



**PENNSYLVANIA INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION AUTHORITY**  
**COVID-19 IMPACT ON CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**  
**EMPLOYEE SEPARATIONS**  
**APRIL 2022**

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# PENNSYLVANIA INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION AUTHORITY

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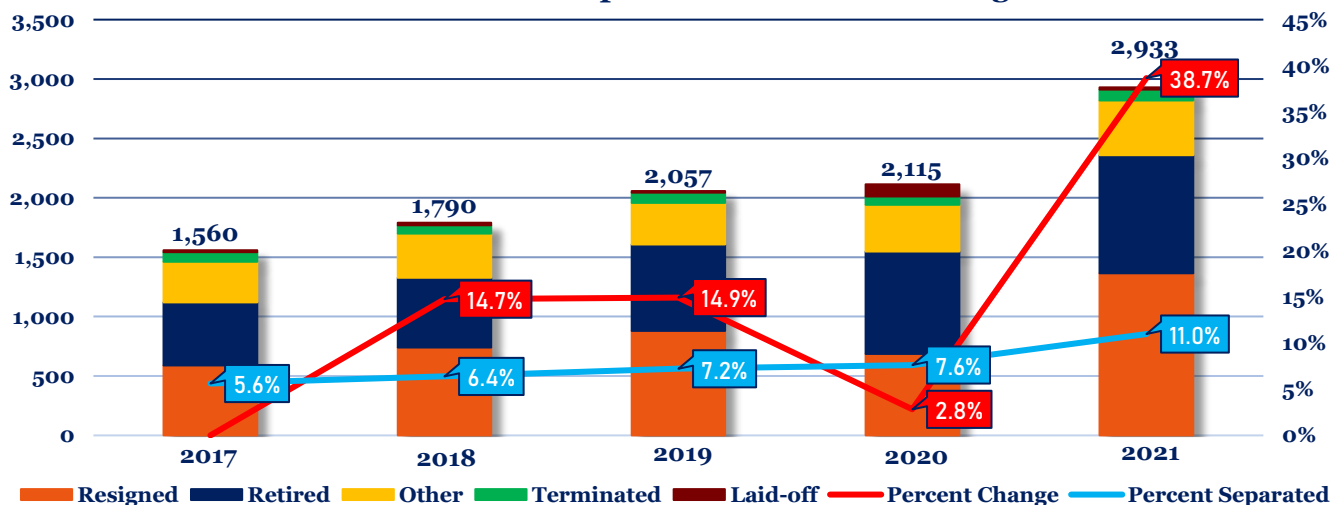
## Executive Summary

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had a dramatic and unprecedented impact on the nation's workforce with record breaking employment separations. This phenomenon has been coined "The Great Resignation."

To determine if the City of Philadelphia's workforce was also affected, PICA analyzed employment separation data from the City's Office of Human Resources for calendar years 2017 through 2021. As illustrated below, PICA's analyses revealed that the City experienced a marked increase in employee separations in 2021, going from a pre-pandemic average of 6.4 percent to 11.0 percent. Specifically, PICA's analyses revealed that:

- In 2021, out of approximately 26,733 employees, 2,933 separated from the City, representing 11.0 percent of the workforce, an increase from the pre-pandemic (2017-2019) average of 6.4 percent.
- The year over year percentage change for separations averaged 14.8 percent prior to the pandemic and dropped to only 2.8 percent during the height of the pandemic (in 2020) and jumped to 38.7 percent in 2021.
- The largest separation category was resignations which reached 1,364, an increase from 881 (54.8 percent) in 2019, and 686 (98.8 percent) in 2020.
- The second largest separation category, retirements, reached 995 in 2021, an increase of 134, or 15.6 percent over 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the average number of retirements was approximately 614 from 2017 through 2019.
- The highest number of resignations in 2021 were attributed to Millennials, amongst which resignations soared to 877, a 91.9 percent increase from 2020, followed by Generation X. However, since all generational groups had a marked increase in the number of resignations in 2021, it appears that age did not factor into the decision to resign.

