

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Joint Committees on Children and Youth and Housing Neighborhood Development and the Homeless to hold hearings to discuss the issue of Youth Homelessness in Philadelphia in order to work towards a strategic plan to address this issue.

WHEREAS, Based on the 2013 United States Census and the United States Department of Education's 2014 count of homeless children in United States public schools, it is estimated that 2.5 million children are homeless each year in America; and

WHEREAS, This historic high represents one in every 30 children in the United States; and

WHEREAS, From 2012 to 2013, the number of children experiencing homelessness annually in the United States, increased by 8% nationally, increased in 31 states plus Washington D.C. and increased by 10% or more in 13 states and Washington D.C.; and

WHEREAS, According to data released from the National Center for Homeless Education, after reaching a record high in the 2011-2012 school year, the number of homeless students enrolled in United States' public schools jumped dramatically in 2012-2013, to a total of 1,258,182 homeless students, an 8% increase over the previous year; and

WHEREAS, The number of homeless students has increased 85% since the beginning of the recession, and has increased in Pennsylvania by 18% between the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years, more than double the national average of 8%; and

WHEREAS, From 2009 to 2013, the percentage of Philadelphia's public school students who had ever experienced homelessness increased by 73%, and is growing; and

WHEREAS, The impact of homelessness on children, especially young children is devastating and may lead to changes in the brain, can interfere with learning emotional self-regulation, social relationships and cognitive skills; and

WHEREAS, Homelessness in the United States disproportionately impacts low-income, minority, LGBTQ and at-risk children and 40% of youth that age out of the child welfare system end up homeless at age 18; and

WHEREAS, According to the Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing, the city has 4,165 emergency shelter beds, 70 of which are specifically reserved for youth - far fewer than the population of homeless youth; and

WHEREAS, There is only one crisis shelter in Philadelphia, Covenant House of Pennsylvania, that exclusively serves young adults, however, they only have 51 beds and on average turn away 34 youth a month because of the shortage of beds; and

WHEREAS, It is therefore not surprising that the majority of homeless youth do not sleep at a crisis shelter:

66% stay with a friend, 22% sleep outdoors, 8% stay at a shelter, 2% sleep in a subway station and 2% sleep elsewhere; and

WHEREAS, Funding is a huge concern; Federal allocations through the McKinney-Vento Act, a federal law providing protections for homeless students and money to assist them, went from \$61.8 million in 2006-07, down to \$61.7 million in 2013 and up again slightly to \$65 million in 2014, however, Pennsylvania's share of that money - once the 8th largest share in the country was only \$2.3 million in 2014; and

WHEREAS, The Office of Supportive Housing has said that only a small portion of her office's annual budget, which is usually between \$72 million and \$75 million, goes specifically towards youth homeless initiatives; and

WHEREAS, In 2014 budget, the City of Philadelphia received \$31 million in federal Continuum Care funding for its homeless care program, only \$1.1 million of which was specifically targeted for youth services; and

WHEREAS, There is no existing state appropriation for "educating homeless students in Pennsylvania" and many youth who experienced homelessness go on to experience homelessness as adults and struggle without high school diplomas and established work experience; and

WHEREAS, A 2010 study released by Project HOME entitled, "Saving Lives, Saving Money" cited research by Dennis Culhane, which revealed that investing in long-term housing solutions for individuals and youth who are chronically homeless leads to substantial savings in critical social services and that permanent supportive housing can yield a cost savings averaging more than \$7,700 per person annually; and

WHEREAS, Services consumed by people living on the street quickly outpace the cost of providing a person with permanent supportive housings. On average the top 20% of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and substance abuse cost the city approximately \$22,000 per person per year in behavioral health services, prison, jail and homeless services; and

WHEREAS, The growing numbers of Philadelphia youth experiencing homelessness deserve sustainable solutions and a comprehensive system of emergency, transitional and permanent housing that supports their growth and development and safeguards against a life of poverty; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes the Joint Committees on Children and Youth and Housing Neighborhood Development and the Homeless to hold hearings to examine the issue of Homeless Youth in Philadelphia in order to work towards a strategic plan to address this issue.