Overhauling Procedures & Expanding Navigation

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O.P.E.N. for Small Business

The OFFICE of the MAYOR

Small business owners in New York City are navigating a system that too often works against them. They face duplicative permits, fines for paperwork errors that pose no risk to anyone, license renewals that pull them away from their storefronts, and inspections that arrive without warning and vary from one visit to the next. The cumulative effect is time lost, money spent, and a sense that City government is an obstacle rather than a partner.

In January, Mayor Mamdani signed Executive Order 11, directing seven City agencies to compile an inventory of their fees and civil penalties and recommend ways to reduce them. In the six months since, the Mayor's Office for Economic Justice (DMEJ) and the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) held roundtables and surveyed business owners across all five boroughs to better understand the barriers they face.

Through conversations with dozens of individual small businesses, the City agencies that regulate them, and the local and citywide organizations that support them, a clear picture emerged. More than the absolute cost of fees and fines, business owners regularly cited time delays and unmet expectations on time to open, uncertainty about compliance requirements, and a feeling that government wasn't always on their side or treating them fairly and with respect.

OPEN for Small Business, Overhauling Procedures and Expanding Navigation, is the result of those conversations: more than 50 regulatory reforms that will transform how government works with small businesses.

Small Businesses in New York by the Numbers

There are around 180,000 small businesses in New York City, defined as businesses with 50 or fewer employees. Together, these small businesses employ approximately one million New Yorkers, about a quarter of the City's total private-sector workforce.

A large portion of these are storefront businesses that occupy ground floor or upper-floor commercial spaces in New York City, and as a result, have to navigate the building code, fire code, health code, other City and State regulatory requirements, and non-government entities like public utilities to open their brick and mortar shop.

What We Heard

Over the first half of 2026, Deputy Mayor Julie Su's team and SBS spoke with small business owners across every borough and every sector: restaurant operators, bodega and grocery owners, child care providers, and the chambers and associations that represent them. The conversations were specific and, on the core problem, remarkably consistent. For most owners, government fees themselves weren't the main problem. They were asking to understand what government wanted from them, to get an answer when they called, and to be treated like a business the City wanted to thrive.

Owners are left to navigate the City alone. Across every borough, owners described dealing with the City as bureaucratic and anxiety-inducing. They often don't know which agency to call, get bounced from one to the next, and come away feeling that government treats them as an adversary rather than a customer. This frustration intensified when they didn't understand why they had failed their inspection, why they couldn't get a straight answer to a question, or why their urgency for having to keep their business closed another week or more seemed to fall on deaf ears. Restaurant owners described a culture, in their words, that "needs to change," where inspections feel like "us against them." The throughline was rarely a single rule. It was the absence of a consistent partner on the government side responsible for helping a business get to open, stay open, and avoid lost time or money.

Child care providers face the sharpest version of this. Providers convened through the roundtable and the Business Outreach Center's Childcare Means Business program described navigating multiple agencies as the single biggest barrier to opening and expanding. Opening a center means satisfying DOHMH, DOB, and FDNY, each on its own timeline, with no single place explaining how the pieces fit together. Providers described acting as the go-between among agencies, architects, and landlords, with no dedicated contact to call when a process stalled.

Outdoor dining came up more than almost any other single issue. The NYC Hospitality Alliance, multiple chambers of commerce, and restaurant owners including The Edge Harlem, Mắm, and Da Claudio described the approval process as costly, slow, and hard to navigate. Several said plainly that simplifying it would make a real difference to their bottom line and their ability to stay open.

A fair chance to fix a problem matters as much as the rule itself. Restaurant owners emphasized that delay is its own penalty: a restaurant that has already corrected an issue can spend close to a year with its grade listed as "pending," unable to show customers that it has earned back its A. Bodega owners pointed to violations issued on the spot for small things they would gladly have fixed if given the chance. Providers described the same enforcement-first posture, inspectors who seem to arrive looking for something wrong rather than to help a good business stay compliant.

