

COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
JOINT COMMITTEES ON LABOR AND CIVIL SERVICE
AND PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106
Tuesday, June 10, 2025
10:10 a.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILMAN JIM HARRITY, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN ANTHONY PHILLIPS, CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN NINA AHMAD
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR.
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU
COUNCILWOMAN QUETCY M. LOZADA
COUNCILMAN JEFFREY YOUNG, JR.

RESOLUTION: 250397

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2 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

3 Good morning, everyone. The hour
4 has come as my colleague just said.
5 This is a public hearing of the
6 Joint Committee on Labor and Civil
7 Service and Parks and Recreation
8 regarding Resolution No. 250397.

9 I note for the record
10 that a quorum of the committee is
11 present. This hearing is now
12 called to order.

13 Mr. Kunkel, will you
14 please read the title of the
15 resolution being considered today.

16 THE CLERK: Resolution
17 No. 250397, titled authorizing the
18 Committee on Labor and Civil
19 Service and the Committee on Parks
20 and Recreation to hold joint
21 hearings investigating the City's
22 enforcement of the Healthy Outdoor
23 Public Spaces, HOPS, law and the
24 risks that exposure to synthetic

1 pesticides pose to the public and
2 City employees.

3 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

4 Mr. Kunkel, will you please call
5 the roll.

6 THE CLERK:

7 Councilmember Ahmad.

8 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

9 Present.

10 THE CLERK:

11 Councilmember Bass.

12 (No response.)

13 THE CLERK:

14 Councilmember Brooks.

15 (No response.)

16 THE CLERK:

17 Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.

18 (No response.)

19 THE CLERK:

20 Councilmember Harrity.

21 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

22 Here.

23 THE CLERK:

24 Councilmember Jones.

1 COUNCILMAN JONES:

2 Present.

3 THE CLERK:

4 Councilmember Landau.

5 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

6 Here.

7 THE CLERK:

8 Councilmember Lozada.

9 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

10 Present.

11 THE CLERK:

12 Councilmember O'Neill.

13 (No response.)

14 THE CLERK:

15 Councilmember Phillips.

16 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

17 Present.

18 THE CLERK:

19 Councilmember Thomas.

20 (No response.)

21 THE CLERK:

22 Councilmember Young.

23 COUNCILMAN YOUNG:

24 Present.

1 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

2 Okay. Where are we at -- all
3 right. Mr. Kunkel, would any
4 member -- oh, okay. I'm sorry.

5 Thank you all for being
6 here today. The purpose of this is
7 to collect as much information as
8 possible so that we as a Council
9 can figure out next steps on how we
10 deal with this. Quite frankly --
11 I'm sorry. I just don't get it.

12 But for the sake of time
13 and since I want to keep things
14 moving, would any other member like
15 to make remarks? I recognize
16 Councilman Curtis Jones.

17 COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank
18 you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you
19 for bringing this important issue
20 back around to the forefront.

21 The 4th Councilmanic
22 District represents close to 68% to
23 70% of the parkland. So this is a
24 downstream issue that we care a

1 great deal about, learned a great
2 deal about in how the watershed
3 actually impacts a lot of the
4 areas. So what happens in the
5 Upper Wissahickon affects Eastwick,
6 and we've learned that.

7 When it was brought to
8 our office's attention about the
9 negative impacts of some of these
10 chemicals and long-lasting impacts
11 where our children play, it was
12 distressing. But what we found to
13 be true was that we were kind of
14 juxtaposing fighting over the cost
15 of safety versus the safety of our
16 children. And those two things
17 shouldn't often come into conflict
18 but they do.

19 So one of the things I'm
20 looking forward to hearing,
21 Mr. Chairman, is if not now, when.
22 And if not alternatives, what do we
23 do to safeguard the health of our
24 children and our seniors and people

1 who play in those parks. So I want
2 to thank you again for taking this
3 up as an At-large member of
4 Council. You represent all of the
5 parks. So thank you. Thank you,
6 Mr. Chair.

7 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

8 Thank you. And before I pass it to
9 my Co-Chair of Parks & Rec, you
10 touched on a thing that I don't get
11 as well which is the cost. If
12 we're thinking about the cost when
13 it comes to our kids, listen, guys
14 like me who had to spray this stuff
15 for a living, I got paid to spray
16 this so, you know, that was my
17 thing.

18 But these kids, they
19 don't know this stuff's being
20 sprayed. And just putting up signs
21 saying it's wet, don't go into the
22 woods, that's just asking the kids
23 to go into the woods.

24 So my question is how

1 much does a child cost nowadays?
2 What is the life of a child worth?
3 For me it's worth everything. So
4 I'm glad that we're doing this. I
5 can't believe that we have to do
6 this.

7 Councilman Phillips, do
8 you have anything to add?

9 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

10 Yep. Good morning. Good morning,
11 everyone. I'm proud to work with
12 Councilmember Jim Harrity on this
13 particular concern. We are all in
14 the mindset that we have to work on
15 making our Parks and Recreation
16 system better. And for you to have
17 the experience of doing this and to
18 bring this up as something that was
19 important to our community, I want
20 to say thank you.

21 In addition to that,
22 what I'm hoping from today's
23 hearing is that we come up with
24 better alternatives to support this

1 matter, right. Because at the end
2 of the day, we understand that
3 children may make a decision that
4 may not be in their best interest
5 even when they see a sign even,
6 adults alike as well.

7 And then also in
8 addition to that, we got to protect
9 our workers. And then also we
10 don't know the lingering facts even
11 at the science or removed of, you
12 know, just having those particles
13 out there. So I think now with
14 this Administration we have an
15 opportunity to do the right thing.
16 And hopefully, we can come together
17 and see this as a productive
18 conversation on how we can do the
19 right thing together. Thank you.

20 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

21 Recognizes Councilwoman Ahmad.

22 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

23 Thank you, Chairman Harrity. Thank
24 you for convening this.

1 The fact that we have to
2 convene this is outlandish to me.
3 Almost four years ago this bill was
4 passed, four years ago. Since
5 then, six cases have been filed in
6 Philadelphia against Bayer
7 pesticide manufacturer. I don't
8 know why we are wasting everybody's
9 time here because the bill has been
10 passed -- and by the way, I am told
11 our Madam Mayor was someone who
12 signed onto that bill.

13 I do not understand why
14 we are having to rehash this all
15 over again because it is abundantly
16 clear this is poison. No other way
17 to put it. It is poison. We don't
18 need it. We need to reform how we
19 do these things. Yes, the Parks &
20 Recs have to figure out what the
21 alternatives are and they had four
22 years to do something.

23 But bottom line is, do
24 we value human lives, do we value

1 our children's lives. And
2 according the PA Department of
3 Health, the exposure to toxic
4 chemicals has been linked to
5 cancer, asthma, developmental and
6 learning disabilities, nerve and
7 immune system damage, liver and
8 kidney damage, reproductive
9 impairment, birth defect and more.
10 I don't know how much we need to
11 underscore that this is bad for us,
12 all of us, not just children, all
13 of us.

14 So what we need is to
15 understand what is standing in the
16 way of implementation. You know,
17 let's be clear that we want
18 evidence-based responses to say
19 what is standing in the way to do
20 this. Is it because we are going
21 to have to think about how we view
22 our landscape, it'll look different
23 than cleanly-mowed lawns? What is
24 it that is holding us back?

1 And this thought that we
2 passed legislation and it is
3 something that does not have to be
4 paid attention to, that's the whole
5 point of having a legislative body.
6 What are we doing here wasting
7 people's time? I hope the fourth
8 (inaudible) is watching and making
9 sure to hold accountable those who
10 are standing in the way of us doing
11 business that need to get done.

12 This was already done,
13 so thank you to this Joint
14 Committee for just underscoring
15 that we are always told we are, you
16 know, not doing enough. We did
17 this. It's done. Let's move.
18 Time to stop making excuses.

19 Thank you, Chairman.

20 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: All
21 right. We're all set now and right
22 on time. Cindy Bass, our
23 Councilwoman from the 8th District,
24 who authored this bill.

1 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Yes.

2 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: We
3 will now hear from my colleague.

4 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
5 Thank you. Thank you to all my
6 colleagues and thank you to
7 everyone who's here today. And I
8 know we've had talks about this.
9 Well, I don't even want to say it
10 seems like for years because it has
11 been for years that we've been
12 talking about, what can we do, how
13 can we make this work.

14 I think that the
15 legislation that we authored and
16 passed in this body a few years ago
17 is something that's more than
18 reasonable. So I think that what
19 we'd like to hear today is why it
20 has not been implemented, and we
21 understand budgetary constraints.
22 But just before I came down, I was
23 listening to my colleague
24 Councilman Harrity discussing

1 what's the price of a human, what's
2 the price of a child, what's the
3 price of your parents, my parents,
4 you know, my siblings, your
5 siblings, like what is the price
6 tag that we want to associate with
7 a healthy green space in the city
8 of Philadelphia because we know
9 that what we are doing is spraying
10 areas with toxic chemicals that are
11 making people sick. We know this
12 is happening.

13 And so, to do nothing is
14 absolutely unacceptable and this is
15 something that's not going to just
16 go away. Someone -- we had a call
17 last week and discussed this matter
18 with the Administration and with
19 the Law Department. And the idea
20 or the theory being that somehow
21 this piece of legislation was a
22 legislative overreach is absolutely
23 unacceptable.

24 And I said on that call

1 that if -- this is what we do, you
2 know, we legislate. The City
3 Philadelphia, City Council, we
4 appropriate, we legislate and we
5 investigate. That's what we do.
6 We don't run departments. And so,
7 everything we do in terms of
8 directing a department to do this,
9 directing an agency to do that, all
10 of these things that we do are
11 executed by the Administration.

12 And so, if we don't have
13 authority on this matter, what
14 matters do we have authority on and
15 is it a matter that needs to be
16 before Commonwealth Court. So I
17 would hope that we will be able to
18 find resolution in the matter.

19 I think I see Coun --
20 Sue Slawson, I'm sorry, I see my
21 good friend the Commissioner Sue
22 Slawson around the chair there, who
23 I know is very interested in trying
24 to work together, that we should

1 all be working together to find a
2 resolution, and we are more than
3 willing to do that in light of the
4 legislation that's been passed.

5 We don't think that this
6 is a matter that needs to go before
7 the courts. We think we can figure
8 it out here. But in a worst-case
9 scenario if it becomes a question,
10 the legal question from the Law
11 Department of this is some sort of
12 a legislative overreach, what
13 determines it to be so and then
14 what is the function then of the
15 Council in terms of passing
16 legislation to help make the City
17 work. So that being said, I look
18 forward to hearing the testimony
19 today and trying to help figure
20 this out. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

22 Thank you, Councilwoman.

23 Anyone else, any of my
24 colleagues have anything else to

1 say?

2 (No response.)

3 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: No,
4 all right. We're going to move
5 right along then.

6 Will the Clerk please
7 call the first panel of witnesses
8 to testify.

9 THE CLERK: Commissioner
10 Susan Slawson, Department of Parks
11 and Recreation.

12 (Witnesses approached
13 witness table.)

14 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: And
15 just for the record, I'd like to
16 note that our Leader is here,
17 Councilwoman Katherine Gilmore
18 Richardson. Thank you for coming
19 out. I think everybody else was
20 here when we called the roll. I'll
21 add the presence of Councilwoman
22 Cindy Bass.