**Total Separations by Year and Category  
with Percent Separated and Percent Change**



## BACKGROUND

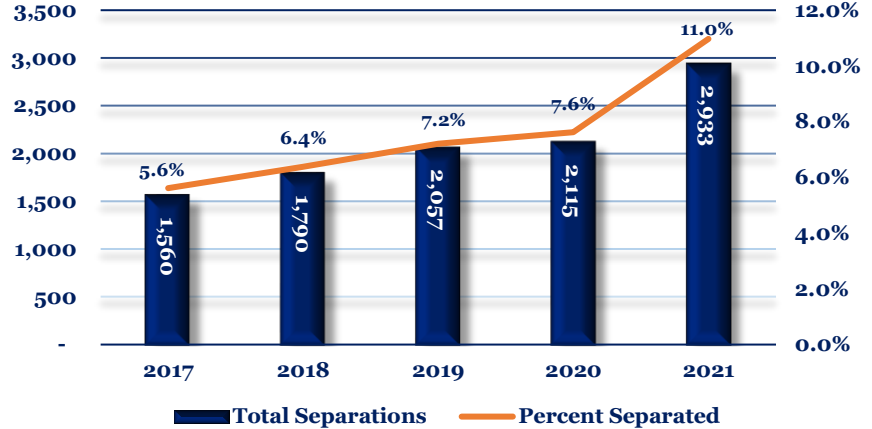
As the initial wave of COVID-19 spread across the United States, it was clear the Pandemic would have a dramatic and unprecedented impact on the nation's workforce. In 2021, 47 million people left their jobs, with record-breaking turnover visible in monthly separation totals throughout the year.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the term "Great Resignation" was coined as a descriptor for the economic trend of workers voluntarily separating from their jobs during the height of the Pandemic.

Research into this phenomenon indicated that employment separation varied across workers' education levels, age and gender groups, and racial lines. Workers' reasons for leaving their jobs were just as varied, with at least 30 percent citing low pay, few or no opportunities for advancement, and feeling disrespected as motivating factors.<sup>2</sup> Workers also cited childcare issues, along with inflexible hours and a lack of employee benefits such as healthcare and paid time off.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, early retirements accounted for a large swath of workers leaving the workforce during the Pandemic. Of the 4.3 million workers who left the workforce in August 2021 (the month with the highest number of US workforce separations ever recorded), 2.5 million retired, with 1.5 million of those categorized as early retirements indicating that older workers made up a large percentage of those who left the workforce during the Pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this report is to determine whether the City experienced an increase in employee separations during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and whether the City's employee separations over that period correlate with the Great Resignation.

**Figure 1: Total Employee Separations with Percent Separated**



**Table 1: Total Employee Separations by Year<sup>1</sup>**

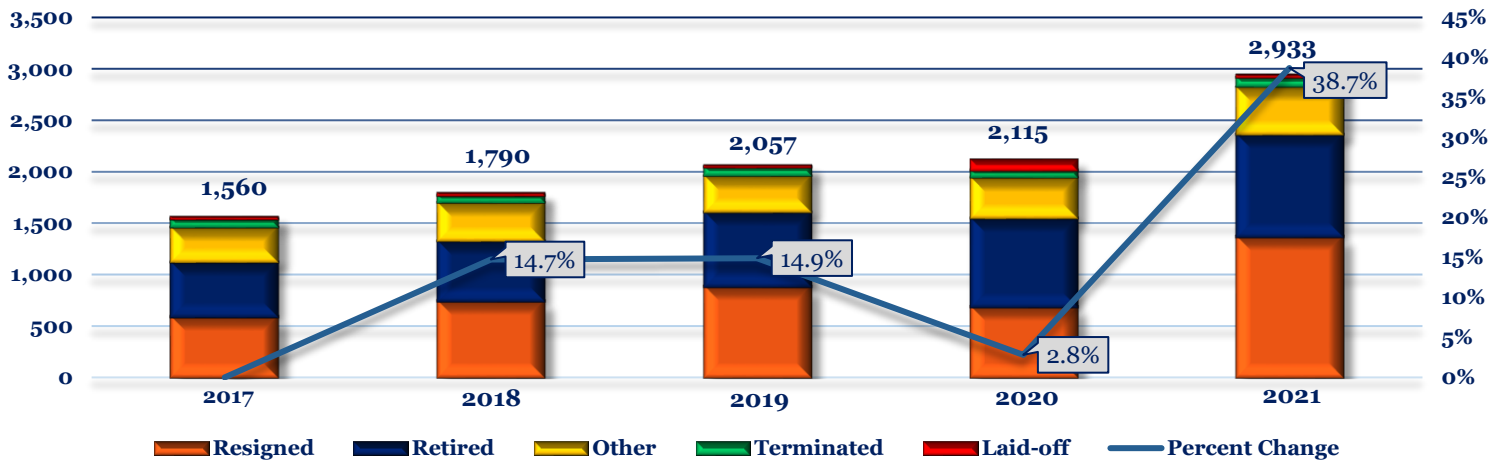
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Resigned	590	741	881	686	1,364
Retired	531	587	725	861	995
Other <sup>2</sup>	341	371	351	395	460
Termination	81	71	86	68	91
Laid-off	17	20	14	105	21
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,560</b>	<b>1,790</b>	<b>2,057</b>	<b>2,115</b>	<b>2,933</b>
<b>Percent Change</b>	-	14.7%	14.9%	2.8%	38.7%
<b>Separation Rate<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>7.6%</b>	<b>11.0%</b>

