

**Testimony of
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New York City Department of Sanitation**

**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committees on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management and Finance
Monday, May 12, 2025 10:00 A.M.**

Executive Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2025-26

Good morning Chair Abreu, Chair Brannan, and members of the Committees on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management and Finance. I am Javier Lojan, Acting Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined today by Joseph Antonelli, Deputy Commissioner, Management and Budget, and by Joshua Goodman, Deputy Commissioner, Public Affairs & Customer Experience.

The Department of Sanitation serves every part of the City, and in my 26 years here, I've seen thousands of Sanitation Workers take pride in a clean street, but as you all know, historically, key cleanliness programs like litter basket service had been subject to a “budget dance” between the Mayor and this Council, in which funding levels were set year-to-year based on political considerations. This creates doubt both among the public and within the Department about the service we can provide.

Instead, as part of the Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget, better known to New Yorkers as “the best budget ever,” Mayor Adams has once again proven himself to be a staunch and unflinching advocate of clean streets, this time by committing to move beyond the decades of political posturing around street cleanliness and allocating resources to Get Stuff Clean not just this year, not just at the handshake, not just for a photo-op, but baselined – which means forever.

This budget includes funding to continue the current level of [litter basket pick-ups](#) citywide (\$29.7 million, growing to \$31 million in FY 2028, baselined). This is likely the highest baselined level of funding for litter basket service in history; basket service in particular had often been negotiated year-to-year at the last minute, and decreases led directly to more overflowing baskets and more rats.

The Mayor's budget also baselines \$1.4 million to support positions dedicated to cleaning park perimeters, something that had been part of the [“Get Stuff Clean” initiative](#) and will now continue permanently. These are areas used by New Yorkers every single day that often look like City streets but, previously, did not always receive regular cleaning due to bureaucratic quirks.

The DSNY Lot Cleaning Unit, responsible for maintenance of city-owned or maintained vacant lots, is now baselined at \$820,000 for FY26 growing to \$1.6 million in FY29, preventing these areas from becoming eyesores and attracting pests.

Further, the Targeted Neighborhood Task Force is baselined at \$3.6 million, growing to \$6.3 million annually in FY 2029. This funding will support almost 60 employees who provide regularly scheduled cleaning of often neglected pedestrian spaces where DSNY did not have jurisdiction, like underpasses, greenways and medians. Through this program, over 1,500 locations across the city are receiving regular, scheduled cleaning for the first time.

And, something that I know is of particular interest to many of you, this budget includes \$1.1 million in permanent funding for DSNY's [Precision Cleaning Initiative](#), which provides targeted cleaning to high-need areas and assists with the City's interagency homeless encampment taskforce.

These are permanent high levels of funding to protect the cleanliness and quality of life of our neighborhoods. And not a moment too soon.

I will now provide updates on a number of strategic initiatives underway at DSNY.

Containerization

In October 2022, the Adams administration kicked off the Trash Revolution by changing set-out times for both residential and commercial waste from 4:00 PM, one of the earliest set-out times in the country, to 8:00 PM effective April 2023, while also allowing earlier set-out if the material is in a container. This incentive of containerization was paired with major changes to DSNY operations, picking up more of the trash far earlier, including ending a practice by which up to one fifth of trash had been left out for a full day.

Just over one year ago, container rules went into effect for all businesses of every type in New York City, requiring them to get their trash off the streets and into a secure bin. We wrote 70,000 warnings to businesses as this rule went into effect, and have written tens of thousands of summonses since, gaining broad compliance and bringing bins to restaurants, delis, bodegas, drug stores, boutiques, and everything else on our commercial corridors.

The first containerization requirement for residential buildings in more than 50 years went into effect November 12, requiring all buildings with 1-9 residential units to use bins. This can be either their own, or the official NYC Bin, the cheapest high-quality bin available.