23 Mr. Kunkel, will you
24 please call the first panel and we

1 can get started.

2 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

3 Good morning, Committee Chair

4 Phillips, Chair Harrity and

5 Committee members. My name is

6 Susan Slawson and I serve as the

7 Commissioner for the Department of

8 Parks and Recreation. I'm joined

9 here today with Deputy Commissioner

10 of Operations Susan Buck and Deputy

11 Commissioner of Planning, Property

12 and Strategic Engagement Leanne

13 Campbell.

14 I'm here today to

15 testify on Resolution No. 250397,

16 which authorized this hearing about

17 the City's enforcement of the

18 Healthy Outdoor Public Spaces bill

19 and the City's application of

20 synthetic pesticides. Council

21 passed Bill No. 200425-A known as

22 the HOPS bill in 2020.

23 Its intent was to

24 prohibit the use of synthetic

1 herbicides on any outdoor property
2 owned by the city. The bill was
3 also intended to require
4 recordkeeping and reporting of
5 herbicide usage. The Mayor, at
6 that time, returned the HOPS bill
7 unsigned with a letter recognizing
8 the importance of the issue and
9 seeking a compromise for the
10 Council's concerns, which I will
11 outline the letter returning Bill
12 200425-A unsigned, explained that
13 the Administration will commit to
14 do the following: Number one, PPR
15 would post signs in advance of
16 applying any herbicides which will
17 remain up until the herbicides dry.
18 Two, herbicides will not be applied
19 within 50 feet of play equipment on
20 PPR property.

21 Three, a pilot program
22 will be initiated on certain
23 parklands to objectively evaluate
24 the cost, time, effectiveness and

1 applicator safety of organic
2 products compared to products
3 currently in use. These results
4 would subsequently be shared in a
5 public forum and PPR will utilize
6 these findings to make further
7 timely decisions about organics and
8 their uses. And number four, PPR
9 will engage in ongoing
10 recordkeeping and reporting on all
11 herbicide usage.

12 PPR continues to hold
13 true to those four commitments.
14 This approach strikes the right
15 balance in assuring the safety of
16 residents, while simultaneously
17 meeting our obligation to best
18 practices for adequately
19 maintaining thousands of acres of
20 land for all to enjoy.

21 PPR manages, as you
22 know, over 10,000 acres of land and
23 only uses herbicides that have been
24 approved by the U.S. Environmental

1 Protection Agency, which requires
2 extensive scientific data on the
3 potential health and environment
4 effects of these substances. PPR's
5 use of these herbicides is always
6 in accordance with their labels
7 pursuant to state and federal laws.

8 Additionally, PPR's
9 staff and contractors who perform
10 herbicide applications hold
11 certified pesticide applicator
12 licenses and follow strict
13 guidelines to ensure the proper use
14 of herbicides. PPR's application
15 of synthetic herbicides is based on
16 guidance from an extensive network
17 of local and national subject
18 matter experts, such as
19 environmental scientists and well-
20 respected practitioners, including
21 senior members of PPR's staff with
22 decades of experience managing and
23 restoring Philadelphia's rich and
24 diverse park system.

1 These products are vital
2 controlling problems of vegetation
3 throughout our parks and have been
4 part of our land management
5 strategy for decades. PPR is
6 committed to remaining compliant
7 with the aforementioned precautions
8 and preparations to ensure that
9 herbicides being used are in a
10 manner that will adequately
11 maintain the land while
12 simultaneously keeping residents
13 and staff safe.

14 We actually appreciate
15 the opportunity to testify and we
16 welcome questions, and this
17 Administration is definitely
18 concerned as well as we want to
19 work with Council in ensuring that
20 we are doing whatever is necessary
21 to -- I think we're all concerned
22 about the safety of our kids, our
23 friends and our family. So our
24 goal today is to come up with some

1 solutions on how we can work
2 together to make sure we can make
3 the changes that are within our,
4 you know, reach. So that's why
5 we're here today. So if you have
6 any questions, please feel free.

7 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Is
8 there anybody else testifying up
9 there?

10 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

11 No.

12 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: No,
13 okay. All right. I'm going to
14 start this off with the author of
15 the bill. Since I'm in control,
16 I'm going to give it to my sister
17 and let her ask her questions first
18 because it was her bill to start
19 with.

20 Councilwoman Cindy Bass.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
22 morning.

23 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

24 Good morning.

1 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: How
2 are you?

3 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
4 Good. How are you?

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I'm
6 well. It's good to see you. So a
7 few questions. The first is, I
8 know we've had these conversations
9 for years now and the
10 Administration is always saying
11 that they're willing to work with
12 us, but I haven't seen the fruit of
13 that. And I know that this
14 predates you. I haven't seen the
15 fruit of that effort to work
16 together.

17 And so, can you give us
18 some indication as to what working
19 together can produce? Do you have
20 some ideas or suggestions that you
21 want to present to the committee
22 today about what we can do?

23 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
24 Yes. Sue Buck.

1 MS. BUCK: Sue Buck,
2 Deputy Commissioner of Operations.
3 We did put those four protocols
4 into place during last --

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Say
6 it again.

7 MS. BUCK: We did put
8 the four protocols into place that
9 Commissioner Slawson gave during
10 her testimony regarding signage
11 reporting and the pilot program.
12 And I just want to say I do believe
13 there's other things that we could
14 look at --

15 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Such
16 as, do you have an idea?

17 MS. BUCK: Okay. So
18 before we -- 50 feet from play
19 equipment, maybe we look at 100
20 feet or what's appropriate. We
21 start to look at mapping our system
22 to see where the fence lines are
23 located to the play equipment to
24 see, you know, maybe we were too

1 short during the last
2 administration, right. So maybe we
3 look at -- I heard from, from
4 Councilman Harrity ball fields in
5 the runoff. Maybe we say no
6 spraying on ball fields. I mean,
7 there has to be some other
8 considerations that PPR, Parks and
9 Recreation, takes into account for
10 the health and safety of the
11 children that are using our
12 playgrounds.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Let
14 me ask from a different angle as
15 well because obviously the health
16 and safety of children is
17 paramount. But let me ask also
18 about our workforce that interact
19 with these chemicals. And I'm
20 going to borrow from my good
21 colleague Council -- Dr. Nina Ahmad
22 here, who as we were just talking
23 about the spraying and the signage
24 is displayed while the chemicals

1 are, you know, until they're dry,
2 but that the chemicals are actually
3 seeping into the ground and into
4 water.

5 And so, we can't really
6 control, you know, it's kind of
7 like, okay, we spray them and it's
8 dry so it's no longer a threat. It
9 is still a threat because it does
10 still end up in our water supply
11 and in other places. So just
12 thinking about the PPR staffing,
13 you know, the employees who have
14 to, you know, put these chemicals
15 out, does Parks and Recreation, do
16 they or have they considered
17 finding out the cancer rates among
18 employees and people who deal with
19 these chemicals? Have we looked at
20 that at all or can we look at that
21 if we have not?

22 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
23 We definitely can look at that.
24 And we actually have a staff member

1 here. If it's okay, I'd like to
2 ask for AeLin Compton to come up so
3 she can address some of your
4 questions.

5 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
6 Certainly.

7 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
8 Thank you.

9 (Witness approached
10 witness table.)

11 MS. COMPTON: Hi. Good
12 morning.

13 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Good
14 morning.

15 MS. COMPTON: My name's
16 AeLin Compton --

17 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Can
18 you speak into the microphone?

19 MS. COMPTON: Can you
20 hear me? So sorry about that.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
22 That's okay.

23 MS. COMPTON: How's
24 this? Can you hear me okay? I'm a

1 little softspoken so right up to my
2 mouth.

3 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: This
4 is Council. Be loud.

5 MS. COMPTON: Thank you
6 for that. I'm a little nervous.
7 This is very intimidating.

8 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
9 Don't be nervous. Don't be
10 nervous.

11 MS. COMPTON: Thank you
12 for that. My name is AeLin
13 Compton. I work with Philadelphia
14 Parks and Recreation on the Natural
15 Lands Team. My title is
16 Environmental Restoration Crew
17 Chief. So I'm a D.C. 33 member.
18 So I have the great honor of
19 tending to our City's public metro
20 lands.

21 And so, I'm one of the
22 people who would be administering
23 these chemicals. I also oversee
24 contractors who do much of our

1 herbicide work for us. And so,
2 yeah, again it's my great honor to
3 tend to these lands. It's my goal.
4 You know, we live in a city that
5 has forests.

6 We're so lucky.
7 Philadelphia has big, beautiful,
8 peaceful, amazing, important
9 forests and I think they're
10 critical to the health and safety
11 and sanity of our citizens. I
12 believe very strongly that if you
13 live in the city of Philadelphia
14 you should have access to natural
15 lands. You should be able to go
16 see beautiful meadows. You should
17 be able to enjoy trails. You
18 should be able to breathe in the
19 clean air that our trees provide.

20 And so, with that ethos
21 I do my work and I'm so grateful to
22 be here today to be able to defend
23 the work that I do. And so, I'm
24 here to help answer some of your

1 questions. Again, I work primarily
2 in the field. I am a licensed
3 applicator. And again, I oversee a
4 lot of the work that is completed
5 by contractors in a natural land
6 setting.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: So
8 let me ask you, are you tracking or
9 is this something that you would be
10 responsible for in terms of
11 tracking who is becoming ill, you
12 know, maybe have some symptoms that
13 should be concerning? Is that you?

14 MS. COMPTON: That's a
15 great question. I think Parks and
16 Recreation has a safety officer who
17 might receive those information
18 better than I, but I will say that
19 between me and my staff I supervise
20 the staff of two. And so, I would
21 probably be their first point of
22 contact in the handling of any of
23 these chemicals if they experience
24 any symptoms, any issues.

1 I should preface that by
2 saying that we are very strict and
3 diligent in ensuring that our staff
4 have the appropriate PPE, that both
5 they have access to it, that they
6 understand how to use it, when to
7 use it and we adhere very
8 strictly --

9 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
10 Point of clarity.

11 MS. COMPTON: Sure.

12 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Can
13 you tell us what that PPE consists
14 of?

15 MS. COMPTON: Oh,
16 absolutely. Yes. So every product
17 that we use again it's reviewed by
18 the EPA. So this is federally-
19 registered products. And we have a
20 saying in the industry, the label
21 is the law, right. So whatever is
22 in the label of that product is the
23 law and that label specifies what
24 PPE is required for use of that

1 product.

2 And also, every product
3 comes with a safety data sheet. So
4 between those two documents, we're
5 able to confirm exactly what's
6 required. And so, from there we
7 have what's required and then also
8 just what each individual staff
9 person's comfort level is. So we
10 offer more than is required
11 essentially.

12 So we offer my team
13 chemical resistant gloves, eye
14 protection. We also have, you
15 know, we have full Tyvek coveralls
16 that will cover your entire body.
17 We offer boot covers to cover your
18 boots. We offer gators that
19 basically go from your boots up to
20 your knees so that if you're wading
21 through vegetation that may have
22 been treated, you have the
23 opportunity to cover that. I
24 should specify that none of the

1 products we use require or even
2 recommend that level of PPE, but we
3 make them available.

4 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: I
5 got to have some clarity here. Do
6 you have any OSHA training or any
7 hazardous material training?

