

Legislation Text

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Urging Governor Tom Wolf and the Pennsylvania General Assembly to protect and expand the General Assistance Program to provide a lifeline for people with disabilities throughout the City of Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

WHEREAS, The General Assistance (GA) program has provided a lifeline for people living in extreme poverty, with disabilities by giving them a modest, temporary monthly cash allowance; and

WHEREAS, General Assistance is a humane and effective way to help extremely needy people with no income who are unable to work and who do not meet the requirements for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program to afford a place to sleep, something to eat, applying for ID, and other necessities even if they are living in a homeless shelter; and

WHEREAS, Individuals receiving domestic violence services and substance abuse recovery programs have a lifetime eligibility maximum of nine months. Applicants for disability benefits can receive GA while they await a favorable decision from the Social Security Administration, a process which can take up to two years; and

WHEREAS, In 2012 Governor Tom Corbett eliminated the General Assistance program which was the sole source of income for more than 65,000 people, the vast majority (about 61,000) had at least one temporary or permanent disability and received about \$200 per month; and

WHEREAS, Currently Governor Tom Wolf has proposed a \$34 billion budget including \$50 million for the program for Fiscal Year 2020, a fraction of 1% of the total proposed budget for a program that as of April 2019 is currently assisting 5,224 Philadelphians and many others statewide; and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania has the twenty-third highest poverty rate of any state in the nation with 1,548,720 people, or 12.5% of the population, living below the federal poverty guidelines, \$24,860 for a family of four; and

WHEREAS, Of those people most likely to be living in poverty, that is, without sufficient money to pay for the basic necessities of life and unable to work or find employment, 20.8% are people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Residents of the City of Philadelphia disproportionately experience poverty with 26.5% living below the poverty guidelines, people who are African American and Latinx are even more likely to be living in poverty, about triple the rate of non-Hispanic whites; and

WHEREAS, Growth in employment rates has continued to leave behind people of color and people with disabilities who consequently have little to no income for basic necessities that would enable them to search and retain a full-time job; and

WHEREAS, The national opioid crisis has exacerbated this problem with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention recording 70,237 drug overdose deaths in the United States in 2017; of which 5,559 happened in

Pennsylvania and 1,217 in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, In January 2019, the City of Philadelphia held its annual “Point in Time Count” where volunteers and City officials counted homeless individuals in overnight cafes and street counts throughout the City of Philadelphia during the overnight hours on January 23 into January 24, 2019. The final tally found 1,069 homeless individuals throughout the City of Philadelphia. One-third of the city’s homeless population found in Kensington reported that they were battling addiction. This homelessness is caused by lack of money to pay the rent and is made worse by the opioid epidemic; and

WHEREAS, Housing instability has led to several public safety concerns along with other quality of life issues for longtime residents and students in the area which caused the Office of School Safety to create “Safe Corridors” in order to provide extra supervision for students traveling to and from school, along with sharing information and reporting suspicious or unusual activities; and

WHEREAS, While Philadelphia has slowed the rate of growth among those who are street homeless, and continues to have the lowest rate of street homelessness among the nation’s biggest cities, the homeless population has continued to grow fueled by extreme poverty disability, and the rising cost of rent; and

WHEREAS, 43% of those who enter the homeless system do not have any income at all, and only 14% of those have earned income from work, yet nearly half exit with more money and a higher income; and

WHEREAS, Panhandling for money has become an impediment to economic growth, an intercept survey of 126 people who were panhandling revealed that their motivation was financial, that they lacked access to employment and used their money for necessities; and

WHEREAS, A pilot same day pay program has shown that when people with no income have access to a legitimate source of money they use it to pay for ID, a phone, food, and a place to sleep; and

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia is investing extensively in solutions to addiction, homelessness, early childhood education, public schooling, and workforce development to address and reduce the poverty rate; and

WHEREAS, Throughout Pennsylvania, between January 1, 2018 and May 18, 2019, over 21,000 doses of naloxone were administered by EMS, there were 13,479 Emergency Room visits for opioid overdoses, and 22,672 calls were made into the “Get Help Now” Hotline; and

WHEREAS, Although, naloxone and the Get Help Now Hotline, and the Philadelphia Resilience Project, are just some of the resources currently in place to assist with this epidemic in Pennsylvania and throughout the City of Philadelphia, other resources are desperately needed including funding for recovery houses and the expansion of the General Assistance Program to include housing; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Joins Philadelphia Delegation Chair, State Representative Jason Dawkins, and other members to urge Governor Tom Wolf the Pennsylvania General Assembly to defend, protect, and expand General Assistance and not abandon the most vulnerable people who are being harmed daily by the opioid epidemic and homelessness in Philadelphia and throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be mailed to Governor Tom Wolf, Philadelphia

Delegation Chair Jason Dawkins, House Speaker Mike Turzai, and President of the Senate John K. Fetterman.