SOURCES: Total employees per Quarterly City Managers Reports as of December 31 of each year; separations data provided by City of Philadelphia Office of Human Resources

<sup>1</sup> Separation categories include resignations, retirements, layoffs, terminations, and other separations

<sup>2</sup> Other includes employees who failed to report for hire, abandoned their position, did not return from leave of absence, and those on disability separation

<sup>3</sup> Separation rate denotes total separations compared to total full-time employees

**Figure 2: Total Separations by Category with Percent Change**

## ANALYSIS OF CITY EMPLOYEE SEPARATIONS

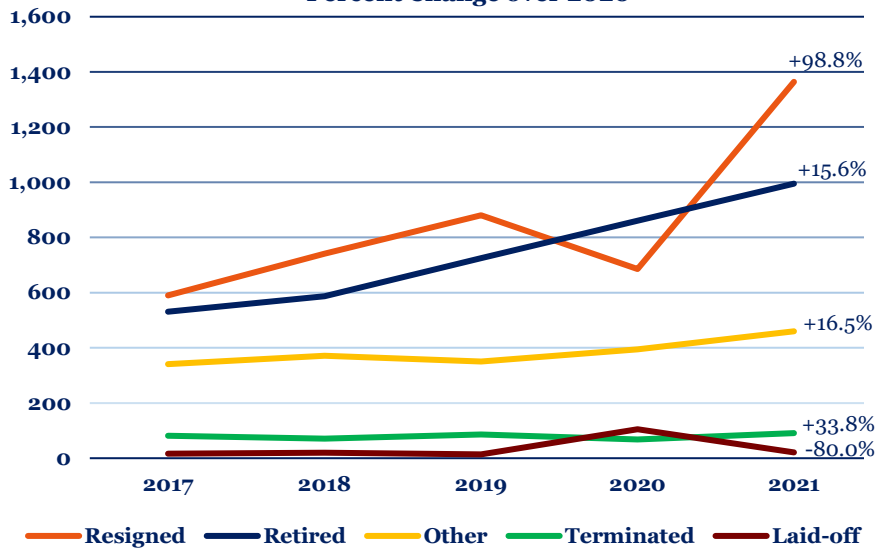
PICA obtained and analyzed employment separation data from calendar years 2017 through 2021. The City categorizes employee separations as ‘Resigned,’ ‘Retired,’ ‘Terminated,’ ‘Laid-off,’ or ‘Other.’ The ‘Other’ category includes various separations that don’t necessarily fit into any category, such as employees who failed to report for work upon hiring, abandoned their position, did not return from a leave of absence, went on disability, or died.

As Figure 1, illustrates, in 2021, out of approximately 26,733 employees, 2,933 separated from the City, representing 11.0 percent of the workforce. This is an increase from the pre-Pandemic (2017-2019) average of 6.4 percent, or an approximate increase of over 1,100 additional resignations. As illustrated in Figure 2, the year over year percent change for separations averaged 14.8 percent prior to the Pandemic, declining to only 2.8 percent in 2020. The percent change jumped to 38.7 percent in 2021, correlating with the effect of the ‘Great Resignation.’

