

Offered by City Councilor **Julia Mejia**, Essaibi-George, Bok, Flynn, Arroyo, Breadon, Edwards,
Flaherty, Wu, Campbell and O'Malley



**CITY OF BOSTON
IN CITY COUNCIL**

**AN ORDINANCE TO CREATE A TASK FORCE TO ADDRESS
LITERACY RATES IN THE CITY OF BOSTON**

- WHEREAS,** Being able to read or write in any language is a privilege that can easily be taken for granted; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The National Center for Education Statistics has found that roughly 1 in 5 adults across the United States struggle with being able to read or write English, and while the NCES has in the past conducted more hyper-local studies on Suffolk County, this information has not been updated since 2003; *and*
- WHEREAS,** DESE guidelines address ameliorating literacy challenges with early, rapid, and equitable research-based interventions. Schools are encouraged to utilize a multi-tiered system of support for all students demonstrating literacy challenges. I see the ordinance is seeking to have similar supports for those in the workforce; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Little is known about rates of literacy amongst adults in the United States who speak languages other than English; *and*
- WHEREAS,** At least some level of reading or writing is required to communicate and access an overwhelming majority of services and information offered by the City of Boston ; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Proposing ways to better serve individuals experiencing issues with literacy is a monumental challenge because it requires completely changing the way that cities and towns collect information and source constituent concerns; *and*
- WHEREAS,** For adults, challenges with literacy proves to be a fundamental workforce development hurdle that is difficult to overcome; for children, challenges with literacy demonstrates the intersectionality between English Language Learners, students with a need for targeted literacy support, students with

accessibility needs, and students who experience a chronic lack of instruction; *and*

WHEREAS, Organizations across Boston, such as the Adult Literacy Initiative and ReadBoston, have already begun the work of creating programming that seeks to boost literacy rates amongst adults and children respectively; *and*

WHEREAS, There is a clear need to explore how the City to better understand the scope of literacy in the City of Boston and to better provide services to individuals who either have limited functional reading or writing skills or who cannot read or write in any language; ***NOW THEREFORE BE IT***

Ordained in the City Council of Boston, as follows:

Section 1:

The City of Boston, Ordinances, Chapter XII shall be amended by adding at the end thereof, the following new section and subsections:

12-17 Task Force to Address Literacy Rates in the City of Boston

12-17.1 Purpose.

The purpose of this ordinance is to establish a Task Force on Literacy Rates in the City of Boston whose goals shall be: to study rates of illiteracy across the City of Boston; to develop an action plan that may be undertaken by the City of Boston in order to help both adults and children who are not able to read or write in any language access city services, due to limited function or otherwise; and to help boost opportunities for adults and children to learn how to read through actionable policy and programming recommendations.

12-16.2 Composition and Term.

The Task Force will include the following people, or their designee:

- A member of the Boston City Council shall be designated by the Council President and shall serve on the Commission
- Mayor of Boston
- 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)

- Representative of the Adult Literacy Initiative or other organization who works specifically with adults who cannot read or write
- Representative of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition or other organization who works with individuals who are English language learners
- Representative of ReadBoston or other organization who works on literacy amongst early learners
- Two representatives who are recent graduates or current BPS students who have literacy-based lived experiences
- Three representatives who have adult illiteracy lived experience

The Task Force will exist for as long as it takes to provide an accurate understanding to develop a comprehensive and usable plan which the City of Boston can undertake to achieve the goals established in 12-17.1 for up to 5 years from the founding of the Task Force.

Members of the Task Force will elect a Chair of the Task Force every year with a simple majority vote. Upon any instance of vacancy or resignation, the Chair will nominate a replacement from an equally qualified office to be elected by the members of the Task Force with a simple majority vote within ninety (90) days. Members of the Task Force will remain members as long as the Task Force exists or unless voted to be removed by a majority vote of the Task Force.

The Task Force will convene within the first sixty (60) days of the effective date of this ordinance and will meet periodically thereafter as required.

Task Force members who are not currently employed by the City of Boston will receive a stipend for \$100 per meeting, not to exceed \$50,000 for one year.

12-17.3 Responsibilities and Authorities of the Task Force

The primary responsibilities of the Task Force are to determine the scope of illiteracy in Boston as well as to create an actionable and coordinated plan that both boosts literacy rates amongst adults and children as well as finds ways for the City of Boston to make it easier for people who cannot read or write in any language to access city services. In the course of their work, the Task Force may deem it necessary to, among other things: determine the number of people in the City of Boston who cannot read or write in any language based on demographics; make necessary distinctions between individuals with little-to-no literacy versus individuals with some literacy capability; identify clear deliverables and goals for boosting literacy rates in Boston; conduct a cost analysis of providing the necessary resources to improve the accessibility of city services as well as to boost literacy rates; and generate a comprehensive and actionable plan that would sufficiently address the goals identified in 12-17.1.

The Task Force shall prepare annual progress reports on the status of their work along with any necessary materials to the Clerk of the City of Boston, and the Clerk shall forward the report to the Mayor of the City of Boston and shall docket the report and include the docket on the agenda of the next-occurring meeting of the Boston City Council. The Task Force may be called in to testify and to update the City Council on the progress of the Task Force.

12-17.4 Severability

The provisions of this ordinance are severable, and if any provision, or portion thereof, should be held to be unconstitutional or otherwise invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, such unconstitutionality or invalidity will not affect the remaining provisions, which will remain in full force and effect.

SECTION 2. Effective Date.

This ordinance shall be effective immediately upon passage.

Filed in City Council: April 28, 2021