What We're Doing About It

OPEN answers what we heard. Many of these reforms trace back to a specific frustration owners named, from the child care provider stuck acting as a go-between among three agencies to the restaurant owner watching a corrected grade sit 'pending' for months. Where owners asked for a single point of contact, clearer guidance, faster inspections, or a fair chance to fix a problem before being fined, OPEN sets out to deliver.

PART 1

Reforms That Make It Easier for All Businesses to Open and Stay Open

The first reforms, codified by Executive Order, take an all of government approach to changing how small businesses interface with City government for the better These reforms will ensure that there is enduring attention to making it easier for small businesses to operate in the city and regular structures for holding government accountable for continuous improvement.

Small business owners pride themselves on providing exceptional customer service, and these reforms bring that same standard to City government, operationalizing our commitment to making government easier to navigate. In particular, expanding the mission of the NYC BEST system has the potential to save many new small businesses time and money by facilitating inspections and permitting across agencies and helping businesses pass their inspections on the first try.

1.1 Assign a Client Manager to Every Business Seeking to Open

A business owner opening a storefront today has to find their own way through permitting, licensing, and inspections across multiple agencies, each with its own requirements and timelines, with no one person accountable for the whole process. Owners told us the time to open, and the uncertainty around it, was among their greatest frustrations.

SBS runs a program called NYC BEST, the Business Express Service Team, which helps owners work through what the City requires of them. Under this Executive Order, SBS will expand its mission so that every small business looking to open is assigned a single client manager who stays with them start to finish, offering individual case management, compliance education before an inspection so owners know what will be checked, and support after a summons is issued. By facilitating inspections and permitting across agencies and helping businesses pass their inspections on the first try, this has the potential to save many small businesses time and money as they open up.

1.2 Put the Business Owner Bill of Rights in Every Owner's Hands

The Business Owner Bill of Rights sets out what owners are entitled to expect from City government during inspections and other interactions: how they should be treated, what an inspector must tell them, and what recourse they have when those standards aren't met. City agencies are required to provide it. In practice, almost no one has seen it. According to SBS's 2025 survey of over 500 small businesses, only 9% reported ever receiving it. A right an owner doesn't know they have is not much of a right.

SBS and the Mayor's Office of Operations have revised the Business Owner Bill of Rights to be more expansive, and City agencies will distribute it at all their points of service and during all customer service interactions in the field. SBS will also make sure all businesses know about these rights during every compliance education visit.

1.3 Give Owners a Direct Line to City Hall

The bill of rights travels with a Customer Service Survey, a short form that lets an owner tell the City how an interaction actually went and offer feedback. Like the bill of rights itself, it only works if owners receive it.

SBS and the Mayor's Office of Operations will work with other City agencies to revise and distribute the survey so that all business owners can share their feedback with the City in real time, at the moment an inspection ends rather than months later. Agencies will review those results regularly, and they feed directly into how the City evaluates and recognizes its own inspectors, as described in 1.5 and 1.6.

1.4 Stand Up a Permanent Taskforce to Untangle Regulatory Burdens

The pain points identified through this process were not the product of any single agency's decisions. They accumulated over years, across agencies that rarely had reason to compare notes. Fixing them once is not enough.

SBS and the Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice will convene nearly ten City agencies and offices in a standing body, the OPEN Taskforce, to regularly discuss the pain points small businesses face in their interactions with government and develop solutions.

Each year, the OPEN Taskforce will deliver an update of regulatory reform opportunities to the Deputy Mayor for Economic Justice, so this work continues past today's announcement.

1.5 Reinforce Excellence in Customer Service

Owners told us that the experience of an inspection varies widely from inspector to inspector, and that inconsistency erodes trust as much as any individual fine.

City agencies will double down on their commitment to ensure that all inspectors receive customer service training annually. SBS and the Mayor's Office of Operations will annually recognize one or more inspectors from relevant enforcement agencies for excellence in public service, based on positive feedback in the Customer Service Survey, feedback from NYC BEST, and input from each agency's leadership.

1.6 Holding City Government Accountable to the Business Owner Bill of Rights

Owners are not going to share feedback regularly with government unless they know that government is listening. Agency leadership will regularly review Customer Service Survey results so that patterns are identified and addressed. City agencies will newly consider feedback received from the Customer Service survey in annual performance evaluations for inspectors so there is a feedback loop informing agency culture based on small business interactions.

PART 2

Reforms That Make Targeted Improvements by Industry

The rest of the reforms cut across a range of small business sectors, from food and beverage to retail to childcare: making targeted cuts to fees and fines, repealing unnecessary requirements, strengthening coordination across agencies and information flow to small businesses, and improving access to City services.

Some reforms save each covered business owner minutes of their day, every day. Others save them hours a year from not needing to go in person to renew a license or take an exam. Once enacted, they will save businesses time, administrative burden, and money, and make it easier for small businesses to open, operate, and grow.

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Food Service and Food Retail Businesses

25 Reforms | Covered businesses: restaurants, mobile food vendors, food vendors at events including street fairs, bodegas, delis, convenience stores, and grocery stores

From your favorite neighborhood Thai spot to the bodega that sells your daily egg-and-cheese, food service and retail businesses blanket the five boroughs but often face several cumbersome regulations to get up and running. New Yorkers are hungry, not just for a little pad Thai – but for some real reforms. Through EO11's findings, we've identified a staggering 25 reforms that can be made – some immediately – to make serving and selling food easier.

2.1 Streamline Outdoor Dining Approvals

3 Reforms

A restaurant that wants to put tables on the sidewalk or in the roadway applies through the City's outdoor dining program. Today that application can end up requiring sign-off from the Mayor's Office, a step that adds time without adding scrutiny. Roadway seating also requires a revocable consent, a form of City permission to use public space that a business can be asked to give back, and which carries its own separate review.

The City will waive Mayoral approval for the sidewalk café program immediately and will waive it for the roadway café program once the pending outdoor dining legislation passes. SBS and DOT have also proposed reforms to the revocable consent process to the Commission on Government Efficiency (COGE), the City body reviewing how government operations can be simplified, which can significantly streamline outdoor dining approvals.

2.2 Expand Access to the Food Protection Certificate Course and Exam

1 Reform

Every restaurant must have a supervisor on site trained in food protection whenever the business is operating. Earning that Food Protection Certificate means taking a City course and passing a City exam, and today that means traveling to a single City-run location to do it.

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) will enable the mandated course with the exam to be available at multiple locations citywide by authorizing third-party providers to offer it.

2.3 Speed Up Restaurant Inspections

1 Reform

The Health Department inspects restaurants and assigns the letter grade posted in the window. A restaurant that receives a B or C can correct the problems immediately but cannot demonstrate that it is ready to earn back an A grade until an inspector returns. The longer that takes, the longer the grade in the window tells customers a story the owner has already worked to change.

The Health Department will expand recruitment in its health inspection program to bring in dozens of additional food safety inspectors and conduct more timely inspections of restaurants posting B and C grades, so these establishments have the opportunity to earn an A grade.

2.4 Relocate Public-Facing Services to a Central Location

1 Reform

The Health Academy is where food service businesses go in person to take classes including the Food Protection Course. It sits at the Riverside Health Center on the Upper West Side, far from most of the businesses that need it.

The Health Department will relocate the Health Academy to 125 Worth Street, a location that is more accessible to businesses in all five boroughs. DCAS is first making necessary upgrades to this historic building, improving the facilities for those seeking City services and for Health Department staff.

