Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Calling on the leadership of the City of Philadelphia to implement the over 140 recommendations and next steps found in the Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia, such as expanding the safe school corridor program, ensuring witness relocation, creating a “helping hand” release program, examining firearm restrictions, reducing retail theft, examining drones, increasing the closure rate of homicides, supporting Philadelphia’s youth, and instituting “The Promise Initiative.”

Sponsors: Councilmember Jones

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Attachments: 1. L240042 - Exhibit, As Introduced.pdf, 2. Resolution No. 24004200, 3. Signature24004200

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result	Tally
2/1/2024	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED	Pass	
1/25/2024	0	CITY COUNCIL	Introduced and Ordered Placed On Next Week's Final Passage Calendar		

Calling on the leadership of the City of Philadelphia to implement the over 140 recommendations and next steps found in the *Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia,* such as expanding the safe school corridor program, ensuring witness relocation, creating a “helping hand” release program, examining firearm restrictions, reducing retail theft, examining drones, increasing the closure rate of homicides, supporting Philadelphia’s youth, and instituting “The Promise Initiative.”

WHEREAS, On June 22, 2023, City Council unanimously passed Resolution #230555, introduced by Councilmember Curtis Jones, Jr. calling on the leadership of the City of Philadelphia, as well as state and federal partners, to develop an anti-crime and anti-gun violence summit that will create a forward-focused, solution-oriented game plan for the 100th Mayor's consideration; and

WHEREAS, On September 30, 2023, over 200 stakeholders from every background, including government, non-profits, the legal community, mental health advocates, and boots-on-the-ground credible messengers, came together for a crime summit at St. Joseph’s University to develop *The Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia.* Advocates attended breakout rooms to address topics such as combating the threat of illegal guns, education and the school-to-prison pipeline, poverty, addressing mental health, alternatives to incarceration, law enforcement, the use of technology to combat crimes, collaboration with the private sector and boots-on-the-ground credible messengers, youth involvement in the criminal justice system, drill music and the music industry, combating specific types of crime, data, combating white institutional racism, and crafting a positive public messaging campaign. On December 21, 2023, Councilmember Jones unveiled the *Blueprint* and presented it to the 100th Mayor of Philadelphia, Cherelle L. Parker (Exhibit A). *The Blueprint* was broken up into “problem,” “solution,” and “next steps.” These include legislation at the local, state and federal level; budget appropriations at the local, state, and federal levels; and policies on the local, state, and federal level. In the past, we have articulated the problem. The time has come to implement the solution; and

WHEREAS, Of the over 140 solutions and next steps offered in the report, one solution is the expansion of the safe school corridors program. Many students coming to and from school face numerous challenges, such as dodging the effects of drug use and gun violence. Under the safe school corridor program, volunteers from the community come together to walk with students to both make them feel safe and disrupt any illegal activities. As of February 2023, the program has been expanded to 18 schools in the School District. Funding and resources should be prioritized in the schools located near the 57 blocks most exposed to gun violence, as well as in the schools located in the 19 zip codes with the most incarcerated individuals on State Road; and

WHEREAS, In order for successful prosecutions, the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office needs witnesses who are willing to come testify at trial. But due to the current "no snitching culture," it is very difficult to accomplish this goal. It used to be common knowledge that the hotel used to house witnesses was the Marriott across the street from the Criminal Justice Center. Witnesses would see the defendant going into court and then refuse to testify. Therefore, bolstering witness protection is necessary to reduce crime. In order to accomplish this, an inter-agency, inter-state program, where the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) renovates properties for witnesses to live in while preparing to testify. Once they have testified in court, they can then be relocated back to their initial residence or a location of their choosing. While this process is playing out, HUD will also have identified dozens of other properties to begin renovating to create a "shell game" to keep witnesses protected and criminals in the dark; and

WHEREAS, Sometimes when an inmate is released from Philadelphia's prisons, they are released at 2:00 in the morning with no winter coat, no food, and a ticket to the transportation center at Bridge and Pratt. This frequently contributes to recidivism. The City must require that when an inmate is released from State Road, they have a " helping hand" release and home plan where they will be able to live, work, and maintain a sustainable wage. These resources could include food and housing vouchers, medication assistance, mental health resources, job referrals, and clothing to provide a "helping hand" to those in reentry; and

