Legislation Text

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Honoring and celebrating trailblazing writer, actor, and comedian Quinta Brunson for her creation of *Abbott Elementary*, an innovative, hilarious Black and woman-led sitcom that sheds light on the joy, struggle, dedication, and resilience of Philadelphia teachers and school communities.

WHEREAS, Quinta Brunson's *Abbott Elementary*-a sitcom set in a fictional Philadelphia school that unabashedly highlights so many of the real-world challenges that Philadelphia schools face today-premiered on ABC on December 7, 2021. It has since taken the television world by storm, drawing comparisons to legendary comedies and bringing laughter and thought-provoking conversations about the state of public education to millions of viewers across the country; and

WHEREAS, *Abbott Elementary* features the experiences of a group of dedicated public school educators and the challenges they face as they come together to give their students the educational experience they deserve. Creator Quinta Brunson writes, executive produces, and stars as Janine Teagues, a bright-eyed second grade teacher determined to do everything she can for her students. Philadelphia icon Sheryl Lee Ralph also stars as veteran kindergarten teacher Barbara Howard, whose steady hand and heart reminds her colleagues that, in the face of harsh realities, a loving commitment to students and their families is essential; and

WHEREAS, *Abbott Elementary* showcases the varied and diverse lives of Black educators and school staff at a critical time when Black teacher recruitment and school staffing is at its most urgent; and

WHEREAS, *Abbott Elementary* embodies the Philadelphia spirit. From Eagles and University of Pennsylvania banners on the classroom walls, to colorful and striking murals outside the school building, to a tribute to legendary news anchor Jim Gardner, *Abbott Elementary* shows the world the heart and grit of our City; and

WHEREAS, Brunson is a Philadelphia native and the daughter of a 40-year school teacher who grew up in West Philadelphia, on 49th and Chancellor Streets. Her experience as the child of a kindergarten teacher and as a student at Harrity Elementary informed her understanding of the funding obstacles that Philadelphia schools face as well as the tenacity of teachers, support staff, and students to overcome them and create vibrant learning communities. After graduating from Charter High School for Architecture and Design (CHAD), Brunson attended Temple University and pursued classes at the prestigious Second City in Chicago; and

WHEREAS, Brunson's comedy career launched on Instagram, and her viral comedy videos eventually landed her a job at BuzzFeed Video. Brunson wrote and starred in the sketch comedy series *A Black Lady Sketch Show,* and appeared in shows such as the supernatural comedy-drama *iZombie* and the animated series *Lazor Wulf* and *Magical Girl Friendship Squad*; and

WHEREAS, Brunson's creation of *Abbott Elementary* stemmed from her appreciation of mockumentaries and her desire to use the format to showcase the experiences of Black educators. Her show focuses on the profound altruism of so many educators and school staff who work on a daily basis to make our City a better place for children, and do it with joy and love, despite not being adequately compensated; and

WHEREAS, Brunson said she named the fictional Abbott Elementary for her sixth grade teacher, Ms. Joyce Abbott, who instilled self-confidence in Brunson and created an exciting and engaging learning community. Across Philadelphia schools, there are so many Ms. Abbotts-educators who always go the extra mile to inspire and support their students; and

WHEREAS, Brunson's positive experience with caring teachers informed her writing of the show: "[H]aving a good experience [in Philadelphia schools] informed what kind of show I would create. A lot of people I think have created school shows with the idea that no one wants to be there…the students, the teachers. Not me. People are doing this job because they care that much. They're being paid pennies. This is just what they do"; and

WHEREAS, *Abbott Elementary* has sent buses to schools in Philadelphia and elsewhere delivering school supplies and sending messages of hope and joy to students and educators around the country; and

WHEREAS, While *Abbott Elementary* brings laughs each week, it also focuses on the stark resource challenges that Philadelphia schools face. In addition to highlighting the inadequacy of classroom supplies and the extraordinary lengths teachers must go to in order to provide what their students need, the show calls attention to staffing and facilities maintenance issues faced by Philadelphia school communities. District schools have multi-year maintenance backlogs and an estimated $5 billion need for repairs and replacements; and

WHEREAS, The staffing challenges depicted on the show are major issues. New teacher certifications in Pennsylvania have plummeted to less than a third of what they were 10 years ago and there remains an urgent need for more Black teachers in Philadelphia and across the Commonwealth. Though Black students comprise over 50% of the student body in the School District of Philadelphia, only 25% of District teachers in Philadelphia are Black. Research has shown exposure to Black teachers has significant benefits for Black students and leads to improved academic outcomes, including an increased likelihood of college enrollment; and

WHEREAS, This City Council body has and will continue to support expanded school funding efforts at the local, state, and federal levels from proposed funding in President Biden's Build Back Better Act, to Pennsylvania's massive surplus of American Rescue Plan Act funds, to the City and School District's upcoming budget decisions. Council also stands in strong support of Pennsylvania's ongoing lawsuit for constitutional school funding, a trial which has shed light on the inequities and inadequacies of a system that gives schools like those portrayed in *Abbott Elementary* so much less than their wealthier suburban counterparts; and

WHEREAS, Brunson's *Abbott Elementary* brings to primetime television a loving ode to Philadelphia educators, school children and their families as well as a call to action to fund and support our youth and our public schools, and for that, this Council body is both grateful and inspired; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors and celebrates trailblazing writer, actor, and comedian Quinta Brunson for her creation of *Abbott Elementary*, an innovative, hilarious Black and woman-led sitcom that sheds light on the joy, struggle, dedication, and resilience of Philadelphia teachers and school communities.

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