2.5 Eliminate the Frozen Dessert Permit

3 Reforms

You shouldn't have to jump through hoops to serve some ice cream. A restaurant that already holds a general food service establishment permit, one that covers the public health protections involved in serving food safely, must obtain a second, separate permit before it can serve ice cream and other frozen desserts. That permit, called a 'manufacture of frozen dessert' permit, is required of mobile food vending units and temporary food vendors too. It protects no one that the existing permit does not already protect.

The Health Department will work with New York State to eliminate this requirement for restaurants and other food service establishments, including for mobile food vendors and temporary food vendors.

2.6 Cut Equipment Registration Fees to Zero

1 Reform

Businesses that operate certain cooking equipment, including food trucks, must register that equipment with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and pay a fee.

DEP will cut process source equipment registration fees from $110 to $0 for 12 months.

2.7 Reduce Fines on Certain Food Safety Violations

3 Reforms

The Health Department will reduce the maximum penalty from $600 to $500 for three violations related to preventing cross-contamination across foods.

2.8 Eliminate Duplicative Allergy Poster Violations

3 Reforms

Restaurants are required to display a poster created by NYC and another poster created by NYS to inform staff and customers about food allergies. An owner can currently be cited multiple times because there are two overlapping requirements, including for not posting, posting in the wrong location, posting an unapproved sign, and not posting it in the necessary languages.

DOHMH will create a single poster that meets both the NYC and NYS requirements, so restaurant owners do not have to meet two similar, but not identical, requirements placing them at risk of multiple violations, while still requiring allergy information so diners are protected.

2.9 Streamline Administrative Burdens on Street Vending

1 Reform

Mobile food vendors work out of a licensed commissary, the facility where a cart is stored, cleaned, and stocked between shifts. Currently, the vendor's agreement with that commissary must be carried in paper form on the vending unit at all times, even though the City can access the same information electronically.

The Health Department will repeal the requirement after making technology improvements to more readily access the electronic information and will lower the penalty in the shorter term from $300 to $200.

2.10 Expand Access to Street Vending

1 Reform

A mobile food vendor needs both a license to vend and a permit for the cart itself. Traditional food vending licenses are not capped but permits historically have been. Vendors who have a traditional mobile food license may be waiting to be called from a waiting list to apply for a permit when it becomes available. When their turn finally comes, outstanding penalties for unpermitted vending can stand between them and the permit they have been waiting for.

The Health Department will remove the requirement to pay outstanding monetary penalties in order to receive an initial food vendor permit. License holders called from the waiting list will not face an additional barrier to obtaining their permit due to the fines they may have owed historically.

2.11 Expand Access to Pop-Up Street Food Vending

1 Reform

Vendors selling food at street fairs and other short-term events need a temporary food service establishment permit. The Administration is slashing the fee by more than 70%, reducing it from $70 to $20.

2.12 Reform Truth-in-Pricing

1 Reform

Under the City's Truth-in-Pricing Law, some items need a price tag on the item itself, and for others a price on the shelf is enough. Owners have a hard time keeping track of which is which, so a store can get a violation even when every price is clearly and accurately marked. Item pricing can also be time-consuming for owners to be compliant with on a day to day basis. DCWP will work with the City Council to revamp the law, simplifying compliance by streamlining the rules around where item-pricing versus shelf-pricing are required. This will save small businesses time, reduce unnecessary violations, and cut red tape for bodegas and retail food businesses.

2.13 Reduce Penalties for Labeling and Packaging Violations

1 Reform

Packaged goods must carry a declaration of responsibility, the label identifying who is behind the product. A store can be fined when that label is missing or unclear on a product – even though the store did not package the product itself.

DCWP will work to reduce first-time penalties for these violations, consistent with the administration's approach elsewhere of starting with compliance and warnings first for violations that don't pose immediate threats to public health or safety. The goal isn't to punish small business owners – especially first-time owners – the goal is always to protect customers and sellers alike.

