

Legislation Text

File #: 240989, **Version:** 0

Authorizing the Council Committee on Streets and Services to hold hearings to investigate the practice of “courtesy towing” by the Philadelphia Police Department, the Philadelphia Parking Authority, and private towing companies.

WHEREAS, Relocation towing, more commonly known as “courtesy towing,” is a practice where vehicles parked on streets that need to be closed for emergencies, construction, road maintenance, snow removal, or special events are towed away from their parking spot; and

WHEREAS, Flaws in the current system have resulted in undocumented and untracked relocations of vehicles towed by government and private; and

WHEREAS, In some circumstances vehicles are towed down the block or around the corner. However, in many cases, vehicles are towed as far as a mile away, inconveniencing vehicle owners who spend hours searching for their vehicles; and

WHEREAS, There have been instances where legally parked vehicles have been courtesy towed to illegal parking spots, where they are then ticketed, forcing owners to contest the unfair tickets in court with no way to prove they did not willfully park their vehicles illegally; and

WHEREAS, The Philadelphia Police Department’s policy is to enter handwritten logs of relocated vehicles faxed over to the police radio room into a searchable database, and rely on owners of vehicles to call 911 and report their vehicles missing; and

WHEREAS, When there is no record of a courtesy towing, vehicle owners are encouraged to file stolen vehicle reports to track down the vehicle, wasting police resources and in one instance leading to a woman’s arrest in another state after her relocated vehicle was recovered but its stolen vehicle status not updated by the Philadelphia Police Department; and

WHEREAS, Through a Right-to-Know request, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* obtained relocation logs from the Police Department and the Philadelphia Parking Authority. They discovered thousands of vehicles courtesy towed between 2016 and 2020, with the 2400 block of Ellsworth Street being a popular relocation spot; and

WHEREAS, The report noted that there is often a lack of communication between towing parties and the Philadelphia Police department where many of the tows did not appear in the police logs; and

WHEREAS, There are no uniform policies among towing parties underscoring the confusion and inconsistency that leads to frustration for Philadelphia vehicle owners; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia drivers have been frustrated with the bureaucratic nightmare of getting their vehicles back, with some viewing courtesy towing as little more than a money making scheme; and

WHEREAS, Class-action lawsuits have been filed against the City of Philadelphia over its practice of courtesy towing, necessitating solutions that avoid hefty payouts to inconvenienced drivers that could be avoided by the City simply adopting best practices from other cities; and

WHEREAS, The City of Philadelphia settled two 2021 lawsuits for \$15,000 relating to aggrieved owners of vehicles that were relocated; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia's practice of courtesy towing is so infamous it was featured during a segment of the award winning *The Daily Show* in September 2024. The City of Philadelphia must remediate its reputation for being unable to properly track relocated vehicles to the inconvenience of Philadelphia drivers; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That the Committee on Streets and Services is hereby authorized to hold hearings regarding the practice of "courtesy towing" by the Philadelphia Police Department, the Philadelphia Parking Authority, and private towing companies.