Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development to conduct a hearing on the City of Philadelphia's capacity to prepare individuals of all educational backgrounds for careers in the growing life sciences industry, with a focus on the cell and gene therapy subsector.

WHEREAS, Life sciences is a rapidly expanding industry in the city of Philadelphia with millions of square feet of lab space expected to open in the next two years. Additionally, Philadelphia region has received more than $8 billion in venture capital funding since 2021 and one billion per year from the National Institute of Health; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia is nationally recognized as the #5 city for life sciences, jumping four spots since 2021; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia was also ranked the #2 hub in the United States for the cell and gene therapy subsectors and is home to the first FDA-approved cell therapy and the first FDA-approved gene therapy; and

WHEREAS, Despite market turbulence, this industry is expected to continue growing; major development like 3201 Cuthbert (expected to be the city's largest life sciences research lab facility) and Hilco's Bellwether District that will include dozens of life sciences companies are actively under construction, while the Schuylkill Biotech Campus is in the final planning stages; and

WHEREAS, Mature cell and gene companies that receive FDA approval offer a range of opportunities including many jobs paying a living wage ($18-$23/ hour) and accessible to individuals with only a high school education such as manufacturing and lab tech positions; and

WHEREAS, There has been a 94% growth in the cell and gene therapy workforce; and

WHEREAS, Many life sciences companies located in areas immediately next to or accessible via public transit from high-poverty and high-unemployment neighborhoods such as Southwest Philadelphia and Kensington; and

WHEREAS, The training program created by partnership between the Chamber of Commerce, Iovance, Philadelphia Works, West Philadelphia Skills Initiative and Wistar Institute graduated its inaugural class in 2023 and demonstrated the possibility of successfully training and placing candidates with a high school education into lab tech jobs in a life sciences company; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia already contains the building blocks to create a robust workforce ecosystem. The School District of Philadelphia just completed a strategic plan that heavily emphasizes STEM education and Career and Technical Education. At the same time, the Community College of Philadelphia, the Commerce Department and several workforce development nonprofits have programs to prepare high school graduates, as well as individuals who have completed higher education, to jobs in life sciences; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia was also the recipient of a $23M grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration’s Good Jobs Challenge to create a workforce ecosystem in a number of industries including life sciences; and

WHEREAS, Despite all of these organizations assets, Philadelphia's current training capacity for positions that require high school degrees is fewer than a couple hundred graduates per year; and

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia needs to start training individuals today if we hope to have the workforce ready for the jobs that are coming in three to five years; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development to conduct a hearing to identify solutions to ensure that the citizens of Philadelphia are prepared to apply for and succeed in jobs within the life sciences industry and the cell and gene therapy subsector.

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