

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 220201, **Version:** 0

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Honoring and commemorating the life and memory of Jennifer Bennetch and the impact of her housing activism on the City of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Jennifer Bennetch, a housing activist and resident of the 5th Council District, was born on December 13, 1985, in Middletown, DE, then moved to Philadelphia with her family as a teenager, grew up as a self-described tomboy playing baseball and football with the boys; and

WHEREAS, That grit and determination seemed to drive Jennifer as she spent the final years of her life fighting for the housing rights of the poor and underrepresented in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, After a dangerous altercation with the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) police in 2016, Jennifer began attending every PHA board meeting, spurred on by issues like quality of homes, the sale of PHA properties rather than developing them for low-income residents, and treatment of tenants by police with no uniforms traveling in unmarked vehicles; and

WHEREAS, Jennifer, who took paralegal classes at Community College of Philadelphia, began to speak publicly about the matters - to the press, other activists, lawmakers and any who would listen, eventually organized the first ever OccupyPHA sit-in in where she and others camped outside PHA headquarters for weeks protesting what they saw as unfair and unjust practices of the PHA; and

WHEREAS, Although Jennifer's style was considered confrontational by some, her relentless passion and willingness to speak truth to power garnered tangible results; and

WHEREAS, Jennifer watched an already impossible housing situation for many deteriorate further during the COVID-19 Pandemic, with some many people losing their jobs and being shut-out of shelters due to lowered occupancy levels; and

WHEREAS, In the midst of a long summer of protests against the police in June 2020, Jennifer along with other housing leaders seized the moment to highlight the housing shortage in Philadelphia, most prominently by establishing a housing encampment of nearly 150 people in the heart of Benjamin Franklin Parkway and another camp, again at PHA Headquarters, halting a planned \$52 million housing complex on the site; and

WHEREAS, The homeless and housing insecure flocked to the camps from all other the City, not only to make a statement about their predicament, but to access much needed food and services made possible through on-site mutual aid programs; and

WHEREAS, After many months of negotiations with the Mayor and Managing Director's Office, the Office of Homeless Services, PHA and other city officials, the group was able to secure 11 vacant homes for those in need, establish a Community Land Trust for permanent low income housing with long-term vacant City and PHA properties, and establish added protections to PHA residents and expansion of homeless services; and

WHEREAS, Jennifer's tireless efforts have shaped the housing landscape in Philadelphia for years to come; and

WHEREAS, Jennifer will be lovingly remembered by her many cherished friends and family, including two sons, Cole Bennetch and Yusuf Williams-Bey, a daughter Nafisa Williams-Bey, and brother; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby honors and commemorates the life and memory of the life and memory of Jennifer Bennetch and the impact of her housing activism on the City of Philadelphia.