



Legislation Text

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Authorizing Council's Committee on Public Safety to investigate and hold public hearings reviewing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole and its practices in Philadelphia, including the LSI-R offender risk assessment tool and the effect that it has on the safety of the citizens of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, The defined mission of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (the Board) is to protect the safety of the public, address the needs of crime victims, improve county adult probation and parole services and assist in the fair administration of justice by ensuring the custody, control, and treatment of offenders under the jurisdiction of the Board; and

WHEREAS, The Board has the legal responsibility to parole, recommit for violations of parole, and discharge from parole offenders sentenced to two years or more; and

WHEREAS, Once an inmate becomes eligible for parole, the decision to release that inmate is guided by an assessment of the inmate's risk to public safety; and

WHEREAS, The benefits of an effective risk/need assessment and classification are numerous and they include making better decisions during sentencing, post-sentencing programming and supervision; and

WHEREAS, Assessments can provide highly accurate predictions of how individuals with similar characteristics might behave in the future. These assessments are predicated on the assumption that individual criminal behavior can be predicted by assigning offenders to groups that have explicit re-offending probabilities; and

WHEREAS, The Board selected the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) instrument as its risk classification. The LSI-R was developed in the late 1970s in Canada through a collaboration of probation officers, correctional managers, practitioners and researchers; and

WHEREAS, LSI-R is a risk/need assessment tool which identifies problem areas in an offender's life and predicts his/her risk of recidivism. It is comprised of a 54-item instrument which assesses offenders across 10 domains known to be related to an offender's likelihood of returning to prison; and

WHEREAS, These domains include: criminal history, education, employment, financial problems, family and marital relationships, living accommodations, leisure time and recreation interest companions (non-family social network), alcohol and drug problems, emotional and mental health, and attitude, values and belief system; and

WHEREAS, This assessment defines the areas for treatment, programming, intervention, and supervision that will be important to reduce the likelihood that an offender will engage in new criminal behavior once released to the community; therefore, keeping Pennsylvania's recidivism rate low; and

WHEREAS, Studies have found that relatively few of the LSI-R factors had significant correlations with outcomes. Other studies, even those done by proponents of this model, have frequently determined that a substantial number of risk factors demonstrate little or no relationship to recidivism; and

WHEREAS, The committee needs to examine the validity of the LSI-R as a risk assessment tool of re-offending among offenders in Pennsylvania. Furthermore, the committee needs to examine whether the LSI-R risk assessment tool provides valid and reliable assessment of the risk to re-offend; and last, whether the Random Forest Modeling risk assessment tool used by Philadelphia Adult Probation and Parole, among other tools, would be a better fit for the Board to utilize and manage the supervision of its parolees and probationers; and

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Committee on Public Safety is hereby authorized to hold public hearings reviewing the effectiveness and efficacy of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole and its readiness to protect the safety of the citizens of Philadelphia.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That in furtherance of such investigation, the Committee is hereby authorized to issue subpoenas as may be necessary or appropriate to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents to the full extent authorized under Section 2-401 of The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter.