

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

**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management
Thursday, October 15, 2026 at 1:00 P.M.**

Oversight: Waste Equity and Environmental Justice

Good afternoon, Chair Sanchez and members of the City Council 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.

The Department of Sanitation has equity baked into our function at the deepest structural level, in that we provide a free, unlimited service to all New Yorkers. There's no sign-up. There's no opt-in. There's no fee for collection or limit on how much you can set out. Just put your waste at the curb, properly sorted and containerized, and we'll come get it. DSNY serves everyone without question and is committed to fairness.

We also acknowledge that our waste management and export system reflects longstanding injustices and inequities. To begin to correct these, we have implemented the City's landmark 2006 Solid Waste Management Plan, which called for a move away from truck export of solid waste from New York City to more sustainable and equitable rail and barge export. The facilities and system built as a result of that plan represent billions of dollars of investment in equitable, sustainable waste management systems and have reduced truck traffic in historically overburdened communities by hundreds of trips per day.

And we did not stop there. Local Law 152 of 2018, which DSNY spent more than a decade working with the City Council on prior to its enactment, required a reduction in the permitted capacity of putrescible and non-putrescible transfer stations in four historically overburdened community districts: by 50% in Brooklyn Community District 1 and by 33% in Queens Community District 12 and Bronx Community Districts 1 and 2.

The law also allowed for certain exemptions to the reductions in permitted capacity for activities consistent with the City's sustainability goals, including for the processing of recyclables and organic waste, for diverting construction and demolition debris to beneficial use, and for facilities that export waste by rail.

Local Law 152 represented the culmination of years of advocacy and organizing that began decades ago, as the City began to close its own disposal facilities. Today, the law has been fully implemented, and we have reduced not only *permitted capacity* but also *actual truck traffic* through these historically overburdened neighborhoods. The ongoing implementation of Commercial Waste Zones will continue to reduce truck traffic in these neighborhoods.

The Commercial Waste Zone program is being implemented under Local Law 199 of 2019 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 expect that commercial waste zones will result in a 63 percent reduction in truck traffic associated with commercial waste collection — more than 18 million miles per year.

The FY 2026 Commercial Waste Zones Annual Report was released just two weeks ago, covering the expansion from just one initial zone to six fully operational zones. DSNY has continued to strengthen the oversight framework, including monitoring awardee compliance, collecting and reviewing required operational data, conducting enforcement activities, supporting worker safety initiatives, and engaging businesses and stakeholders throughout each phase of implementation.

There is a substantial amount of data and information in the report, including on the 192,000 outreach activities conducted by DSNY and its partners, 2,581 individual employee trainings conducted by the carters, collection tonnage by zone and stream, enforcement actions and much more.

When LL 199 was enacted, some opponents projected that the program would cause massive disruption for businesses, drive up costs, and reduce the quality of service. To date, the opposite has been true. Pricing and service quality have both improved, and city streets are both cleaner and safer as a result. We are proud of our implementation of this historic program, and we look forward to celebrating its full implementation by the end of 2027.

DSNY was also proud to have contributed to New York City's first citywide Racial Equity Plan, mandated directly by voters in a 2022 ballot initiative. In this plan, we acknowledge that our operations are deeply connected with structural issues that affect New Yorkers of color, and that our mission includes a responsibility to address inequities in service levels and neighborhood cleanliness. As we work to strengthen our efforts, we are committed to ensuring that our sanitation programs promote equity and serve all New Yorkers, especially those in historically underserved communities.

In this report, we commit to continuously improving programs and service delivery to New Yorkers through ongoing evaluation of data analytics, stakeholder feedback, and operational enhancements responsive to community needs. In the coming years, DSNY will publish neighborhood-level datasets to measure key outcomes around diversion, containerization, and commercial waste reform. These will include measures such as residential and commercial diversion rates, rat sightings, commercial vehicle miles traveled, and diversion participation, and we will use these measures to identify disparities and target improvements in historically underserved neighborhoods. DSNY will also use this data to inform outreach, enforcement, improvements, and resource allocation.

Turning to the legislation on today's agenda, Intro. 30, sponsored by Council Member Abreu, would require DSNY, in consultation with DCAS and DOE, to create a program requiring City-owned buildings to dispose of waste in stationary on-street containers. DSNY agrees that we should move aggressively to containerize the city's trash. In fact, trash containerization has been required for all City agencies for nearly two years.

Trash containerization is imperative for New York City, but we must take a thoughtful and strategic approach that accounts for density and efficiency. This bill would require all City agencies, including small schools and offices, to use Empire Bins, which may not appropriate in all cases. Moreover, all City buildings are already required use some form of trash containerization, whether tilt trucks, NYC bins, or off-street containerized collection.