In 2021, all separation categories—with the exception of ‘Laid-off’—increased over 2020 (see Figure 3). The largest increase was in the ‘Resigned’ category, which increased to 1,364 in 2021, from 881 in 2019, and 686 in 2020. The year-over-year increase in this category amounted to 54.8 percent from 2019 and 98.8 percent from 2020, a significant increase highlighting the Pandemic’s impact on City employment. In addition, during the pre-Pandemic years of 2017 through 2019 the ‘Resigned’ category, on average, accounted for 2.6 percent of the total annual workforce; in 2021 this category jumped to 5.1 percent. As Table 1 shows, the ‘Resigned’ category decreased from 881 in 2019 to 686 in 2020, representing a year-over-year decline of 22.1 percent. The decline might indicate City employees were hesitant to resign during the height of the Pandemic due to the uncertain economic conditions.

The second largest separation category, ‘Retired,’ was 995 in 2021 an increase of 134, or 15.6 percent over 2020. Prior to the Pandemic, the average number of retirements was approximately 614 from 2017 through 2019. In addition, prior to the Pandemic, the ‘Retired’ category contributed approximately 33 percent to the total annual separations, in 2020, this rate jumped to 40.7 percent. This increase indicates an acceleration of retirements during the height of the Pandemic.

The ‘Other’ category experienced a 12.5 percent and 16.5 percent year over year increase in 2020 and 2021 respectively, reaching a total of 460 in 2021. This is in contrast to the pre-Pandemic average of approximately 354 from 2017 to 2019. Although this category is designated for various types of separations, it nonetheless also depicts an upward trend of separations during the Pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

**Figure 3: Total Separations by Category with Percent Change over 2020**

The ‘Terminated’ separation category experienced a dip in 2020, dropping to a low of 68 (representing a year-over-year decrease of 21 percent), before rising to its highest level of 91 (representing a year over year increase of 33.8 percent) in 2021. This could indicate that the work from home orders were not conducive to terminating employees during 2020 as it represented the lowest number of terminations for the calendar years reviewed.

In contrast, when the pandemic restrictions were eased in 2021 and some employees returned to the office, terminations increased. However, it should be noted that ‘Terminated’ is by far one of the least-used separation categories, representing on average less than 0.3 percent of the total workforce. ‘Terminated’ is also a small percentage of total separations, ranging from approximately 5.2 percent of separations in 2017 to 3.1 percent in 2021.

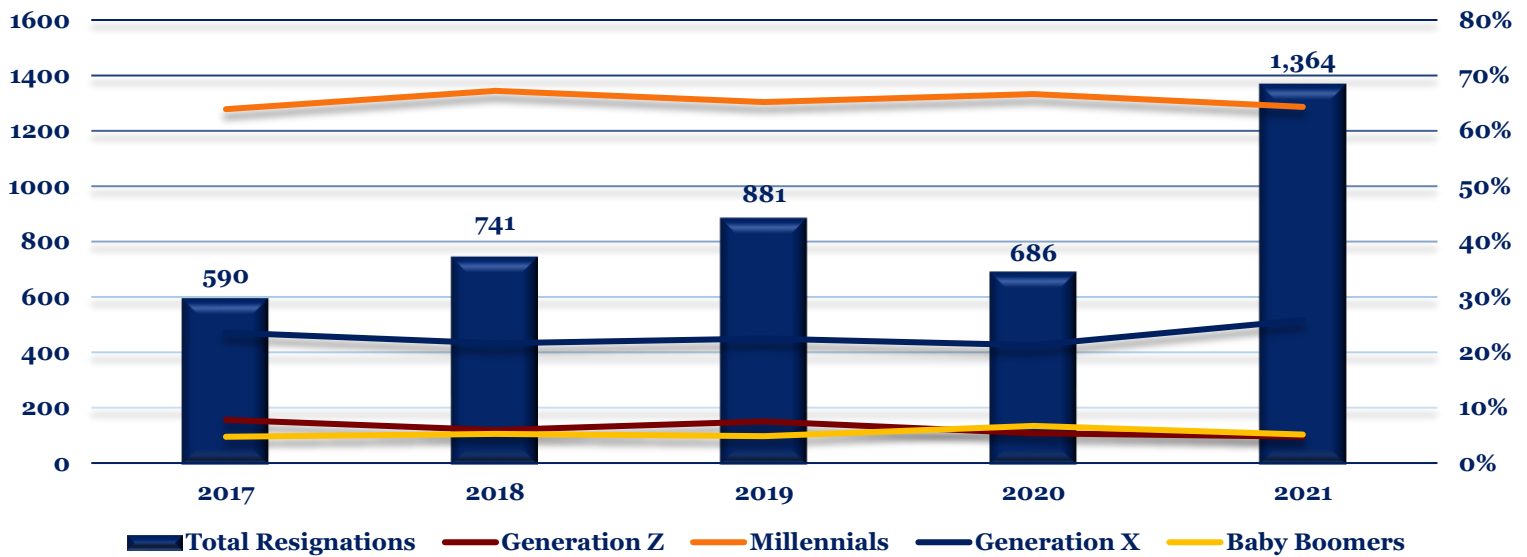
The ‘Laid-off’ category experienced a sharp increase in 2020 due to the adverse economic effects of the Pandemic on the City’s budget, and the need to implement considerable cost-saving measures. As a result, layoffs were highest in 2020, reaching a total of 105—in sharp contrast to the pre-Pandemic average of 17. In 2021, the ‘Laid-off’ category fell back to 21, representing a significant reduction (80 percent) as the influx of American Rescue Plan Act (“ARPA”) funds helped the City balance its FY2022 budget, eliminating the need for such cost-saving measures.

