Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development, and the Homeless to conduct hearings regarding discrimination against households holding tenant-based vouchers, putting thousands of vulnerable Philadelphians at risk of homelessness, and the effect of this discrimination on Philadelphia's affordable housing crisis.

WHEREAS, Since 1974, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, has provided rental assistance to low-income families in the private rental market under the Housing Choice Voucher Program; and

WHEREAS, Tenant-based vouchers were seen as a mechanism to increase affordable housing options for low-income families by allowing households to choose their own apartment on the private rental market and apply the voucher toward monthly rent; and

WHEREAS, The Housing Choice Voucher Program serves approximately 19,000 households in Philadelphia, making it the largest tenant-based voucher program in the City; and

WHEREAS, Tenant-based voucher programs have been implemented by government agencies and nonprofits alike, including the City of Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services, and nonprofits that serve populations that are disproportionately discriminated against on the housing market, such as resettling immigrants and young adults who have aged out of foster care; and

WHEREAS, Tenant-based vouchers serve families at much lower income than most new apartment buildings constructed with government funding, as well as new rent-restricted units created through the Zoning Code's various Mixed Income Housing and Mixed Income Neighborhoods provisions, with 75% of PHA's voucher households earning 30% of the region's Area Median Income or below; and

WHEREAS, The Fair Practices Ordinance protects tenants from unfair rental practices by landlords and prohibits landlords from refusing to rent based on a tenant's source of income, including tenant-based vouchers; and

WHEREAS, However, source of income discrimination is still preventing Philadelphians holding tenant-based vouchers from securing rental units on the private market, with more than 65% of Philadelphia landlords refusing to accept tenant-based vouchers; and

WHEREAS, The rate of rejections of tenant-based vouchers is even higher in neighborhoods with low poverty rates, with up to 83% of landlords refusing to accept vouchers; and

WHEREAS, Black Philadelphians are disproportionately affected by source of income discrimination. Although Black households only make up about 40% of the City's population, more than 80% of the 20,000 households holding tenant-based vouchers in Philadelphia are Black; and

WHEREAS, Widespread refusal to accept vouchers prevents low-income households from competing in a private rental market that is becoming increasingly hostile toward low-income tenants; and

WHEREAS, In the 3rd District, dozens of residents who have been forced out units that will not be retaining their affordability are unable to find landlords who will accept Housing Choice Vouchers, especially in amenity -rich West Philadelphia neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, In all but a few cases, these residents have been forced to move miles away from neighborhoods that they and their families have called home for generations to find a landlord that will accept Housing Choice Vouchers; and

WHEREAS, This is especially concerning considering the boom in development that has overtaken large swaths of West Philadelphia in recent years; and

WHEREAS, It is necessary to examine how source of income discrimination against households with tenant-based vouchers is undercutting Philadelphia's Housing Choice Voucher program, and how this discrimination is exacerbating the City's affordability crisis; and

WHEREAS, Action needs to be taken at the state, local and federal levels to best address source of income discrimination, and to create a path toward better enforcement of Philadelphia's Fair Practices Ordinance; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development and the Homeless to conduct hearings regarding discrimination against households holding tenant-based vouchers, putting thousands of vulnerable Philadelphians at risk of homelessness, and the effect of this discrimination on Philadelphia's affordable housing crisis.

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