

**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
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Preliminary 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.

I am in my 26th year with New York's Strongest, and today, the men and women of this Department are doing more to create and maintain a clean, livable, and sustainable City than at any time I can remember. This administration has shown an unflinching willingness to essentially run a street sweeper over the avenues of red tape that had bound filth to our communities for decades, and has made the investments in personnel and equipment to match. We are cleaning more areas, diverting more material, and enforcing quality of life more effectively.

And we're just getting started, with plans to expand or refine virtually every one of our successful strategic initiatives.

Let me begin by sharing some astounding news: new rat numbers.

I know what you're thinking – "this is a new Commissioner, are we really still talking about the rat numbers?" You bet we are. For the last several years, we have been proud to announce decreases in rat sightings across the City, correlated with our efforts to get the trash off the street through containerization, composting, and enforcement programs.

But please allow me to emphasize: the numbers you are about to hear are amazing in virtually any historical context. For years, rat sightings reported to 311 basically only increased. In 2023, we were incredibly gratified to start seeing decreases in the single digits citywide, maybe in the low double-digits in the City's four Rat Mitigation Zones. That alone was cause for true, meaningful celebration.

December 2024 was the first full month in which buildings with one to nine residential units were required to put their trash in bins. In that month, rat sightings were down 23% compared to the same time the year before.

January 2025 was the second full month of residential container rules, and rat sightings fell 24% compared to the same time the year before, a time when sightings were already falling.

In February 2025, the third full month in which 70% of New York City trash was covered by requirements to use bins, rat sightings were down 26% compared to the year before.

This isn't an accident. It isn't an anomaly. It is something that cynics in Chicago and LA and Paris and even right here in town never thought possible: a turning of the tide in New York City's war against rats.

It is a direct result of a once-in-a-generation change to the way the trash is set out, a Trash Revolution being waged on many fronts with more still to come.

Containerization

In October 2022, the Adams administration kicked off this effort 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.

As mentioned, 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.

New Yorkers have purchased over 650,000 of these bins at www.bins.nyc or at NYC Home Depot locations, and as you can see in the pictures behind me, 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.

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.

DSNY worked hard and demonstrated the incomparable creativity of the public sector in developing a contractual model that made this bin the cheapest on the market by far – about a third the cost of similar bins. I know that many members of the Council still wanted free bins to be made available to some homeowners, as shown by the recent passage of Intro 1126. While I respect your desire to ease costs to homeowners, no matter how reasonable those costs may be, I must share major concerns about how this bill can be implemented. DSNY was not given the opportunity to review a final draft version of the bill until 10pm on the night it aged, despite longstanding practice, and none of the input we offered was taken before it was brought for a vote.

As written, the bill requires DSNY to give an unspecified number of trash bins to one- and two-family homeowners who are also enrolled in the STAR or E-STAR tax programs, and to provide reimbursements to eligible property owners who have already purchased bins. As we told Council Committee staff, in vain, it turns out, STAR and E-STAR are state programs, and we do not have data on enrollment. A property owner would have to submit their tax return to DSNY and DSNY would have to store that information securely. As an operational agency, we do not have the resources or expertise to do this safely and effectively. The bin is affordable, but this law risks taking away Sanitation services that benefit all New Yorkers in order to pay for a complex reimbursement program that will benefit relatively few homeowners.

The same is true for the reimbursements described in the bill. Remember, the manufacturer of the bin is a City concessionaire, selling to residents directly. No money changes hands with the City on either side. To our knowledge, there has never before been a legislative requirement to reimburse New Yorkers for an item they purchased from a private company, not once in the City's 400-year history. We cannot review receipts and mail checks. The Council has created a program ripe for fraud and waste.

We proposed automatic dispersal of bins to property owners enrolled in the City's senior and disabled property owner tax programs; this would have been simple and straightforward. While that legislative proposal was rejected, we plan to prioritize these homeowners over those with incomes of close to half a million dollars, and will distribute bins subject to appropriation. This will give a free bin to the most people of greatest need, and allow containerization efforts to continue.

And they certainly are continuing. You all know that 70% of trash is already covered by containerization requirements, but we have a plan for the remaining 30%. In just over one month, installation of stationary on-street containers called Empire Bins will begin in Manhattan Community District 9 for the first full-district containerization pilot, 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.

This 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: 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 for the dustbin of history – and far more than just dust will return to our streets.

The same can be said for Chair Abreu's Intro-1115, which would extend on-street container requirements to City-owned buildings. While we believe strongly in the spirit of this legislation, we know that City buildings, just like residential buildings, should not have a one-size-fits-all approach. Schools and other buildings that generate large amounts of waste should absolutely be moving towards an on-street container model, and we look forward to working with you, Mr. Chair, to get this bill targeted on those buildings specifically where wheelie bins are not an appropriate containerization solution.

We know New Yorkers want this, as evidenced by the overwhelming passage of Proposition 2 last fall. We hope you will join us in delivering for them.

