

Legislation Text

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Authorizing Council's Committee on Health and Human Services to hold hearings to examine the possibility of the Department of Human Services creating objective guidelines and uniform reporting standards for personnel who are tasked with protecting children in Philadelphia from abuse while preventing the tragedy of unjustified family separations.

WHEREAS, Child abuse is a very serious, deplorable offense that has no place in a just society; and

WHEREAS, Recent high-profile cases of child abuse have underscored the importance of protecting children from abuse; and

WHEREAS, While the balance is delicate between erring on the side of caution or deciding against reporting any level of suspicious activity, the bonds between family members-especially parent and child-are developmentally important, and should be jeopardized only under compelling circumstances based on evidence in the interest of protecting the child; and

WHEREAS, The lack of objective reporting standards and the risk of liability for mandated reporters incentivizes the reporting of all incidents as suspected child abuse, regardless of evidence; and

WHEREAS, Such policies have the adverse effect of causing a proliferation of reporting without adherence to standards, protocols, or guidelines regarding the merits of such reports; and

WHEREAS, A lack of objective guidelines and uniform reporting standards as to what qualifies as reasonable grounds for reporting incidents as possible child abuse opens the possibility of subjective reporting influenced by cultural or other biases instead of factual evidence; and

WHEREAS, Reports of suspected child abuse which are not backed up with any evidence but instead rely on the intuition of personnel who are incentivized to report all incidents while lacking established, objective criteria can cause significant risk and hardship for families subjected to unjustified separations; and

WHEREAS, Every effort is needed to ensure that cases of child abuse are properly identified, reported, and prosecuted. Adherence to a clearly-defined set of guidelines and uniform reporting standards could increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness in accomplishing this goal; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes Council's Committee on Health and Human Services to hold hearings to examine the possibility of the Department of Human Services creating objective guidelines and uniform reporting standards for personnel who are tasked with protecting children in Philadelphia from abuse while preventing the tragedy of unjustified family separations.