



Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Special Committee on Gun Violence Prevention to conduct a hearing to develop a comprehensive approach to supporting youth who are at risk of being involved in or are currently involved in gun violence.

WHEREAS, The combined crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, gun violence, and housing instability have traumatized young Philadelphians, resulting in increased harm to self and others. In 2021, the US Surgeon General issued an advisory about the mental health crisis among youth, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, This mental health crisis contributed to a spike in gun violence among youth. The number of shooting victims under the age of 18 has been steadily growing since 2015. In 2015, 81 juvenile victims comprised 6.3% of all shooting victims. In 2021, 213 youth were shot, comprising 9.6% of total victims. Percent of youth arrested for gun violence has also grown from 5% of all arrestees (5 total) in 2017 to 17% (24 total) in 2022. While many factors may contribute to an increase in arrests among youth, these data points point to an alarming trend that the City must address; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia has suffered many high-profile events where the perpetrators or the victims were under the age of 18. These tragic events include the killing of Tiffany Fletcher at the Mill Creek Recreation Center; the shooting of five teenage students at Roxborough High School; the Shephard Recreation Center shooting and the most recent shooting at Overbrook High School; and

WHEREAS, Being a victim of a gun crime or witnessing community violence is a significant contributing factor to a young person feeling unsafe and choosing to protect themselves with a gun; and

WHEREAS, Community members frequently express frustration about not knowing where to go for support or how to connect to services when their children need help. When services can be identified, they are too often not delivered in time to save their children. Philadelphia's children and their parents are calling out for help and City government has a responsibility to do more to meet the need; and

WHEREAS, 93% of all individuals who were arrested for shootings had come into contact with either the criminal justice system, or a Health and Human Services agency, in most cases as early as their teen years.

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia's Roadmap to Safer Communities called for a public health approach to gun safety and outlined three recommendations for youth, based on national best-practices research. However, the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented the majority of those recommendations from being fully implemented; and

WHEREAS, The City provides an extensive array of services for youth, through the Office of Children and Families, Department of Human Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disability Services, the School District, and many others. However, the gaps identified by community members and the continuing growth in the number of young people involved in gun violence show that those services need to be augmented,

updated or provided more broadly; and

WHEREAS, Advocates have identified many areas of need for youth at risk for gun violence, including connections to well-paying jobs and affordable housing, reconnecting to school, access to mentors, family-based trauma and therapy supports, restorative justice programs and comprehensive reentry services; and

WHEREAS, The Controller's analysis of the funds committed to fight gun violence in the 2023 City budget showed that while the City invests considerably in prevention, only 17% of the City of Philadelphia budget was invested in Intervention Services; of that \$36 million, no programs are directly targeted towards youth; and

WHEREAS, Although the City previously had robust programs focused on youth, many programs have been reduced or discontinued, as funding for youth employment, programming and mental health care supports have been drastically cut; and

WHEREAS, Most of the programs in current set of prevention services for youth do not have publicly available data demonstrating their effectiveness. While many of the current programs may be producing results, it is critical to confirm this through independent studies; and

WHEREAS, Council President Darrell Clarke and Councilmembers Helen Gym, Curtis Jones, Kenyatta Johnson, Katherine Gilmore Richardson Isaiah Thomas and have worked extensively to bring resources to address the problem of youth involved in gun violence, and it is necessary to further explore this issue and identify effective supports for Philadelphia's young people; and

WHEREAS, Gun violence is a public health emergency. Every day of inadequate inaction creates a lifetime of consequences; and

WHEREAS, Today's youth are tomorrow's leaders. The future of Philadelphia depends on the City of Philadelphia investing in the development and wellbeing of our next generation. The City of Philadelphia must do everything within its power to support youth who have experienced the trauma of gun violence, keep them safe and make sure we are investing in everything they need to thrive and become leaders in the City; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Special Committee on Gun Violence Prevention to conduct a hearing to develop a comprehensive approach to supporting youth who are at risk of being involved in or are currently involved in gun violence.