

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the City Council Committee on Public Safety to hold public hearings to examine the open-air drug market and other barriers to clean, safe, crime-free streets in Kensington.

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia faces an ongoing opioid epidemic that has wreaked havoc on the 7th District for years. In 2021, there were a record 1,276 fatal overdoses in Philadelphia alone-more than in 31 states; and

WHEREAS, Kensington is home to more than 32,000 people within 1 square mile. It was a vibrant, thriving community until deindustrialization and redlining changed the neighborhood in the 1950s, as factories and homes became vacant and blight spread; and

WHEREAS, The neighborhood came to be called the “walmart of heroin” due to hosting the largest open-air narcotics market on the East Coast, with tens of thousands of drug deals each week. Hundreds of individuals live on the streets and the Conrail tracks, and have for decades, for faster access to heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, and other illegal substances. As a result, the ongoing public health crisis in Kensington includes garbage that litters the streets as quickly as residents and city workers clean it up, and widespread illegal dumping; and

WHEREAS, In 2023, the 7th District had more than 50% of the city’s arrests for drug dealing (1569 out of 3076 total arrests for Possession With Intent to Distribute) 22% of the city’s fatal shootings (105 out of 469 total for the city) and 25% of the city’s total shootings (547 out of 2193 total for the city); and

WHEREAS, Harm reduction advocates now distribute more than 4 million needles per year in Kensington to slow the spread of infectious disease. To help people become eligible for treatment and housing programs, they treat wounds that result from Xylazine, an animal tranquilizer first identified in Philadelphia’s street drug supply more than 15 years ago and still has no overdose reversal agent. Xylazine wounds-regardless of whether an individual injected, snorted, or smoked-lead to amputations; and

WHEREAS, A complex landscape of local, state, and federal laws complicate progress, leaving all residents of Kensington to face major ongoing quality of life issues; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, that it hereby authorizes the City Council Committee on Public Safety to hold public hearings to examine the open-air drug market and other barriers to clean, safe, crime-free streets in Kensington.