PICA also analyzed the age of those who resigned from year 2017 to 2021 to determine if there was a correlation between employee age and resignations (See Figure 4). The data was categorized by generation: Generation Z (age 16 to 25), Millennials (age 26 to 40), Generation X (age 41 to 55), and Baby Boomers (over age 55).<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned above, the number of total resignations declined from 2019 to 2020, then increased significantly in 2021. As Figure 5 illustrates, the highest number of resignations in 2021 were attributed to Millennials, amongst which resignations soared to 877—a 91.9 percent increase from 2020. The Millennial pre-Pandemic average number of resignations (2017-2019) was approximately 483. The next highest number of resignations was recorded by Generation X, of which 352 resigned in 2021, a year-over-year increase of 141.1 percent. Pre-Pandemic, this group averaged 165 resignations annually. Even Baby Boomers recorded a high number of resignations in 2021 at 70, far outpacing the pre-Pandemic average of 36. Therefore, since all generational groups had a marked increase in the number of resignations in 2021, it appears that age did not factor into the decision to resign.

Figure 6 illustrates employee separation rates—the number of total annual separations (including ‘Resigned,’ ‘Retired,’ ‘Other,’ ‘Terminated,’ and ‘Laid-off’) compared to total full-time employees within each individual department. The listed departments each had over 400 separations from 2017 to 2021. By examining these figures, trends in separations categories over time are revealed. As Table 2 indicates, some departments’ separation rates remained relatively low and stable over this period.

**Figure 4: Total Resignations with Percent Change by Age Group**



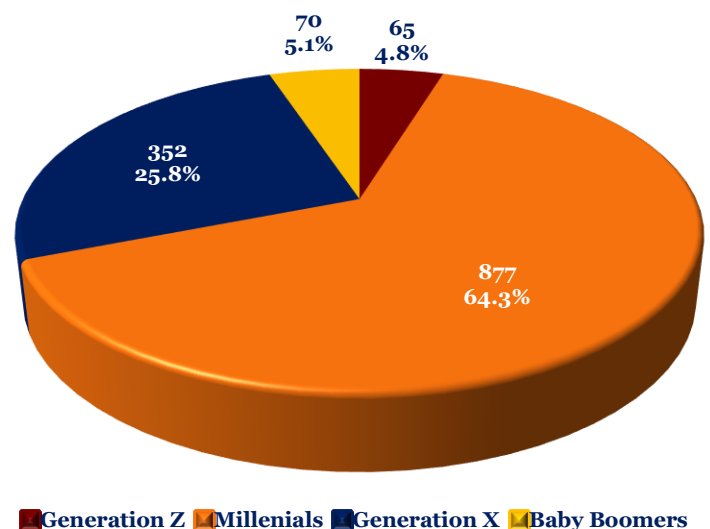
For example, the Fire Departments' separation rate hovered between 2.4 percent in 2017 and a high rate of 3.8 percent in 2019. The Police Department maintained a separation rate under 4.7 percent from 2017 to 2020, with its rate only increasing to 7.0 percent in 2021. While the Streets Departments' is slightly higher throughout the period, it remains relatively stable, ranging between a low of 7.2 percent in 2018 and a high of 9.6 percent in 2017.

