



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

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Commissioner

Testimony

of

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**Deputy Commissioner of Environmental Health
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**

before the

**New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management**

on

Street Cleanliness

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Chair Abreu and members of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, I am Corinne Schiff, Deputy Commissioner for Environmental Health at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department). I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony relating to the Health Department's rat mitigation work and on the legislation before your committee.

The Health Department's rat control program takes a multi-pronged, evidence-based approach across New York City that builds on decades of experience. The approach, called Integrated Pest Management (IPM), emphasizes inspections, monitoring, and removal of conditions that rats need to survive. Rats thrive when they have ready access to food and water, a place to live, and effective transportation routes. That means that reducing the rat population requires managing garbage, eliminating nesting areas, and repairing cracks and holes in sidewalks, structures, and buildings.

Safe, targeted treatment using best practices is the final piece of an effective IPM program. The Health Department is focused on researching and transitioning to rat control methods that minimize risks to birds and other wildlife. We share New Yorkers' grief about the death of Flaco the Eurasian eagle-owl.

Turning to the legislation being discussed today, Introduction 736 would require the Health Department to establish a pilot program to deploy rat contraceptives, and report on the outcomes of the program. The pilot program would require the monthly inspection of the program and comparison areas for signs of rats for six months before the application of rat contraceptives, and then the monthly inspection of such areas for the twelve-month period during the application of the rat contraceptive.

The Health Department has operational and effectiveness concerns about this legislation. There has been significant study of rat contraceptives over the last decade—including our own study in 2017—the studies have found that rat contraception is not effective for an urban pest control program. We have also been in touch with other municipal pest control programs, and they likewise have not found rat contraceptives effective.

We are concerned that the study methodology contained in the bill may not evaluate these products completely, providing ambiguous results. This is because contraception is effective only in a contained environment because approximately 95% of the rat population would need to be made infertile. In New York City, any rat rendered infertile would potentially be replaced by other rats from outside the study areas. Furthermore, the Health Department does not have full control over the proposed study areas. Our staff only treat a private property when the owner fails to do so as part of our enforcement program.

We look forward to sharing our research on this topic and continuing to work with you on rat mitigation efforts. I also want to reiterate our commitment to research and transitioning to rat control methods that minimize risks to birds and other wildlife while maximizing the impact on the rat population. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I look forward to continuing the conversation.