



Law Department
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA



Year in Review

2024



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City of Philadelphia Law Department
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www.phila.gov/law

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300+ Attorneys **120+** Professional Staff **50+** Interns

2024 Staff Photo

About Us

The City's Law Department employs over 400 lawyers and professional staff practicing in diverse areas such as federal, state, and local agency litigation, commercial and real estate transactions, regulatory law, social services, tax collection, and legislation.

Our Responsibilities Include:

- Advising and representing the City, its officials, and employees in all legal matters;
- Drafting, negotiating, and approving City contracts;
- Collecting unpaid taxes, fines, and other debts; and
- Preparing laws for introduction in City Council.



Renee Garcia, City Solicitor

Solicitor Garcia was appointed as the City of Philadelphia's chief legal officer by Mayor Cherelle Parker in January of 2024. Her appointment was confirmed by City Council in March of 2024.

Our Mission

The Law Department's mission is to serve the residents of Philadelphia by providing excellent legal counsel as trustworthy partners to our clients, no matter the challenges we face. We promote an environment of comradery, accountability, and inclusiveness where our staff can do their best work while achieving balance in their lives. Above all, we are dedicated to bettering the city of Philadelphia for all residents.

Integral to achieving our mission is the proud celebration of the rich diversity of our staff, the City's workforce, and the residents whom we serve.



Our Practice

Our attorneys specialize in a range of issues, providing legal counsel to clients across the City of Philadelphia government.

Corporate & Tax Group

- Tax Litigation & Collections Unit
- Property Assessment, Boards, & Commissions Unit
- Commercial Law Unit
- Real Estate & Development Unit
- Regulatory Law Unit

Compliance and Legislation Group

- Compliance Unit
- HIPAA & Privacy Unit
- Legislation & Legal Counsel Unit
- Right-to-Know Unit
- E-Discovery

Litigation Group

- Civil Rights Unit
- Code & Public Nuisance Unit
- Labor & Employment Unit
- Tort Litigation Unit
- Affirmative & Special Litigation Unit
- Appeals Unit

Social Services Group

- Child Welfare Unit
- Health & Adult Services Unit



*Our Department is proudly **Mansfield 2.0 Certified Plus***

Our Team

The Law Department's dedication to legal excellence is inseparable from its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We celebrate the diversity of our staff, the City's workforce, and the residents whom we serve, and are committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable work environment.

We employ **30%** historically underrepresented lawyers – including women lawyers, underrepresented racial and ethnic lawyers, LGBTQ+ lawyers, and lawyers with disabilities.

Based on a self-identification survey,

66% of staff are women

25% of staff are Black or African American

6% of staff are Asian

6% of staff are Hispanic or Latino

3% of staff are two or more races



Budget

	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Employee Compensation	\$20,280,371	\$23,644,960	\$26,479,981
Purchase of Services	\$9,406,946	\$14,684,007	\$14,854,759
Materials, Supplies & Equipment	\$216,403	\$227,379	\$227,686
Total Operating Budget	\$29,903,720	\$38,556,346	\$41,562,426

By the Numbers

Beyond providing daily counsel and representation, the Law Department is charged with supporting operational departments with information and contracts management, including the development and approval of professional services contracts, advising on the release of public records and information, fulfilling press requests, and training employees on privacy and confidentiality. The Law Department also initiates enforcement actions and is responsible for collecting associated fines and fees.

The following section highlights a snapshot of our work in these areas throughout 2024.

Health Services

The Health & Adult Services Unit attended over **10,000** mental health court hearings, filed **38** new lead court cases and processed **772** record requests (firearm background checks and Health Center records for medical, billing, radiology, etc).

HIPAA

The HIPAA & Privacy Law Unit provided annual **training for 4,648 workforce members** and conducted **two internal HIPAA audits** of the City's HIPAA-Covered Units. The team also updated the internal policies for HIPAA-Covered Units, and addressed **766** privacy advising requests in 2024.



Code Enforcement

The Code & Public Nuisance Unit handled approximately **3,947** matters related to compliance under The Philadelphia Code, and collected **\$2,826,420** in statutory judgements.

Environmental Enforcement

The Regulatory Unit initiated enforcement actions to collect over **\$300,000** in air and water pollution violations.

