

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Public Health and Human Services and the Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings examining the intersection of mental health, disability, and police encounters; and to develop strategies and best practices for non-lethal de-escalation, crisis intervention, and restraint of individuals experiencing mental or emotional distress.

WHEREAS, Between one-quarter and one-half of all people killed by police were experiencing a mental health crisis; and

WHEREAS, On October 26, 2020, Walter Wallace, Jr. was shot multiple times and killed by Philadelphia police officers after receiving a call that a man was armed with a knife. Both the video released on social media and his family indicated that Walter was experiencing a mental health emergency; and

WHEREAS, There have been multiple preventable occasions where people with disabilities were killed by the police, like Laquan McDonald who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and complex mental health problems, Ethan Saylor who had Down syndrome, and Michelle Cusseaux who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder; and

WHEREAS, Police have become default responders to mental health calls but are not trained to de-escalate situations and address disability emergencies. Police might presume people with psychiatric disabilities as “dangerous to themselves and others” during police interactions; and

WHEREAS, People with emotional, physical, cognitive, or sensory disabilities are more likely to be arrested. 55% of Black Americans with disabilities will be arrested by the time they reach their late 20s compared to 46% of Latino people with disabilities and 28% of White Americans with disabilities. Youth with mental or physical disabilities are 13% more likely to be arrested than youth without disabilities, while being Black widened the chances of arrest by 17%; and

WHEREAS, On October 9, 2020, the City of Philadelphia announced an initiative to improve police response to 911 calls coming from people having a behavioral health crisis. The City must do more to develop alternative responses to mental health and disability emergencies that do not involve interactions with the police; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council hereby authorizes the Committee on Public Health and Human Services and the Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings examining the intersection of mental health, disability, and police encounters; and to develop strategies and best practices for non-lethal de-escalation, crisis intervention, and restraint of individuals experiencing mental or emotional distress.

