

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, November 5, 2025
3:18 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN MARK SQUILLA, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JAMIE GAUTHIER
COUNCILMAN MIKE DRISCOLL

ALSO PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS

BILLS: 250888, 250916
RESOLUTION: 250028

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COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

3

Good morning -- good afternoon,

4

everyone. Sorry for the delay.

5

Today the Committee on Commerce and

6

Economic Development. We welcome

7

us to the hearing. I note that the

8

hour's come and a quorum of the

9

committee is present.

10

For the record, we have

11

Councilmember Gauthier on my left,

12

Councilmember Driscoll and

13

Councilmember Thomas all present

14

for the hearing. A quick

15

procedural note. We're going to

16

hear testimony on Bill Nos. 250888

17

and 250916. We'll then proceed

18

into a public meeting to consider

19

actions on those bills and then we

20

will go back into a hearing for the

21

resolution on No. 250881.

22

Now that a quorum has

23

been committed, the hearing is now

24

called to order. This is a public

1 hearing of the Committee on
2 Commerce and Economic Development
3 regarding Bill Nos. 250888 and
4 250916.

5 Mr. McMonagle, please
6 call the titles of the bills.

7 THE CLERK: Bill No.
8 250888, amending Title 9 of The
9 Philadelphia Code, entitled
10 "Regulation of Businesses, Trades
11 and Professions" by adding a new
12 chapter to prohibit third party
13 restaurant reservation services
14 from arranging unauthorized
15 restaurant reservations with food
16 service establishments and to
17 provide for definitions, prohibited
18 acts, penalties and enforcement,
19 all under certain terms and
20 conditions.

21 And Bill No. 250916,
22 granting permission to have
23 Haverford Business Association to
24 install and maintain encroachments

1 in the nature of decorative
2 lighting fixtures attached to
3 existing facilities owned by the
4 City or other entities, subject to
5 the owner's consent, all under
6 certain terms and conditions.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

8 Thank you, Mr. McMonagle. Will you
9 please call the first panel to
10 testify on Bill No. 250888.

11 THE CLERK: Can we
12 please have Sarah Adamo.

13 (Witness approached
14 witness table.)

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

16 Good afternoon, Sarah. Just state
17 your name for the record and
18 proceed with your testimony.

19 MS. ADAMO: Good
20 afternoon, Chairperson Squilla,
21 members of the Committee on
22 Commerce and Economic Development.
23 My name is Sarah Adamo and I am the
24 Director of Zoning and Legislation

1 for the Department of Licenses and
2 Inspections Quality of Life.

3 Today I'm here to
4 provide testimony on Bill No.
5 250888, introduced by Councilmember
6 Thomas which, if enacted, will
7 amend Title 9 of The Philadelphia
8 Code, entitled "Regulation of
9 Businesses, Trades and Professions"
10 by adding a new chapter and
11 prohibiting by adding new chapter
12 to prohibit third party restaurant
13 reservation services from arranging
14 unauthorized restaurant
15 reservations with food service
16 establishments and to provide for
17 definitions, prohibited acts,
18 penalties and enforcement, all
19 under certain terms and conditions.

20 This legislation
21 requires that third party
22 reservation services obtain written
23 authorization from food service
24 establishments prior to charging or

1 collecting a fee for a reservation
2 for a restaurant. This bill also
3 gives the Department of Licenses
4 and Inspections the authority to
5 enforce this requirement.

6 The department is
7 prepared to initiate a complaint-
8 based enforcement system where a
9 restaurant can submit documentation
10 showing that a third party
11 reservation service is in violation
12 of the law and L&I QOL will respond
13 by issuing the appropriate
14 violation.

15 We would request an
16 amendment to the bill requiring
17 third party reservation services to
18 maintain written records of
19 authorizations received from
20 restaurants. This would make it
21 easier for an entity to disprove a
22 violation, and the failure to
23 maintain such records would
24 constitute its own violation and

1 serve as evidence of a lack of
2 authority in enforcing or
3 establishing a violation.

4 Thank you for the
5 opportunity to provide this
6 testimony on behalf of the
7 Department of Licenses and
8 Inspections Quality of Life.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

10 Thank you, Sarah, so much for your
11 testimony. Do you have a copy of
12 the recommended amendment?

13 MS. ADAMO: I don't have
14 a draft of the recommended
15 amendment, but we could draft
16 something up for you.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

18 Yeah. If you could draft it and
19 get that to us, I think it would be
20 considerate.

21 Councilmember Thomas.

22 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

23 Thank you for your testimony. I
24 just want to go on the record to

1 the members of the Committee that I
2 am open to working with the
3 Administration as long as they're
4 willing to work with the
5 stakeholders who are most impacted
6 by the legislation to be able to
7 discuss further amendments if the
8 members of the Committee agree to
9 vote it out of committee today. So
10 just want to put that on the record
11 as well.

12 MS. ADAMO: Thank you.

13 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

14 Thank you.

15 MS. ADAMO: We're happy
16 to work together.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

18 Thank you. We will also be able to
19 vote this out of committee and then
20 amend it on the floor, if
21 necessary, once there is an
22 agreement. Thank you so much.

23 Are there any other
24 questions?

1 (No response.)

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

3 Seeing none, is there anyone else
4 here to testify on Bill No. --

5 THE CLERK: Can we
6 please have the members of the
7 Pennsylvania Restaurant Lodging
8 Association?

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
10 This is Bill No. 250888 still.

11 (Witnesses approached
12 witness table.)

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
14 Good afternoon. Just state your
15 name and start.

16 MR. FILECCIA: Good
17 afternoon. My name is Ben Fileccia
18 and I serve as the Vice-President
19 of Strategy Engagement for the
20 Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging
21 Association. I'm joined today by
22 Chris D'Ambro of Southwark and
23 Ambra.

24 The PRLA represents tens

1 of thousands of restaurants,
2 hotels, hospitality businesses
3 across the Commonwealth, including
4 thousands here right in
5 Philadelphia. And I want to thank
6 Councilman Thomas for introducing
7 this proactive piece of legislation
8 and for his continued partnership
9 with the restaurant community.

10 This bill addresses a
11 growing issue that many operators
12 face, unauthorized third party
13 reservation scalpers listing
14 restaurants without their knowledge
15 or consent. When a diner books a
16 table through an unauthorized
17 platform, they believe they've made
18 a legitimate reservation, but the
19 restaurant often has no record of
20 it. That leads to confusion, lost
21 revenue and frustrated guests.

22 It then damages the
23 reputation of the business through
24 no fault of their own. These

1 services sell or resell
2 reservations, profiting off
3 restaurant inventory they don't
4 control. And that's unfair, it's
5 deceptive and it's harmful to both
6 restaurants and our consumers.

7 This legislation is
8 about transparency and fairness.
9 It ensures that reservations are
10 made only through authorized
11 systems so that diners know they
12 have a table and restaurants can
13 manage their seating and staffing
14 responsibly. It's a simple
15 commonsense protection that gives
16 small businesses back control of
17 their own operations.

18 Philadelphia
19 restaurants, seen as one of the
20 most celebrated in the country, we
21 are home to James Beard Award
22 winners, nationally recognized
23 chefs, three of North America's 50
24 best restaurants in 2025, and soon

1 the Michelin Guide Northeast
2 ceremony will take place right here
3 in our city and award our talented
4 Philadelphians with Michelin Stars
5 and Big Gourmands.

6 And in just a few months
7 as we welcome visitors from around
8 the world for the 2026 World Cup
9 and other global events, our
10 restaurants will be the front door
11 to Philadelphia's hospitality. By
12 passing this ordinance now, the
13 City is taking a forward-thinking,
14 proactive step to protect the
15 integrity of our dining experience
16 before the problems grow larger.

17 It sends a clear
18 message: Philadelphia values its
19 restaurants, respects its guests
20 and supports a fair business
21 environment. So on behalf of the
22 Pennsylvania Restaurant and Lodging
23 Association, I urge Council to move
24 this bill forward. This is smart,

1 balanced legislation that benefits
2 everyone, operators, workers and
3 consumers alike. Thank you again,
4 Councilmember Thomas, for your
5 leadership and thank you all for
6 your time and support of the
7 hospitality community that helps
8 Philadelphia become and continue to
9 be a world-class city. Thank you.

10 MR. D'AMBRO: Good
11 morning, members of City Council.
12 My name is Chris D'Ambro. My wife
13 and I own two businesses in Queen
14 Village, Southwark and Ambra. We
15 want to thank Councilmember Thomas
16 for introducing this important
17 piece of legislation and its
18 ongoing support of Philadelphia's
19 restaurant community. We're also
20 grateful to the Pennsylvania
21 Restaurant and Lodging Association
22 for its continued advocacy on
23 behalf of small operators like us.

24 Until recently, we were

1 unaware of websites such as
2 Appointment Trader were listing and
3 reselling restaurant reservations
4 without permission. When we
5 learned about it, we were shocked.
6 These listings are misleading to
7 diners, making them think they have
8 legitimate reservations at our
9 restaurants when they really don't.