Bond Issuances

Attorneys in the Commercial Law Unit supported bond issuance for more than **\$1.7B**. These bonds were issued by the Water Department, Philadelphia Gas Works, Philadelphia Authority for Industrial Development, Airport and Redevelopment Authority.

Contracts

The Law Department is responsible for working with client departments to draft and approve contracts for professional services, including competitive procurement law (RFPs and bids), public works contracts, and general corporate matters. In 2024, the Law Department reviewed and approved over **2,400 contracts**.

Communications

The Law Department supports operating departments in their public communications, particularly in scenarios involving risk, public safety, or issues regarding litigation or legal transactions.

In 2024, we responded directly to over **200 press requests** in addition to counseling clients on responses to requests through operating departments.

Right-to-Know

The Right-to-Know Unit responded to **2,594** RTKL records requests on behalf of its more than 25 client departments. Additionally, the Unit processed **162** appeals, equating to a **43% decrease in the appeal rate** from 2023.

The E-Discovery team also opened **91 matters** for the collection and review of electronic information.

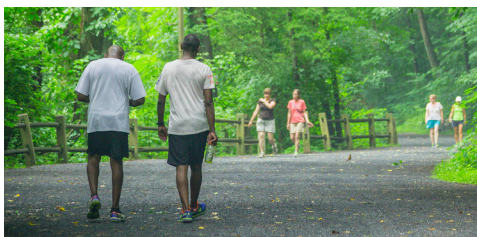


2024 Ghost Guns settlement press conference

Safer, Cleaner, Greener

Success Stories

As counsel to the Mayor's Office, operating departments, City Council, and City Boards and Commissions, our team is working to support our clients in providing exemplary city services in furtherance of Mayor Parker's vision for a safer, cleaner, greener Philadelphia with economic opportunity for all.



Success Stories


In all of our legal work, the Law Department strives to achieve equitable outcomes and improve quality of life for Philadelphia residents. The Law Department contributed its legal services in support of the following initiatives. From providing counsel to drafting contracts and initiating litigation, our attorneys and professional staff made these efforts possible.


Theme Key: Each color marker indicates alignment with a strategic priority of the Parker Administration.

 *Safer*


 *Cleaner and Greener*

 *Economic Opportunity and City Services*

 **Satellite Election Offices:** Through several negotiations, an agreement and legislation was authorized to establish Satellite Election Offices in each council district. Providing year-rounds services, these offices help educate voters about the election process and their rights, helping to support free and fair elections in the city.

 **Election Counsel:** The City successfully facilitated fair and equitable elections. As counsel to the City Commissioners during the 2024 Presidential Election, the Law Department successfully defended the Philadelphia Board of Elections' decisions regarding the counting of ballots in Court.



 **Mayoral Transition:** In 2024, Mayor Cherelle Parker was elected as the 100th Mayor and first Female Mayor of Philadelphia. The Law Department supported the implementation of her vision for City government with several executive orders that established the structure of the new administration, including defining the role of the Office of the Chief Public Safety Director; restructuring the Department of Licenses and Inspections into two agencies; establishing the Offices of Multimodal Planning, Philly Stat 360, and the Office of Clean and Green Initiatives.



▼ **Opioid Epidemic:** With efforts beginning in 2017, the Affirmative and Special Litigation Unit initiated legal action against manufacturers, distributors, and pharmacy dispensaries of prescription opioids for fueling the opioid epidemic, which has impacted countless Philadelphians. In early 2024, the City settled its litigation with Walgreens for \$110 million. The City's claims against other retail pharmacies are pending in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas.

▼ **Riverview Wellness Village:** The City opened a first-of-its-kind care and recovery housing center, Riverview Wellness Village. Commercial Law Unit attorneys supported efforts to establish the Riverview Wellness Village, which will tackle a critical gap in Philadelphia's wellness ecosystem. In addition to the record-time construction and renovation of the Village, attorneys also assisted the Managing Director's Office in negotiating professional services contracts with providers to ensure the residents of the Riverview Wellness Village receive comprehensive care and recovery support.

▼ **Hybrid Wellness Hearings:** Over the last year, children's mental health court has transitioned from in person to virtual-hybrid. The psychiatrist, witnesses, and child testify remotely while the solicitor, judge, and public defender are in person. This new arrangement is less traumatic for the children and allows the doctors to continue their work at the hospital without prolonged interruptions. The witnesses also appreciate the convenience of testifying virtually.

