



**Testimony Presented to Philadelphia City Council  
Children and Youth and Technology and Information Services Committees  
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October 28, 2025**

Dear Chairs Phillips and Landau and Members of the Children and Youth and Technology and Information Services Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the use of GPS technology in Philadelphia's juvenile justice system.

Philadelphia uses GPS ankle monitors as a tool to supervise youth in the community, ostensibly as an alternative to placement in secure facilities. Ideally, this practice allows children to remain at home and in school while the courts ensure public safety. However, evidence suggests that we do not yet have enough data or policy clarity to determine whether GPS monitoring is truly serving as an alternative to incarceration, or whether it is driving youth deeper into the system.

In 2024, nearly 1,900 Philadelphia youth were placed on GPS monitors, a 16% decrease from 2019; however, this decrease was not accompanied by a similar reduction in detention admissions. In fact, despite falling youth arrest rates and a sharp decline in violent offenses, both detention admissions and GPS use have risen in recent years. This raises questions about whether GPS is being applied to children who might otherwise have remained at home without supervision, leading to an increase in detention due to technical violations.

At present, there is no publicly available data detailing:

- The types of charges that lead to GPS monitoring,
- The demographic characteristics or assessed risk levels of monitored youth,
- How violations are handled, or
- The outcomes of GPS use compared to other supervision options.

Without transparency and standardized practices, it is impossible to evaluate whether GPS is reducing incarceration or simply widening the net of system involvement.

In addition to limited data, anecdotal reports from youth indicate that they are unable to access prosocial activities while on a GPS monitor. Youth cannot participate in sports teams, maintain an after-school job, or, in some cases, attend court-ordered programming without fear of a violation of the monitor's restrictions.

Youth and families also report that ankle monitors are stigmatizing, uncomfortable, and disruptive to education, often forcing youth out of their community schools and into cyber programs with lower academic outcomes. These collateral consequences undermine the very rehabilitative goals the system aims to promote.

Meanwhile, spending on GPS monitoring is rising sharply, with Philadelphia budgeting more than \$1.2 million in FY 2026 for monitoring alone, nearly double the expenditure just three years ago. These public dollars must be used in ways that promote youth well-being, not unnecessary surveillance.

To ensure that GPS is used fairly, effectively, and only when necessary, policymakers should:

- Establish clear statewide standards for when and how GPS monitoring is applied and reviewed, ensuring that it is only used for youth who would otherwise be incarcerated;
- Pair monitoring with rehabilitative supports like counseling, education, and mentoring;
- Require public reporting of aggregate data on GPS use, violations, and outcomes to determine if GPS is used outside of its stated purpose;
- Guarantee that youth on monitors can attend their schools and participate in after-school jobs and other positive community activities; and
- Prohibit the sharing of data with law enforcement to protect children's privacy and due process rights, especially for those children awaiting adjudication.

In closing, GPS monitoring can be a valuable alternative to detention, but without stronger guardrails and greater transparency, it risks expanding system involvement instead of reducing it. Clear, consistent policy guidance is essential to ensure that this tool supports, not harms, the youth it is meant to help. Thank you for your attention and commitment to improving outcomes for Philadelphia children and their communities.