



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

Committee on Government Operations

Lydia Edwards, Chair

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REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

December 15, 2021

Dear Councilors:

Docket #0600, an ordinance to create a task force to address literacy rates in the City of Boston, was sponsored by Councilor Juila Mejia and referred to the Committee on April 28, 2021. The Committee held a hearing on October 25, 2021 where public comment was taken.

Summary of Legislation:

This proposal will establish a Task Force on Literacy Rates in the City of Boston. The purpose of the task force will be to study rates of illiteracy across the City of Boston, to develop a plan to help adults and children who are not able to read or write access City services, and to recommend programs and policies to advance literacy in adults and children. The proposal establishes the membership of the task force and the terms. The ordinance also provides that members of the task force who are not employees of the City will receive a stipend of \$100.00 per meeting not to exceed \$50,000.00 per year. The proposal also outlines the responsibilities and authorities of the task force.

Information Gathered at the Hearing:

Councilors discussed participation on the task force, discussed the objectives of the task force as well as its focus and metrics. Councilors discussed the importance of literacy and the importance of having literacy services for immigrants. The Committee discussed who will appoint the task force, the relationship of the task force with the school committee, available resources, and whether the stipend in the proposal is in line with other entities.

The following individuals from the Administration joined the Committee: Trinh Nguyen, Director of the Office of Workforce Development (“OWD”); Kristen D’Avolio, Senior Director of the Adult Learning Center; Yusufi Vali, Director, Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Advancement; and, Jennifer Vivar Wong, Director of the Office of Language and Communications Access. The following individuals joined the Committee as panelists: Elizabeth Santiago, Founder, The Untold Narratives; Lee Haller, English for New Bostonians, Director of Programs; and, Edith Bazile, education advocate.

Trinh Nguyen provided an overview of the services offered by the City explaining that adult and youth literacy are priorities. Director Nguyen discussed the Office of Financial Empowerment

which ensures that individuals have pathways to trusted quality services to build wealth. Director Nguyen provided an overview of the Adult Literacy Initiative (“ALI”) created by the OWD. Director Nguyen explained that ALI programs are provided by community based organizations. Director Nguyen explained that the OWD collaborates with the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“DESE”). Director Nguyen stated that the OWD has fiscal agents and would be able to provide administrative support or stipends. Director Nguyen also explained the ALI is under the OWD and can provide support as needed. Kristen D’Avolio reviewed the programs and classes offered by the Boston Public Schools Adult Education. Ms. D’Avolio explained that there are daytime and evening classes that offer adult basic education, adult diploma pathways, high school courses, online learning, ESOL, and family literacy. Yusufi Vali offered testimony and reviewed barriers to literacy. Director Vali explained that there are literacy barriers for those who are not literate in their native language or any language and those that are not literate in the English language. Director Vali stated that the task force should address the issues of illiteracy in any language and illiteracy in the English language.

The Committee heard testimony from the following panelists: Elizabeth Santiago, Founder, The Untold Narratives; Lee Haller, Program Manager, English for New Bostonians; and, Edith Bazile, education advocate. Elizabeth Santiago discussed her experience in literacy work and discussed education models. Lee Heller explained that English for New Bostonians partners with the City in creating opportunities for immigrants to learn English. Mr. Heller described working with the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Advancement and the Neighborhood Jobs Trust. The Committee discussed the following issues and how the Task Force should address such issues: the fact that adults with limited literacy are not counted properly; adults with limited literacy are a diverse group; adults with limited literacy with support can be successful in the workforce. Edith Bazile stated that partnerships with Boston Public Schools need to be proactive. Ms. Bazile stated that students should be screened to determine where they are with literacy so that they may function as adults.

Summary of Amendments:

Based upon information gathered at the hearing, the ordinance has been amended to clarify and further define the objectives of the task force and to ensure that the membership of the task force includes entities with expertise to accomplish its goals.

The docket is amended from its initial filing by placing the ordinance in Chapter XV of the City of Boston Code instead of Chapter XII. The divisions of the Mayor’s Office fall under Chapter XV; therefore, the task force is more appropriate in this Chapter for coordination and monitoring purposes.

The purpose clause is amended to include the word “establishment” to appear as 15-12.1, Establishment and Purpose. The docket is amended to include that the task force develop a plan to access education services in addition to city services. This change will ensure that barriers to education are specifically addressed, that metrics be developed to measure progress, and that services or programs are available to students and parents to offer support.

In Section 15-12.2, Composition and Term, changes have been made to split between 8 community organizations and six administration representatives and a City Council representative ex officio in order to delineate between their position on the Task Force. This

change will allow for the coordination of services and programs in order to focus on the issues of illiteracy in any language and illiteracy in the English language. The composition of the Task force as amended is as follows:

The Task Force will include eight (8) members appointed by the Mayor, as follows:

- One (1) representative of English for New Bostonians (ENB);
- One (1) representative of the Adult Literacy Initiative or other organization who works specifically with adults who cannot read or write;
- One (1) representative of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition or other organization who works with individuals who are English language learners;
- One (1) representative of ReadBoston or other organization who works on literacy amongst early learners;
- Two (2) representatives who are recent graduates or current BPS students who have literacy-based lived experiences;
- Two (2) representatives who have adult illiteracy lived experience;

The Task Force will include the following seven (7) people or their designees, ex officio:

- A member of the Boston City Council designated by the Council President;
- Superintendent of Boston Public Schools (BPS);
- Director of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement (MOIA);
- Director of the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (OWD);
- President of Boston Public Library (BPL);
- Commissioner of Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF);
- Director of the Office of Language and Communications Access (OLCA).

The payment/stipend language for Task Force members was removed.

Rationale and Recommended Action:

Passage of this ordinance will establish a Task Force on Literacy Rates in the City of Boston. The amended version provides clarity and defines the goals and objectives of the task force. Passage of this docket will ensure that the City has intentional plans to address illiteracy in adults and children, illiteracy in native language, illiteracy in the English language and to implement the necessary programs, coordinate resources, and develop metrics to decrease illiteracy and to ensure that those experience illiteracy have access to both education and city services.

By the Chair of the Committee on Government Operations, to which the following was referred:

Docket #0600, an ordinance to create a task force to address literacy rates in the City of Boston,

submits a report recommending that this docket **ought to pass in an amended draft.**

For the Chair:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lydia Edwards". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and "E".

Lydia Edwards, Chair
Committee on Government Operations