

Legislation Text

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Proposing an amendment to The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter providing for the creation of the Office of the Homeless Services Ombudsperson, and providing for the submission of the amendment to the electors of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Homelessness and housing insecurity continues to affect Philadelphians and the City is charged with providing high-quality services to those who are experiencing some of their darkest days; and

WHEREAS, Cities around the country are facing immense challenges with providing high-quality housing and shelter to those most in need, and despite significant spending for homeless services, Philadelphia is still not meeting the needs of our most vulnerable residents; and

WHEREAS, In Fiscal Year 2024 alone, the City of Philadelphia has allocated over \$80 million in General Fund resources to the Office of Homeless Services with an additional \$49 million in state and federal resources. Yet, City Council continues to hear of lack of resources, complaints about poor service quality, and issues with vendor payments; and

WHEREAS, Throughout the FY24 budget process, it has come to the attention of City Council that there are significant issues with resources and spending in the Office of Homeless Services and a litany of unresolved grievances with shelter providers from residents experiencing homelessness; and

WHEREAS, Due to the significant concerns already identified by City Council and ongoing investigations by the Office of the Inspector General, it is crucial that we establish additional oversight and safeguards for individuals and families experiencing homelessness; and

WHEREAS, Under Section 6 of the First Class City Home Rule Act (53 P.S. §13106), an amendment to The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter may be proposed by a resolution of the Council of the City of Philadelphia adopted with the concurrence of two-thirds of its elected members; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the following amendment to The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter is hereby proposed and shall be submitted to the electors of the City on an election date designated by ordinance:

ARTICLE III - EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE BRANCH - ORGANIZATION

CHAPTER 1

OFFICERS, DEPARTMENTS, BOARDS, COMMISSIONS AND OTHER AGENCIES

§3-100. Executive and Administrative Officers, Departments, Boards, Commissions and Agencies Designated.

The executive and administrative work of the City shall be performed by:

(a) The following elected or appointed officers:

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Victim Advocate;
Homeless Services Ombudsperson.

* * *

CHAPTER 2 ELECTION OR APPOINTMENT

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§ 3-215. *Homeless Services Ombudsperson.*

The Mayor, with the advice and consent of a majority of all the members of the Council, shall appoint the Homeless Services Ombudsperson.

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ARTICLE IV EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE BRANCH - POWERS AND DUTIES

The Mayor, The City Representative and Departments, Boards, Commissions and Offices under the Mayor

* * *

CHAPTER 29

OFFICE OF THE HOMELESS SERVICES OMBUDSPERSON

§ 4-2900. *Creation.*

The Office of the Homeless Services Ombudsperson is hereby created, headed by the Homeless Services Ombudsperson.

§ 4-2901. *Powers and Duties.*

The Office of the Homeless Services Ombudsperson shall have the power and its duty shall be to perform the following functions:

(a) Act as an advocate for Philadelphians experiencing homelessness and their families. Such advocacy may pertain not only to broader issues of law, policy, practice, and resources, but also to

individual judicial, administrative and investigative matters, as necessary and prudent. The Office shall develop a particular expertise and focus on the shelter system, given its significant cost to Philadelphia taxpayers and concerns regarding service quality;

(b) The powers and duties of the Ombudsperson includes the power to conduct investigations, including the power to subpoena testimony and records to the extent legally permissible;

(c) Facilitate coordination and planning among governmental and non-governmental entities that serve or otherwise interact with Philadelphians experiencing homelessness;

(d) Provide training and technical assistance to enhance the work of governmental and non-governmental entities that serve or otherwise interact with Philadelphians experiencing homelessness;

(e) Ensure that Philadelphians experiencing homelessness are notified of their rights and that such rights are vindicated;

(f) Serve as a liaison between Philadelphians experiencing homelessness and City government;

(g) Educate the public regarding issues affecting Philadelphians experiencing homelessness;

(h) Review relevant annual audits by the City Controller, as required by section 6-400, and as it deems necessary request that the Controller audit relevant contracts;

(i) Investigate complaints regarding the interactions with Philadelphians experiencing homelessness by government, government-funded agencies, and government-funded contractors;

(j) Evaluate and investigate grievances reported by Philadelphians experiencing homelessness, address unresolved grievances or dissatisfied outcomes, and provide mediation services;

(k) Examine issues of general importance to Philadelphians experiencing homelessness and publish findings and recommendations;

(l) Track strategic data and formulate and advocate for policy recommendations within City government;

(m) Convene an advisory board composed of community representatives, practitioners, experts, and other stakeholders and facilitate collaboration with other City advisory boards focused on homelessness and homeless services;

(n) Hold public hearings as necessary to address systemic challenges within the homeless services system;

(o) Take such action as is necessary to fully realize the powers and duties specified above.

Explanation:

Italics indicate new matter added.

~~Strikethrough~~ indicates matter deleted.