8 MS. COMPTON: I do not.

9 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
10 Thank you. Yeah, that's a good
11 answer. I'm glad to see now that
12 you're saying Tyvek suits because
13 that wasn't the case and that's not
14 in your specs. It just says they
15 must be wearing long -- you
16 understand?

17 MS. COMPTON: Sure.

18 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: And
19 you say that they need to be
20 wearing a mask. We have to wear
21 respirators. This here, which you
22 have a copy of now, is the law.
23 This is OSHA. This is what we all
24 follow. These are the rules, all

1 right, for one of us in the
2 laborers Union. In order to spray
3 that stuff, we must have a Tyvek
4 suit on. We must have rubber
5 chemical resistant gloves, rubber
6 chemical resistant boots. We must
7 also have a respirator, a full
8 respirator, not just glasses and a
9 paper mask. This is micro spray.
10 And if you don't know what that
11 means, that means when it sprays
12 back at you, you don't necessarily
13 feel it. And they get into that
14 paper mask and it sits there and
15 people breathe that in.

16 So for you to tell me
17 that you're following the law, the
18 guidelines, on the back of the
19 thing is a warning, that is not the
20 law. This is the law. And that's
21 just what I -- I'm sorry for
22 interrupting.

23 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

24 That's okay. I think the Chairman,

1 you know, the points made were very
2 important to make. And the
3 question I have is, are these
4 materials, as Chairman Harrity just
5 mentioned, that are required, Parks
6 and Recreation is requiring them
7 also, are we requiring them or can
8 folks deviate and as long as you
9 have on long pants that you're
10 okay?

11 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
12 Because you said what was
13 comfortable.

14 MS. COMPTON: So I
15 should say that the bare minimum
16 requirement for all staff who may
17 be interacting with, you know, this
18 is mixing, transporting, applying
19 herbicides is they must adhere to
20 what the label requires for that
21 product.

22 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
23 Okay. So it's not optional? I
24 just wanted to be clear on that

1 because I wasn't really clear.

2 MS. COMPTON: Thank you
3 for the opportunity to clarify. So
4 it is not optional. If they want
5 to go above and beyond, they have
6 access to that equipment.

7 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Got
8 you. Understood. Thank you,
9 Mr. Chairman. I'll come back
10 around. I know there are other
11 questions.

12 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
13 Yeah. I'm going to go to Chairman
14 Phillips from Parks & Rec. Then
15 we'll have Nina Ahmad and then Rue
16 Landau.

17 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
18 Thank you so much, Chairman
19 Harrity.

20 Just a few questions.
21 Currently, originally in the bill
22 it mentioned that, you know, it was
23 unsigned. The 2020 letter, excuse
24 me, the 2020 letter from the

1 Administration committed to
2 piloting organic alternatives.
3 What were the results of that pilot
4 program? And particularly, for
5 organic products were they
6 evaluated, how did they perform in
7 terms of cost effectiveness and
8 safety for staff and the
9 environment? What were the results
10 of that pilot program?

11 And also thank you,
12 Commissioner, for your commitment
13 to Parks & Rec.

14 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
15 I'm going to give you some -- share
16 the information to your question.
17 So in May of 2022, PPR initiated
18 organic herbicide trials at Fern
19 Hill Park, 4600 Morris Street, to
20 test the efficacy of organic pest
21 management practices. These trials
22 have been completed, resulting in
23 the compilation of a summary report
24 on the use of organic pest

1 management practices.

2 These trials found that
3 the pelargonic acid treatments were
4 not effective at controlling
5 targets regardless of location, sun
6 exposure or species. Treatments
7 burned off a portion of the
8 aboveground vegetation. However,
9 roots remained unaffected across
10 all targets, allowing plants to
11 resprout and continue to grow.
12 Many species, particularly vines
13 and woody plants, resprouted
14 vigorously.

15 The dense regrowth was
16 more challenging to control,
17 requiring approximately four times
18 as much product and twice as much
19 time to treat with unsatisfactory
20 results from controlling the
21 vegetation as intended. PPR
22 partnered with the U.S. Forest
23 Service to design and execute an
24 experiment evaluating the efficacy

1 of various invasive plant control
2 methods. The experiment is
3 ongoing. The partnership and
4 elements of the program will
5 continue.

6 A draft report outlining
7 the experiment process and results
8 is included with this memo and
9 we're happy to share that. I'll
10 note that this draft report can be
11 shared internally but not yet be
12 made publicly available. The full
13 report may be shared upon
14 completion.

15 In 2023, PPR continued
16 with two rounds of organic
17 herbicide treatments as part of
18 this experiment and performed rapid
19 vegetation assessments to measure
20 the effectiveness of those
21 treatments in collaboration with
22 the U.S. Forest Service.

23 The following aspects of
24 the experiment were completed: The

1 team identified 16 canopy gaps
2 within approximately 30-acre
3 forested sites. Within the 16
4 canopy gaps, the team marked 36
5 randomly stratified 5 millimeter
6 radius sample plots. Each example
7 plot receives one to three invasive
8 control treatments as outlined:
9 mechanically only, mechanically
10 followed by synthetic treatment,
11 treatment mechanically followed by
12 nonsynthetic treatment. And the
13 team has conducted vegetation
14 surveys over the course of the
15 experiment, recorded every species
16 present and their percentage cover.

17 To date, two full
18 vegetation surveys have been
19 completed at each plot. In the
20 summer of 2022 and '23, the team
21 worked with contractors to complete
22 subsequent treatment at each plot,
23 tracking the amount used and the
24 cost. The team is working with

1 contractors to complete synthetic
2 and nonsynthetic herbicide
3 treatments, tracking the
4 effectiveness. Following
5 treatments, each plot was replanted
6 in the fall of 2022 and using one
7 of two planning schemes,
8 traditional high density, oak
9 dominant, biodiverse native plant
10 platelet, modified planting
11 platelet to incorporate hybrid
12 poplars and willows, as the breed
13 to grow quickly, utilizing high
14 shade levels as a cultural control
15 measure.

16 Additionally, in
17 previous years PPR led a
18 demonstration project at Fern Hill
19 Park in partnership with the Philly
20 Goat Project. This project was an
21 experimental design utilizing goats
22 as a mechanical means of mitigating
23 invasive plants. The project
24 yielded mixed results as the goats

1 ate virtually all the foliage, but
2 none of the woody stems of plants.
3 Invasive plants resprouted
4 vigorously.

5 Since the hearing on
6 Bill No. 200425, PPR has posted the
7 signage in advance of applying
8 herbicides. And that's pretty much
9 what we had said the four things
10 that we had done. So this is what
11 has been done and is still being
12 done as a result of the initial
13 bill.

14 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: So
15 thank you. Just to follow up on
16 that, we have some experts here who
17 are arborists in the city. They're
18 going to be testifying. I've read
19 the testimony of one of them and I
20 believe his name is Matt Benzie.
21 He mentioned that he's never used
22 this type of pesticide removal
23 ever.

24 And so, the question

1 becomes are we talking to other
2 entities that are doing this,
3 right, other organizations, other
4 experts to see what the
5 alternatives are since this is a
6 heightened problem? You just
7 mentioned, Commissioner, all of the
8 ones that you tried, right, maybe
9 the other people are being
10 successful with other alternatives,
11 right.

12 So what are we doing --
13 and also, I just want that question
14 for, I'm sorry, to get your name?

15 MS. COMPTON: AeLin.

16 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:
17 AeLin, so since you're a part of
18 this experience, right, can you
19 just comment on as your team work
20 with people like Matt Benzie and
21 other experts or arborists to talk
22 about what else can you do other
23 than this?

24 MS. COMPTON: Yeah,

1 thank you for the question. So
2 again, I'm a civil servant. I take
3 my role very seriously. It's my
4 great honor to help care for our
5 forests and meadows and wetlands
6 and environment. And so, I am
7 constantly striving to do that job
8 better and to ensure that we're
9 employing the best methods, the
10 best practices.

11 We follow an integrated
12 pest management approach. We look
13 to field experts to ensure that
14 we're constantly updating and
15 reviewing and again doing our work
16 to the best of our ability. And
17 so, yes, thank you for that
18 question. We do talk to others in
19 the industry. We talk to others in
20 the city.

21 One of these studies was
22 conducted in partnership with the
23 U.S. Forest Service. And so, we
24 consult with experts in that

1 department, in that agency to help
2 guide and improve and explore
3 different ways. So that study, I
4 think I can spend three hours
5 talking about all the different
6 elements of that study and ways
7 we're looking at innovative
8 approaches to manage our natural
9 lands, to manage our public open
10 spaces, both with using hybrid
11 trees is one thing she mentioned.
12 So that's something that we would
13 plant early stages in a forest
14 restoration project.

15 These are trees that are
16 designed to grow very quickly. And
17 so, they grow quickly. They'd
18 introduce a lot of shade with the
19 hope that that would help reduce
20 the invasive plant pressure to
21 restoration sites. So that's a
22 technique that we're exploring and
23 trying to understand will it work,
24 will it not. Does it work in

1 different settings, does it work
2 when we have a drought and we don't
3 have any rain for the whole month
4 of October?

5 Does it work, you know,
6 so that's one example of some of
7 the innovative approaches we're
8 trying to look at and understand to
9 help both improve the way we do
10 things and address many of the
11 concerns that you're raising today.

12 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

13 Let me just ask this question:
14 What is the real reason why you're
15 so committed to this type of
16 herbicide removal? By the way, I
17 said the wrong word earlier to say
18 herbicide. Why are you so
19 committed to this one? Are you
20 that committed? Are you committed
21 to doing something different if
22 Council and the experts come up
23 with other alternatives or is it
24 just like this has to be the way?

1 MS. COMPTON: No. Thank
2 you so much for that question. I
3 want to do what works. I've
4 explored, you know, I've used
5 different organic products. I
6 think -- so from my understanding
7 of my use of those products,
8 they're essentially a chemical mow.
9 There's no difference than going
10 out and using a weed whacker. It's
11 a chemical mow. It only impacts
12 the vegetation that it comes into
13 contact with so it does not kill
14 the roots. It often doesn't kill
15 the twigs, doesn't kill the buds.
16 So all that vegetation
17 can grow back in two to three weeks
18 is what we're seeing, sometimes 17
19 days. That's what the literature
20 says online. It grows back and you
21 have to do it again. And then it
22 grows back and you have to do it
23 again.
24 And so, to answer your

1 question I'll just say I would love
2 to explore if there's a different
3 product that works. I will
4 investigate that. I will look into
5 that. I will hear what other
6 people's experiences with that is
7 and I would love to incorporate
8 that as much as possible to improve
9 and enhance the way we're doing
10 things.

11 Ultimately, again I
12 opened my testimony to say that I
13 love Philadelphia. I love our
14 natural lands. I am so committed
15 to the forests, the meadows, the
16 wetlands, the natural environment
17 that we have in this beautiful
18 city. Again, I think that every
19 child of Philadelphia should have
20 access to nature. They should be
21 able to go out into the woods and
22 enjoy that space. That's a goal
23 that I think we all share and I'm
24 so glad to be in the room with

1 people who are holding that up as
2 an important thing.

3 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: My
4 last question and comment is I just
5 want to say that I want to applaud
6 what you try to do, right, in terms
7 of the entire Parks & Rec
8 Commission to at least, you know,
9 50 feet away to abide by those
10 guidelines that was left by the
11 previous administration, so you're
12 doing the best you can. But what
13 we're learning is that even the
14 best we can do is not working.

