

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 550 Session of 2013

INTRODUCED BY HARHAI, GILLESPIE, SCHLOSSBERG, R. MILLER, COHEN, KOTIK, KIRKLAND, HAGGERTY, LUCAS, B. BOYLE, KINSEY, V. BROWN, BROWNLEE, CALTAGIRONE, JAMES, YOUNGBLOOD, BOBACK, BIZZARRO, SCHREIBER, READSHAW, HENNESSEY, SWANGER, DAVIS, MAHONEY, GODSHALL, WHITE, KORTZ, PARKER, GINGRICH, ROSS, MURT, FARINA, REED, CLYMER, MAJOR, GRELL, FLECK, GOODMAN, THOMAS, MCNEILL, DELISSIO, WATSON, SABATINA AND SCAVELLO, NOVEMBER 13, 2013

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, NOVEMBER 13, 2013

A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Joint State Government Commission to establish a
 2 bipartisan legislative task force and an advisory committee
 3 to conduct a study of the occurrence, effects and trends of
 4 homelessness in Pennsylvania and to report its findings and
 5 recommendations to the House of Representatives.

6 WHEREAS, Shelter is a basic human need; and

7 WHEREAS, A stable, quality, affordable home promotes family
 8 stability, physical and mental health and enhances both adults'
 9 and children's ability to be productive. Conversely, the lack of
 10 a stable, quality, affordable home increases the risk of
 11 illness, failure at school, inability to find or hold a job,
 12 incarceration and nursing home placement, often at public
 13 expense; and

14 WHEREAS, In 2011, more than 34,000 Pennsylvanians spent at
 15 least one night in an emergency or transitional housing program,
 16 not including those individuals living on the street, under
 17 bridges, in parks or sleeping in someone else's house

1 temporarily; and

2 WHEREAS, The National Alliance to End Homelessness reported
3 an estimated 235,000 Pennsylvanians as living doubled up in
4 someone else's house temporarily in 2011; and

5 WHEREAS, In Pennsylvania, statistics show that family,
6 veteran and chronic homelessness have all risen between 2011 and
7 2012; and

8 WHEREAS, Homeless pregnant mothers are less likely to have
9 received adequate prenatal care and more likely to be young and
10 without a high school education; and

11 WHEREAS, Children born to homeless mothers are more likely to
12 be born prematurely and at a low birth weight. These children
13 have higher than average rates of chronic health conditions such
14 as asthma, evidence high rates of chronic ear infections and are
15 at increased risk for iron-deficiency anemia and lead toxicity;
16 and

17 WHEREAS, In Pennsylvania, more than 9,400 children spent at
18 least one night in emergency or transitional housing in 2011,
19 nearly 60% of whom are less than six years of age; and

20 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania school districts provided services to
21 20,556 homeless children and youth in 2010-2011; and

22 WHEREAS, For many children, homelessness represents many
23 risks, including the likelihood of experiencing an array of
24 health challenges; and

25 WHEREAS, In addition to health-related risks, research
26 demonstrates that children experiencing homelessness are more
27 likely to have been exposed to family violence; and

28 WHEREAS, Almost 40% of children served by emergency housing
29 programs experienced substantiated abuse or neglect and more
30 than 20% had been placed in out-of-home care by the end of the

1 second grade; and

2 WHEREAS, The effects of childhood homelessness do not end
3 with childhood. Homeless children experience higher rates of
4 physical and sexual risk behaviors and are more likely to
5 partake in illegal substances; and

6 WHEREAS, Homeless children show higher rates of poor mental
7 health, are less likely to graduate from high school and are
8 more likely to end up incarcerated; and

9 WHEREAS, The adverse influence of childhood homelessness on
10 children's health, development and well-being is associated with
11 short-term and long-term societal costs that far exceed the cost
12 of providing shelter alone and creates a costly toll on society;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, Funding for the Homeless Assistance Program in
15 Pennsylvania has decreased by \$8,000,000 since 2008; and

16 WHEREAS, The high demand for housing and other causative
17 factors of homelessness compelled counties in Pennsylvania to
18 increase their emergency housing units for families by 12% from
19 2009-2011; therefore be it

20 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission be
21 directed to establish a bipartisan legislative task force to
22 investigate, review and make recommendations of the causes and
23 impacts of homelessness in Pennsylvania; and be it further

24 RESOLVED, That the task force be authorized to hold public
25 hearings, take testimony and conduct site visits; and be it
26 further

27 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission oversee
28 the creation of an advisory committee of no fewer than 13
29 members to assist the task force in its study and
30 recommendations; and be it further

1 RESOLVED, That the advisory committee be a bipartisan, broad-
2 based and geographically diverse representation among the
3 business, faith, community, labor, local government and human
4 services communities and individuals affected by poverty; and be
5 it further

6 RESOLVED, That the advisory committee be comprised of at
7 least:

8 (1) one representative from the executive branch;

9 (2) four representatives of agencies that work with
10 homeless Pennsylvanians, with every reasonable effort made to
11 include diverse homeless populations, such as veterans,
12 people with disabilities, families with children, single
13 individuals, senior citizens and victims of domestic
14 violence;

15 (3) individuals from the general public; and

16 (4) two individuals from each of the Southeastern,
17 Northeastern, Central and Western geographic regions of this
18 Commonwealth;

19 and be it further

20 RESOLVED, That the advisory committee examine data, interview
21 individuals and families, survey communities through methods
22 decided by the committee and examine successful strategies used
23 in other states' poverty reduction efforts; and be it further

24 RESOLVED, That additional assistance in this endeavor be
25 provided by the Urban Affairs Committee of the House of
26 Representatives; and be it further

27 RESOLVED, That the task force, with the assistance of the
28 advisory committee:

29 (1) Review other recent studies of homelessness from
30 around the country.

1 (2) Research and review the cost factor of homelessness
2 that shall include health care costs, education, mental
3 health, incarceration rates and other factors.

4 (3) Undertake a comprehensive analysis of Pennsylvania's
5 homelessness problem to determine what policy
6 recommendations, if any, would move the Commonwealth toward
7 permanently reducing and eliminating homelessness.

8 (4) Examine other matters that it deems important;
9 and be it further

10 RESOLVED, That the task force propose new legislation, if
11 necessary and appropriate; and be it further

12 RESOLVED, That the task force and advisory committee choose a
13 chairperson from among its members; and be it further

14 RESOLVED, That members of the task force and advisory
15 committee serve without compensation, but be reimbursed for
16 necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties,
17 within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made
18 available to the task force and advisory committee for their
19 purposes. All members of the task force or advisory committee
20 who are duly elected members of the General Assembly shall
21 remain members of the task force or advisory committee until
22 they report their findings and recommendations to the House of
23 Representatives; and be it further

24 RESOLVED, That all State, county and municipal agencies,
25 departments, boards, bureaus and commissions cooperate fully
26 with the task force and advisory committee; and be it further

27 RESOLVED, That the task force and advisory committee report
28 their findings and recommendations to the House of
29 Representatives no later than two years after the adoption of
30 this resolution.