10 The result is confusion,
11 disappointment and frustration for
12 guests and it damages the
13 reputation of restaurants that work
14 so hard to create a personal and
15 intentional dining experience.
16 Philadelphia's restaurant scene is
17 built on trust, trust between
18 guests, restaurants and the city
19 itself.

20 Unauthorized reservation
21 listings break the trust of that.
22 This legislation restores control
23 to the people who actually run the
24 restaurants and ensures that guests

1 know the reservations are real. We
2 want to acknowledge the timing of
3 this effort. Philadelphia is about
4 to host the Michelin Guide in a few
5 weeks on the 18th and we're proud
6 to be invited to attend as the
7 world's attention turns towards our
8 city.

9 This proactive
10 legislation sends a clear message
11 Philadelphia supports its
12 restaurants, values, transparency
13 and protects the integrity of our
14 hospitality industry. We strongly
15 support this bill and urge its
16 passage. It's a commonsense,
17 forward-thinking measure that will
18 help restaurants like ours continue
19 to thrive and maintain the trust of
20 our guests. Thank you for your
21 time, your leadership, commitment
22 to the hospitality community that
23 makes Philadelphia so special.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

1 Thank you. Thank you so much, both
2 for your testimony and willingness
3 to work with Councilmember Thomas
4 to sponsor a bill and the
5 Administration on future amendment,
6 hopefully to be able to get this
7 bill passed before the end of the
8 year.

9 And one question I had
10 because honestly I support this
11 wholeheartedly, but there was
12 another question. I saw some news
13 reports about people even putting
14 fake reviews up there on social
15 media and things like that.

16 MR. FILECCIA: That
17 started with Chris.

18 MR. D'AMBRO: My wife
19 and I, yeah, both of our
20 restaurants we received over 35
21 one-star reviews for both of our
22 businesses. This was like Thursday
23 or Friday night. Since then,
24 Google's worked to take them down.

1 Most of them I believe are down.
2 But it's a scary thing to have your
3 reputation smeared within an hour
4 and then have somebody to extort
5 you for the removal of such
6 reviews. It's kind of, you know,
7 we know the refrigerator is going
8 to break, but that was a new one
9 for us this week.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
11 maybe we could work with our
12 sponsor here to see maybe if
13 there's something else that we
14 could do, because these platforms
15 are used by others to search, to go
16 out to restaurants. And like you
17 said, Ben, Philadelphia is known
18 for the restaurant scene. We have
19 great restaurants and you could
20 talk about any other city, but
21 Philadelphia is the top. And to
22 have people go in there -- and why
23 they do it, I mean, I guess they
24 wanted you to take them down and

1 get paid for you to take them down?

2 MR. FILECCIA: We
3 reached out to them. So did
4 Michael Klein with the Philadelphia
5 Inquirer, and we found a gentleman
6 from Pakistan who had posted the
7 reviews or said -- he didn't post
8 the reviews, but he could take them
9 down for \$250. And when we were
10 skeptical, he said mark one right
11 now and watch me take it down.

12 And sure enough, he was
13 able to remove that.
14 Unfortunately, it's out of our
15 country, kind of out of our hands,
16 but it's definitely a serious
17 problem. A lot of times,
18 especially when we have visitors
19 come to the city, they're going to
20 be looking at Yelp reviews, at
21 Google reviews, at Open Table
22 reviews, and we want to hope that
23 they are true reviews, you know.

24 But when you go from a

1 4.9 reviewed restaurant to the next
2 day a 3-star restaurant, when
3 somebody sees that, when a guest
4 sees that for the first time, they
5 skip over. They're not going to
6 your spot. So it is an issue that
7 I think will need to be tackled in
8 the coming years.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

10 Well, maybe we could work with you
11 guys and those platforms to see how
12 we could put better protections in
13 place for them, because again they
14 should be liable for their
15 platforms and having people do this
16 is a challenge. But I know that's
17 not why we're here today, but I
18 just wanted to bring that up,
19 obviously as that could be a future
20 concern moving forward.

21 Any other questions?

22 (No response.)

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

24 Seeing none, thank you so much for

1 your testimony.

2 MR. FILECCIA: Thank
3 you.

4 MR. D'AMBRO: Thank you.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
6 Mr. McMonagle, is anybody else here
7 to testify on Bill No. 250888?

8 THE CLERK: We have no
9 further witnesses for that.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
11 Thank you. Can you please read --

12 THE CLERK: Bill No.
13 250916, can we please have Richard
14 Montanez from the Streets
15 Department.

16 (Witness approached
17 witness table.)

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
19 Rich, state your name for the
20 record and proceed with your
21 testimony.

22 MR. MONTANEZ: Good
23 afternoon, Chairman Squilla,
24 members of the Council on Economic

1 Development Committee. My name is
2 Richard Montanez. I'm the First
3 Deputy Commissioner for the
4 Department of Streets. I'm here to
5 offer testimony on Bill No. 250916,
6 introduced by Councilmember Jones.

7 This bill authorizes the
8 Haverford Business Association and
9 its successors, assigned and agents
10 to install and maintain
11 encroachments in the nature of
12 decorative light fixtures in the
13 public right-of-way attached to
14 existing facilities owned by the
15 City of Philadelphia or other
16 entities subject to the owner's
17 concession.

18 No more than 14
19 decorative lights will be placed on
20 the existing facilities in the
21 right-of-way along the sidewalk
22 frontage of Haverford Ave situated
23 along Haverford Ave between
24 Woodbine Ave and City Ave, as

1 designated by the Philadelphia
2 Office of Property Assessment.

3 The Department of
4 Streets is not opposed to these
5 proposed encroachments and
6 decorative lighting, so long as
7 they comply with the laws and
8 regulations of the city,
9 specifically those of the
10 Department of Licenses and
11 Inspections, the Department of
12 Streets and the Art Commission.
13 This concludes my testimony. I'm
14 pleased to answer any questions you
15 have. Thank you.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Do
17 we have any questions?

18 (No response.)

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
20 Seeing none, thank you for your
21 testimony.

22 MR. MONTANEZ: Thank
23 you.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

1 Mr. McMonagle, is there anyone else
2 here to testify on this bill?

3 THE CLERK: We have no
4 further testimony on this bill.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All
6 right. Thank you. We will end the
7 public hearing at this minute to go
8 into a public meeting and then come
9 back in the public hearing to hear
10 our resolution.

11 Mr. McMonagle, before we
12 start, should we call the roll for
13 the public meeting.

14 THE CLERK: Councilman
15 Driscoll.

16 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
17 Present.

18 THE CLERK: Councilwoman
19 Gauthier.

20 COUNCILWOMAN GAUTHIER:
21 Present.

22 THE CLERK: Councilman
23 Squilla.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

1 Present.

2 THE CLERK: Councilman

3 Thomas.

4 COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

5 Present.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

7 Thank you. A quorum for the
8 meeting is here.

9 Chair recognizes

10 Councilman Driscoll for a motion on
11 the amendment to Bill No. 250888.

12 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

13 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

14 I offer an amendment to
15 Bill No. 250888. A copy of the
16 amendment has been circulated to
17 all members of the committee and I
18 move that the amendment to Bill No.
19 250888 be approved.

20 (Duly seconded.)

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: The
22 bill has been moved and properly
23 seconded that the amendment to Bill
24 No. 250888 be approved.

1 All those in favor will
2 signify by saying aye.

3 (Aye.)

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

5 Those opposed?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: The
8 ayes have it and the motion
9 carries. And the amendment to Bill
10 No. 250888 has been approved.

11 Chair recognizes
12 Councilmember Driscoll for a motion
13 on Bill No. 250888 as amended.

14 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 I move that Bill No.
17 250888 as amended be reported from
18 this committee with a favorable
19 recommendation and further move
20 that the rules of Council be
21 suspended to permit first reading
22 of this bill at the next session of
23 Council.

24 (Duly seconded.)

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

2 Chair notes for the record that
3 Councilmember Gauthier seconds the
4 motion.

5 It has been moved and
6 properly seconded that Bill No.
7 250888 as amended be reported from
8 this committee with a favorable
9 recommendation and further move
10 that the rules of Council be
11 suspended as to permit the first
12 reading of this bill at the next
13 session of Council.

14 All those in favor will
15 signify by saying aye.

16 (Aye.)

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

18 Those opposed?

19 (No response.)

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: The
21 ayes have it and the motion
22 carries.

23 Chair recognizes
24 Councilman Driscoll for a motion on

1 Bill No. 250916.

2 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

3 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 I move that Bill No.
5 250916 be reported from this
6 committee with a favorable
7 recommendation and further move
8 that the rules of Council be
9 suspended to permit first reading
10 of this bill at the next session of
11 Council.

12 (Duly seconded.)