15 So I think that --
16 Councilman Harrity has some ideas
17 he's going to share during his Q&A
18 about other alternatives that we
19 need to do now as opposed to later.
20 Because at the end of the day, one
21 of the things I'm recognizing and
22 listening to this is that you put a
23 sign up and people are going to do
24 what they want to do.

1 The other part is how do
2 you determine when it's dry enough
3 that people can go into those
4 areas, right? And then the other
5 thing is that people may really
6 want to be anxious to actually go
7 play in the park, in the playground
8 area, whatever that might be. And
9 maybe now all of a sudden you just
10 spray and they just can't go that
11 day but it's the only day they had.
12 So it's hard for us to kind of just
13 put this signage situation and just
14 commit ourselves to signage.

15 I mean, it may have
16 worked before but we're dealing
17 with different levels of children
18 and also different levels of
19 adults. And also, how do you know
20 when it's really dry? Are there
21 lingering things? So those are
22 important.

23 MS. BUCK: I just want
24 to add, Councilman Dr. Phillips,

1 it's typically 24 hours is our
2 rule, but we do watch the weather.
3 The trees are under my jurisdiction
4 so we're constantly watching the
5 weather to see, so that's the
6 general rule.

7 I do want to add some of
8 the advocates will propose organic
9 herbicide and we have looked at the
10 labels, and a lot of the same words
11 on the synthetic herbicides you
12 will see on the label, caution,
13 safety, out of reach of children,
14 some of the same words.

15 So we are mindful of
16 that and we typically try to do the
17 spraying during the off hours when
18 the children aren't there.
19 Sometimes we'll come in at
20 5:00 a.m. And when we can, we do
21 do with (inaudible) labor to do it.
22 We've done areas in every Council
23 District we've done clearing
24 manually. But to AeLin's point, it

1 will come back two to three weeks.
2 One example is where we did it
3 manually, Godfrey Avenue, I think
4 that was three blocks long, that
5 whole wall was covered. We were
6 able to remove those vines, but I
7 guarantee you if you're back there
8 today, it's covered in vine. So we
9 try to do it manually when
10 possible. And I'm interested in
11 hearing what the advocates have to
12 say about how we can do better.

13 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

14 Thank you. Thank you so much.
15 Appreciate you.

16 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

17 Before I pass it on, I'll just give
18 an example. Let's hire some kids,
19 Parks & Rec summer jobs pulling
20 weeds, \$15 an hour, you know.

21 But anyway, my question
22 is have there been any soil
23 samples? Where do you come up with
24 50 feet? How do you know that

1 that's the thing? Because I know
2 that that's not true. It gets in
3 there. It may dry, but those
4 chemicals are still there. Dry or
5 wet, they're still on the plants.
6 They're still on the things and
7 they're seeping into the ground.
8 It's got to be runoff.

9 You know, construction
10 workers we deal with runoff all the
11 time. I know so much about dirt
12 and soil it would amaze you. Like
13 one square foot of dirt weighs
14 about 200 pounds. So different
15 densities of soil being different
16 things, different densities stuff
17 travels faster, travels longer,
18 further. So are there any studies,
19 and where'd you come up with 50
20 feet?

21 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
22 No, we don't have any studies.

23 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
24 I'll make sure you get some.

1 Councilwoman Nina Ahmad.

2 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD:

3 Thank you, Chairman.

4 Thank you so much for
5 sharing with us where you are in
6 terms of looking at innovation,
7 right. Many moons ago cigarettes
8 were supposed to help your
9 digestion. We get more information
10 and things change, right. And so,
11 we have to change with the time.

12 So I understand the
13 dilemma of you having to maintain
14 these fields and having it to look
15 a certain way and how you do it
16 cost effectively. But the cost-
17 benefit analysis is what we're
18 talking about here, right. What is
19 it going to cost us in the long
20 run.

21 As you know, the entire
22 world, this is not just
23 Philadelphia's problem. We have a
24 entire globe that is much higher

1 rates of cancer, right. And we
2 know we can trace it back to a lot
3 of these overuse of chemicals. We
4 know this. The question is what
5 are we trying to achieve in terms
6 of a cultural shift of viewing our
7 spaces. The same thing with people
8 who have lawns, right. They have
9 shifted in terms of what a lawn
10 should look like. We have this
11 image of pristine green, mowed
12 lawns that are shaped in certain
13 ways. So there's a culture shift
14 that needs to happen for all of us
15 to have an expectation of what
16 these grounds should look like.
17 Because you mentioned how hard it
18 is to do it any other way but using
19 these chemicals in terms of time,
20 in terms of permanency. But we
21 have to do it is the point.

22 We have to explore and
23 you're doing that. We just have to
24 ramp it up to say that we have to

1 look at best practices that don't
2 employ these chemical methods to
3 maintain our public spaces. It's
4 not easy and I know you have a
5 huge, you know, issue on your
6 hands, but here we are. We are
7 supposed to safeguard our
8 communities and all Philadelphians.

9 As was mentioned, it can
10 dry but there'll be a rain and
11 mobilize things again. Things get
12 into our water system. It's just
13 seeping in everywhere. There's no
14 point in belaboring that it is bad
15 for us. We all know this. Because
16 we can't give protective equipment
17 to children when they're going on
18 it. The workers are getting that,
19 and even then they're exposed.
20 Think about the kids just bare skin
21 rolling on the ground, right.

22 So we need to think
23 differently. And this is the
24 Administration that wants to be

1 bold. We are putting \$800 million
2 in housing, but we have to have
3 people who will live in that
4 housing who are not going to be
5 sick. So what is the bold plan?
6 And we're wanting to work with you
7 on what does a bold vision look
8 like in safety in our public
9 spaces.

10 You have to have that
11 innovative look of saying what are
12 the best practices, what can we do
13 and how do we educate the public to
14 have expectations of what it will
15 look like as we are doing this. We
16 know we can't let perfection be the
17 enemy of good, but we have to move
18 forward.

19 So I want to hear from
20 Parks & Recs what is your bold
21 vision for addressing these really
22 dangerous chemicals that we're
23 putting into the ground and the
24 groundwater system as well?

1 Thank you, Council -- I
2 mean, Chair.

3 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

4 So we can get together and based on
5 this bill we will come up with a
6 plan. I can't sit here right now
7 and say that I have a plan that I
8 can sit down and rattle off to you
9 because I don't. But we are
10 concerned. The Mayor uses
11 prevention intervention and that's
12 what we're planning to do. We'll
13 come up with a plan.

14 And I just want to give
15 you -- because we looked at some
16 other practices, because like you
17 said, Councilmember, this is a
18 worldwide problem. This is not
19 just a Philadelphia problem and it
20 is something that we're going to
21 have to tackle and it's not going
22 to happen overnight, but it is
23 something that we're willing to
24 tackle.

1 In Portland, Oregon,
2 they identified five city parks
3 where the use of pesticides have
4 been eliminated for a three-year
5 trial. Pesticides continue to be
6 used at the remaining sites, but
7 they've identified -- so when we're
8 talking about a plan, we need to
9 know that 10,000 acres, we won't be
10 able to attack 10,000 acres all at
11 one time, but we will come up and
12 identify areas where we can do a
13 pilot just like they did in
14 Portland.

15 In New York City, their
16 ban includes exceptions for golf
17 courses, athletic fields, invasive
18 species and plants that present
19 harm or obstruct, so there may be
20 some areas that we may have to say,
21 you know, in order for certain
22 behaviors to continue we may have
23 to say, well, we're not going to do
24 anything here as a part of a plan.

1 Boulder, Colorado, they
2 established a protocol and they
3 have a list of approved, just like
4 you're talking about, approved
5 pesticides we can identify as a
6 part of a plan. What are we going
7 to say is approved and what isn't
8 approved based on having
9 conversations with HOPS, having
10 conversations with you all.

11 In New Jersey, they
12 identified again a few spaces where
13 pesticides did not exist,
14 completely free of pesticides.
15 Other places they continue to use
16 pesticides. So we've been looking
17 at best practices, we've been
18 looking at other cities and we're
19 going to come up with a plan. And
20 it will be initially a pilot
21 because we can't tackle 10,000
22 acres at one time.

23 COUNCILWOMAN AHMAD: And
24 I would highly recommend you use

1 partners in this, you know, to use
2 thought leaders in this space who
3 have been involved in the best
4 practices. We are a city of eds
5 and meds. Challenge all of us to
6 work with you to look -- but the
7 bottom line is this is just bad,
8 right. That's where we have to
9 start from.

10 I think the pushback
11 saying we can't legislate, we can't
12 do this, that's just noise. That
13 should not be the response from an
14 administration. The response
15 should be we hear you, we know it's
16 bad, we're going to work and we're
17 going to give ourselves a timeline
18 how we're going to do it, here's
19 the plan.

20 We've had a year and a
21 half of this administration. Our
22 Madam Mayor was a Councilmember
23 when this was passed in the
24 previous administration, which it's

1 over four years almost that we have
2 had this, so there needs to be some
3 urgency about this issue. And I
4 know you have many things on your
5 plate, believe me we understand.
6 We need to staff you. We need to
7 make sure a lot of these things are
8 going to be labor-intensive,
9 people-intensive. So be it, right.

10 But we have to
11 understand that this is hurting us.
12 And when something hurts us, we
13 stop it. We look to do something
14 different. So thank you for being
15 so thoughtful and being open to
16 making change. We just have to do
17 it. So I thank you all for your
18 testimony.

19 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
20 Thank you for those questions too.
21 And I want to just clarify this
22 Administration is supportive and
23 wants to ensure that we are being
24 mindful of what we're doing in our

1 environment. I just wanted to
2 clarify that. This Administration
3 wants to make sure that we come up
4 with a plan as well and address the
5 challenges that are causing any
6 kind of harm in our communities.

7 And so, we're going to
8 move, we're going to come up with
9 the plan and we definitely -- I
10 appreciate your comments about this
11 is eds and meds. We will
12 definitely reach out. We will get
13 other thinkers to be a part of this
14 process as we're putting the plan
15 together. Thank you for sharing
16 it.

17 MS. BUCK: Can I just
18 add one more thing?

19 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
20 Reference --

21 MS. BUCK: Excuse me,
22 Councilman. Can I add one more
23 thing just to the Councilwoman's
24 comments about rolling in the

1 grass. We don't spray for weeds in
2 the grass. I just want to clarify,
3 not anywhere in our park system,
4 not even the Parkway. And the only
5 place you won't see weeds right now
6 is LOVE Park because it's just
7 recently sodded. But we don't
8 spray for weeds in the grass.
9 That's not something typically we
10 would prioritize.

11 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

12 Okay. Just a point of clarity so
13 you know. It's kind of funny how
14 things work. You just mentioned
15 golf courses. And New York
16 excluded them. New study shows
17 living near a golf course may more
18 than double the risk of Parkinson's
19 disease, which is one of the actual
20 causes of this.

21 It says new research
22 study troubling link between
23 proximity to golf courses and
24 increased risk to Parkinson's

1 disease. It is not just golfers at
2 risk. These findings highlight the
3 dangerous legacies of pesticides
4 used in green spaces and larger
5 risks they pose on students and
6 communities. That's just a point
7 of reference. I don't need you
8 to -- just so you know that things
9 are changing because, as you said,
10 more information is coming to
11 light.