Consumer Protection:

The Consumer Protection Ordinance, introduced by Councilmember Rue Landau, was signed into law by Mayor Parker in July of 2024. The legislation aims to protect consumers from the threat of deceptive business practices and provide tangible relief by holding repeat offenders of fraudulent activities accountable at the local level. The Consumer Protection Ordinance empowers the Law Department to investigate potential violations, and pursue remedies in the Court of Common Pleas, such as injunctive relief, civil penalties, and compensatory damages for affected consumers. The Law Department has begun monitoring consumer complaints and investigating potential violations of the Consumer Protection Ordinance that are impacting Philadelphians.



▼ **Ghost Guns:** In April of 2024, the City reached a settlement agreement in its lawsuit against distributors of ghost guns, Polymer80 and JSD Supply. The agreement prohibits Polymer80 from ever advertising or selling ghost gun kits in Philadelphia. Additionally, the agreement prevents the company from marketing or selling kits in the surrounding counties for four years. Polymer80 also agreed to pay the City \$1.3 Million in compensation. The settlement also requires JSD Supply, the biggest distributor of ghost guns in Pennsylvania, to stop selling ghost guns kits to consumers in Pennsylvania for four years. Eagle Shows, a gun show operated by JSD Supply, will prevent vendors from selling ghost guns at their events for two years.

▼ **Straw Purchasing:** In 2023, the City filed a lawsuit against several gun shops that it alleges have recklessly and repeatedly engaged in straw purchasing transactions, consequently fueling homicides and shootings in Philadelphia. Two vendors located in Northeast Philadelphia and one vendor located in Jamison, PA, are named in the lawsuit filed by the City of Philadelphia with co-counsel, Everytown Law, and the law firm, Kramer Levin. Jointly, these three vendors are the source of more than 1,300 crime guns recovered in Philadelphia from 2015-2019, the last years for which this data is publicly available. In 2024, one vendor named in the lawsuit, Frank's Gun Shop, had its federal firearms license revoked. Defendants' motion to dismiss the case was denied by the Court, and litigation remains ongoing.



▼ **Achieving Permanency for Families:** As the City continues to prioritize achieving permanency for children by helping them find their “forever homes,” Child Welfare Unit attorneys have significantly reduced the number of children awaiting finalization of their adoptions from an average of 900 in 2023 to an average of 600 in 2024. Additionally, the number of foster care cases in dependency court has decreased in 2024 from 3,206 children in care to 2,695 (representing a decrease of 16%), and DHS continues to increasingly place youth with family members when placement is necessary.

▼ **Automatic Speed Enforcement:** To enhance public safety and support City operations, the Regulatory Unit's Right-of-Way division drafted an ordinance authorizing automatic speed enforcement in five school zones, and another for the implementation of speed cameras on Broad Street and Route 13 (creating the first two corridors spanning the entire City).

▼ **Contract Collaboration Lab:** Working closely with CAO, Procurement, and Finance, the Law Department conformed over 500 contracts in a 3-week period. The Commercial Law Unit's Contracts and Procurement Division is working with these departments to streamline the process for future contract renewals and conformance.





Short Dumping:

Enforcement against short-dump violators significantly increased in number of cases brought against violators with the City filing 49 new cases (compared to 13 in 2023). 43 matters were closed in 2024 resulting in over \$3.3 million dollars in judgments, which include statutory fines and abatement costs.

Nuisance Businesses:


The Police Department's enforcement of critical and chronic nuisance businesses resulted in 16 executed Nuisance Abatement Plans and legal actions brought by the Code Enforcement and Public Nuisance Litigation Unit against three speakeasies. The actions resulted in court orders for judgments and injunctions including the discontinuing of utilities.



Residential Lead

Water Lines: To comply with the new Lead and Copper Rule regarding residential lead water service lines, the Regulatory Law Unit's Water division supported the Water Department in the creation of a public facing material map where residents are able to search their address to see if the the property has records of a lead water line.



 **Water Management Infrastructure:** Over 100 agreements related to development projects for City infrastructure needs and stormwater management were drafted and/or executed by the Law Department.