Just two other points I'd like to make on containerization before we move on. First, you are all familiar with the BetterBin, our litter basket of the future, which is both easier to service than the traditional wire mesh basket and more rodent resistant. You may have seen press reports that the roll-out of these baskets could be impacted by tariffs between the US and Canada. I'm afraid those reports are accurate. We were able to get about 5,000 bins in this fiscal year ahead of the tariff, but purchases next fiscal year will need to account for tariff costs.

And finally, many of you have reached out with questions about a rule requiring Business Improvement Districts and supplemental sanitation service providers to stop placing bags directly on the street, which goes into effect August 1. Despite what you may have heard, the

idea is simple: residents and businesses can't put bags right on the street. I can't just walk down to the corner and drop a trash bag. This rule simply holds BIDs and other similar entities to the same standard; the rule is agnostic in approach, and we have proactively offered multiple options for how to comply.

Over the course of one-on-one meetings with 66 of the City's 76 BIDs, as well as multiple meetings with the BID Association and with supplemental service providers like ACE, we have explained that this could look like a stationary on-street container for a mid-sized BID, an extra litter basket for a smaller one, or direct trucking to a Sanitation garage for a large BID. We are working with all BIDs in good faith, and many critics have come to see the importance of this program. I want to assure you that despite the effective date, we will not be summoning anyone who is making an honest effort to comply with this rule for a considerable period of time.

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

Composting

Now I will seek to contain the desire to talk about bins and move to another exciting topic: composting and the beneficial use of source-separated organic material. 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. And we have numbers to back this up: in fiscal year 2024, DSNY diverted 265 million pounds of compostable material from landfill, an incredible increase of 65% from two years before. This is a testament to the value of simple, universal programs.

But we still hear from residents of larger buildings, in particular, that their landlords are not offering an opportunity to participate in this program. I want to be clear: under Local Law 89 of 2023, this is not optional. All New Yorkers must participate, just as they must separate their metal, glass, plastic, and paper. The law gives DSNY the ability to enforce this mandate starting

April 1, but we have written well over 20,000 warnings thus far. When enforcement starts, a new 311 service request will also go live, allowing residents to report their buildings for failure to allow participation in curbside composting.

I can assure you, we will investigate those complaints. We have made participation easy – now it's up to New Yorkers to follow the law or face a summons.

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 we are working hard to add a third site in Queens before the end of this season.

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.

DSNY would also like to raise the issue of commercial organics separation, as we have done at the last half-dozen council hearings. Local Law 146 of 2013 requires certain commercial establishments to separate their compostable material, but this law is now substantially out of step with the City's commitment to diversion of compostable waste. 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, but we were thrilled to see that the Council is also considering a bill to allow DSNY to require source separation at all commercial establishments, in line with the progress made in residential diversion. We look forward to working with you on this proposal.

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.

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 miles fewer 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. In the past, advocates had called for DSNY to launch the entire City at once; having led the roll-out of this first zone, I can tell you I am incredibly thankful that we did not do that. This has been a successful launch. Incredibly, not a single one of the 11,000 businesses in the Zone has made a complaint to DSNY of any issues with service or billing, but our Bureau of Commercial Waste learned a tremendous amount during this first-of-its-kind implementation that will be useful for future zones.

We are completing a data analysis that will allow for the start of the next zone or zones later this year, with more details to come at the upcoming oversight hearing on this topic.

That said, we are actively enforcing in Queens Central on both administrative and safety requirements. We are routinely writing safety violations, 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.

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. 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 3,725 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 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 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."

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, and for remembering that no matter what anyone says, it absolutely *does* still snow in New York City.

FY2026 Preliminary Budget

There is so much happening at this agency; so much that New Yorkers will never see. We have not even touched on recent developments like the new DSNY Highway Unit, which provides dedicated staffing to clean the first places seen by visitors to our City, the Targeted Neighborhood Task Force for cleaning long-forgotten corners of neighborhoods and all City-owned property, and our plan to increase compliance with mechanical brooms during Alternate Side Parking by pursuing state legislation for automated enforcement.

But all career public servants like the people on both sides of this room chose our path not for credit or glory, but to do right by the communities that have given us so much. A cleaner, more livable City isn't just a job for us; it is a calling, and all of the Strongest are thankful for your willingness to invest in our work.

With that in mind, I will now turn to the proposed 2026 budget.

The Preliminary Budget includes \$1.996 billion in expense funds in Fiscal Year 2025 and \$1.93 billion in Fiscal Year 2026, reflecting increases of \$48.3 million and \$711,000, respectively, from the budget adopted last June.

The Fiscal Year 2026 budget includes \$1.18 billion for personal services to support a total budgeted headcount of 9,478 full-time positions, including 7,846 uniformed positions and 1,632 civilian positions, and \$756.5 million for other than personal services, or OTPS.

DSNY's Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Capital Budget includes \$3.54 billion in capital funding in the 10-year plan, \$1.17 billion of which is for garages and facilities, \$2.25 billion for equipment, \$66.12 million for IT, and \$53.98 million for solid waste management infrastructure.

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

- \$487 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Bronx Districts 9, 10, and 11, with demolition;
- \$283 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Queens District 1, which is slated to begin design next 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.