12 Councilwoman Nina -- I
13 mean, Councilwoman Rue Landau and
14 then Councilwoman Quetcy Lozada.

15 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
16 Thank you so much for being here
17 and thank you so much to my
18 colleagues for all of your really
19 informative and passionate
20 testimony. I will say this moment
21 I am once again very happy I'm not
22 a golfer, but that is really
23 disturbing information.

24 I wanted to ask some

1 questions. To me when I heard
2 everyone's opening about how
3 dangerous and toxic the chemicals
4 are and how harmful they are, and
5 to hear from the Administration at
6 the minimum your offer of PPE that
7 includes everything from gloves to
8 masks to boots to what looks like
9 hazmat suits, I actually
10 visualized, you know, kids going
11 out to play in the forest with
12 these things on and that is not
13 what we want our kids doing at all.
14 We want them to be free.

15 I wanted to understand
16 more of what exactly is in your
17 testimony, Commissioner Slawson.
18 These products are vital in
19 controlling problematic vegetation
20 through our parks and have been a
21 part of our land management system
22 for decades. What exactly is
23 problematic vegetation? Do you
24 have a hierarchy of it? Some is

1 worse than others, you go attack
2 some more than others? Do you go
3 in a geographic look?

4 I was very interested
5 and I was already thinking about
6 what does it look like if we just
7 hire young people to pull things
8 out by their weeds and weed all
9 summer long? Is this a round-the-
10 year process that we have? Is it
11 only seasonal in the spring and
12 summer?

13 And finally, I want to
14 say that as someone who's also
15 worked for the administration in
16 the past, I appreciate so much when
17 new leadership comes in or comes
18 back in and says we will come up
19 with a plan. But I want to
20 underscore very much that this
21 seems extremely urgent and I feel
22 like our plans take a long time
23 often, but this one should be --
24 plans are only as fast as the

1 urgency of the leaders behind them.
2 So I will love to see something
3 come up immediately, including for
4 example let's try 100 feet from
5 where kids are playing, anything
6 that you can think of that is
7 immediate let's do it and start
8 there. So those are my questions.

9 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

10 Great. AeLin Compton is going to
11 answer a part of your question and
12 then I'll jump back in.

13 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

14 Thanks.

15 MS. COMPTON: Thank you
16 for your question. I really do
17 appreciate the opportunity to
18 explain more of what I do and the
19 work that we do. So I work at a
20 natural land setting as I've
21 mentioned, and our forests are very
22 sick. They are inundated with
23 invasive plant species, so species
24 that did not evolve here, they

1 don't have the same level of
2 herbivory so deer don't eat it.
3 They're removed from the usual
4 diseases and pests that might keep
5 those populations in check and in
6 balance.

7 And so, what we have is
8 an imbalanced ecosystem in our
9 forests and our meadows and our
10 sites. And so, it's my job to try
11 to return that balance. And so
12 again, our forests are inundated
13 with invasive plants, which is
14 another term for problematic
15 species. So examples include
16 Mile-A-Minute, which true to its
17 name, grows so very fast it will
18 completely consume a tree within
19 one season. And so, we are losing
20 trees. Trees are dying because of
21 invasive plant pressure on our
22 forests.

23 Our ability to replace
24 those trees, to plant more trees in

1 our sites is completely hindered
2 and dependent on our ability to
3 control the invasive plants within
4 that site. So I would be happy to
5 offer a full list of some of the
6 species that we control. There is
7 no blanket. It's not like every
8 time we see Mile-A-Minute or every
9 time we see knotweed or every time
10 we see mugwort we control it.
11 That's not how we do things.

12 We use a much more
13 targeted, strategic approach. We
14 consider the species, we consider
15 the location, we consider the goals
16 for that location. Are we trying
17 to create a meadow, are we trying
18 to preserve forest, are we trying,
19 you know, what are the ecological
20 goals of that site, how can this
21 system be most functional for the
22 city of Philadelphia. So we kind
23 of balance all of that. And again,
24 I'd be happy to provide more

1 information on the types of species
2 and how we target our approach.

3 And then we look at how
4 we can control that. So if we can
5 use mechanical means, we do. If we
6 can pull it, we do. There are some
7 species you cannot control by
8 mechanical means alone. Again, I'm
9 here today. I'm here to learn.
10 I'm here to grow. I'm here to
11 advance the way we do things so
12 that I'm serving the City of
13 Philadelphia better so that we're
14 preserving our forest better. So I
15 welcome the conversation.

16 I thank you for the
17 opportunity. But to date, there
18 are some species that I've
19 discovered that we cannot control
20 through those means alone. And
21 again, using organics it's
22 essentially a chemical mow. You
23 have to come and do it again, which
24 introduces more chemical to the

1 environment, which introduces more
2 opportunity for risk and contact
3 with those chemicals because they
4 are chemicals. And again -- yeah,
5 so again it's a strategic approach
6 that we utilize.

7 There are so many
8 species in the city of Philadelphia
9 that we need to control. Without
10 that, we will lose our natural
11 lands. They will become acres and
12 acres of vineland, porcelain berry,
13 Poison Ivy , bittersweet, these are
14 species that I work very hard to
15 control every day. And with the
16 resources we have, we are losing
17 that battle. We're doing the best
18 we can but we need more resources.
19 We need more innovative ideas. So
20 I thank you for bringing up this
21 important discussion.

22 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

23 Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

1 So just to share, one of our goals
2 is tree canopy, right. This would
3 affect our tree canopy without a
4 question. We would have less sight
5 lines, more short-dumping. And
6 these are just some of the
7 challenges that we would have as a
8 result of not being able to manage.

9 When we have access to
10 view rivers and creeks, they would
11 be replaced by walls of knotweed.
12 We would not have that, the trails
13 that we are building up. So when
14 we think about our plan and we come
15 up with what we're going to do, we
16 also have to keep these things in
17 mind that community members, that
18 the people that are in Wissahickon,
19 the people that are in West
20 Fairmount Park and East Fairmount
21 Park, that they love so much,
22 depending on how we manage we lose.
23 So we have to come up with that
24 balance.

1 The other thing I wanted
2 to address because we talked about
3 cost and when we say cost, we're
4 not talking about a cost that is
5 more valuable than life. I have
6 grandchildren that play in these
7 parks. So the cost is what does
8 it -- we have to be mindful of what
9 it's going to cost us so we're
10 presenting for budget purposes. We
11 need to know.

12 So when we're talking
13 costs, we're not saying that, oh,
14 it would cost too much for us to
15 manage if we have to change a
16 system. That is never what we're
17 talking about. We have to always
18 include cost because we have a
19 budget that we have to be mindful
20 of. I just wanted to put that out
21 there.

22 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
23 Thank you. We would love if you
24 could provide the list to the

1 Chair, it would be wonderful, of
2 the species that you're attacking
3 and kind of your plan and your
4 geographic way of doing it. Thank
5 you.

6 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: And
7 before I pass it to Councilwoman
8 Lozada, I just want to say that
9 other major cities have already
10 done it. They're in compliance.
11 We're on the list of compliance but
12 we are not in compliance. So I
13 would like to look at what they're
14 doing and how they're doing it,
15 because I am absolutely positive
16 that people are still enjoying the
17 parks in New York and LA and
18 Chicago where they're doing this
19 kind of stuff now.

20 Councilwoman Lozada.

21 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:
22 That was actually part of what I
23 wanted to ask, right --

24 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

1 Sorry.

2 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

3 It's okay. I'm glad that,
4 Commissioner, you clarified that
5 point, right, that while we want to
6 preserve and protect green spaces,
7 we also recognize that we want to
8 protect the health and well-being
9 of the communities that use these
10 spaces and that there is no cost
11 too high to be able to protect our
12 communities and the residents of
13 our city. So thank you for
14 clarifying that.

15 You mentioned a little
16 while ago that you've already
17 started having conversations with
18 other cities about what it is
19 they're doing. Can you share with
20 us maybe two or three things that
21 they're doing that we should maybe
22 be considering that would help us
23 respond to this important topic?

24 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON: I

1 just only had the information that
2 I shared thus far about New York
3 and New Jersey. That's the only
4 thing we have now, but that's a
5 part of our plan. Finding best
6 practices, that's the beginning of
7 what we do. Pretty much to what
8 you're saying, Councilmember
9 Harrity, what are other cities
10 doing, and that's part of the
11 research that we have to do.

12 And just let me
13 apologize for any miscommunication
14 that has happened prior to this
15 hearing right here. We are
16 supportive of making sure that
17 Philadelphia is safe. This ties
18 right in with Mayor Parker. Safe,
19 clean and green. In the midst of
20 us ensuring that we are using the
21 right products, we're talking about
22 safety but we also have to make
23 sure we continue to keep a green
24 city. And depending on what

1 chemicals we use, we're affecting
2 either our young people, our adults
3 or our entire system. So we have
4 to find that balance.

5 And so, we're going to
6 continue to really look to see what
7 other cities are doing,
8 Councilmember Lozada. I don't have
9 a whole list of that in front of me
10 right now.

11 COUNCILWOMAN LOZADA:

12 Yeah. I think part of the
13 frustration that I've heard from
14 some of my colleagues when talking
15 about this is that this has been a
16 topic of conversation since 2020,
17 right, and we have many of the same
18 people working in the Department of
19 PPR. And so, at what point does
20 someone take it very seriously and
21 start to make recommendations. I
22 recognize that this Administration
23 just arrived in 2024, but this has
24 been a topic of conversation for a

1 really long time. And so, at what
2 point do we decide these are the
3 things that we need to put in
4 place.

5 Maybe there should have
6 been conversations and options
7 offered to this leadership. And
8 so, I'm just trying to figure out
9 why if this is so serious, right
10 and if this is so important to so
11 many people, why are we not further
12 along in the process? I mean, I'm
13 just, you know, I don't understand
14 that.

15 And so, it's a little
16 frustrating that we're still
17 looking at options, that we're
18 still having conversations, that
19 we're not changing how we do
20 things. And I think it's part of
21 government, right. For a long time
22 government has been used to just
23 doing things the same way for a
24 really long time. And so, looking

1 at kind of taking the off-road and
2 doing something different I think
3 has been challenging for government
4 and the City of Philadelphia for a
5 really long time. And so, I'm glad
6 that you are at least having
7 conversations with other cities and
8 trying to figure out how to move it
9 forward.

10 I just hope that in our
11 next session or a year from now
12 we're still not having a
13 conversation about what are the
14 actions and how do we decide how
15 we're going to continue to preserve
16 and protect green spaces and
17 residents that should be able to
18 use these spaces in a healthy way.
19 Thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

21 Thank you.

22 MS. COMPTON: I wonder
23 if I could say one thing. I'm so
24 sorry.

1 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

2 Yeah. Go ahead.

3 MS. COMPTON: Thank you
4 so much for those comments and
5 those questions. It really
6 resonates your vision. I just want
7 to say that we do continue to
8 search for better ways to do what
9 we do. Unfortunately, I have not
10 found that magic bullet approach
11 that will solve all of our problems
12 and meet all of the needs of our
13 city and the land that we are
14 tasked to steward.