Other departments' separation rates were much more volatile. The First Judicial District maintained a rate of approximately 9.0 percent from 2017 to 2020, before increasing to 13.9 percent in 2021. The Office of the District Attorney's rate jumped twice, from 12.1 percent to 18.5 percent from 2017 to 2018, and then from 10.4 percent in 2020 to 26.2 percent in 2021. Finally, the Prisons Department had a low rate of 4.7 percent in 2017 which then rose steadily through 2020 to 13.7 percent and jumped to 29.6 percent in 2021.

Regardless of volatility, several departments experienced their highest separations in 2021.\* For example, the Police Department's average separations were 284 prior to the Pandemic (2017-2019) jumping to 480 in 2021, a 68.6 percent increase over the pre-Pandemic average.

Similarly, the Prisons department averaged 150 annual separations pre-Pandemic, while it jumped to 440 in 2021, a 194 percent increase over the average. Meanwhile, the District Attorney's Office had two large fluctuations in separations. The first was in 2018, when it recorded 105 separations, which was an increase of 52.2 percent over 2017 when it recorded only 57 separations. In 2021, separations in the District Attorney's Office jumped to 157, an increase of 76, or over 93 percent over the pre-Pandemic average of 81.

**Figure 5: Total Resignations by Age Group-2021**



\* NOTE: The nation saw its highest number of total separations in 2020.



**Table 2: Employee Separation Rates\***

	2017			2018			2019			2020			2021		
	Emp.	Sep.	Rate	Emp.	Sep.	Rate	Emp.	Sep.	Rate	Emp.	Sep.	Rate	Emp.	Sep.	Rate
<b>Police</b>	7,290	254	3.5%	7,449	268	3.6%	7,434	326	4.4%	7,188	335	4.7%	6,900	480	7.0%
<b>Fire</b>	2,532	62	2.4%	2,618	78	3.0%	2,760	106	3.8%	2,797	85	3.0%	2,786	84	3.0%
<b>Prisons</b>	2,234	105	4.7%	2,165	136	6.3%	2,051	208	10.1%	1,822	249	13.7%	1,484	440	29.6%
<b>Streets</b>	1,700	164	9.6%	1,758	127	7.2%	1,861	170	9.1%	1,864	125	6.7%	2,017	190	9.4%
<b>First Judicial District</b>	2,372	210	8.9%	2,342	212	9.1%	2,334	202	8.7%	2,287	191	8.4%	2,115	295	13.9%
<b>Water</b>	1,873	84	4.5%	1,885	120	6.4%	1,996	126	6.3%	1,910	127	6.6%	1,938	162	8.4%
<b>Human Services</b>	1,558	104	6.7%	1,539	118	7.7%	1,497	132	8.8%	1,510	106	7.0%	1,498	165	11.0%
<b>District Attorney</b>	570	69	12.1%	568	105	18.5%	626	70	11.2%	642	67	10.4%	629	165	26.2%

NOTE: Emp. = Total full-time employees, all funds; Sep. = Total employee separations

