



City of Philadelphia

City Council
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Legislation Text

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Authorizing a Joint Hearing of the City Council Committee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Technology and Information Services on the use of electronic monitoring or Global Positioning Systems (GPS) for youth involved with Philadelphia's Juvenile Justice System.

WHEREAS, The spending of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services Juvenile Justice Services Division has decreased from \$99 million in FY2017 to \$68.1 million in FY2022; the number of Philadelphia youth placed in secure detention decreased from 2,499 in CY2019 to 1,733 in CY2023; and the number of youth served by the Juvenile Probation Office also declined, from 3,637 in FY2017 to 2,050 in FY2023; and

WHEREAS, Despite this overall reduction, racial disparities persist in the juvenile justice system. According to FY22 data from the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission Annual Report, in Philadelphia, Black youth account for 78% of delinquency dispositions. Black youth are also disproportionately represented in the use of secure detention, comprising 82% of secure detention admissions in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Electronic monitoring has been utilized in Philadelphia as a means to monitor and supervise youth involved in the juvenile justice system, presenting one, but not the only, alternative to secure detention. During the COVID-19 pandemic, GPS surveillance was increasingly used as an alternative to placement to reduce the risk of virus transmission in congregate settings; and

WHEREAS, The number of youth monitored by Philadelphia juvenile probation using electronic monitoring as an alternative to incarceration has increased over time, from 1,500 youth monitored in FY2017 to 1,720 youth in FY2023. This has contributed to a "GPS culture", where GPS surveillance is now a prevalent method for managing youth in the juvenile justice system; and

WHEREAS, While GPS surveillance aims to provide an alternative to detention, it can also significantly restrict access to normal activities and essential services for youth. Many youths under GPS surveillance face barriers to participating in supportive programs, mental health services, and other prosocial activities because their GPS officers, who coordinate with the juvenile probation office, often do not approve these opportunities. This limitation underscores that GPS monitoring is not a blanket solution for all youth; and

WHEREAS, There is limited additional data available about the use of electronic monitoring for juveniles in Philadelphia, including but not limited to: the degree to which GPS is truly used as an alternative to youth incarceration; monitoring outcomes; discharge rates (both positive and negative); utilization according to gender, race, and ethnicity; average duration of monitoring; frequency and severity of probation violations related to electronic monitoring, especially those that result in commitment to secure detention; and opportunities and barriers related to engagement in employment and other prosocial activities; and

WHEREAS, It is crucial to thoroughly examine the costs, potential benefits, limitations, concerns, and implications of implementing electronic monitoring programs for children within the City of Philadelphia, including:

1. The benefits and limitations of the use of electronic monitoring for youth in Philadelphia;
2. The impact of electronic monitoring on re-arrest rates, incarceration rates, and other juvenile justice outcomes;
3. Ethical and privacy concerns associated with electronic monitoring; and
4. The impact of GPS surveillance on access to normal activities and essential services, including supportive programs and mental health services; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby authorizes the City Council Committee on Children and Youth and the Committee on Technology and Information Services to hold a joint public hearing providing an opportunity for youth and their caregivers, system stakeholders, and other experts to present their perspectives, research, and experiences related to electronic monitoring for children.