This program was designed thoughtfully so that these bins would be by far the cheapest of their quality on the market at around \$50, a reasonable responsibility for most New York City property owners. I understand that members of this Council still felt a strong desire to distribute free bins, as seen in the passage of Intro-1126. While I share your concern about cost burdens on homeowners, this bill requires DSNY to use data on the STAR and E-STAR tax exemption to determine eligibility. This is state data which, by law, DSNY cannot access. Unfortunately, the program as described in the law will be extremely expensive and difficult to operationalize, will not reach communities of the greatest need, and is ripe for abuse.

New Yorkers have purchased over 800,000 of these bins at www.bins.nyc or at NYC Home Depot locations, and they have fundamentally altered the look and feel of our streets, replacing piles of black trash bags that attracted the rats, impeded pedestrians, and generally made New Yorkers feel that no one cared about their neighborhoods. These bins may look like simple pieces of plastic, but they have led to double digit percentage decreases in rat sightings citywide.

Starting June 2026, this will be the only bin permitted for trash, to facilitate safer, cleaner mechanized collection. As you all know, I was a Sanitation Worker. I still am one at heart. And it pains me that fully half of our line of duty injuries are sprains and strains from throwing bags. The two Sanitation Workers operating a truck with mechanical tippers will have one less thing to worry about.

That gets us to 70% of trash already covered by containerization requirements, but we have a plan for the remaining 30%. Installation of stationary on-street containers called Empire Bins is well underway in Manhattan Community District 9 for the first full-district containerization pilot, with these bins to be serviced by new automated side-loading trucks. This is one of those innovations where we talk about it so much that it may be hard to maintain sight of just how fundamentally it changes the way that trash is stored and collected in New York City, and thus our experience of the streets in general. Consider the fact that even a small-scale test of on-street containerization on 10 blocks in Hamilton Heights led to a 60% decrease in rat sightings. This will make a difference – forever.

The new West Harlem pilot will take those huge piles of trash bags that are generated by the largest buildings off the streets and, instead, store them in secure containers just like you'd see in Europe, South America, or Asia, years faster than anyone thought possible. West Harlem will see just over 1,000 Empire Bins, covering more than 80% of their apartment units. Unlike in other parts of the world, the bins are not shared by the entire block. Bins will be assigned to a single large building, using our density, which had long been thought of as the Achilles' Heel of containerization, to our advantage, by allowing for greater oversight. Property owners will have access cards and designate appropriate staff to be able to access the bins.

DSNY outreach staff is on the ground in the neighborhood now explaining this process, and upon completion of installation, use of these on-street containers will begin June 1, and we will begin analyzing results and outcomes right away. But I must caution the members of this Council, as I have done at previous hearings: if you would like to see this international best-practice expand beyond West Harlem – if you would like to defeat the piles of trash and the rats once and for all – there is pending legislation that must pass. Council Member Hudson is the lead sponsor on a bill many of you have already joined; the Removing Animals from Trash Act, or RAT Act, is absolutely essential to the expansion of this program. Without that bill becoming law, this will be just another pilot.

We can have clean sidewalks, clear corners, and passable curb cuts. We really can, if we just see this through to the end.

Composting

Just like with containerization initiatives, our citywide composting program is something that many of the cynics believed we couldn't have – and New Yorkers are proving them wrong every single day. While curbside composting programs have existed in New York City for the last decade, until last October, none had ever served more than approximately 40 percent of the city. When Mayor Adams took office, he committed to developing a universal program that *works* for New Yorkers, and the team at DSNY set to work developing a model built for long-term success.

The resulting program is now running in the entirety of our City, providing residents with simple, universal weekly collection of leaf and yard waste, food scraps, and food-soiled paper products on their recycling day.

That simplicity is the most important part of the program. There's no need for sign-ups, special dates to remember, or specific locations to visit within limited hours. Simply place your materials out on recycling day, your Sanitation Workers will collect it from your home, and we'll ensure it's put to good use. This is a composting program for all New Yorkers.

