

Legislation Text

File #: 200690, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Committees on Public Safety and Public Health and Human Services to conduct joint hearings to examine available options for protecting Philadelphians in the Philadelphia jail system and the Pennsylvania prison system from COVID-19.

WHEREAS, During the COVID-19 pandemic, jails and prisons have been infection hotspots; and

WHEREAS, According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, jails and prisons can be a amplifiers of infectious diseases such as COVID-19 due to their specific characteristics:

“Such challenges include crowded dormitories, shared lavatories, limited medical and isolation resources, daily entry and exit of staff members and visitors, continual introduction of newly incarcerated or detained persons, and transport of incarcerated or detained persons in multi-person vehicles for court-related, medical, or security reasons.”

Moreover, Stanford researchers found, in a study of a major city jail that the COVID-19 infection rate was more than double other hotspots such as cruise ships; and

WHEREAS, Inmates have minimal ability to mitigate risk, given that social distancing is next to impossible in jails. Most inmates also are indigent, and their ability to obtain PPE and other protective measures is therefore severely limited; and

WHEREAS, During the prior surge in COVID-19 infections this past spring, there was a collaborative effort between City Council, the First Judicial District, the District Attorney's Office, the Police Department, the Defender Association and other criminal justice stakeholders to reduce the prison population by limiting new admissions into county jails and considering emergency motions for release. As a result, the population in Philadelphia prisons dropped 22% as much as 22% from its pre-pandemic baseline. At the same time, the Department of Prisons instituted a range of policies designed to protect inmates, staff, and visitors alike; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, as infections have risen again, the jail population has also risen, beginning to approach pre-pandemic levels; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, The Council hereby authorizes the Committees on Public Health and Human Services and Public Safety to conduct joint hearings to examine the significant threat of the spread of COVID-19 within the Philadelphia county jail system.