

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committees on Legislative Oversight and Public Safety to hold public hearings examining abolition of solitary confinement for juveniles.

WHEREAS, Juvenile justice is a major area of evolving constitutional jurisprudence and bipartisan reform at the local, state, and national levels; and

WHEREAS, That movement is the result of growing scientific and policy insights into the complex and vulnerable developmental status of youth; and

WHEREAS, juvenile detention practices have earned heavy scrutiny due to tragic accounts of justice-involved juveniles, such as Kalief Browder, whose experiences in the justice system have had devastating consequences, including suicide; and

WHEREAS, At any given time approximately 30 to 50 juveniles charged as adults in criminal cases are held in Philadelphia's adult prison system; and

WHEREAS, These juveniles are frequently placed in administrative segregation for protective purposes or are placed in punitive segregation for disciplinary purposes; and

WHEREAS, Female juveniles assigned for holding at an adult facility are automatically placed in administrative segregation due to lack of other available housing at Riverside Correctional Facility, Philadelphia's jail for women; and

WHEREAS, Almost all juvenile inmates in Philadelphia's adult prison system have not yet been convicted of a crime, but rather are being held in pre-trial detention; and

WHEREAS, A juvenile inmate in administrative segregation spends up to 23 hours per day in a cell; and

WHEREAS, A 2009 U.S. Department of Justice study found that half of suicides by incarcerated juveniles occur in solitary confinement; and

WHEREAS, In January 2016, then-President Obama abolished punitive use of solitary confinement for juvenile inmates in the federal system; and

WHEREAS, until 2001, all detained juveniles were held at the Youth Study Center, Philadelphia's juvenile detention center at that time; and

WHEREAS, presently juveniles may be placed at Philadelphia’s current juvenile detention center, the Juvenile Justice Services Center, if ordered by a judge; and

WHEREAS, Juveniles charged as adults are typically held in juvenile detention facilities in other major city justice systems, including those in Los Angeles, Cook County (Chicago), Illinois, and New Orleans, as well as in several statewide systems, including neighboring states New Jersey, Maryland, Ohio, and West Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Given its mission, staff, facilities, and other special characteristics, the Juvenile Justice Services Center is particularly advantaged in its capacity to address the unique needs and circumstances of justice-involved youth; and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Act includes among its purposes “supervision, care and rehabilitation . . . to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community” (42 Pa. C.S. § 6301(b) (2)); and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia’s detention practices for justice-involved youth should promote that purpose; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Committees on Legislative Oversight and Public Safety are hereby authorized to hold public hearings examining abolition of solitary confinement for juveniles.