2.14 Introduce Cure Periods for Common Retail Food Violations

3 Reforms

Most violations arrive as a summons and a fine. A cure period works differently: it gives the business a window to fix the problem and avoid the fine entirely. Today, an owner missing a price tag on a deli item learns about it through a fine —no grace period.

DCWP will work to make three violations eligible for cure: not having a price displayed for deli items, not having a scale available for customers, and failure to post a sign stating the identity of a commodity sold in bulk and its price.

Transparency for customers is important, but it doesn't need to come by harshly punishing small business owners.

2.15 Repeal the Stoop Line Stand License

1 Reform

A stoop line stand is a display set up directly outside a store, like the fruit stand in front of a bodega. A business that sells fruit, vegetables, soft drinks, flowers, confectionery, or ice cream this way needs a separate license to do it, on top of any license it may be required to hold to sell the same goods inside. DCWP, DOT, and DSNY will develop a proposal to repeal the license, while giving owners clear guidance on how much clear sidewalk path they need to keep open.

Transportation Businesses

7 Reforms | Covered businesses: for-hire vehicle drivers, pedicab operators, garages, and tour companies

Taxi and for-hire vehicle drivers and other transportation businesses already work hard enough connecting New Yorkers and visitors to their city quickly and reliably, so we shouldn't burden them further with fines and fees just for maintaining their licenses and related requirements. These reforms remove these pain points to ease the interactions between transportation providers and city government.

3.1 Eliminate Punitive TLC Fines

3 Reforms

The Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) licenses for-hire vehicle drivers and the vehicles they drive. A driver who loses their license pays a fine on top of the cost of replacing it. A driver who misses the window for their required annual drug test pays a fine even though their license is already suspended and they cannot work, meaning the fine lands on someone with no income coming in. A driver late on a vehicle inspection pays a fine as well.

TLC will eliminate fines for losing a license, for missing the annual drug test window, and for late vehicle inspections. Drivers will continue to receive alerts from TLC to follow through on these requirements ahead of deadlines.

3.2 Reduce the Cost to Replace a Lost License

1 Reform

TLC will eliminate the replacement fee for a lost TLC license, up to three replacements over three years. Rules related to renewing State driver's licenses will remain unchanged.

3.3 Extend License Terms for Transportation Businesses

3 Reforms

A license term is how long a license lasts before the owner has to renew it, and every renewal is time spent on paperwork rather than on the business.

DCWP will shift pedicab licenses, garage and parking lot licenses, and sightseeing bus license terms to longer renewal cycles.

Other Retailers

5 Reforms | Covered businesses: newsstands, pawnbrokers, secondhand dealers, ticket sellers, and dealers in products for people with disabilities

Many storefront retailers are stable businesses that have served the community for decades. In many cases, nothing about the business changes between renewals, yet the paper work simply comes due again.

4.1 Extend License Terms for Other Retailers

5 Reforms

These businesses are licensed by the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) and must renew on a fixed cycle, some as often as every year.

DCWP will extend license terms for pawnbrokers from 1 to 2 years, for ticket sellers from 1 to 2 years, for newsstands from 2 to 4 years, for general second-hand dealers from 2 to 4 years, and for dealers in products for people with disabilities from 2 to 4 years.

Childcare Businesses

4 Reforms | Covered businesses: childcare providers

Childcare businesses are focused day in and day out on caring for our city's children, and the spaces they manage are some of the most tightly regulated by the City. The vast majority of businesses, especially those that are looking to expand their footprint into more centers, are urgently trying to open up shop to serve more children and families, yet the regulatory hurdles they face are some of the most intensive, both on the staffing and space sides. Businesses seek more clarity on the sequencing of the steps they should be taking with the various agency approvals to save time and in particular want some more government navigation resources and proactive communication of information from government so that they can focus on what they do best.

