

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Public Safety to conduct hearings concerning the feasibility and impact of the City replacing outdated payphone booths with new emergency service kiosks to immediately connect the public with first responders in the event of a public emergency.

WHEREAS, Throughout the 1990s, there was a reported 2.6 million public pay phones located across the United States; and

WHEREAS, Due to the growing popularity of the cell phone market, many telephone service providers stopped their operations of public payphones across the country. In 2007, AT&T officially announced its exit from the payphone market, while Verizon announced their exit from the payphone market in 2011; and

WHEREAS, The Payphone Project has identified that there are still hundreds of public payphone booths located across the City of Philadelphia, with none of them being operational; and

WHEREAS, Although innovations in modern day technology have made public payphones obsolete, there are many citizens who are still unable to afford cellular phones to use in the event of an emergency; and

WHEREAS, The City Council of Philadelphia is already looking into other connectivity related issues within the City. Councilwoman Bass has introduced a resolution to explore adding Wi-Fi kiosks in the City. Additionally, the Public Safety Committee will explore how to increase connectivity within the Fairmount Park System; and

WHEREAS, The City of New York has lead the way in reintegrating public payphones for use by its citizens. In February of 2016, NYC repurposed more than 7,500 public payphones into emergency service kiosks. The kiosks also provide free internet service, as well as cell phone charging stations; and

WHEREAS, Emergency call boxes are an integral component of public safety on a vast number of our nation's higher education campuses which experience a much lower crime rate than the rest of the nation; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia has already experienced the public benefit of emergency call kiosks, due to their implementation by SEPTA. Disaster was averted on May 16, 2013 at the SEPTA 56th Street Station, when a bystander used an emergency call box to notify authorities of an accident where a 14-month-old baby's stroller rolled off the platform and her mother and other passengers jumped onto the tracks to rescue the baby. A train at the preceding station was held by the dispatcher until all persons were safely on the platform; and

WHEREAS, The City's repurposing of public payphone booths could provide highly visible, brightly colored emergency phone towers with the ability to directly connect a user to emergency services. These emergency call boxes could also be equipped with "help" buttons which activate the phone tower with flashing lights to further divert crime and send emergency rescue to crime scenes faster, benefitting all citizens in the event of a public emergency; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Committee on Public Safety to conduct hearings concerning the feasibility and impact of the City replacing outdated payphone booths with new emergency service kiosks to immediately connect the public with first responders in the event of a public emergency.