



PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Ben Wilcox

benjamin.wilcox@phila.gov

**Majority Whip Thomas, Minority Whip O'Rourke Introduce
Charter Change Legislation To Begin Prison Oversight Process**

The measure has the support of a supermajority of Council

PHILADELPHIA, PA– City Councilmember and Majority Whip Isaiah Thomas (D- At Large), in collaboration with Minority Whip Nicolas O'Rourke (Working Families- At Large), introduced on Thursday, after nearly two years of stakeholder engagement, legislation **“proposing an amendment to the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter to provide for the creation of the Philadelphia Prison Community Oversight Board and the Office of Prison Oversight.”**

For years, Philadelphia's prisons have been under scrutiny critical understaffing, inmate overdoses and deaths, high profile escapes, general cleanliness, and maintenance, all of which precede this Administration and Council body. **Council looks to work collaboratively to remedy these long standing but fixable issues.**

On August 23rd, following a damning decision with a \$25 million penalty by U.S. District Court Judge Gerald McHugh holding Philadelphia's prisons in contempt for poor conditions, Councilmembers Thomas and O'Rourke sent a joint letter to Philadelphia Commissioner of Prisons Michael Resnick. The letter emphasized that, in addition to **“human rights and civil rights violations being committed on State Road,”** we are losing **“taxpayer funds to near-constant lawsuits and protracted court proceedings that extend costly stays** in Philadelphia Department of Prisons facilities.”

“I am proud to begin this Prison Oversight process in the wake of multiple recent tragedies in our city operated prisons,” **Councilmember Thomas said**, adding that “we have a duty to keep our incarcerated populations safe, secure and healthy while they are under our watch, regardless of the circumstance that found them incarcerated.”

“City Council must confront the crisis in our jails, our incarcerated constituents cannot fall out of sight or out of mind,” **Councilmember O'Rourke said**. “Decade after decade, in the streets and the halls of power, Philadelphians have demanded public oversight of law enforcement. That call includes Philly Prisons, and we're ready to answer.”

The duties of the Office of Prison Oversight, housed within the Office of Public Safety, would include, among other responsibilities, 1) **increasing transparency and accountability** within the City's correctional institutions, 2) **providing recommendations** upon review of Philadelphia Department of Prisons (PDP) policies and practices, 3) **accessing and monitoring** PDP facilities, databases and documents, and meeting with staff and incarcerated people, and 4) developing **community education programs**.

The charter change must be approved by the electorate via ballot measure in Spring 2025.

This legislation is cosponsored by Council President Johnson and Councilmembers Ahmad, Bass, Brooks, Driscoll, Gauthier, Harry, Jones, Landau, Lozada, O'Neill, Phillips, Squilla, and Young.

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