City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Education to hold hearings reviewing the current state and role of social workers in Philadelphia schools and examining best practices for integrating schoolwide social workers to create safer and more supportive educational environments.

WHEREAS, School social workers provide crucial supports for vulnerable students by connecting young people to the resources necessary to function and learn in safe, nurturing school environments despite emotional and behavioral barriers; and

WHEREAS, School social workers are trained and certified in risk assessment and intervention as well as clinical strategies that can support the emotional and mental health needs of students, and especially those at high risk for truancy and dropping out of school; and

WHEREAS, Although school social workers predominantly work with individual students, they also spearhead collaborative efforts such as the development of behavioral plans and the training of other school staff to be able to effectively communicate with and further support at-risk students. Through thorough assessments of students and collaboration with key community and school partners, school social workers can provide essential information and comprehensive plans that can assist children, their families, and their communities; and

WHEREAS, A social worker that works within a single school can support administrators, teachers, and other school staff to recognize and navigate the effects of specific challenges facing students such trauma and food insecurity, and can promote positive behavioral approaches to classroom management and discipline; and

WHEREAS, School social workers play a pivotal role in working with students who have Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), thus providing schools with the capacity to support students who are exposed to violence, emotional and physical abuse, domestic violence, familial incarceration, and mental health issues, which fundamentally compromise academic achievement and shapes students' ability to learn; and

WHEREAS, School social workers work in concert with-rather than in lieu of-counselors, school psychologists, and other support staff to ensure that highly complex needs of students are rigorously evaluated and appropriately met so that they can academically succeed; and

WHEREAS, Twelve schools across the City of Philadelphia have been designated as community schools, and, as a result, are directed to specifically offer increased social emotional health services and supports to serve the complex needs of students and community members. Despite school funding deficits, there is a growing need for trauma-informed social and emotional intervention services to be deployed to communities through schools, and for social workers to serve as bridges between school and community; and

WHEREAS, As many as one out of three students in some neighborhood School District of Philadelphia (SDP) high schools are involved in the child welfare system; for these especially vulnerable youth, access to a certified social worker in their school is a critical lifeline; and

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WHEREAS, Nearly half of students in some neighborhood SDP high schools are English Language Learners, who often struggle to access behavioral support services due to language barriers and community stigma. The linguistic and cultural gaps that these students face often create an urgent need for social workers to provide case management to assist immigrant families; and

WHEREAS, In August, SDP took its first step towards recognizing the urgent need for schoolwide social workers when it announced its launch of the Philadelphia STEP (Support Team for Education Partnership) Project, providing full-time social workers to 22 schools with high behavioral health needs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Does hereby authorize the Committee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Education to hold hearings reviewing the current state and role of social workers in Philadelphia schools and examining best practices for integrating schoolwide social workers to create safer and more supportive educational environments.

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