Make the separation of compostable material easy, and people will do it. I've seen these programs operating for a long time. I have never seen numbers like what New Yorkers diverted in April, when they set weekly tonnage records three weeks in a row.

New Yorkers want to help the environment. They want to fight rats. And with this program, they're doing both.

Composting has a benefit not just for our environment more broadly, but also for NYC gardeners. We give tens of millions of pounds of high-quality New York City compost away for free during the spring, summer, and fall, but for many years, you had to either catch a pop-up event or drive to a site on Staten Island to get it. Last year, we added a second site, in Greenpoint, that is accessible by cyclists, pedestrians, and public transit, and earlier this year, we added a third site, in Astoria. I'm proud to share that New Yorkers are composting so much that we will add a FOURTH site in Eastern Queens before the end of this season, and we are working to identify locations in the Bronx and Manhattan as well, bringing this service to every borough.

Some of you have asked me whether the success of the curbside composting program means the popular Smart Composting Bins are going away. These 400 bins, where residents can drop off their compostable material 24/7 through an easy-to-use smartphone app, are complementary to curbside service and will continue to operate.

We are making great strides in residential diversion by applying simple, easy to understand rules citywide, and we believe the same should be true for commercial organics. While the Commercial Waste Zone system will improve commercial diversion, in that DSNY is requiring carters to charge businesses less to collect recyclables and compost than to collect trash, we were thrilled to see that the Council is also considering a bill to allow DSNY to require source separation at all commercial establishments. We believe this will bring clarity to a confusing system, and help the environment while fighting rats.

Commercial Waste Zones

Now that we've mentioned Commercial Waste Zones, I'll provide a fuller update on that program and our implementation of Local Law 199 of 2019 for anyone who may have missed the recent oversight hearing on this topic.

This law was designed to reform the commercial waste hauling system by establishing new safety standards for workers in the commercial carting industry, improving service for businesses, increasing diversion rates, and reducing vehicle miles traveled as well as harmful emissions from waste hauling vehicles.

When fully implemented, we are looking at about 12 million fewer miles traveled by commercial carting vehicles. And, making good on a promise from when this program was created, businesses will pay less for the collection of recyclables and compostable material than they do for trash at a citywide average of 32% less for recycling and 18% for compostable material. That means businesses will have a meaningful financial incentive to separate their waste properly.

In January, after years of planning and months of outreach, the first of New York City's 20 non-exclusive Commercial Waste Zones came online in Corona, Elmhurst, and Jackson Heights. Because it was done thoughtfully, this has been a successful launch, and not a single one of the thousands of businesses in the Zone has made a complaint to DSNY of any issues with service or billing. We are routinely writing safety violations there and are seeing very strong compliance, likely due at least in part to the significant fine escalators built into the CWZ program, with a total of about 200 violations written since implementation of the Zone began in September.

Following a thorough data analysis of the first zone and of conditions across the City, we recently announced that the next two zones will cover the entirety of the Bronx beginning later this year, with full citywide implementation complete by the end of 2027. This is an important program, but it is a program that was destined to fail if it were rushed. We are doing it right.

Special Enforcement Programs

The expansion of DSNY quality of life enforcement under the current administration is not restricted to the Queens Central Commercial Waste Zone; since April 2023, Sanitation has been the lead agency on enforcement of the City's laws around street vending, also a topic of a recent

oversight hearing by the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection. Our Sanitation Police Officers enforce these laws with a focus on cleanliness and pedestrian access, and they conduct routine enforcement operations rooted in the belief that all New Yorkers, across every neighborhood, in every borough, deserve clean, safe sidewalks.

While we take a warnings-first approach, often posting dozens of warning signs throughout an area before taking any enforcement actions, we also engage in robust enforcement to protect cleanliness and quality of life, and DSNY issued around 4,000 vending-related summonses in 2024.