WHEREAS, Firearm discussions were a pivotal component of the crime summit and *The Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia.* Numerous recommendations were made on how Philadelphia can turn the tide on gun violence in particular. Gun buy-back programs, designed as a way to get guns off the street, do contribute to the decrease of firearms in the possession in Philadelphians; however, they are not extremely successful in removing the guns that are being used to commit crimes off the street. Therefore, examining a program like in St. Louis, Missouri, to get consent from parents to conduct no-questions-asked searches of their homes for illegal firearms could be beneficial. Bringing this program to Philadelphia could contribute to a higher number of illegal firearms being removed from our streets. Ghost guns are untraceable firearms that are purchased as kits and assembled. These firearms have no serial number, which has resulted in them being used in an increasing number of fatal and non -fatal shootings. The Pennsylvania House of Representatives has passed legislation imposing a second-degree felony on the purchase of firearms or firearm parts without serial numbers. This legislation needs to be passed by the Pennsylvania State Senate and signed by Governor Shapiro. According to the Philadelphia Law Department and Ceasefire PA, half of the firearms used in illegal shootings come from one percent of licensed gun dealers. Therefore, gun shops need to do a better job of reducing the threat of illegal guns, such as by identifying obvious signs of straw purchasing. The Philadelphia Law Department has filed lawsuits against three shops in Philadelphia for enabling straw purchases. These lawsuits must be vigorously argued to hold gun shops accountable for their failure to act. In 2018, City Council passed legislation enacting "red flag laws" because when someone shows us who they are, we must believe them. In addition, in 2008, Council passed legislation requiring an individual who has either lost or had their firearm stolen report it to the proper authorities. Both of these necessary pieces of legislation have been involved in extensive litigation due to the issue of preemption. Philadelphia is currently involved in a lawsuit challenging preemption, but more work must be done on the state level to reform preemption for cities of the first class. Finally, according to the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, one of the largest increase in shootings is carried out by those who

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legally own firearms. This is largely due to the lack of training required to purchase a firearm. Currently, it is easier to purchase a firearm than it is to drive a car because there are no examinations, practical training, or extensive waiting periods which are all required to drive a car. More work must be done to require training in order to purchase a firearm to know the "rules of the trigger."; and

WHEREAS, Reducing retail theft is an important step to combating crime in Philadelphia. In neighborhoods all over the City, businesses have had to close because they cannot sustain themselves with retail theft. Retail theft rings, where individuals steal from a store and then sell products door-to-door, to other retail locations, or on the online marketplace, have skyrocketed. City Council recently passed legislation to add fines for trespassing after an individual has been banned from a store, in an effort to combat retail theft, but more must be done. Grant programs to help businesses struggling with retail theft is one way; conducting safety audits is another; and ensuring all criminal justice stakeholders are aligned in enforcement of retail theft laws is a priority; and

WHEREAS, On September 29, 2023, The City Council Committee on Public Safety held a hearing investigating the use of drone technology to combat crimes. In testimony from both Chula Vista, California, and Brookhaven, Connecticut, the Committee heard about the immense benefit drones can add to crime fighting. The School District currently operates a program to teach students about drone maintenance and use these drones to monitor school safety. If further implemented by the Philadelphia Police Department, drones could be used to monitor civil unrest, pursue illegal dirt bikes and ATVs, and investigate both amber and silver alerts; and

WHEREAS, Organizations like PAL and other youth-organized sports teams are excellent engagement tools for at-risk youth. It also creates a better atmosphere for community policing and is a critical aspect of violence prevention. However, local youth sports teams that offer community-based programs are being priced out of school athletic facilities and recreation center spaces. This practice must be reevaluated to ensure that our children have safe places to play. Therefore, the Administration and City Council must prioritize funding in the budget for these barriers for access to cover the costs for youth sports teams to use these critical safe spaces in our City; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia needs to break the school-to-prison pipeline and build a school-to-paycheck pipeline. We ask children to make promises to us all the time; it is time that we make "the promise" to them. The administration must work with the private sector to connect our youth with life-sustaining employment upon graduation from high school. One way to do this is to create "The Promise Initiative," a pipeline for at-risk youth between the ages of 13 and 17, in partnership with organizations like JEVS Human Services, The United Way, The Urban Affairs Coalition, The Urban League, community umbrella agencies, The School District, the diverse chambers of commerce, and the Department of Human Services. If a student agrees to take part in "The Promise Initiative," they will be assigned a mentor who will work with them throughout their high school career and beyond. If a student maintains a "C" or better average and avoids criminal activity, they will be guaranteed one of four options: a sustainable wage job, college admission, attendance at a trade school, or the opportunity to join the military. By implementing this program with a focus on the young people most like to shoot or be shot, the City can turn off a valve that leads to gun violence and poverty; and

WHEREAS, By implementing these critical solutions offered in *The Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia,* we can turn the tide on crime and gun violence in our City. The recommendations from the summit touched on every topic, from utilizing our City's Universities to expanding community policing, and examined problems in every neighborhood, from the Northeast, to Kensington, the Fairmount Park System, and South Philadelphia. Even though the *The Blueprint* has been released, the City and its leadership must now turn to implementation. In order for crime to go down, we must implement the solutions that were diligently offered by our stakeholders, the experts in their fields, the ones with lived experience, and the ones who showed up to make a difference;

now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby calls on the leadership of the City of Philadelphia to implement the over 140 recommendations and next steps found in the *Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia,* such as expanding the safe school corridor program, ensuring witness relocation, creating a "helping hand" release program, examining firearm restrictions, reducing retail theft, examining drones, increasing the closure rate of homicides, supporting Philadelphia's youth, and instituting "The Promise Initiative."

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