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

14 Chair recognizes Councilwoman
15 Gauthier seconds the motion.

16 It has been moved and
17 properly seconded that Bill No.
18 250916 be reported from this
19 committee with a favorable
20 recommendation and further move
21 that the rules of Council be
22 suspended to permit the first
23 reading of this bill at the next
24 session of Council.

1 All those in favor will
2 signify by saying aye.

3 (Aye.)

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

5 Those opposed?

6 (No response.)

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: The
8 ayes have it and the motion
9 carries.

10 We will now go back into
11 a public hearing to consider
12 Resolution 250881 and we do have a
13 quorum back for the public hearing.
14 To my left, Councilmember Gauthier.
15 To my right Councilmember Driscoll
16 and Councilmember Thomas.

17 Could you please read
18 the title of the resolution.

19 THE CLERK: Resolution
20 No. 250881, authorizing the
21 Committee on Commerce and Economic
22 Development to hold hearings on the
23 disposition policy regarding the
24 Polish American Cultural Center and

1 Museum located at 3081 Walnut
2 Street.

3 Can we please have
4 Michael Blichasz.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
6 Thank you --

7 THE CLERK: Oh, I'm
8 sorry.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
10 Thank you, Mr. McMonagle.
11 Mr. Blichasz, you can come to the
12 table. I just want to read the
13 testimony.

14 (Witness approached
15 witness table.)

16 MR. BLICHASZ: Well,
17 first of all --

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
19 Before you start, Mr. Blichasz, I
20 just want to read testimony into
21 the record for the PRA,
22 Philadelphia Redevelopment
23 Authority and the Administration.
24 This testimony is coming from David

1 Thomas, Chairman of the Board of
2 Directors; Angel Rodriguez, Deputy
3 Executive of Philadelphia
4 Development Authority.

5 It says, Good morning,
6 Chairperson Squilla and members of
7 the Committee on Commerce and
8 Economic Development. This is
9 written testimony regarding
10 Resolution No. 250881 submitted by
11 David Thomas, Chairman of the Board
12 of Directors; and Angel Rodriguez,
13 Deputy Executive Director of
14 Philadelphia Redevelopment
15 Authority.

16 It has come to our
17 attention that the PRA and Michael
18 Blichasz have reached out to
19 Councilman Squilla for assistance
20 in obtaining ownership of 308-10
21 Walnut Street, the property in
22 Philadelphia, Pa which is property
23 owned by the PRA.

24 Mr. Blichasz's account

1 of the events that has transpired
2 regarding this property is
3 inaccurate and the PRA is compelled
4 to correct the inaccuracies
5 presented to Councilman Squilla.

6 As further details below, the PRA's
7 ownership and writ of possession of
8 the property has been fully
9 adjudicated by the Philadelphia
10 Court of Common Pleas. Following
11 years of long attempt, the PRA to
12 negotiate a resolution with
13 Mr. Blichasz on an effort met only
14 by Mr. Blichasz's refusal to
15 negotiate in good faith.

16 Mr. Blichasz's refusal
17 has imposed substantial cost to the
18 PRA and its ability to keep the
19 property in good repair and safe
20 conditions. Now that the court has
21 resolved the issue of the ownership
22 of the possession in favor of the
23 PRA, the PRA is in position to deal
24 with the property in accordance

1 with the PRA's statutory
2 obligation, and therefore
3 respectively request that
4 Councilman Squilla and the rest of
5 the Committee not pursue the
6 counterproductive course of action
7 proposed by Mr. Blichasz.

8 The factual and legal
9 history regarding the property is
10 as follows: In 1987, Philadelphia
11 City Council via ordinance
12 authorized the PRA to issue a bond
13 for up to \$3 million to finance the
14 transfer of the property to the
15 Polish American Cultural Center,
16 PACC. The ordinance provided that
17 the PRA and PACC enter into an
18 installment contract dated August
19 21, 1987. Pursuant to which, PACC
20 would purchase the property through
21 installment payments in an amount
22 of sufficient pay debt service the
23 bonds. To install the contract
24 also set forth, PACC's maintenance

1 obligations with respect to the
2 property.

3 Over ensuing decades,
4 PACC continued to occupy and
5 operate within the property. PACC
6 failed to comply with the payment
7 obligations under the installment
8 contract. Documents contained by
9 the PRA indicate the bonds were
10 redeemed in 1995 with PACC having
11 allegedly paid \$155,000 of the
12 aggregate of \$4.687750 million debt
13 service, principal and interest,
14 and the balance paid by the City of
15 Philadelphia as the grantor of the
16 bond.

17 Records also indicate
18 that PACC never paid the PRA annual
19 administration fee of \$1,500 from
20 '88 through '95 totaling \$12,000.
21 The City has no records of evidence
22 anyone in the city ever agreed to
23 pay the balance on behalf of PACC
24 to obtain ownership of the

1 property. The PRA and PACC also do
2 not have any records that
3 established the city's agreement to
4 pay the balance on behalf of PACC.

5 Had that been the reason
6 why the city paid the balance
7 opposed to its responsibility as
8 the grantor of the bond, the city
9 would have advised the PRA of such
10 and directed the PRA to complete
11 the transfer of the property to
12 PACC and that PRA would have
13 transferred the property to PACC
14 decades ago.

15 In addition, PACC's
16 failure to satisfy its payment
17 obviously under the installment
18 contract, PACC also failed to
19 actually maintain the property,
20 resulting in structural issues,
21 dangerous structural issues. The
22 PRA over the years has met with
23 Mr. Blichasz in his capacity as
24 President to discuss the property

1 in June of 2019.

2 PRA toured the property
3 with Mr. Blichasz based on
4 concerning conditions observed
5 during the tour. The PRA engaged
6 Hill International to inspect the
7 property and produce a report.
8 Hill International issued the Hill
9 report on January 2021 identifying
10 numerous dangerous conditions at
11 the property and long-term
12 maintenance of the property and
13 neglected the property.

14 The Hill report also
15 concluded it would cost about \$1.8
16 million to bring the property into
17 safe condition and in compliance
18 with The Philadelphia Code. When
19 PRA met with Mr. Blichasz regarding
20 the condition of the property and
21 finding of the Hill report, he
22 advised that the PACC did not have
23 sufficient funds to pay for the
24 necessary repairs.

1 The PRA attempted to
2 negotiate with Mr. Blichasz
3 offering various options, including
4 remaining in a portion of the
5 property pursuant to a lease, but
6 Mr. Blichasz refused to cooperate
7 and repeatedly requested outright
8 ownership.

9 I'm going to summarize
10 the rest of this. I'll submit this
11 to the record. But the PRA
12 respectfully requests that the
13 Committee recognize that the PRA
14 properly pursued its legal rights
15 in the court of law and established
16 its ownership. And thank you for
17 your time and consideration.

18 Before I read the
19 Administration's testimony, I just
20 want to say that I was at several
21 of those meetings with the PRA.
22 And unfortunately, they're not here
23 to testify today and receive
24 written testimony, but I always

1 believed back in 1987 when I
2 received the information that an
3 ordinance was introduced to have
4 the City purchase the property on
5 behalf of PACC, the organization to
6 own that property.

7 From what I further
8 understand and from evidence that
9 we have received even here today
10 from applications for HUD grants
11 that were sent by the Mayor at that
12 time, Mayor Goode to receive the
13 money to pay off the balance of
14 that and therefore turn the
15 property over.

16 I do believe the intent
17 was there. We don't have any proof
18 that I had seen that the grant was
19 ever fully given to the City of
20 Philadelphia, even though they
21 applied for it. The only letter I
22 did see was a letter to the City of
23 Philadelphia saying that they could
24 use discretionary HUD funds to pay

1 off that debt if they so chose.

2 I would always ask for
3 an amicable solution and a
4 compromise to figure out how we
5 could work out a deal to be able to
6 keep this property in the hands of
7 the Polish Museum and PACC. That
8 unfortunately did not happen. You
9 heard most of the testimony from
10 the PRA. And now, I'm just going
11 to read testimony from the City of
12 Philadelphia.

13 Good afternoon, Chairman
14 Squilla and members of the
15 Committee of Commerce and Economic
16 Development. My name is Jesse
17 Lawrence, Director of Planning and
18 Development. I'm submitting
19 written testimony on Resolution
20 250881, introduced by Chairperson
21 Squilla.

22 The Department of
23 Planning and Development of the
24 City of Philadelphia works closely

1 with the Philadelphia Redevelopment
2 Authority, and we support their
3 mission to eliminate blight and
4 planning and developing balanced,
5 mixed-use commercial activities,
6 thriving well-served neighborhoods.
7 We continue to work with them very
8 closely on the Mayor's H.O.M.E.
9 Initiative to produce and preserve
10 30,000 homes.

11 Despite our close
12 working relationship with the
13 Redevelopment Authority, the City
14 and department have no legal
15 ability to direct the sale of their
16 assets. However, we share their
17 goal being responsible stewards of
18 the property. The Redevelopment
19 Authority is a Pennsylvania state
20 authority and legally independent
21 of the City of Philadelphia.