Street vendors are a part of vibrant neighborhoods. But the rules exist for a reason, so that those neighborhoods can be enjoyed by all, and New Yorkers appreciate our enforcement, as shown by the overwhelming support for Proposition 2. The expansion of DSNY vending enforcement under that ballot measure is in the early implementation stage.

On the same day that DSNY became the lead agency on street vending enforcement, we were also designated to manage the City's graffiti removal program. We brought our operational knowledge to the organization of this program, and in the FY25 PMMR, the number of graffiti service requests closed is up 80%.

Recently, DSNY began enforcing the rules around mobile carwashes, per a new law sponsored by Council Member Salamanca and passed by this Council. While this work is only just beginning, we are encouraged by early results about the impact this can have on cleanliness and quality of life.

We are also continuing our interagency work around ghost cars and abandoned vehicles, through which tens of thousands of abandoned vehicles have been removed from our streets, in addition to over 10,000 more ghost cars since the ghost car task force was launched in September of last year. These are unlicensed vehicles that not only steal public space and toll dollars, but are untraceable if used in crimes.

And like with containerization efforts, getting this done just helps fight the feeling that the City doesn't care about your neighborhood.

I assure you, we do. Because it's our neighborhood, too.

Snow

And with winter now behind us, I'm proud to say that you weren't forgotten during snow season, either. If you grew up here, you likely remember the old days of "primary, secondary, and tertiary" streets. That kind of division in service level is over. Thanks to higher headcount and new technology for internal monitoring, every street is on a route, and every route can be

dispatched at the same time for snow operations as soon as conditions warrant it, a practice we call “Snow Equity.”

And I want to preview something exciting for you – all-new brine flushers are on their way, reducing the City’s dependence on rock salt and proving that even in a perfected science like snow removal, there is always room for innovation as part of the Trash Revolution. We’ll have more to say about that at the next snow hearing.

In the winter of 2024-25, DSNY responded to 14 winter weather events and observed 12.5 inches of accumulating precipitation. Half of these events were in February alone, and Sanitation Workers were on 12-hour shifts for weeks to address these conditions.

Thanks to their efforts and the administration’s investments, they were able to get the streets open, even servicing car lanes and bike lanes at the same time. I want to take this moment to thank our Sanitation Workers for their efforts, for being the heroes with the plow just as they have been for decades.

FY2026 Executive Budget

With their work in mind, I will now turn to the FY 2026 Executive Budget, the Best Budget Ever, which baselines critical cleaning services – forever.

The Executive Budget includes \$2.03 billion in expense funds in Fiscal Year 2025 and \$1.97 billion in Fiscal Year 2026, reflecting increases of \$81.4 million and \$41.2 million, respectively, from the budget adopted last June.

The Fiscal Year 2026 budget includes \$1.2 billion for personal services to support a total budgeted headcount of 9,618 full-time positions, including 7,957 uniformed positions and 1,661 civilian positions, and \$757.7 million for other than personal services, or OTPS.

DSNY’s Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Capital Budget includes \$3.54 billion in capital funding in the 10-year plan, \$1.16 billion of which is for garages and facilities, \$2.25 billion for equipment, \$66.62 million for IT, and \$59.87 million for solid waste management infrastructure.

The Capital Budget includes funding for several major facilities projects, including:

- \$488 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Bronx Districts 9, 10, and 11, with demolition;
- \$284 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Queens District 1, which is slated to begin design next fiscal year;
- Upgrades to the facility that serves as the home for the Bronx District 12 Garage, which has an overall budget of \$55.0 million and will begin construction next year;
- And the \$17 million finishing touches of the \$212 million build out for the brand-new home for Staten Island District 1 and 3, which is slated to be completed this year.

- That project, along with the new BK3, means we will be opening three new garages at two buildings this calendar year, a rare milestone for this Department and a sign of this administration's serious investment in the safety and well-being of Sanitation Workers and the neighborhoods they serve.

Thank you, and we look forward to taking your questions.