▼ **Efficient Waste Collection:** The SmartCityPHL pilot was launched to digitize the City's trash pickup operation. The initiative leverages technology to enhance waste collection management and streamline city services, improving efficiency and supporting a cleaner and greener Philadelphia.

▼ **Verizon Franchise Renewal:** The City renewed its Verizon Cable Franchise agreement – bringing broadband internet to 183 City recreation centers, bridging the digital divide, and providing equitable access to technology – a first of its kind in any municipality by any cable franchise. Additionally, this agreement created a private network which will be managed by the City solely for the City's needs, such as surveillance cameras to monitor large crime areas and areas prone to short dumping, large scale public events, community resource centers, etc.






▀ **Tax Liability Challenge:** Philadelphia provides a credit to resident taxpayers against their respective wage, earnings, and net profits tax liabilities for similar taxes paid to another locality, but it does not provide a credit for similar taxes paid to another state. Taxpayers have challenged the City's refusal to grant a credit for taxes paid to other states under the federal Constitution's Dormant Commerce Clause, and the Law Department successfully defended the City's position all the way up to the United States Supreme Court, which rejected the challenge. This successful litigation has saved the City more than \$10 million in refunds and will result in additional revenue every year going forward.

▀ **Real Estate Tax Assessment:** The Office of Property Assessment prevailed in thousands of real estate tax assessment appeals pending before the Board of Revision of Taxes for tax years 2023 and 2024. The Law Department counseled OPA on its tax year 2025 revaluation to ensure that property assessments in the City of Philadelphia are as accurate, fair, and equitable as possible.

Employee Speech and Workplace Ethics:

Twenty police officers sued the City in federal court for constitutional violations after the Philadelphia Police Department disciplined them for racist, violent, and other offensive Facebook posts. The trial judge in federal district court upheld the City's right to discipline police officers, even for off-duty speech, where that speech has a detrimental impact on Police Department operations. In this case, the community expressed hurt and distrust over the posts, and the posts caused a similar reaction among the Police Department's diverse workforce as well. Maintaining the public's trust and cooperation is essential to police, as is maintaining a harmonious workforce. The officers did not appeal.

 **Workplace Accessibility:** In a collaborative effort between OHR, CAO, the Mayor's Office, and Law, the City established a Reasonable Accommodation Policy outlining rights and responsibilities for HR and employees, and trained dozens of HR employees across the City on how to handle FMLA and ADA requests. The Law Department became the first department in the City to have an ADA certified attorney dedicated to accessibility and disability issues.



▀ **Resumption of Sheriff Sales:** In July, the City resumed taking real estate tax delinquent properties to Sheriff Sale after significant negotiations by the Commercial Law Unit to establish a vendor contract. The six sales processed in 2024 brought over \$250,000 in real estate tax payments from taxpayers making agreements or paying in full to stop the sale of their properties.



▀ ▀ **Vacant Property Title Clearance:** Attorneys in the Real Estate and Development Unit processed nearly two hundred deed restrictions releases of reversionary interests for former city vacant properties were processed, helping to clear title on these properties and make them more marketable.

▼ **AMS's Revised Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy:**

With input from Regulatory Law Unit attorneys, the Department of Public Health's Division of Air Management Services updated its EJ and Public Participation Policy for the first time since 2003. The revised policy ensures robust public participation for EJ communities throughout the air permitting process.



▼ **Airline Incentive Program:** With support from the Regulatory Law Unit's Airport Division, the Philadelphia International Airport expanded its airline incentive program to connect to new destinations, such as Copenhagen, Nice, Athens, Milan, and Edinburgh. This has helped strengthen the Airport's position as a major gateway for international travel, offering travelers more convenient options and contributing to the local economy's growth.



▼ **PECO Rate Case:** The Regulatory Law Unit's Water Division intervened in PECO's electricity increase for 2025 and 2026. The City and PECO participated in negotiations regarding electricity increase for 2025 and 2025, resulting in a settlement for (1) a projected reduction of \$219 million from the original requested rate hike; (2) expanded protections for low-income ratepayers; and (3) expanded incentives to electrify City fleet vehicles.