22 The PA Urban
23 Redevelopment law specifies the PRA
24 shall in no way be deemed to be

1 instrumental of such municipality
2 or county or engaged in performance
3 of municipal function. See the
4 Urban Redevelopment Law 35PS
5 regarding the subject of today's
6 hearing, Resolution 250881, the
7 City does not own the property
8 located at 308-10, Walnut Street.
9 Therefore, the City cannot transfer
10 this property it does not own. The
11 authority sits solely with the
12 Redevelopment Authority as
13 authorized to sell, lease or
14 otherwise transfer its real estate
15 property.

16 The Administration
17 supports the PRA's action and
18 decision, the court process and the
19 court order issued based on the
20 evidence of the court regarding
21 ownership of 308-10 Walnut Street.
22 Thank you for the opportunity to
23 testify.

24 I just wanted to read

1 that into the record. We will
2 submit this written testimony to
3 the record. And I want to give the
4 opportunity to Mr. Blichasz.

5 State your name for the
6 record and then proceed with your
7 testimony.

8 MR. BLICHASZ:

9 Wonderful. Thank you so much for
10 allowing us to have this
11 opportunity and thank you,
12 Councilman Squilla, who's
13 constantly been with us through
14 this whole process and, of course,
15 Mike Driscoll, who I've known and
16 worked with for many years. He's
17 been an unbelievable champion.
18 He's now in the seat that was
19 occupied by the board, one of the
20 board members of the Polish
21 American Social Service Agency, and
22 that one of the people who really
23 suggested that this whole project
24 come about.

1 Before I start, let me
2 just tell you that this was an
3 opportunity welcomed by the
4 Council, not by the Polish American
5 community, to bring a new historic
6 feature to the City of
7 Philadelphia. And Joan and others
8 who are very instrumental --

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

10 Joan?

11 MR. BLICHASZ:

12 Councilwoman Krajewski was very
13 instrumental in getting these
14 things involved. And we had a
15 committee, a Building committee at
16 that time who worked very closely
17 with her. And we had different
18 people on the committee, Cardinal
19 Krol, Ed Piszek, Irene Schmidt and
20 Gene Pasymowski, who were part of
21 the Building committee with other
22 individuals.

23 I was not on that
24 committee and I attended no

1 get-togethers on what they should
2 do and this and that. But the
3 Mayor of Philadelphia, having been
4 through some tough times in '85 and
5 '86, was very open and recommended
6 this kind of a property.

7 Remember, Polish
8 American Social Services was a
9 social service, a human service
10 agency, not an exhibit hall. Our
11 original name of the building we
12 were in, in Fairmount was Polish
13 American Center. It was a Polish
14 American Center mainly because it
15 was a place where groups came to
16 coordinate events like Folk
17 Festival, Polish American weekend
18 at Penn's Landing, the Pulaski Day
19 Parade.

20 We were not an exhibit
21 hall where the people, the great
22 people of Council, thought this
23 would be a wonderful opportunity to
24 bring something new to historic

1 Philadelphia and allow people to
2 get a new group of people to
3 promote historic Philadelphia. In
4 1987, it was proposed and it was
5 proposed in '86 at the time of a
6 very difficult situation going on
7 in Philadelphia.

8 And of course, they
9 thought it was a wonderful idea, a
10 new opportunity to outreach the
11 people. And this, the board of the
12 social service agency made it
13 crystal clear, abundantly clear,
14 let me say, that they could not
15 take on such a project on their
16 own. We were a human service
17 agency, not a museum. This was a
18 new thing.

19 The Building committee
20 from the city, they located several
21 properties. One was at 308 Walnut
22 Street. We went there and took a
23 look. And of course, everybody
24 thought it was wonderful and they

1 thought it was a great opportunity.

2 It was sold. If it was me, I would
3 have had a lot more questions and I
4 would have documented even more.

5 You know yourself, Mark,
6 Councilman Squilla, when they came
7 to have a meeting at our place,
8 they were baffled with the amount
9 of records that we had. Luckily,
10 our people were the kind who held
11 onto records and they wanted our
12 stuff more than anything. And I
13 said, fine, I'll give you whatever
14 we have as long as you show us what
15 you have. That never happened to
16 date.

17 Let me just give you a
18 quick rundown. I made this quick
19 and I'll give you a copy of what I
20 have. In '87, they asked us --
21 Councilwoman Joan Krajewski
22 suggested this would be an
23 opportunity for Philadelphia, not
24 for the Polish American community

1 alone, but for Philadelphia to be
2 able to outreach to Polish people
3 to come to Philadelphia because we
4 had many events in Philadelphia.
5 And so, we did that at her
6 suggestions and many of the good
7 people who I mentioned before did
8 great unbelievable work, not only
9 great but unbelievable work, trying
10 to make it happen.

11 But we made it clear
12 there is no way a social service
13 agency would take on this kind of
14 obligation without it being totally
15 funded. I mean, Joan was talking
16 about the Mummars Museum, the Black
17 History Museum, the Swedish Museum,
18 all these things, but it never got
19 to the point that we were going to
20 say yes, unless it was totally
21 funded with some kind of public
22 grants.

23 Bearing that in mind,
24 our good Mayor, who we regard as an

1 outstanding friend and endless
2 participant of everything that we
3 did in the community, filed --
4 first of all, we raised money after
5 we went to the building. Yes, they
6 did put this ordinance in City
7 Council with the understanding, and
8 it was agreed by everybody that the
9 City of Philadelphia would generate
10 the money to pay for this property.
11 No dancing around, there was no
12 dancing around.

13 The thing is the City
14 Council was very involved at this
15 time. Councilman Cohen, Councilman
16 Rafferty, there were several other
17 Councilmen who were very involved
18 in this process and sold the idea
19 as a very positive thing for
20 Philadelphia. Everybody went for
21 it.

22 Next thing that happened
23 is the people agreed. They all
24 went to the settlement and our

1 attorney at the time was George
2 Mechetto(ph). He was there and
3 everything went through as it
4 should have been. We then moved
5 our offices after the settlement to
6 308 Walnut Street and the Social
7 Service Agency was to be the main
8 recipient of the grant, not the
9 Cultural Center, because it was
10 Polish American Center. There was
11 no culture name in there. It was
12 Polish American Center, 804 North
13 24th Street in Fairmount.

14 The next thing is Mayor
15 Goode appoints Edward Schwartz, the
16 Director of Housing and Community
17 Development, to be the main contact
18 for him. Done. He came, they went
19 to him. They went to 222 North
20 24th Street for various meetings.
21 Luckily, I didn't attend but I wish
22 I was there.

23 But the thing is all of
24 this went through. Council totally

1 approved this ordinance, as you
2 heard and you saw. I sent all of
3 you copies of it and I will give
4 you additional information and
5 copies. I'll fax it to all of you,
6 if not fax, but email it to all of
7 you today. Ed Schwartz was
8 extremely instrumental in helping
9 to get that thing through Council.

10 The next thing was the
11 settlement. The settlement was
12 done and there was a grant that was
13 supposed to be included to help the
14 building to be repaired. The
15 building needed a good amount of
16 funds, so I have this in the
17 package. And Wilson Goode sent
18 this off under the name of the
19 Philadelphia Department -- wait,
20 the Housing and Community
21 Development under the direction of
22 Edward Schwartz. We had nothing to
23 do with the Philadelphia
24 Redevelopment Authority. I'd never

1 heard of them until afterwards when
2 George started to say, well, yeah,
3 they were involved through the
4 processing of the thing this, here
5 you have copies of this and how it
6 was sent directly to Washington to
7 then Secretary Pierce, when Pierce,
8 when the cultural center was opened
9 on August 9, 1988.

10 Then Vice-President Bush
11 came to the Cultural Center for the
12 ribbon-cutting of the new exhibit
13 hall. He went in, he got a
14 beautiful tour of the place and he
15 totally agreed to make this a
16 priority in the HUD administration
17 with Samuel Pierce.

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I
19 don't want to cut you off here but
20 just a quick question. So you
21 moved into the property in '87?

22 MR. BILCHASZ: Yes.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Who
24 paid to rehab the building?

1 MR. BILCHASZ: 100%

2 Polish Americans. The City gave
3 nothing.

4 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So
5 it was rehabbed by the
6 organization?

7 MR. BLICHASZ: Yes.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
9 Receiving the property?

10 MR. BLICHASZ: Yes.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
12 After you moved in, who paid the
13 utilities?

14 MR. BLICHASZ: We paid
15 100% of our own. We've never
16 received a penny from the city for
17 any kind of operational cost of the
18 museum or anything, no. The agency
19 may have received some grants for
20 agency-type social service work but
21 never the museum.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Did
23 you ever have a lease from the PRA
24 or never had a lease from anybody?

1 MR. BLICHASZ: No, there
2 is no such document like that. In
3 fact, Mark, let me just say a few
4 more things and we'll go right to
5 that, what you're talking about.

