Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Resolution calling on the appropriate Committee of the Council to hold a hearing to assess the condition of fire alarm safety systems in public schools throughout New York City and to evaluate the safety implications of the Board of Education's recent decision to cancel life safety system contracts for 50 public schools.

Sponsors:

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7/24/2002	*	City Council	Introduced by Council	
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Res. No. 402

Resolution calling on the appropriate Committee of the Council to hold a hearing to assess the condition of fire alarm safety systems in public schools throughout New York City and to evaluate the safety implications of the Board of Education's recent decision to cancel life safety system contracts for 50 public schools.

By Council Members Oddo, Provenzano, Lanza, Avella, Serrano, Gallagher, Sears, Felder, McMahon, Comrie, Jackson, Seabrook, Addabbo, DeBlasio, Dilan, Fidler, Gennaro, Gerson, Katz, Lopez, Monserrate, Nelson, Recchia, Reed, Rivera, Sanders and Weprin; also Council Member Quinn

Whereas, For the past 10 years, the fire alarm industry, which has provided fire alarm service to the Board of Education, has asserted that the life safety systems in New York City public schools have not been adequately maintained and, in fact, a large percentage are in disrepair; and

Whereas, Such conditions are due in large part to the fact that the custodians and electricians responsible for operating and maintaining these fire alarms do not have the resources or the time to perform such services; and

Whereas, While it is a known practice for school custodians to shut off these systems during school hours in order to prevent nuisance alarms, these critical systems for the early detection of a fire event need to be maintained, and under no circumstances should they ever be turned off without fire department notification and approval, and a fire watch; and

Whereas, During 2000, efforts had just begun to outsource critical life safety services (testing, maintenance and repair) to ensure that the fire alarm systems in New York City's schools were being adequately operated and maintained similarly to what is required by code for high-rise office buildings; and

Whereas, In May of 2002, The Board of Education, in a cost savings effort, cancelled contracts with private fire maintenance companies in 50 New York City Public Schools, and the duties for fire alarm system maintenance were assigned to the custodial staff of the respective schools; and

Whereas, Fire alarm systems are a critical mechanism for the early detection of a fire incident and require proper maintenance and operation to act in their intended life-saving manner; and

Whereas, New York City Public School custodians are only required to earn a one-time Certification of Fitness on fire system maintenance by taking a test based on a 10 to 15 page booklet which, according to Fire Lt. Joe Torrillo, director of fire safety education for the FDNY, represents "a very superficial knowledge of alarm systems" that "you don't have to be a rocket scientist to pass" and that "allows you really [just the ability to] activate the system and keep a record of its functioning;" and

Whereas, Industry experts contend this cursory knowledge of fire alarm systems is not adequate to perform the maintenance tasks now required of custodians, particularly in New York City Public Schools which use as many as ten different alarm systems, each requiring specified maintenance; and

Whereas, Most specialists in private fire maintenance companies must successfully complete four levels worth of increasingly more

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intricate training, typically over the period of one year, and are certified by the National Institute for Certification in Engineering Technology; and

Whereas, The children of the City of New York are entrusted to the care of Public School officials for seven hours each day, and the discrepancy between the level of knowledge required to maintain a fire alarm system and the skill of those charged with maintaining these systems in our schools has provoked reason for concern; and

Whereas, It is the duty of the Council of the City of New York to ensure that the safety of those in schools is carefully guarded at all times; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the appropriate Committee of the Council to hold a hearing to assess the condition of fire alarm safety systems in public schools throughout New York City and to evaluate the safety implications of the Board of Education's recent decision to cancel life safety system contracts for 50 public schools.

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