5.1 Publish Plain Language Guidance

1 Reform

Opening a child care center means clearing reviews from several agencies, the Health Department for health, the Department of Buildings (DOB) for the building itself, the Fire Department (FDNY) for fire safety, each with its own process and timeline, and no single place explaining how they fit together.

The Office of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (OCECCE), which coordinates the City's child care work, will work with the Health Department, DOB, and FDNY to produce a resource guide with clear, accessible guidance on the processes and timelines for opening and operating a child care center.

5.2 Expand the Child Care Permitting Portal

1 Reform

The child care permitting portal is the City's online system for child care permits. Today it only handles new applications, and only for the Health Department's review. Everything else, renewals, modifications, and the DOB and FDNY reviews, happens outside it.

The City will expand the portal to cover permit renewals and modifications and incorporate resources on DOB and FDNY review processes.

5.3 Upgrade the Background Check Request Portal

1 Reform

Anyone working in a licensed child care center must clear a comprehensive background check, and a provider cannot bring staff on to work independently until those checks come back. Delays here can mean classrooms that stay closed.

The Health Department will continue to make upgrades and assess process improvements to the Child Care background check request portal to accelerate processing for providers.

5.4 Launch a Child Care Ombuds Office

1 Reform

Child care providers with a question or a problem have no dedicated contact at the Health Department, so inquiries take whatever path they can find.

The Health Department will create an ombuds office, a single point of contact whose job is to help providers navigate the agency, streamline inquiries and reduce response time.

Industrial and Commercial Businesses

Not every licensing requirement keeps pace with how these industries actually operate today: scrap metal processing licensure has become an outdated layer of oversight, while scale dealer repairers and storage warehouses would benefit simply from longer license terms that cut renewal frequency without reducing accountability. Right-sizing these rules — repealing where redundant, extending where reasonable — frees up business owners' time.

3 Reforms | Covered businesses: scrap metal processors, scale dealer repairers, and storage warehouses

6.1 Repeal the Scrap Metal Processing License

1 Reform

State law requires that all scrap metal processors obtain a license from their local municipality. Since DCWP does not see a consumer protection need to maintain this license, DCWP will seek to carve out New York City from this requirement to remove the burdens of licensure from the businesses that currently hold the City-level license.

6.2 Extend License Terms for Other Industrial and Commercial Businesses

2 Reforms

Scale dealer repairers, the businesses that sell and service the commercial scales used to weigh goods for sale, currently renew their license every year. DCWP will extend that renewal cycle from 1 year to 2 years, and storage warehouse licenses from 2 years to 4 years.

Personal Care Businesses

2 Reforms | Covered businesses: barber shop owners

Streamlining requirements for barber shops and other personal care businesses help entrepreneurs focus more on their day to day work rather than doing paperwork, without compromising the health and safety protections that matter.

7.1 Reduce Barber Shop Permit Renewal Frequency

1 Reform

The Health Department will shift the annual barber shop permit renewal requirement to a 3-year cycle, cutting the paperwork by two-thirds.

7.2 Streamline Overlapping License Requirements

1 Reform

A barber shop owner currently needs three separate permits to operate: a New York State barber occupational license to cut hair, a New York State Barber Shop Owner/Renter License to run the shop, and a New York City Barber Shop Permit on top of both.

The City and State will work together to streamline these requirements.

Other Items

3 Reforms | Covered businesses: nonprofits operating bingo and games of chance, and the businesses that rent space to them

Rules that govern bingo nights and games of chance are still operating under rules written for a different era. Modernizing these requirements removes barriers that have outlasted their purpose.

8.1 Streamline Bingo and Game of Chance Licenses

3 Reforms

Nonprofits that run bingo nights and other games of chance as fundraisers are licensed by DCWP, and those licenses come with rules that no longer reflect how these games are run, including caps on prize amounts set unnecessarily low.

DCWP will remove unnecessary regulations for both license types, including the prize limits. This will also benefit commercial lessors, the businesses that rent space to licensed nonprofits running bingo or games of chance.