15 So it's our job to care
16 for these lands for current
17 Philadelphians, for future
18 Philadelphians, to preserve and
19 make sure that they remain
20 available and remain functioning
21 and doing the things that we need.
22 And unfortunately, as we continue
23 to learn and we continue to talk to
24 other cities, there is no single

1 magic bullet approach that will
2 replace this really critical tool
3 that -- it's one tool in our bag.
4 We do many, many different ways --
5 we control invasive plants in many
6 different ways, but we have not
7 found one catch-all amazing
8 approach.

9 But again, we're here to
10 learn. We're here to continue to
11 learn. I do want to say that we
12 are doing our best and working very
13 hard to try to implement new
14 strategies and implement
15 innovation, but we continue to use
16 these pesticides, because like many
17 of other cities across the country
18 who continue to use pesticides,
19 there are certain situations,
20 certain species, certain
21 environments where it's the
22 cleanest, safest, best method to
23 manage that land.

24 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

1 Thank you for that, but I would say
2 cleanest and safest for who. Thank
3 you for your testimony today.

4 Before I dismiss you,
5 I'm just sorry that you're actually
6 not going to be here to hear some
7 of the testimony from the experts
8 and some of the testimony of the
9 people who are suffering with the
10 results of this kind of stuff. But
11 I'm glad you're leaving people here
12 and staff will be here to give you
13 the information.

14 If you noticed, I didn't
15 ask a lot of questions. This
16 wasn't about me trying to come
17 out -- this is about us trying to
18 get answers to work together on how
19 we make the city safe for our
20 children and for everyone to play
21 in the parks.

22 My hope with this is
23 that we're going to come up with
24 some more ideas. We're going to

1 come up with more conversations,
2 more bringing people in to be
3 included. Because to me, there is
4 no miracle. We're always looking
5 for that magical cure. It doesn't
6 exist. We either have to invest in
7 something more expensive or switch
8 to organic or something around
9 those lines. There's not going to
10 be that miracle that's going to
11 come out. If it does, I can
12 guarantee you it's going to be
13 worse than the one you're using.

14 So there's a lot of
15 things I would like to see.
16 There's a lot of things I'm going
17 to bring up as a result of this.
18 Some to your union about the way
19 they are doing the spraying, what
20 training should be given to their
21 members in order to do this kind of
22 stuff.

23 You have three people.
24 God bless you. I get it. It's not

1 a lot of people, but we're
2 subcontracting this stuff. And the
3 other idea is to make sure that
4 these subcontractors are following
5 the rules also. I kept this
6 hearing very low because I didn't
7 want it to turn into a spectacle of
8 people in here shouting. And I
9 have to commend all the
10 professional speakers and you. I
11 asked them not to pack the room
12 with people because I wanted to
13 actually hear the information. I
14 wanted to hear what you guys had to
15 say.

16 Ms. Slawson, I know you.
17 I think I know your heart and
18 you're in this and I know you want
19 to do what's best for the citizens
20 of Philadelphia. So I'm going to
21 give you the benefit of the doubt
22 because I know what kind of person
23 I think you are, and I think that
24 you have a heart. And I know, like

1 you said, you have kids, and
2 whatever we can do, we should be
3 doing no matter the cost.

4 Anyone have anything to
5 say before we dismiss this panel?

6 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

7 Well, I want to thank -- thank you.
8 I would like to thank you all for
9 being here and I apologize, I had
10 to step out for another meeting,
11 but I really look forward to
12 working together to resolve this
13 matter and to make sure that we
14 have, as the bill intended, healthy
15 outdoor public spaces because we're
16 not there yet. And I think we can
17 get there.

18 So we really want to
19 work with you, work with the
20 advocates and just make our spaces
21 healthier because we all want to
22 use them and we all want to use
23 them without concern. As the
24 Commissioner knows, we do our

1 summer event series which is
2 getting ready to kick off. We're
3 in our parks, our rec centers, our
4 playgrounds and we need for them to
5 just be healthy public spaces. So
6 thank you so much.

7 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

8 We are committed to work with you,
9 to work with the community. The
10 Mayor uses that PIE, prevention,
11 intervention and enforcement. We
12 want to prevent anything that we're
13 using that's going to cause any
14 harm. And the way we do it is to
15 intervene and to identify what's
16 happening in other cities and what
17 we can do. And then our goal is
18 our plan will be able to enforce
19 what we put in place.

20 So we're definitely here
21 to work with you. We're not going
22 to drag our feet on this. It's not
23 going to -- next year you will not
24 sit here and we haven't moved.

1 COUNCILWOMAN BASS:

2 Well, I am going to make an ask
3 which is that we meet on a much
4 more regular basis. So I know we
5 had the hearing back in 2000 or
6 2001 or whatever and we're having a
7 hearing today, but I'm going to ask
8 the Chairman if we are able to meet
9 on a regular basis, have a hearing
10 maybe like a quarterly update so
11 that maybe at the end of the summer
12 we can have an update and just stay
13 on top of this issue so that it
14 doesn't just go away.

15 But maybe, Mr. Chairman,
16 we could have another hearing in
17 September, October and then early
18 in the new year and just keep the
19 conversation going because that's
20 the way I think we're going to make
21 progress.

22 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:

23 Thank you.

24 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: I

1 agree and I thank you for your
2 testimony. And, Ms. Buck, also
3 thank you for all your years of
4 service and thank you for what
5 you're doing for our parks trying
6 to keep the green spaces. I'm a big
7 green guy. Everybody knows. I'm a
8 gardener, you know, so I appreciate
9 being here as a person that's boots
10 on the ground actually doing the
11 work to give us your testimony and
12 your feelings. I just ask you to
13 please, please be careful out there
14 and don't play around with this
15 stuff. Thank you.

16 MS. COMPTON: Thank you.

17 MS. BUCK: Thank you for
18 your time.

19 COMMISSIONER SLAWSON:
20 Thank you very much.

21 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
22 Mr. Kunkel, will you please call
23 the next panel of witnesses to
24 testify.

1 THE CLERK: Linda Stern,
2 Poune Saberi, Francie Rubin.

3 (Witnesses approached
4 witness table.)

5 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
6 Thank you all for being here today
7 taking time out of your schedule to
8 come in here and help us get
9 through this. Please state your
10 name for the record and begin with
11 your testimony.

12 DR. STERN: Thank you.
13 Dr. Linda Stern. And good morning
14 and it's still morning, yep. Thank
15 you for providing me the
16 opportunity to offer testimony for
17 the public health and environmental
18 bill introduced by Councilmember
19 Harrity.

20 My name is Dr. Linda
21 Stern. And most of my medical
22 career was served at the
23 Philadelphia Veterans Affairs
24 Medical Center as a primary care

1 physician and researcher. I
2 treated many veterans who were
3 exposed and sickened by the
4 herbicide Agent Orange.

5 The Philadelphia Parks
6 Department still sprays the
7 herbicide 2,4-D, which is one of
8 the two active ingredients in Agent
9 Orange for weed control on our
10 playgrounds and parks. 2,4-D has
11 significant health risks, including
12 non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, multiple
13 myeloma and Parkinson's disease.
14 It's associated with DNA damage and
15 hormone disruption that can lead to
16 birth defects, cancer.

17 Additionally, the Parks
18 Department sprays literally tons of
19 glyphosate, the most widely-used
20 pesticide on the planet. Strong
21 scientific evidence, overwhelming
22 evidence, shows that glyphosate is
23 dangerous to humans, especially
24 young children, pregnant women and

1 the workers who apply them. The
2 World Health Organization
3 determined that glyphosate is
4 probably carcinogenic. And the
5 University of Washington study
6 showed that glyphosate increased
7 the risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
8 by more than 40%. And that review
9 of studies included one with 54,000
10 people who had jobs applying the
11 pesticides.

12 Let's be clear, there
13 are no established safe levels of
14 herbicides and children are
15 uniquely vulnerable to the health
16 effects of that exposure. And
17 children age 6 to 11 have higher
18 levels of common pesticides in
19 their bodies than adults.

20 A Harvard study
21 published in pediatrics determined
22 that there was an increased risk
23 for leukemia from herbicide
24 exposure during childhood.

1 Children exposed to herbicides
2 during pregnancy have higher risks
3 of developing brain tumors.

4 Mothers exposed to glyphosate have
5 an increased risk of spontaneous
6 abortions and shortened
7 pregnancies.

8 We know in particular in
9 Philadelphia that pesticide
10 exposure can both trigger and is a
11 root cause of asthma. Overall U.S.
12 asthma prevalence is only 5.8%, but
13 in Philadelphia it's 21%. And
14 children exposed to herbicides
15 during their first year of life are
16 more than four times more likely to
17 be diagnosed with asthma before the
18 age of 5, and Black children are
19 three times as likely to die from
20 asthma as White children.

21 Unfortunately, this
22 common practice that we've talked
23 about of allowing 24, even 72 hours
24 to pass before allowing play on

1 fields when pesticides have been
2 applied is not sufficiently
3 protective. These chemicals can
4 remain in the soil for many weeks,
5 even months.

6 In closing, I nearly
7 demand that you enforce the law. I
8 feel like I'm preaching to the
9 choir here, but it's a moral
10 imperative. And just think, if it
11 was your child diagnosed with
12 leukemia, if it was your friend or
13 brother who applied the herbicides
14 developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma or
15 if you had the misfortune like I've
16 had of watching a teenager die of
17 asthma in the emergency room, I
18 know you would be demanding that we
19 stop spraying and find the safe
20 alternatives that we know exist.
21 Thank you.

22 MS. FRANKLIN: Sure.
23 Good morning. My name is Alexis
24 Franklin and I'll be reading

1 testimony on behalf of Dr. Poune
2 Saberi who could not be here today.
3 Thank you for the opportunity to
4 provide testimony today regarding
5 Bill No. 250397, introduced by
6 Councilmember Harrity.

7 Five years ago as a
8 long-term Philadelphia resident and
9 a physician specializing in
10 occupational and environmental
11 medicine, I submitted testimony
12 about harms of pesticides to human
13 health. At that time, the joint
14 testimony was with a long-term
15 colleague of mine, Dr. Julie
16 Becker. This past February she
17 unfortunately passed away. She
18 died from the side effects of the
19 treatments for three different
20 types of cancers that she suffered
21 from.

22 In her lifetime she
23 fought tirelessly to educate and
24 illuminate the connection between

1 chemicals, chiefly pesticides in
2 our environment and terrible
3 terminal diseases like cancer. She
4 and I expressed grave concern about
5 the overuse of pesticides in
6 Philadelphia's public grounds. It
7 is sad to speak to the same issue
8 five years later despite the
9 passage of the bill in a city that
10 claims to be green.

11 It is also sad that my
12 colleague never saw the fruits of
13 her efforts. My experience is in
14 studying and practicing how
15 environmental impacts our health as
16 individuals and communities. In
17 the past five years, numerous cases
18 have been brought forth against the
19 use of glyphosate and other
20 pesticides. Chemical companies
21 have been accountable and made to
22 pay. Harmed people have gotten
23 justice for their suffering, but
24 they never got their health back.

1 Many of these chemicals
2 build up in our bodies and in the
3 environment, and the effect is
4 termed cumulative exposure. This
5 cumulative exposure may have been
6 more severe effects on certain
7 groups of people like children
8 because they spend more time
9 playing outdoors, drink more water
10 and are closer to the ground.

