis. By requiring youth to serve their entire state sentence on top of months spent in holding unnecessarily prolongs suffering, and being forced to live in the conditions of the PJJSC, we are setting up our young people for failure; and

WHEREAS, While there are many more solutions that could be addressed, such as raising staffing ratios, this immediate measure to protect youth is a commonsense solution to an unnecessary problem, and this Council body urges the General Assembly to pass comprehensive reforms before it is to late; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby calls on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to pass comprehensive legislation providing sustainable relief to an overburdened system and to protect children held at the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center by recognizing time spent as time served.

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