▼ **Increasing Water Collections from Sequestration:** Sequestration, a court-ordered appointment of a Sequestrator who collects rents and satisfies City liens with any excess over expenses, continues to be an effective equitable collection tool with minimal impact on tenants. In 2024, the City collected \$10.5 million in Water Debt (compared to \$8.2 million in 2023 and \$6.5 million in 2022).

▼ **TAP (Tiered Assistance Program) Rate Reconciliation:** With support from the Law Department, the Water Department participated in a rate filing to recover costs of implementing the TAP rate program. This ensures the TAP Program continues in helping low-income households obtain affordable water service.

■ **Project OPAL Implementation:** Attorneys in the Commercial Law Unit continue to negotiate documents and provide counsel to City departments regarding implementation of Project OPAL, which will replace PHL Contracts, ACIS, FAMIS, and other legacy software systems. By updating these various legacy systems, the City will be able to function more efficiently and nimbly in its core functions, and the City's vendors will be able to navigate City processes more easily. In turn, this will allow the City to more effectively focus on administrative priorities such as the Clean and Green Initiatives.

■ **City College for Municipal Employment:** The Commercial Law Unit negotiated an agreement with the Community College of Philadelphia for the City College for Municipal Employment (CCME) program. CCME provides free workforce training and a pathway to employment with the City of Philadelphia. Current City employees also have the opportunity to participate in CCME to advance their careers.





NEW!

Compliance Unit

The newly created Compliance Unit counsels and represents City departments on issues involving compliance with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and best practices with a focus on children and family welfare, public safety, and accessibility.

The Compliance Unit is responsible for:

- Monitoring and advising on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, including the issuance of reasonable accommodations for employees and applicants with disabilities;
- Advising the City's family and child welfare related entities on efforts to enhance child safety; and
- Counseling public safety departments on initiatives to enhance safety protocols for staff and individuals in custody in compliance with civil rights laws.



Office Culture

We promote an environment of comradery, accountability, and inclusiveness where our staff can do their best work while achieving balance in their lives. Annual and recurring events create opportunities for colleagues to connect, decompress, and celebrate together.



Plant Swap



Therapy Dog Visits



Holiday Bake-Off



Coffee with the Solicitor



Pride Celebration



Holiday Party



Professional Development

Management Training

In 2024, supervisors in the Law Department participated in a four-part training series exploring a range of topics relevant to management including leadership, communication, project management, developing cultural diversity, and coaching skills.

NEW: Writing Lab

Writing Lab is a new professional development resource offered to all Law Department staff. During weekly office hours and one-on-one meetings, attorneys who volunteer as coaches provide their colleagues with a peer review and offer feedback for improving their writing. Writing Lab facilitates collaboration and mentorship between colleagues in a low pressure environment.



Continuing Legal Education

Every year, the Law Department hosts a two-day Continuing Legal Education (CLE) Conference at the Philadelphia Convention Center, during which attorneys are invited to complete their CLE credit requirement through a series of courses planned and presented by their colleagues. This is a unique opportunity provided to Law Department attorneys to complete their requirements free-of-charge.

In 2024, the Law Department welcomed Jennifer Coatsworth, Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association, as the keynote speaker.

Course topics included election law, inequity in public education funding, accessibility challenges, and environmental regulation.

The CLE Awards program acknowledges the phenomenal work of staff members, as nominated by their peers.



*City Solicitor Renee Garcia
with Jennifer Coatsworth*

2024 CLE Awards

The following individuals were awarded for their accomplishments in each category:

Community Service

- Bridget Warner

Mentorship

- Jeremy Giatras
- Francois Dutchie

Impact

- Nicole Stokes
- Mark Kinsey

Diversity Champion

- Ji Jun

Longevity

- Nicole Osborn
- Ken Butensky

Creativity

- Phillip Bullard
- Lauren Lane

Team Player

- Adam Zurbriggen
- Matt Tacuri
- Chris Muller
- Jonah Santiago-Pagan

Collaboration

- Ryan McSherry
- Hilary Emerson
- Zoey Chenitz



Awardee group photo 2024

Committees

Committees play an important role in the our culture by providing opportunities for colleagues to connect, collaborate, and further their personal and career goals. Committees liaise with the Executive Team to support the goals of the Law Department.