11 It is unfathomable to
12 think that the Administration of
13 the city would have protected us,
14 the residents from an additional
15 five years of chemical build-up,
16 but they chose bureaucracy over
17 what was legally our right and
18 morally the right to do.

19 Many of the scientific
20 research has shown that the health
21 impacts of pesticides to skin, eye,
22 lungs, brains and nervous system,
23 blood and circulation, pregnant
24 women and their infants and the

1 hormonal system. Outside of these
2 city walls, science is met with
3 skepticism. It's a sad day when
4 even the city wall's science does
5 not have sanctuary.

6 It bears emphasis that
7 the efforts of Councilmember
8 Harrity to hold this hearing are
9 appreciated. The Healthy Outdoor
10 Public Space law was passed five
11 years ago. The city now must
12 enforce it and reduce the harm to
13 our community and residents. Thank
14 you.

15 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
16 Your name and begin your testimony.

17 DR. RUBIN: Good
18 morning. Thank you for the
19 opportunity to provide testimony
20 today regarding Bill No. 250397,
21 introduced by Councilmember
22 Harrity. I am Dr Francie Rubin.
23 I'm a veterinarian and previous
24 owner of the Rockledge Veterinary

1 Clinic just outside of Northeast
2 Philadelphia. I've been a
3 veterinarian for 31 years.

4 My Veterinary
5 Association, the AVMA, reports that
6 1 in 4 dogs die of cancer every
7 year. Almost 1 in 2 dogs over the
8 age of 10 develops cancer. These
9 are alarming statistics. When I
10 walk my own dog during the summer
11 and spring, I can smell the lawn
12 chemicals that many of my neighbors
13 have applied. I see the little,
14 almost invisible signs that
15 companies like TruGreen leave on
16 the lawn. I often experience
17 burning in my nose and throat.

18 I hope that you will
19 support -- I hope that you will
20 support enforcing the law that bans
21 the use of these dangerous
22 chemicals in your public spaces and
23 set a precedent so that I can start
24 a movement in my own community.

1 Our children and our pets, helpless
2 beings, deserve our efforts to
3 protect them from the potentially
4 toxic effects of these very
5 dangerous chemicals. Thank you.

6 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

7 Mr. Kunkel, are there any other
8 people to testify on this panel?

9 THE CLERK: No.

10 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: No,
11 okay. I'm going to open up for
12 questions starting off, as I said,
13 with my colleague Cindy Bass who
14 was the originator of this bill. I
15 just have to say that. I'm just
16 piggybacking off of her legislation
17 trying to figure out why we haven't
18 figured this out yet.

19 So please, Councilwoman
20 Bass.

21 COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I
22 just want to say thank you ladies
23 for being here and for your very
24 powerful testimony, speaking from

1 experience, speaking from your
2 personal -- giving your personal
3 stories related to just these
4 chemicals, the effects that they've
5 had and around what you've seen and
6 what you know.

7 I think that there's
8 nothing more important and more
9 valuable when we do public
10 testimony than to hear it straight
11 from "the horse's mouth, but
12 straight from your mouth," so that
13 people can really understand it's
14 not just us sitting here
15 testifying. It's not just what we
16 think. You all are the subject
17 matter experts in this matter. And
18 so, we just want to say thank you
19 so much for being here and for your
20 very powerful testimony today.

21 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

22 Thank you.

23 Dr. Stern, thank you for
24 your testimony. Your testimony

1 states that Philadelphia Parks &
2 Rec still sprays herbicides two to
3 four days. How many veterans would
4 you say you have treated with
5 exposure to this herbicide? And
6 you can give us a rough estimate.
7 And your testimony states health
8 risks that most of us are unaware
9 of, such as cancer, Parkinson's
10 disease and also mentioned DNA
11 damage and hormone disruption. Can
12 you tell us more about these?

13 DR. STERN: Yeah. Let
14 me start with 2,4-D and glyphosate
15 are both considered endocrine
16 disrupters. And I won't give too
17 much basic medicine, but we need
18 our hormones for growth and
19 metabolism. And when they're
20 disrupted, everything goes haywire.
21 And including DNA, our genetic
22 material gets destroyed, gets
23 disrupted.

24 We have to remember

1 what's the role of herbicides.
2 Herbicides are designed to disrupt
3 and destroy life. They do it very
4 well. And when they were first
5 discovered, we thought they were
6 safe because what they end up doing
7 is disrupt -- one of the mechanisms
8 is to disrupt the bacteria in our
9 guts. So even though it might not
10 hurt human cells, it hurts
11 bacteria. And we are learning more
12 and more that we cannot be healthy
13 without a healthy microbiome.

14 In terms of how many,
15 gosh, I'm sorry I don't have exact
16 numbers for you but I'll tell you
17 this: The U.S. government -- I
18 worked in comp. and pension for a
19 while. And the U.S. government
20 recognizes 14 diseases, and the
21 list keeps growing actually, caused
22 by Agent Orange. And anyone with
23 exposure gets compensation.

24 And you'd be surprised,

1 it's just not, you know, we hear a
2 lot about the non-Hodgkin's
3 lymphoma and leukemia, but other
4 things are soft tissue tumors and
5 neuropathy and diabetes, even heart
6 disease because of the many
7 mechanisms these herbicides have.
8 It's complicated and it's like
9 pulling a thread out of a fabric,
10 but they're exquisitely dangerous.

11 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

12 Yeah. I can also testify my father
13 is 100% disabled from the military,
14 but he gets way over 100% because
15 he was hit with Agent Orange. And
16 every time, like you said, the list
17 of diseases and symptoms and causes
18 that are caused by Agent Orange,
19 which this substance is derived
20 from, is already known, it has been
21 known. We have case studies. Look
22 at our Vietnam vets. Look what we
23 did to them. So I thank you for
24 your testimony.

1 Any of my colleagues

2 have any -- Councilwoman Rue

3 Landau.

4 COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

5 Thank you so much. I just want to

6 jump in to repeat your amazingly

7 chilling statement that you just

8 said, that herbicides are created

9 to disrupt life. I think that's

10 going to stick with all of us for

11 the rest of the day. Thank you all

12 so much.

13 DR. STERN: Thank you.

14 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: All

15 right. Thank you for your

16 testimony. I appreciate you taking

17 your time and coming here and we

18 look forward to collaborating with

19 you more. You guys are the boots

20 on the ground, your medical

21 doctors, you know, we need to take

22 what you say with the, you know, as

23 knowledge.

24 And the fact of the

1 matter is the reason I haven't
2 asked a lot of questions and I have
3 a lot of them is because I want my
4 colleagues to get their questions
5 out. I know what this stuff does.
6 I'm trained to know what this stuff
7 does. So I appreciate you today
8 and I appreciate you taking up your
9 time.

10 DR. RUBIN: Thank you.

11 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

12 Mr. Kunkel, will you please call
13 the next panel of witnesses to
14 testify.

15 THE CLERK: Lisa
16 Bonitatibus, Nasir Johnson, Kris
17 Soffa, Amy Stephen, Kacy Gao.

18 (Witnesses approached
19 witness table.)

20 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

21 Hello. Thank you for coming here
22 today to share your experiences and
23 your story. Please state your name
24 and begin your testimony. We're

1 going to hear everyone's testimony.
2 And then if we have any questions,
3 we'll answer them after everybody
4 gives their testimony. Thank you.

5 MR. LEWIN: Good
6 morning. My name is Nasir Lewin.
7 I'm a 19 year old --

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:
9 Talk into the mic.

10 MR. LEWIN: I'm sorry.
11 Again, good morning. My name is
12 Nasir Lewin. I'm 19 years old and
13 a senior at PA Cyber High School.
14 I graduate in July. Thank you for
15 the opportunity to testify today.

16 I grew up playing
17 basketball at Lonnie Young Center
18 on Chelten Ave. When I was 14, I
19 started to feel short-breathed when
20 I played basketball one morning. I
21 woke up with a bruise on my face.
22 It came out of nowhere. My mother
23 was concerned and took me to a
24 doctor. It turned out I had

1 leukemia. We don't know if it was
2 an environmental cause or not, but
3 I spent the next 14 months at
4 St. Christopher's Hospital getting
5 treatment. I went through 45 blood
6 transfusions and 9 operations. I'm
7 glad to say I've been in remission
8 for three years now, but I lost a
9 year and a half of my life.

10 We don't know for sure,
11 but if there's any chance the
12 herbicides sprayed on the courts to
13 control weeds causing my cancer
14 there is no good reason to keep
15 using them. I wouldn't want anyone
16 else to go through what I've gone
17 through. Please make sure the law
18 is followed and that dangerous
19 synthetic herbicides are not used
20 on any parks. We need to protect
21 other kids. Thank you.

22 (Applause.)

23 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

24 Please state your name and begin

1 your testimony.

2 MS. BONITATIBUS: Good
3 morning. My name is Lisa
4 Bonitatibus. I'm a co-founder of
5 Toxic Free Philly, an active park
6 supporter and a long-time volunteer
7 for Parks and Recreation,
8 specializing in restoration at the
9 Schuylkill River banks.

10 You may remember me from
11 outside City Hall at the rally for
12 a fully-funded Parks and
13 Recreation. I was the one wearing
14 a bee costume. Thank you for the
15 opportunity to testify today for
16 Bill No. 250397, introduced by
17 Councilmember Harrity, in support
18 of the enforcement of the Healthy
19 Outdoor Public Spaces law.

20 12 years ago I was
21 diagnosed with Stage 3 breast
22 cancer, now Stage 4. And look, we
23 all have someone in our life who's
24 living with cancer and we know

1 firsthand how it can break
2 increasingly younger families
3 through terror, loss, bankruptcy.
4 I don't need to tell you that, but
5 I can tell you that most
6 oncologists will say the cancer was
7 not your fault and don't blame
8 yourself. It was just bad luck.
9 I don't believe that.
10 My surgical oncologist tells it
11 like it is. She says that my kind
12 of breast cancer, estrogen
13 receptor-positive, by far the most
14 common type, comes from endocrine
15 disrupters like herbicides. I was
16 the first in my family to have
17 cancer. What makes me different
18 from the rest is environmental
19 factors, which include diet and
20 lifestyle, over which we have some
21 control, but most importantly, the
22 many synthetic endocrine disrupters
23 coming from petrochemicals found in
24 plastics, cosmetics, clothing,

1 household products and, yes,
2 herbicides. 63% of all breast
3 cancers are caused by endocrine-
4 disrupting chemicals like 2,4-D and
5 glyphosate.

6 My doctor explained to
7 me the bucket theory of health,
8 that our bodies are like a bucket
9 that can fill up with insults. We
10 just need to keep the bucket from
11 spilling over because that's when
12 disease happens. Most of an
13 herbicide spray misses the target
14 plant and harms the air, water,
15 soil, nontarget plants and animals.
16 My oncologist says emphatically we
17 should not be spraying.

18 We know what the people
19 want. We passed the law and the
20 clock is ticking. Let's enforce
21 this now before anyone else is
22 harmed. Thank you.

23 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

24 Thank you.

1 MS. STEPHEN: Okay.

2 Good morning. My name is Amy
3 Stephen. Thank you, Councilmember
4 Harrity, for calling these hearings
5 and for the opportunity to testify.
6 I wanted to thank Councilmember
7 Bass also for sponsoring the
8 original legislation and getting it
9 made into law.

