

**Testimony of
Gregory Anderson, Commissioner
New York City Department of Sanitation**

**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management
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Oversight: Waste Valorization & the Circular Economy

Good morning, Chair Sanchez and members of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. I am Gregory Anderson, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined today by Jennifer McDonnell, Deputy Commissioner of Solid Waste Management, and by Kate Kitchener, Executive Director of Resource Recovery. Thank you for inviting us to testify today.

New Yorkers have been recycling in some form for more than 200 years. In the nineteenth century, rendering plants, scrap dealers, and an informal network of rag and bone pickers ensured that most usable discards were given a new life. In the early 20th century, during the world wars and Great Depression, New Yorkers used and reused products out of a sense of civic duty, necessity, or both.

But in the 20th century, industrial growth and economic transformation in the United States built a powerful economy, one that was based on the insatiable appetite of a growing population of Americans as consumers — of products, of energy, of land and water. The fundamental premise of this 20th century economy was to take, make, and waste both natural and labor resources from around the globe to fuel economic growth. At the same time, we found every possible way to dispose of the growing volumes of trash we generated — dump it in the ocean, burn it, bury it in giant mountains of trash.

Over time, there was a growing realization that we were asking more of our planet than it could endure and that this economic model — take, make, waste — was unsustainable. And here in New York City, we struggled with the reality that our means of disposal — in polluting incinerators, barely-regulated landfills across the city, and the behemoth of Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island — would not last.

For decades, the Department of Sanitation has endeavored to recover and reclaim as much of the value remaining in the products New Yorkers use, whether by reuse, recycling or composting, through conversion to energy, or through other means.

Our modern recycling programs were born out of the environmental movement of the 1970s and 80s, beginning with grassroots efforts to collect recyclable products like cans and newspapers at the neighborhood level. New York City instituted its first recycling program in 1985, collecting old newspapers in Greenwich Village, before expanding to other neighborhoods and material

types. Local Law 19 of 1989 codified the City's mandatory curbside recycling program and is the foundation for the program we have today.

More recently, we've created the largest mandatory curbside composting program in the nation to collect compostable material so that we can turn it into finished compost or into renewable energy, far, far better than shipping it to landfills hundreds of miles away.

As we continue our work to create a more circular economy, we are in the process of finalizing our 2026 Solid Waste Management Plan, or SWMP for short, a 10-year plan designed to guide the future of resource recovery in the city. We remain on track to complete that plan this year, and we look forward to continued engagement with the City Council regarding its completion and implementation.

The New York City Department of Sanitation collects and processes 24 million pounds of trash, recycling, and compostable material each day, and for many decades, one of our goals as an agency has been to put as much of this material as possible to beneficial reuse. What items can achieve a beneficial use, though, changes with technological development and with the shifting market. There are also formal and informal exchanges of used and unwanted goods — in thrift stores, on WhatsApp chats, and at stoops — that ensure that products with value stay in circulation beyond just one initial use.

In our experience at DSNY, recovering value from waste has worked best when the public sector and private sector come together to make investments in sustainable processes and facilities to support waste diversion. The Staten Island Compost Facility was built by the City of New York, and much of its operation is handled by a contracted vendor. We process millions of pounds of food waste there every year, keeping that material out of landfills and producing valuable compost, which we both sell and give away. Likewise, the Sunset Park Materials Recovery Facility is built on City land, which was improved with City capital funds, but the facility was built and is operated by a private sector partner.

Nowhere is the value of public private partnerships in the circular economy clearer than at the Pratt Industries Paper Mill on Staten Island. Thanks to tens of millions in private and public investment, when you throw a newspaper in your green recycling bin in Manhattan today, it will be barged to Staten Island to become a pizza box sold in Brooklyn next week. That's recycling at work.

A similar model may be the path forward for two of the biggest remaining challenges in the development of our waste management infrastructure - used textiles and lithium batteries.

For textiles, which represent about five percent of New York City's waste stream, there are a number of not-for-profit and for-profit entities developing their operational capacity for sorting and processing, and DSNY is ready to assist as this industry develops. Our current textile recycling partnership provides easy, convenient drop-off for many New Yorkers, but we are interested in working with private sector partners to develop a mass-market solution more aligned with our composting and traditional recycling programs.

Lithium batteries have suddenly appeared in an incredible variety of products, and that means they are in the trash somewhere in the city every day. They explode in our trucks and put Sanitation Workers at risk. Imagine a world where lithium battery recycling becomes economically preferable, and producers are therefore incentivized to ensure proper handling of these items. Shifting this responsibility to the private sector would keep Sanitation Workers safer and reduce the extractive impacts of lithium mining.

As we look to the future, we are encouraged by efforts to create new partnerships to reduce waste, increase waste diversion, and move to a more circular economy. We have long supported the creation of extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws to shift the financial and physical responsibility for recycling and disposing of products from local governments and taxpayers to companies that manufacture, sell, and distribute those products.

Chief among these is packaging waste, created explicitly for one-time use and often difficult to separate, sort, and remanufacture, leaving New York taxpayers holding the bill to collect and process these materials. An EPR program for packaging would incentivize manufacturers to reduce waste and increase recyclability and the use of recycled content—lowering recycling and disposal costs for cities, saving taxpayer dollars and reducing waste in landfills. Based on bills previously introduced in the State legislature, New York City alone stands to receive more than \$100 million annually to support our recycling program and investment in new infrastructure and consumer education. I thank the Council for its prior support on this issue, and I call on our partners in Albany to work with municipalities and recyclers across the state to get this bill across the finish line.

Turning to the legislation on today's agenda, Intro 256, sponsored by Council Member Hudson, would require DSNY to study the feasibility and potential environmental effects of a mandate for the source separation of textiles by households and the collection of these items by DSNY. We support the intent of this bill to increase the amount of textiles diverted from landfills, which make up at least 5% of the city's residential and institutional waste stream.

DSNY currently offers several programs to divert textiles from landfills, including in-building collection for residential buildings with 10+ units, commercial buildings, schools and nonprofits, community recycling events in all 59 community districts annually, and publicly-accessible textile collection bins in each borough. We look forward to discussing this bill further with the Council and strategies to increase diversion of this material.

On Intro. 970, sponsored by Council Member Gutierrez, which would require DSNY to designate nightlife districts and provide supplemental street cleaning and litter basket services in such designated districts, DSNY supports the intent of this legislation to keep neighborhoods clean, and looks forward to further conversations around the specific neighborhoods covered by this bill and the resources needed to provide additional service.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and we look forward to answering your questions.