Legislation Text

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Authorizing Council to hold public hearings on the history of asbestos cleanup and abatement practices in Philadelphia public schools.

WHEREAS, Exposure to toxic asbestos fibers can produce severe lung scarring and the development of mesothelioma and lung cancer; and

WHEREAS, Asbestos was used in abundance for building insulation, piping, flooring, and more prior to the 1970s and 1980s when its toxic properties became well documented; and

WHEREAS, This was particularly concerning to schools across the United States - many of which contained toxic levels of asbestos. The Environmental Protection Agency issued a report in 1984 estimating 15 million students and 1.4 million teachers were at risk of exposure to airborne asbestos based upon samples taken from 2,600 schools; and

WHEREAS, The federal government acted two years later with the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986, which required schools to submit detailed asbestos abatement plans, with a $5,000 penalty per day a plan was not submitted; and

WHEREAS, In 1989, the Associated Press reported that Philadelphia would have to spend $425 million to remove asbestos from public school facilities in compliance with the 1986 Asbestos Hazardous Response Act; and

WHEREAS, The same Associated Press report stated the School District of Philadelphia had already spent more than $50 million dollars on asbestos related abatements; and

WHEREAS, Bernard Rafferty, the appointed “asbestos cleanup chief” for the School District of Philadelphia, publicly stated they would spend an additional $75.8 million on asbestos abetment in the next six years, or from 1989-1995; and

WHEREAS, According to the AP report, all asbestos abatements in Philadelphia schools were documented, including the date work began, the amount of asbestos abated, and location where removed asbestos was taken; and

WHEREAS, Despite the federal act in 1986 requiring asbestos management and abatement plans, and millions of dollars reportedly spent, toxic asbestos can still be found today in public schools throughout Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, As we continue to grapple with additional asbestos abatements, we should further investigate how much asbestos was abated, where the funds were spent, and why the problem still persists decades later; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes Council to hold public hearings on the history of asbestos cleanup and abatement practices in Philadelphia public schools.