

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committees on Finance and on Commerce & Economic Development to hold joint hearings regarding Philadelphia's safe, equitable, and robust economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

WHEREAS, The pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 has led to a wave of public health measures and private reactions that have caused untold and differentiated loss, death, illness, and hardship, including myriad economic difficulties, not least in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, To avoid confusion with the unrelated SARS disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) refers to the strain of the virus known formally as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (or SARS-CoV-2) as COVID-19, which is the abbreviation for the name of the illness it causes, coronavirus disease 2019; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 may cause most people infected with it mild to moderate respiratory illness that will recover without special treatment, some number will be asymptomatic yet contagious, but older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious (sometimes fatal) illness; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 poses additional, indirect health risks by endangering uninfected people who cannot obtain medical care from overwhelmed health systems and those avoiding care to minimize their exposure; and

WHEREAS, The origin of COVID-19 has yet to be determined after first being detected in humans late last year, but the results of its spread are painfully clear, with millions of people worldwide infected, over 62,000 confirmed cases in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania alone, about a third of which have been in Philadelphia, causing no fewer than 1,000 deaths here since the first on March 25th, and shuttering social functions, family gatherings, artistic experiences, and economic activities, with a cascade of income deprivation in its wake, for families, businesses, and governments alike; and

WHEREAS, Employment has been severely affected by the prudent stay-at-home orders issued by the Governor starting on March 23rd, with new unemployment filings reaching beyond 1.5 million people, shattering the previous record for most filings in a month set in January 2009 with about 110,000 claims; and

WHEREAS, Economic activity has been so thoroughly stopped by public health orders and private decision-making that for the first time, alongside paying for a one-time, direct check to adults and families, Congress has allowed independent contractors and other workers who are not treated as employees to obtain relief through their respective state unemployment systems for lost income, with approximately 90,000 Pennsylvanians filing for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance so far; and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania has the cold comfort that our state unemployment filing system is sufficiently operating to receive those filings, despite the unemployment office being overwhelmed by calls, emails, and other communications from understandably anxious filers, given how some state's systems have proven inadequate; and

WHEREAS, The emergency order of the Governor closed non-essential businesses, such as non-food retail, dine-in restaurants, arts and leisure activities, professional and educational services, non-emergency construction, many manufacturing enterprises and financial services, as well as - in combination with the physical distancing recommended to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the absence of a systematic program to track infection and trace contact - greatly restricting commerce for those allowed to operate, such as hotels, transportation, and domestic work; and

WHEREAS, Because of governmental limits on assistance imposed due their immigration status, the precise harm to undocumented workers and their families is unknown, but the magnitude for a group of people over-represented in construction, hospitality, and domestic work sectors is staggering; and

WHEREAS, Disadvantaged small businesses, including those owned by women and people of color, which already face challenges obtaining access to capital, have been further pressed by the federal government's bureaucratic and de-centralized approach to disseminating support to businesses; and

WHEREAS, The brunt of diminished commerce has been borne particularly by workers and their families, as reflected in the unemployment figures, in our reliance on essential employees in medical care, transit, grocery, and other professions who do not have the luxury of remote work, and in across-the-board uncertainty, all against the backdrop of job-dependent health and retirement benefits and a threadbare social safety net; and

WHEREAS, The financial burden on people and businesses has naturally been reflected in tax revenues, severely restricting the ability of states and municipalities, including the City of Philadelphia, which must all maintain balanced budgets each year, to maintain pre-existing levels of public services, let alone meet their increased demand at this volatile time; and

WHEREAS, Life is more than domestic product, if every part of consumption is diminished - unclear but reduced consumer demand leading to business disinvestment, reduced trade, and inadequate government spending - the hit taken to our economic life will exacerbate ongoing stress and deprivation; and

WHEREAS, To fulfill our duties to Philadelphians, particularly in light of willful disinterest from the White House and U.S. Senate in establishing track and trace, restoring state and local government coffers to pre-pandemic levels, or providing workers and small businesses with adequate resources to sustain themselves and thrive, the City must harness all available resources, including the expertise and opinions of its residents and stakeholders to provide a safe, equitable, and robust recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby authorize the Committees on Finance and on Commerce & Economic Development to hold joint hearings regarding Philadelphia's safe, equitable, and robust economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.