6 When Vice-President Bush came, four
7 months later he became President of
8 the United States. He appointed
9 Jack Kemp as the Secretary of HUD.

10 Jack Kemp asked
11 Wilson -- by the way, let me just
12 say this. Joan Krajewski and her
13 group prepared a letter that went
14 to then Chairman of the Finance
15 Committee for the City of
16 Philadelphia. You have that in
17 that packet that you have. Lucien
18 Blackwell, who we knew very well
19 too, he was a great supporter of
20 everything Polish. He on June 27,
21 1987, he was asked to move forward,
22 it was at that time they were
23 adjourning Council, I guess for the
24 summer or whatever, to put that

1 into every possibility as the
2 building was being settled, to get
3 this thing through the HUD, push
4 the Goode Administration and Ed
5 Schwartz and anybody who was
6 involved with the HUD grants from
7 the federal government. That was
8 that.

9 We moved into the
10 building. The Vice-President
11 comes. He becomes President. He
12 then appoints Jack Kemp. When Jack
13 Kemp became the person who became
14 the new Secretary of HUD, he
15 requested that Ed Schwartz forward
16 a new application for federal
17 assistance, and that was then sent
18 on March 28th of '89.

19 That was going to be for
20 a grant without the repair funds
21 included. Anybody who has that
22 copy of the grant you can see it,
23 without the repair funds. Because
24 he said that the Social Service

1 Agency was 100% eligible to receive
2 that grant, which it did.

3 Then what happened?

4 Then he and John Heinz got very
5 involved in the project. You have
6 a copy of the letter. John Heinz
7 followed this very closely because
8 John Heinz and his family were very
9 involved in the Heinz Museum in
10 Pittsburgh and he was really
11 unbelievable.

12 He came to visit us at
13 the Cultural Center, and he had met
14 with Ed Schwartz and he agreed with
15 Senator Schwartz, Jack Kemp. In
16 view of the limited funds remaining
17 in the fiscal budget in Washington,
18 the City of Philadelphia may wish
19 to consider optional resources for
20 the funding of the project, such as
21 local reprogramming of the
22 Community Development Block Grants
23 they already have secured in their
24 treasury in Philadelphia or take a

1 loan against a future community
2 development entitlement to pay it
3 off.

4 It was totally to pay --
5 it's listed in the letter, you all
6 have a copy of it -- for Polish
7 American Social Services, not for
8 the Cultural Center, but to Social
9 Services. This here was submitted
10 through Mayor Goode, signed, sealed
11 and delivered by Mayor Goode,
12 acknowledged by Mayor Goode,
13 acknowledged by Ed Schwartz,
14 acknowledged by Senator Arlen
15 Specter, acknowledged by Senator
16 Heinz. Everything was smooth.

17 How the Redevelopment
18 Authority took over everything
19 only -- they were supposed to be
20 the processing agent. They were
21 supposed to be the processing agent
22 for this grant when it came
23 through. They have on their
24 records Polish American Cultural

1 Center, not Polish American Social
2 Services. Social Services is the
3 501(c)(3) organization.

4 Okay. Let's go to the
5 next thing. For 30 years, it was
6 total silence. In late 2017, we
7 were looking to do -- we did a lot
8 of repairs on that building, side
9 wall. You can look at the permits
10 in the city. We put on brand new
11 towers. It cost us \$100,000-plus
12 the cranes and all to take that
13 tower to the roof and all this sort
14 of stuff. Permits are all listed
15 within the City of Philadelphia.
16 What was done paid for by the
17 Polish American community, no one
18 else. Not one penny from
19 Philadelphia.

20 Okay. The next thing,
21 30 years passed and we go to get
22 the deed. Unfortunately, the lady
23 who would be caring for the deed
24 and they're all gone. They have a

1 person looking through the files,
2 can't find anything. So I said,
3 call the Department of Records, see
4 what's going on there. Get a copy
5 of the deed from them because the
6 grants from Harrisburg and
7 foundations wanted two pages of the
8 deed to show that this was not a
9 city property, a religious
10 property, or anything other than a
11 501(c)(3) property, done.

12 They said then contact
13 the Department of -- Redevelopment
14 Department because they're listed
15 on there too. Okay. We went to
16 the Redevelopment Authority and
17 that's when all hell broke loose.
18 That was in 2018. We went to the
19 Department of Redevelopment. When
20 I contacted them -- I contacted
21 them -- I had another person
22 contact them too from the board.
23 They didn't know anything about it.
24 It must have been shoved in some

1 file or whatever.

2 But then I found out, I
3 went through the process of finding
4 out what the hell was going on all
5 this time. So I said that we had a
6 meeting, if you remember, in your
7 office. They said we had the
8 meeting first at the Cultural
9 Center. That was in March 2019.

10 Do you remember that
11 meeting on the fifth floor, Mark?
12 You'll never forget that meeting on
13 the fifth floor. But anyways,
14 their attorney said to me, I want
15 to come and we're going to copy all
16 your information. I have tons of
17 information. Irene and all those
18 were great hoarders.

19 So after that, it went
20 silent again. I called, no
21 response. I called, then the
22 pandemic came. Imagine March of
23 2019 to March 2020. Silence again.
24 The pandemic came, nothing, zero.

1 Couldn't get anything. I asked
2 Susan at that meeting in March of
3 2019, Susan Varesco, the attorney
4 for the Redevelopment Authority, I
5 said, here is what is needed. I
6 need a sheet of paper. If you go
7 to buy a property -- I said, this
8 can be settled very quickly.

9 Do you remember my
10 words? This can be settled very
11 quickly. I need a bill of sale or
12 something. I will take it to
13 Harrisburg. I will take it to
14 Washington and ask them to do what
15 is right for something that has not
16 been properly done. Unfortunately,
17 it wasn't properly done. And 30
18 years is very questionable why
19 anything could be not touched in 30
20 years. Really makes me wonder what
21 the hell was going on over there.

22 When John Heinz -- let
23 me backtrack one second. When John
24 Heinz came to the building, he said

1 the city agreed to take the money
2 from what was in their treasury,
3 \$2.1, million, that was in May of
4 1989. They agreed. We'd be done.
5 We'd be signed off whenever the
6 budget signed off. Done. That's
7 where that stood. Unfortunately,
8 our buddy John Heinz was killed in
9 that helicopter crash, that plane
10 crash. Otherwise, he's the kind of
11 guy who would definitely come and
12 be part of this hearing today.

13 All those people, people
14 like Cardinal Krol, if you go on
15 the front page of Google and put in
16 Cardinal Krol and his involvement
17 with the Cultural Center, it's all
18 there. He regarded this as a very
19 important part of what he did for
20 the community and to help
21 Philadelphia. After all the stuff
22 that happened in Osage and
23 everything, he was very involved
24 with that.

1 So the story is this:
2 They needed that bill of sale. In
3 order to resolve this, we need a
4 sheet of paper. I couldn't get it.
5 It's seven years. Something that
6 could have been solved in seven
7 weeks, seven months, it's seven
8 years and nothing happened. They
9 thought they could push us around.
10 Unfortunately, it hasn't worked.

11 There's something else I
12 want to say that, and you have this
13 in your packet, Councilmember
14 Street met with the board of the
15 Center and the board of Polish
16 American Social Services. And at
17 that meeting, these are his
18 words -- there's Councilmember John
19 Street and Councilmember James
20 Tayoun held a personal meeting and
21 where he said, we wrote the
22 ordinance -- I didn't write the
23 ordinance so I have no idea even
24 how that process works. We wrote

1 the ordinance so no matter what,
2 the City would help you to maintain
3 or pay for this property and get it
4 off the books. He said, Don't be
5 worried, stop concerning yourself.

6 I had a very nice lady
7 involved, Irene Schmidt. Many of
8 you may remember her. She was a
9 realtor and she liked to get
10 things -- she called this thing
11 down. And he said, Don't worry
12 about it. One way or another it's
13 a done deal. Stop already being
14 concerned.

15 Well, with that
16 unfortunately, volunteer board
17 members tried their best, they did
18 their best. And I will tell you no
19 one has done better to make a
20 project requested by members of
21 City Council, not only Joan
22 Krajewski, it was Councilman Cohen
23 and others that came forward.

24 Lucien Blackwell, he was

1 overwhelmed. He said, we have
2 never done anything like this, not
3 even one time for the Polish
4 American community. Of course,
5 we're going to move forward full
6 steam ahead.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So
8 real quick question: You never had
9 a lease in the building. You're in
10 there years?

11 MR. BLICHASZ: Never.

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Did
13 you ever receive anything in
14 writing or letters from the
15 Redevelopment Authority?

16 MR. BLICHASZ: Never.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Did
18 they ever give you a number or an
19 amount that you owed to the
20 Redevelopment Authority?

21 MR. BLICHASZ: Never.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

23 Now, you --

24 MR. BLICHASZ: Was it

1 owed to the Redevelopment
2 Authority? I have no idea.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

4 Well, you had showed me information
5 and papers from the OPA that had
6 Polish Cultural Center as the owner
7 of that property.

