



## CITY OF BOSTON

### IN CITY COUNCIL

#### ORDER FOR A HEARING TO DISCUSS INCREASING ACCESS TO SWIMMING LESSONS AND AWARENESS OF WATER SAFETY

- WHEREAS:** As a city surrounded by water, it is vital for our young people to have basic water safety awareness and that they know how to swim. Past tragedies highlight the need for free or low-cost swimming lessons for young people, particularly children from immigrant families, and children of color; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** In May of 2021, there were 18 drownings, more than the previous three Mays combined. Last July, 19-year old Boston resident Joao Alves Teixeira drowned while swimming off Castle Island in South Boston; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** These tragedies are particularly likely to affect Black and low-income residents. A 2017 study from the University of Memphis found that 66 percent of Black children could not swim well enough to be safe in the deep end. Only 36 percent of white children lacked the same basic swimming skills. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black children are almost six times more likely to die from drowning than white children; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** Low-income children are also less likely to be competent swimmers. According to the report by USA Swimming, 79 percent of children in families that bring in less than \$50,000 in annual income have little or no swimming ability; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** For students and children with disabilities, there is a lack of swimming lessons and programs that cater to them, which makes it more difficult for them to participate in swimming and water activities; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** There is also, unfortunately, a staffing shortage for lifeguards, as recently, the Mattapan Mildred Avenue pool - the only public pool in the neighborhood - was forced to close due to lifeguard shortages. The Thomas M. Menino YMCA in Hyde Park also had to close its pool due to the lack of lifeguards; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** In early April, only 7 of the 17 BCYF public pools are open, and only two of those pools are opened in neighborhoods with an area median income that is lower than the city's average. This further limits the accessibility and availability of swimming lessons and water activities, especially for low-income families and communities of color; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** To prevent drowning incidents and ensure that all residents—regardless of race and income—have the basic skills to be safe around water, the City should consider ways to expand access to free swimming lessons for children and adults, as well as more ways to train and recruit lifeguards; *and,*

- WHEREAS:** In 2021, Mayor Janey launched the Swim Safely Partnership for residents of Roxbury, Dorchester, Hyde Park, and surrounding communities. The initiative is a partnership with the YMCA, and it offers free swimming lessons to adults and children, free training for lifeguards, and hopes to implement a pilot program for free swimming lessons for BPS students; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** BPS and BCYF should strengthen partnerships with local organizations to provide opportunities for children from low-income communities and communities of color to explore the Waterfront and Harbor Islands; *and,*
- WHEREAS:** Pools and beaches have been historically segregated, resulting in a lack of skill and reduced use of public pools; the city of Boston has a responsibility to correct this inequity by getting creative and investing the proper resources to expand access and safety in our communities.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDERED:**

The appropriate Committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing to discuss measures to provide free and low-cost swimming resources to Boston residents; representatives from BPS, BCYF, local non-profits, and other relevant and interested parties shall be invited to attend.

Filed in City Council: February 8, 2023