

Legislation Text

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Recognizing Tarana Burke for her tenacity and spirit in creating a platform for empowerment through empathy by spearheading the #MeToo movement, and honoring the “Silence Breakers” for their bravery in creating awareness through sharing stories of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and resilience and for subsequently being named TIME’s 2017 Person of the Year.

WHEREAS, Tarana Burke, a lifelong activist and organizer, started the “Me Too” campaign on social media ten years ago to center the voices and experience of women, and namely women of color, to “radicalize the notion of mass healing”, and to create an intersectional space where victims of sexual violence in our most vulnerable communities could be recognized and could build solidarity; and

WHEREAS, Burke has dedicated her life’s work to the intersection of social justice and Black arts and culture. Originally from Harlem and Queens, she began her career in Selma, Alabama as a youth worker dedicated to supporting Black children who were survivors of sexual violence; and

WHEREAS, Burke founded Just Be Inc. in 2003 to create programs and systems for women to heal and become empowered in the aftermath of sexual assault, and launched the “Me Too” campaign in 2007, constituting a grassroots forum for survivors of sexual violence to build healing systems and access support in underserved communities that suffered from a lack of rape crisis centers and sexual assault victim advocates; and

WHEREAS, Burke has made substantial contributions to social justice work in the City of Philadelphia, moving to the City in 2008 and working to mobilize and innovative strategies to support young people and survivors of sexual violence. While in Philadelphia, Burke served as a Grant Officer for the American Friends Service Committee, the Managing Director at Art Sanctuary, and a Site Director at Breakthrough Collaborative of Greater Philadelphia, all while continuing to run Just Be Inc.; and

WHEREAS, Over the past ten years, the “Me Too” movement has created a space of connection and healing for young women, and especially young women of color, to spur empowerment through empathy. Through the Organization’s work, Burke aims to simply say to survivors, “I see you. I support you. I get it.”; and

WHEREAS, In October 2017, in the wake of countless brave, resilient women stepping forward to share truths of sexual harassment, the “Me Too” movement became amplified after Burke’s framework was invoked and women spearheaded the #MeToo campaign: a digital, intergenerational, cross-cultural rally to provide an international umbrella of solidarity for millions of women, and to spread awareness about the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and violence; and

WHEREAS, On December 6, 2017 TIME Magazine honored Tarana Burke and millions of “Silence Breakers” as the 2017 Person of the Year for casting a critical gaze on the overwhelming presence of gender violence and the complicity of men in perpetuating cultures of sexual violence and apologism; and

WHEREAS, While the #MeToo campaign has united women in sharing stories of sexual misconduct and abuse,

Burke has consistently called for the recognition and centering of voices of women of color, women with disabilities, and people who are queer and transgender. She also has emphasized the need to support young women in middle and high schools who also experience sexual harassment at the hands of peers and staff members, and has stressed that women across professions and class backgrounds--from domestic workers to farm workers to celebrities--need to be heard, acknowledged, believed, and amplified; and

WHEREAS, Sexual violence knows no racial, gender, nor class boundaries--but the response to sexual violence does; and

WHEREAS, The #MeToo movement transcends a single person and story, representing the next frontier in the long journey to end sexual violence; and

WHEREAS, Studies show that accusations and reports of sexual assault and misconduct are overwhelmingly true and reliable; and

WHEREAS, We each have a role to play in ending sexual violence, helping survivors to heal, and dismantling power structures that enable gender-based violence in the workplace and beyond; and

WHEREAS, Women across the City of Philadelphia, the United States, and the globe have the right to live a life free from abuse and gender-based violence; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED THAT, THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Recognizes Tarana Burke for her tenacity and spirit in creating a platform for empowerment through empathy by spearheading the #MeToo movement, and honors the "Silence Breakers" for their bravery in creating awareness through sharing stories of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and resilience and for subsequently being named TIME's 2017 Person of the Year.