10 I volunteer as a trail
11 ambassador in our parks. I've
12 helped lead native plant
13 restoration the way AeLin was
14 talking about for over 10 years as
15 a volunteer in other parks and I
16 founded the group Toxic Free
17 Philly.

18 One day I asked a worker
19 at my rec center how they
20 controlled the weeds around the
21 tennis courts and the basketball
22 courts. And the fellow was very,
23 very nice and he said, oh, I have
24 to get out there and spray some

1 more glyphosate. And I was like,
2 oh, well, you don't really have to
3 do that, it's fine, it's fine, I'm
4 not complaining. But here kids
5 were playing, leaving their
6 sweatshirts, their backpacks lying
7 on the ground at the edge of the
8 court and then they put them on
9 when they leave and they're
10 literally bringing home toxic
11 herbicides on their bodies totally
12 unbeknownst to them. I've known
13 Nasir for many, many years and I
14 think about him when I see this
15 situation.

16 Philadelphia took a big
17 step towards correcting this
18 problem when you passed the HOPS
19 law in 2020 unanimously. Thank
20 you. But the City is not following
21 the law you passed. Workers and
22 the kids and the public are still
23 at risk. Every year since the law
24 was passed literally tons of these

1 prohibited herbicides have been
2 applied in violation of the law.

3 I want to draw your
4 attention to that map over there on
5 the poster. Each blue icon on that
6 map represents a park that was
7 treated with a toxic herbicide in
8 violation of the law, each of those
9 blue dots. I invite you to go to
10 our website toxicfreephilly.org and
11 look at that map. It's
12 interactive. And if you click on
13 any of those blue dots, you can see
14 the park, what was applied, when,
15 how much, by whom.

16 We also did a more
17 detailed kind of analysis in a
18 written form that you have in your
19 packet that goes through it. I
20 invite you to please just take at
21 least a look at it. It's a lot to
22 comprehend. But the basic bottom
23 line is that each year since the
24 law has been in effect between 13

1 and 16 tons of pesticides have been
2 applied in violation of the law to
3 our parks. And about half of it's
4 in that native plant stuff that
5 AeLin was talking about and then
6 half of it's just along fence lines
7 and ball fields where really
8 mechanical removal is completely
9 possible. The contracts would need
10 to be renegotiated.

11 The other thing about
12 this law is that it includes an
13 advisory committee. I know that
14 the Health Department is willing to
15 run that advisory committee.
16 They've been very cooperative. And
17 that advisory committee would
18 oversee waivers. So if there
19 really is a critical need, as was
20 expressed by Parks, your law
21 provides for a mechanism to give an
22 exception through a waiver, but it
23 doesn't allow it just to be done
24 willy-nilly or because -- I know

1 it's not willy-nilly, but just to
2 be done because somebody thinks
3 it's necessary. It has to be kind
4 of proven that nothing else would
5 work. You have that in your law.

6 The law also requires
7 reports to be issued. No reports
8 have been issued. All the
9 information we got we had to beg --
10 we had to go through a right to
11 know. And most people don't have
12 this information. We've put it on
13 the website, but the City hasn't
14 published it.

15 I really encourage you
16 not to take any excuses. Many
17 other cities across the country
18 have similar laws, but they've made
19 real progress. When you look at
20 what they've done, they've trained
21 their staff in mechanical removal
22 and other nontoxic products. They
23 have renegotiated contracts to
24 mechanical removal and they've cut

1 their herbicide usage by 50%, 60%
2 or more. We haven't cut ours at
3 all in the time this law has been
4 in effect.

5 Thank you again for
6 holding these hearings. I really
7 put my faith in your leadership and
8 I know this Administration cares,
9 but we need to enforce the law and
10 not just have it slip down the
11 road. Thank you so much.

12 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

13 Thank you.

14 Please state your name
15 for the record and begin with your
16 testimony.

17 MS. SOFFA: My name's --
18 good morning or good afternoon. My
19 name is Kris Soffa and thank you
20 for the opportunity to speak today
21 on 250397. First of all, we are
22 deeply grateful to Councilmember
23 Harrity for holding this hearing
24 and also to Councilmember Bass for

1 making the Healthy Outdoor Public

2 Spaces law, the HOPS law.

3 I'm a democratic

4 committee person in the 21st Ward,

5 a former co-chair of the 5th Police

6 District Advisory Committee and a

7 proud former member of the Parks

8 and Recreation Commission. We've

9 been misled before about DDT,

10 cigarettes and now glyphosate. I

11 believed the lies and I even taught

12 others to use it. I had it in my

13 garage.

14 And now, after a

15 lifetime of service to my community

16 and the land I've been diagnosed

17 with three different types of

18 cancer. And my doctors at Fox

19 Chase have asked that the City

20 enforce the HOPS law, and they

21 shared some pamphlets that you have

22 in your collection for your

23 constituents if they come and ask

24 you for help.

1 So it breaks my heart to
2 think that I trusted what may have
3 harmed me and possibly the other
4 people that I worked with. But now
5 that we know the truth, how can we
6 keep spraying these toxins in
7 places where children play. It's
8 preventable harm and a violation of
9 public trust.

10 And someone recently
11 called this a moral humiliation for
12 Philadelphia and I agree. So let's
13 face the facts. You have -- well,
14 especially during National Gun
15 Violence Awareness Month, this is
16 an image of a gun and a weed
17 sprayer. So the weed sprayer
18 nozzle may not make the headlines
19 like a gun barrel, but both of them
20 carry the power to harm. Guns kill
21 loudly and quickly. Herbicides
22 kill silently and slowly. Both are
23 deadly and both are preventable.

24 So as we prepare to

1 celebrate Philadelphia's 250th
2 birthday what better legacy than a
3 city that's truly clean and green,
4 but that must mean that it's toxic-
5 free. Thank you.

6 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:
7 Please state your name for the
8 record and begin your testimony.

9 MS. GAO: Thank you for
10 the opportunity to speak today. My
11 name is Kacy Gao. I will be
12 graduating from Drexel University
13 in a few days and I founded and led
14 Toxic Free Philly Drexel, a student
15 org focused on reducing
16 environmental toxin exposure
17 through campus and community
18 advocacy.

19 I first joined the
20 broader toxic-free Philly movement
21 during rallies calling for
22 increased funding for Parks & Rec
23 to kickstart the transition away
24 from the routine use of toxic

1 herbicides on our public lands. On
2 my campus, I also noticed unmarked
3 spray zones, groundskeepers who
4 could have been using better
5 protective equipment and students
6 relaxing on treated lawns. With a
7 team of other passionate student
8 advocates, I led the charge to
9 transition Drexel to organic green
10 space management.

11 After the initial
12 one-year pilot, groundskeepers were
13 able to bring organic turf care
14 campus-wide without a budget
15 increase, after witnessing
16 increases in turf lushness. And by
17 the way, organic land care is not
18 just organic herbicides. It's
19 improving soil health so the turf
20 and the native plants can naturally
21 out-compete weeds.

22 Other institutions
23 within the Re:wild Your Campus
24 network that have gone organic see

1 decreases in weed growth and cost
2 savings within five years of
3 implementation due to increased
4 soil health. Drexel's grounds
5 director has talked about how
6 working the pilot gave his team the
7 confidence and self-sufficiency to
8 phase out herbicides they knew
9 could be harmful.

10 Thanks to my team and
11 the readily-available consultants
12 we worked with, PGC Organics,
13 Osborne Organics, Drexel became the
14 first university in Philadelphia
15 and all of Pennsylvania to go
16 organic, joining institutions like
17 Harvard and other top schools
18 across the country. If students
19 and campus grounds keepers can make
20 this kind of change, so can the
21 City of Philadelphia. Enforce the
22 HOPS law, protect our parks, our
23 health and our future. Thank you.

24 (Applause.)

1 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Oh,
2 I'm sorry. I was waiting for the
3 next person to testify. Thank you
4 all for coming in here today and
5 sharing your stories. Very
6 inspiring but very upsetting
7 knowing that stuff like this can be
8 avoided.

9 Man, thank you for
10 coming. You made me cry, dude, you
11 know what I mean. It's very
12 touching and you were playing
13 something that you enjoy and you
14 may have gotten sick because of it.
15 It's not right. 19 years old, you
16 got your whole life ahead of you,
17 and I'm glad to see that you're in
18 remission and you're doing well. I
19 wish you well in your life.

20 (Applause.)

21 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Do
22 any of my colleagues have any
23 questions for this panel?

24 (No response.)

1 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

2 Anyone?

3 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

4 Thank you so much.

5 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

6 Thank you for sharing your story.

7 And this isn't over. You've heard

8 this panel here. We're all

9 concerned about this. We all have

10 children, have grandchildren now.

11 Not trying to go through this again

12 in another four years. So I thank

13 you for what you're doing.

14 I thank you for coming

15 down. I thank you for keeping up

16 even though it states that we are

17 in 100% compliance. And if it

18 wasn't for the fact that it was

19 brought to my attention that we

20 weren't, I would have thought just

21 like everybody else because we were

22 on that list that we were one of

23 the cities striving forward. But

24 that is not the case.

1 So I thank you for
2 sharing your testimony. I thank
3 you for coming out and appreciate
4 you. We are now going to break --

5 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS:

6 Just want to --

7 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: I'm
8 sorry. Councilman --

9 COUNCILMAN PHILLIPS: --
10 quickly echo something that
11 Councilwoman Rue Landau stated.
12 We're going to continue to monitor
13 this and we're going to continue to
14 monitor the situation and work with
15 Parks & Rec to ensure that we do
16 some better safety measures and
17 hopefully we get a report back to
18 you. Thank you.

19 COUNCILMAN HARRITY: All
20 right. Thank you. Appreciate you
21 coming in again. Thank you for
22 being here.

23 Mr. Kunkel, are there
24 any other speakers scheduled for

1 public comment?

2 THE CLERK: There are no
3 further witnesses, Mr. Chairman.

4 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

5 Okay. I would like to thank
6 everyone who came out, our
7 witnesses, for joining us today.

8 If the Clerk will read
9 the list of written testimony to be
10 added to the public record.

11 THE CLERK: Providing
12 written testimony for the public
13 hearing is Dr. Sarah Evans, Dr. Ken
14 Spade, Jay Feldman, Linda Knapp and
15 guidelines for pesticide use on
16 construction sites provided by
17 Laborers Local 57.

18 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

19 Thank you for that. Thank you,
20 Mr. Kunkel.

21 Before we conclude our
22 public hearing on Resolution No.
23 250397, are there any closing
24 remarks from members?

1 (No response.)

2 COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

3 Seeing none, this concludes the
4 business before the Joint Committee
5 on Labor and Civil Service and
6 Parks and Recreation today. Thank
7 you everyone so much for your
8 attendance.

9 (Joint Committees on
10 Labor and Civil Service and Parks,
11 Recreation and Cultural Affairs
12 concluded at 11:55 a.m.)

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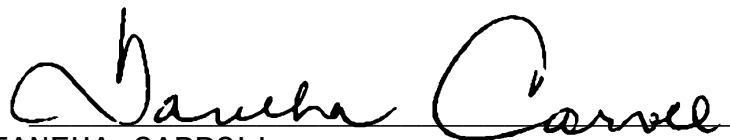
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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Taneha Carroll", is written over a horizontal line.

TANEHA CARROLL
Court Reporter - Notary Public

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