

## Legislation Text

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Recognizing and Honoring the 50th Anniversary of Philadelphia's Public Interest Law Center for its pioneering litigation, which has dramatically advanced the civil, social, and economic rights of communities in the Philadelphia region.

WHEREAS, Over the last 50 years, the Public Interest Law Center has used high-impact legal strategies to protect, defend, and advance fundamental human rights. Its attorneys, organizers, and support staff have fought for environmental, education, healthcare, housing, employment, and voting justice, and the organization's work is rooted in a deep-seeded, relentless commitment to pursuing racial justice and social equity through public interest law; and

WHEREAS, The Law Center was founded by Ned Wolf, who served as the Director of Philadelphia's branch of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in Philadelphia. In 1969, Wolf founded the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia as an organization of lawyers that used the power of high impact litigation to champion civil rights in the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection, and its surrounding region; and

WHEREAS, In its very first case, the Law Center challenged a neighborhood development plan that would have concentrated public housing in East Poplar, thus compromising efforts of racial and economic integration. The Law Center, on behalf of a diverse group of East Poplar residents, successfully prevented this further racial segregation of low-income housing, compelling the Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure its projects do not increase or perpetuate segregation. Since then, the Public Interest Law Center has been a leader for housing justice, successfully defending tenants facing eviction. Currently, the Law Center is spearheading a new initiative to couple tenant organizing with high-impact litigation, legal support and capacity building; and

WHEREAS, The Law Center has played an active role in supporting the rights of public school students and their families over its 50 year history. In the 1970s, it represented students with intellectual disabilities who were deemed "uneducable" and turned away from public schools in Pennsylvania, filed the first-ever successful "right-to-education" case in the United States, and facilitated a national legal movement to protect the education rights of students with disabilities. The Law Center has since provided legal assistance to hundreds of parents and caregivers who support students who receive special education services. Today, the Law Center is on the forefront of fighting for fair education funding in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, challenging the state's system of education funding that has created the widest funding gap between wealthy and poor school districts in the nation; and

WHEREAS, The Law Center has fought for full integration, respect, and freedom from discrimination on behalf of people with disabilities in Philadelphia and across the country throughout its history. At Pennhurst

State School and Hospital, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania forcibly confined thousands of people with developmental disabilities, who were often denied educational services and experienced abuse and neglect. The Law Center helped these Pennsylvanians return to their communities by representing residents of Pennhurst in a class action lawsuit against the institution in 1974, forcing the state to close the facility and develop a system of community-based services. The Law Center continued to lead the movement for community-based services, filing similar successful lawsuits on behalf of residents of large segregated institutions across the country over a period of almost 40 years. Today, the Law Center promotes employment for people with disabilities, working to protect key employment and education rights; and

WHEREAS, The Law Center has also served as a pioneering force for climate justice, successfully reducing emissions from incinerators, industrial plants and automobiles. The Law Center drafted the first ever Community Right to Know ordinance in Philadelphia, adopted by this Council in 1981 after extensive organizing by Bridesburg residents, first responders, and union workers concerned with hazardous chemicals stored in their community. The Law Center's Garden Justice Legal Initiative has also uplifted and supported community gardeners and other residents who wish to develop vacant land into green, inclusive public spaces; and

WHEREAS, Recognizing that voting rights are an essential pillar of democracy, the Law Center has long aimed to enhance the integrity of elections by protecting every citizen's right to vote. After the Pennsylvania legislature passed a law requiring photo identification to be presented before voting, the Law Center sued and prevented the law from being in effect for the 2012 general election, before it was ultimately deemed unconstitutional by the Commonwealth Court. In 2018, the Law Center's litigation led to a Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling that Pennsylvania's gerrymandered congressional map "plainly and palpably" violated the state constitution, and ordered the drawing of a new map for the 2018 primary and general elections. This litigation marked the first successful challenge to partisan gerrymandering resulting in a redrawn congressional map in United States history; and

WHEREAS, The Law Center has also spearheaded innovative work to protect employment rights for Philadelphians. In the mid-1970s, the Law Center used litigation to challenge deeply embedded sexism in the Philadelphia Police Department, leading to a Federal District Court judicial order that 100 new women officers be hired. In the 1980s, the Law Center obtained more than \$15 million in back pay for Black workers who faced discrimination at US Steel Company's Fairless Hills Plant. Today, through their Fair Employment Opportunities Project, the Law Center addresses widespread discrimination against job-seekers with criminal records by representing individuals who are unlawfully denied employment based on a criminal history and educating both employers and the public to debunk myths about workers with criminal history; and

WHEREAS, The work of Public Interest Law Center has, time and time again, reinforced the notion that access to quality healthcare is a human right. In 1995, the Law Center secured a settlement with Pennsylvania's Medicaid program that tripled the number of children enrolled. For ten years, the Law Center spearheaded a similar case in Florida that challenged the inadequate healthcare resources, such as long wait times and far travel distances to specialists that Medicaid recipients experienced. Thanks to this litigation, physicians treating

low-income children and children with disabilities receive higher payments, in order to incentivize the deliverance of efficient and thorough healthcare through this essential program; and

WHEREAS, For five decades, the Public Interest Law Center has been an innovative force for justice in the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and beyond. The Law Center focuses on securing the fundamental resources that people use to build their lives-safe housing, quality education, a voice at the ballot box, and more-for communities that face discrimination and exploitation. The Law Center's policy, advocacy, and legal work has consistently pushed the boundaries of what justice can look like, and its work always follows the lead of communities that are the lifeblood of the Philadelphia region; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors and recognizes the 50th Anniversary of Philadelphia's Public Interest Law Center for its pioneering civil rights litigation, which has dramatically advanced the civil, social, and economic rights of communities in the Philadelphia region.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution shall be presented to Jennifer Clarke, Executive Director of the Public Interest Law Center, as evidence of the sincere respect and admiration of this legislative body.