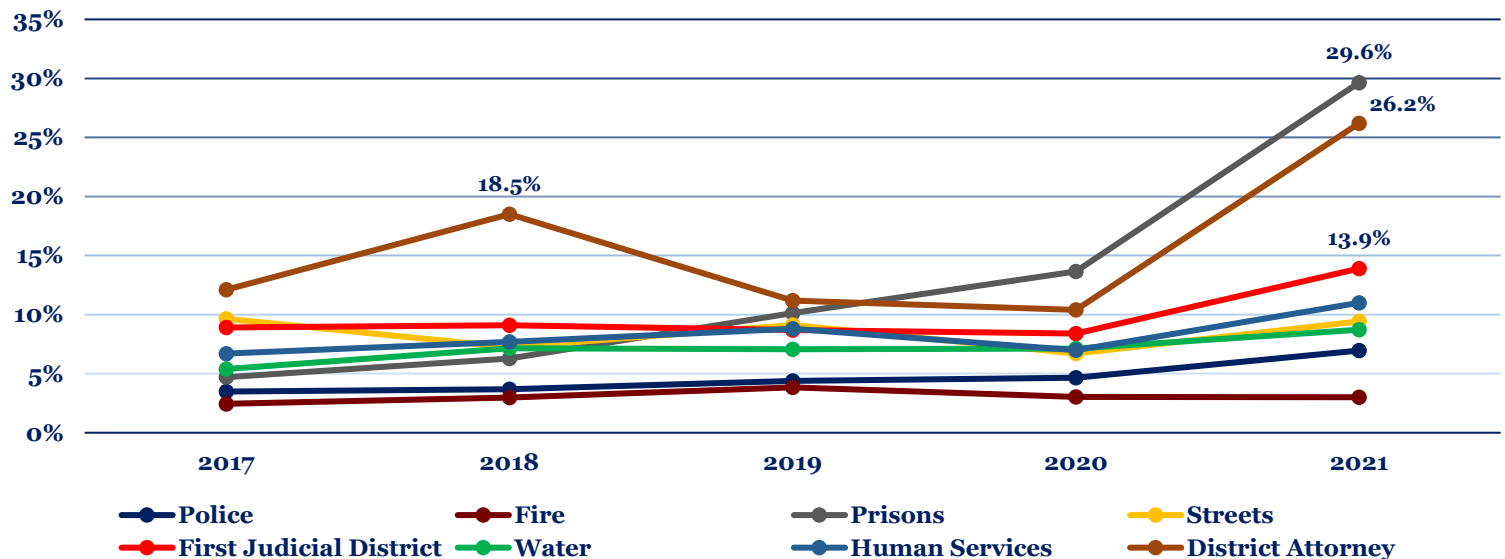
SOURCES: Total employees per Quarterly City Managers Reports as of December 31 of each year; separations data provided by City of Philadelphia Office of Human Resources

\*Separations includes resignations, retirements, layoffs, terminations, and other separations; separation rate denotes total separations compared to departments' total full-time employees

## CONCLUSION

The City experienced increased employee separations during the COVID-19 global Pandemic. In 2021, out of approximately 26,733 employees, 2,933 separated from the City, representing 11.0 percent of the workforce—a notable increase from the pre-Pandemic (2017-2019) average of 6.4 percent. The largest increase was due to resignations which increased to 1,364 in 2021, consisting primarily of Millennials, followed by Generation X. All separations categories increased in 2021 except for 'Laid-off,' as most of the City's lay-offs took place in 2020. Overall, employee separations increased during this period, most likely due to the Pandemic-related circumstances affecting the workforce at the time. Therefore, while the timing and category of separations may have fluctuated from national trends, it is clear that Philadelphia's municipal workforce was affected by the "Great Resignation."

**Figure 6: Separation Rate by Year**  
(Departments with 400+ Separations)



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Fuller, Joseph and Kerr, William, “The Great Resignation Didn’t Start with the Pandemic,” *Harvard Business Review*, March 23, 2022: <https://hbr.org/2022/03/the-great-resignation-didnt-start-with-the-pandemic#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20according%20to%20the,being%20called%20the%20Great%20Resignation.>

<sup>2</sup> Parker, Kim and Mensace Horowitz, Juliana, “Majority of workers who quit a job in 2021 cite low pay, no opportunities for advancement, feeling disrespected,” *Pew Research Center*, March 9, 2022: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>.

<sup>3</sup> Rosenberg, Eli, “4.3 million Americans left their jobs in December as omicron variant disrupted everything,” *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2022: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/01/job-quits-resignations-december-2021/>.

<sup>4</sup> Wottenberg-Cox, Avivah, “Is The ‘Great Resignation’ Actually A Mass Retirement?,” *Forbes*, November 16, 2022: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivahwittenbergcox/2021/11/16/the-great-resignationactually-a-mass-retirement/?sh=7f87c1418ba1>.

<sup>5</sup> Dimock, Michael, “Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins,” *Pew Research Center*, January 17, 2019: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

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