8 MR. BLICHASZ: But who
9 is supposed to owe that money too
10 because that's why I asked for that
11 piece of paper from Susan Varesco.
12 I asked her and Greg Heller. I
13 said, Give me that piece of paper.
14 Otherwise -- even when I went more
15 recently to Senator Fetterman and
16 his people, they said, Michael,
17 where's the paper?

18 If I'm -- by the way,
19 Scott Heppard, you remember dealing
20 with him about this. He said to
21 me, Where's the piece of paper to
22 tell us exactly what you need if we
23 put in an earmark or some kind of a
24 grant and get the caucus to back

1 it, where's the piece of paper. We
2 need this, not this, and we never
3 got it. They never sent it to us.
4 I regard that as very unfortunate
5 that they did that. Very, very sad
6 that they did it. So the thing is
7 that whatever they did should be
8 resolved.

9 Now, here is one more
10 thing I have to say. We did not
11 find out until the meeting that in
12 2019 City Council has no
13 involvement in the HUD funds coming
14 to Philadelphia, as John Heinz
15 thought was still coming in,
16 Senator Heinz. Senator Specter
17 said, You have the City Council
18 work together with them. They
19 handle it.

20 Now, under Mayor Goode,
21 there was a closer relationship
22 with this. Joan Krajewski,
23 Councilwoman, sort of ruled a lot
24 of these things. And that's all

1 I'll say.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

3 Okay. I mean, we do approve the
4 City budget that has federal
5 dollars in it. So we do approve
6 the budget, but we don't direct HUD
7 dollars.

8 MR. BLICHASZ: Well, I
9 know. They give you a budget that
10 says you have \$50 or whatever. You
11 just approve it. You know that
12 they got \$50 from the federal
13 government, but you don't have any
14 way to administer those dollars; is
15 that correct?

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

17 Okay. Councilmember Driscoll.

18 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

19 Mike, I know this has been an
20 anxious part of the last couple of
21 years with you. We've had many
22 conversations on this. And I'm not
23 asking you as a lawyer. The
24 question I'm going to ask you is,

1 have you explored legal action
2 against the City and/or the
3 Redevelopment Authority? And do
4 you possibly have a claim of
5 adverse possession?

6 MR. BLICHASZ: Well,
7 adverse possession is not done or
8 able to be done, from what I'm
9 told, because it is owned by or was
10 owned by the City. And until the
11 City officially turned it over,
12 it's still real property of the
13 City.

14 And I know that
15 Councilman Squilla mentioned that
16 and stated that loud and clear, and
17 others have by the way. And I
18 think --

19 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
20 Point of information. Adverse
21 possession can be granted in the
22 court with city-owned property. It
23 has been done in the past. It can
24 be granted.

1 MR. BLICHASZ: Good.

2 Okay. Let me just say this, and I
3 want to say this without any
4 problems and I want everybody here
5 to understand why this took a very
6 strange turn too. When this first
7 came up in 2019, I called the
8 Mayor's office, that's when I found
9 out that the Mayor governs all the
10 money from the federal government.
11 I didn't know that. I had no idea.
12 No one from the Redevelopment
13 Authority who I've never really had
14 any contact, period, with never
15 said that we are the only ones and
16 the Mayor -- I had to research that
17 on my own. I found out through
18 Harrisburg when that all came
19 about, the whole deal.

20 The thing that is very
21 strange, very, very strange about
22 this is no one at the Redevelopment
23 Authority said, do something about
24 this, in what would it be, 1990, I

1 guess 1991, nothing.

2 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

3 Point of information. When did the
4 Redevelopment Authority go to the
5 courts?

6 MR. BLICHASZ: That was
7 probably after our meeting in your
8 office.

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
10 After the pandemic? Before the
11 pandemic?

12 MR. BLICHASZ: Oh, no,
13 after the pandemic. We had a
14 meeting in your office in December
15 of 2022. Do you remember that
16 meeting? In fact, I think a couple
17 people were in there. They said to
18 us that no action whatsoever would
19 be taken unless you, as Councilman
20 of the First District and Michael
21 Blichasz as President of this
22 organization was notified in
23 advance. You remember that?

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

1 (Nodded affirmatively).

2 MR. BLICHASZ: Yes,
3 okay. Instead, a few months later
4 I get a letter in the mail that
5 it's been taken to court. I ask a
6 few people what they thought. To
7 me, I would have gone to the court.
8 If it was me personally, oh, yes, I
9 would have done it because I could
10 speak my mind. And of course then
11 I'd have to be represented, which
12 would then probably be George
13 Mechetto.

14 At that time, our former
15 Mayor was in office. I had
16 contacted the office and his staff
17 said -- he said, Well, tell us --
18 you went to meeting about this,
19 this and that. And I said, Yes.
20 And who else would be in the
21 meeting? First I said, Councilman
22 Squilla. And then I said, our
23 friend, the attorney, who's a
24 longtime friend and members of

1 ours, George Mechetto.

2 She got back to me, such
3 a meeting can't happen. And I
4 said, Why? And she said, Well,
5 it's nothing to do against the
6 Polish community, but you have two
7 people who have done things to the
8 Mayor, and he will not meet. Do
9 you remember that, Mark?

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: On
11 the record, that was not said to me
12 from the Mayor.

13 MR. BLICHASZ: Not the
14 Mayor. The Mayor's staff. Not the
15 Mayor. He never said that to me
16 either. The Mayor's staff said we
17 couldn't do that and any additional
18 attempts for a meeting would have
19 to come from you. Do you remember
20 that?

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
22 they directed it to the PRA to meet
23 with the people.

24 MR. BLICHASZ: Okay.

1 You're exactly right. And it just
2 didn't happen --

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
4 we set up the meeting --

5 MR. BLICHASZ: When this
6 Mayor wasn't --

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
8 Hold on. And then we did set up a
9 meeting with the Redevelopment
10 Authority.

11 MR. BLICHASZ: That's
12 right. When this Mayor came to
13 office, everybody said -- by the
14 way, courts, a lot of those people
15 who were involved in this project
16 are gone long before any court
17 case. I'm not about to go and act
18 on their behalf. I could act on my
19 behalf, but I can't give you the
20 details that they could give you.

21 They should have taken
22 this to court 30 years ago, but
23 they didn't. They should have, and
24 that should be on the record of the

1 city, that anything that is sitting
2 around for four, five, six years
3 must be directed to the proper
4 department to take action. Where
5 were they sitting for 30 years with
6 these files, with that building,
7 never entering the property.

8 If they owned a
9 building, why didn't they come to
10 see if the roof was okay, and
11 where's your lease. There was
12 nobody that came. The thing you
13 read today from the Administration,
14 that's like lollygaggy dreams as
15 far as I'm concerned.

16 It doesn't mean anything
17 because, number one, they didn't
18 follow through with the piece of
19 paper that I asked for from day 1
20 and consistently asked for.

21 Brendan Boyle asked me to get that
22 a few years ago because he said, in
23 order to get a federal grant, we
24 would need what it's exactly for.

1 When I talked to Fetterman, he said
2 same thing.

3 When I talked with the
4 staff of the new guy, McCormick, he
5 said the same thing, where's the
6 paper, what are we putting in an
7 earmark for, what are we putting
8 in. We have to have a paper that
9 has something on it, not
10 conversation, and it has to come
11 from the people who say they own
12 the building, not from you.

13 I called Dave Thomas
14 recently again within four months.
15 And I asked him, will you get that.
16 You know what he said? Go on the
17 front page of our site and fill the
18 sheet in. They don't do that kind
19 of stuff. An elected official
20 wants to know that this is what
21 you're able to generate, not them.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
23 Okay. So after we had these
24 meetings, there were a couple

1 offers that were made to me to
2 present to you. Those offers from
3 what I understand were not
4 accepted, and correct me if I'm
5 wrong, it's because the Polish
6 community believe they own the
7 building. Therefore, why should
8 they take an offer to lease or sell
9 the building and move out and other
10 things.

11 MR. BLICHASZ: Right.
12 Yes.

13 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
14 Would there be any means of making
15 an agreement if an offer was made
16 similar to those offers in the
17 past?

18 MR. BLICHASZ: Well,
19 here is something which would be
20 interesting and we discussed this
21 before. When Joan Krajewski was
22 involved, Councilwoman --

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
24 Before --

1 MR. BLICHASZ: Let me
2 just tell you this --

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
4 Mike, a lot of those people aren't
5 here anymore and it's hard to get
6 information. And --

7 MR. BLICHASZ: I know.
8 But let me tell you and you'll
9 understand why --

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: One
11 second. I would agree with you if
12 they would have did this 20 years
13 ago, those people who were involved
14 would be alive and they might have
15 been able to address those issues.
16 We can't go back on what they did.

