

A RESOLUTION

Authorizing the Committees on Finance and on Gun Violence Prevention to hold joint hearings regarding the connection between poverty, gun violence, and systemic racism in Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, according to the latest U.S. Census data, the overall poverty rate in Philadelphia is an unacceptable 24.5% (nearly 380,000 residents), the highest of the ten largest U.S. cities, and of the City's 43% African American population, a disproportionate 29.4% live below the federal poverty line; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Census Bureau also indicates that just 6.3% of all businesses with employees in Philadelphia were owned by African Americans even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a staggeringly low proportion considering the City's substantial Black population that demonstrates the significant level of racial economic privation in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on Philadelphia's African American businesses, with the number of active Black business owners having fallen by 68% between March and July 2020, according to the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, compared to a 44% reduction of active white business owners during this same period; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only illuminated the issues of poverty in and economic disparity for the African American community, but has heightened the urgency to address gun violence in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, Philadelphia recorded 499 homicides, which is the highest murder total since 1990 and 75 people have been slain in Philadelphia as of this last week of February 2021, a 42% increase from the same time last year; and

WHEREAS, the significant increase in homicides locally and nationally coincides with spikes in joblessness, social isolation, economic precarity, and the reduction of African American businesses, a critical factor in Philadelphia's inability to reduce its already too high rate of poverty; and

WHEREAS, the inability to secure existing Black businesses – let alone increase their number or grow their size – and reduce poverty are connected to issues of systemic racism that have historically plagued our country and challenged Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, budgets reflect values and priorities, and therefore the City's budget must demonstrate our interest in investing in people by promoting jobs skills, entrepreneurship, and realignment of the City's operations to enable equitable access, operations, and outcomes; and

WHEREAS, to achieve our moral imperative to reduce the number of homicides in Philadelphia, we must examine this increase in gun violence and its correlation with the issues of poverty and systemic racism; and

WHEREAS, in order to ensure the safety and to improve the quality of life of Philadelphia residents, this connection must be acknowledged and addressed with an eye toward developing comprehensive strategies and initiatives to combat these issues. Now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby authorize the Committees on Finance and on Gun Violence People to hold joint hearings regarding the connection between poverty, gun violence, and systemic racism in Philadelphia.

Introduced by:

Councilmember Derek S. Green

Co-sponsored by:

Councilmember Kenyatta Johnson

Councilmember Maria Quiñones Sánchez

Councilmember Isaiah Thomas

February 25, 2021