Lunar New Year Luncheon in Chinatown

Diversity Equity Inclusion Committee

Promotes a culture of inclusion through programming, supports the retention of a diverse staff, and advocates for equity within the workplace.



Mentorship Kickoff Meeting

Professional Development Committee

Provides targeted programming and administers mentorship program to support staff in their professional growth.



Clothing Drive

Public Service Committee

Facilitates the creation of public service and volunteer opportunities for Law Department staff.

In the Community

The Law Department encourages employee participation in professional development opportunities and leadership roles in various legal and community organizations. Staff regularly serve as representatives and volunteers in the legal community to raise awareness of the Department's work, its culture, and opportunities for employment to aid in the recruitment of diverse talent.

Through the Department's ongoing relationships with diverse bar associations, local nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions, staff are often involved in service efforts ranging from pro bono legal service to donation drives.



Barristers' Association Amber Racine Turkey Drive

Staff are also provided with a Philadelphia Bar Association membership, through which they may access award-winning CLE programming and networking opportunities with other legal professionals.



Tabling at Drexel University



Philadelphia Bar Association Annual Awards

Awards & Publications

The Law Department is proud to celebrate the recognition of the work of our staff and attorneys in media publications and as nominated for legal association awards. Congratulations to the following attorneys for their accomplishments in 2024:

Ken Butensky, Tort Litigation Unit

- Received the 2024 William J. O'Brien Distinguished Service Award from the Philadelphia Association of Defense Counsel.
- Became the first government attorney to serve as President of the Philadelphia Association of Defense Counsel.

Desjeneé Davis, Civil Rights Unit

- Received the 2024 F. Sean Peretta Award from the Young Lawyers Division (YLD) of the Philadelphia Bar Association, which is presented to an individual who has devoted substantial time to community service.
- Published § Mastering the Art of Client Management as an editor of the Young Lawyer Editorial Board. The article provides new and young attorneys with tips on how to handle demanding clients and clients with unreasonable expectations, whether individuals or entities.
- Contributed to § The Road Ahead for DEI- Breaking Down Barriers and Challenging Biases (pg. 26), published in the Philadelphia Lawyer fall issue.



Daniel Cantu-Hertzler, Commercial Law Unit

- Received the Brad D. Bailey Assistant City/County Attorney Award from the International Municipal Lawyers Association.

Renee Garcia, City Solicitor

- Received the Justice Sonia Sotomayor Diversity Award from the Philadelphia Bar Association.
- Received the Powerful Latina Award from El Sol Media.
- Featured in “Soliciting Justice” Alumnae Stories Spotlight in Barnard Magazine, Fall 2024 edition.

Emily Kaufman, Labor and Employment Unit

- Published an article to the University of Miami School of Law Institutional Repository in December of 2023: Emily Kaufman, On Liberty: From Due Process to Equal Protection-Dobbs' Impact on the Transgender Community, 14 U. Miami Race & Soc. Just. L. Rev. 82 (2023).



Valerie Robinson, Corporate & Tax Group

- Received the Lifetime Achievement award from the International Municipal Lawyers Association

Zach Strassburger, Compliance Unit

- Received the 2024 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award from International Municipal Lawyers Association.
- Earned the ADA Coordinator certification from the Great Plains ADA Center and the University of Missouri.

Jim Zwolak, Tax Litigation + Collections Unit

- Published several food reviews in the Philadelphia Bar Reporter, most recently highlighting Silk Way.

Adam Zurbriggen, Appeals Unit

- Received Temple Law's LEAP (Law and Education Participation Project) Huey R. Burkett Service Award to acknowledge "Years of Outstanding Service to Temple-LEAP and the John S. Bradway Philadelphia High School Mock Trial Competition."

Keep in Touch

Have a question or looking to host a staff member of the Law Department for a speaking engagement?

Call (215) 683-5000

Our office is open Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Follow Along

Keep up to date on what's happening at the Law Department on LinkedIn:



City of Philadelphia
- Law Department



Join our Team!

If you're interested in working with a passionate team of people who care about the future of Philadelphia, consider a career in the Law Department! We are always seeking talented attorneys and professional staff to join our team.

Visit **phila.gov/jobs** and search for the Law Department, or scan the QR code to browse.

Don't see a position that works for you?
Email us your resume at
lawdepartmentrecruiting@phila.gov





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