17 MR. BLICHASZ: But here
18 is something I want to tell you.
19 Councilwoman Krajewski was asked,
20 why can't we do something like the
21 Black History Museum has, like the
22 Mummers Museum has. And she said,
23 because we're now doing this kind
24 of situation, this kind of deal.

1 The Councilmen at that time wanted
2 it to be a one-and-done deal. Once
3 you get the property, you take care
4 of it. That's your obligation.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
6 from looking at historic facts, I
7 think it was Bicentennial time is
8 when I think Mayor Rizzo at that
9 time --

10 MR. BLICHASZ: That's
11 right.

12 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: --
13 had organized and supported the
14 building of the African American
15 Museum and the Mummars Museum, the
16 two museums. So they had done
17 that. And this happened afterwards
18 as a different type of -- those
19 buildings were built by the City of
20 Philadelphia, owned by the City of
21 Philadelphia and leased to those
22 organizations.

23 MR. BLICHASZ: Right.

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: The

1 property that you were involved
2 with and the legislation that
3 passed for the Polish Museum was
4 done differently in that the
5 organization would own the
6 building, which is what you believe
7 the intent of the legislation was.

8 MR. BLICHASZ: That's
9 what the intent was. Based upon
10 all the political people who
11 received letters from Washington.
12 In fact, in your packet too you
13 have another letter that came
14 recently from HUD. It's on this
15 blue paper. It's in the packet I
16 gave to you where it says, On
17 behalf of the new Secretary under
18 Trump, Scott Turner, thank you for
19 your letter for funding the Polish
20 American Cultural Center Museum.
21 This is possible through the
22 Community Development Block Grant
23 Program, which may be able to
24 assist you.

1 What they were
2 requesting that we contact this
3 gentleman in Philadelphia, Mark
4 Dodds. He's the Policy and
5 Planning Program Manager, which I
6 did. They said that the City
7 received in that particular
8 Community Development Block Grant
9 program, \$44,299,000 and I should
10 be in touch with them. I did speak
11 to Mark. And of course, a lot of
12 this stuff is based upon all this
13 stuff with the hearings and all,
14 how is it going to turn out? It
15 could still be something.

16 Mark, if there was a
17 deal to do what they did with the
18 Black History Museum, the Mummers
19 Museum, the Swedish Museum. I
20 mean, nobody owns this property
21 individually. This could stand and
22 live forever. One of the things
23 that Wilson Goode --

24 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Are

1 you saying if there was a deal, you
2 would consider it or --

3 MR. BLICHASZ: That kind
4 of deal, but not with the
5 Redevelopment Authority. That goes
6 to the Department of --

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
8 Public --

9 MR. BLICHASZ: Public
10 Property.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
12 Public Property owns it.

13 MR. BLICHASZ: That's
14 who owns those buildings. I can't
15 sell that building and benefit from
16 it. You can't sell it.

17 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
18 Well, the City of Philadelphia can
19 sell --

20 MR. BLICHASZ: Well, the
21 City of Philadelphia, that's no
22 problem.

23 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
24 They can sell property. PRA can

1 sell property. Public Property can
2 sell property.

3 MR. BLICHASZ:

4 Absolutely.

5 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: But
6 if there were other opportunities
7 to look at other options, the
8 Polish Museum, Social Service
9 organizations would consider them
10 because previous offers for some
11 offers were not accepted?

12 MR. BLICHASZ: No, those
13 were insane. If you look at what
14 they said, you can stay there while
15 we're looking for a customer or you
16 can have one floor and we'll rent
17 the other floors out. It was
18 insane. The building, the
19 reason --

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: One
21 of the offers was to sell the
22 building outright and then give you
23 proceeds to relocate to another.

24 MR. BLICHASZ: \$150,000.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

2 Well, I don't think there was a
3 number.

4 MR. BLICHASZ: There was
5 a number. That was the number
6 because I asked point blank. And
7 they said, well, based -- about
8 150. I said that is totally --
9 it's not even something anybody
10 would even think about.

11 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
12 What would be acceptable to the
13 Museum and/or the Polish
14 Cultural --

15 MR. BLICHASZ: If it was
16 transferred to Public Property and
17 they helped to repair it, I could
18 get funds from Washington and
19 Harrisburg to do what we were
20 planning to do back in 2017, 2018.

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
22 When you applied for that grant to
23 fix the facade or whatever it was
24 that there was some need for work

1 that was done, none of that work
2 obviously has been done to date.

3 MR. BLICHASZ: That work
4 hasn't been done. The painting on
5 the building hasn't been done in 25
6 years. The new wall was put up
7 about 30 years ago. It's in fine
8 condition. There was a new roof
9 put in on there by the Polish
10 American community. That was at
11 the time they were opening the
12 museum. That was all paid for by
13 the Cardinal Krol tribute that had
14 thousands of people at the Civic
15 Center.

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So
17 again, you would consider if they
18 came up with -- if the
19 Administration or the PRA,
20 Redevelopment Authority, came up
21 with an offer, the community would
22 consider that offer instead of
23 going through this eviction
24 process.

1 From what I understand,
2 they went to the courts, they ruled
3 that the PRA, Redevelopment
4 Authority, owned the property and
5 they started the eviction process.

6 MR. BLICHASZ: Right.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: So
8 what are the options?

9 MR. BLICHASZ: The
10 option is what we discussed seven
11 years ago, to do a deal,
12 which unfortunately Councilwoman
13 Krajewski did not bring to the
14 table, and don't ask me why because
15 I wasn't involved to that degree
16 other than the fact that they said
17 it would be a one-and-done deal.
18 Let's move forward with it and get
19 it over with.

20 The grants -- Mark, the
21 fact that these grants were sent to
22 Washington to HUD are proof that
23 they worked hard, all the responses
24 that came --

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I'm
2 not saying what the intent was. I
3 believe the same intent you believe
4 in my mind.

5 MR. BLICHASZ: Yes.

6 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
7 other people may not. But it did
8 say in their testimony it was
9 approximately \$4 million that would
10 have been owed on that property.
11 If they say that you paid that
12 amount to own the property, is that
13 something that you would be
14 interested in?

15 MR. BLICHASZ: Well, the
16 thing is this, let me just tell
17 you, we discussed this and if the
18 property was finalized as it was
19 supposed to be in '87, that would
20 be a \$2.1 million deal plus the
21 repairs, and there was something
22 else I'll bring up too.

23 But anyways, that would
24 average to \$60,000 a year over 35

1 years if you look at it that way.
2 We never asked the City for a penny
3 of operational funds. They should
4 just say here. I wrote a letter to
5 Mayor Parker that was on May 12,
6 2025 -- you remember seeing that
7 letter -- asking her, which was
8 suggested by Senator McCormick, to
9 just transfer the property to
10 Polish American Social Services or
11 sell the property to Polish
12 American social services because
13 they need that piece of paper to
14 say what we can do with earmarks,
15 federal earmarks, and then I would
16 have the job to get the Caucus to
17 fund the place and get it over
18 with.

19 For some reason,
20 everybody wanted this property to
21 be in the hands of the Polish
22 American community, not another
23 property where the City has to
24 worry about leases or whatever.

1 Don't ask me why this continues to
2 come up.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I
4 mean, that might have been the
5 intent. But obviously, we don't
6 have any proof of how it came to be
7 in where we are today, except for
8 the fact that the City did or the
9 Redevelopment Authority purchased a
10 property where they floated bonds
11 for it. They paid off the bonds in
12 2010, right. And at that time,
13 they then owned the property
14 outright whether -- I know OPA, you
15 said it said Cultural Center on
16 there.

17 But the issue we're
18 trying to get to is, is there a
19 possible way to continue the use of
20 that building as a service or other
21 option that would be considered?
22 We understand -- Councilman
23 Driscoll asked you about an
24 attorney, are you interested. It

1 sounds like you're not interested
2 in getting an attorney. You do not
3 want to go to legal action. You
4 did not respond to the court cases.
5 So you would consider other options
6 if the PRA or the City proposed
7 them to you. I'm not saying that
8 is even the case. I don't know if
9 they're even willing to do that.

10 MR. BLICHASZ: Let me
11 ask you this, Councilman. All
12 buildings are owned by the
13 taxpayers. In this case, they're
14 administered by the City of
15 Philadelphia, correct?

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
17 Correct.

18 MR. BLICHASZ: Could
19 that property be transferred to
20 Public Property in the way of the
21 Black History Museum and the
22 Mummers Museum? Not to put it into
23 a situation where an organization
24 who has gone out of their way to

1 try to hurt us, what I would say
2 myself, Michael Blichasz, spite us.

3 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: Can
4 I just say this. With an
5 agreement, the City could agree to
6 do a lot of different things if
7 they so wanted to. There were
8 offers early on during this process
9 that were not accepted.

10 MR. BLICHASZ: Well,
11 there was nothing from the
12 Department of Recreation or Public
13 Properties. It was only by the
14 Redevelopment Authority.