In developing a plan for the citywide rollout of Empire Bins, we have focused on residential properties with 10+ units not currently covered by containerization requirements to maximize the impact of getting trash bags off the sidewalk. Empire Bins now serve large residential buildings in West Harlem and are rolling out this fall in Brooklyn Community District 2, including Fort Greene and Downtown Brooklyn.

As the Mayor announced this spring, we are on an aggressive timeline to achieve full trash containerization by 2031, faster than previously envisioned. Adding Empire Bins at every City facility would divert resources from that important focus on residential trash and delay the full rollout. There certainly are some municipal buildings for which Empire Bin service is appropriate, and we will pursue installation at the appropriate time. We would be happy to continue conversations with the Council as we expand our revolutionary trash containerization programs citywide.

Intro. 352, sponsored by Council Member Nurse, would require DSNY to develop a plan for ensuring proper disposal of rechargeable batteries used for powered mobility devices. These batteries present a major problem for DSNY, causing fires in our trucks and facilities when they are improperly disposed of.

DSNY currently offers services aligned with the spirit of this legislation. We recently expanded the operating hours of our Special Waste Drop-off sites and now have one location in each borough that accepts rechargeable batteries, electronics, paint, and automotive products five days a week: Tuesday-Saturday from 9am to 3pm. Adding a second site in each borough and further-expanding hours would require substantial additional resources.

The proposed bill also calls for DSNY to accept these items at any disposal or collection event organized by the Department. While we do accept them at our SAFE events — one per borough per year — it would be impractical to collect them at all Department-sponsored events without additional funding or material support from the rechargeable battery industry.

We believe that battery manufacturers should be primarily responsible for the cost of collecting unwanted batteries and educating the public on safe use and disposal. Many rechargeable batteries, but excluding those in e-mobility devices, are covered by a New York State extended producer responsibility and retailer take back program. This law requires that all stores that sell

rechargeable batteries or items that contain them must also collect them for recycling, and the cost is borne by battery manufacturers.

The State recently enacted legislation to expand this producer responsibility program to include e-mobility batteries, but retailer take back and recycling of those items remains voluntary in the updated state law. We are currently working with DEC, FDNY, and the program's producer responsibility organization, the Battery Network, to ensure that the producer responsibility program implemented pursuant to this new law provides for sufficiently *safe* and *convenient* collection options for New York City residents, including by providing funding for City-operated collection sites and events. We appreciate the Council's strong interest in this topic and will keep the Council informed as these discussions progress.

Intro. 401, sponsored by Council Member Restler, would require DSNY to install 25 public organic waste receptacles in every community district. DSNY currently has a network of approximately 400 smart compost bins installed citywide. However, that program was established before the implementation of our nation-leading, mandatory, universal curbside program as our primary approach to providing composting service to New Yorkers. Since the mandatory curbside program has been fully implemented, utilization of the smart compost bins has declined significantly. Given this fact, and the added cost to install and service the additional organic waste receptacles this bill would require, we cannot support this bill at this time.

Intro. 987, sponsored by Council Member Abreu, would require DSNY to establish a process for block associations and nonprofits to request shared stationary on-street containers. DSNY has established an application process for shared Empire Bins for small (1-9 unit) and medium (10-30 unit) buildings located in Brooklyn Community District 2, and we are actively seeking applicants to test this approach there. We look forward to further discussions with the Council about this legislation as we continue implementation of this program.

Lastly, Intro. 1041, sponsored by Council Member Hankerson, would change how the Department considers litter basket removals. We understand that the Department's past practice of removing chronically misused litter baskets was frustrating to elected officials and New Yorkers alike. Today, several factors make such removals rare and, when exercised, *the last possible resort*.

First, the Department has the highest level of baseline-funded litter basket service in recorded history, meaning that we are able to service every basket more frequently citywide. Second, the Department adjusts service levels more thoughtfully and proactively than in the past, changing the frequency and time of day of collection to best optimize service to a neighborhood's need. Third, our network of community partners has grown in both size and scope, including BIDs, local mutual aid groups, and supplemental service providers. And finally, thanks to action by the City Council several years ago, we have stronger enforcement tools to hold those who misuse our litter baskets for disposal of household and commercial waste accountable.

In rare cases of clear, recurring misuse that leads to consistent, unmanageable overflow, DSNY may determine that a basket must be removed or relocated. Any such removals are subject to my

own personal final review, and it is an action that I do not take lightly. But it is critical that we retain this tool as an option of last resort to address chronic misuse and improper disposal.

On reporting, I am happy to say that we recently began updating the litter basket inventory posted on Open Data on a *monthly* rather than *quarterly* basis, and I would be happy to discuss further reporting, transparency, and accountability with the Council.

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