15 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: And
16 so, a lease from the Redevelopment
17 Authority would not be acceptable,
18 but a lease from Public Property
19 would be acceptable?

20 MR. BLICHASZ: Sure.
21 That's because I know that they are
22 part of the Mummers Museum, the
23 Black -- It's no individual's
24 property. I can't sell it. You

1 can't sell it. None of the people
2 who are still left here can sell
3 it. It's public -- by the way,
4 when this whole thing came about,
5 Wilson our Mayor, Wilson Goode who
6 was a very close friend of ours,
7 said this is what we need. We want
8 to bring people to Philadelphia.

9 And Philadelphia is in
10 the same situation now. It needs
11 to bring people. With all the
12 negative publicity, we need to
13 bring people for positive things.
14 That's what the Polish people are
15 most known for, doing positive
16 things to bring people to the city.

17 As I said, our main goal
18 is social services. Our secondary
19 goal with this new deal that came
20 about in '87 is to also help to
21 bring people to Philadelphia. Get
22 it, move to Public Properties and
23 then it's up to the good people in
24 the community, which we have tons

1 of them, and a lot of them are
2 disappointed that this kind of
3 thing even would go on for 30
4 years.

5 Mark, if we switched
6 places today, would you like
7 hearing that there was no
8 notification to your organization
9 for 30 years? I don't think so.

10 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I
11 do not disagree with you.

12 MR. BLICHASZ:
13 Councilman Driscoll, would you like
14 to hear that there was nothing said
15 or nothing sent to your
16 organization for 30 years letting
17 them know that there was any
18 problem, anything with the grants
19 not being processed properly or
20 whatever?

21 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I'm
22 just going to make one point before
23 we complete. The attorney you
24 mentioned has been successful in

1 other cases against the City of
2 Philadelphia. If you would have
3 chose to go in that direction, it
4 may have been a different outcome.
5 Obviously, that's in the past.

6 MR. BLICHASZ: Do we
7 have an attorney? Of course, we
8 have tons --

9 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
10 Well, I mean would you consider
11 hiring an attorney to address those
12 issues or would you rather make a
13 compromise, deal with the PRA?

14 MR. BLICHASZ: I think
15 we can have a good, well-working
16 member of our community take care
17 of that. I don't understand why it
18 couldn't have been taken care of
19 with us.

20 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: We
21 understand. We don't know that
22 answer. I don't know that answer.

23 MR. BLICHASZ: I don't
24 know it either.

1 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:

2 Their legal recourse was not a
3 decision that the Polish community
4 wanted to take, correct?

5 MR. BLICHASZ: Correct.

6 And, Mark, I just would like to add
7 one thing. Because this started
8 out under grants, I think that it
9 might be -- I don't think that --
10 because so many people are involved
11 in Washington and all now, I have
12 to bring it together. They're
13 interested to help.

14 You're friendly with
15 Brendan Boyle, the Councilman. They
16 said, give me that paper. Alicia
17 says to me, where is the paper.
18 McCormick, where's the paper.
19 Before you know it -- I'm saying
20 this because they can come to an
21 agreement. And I have a very, very
22 reasonable, very good friend of
23 ours who is an attorney, a longtime
24 participant of the organization, no

1 problem, but I wouldn't go to such
2 a hearing to degrade the people who
3 began this effort, people like Ed
4 Piszek, Cardinal, Krol, Irene
5 Schmidt, all these other people, I
6 would not go to a court and degrade
7 them. Absolutely not.

8 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All
9 right. I have no other questions.
10 I'm just going to say sometimes
11 though when you feel like you're
12 not being heard or somebody's doing
13 something that's not legal, that
14 you do have to go to the courts for
15 that decision. That's all I'm
16 saying. And if it's a choice to
17 not do that, I'm fine with that
18 also.

19 But sometimes there are,
20 you know, the reason why we have
21 three branches of government is for
22 that reason, to try to keep each
23 branch in line.

24 Councilman Driscoll.

1 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:

2 Are you currently occupying that
3 property or are you --

4 MR. BLICHASZ: We've
5 been out of there for six months.

6 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL: By
7 choice or by court order?

8 MR. BLICHASZ: Not by
9 court order, no, no. What happened
10 is this, when the court decided it
11 was the City of Philadelphia
12 property, no problem. I would have
13 never argued that because I looked
14 at the Department of Records right
15 here. On one side, it says it was
16 satisfied by the City of
17 Philadelphia, satisfied by the city
18 of Philadelphia and owned by the
19 Cultural Center from 1992 to 2010.

20 We never knew that there
21 was any kind of a changeover back.
22 For whatever reason it was, no one
23 knew this was happening. If they
24 had said, hey, by the way, guys,

1 you didn't do this or you have to
2 do this or that, that would be
3 different. That would have been
4 settled 15 years ago.

5 Our attorney by the way,
6 I want to put this on the record,
7 did speak to Mr. Thomas maybe five
8 months ago and it was the same
9 rigmarole. He said it was
10 niceties. They knew different
11 things because this person had
12 worked, you know, in various parts
13 of city government. But it was
14 always that we wanted our --
15 whatever.

16 The thing is transfer it
17 to Public Properties as the other
18 museums are and no problem. I'd
19 only like to add one thing. If
20 these people in Washington want to
21 give money to own the building, it
22 would be put in the -- if they gave
23 the money to the City to pay for
24 it, it would be put into a Polish

1 Foundation's name. To continue
2 that operation, that building would
3 be the place that they have to do
4 that.

5 I want to keep everybody
6 happy, because people in HUD in
7 Washington are saying to contact
8 this gentleman in Philadelphia
9 because you're eligible. You have
10 it in your packets, for the museum
11 portion. Remember, it should have
12 been under the name Polish American
13 Social Services, which is what Jack
14 Kemp told Wilson Goode to do, and
15 he did it, and it was signed,
16 sealed and delivered.

17 And all these people,
18 these great people, came and said
19 it was finalized. And no one ever
20 came for 30 years. So that's what
21 happened.

22 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
23 Thank you, Mr. Blichasz, for your
24 testimony. We have all your

1 documentation here that we will
2 submit for the record and I will
3 call to the order of the Chair that
4 we will close the hearing, but
5 we'll leave this open for future
6 conversations.

7 MR. BLICHASZ: Well, my
8 final question is what's tomorrow
9 going to bring. Tomorrow is a
10 Council day -- and by the way, all
11 members of City Council, I don't
12 know why this is, because they were
13 more involved with this than our
14 Council is able to be involved now.
15 That's possibly because Mayor Goode
16 and the Council worked closer.
17 However, I don't know what it was.

18 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: I
19 mean, there was a Council ordinance
20 that allowed this to occur as
21 part of the agreement.

22 MR. BLICHASZ: But even
23 after the Council ordinance was
24 done, the Councilmembers came to

1 all the events, of course Tayoun
2 and others, Rafferty, and all they
3 came to all the events. They were
4 just pushing this like it was a
5 done deal. That's what makes this
6 so weird. That's all.

7 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA: All
8 right. Thank --

9 MR. BLICHASZ: Mark, I
10 would like you to bring it up to
11 Council and ask them. And also, I
12 have to tell you -- because I
13 already started this with the
14 people in Washington -- they say
15 that normally the money that comes
16 from HUD is supposed to be
17 administered by administrative and
18 legislative portions of the
19 government. That's not how it is
20 in Philadelphia. It's done by the
21 Administration and not by the
22 legislative -- the Council.

23 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
24 Mike, that's the way the City

1 Charter works.

2 THE CLERK: That's the
3 City Charter. Is it time --

4 COUNCILMAN DRISCOLL:
5 City Council is the legislative arm
6 of government. We are not the
7 executive branch.

8 MR. BLICHASZ: I know.
9 But is that a reason to change the
10 Charter, that each group has some
11 representation as they do. They
12 told me in Harrisburg, it's that
13 way. In Scranton, it's that way.
14 In Pittsburgh, it's that way. Why
15 not in Philadelphia?

16 COUNCILMAN SQUILLA:
17 Okay. Well, thank you for that.
18 We do approve the budget though
19 that has the HUD dollars.

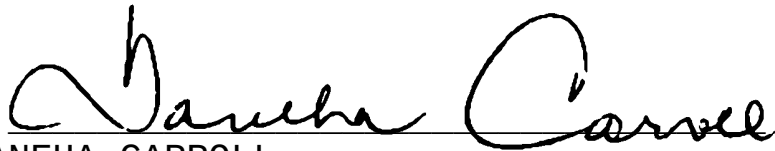
20 So that would conclude
21 the hearing today and we'll leave
22 it open to the call of the Chair in
23 case we need another additional
24 hearing. And I really want to

1 thank you for your testimony and
2 hopefully we can find some
3 resolution.

4 (Committee on Commerce
5 and Economic Development concluded
6 at 4:49 p.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings
and evidence noted are contained fully and
accurately in the stenographic notes taken by
me in the foregoing matter, and that this is a
correct transcript of the same.



TANEHA CARROLL
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