



**City Council
Committee on Education
Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
Wednesday, January 16, 2019**

Good morning Chair Treyger and the New York City Council Committee Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on a series of measures to improve the health outcomes of our children through improved health education and healthy food.

Brooklyn is home to 2.6 million residents representing the largest population by county in the City of New York and the entire state. Brooklyn is also the home to nearly 350,000 of the 1 million school children in New York City.

I have long believed that we must do more to educate our young people during their time in our schools on issues that will have a long-term impact on their health and the health of their families.

There are several items under consideration at today's hearing, and I am supportive of the vast majority of them, including:

- Intro 365 would amend the administrative code of the City of New York in relation to requiring the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to stock opioid antagonists, like naloxone, in all school buildings. Throughout 2018, my office partnered with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to provide free overdose prevention trainings throughout Brooklyn, ultimately hosting a dozen trainings, reaching more than 700 residents, and distributing more than 625 naloxone kits. The DOHMH has indicated that they are looking to duplicate these trainings across New York City and our schools should be on the frontlines of countering this terrible epidemic.
- Intro 560 would create a local law to form a task force to study the feasibility of starting middle and high schools after 8:30 AM in order to reduce adolescent sleep deprivation.

This bill would be a first step towards rethinking our school day based on the most up-to-date science. I applaud Council Member Treyger for introducing this legislation and Staten Island Borough President James Oddo for being a leading voice of reform on this topic.

- Intro 1283 would amend the administrative code of the City of New York with respect to reporting on food and nutrition education in city schools. This legislation will provide a baseline for where we need to go as an education system to educate our children on how to live healthy lives through food. I would encourage this legislation to prioritize whole food, plant-based, education, and the most recent research and science to best inform our students, and in turn, their caretakers, on how to best fuel our bodies.
- Reso 632 calls upon the DOE to create a diabetes and prediabetes health based curriculum. This is an important initiative led by Council Member Inez Barron and I encourage the Council, as they consider this resolution, to focus efforts on the most significant source of these health care crises: our food.

I am here personally to support Resolution 238, the proposed ban on serving processed meats in New York City schools. This bill was introduced on my behalf by Council Member Fernando Cabrera, and I thank him for partnering with me on this important effort.

Brooklyn is home to more than 700,000 people living with obesity and nearly 300,000 people living with diabetes. I, too, was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in 2016 and faced losing my eyesight and my fingers. My A1C level was a 17 when normal levels are within the five range. It wasn't until I switched to a whole food, plant-based diet that I was able to reverse my disease and begin to live a fuller, healthier life.

Since then, my office has embarked on a mission to bring the City's resources to bear in an effort to assist individuals and families to transition to healthier lifestyles. My office has hosted a series of workshops and meet-ups to teach people how to cook plant-based meals; we have launched Meatless Mondays in schools across Brooklyn and in New York City Health and Hospitals H+H facilities across New York City; and we have partnered with H+H to open the first plant-based health clinic in the United States in the oldest hospital in the United States, a testament to the demand for new ideas and innovation of our H+H leadership.

But we must do more and earlier in our communities' lives. This is why having these conversations and interventions in our school system are so important.

This resolution is important to me personally, but even more important for the future of all of New York City's children. The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies processed meats as a group one carcinogen, meaning consuming processed meats significantly raises the risk of cancer. The WHO also places cigarettes, which we would of course never give to children, in the very same carcinogen category – group one – as processed meats. New York City recently

banned the sale of cigarettes in pharmacies – we should also ban carcinogens from the school lunch line.

By continuing to include processed meats on our school menus, such as the acknowledged processed turkey ham, Canadian bacon, turkey-ham, sandwich salami, and sandwich bologna, we are in effect endorsing eating patterns that evidence shows lead to chronic diseases. Research from Harvard University, the American Institute for Cancer Research, and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health has all linked processed meats not just to cancer, but to diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.

I believe it is our obligation as policymakers to ensure that government is not literally feeding our health care crisis. Services we provide our constituents, like the Hippocratic Oath, should at the very least do no harm. We therefore have a responsibility to ensure the food we feed our children in New York City public schools does not exacerbate the health epidemic even our youngest citizens face today.

Furthermore, we must ensure our practices are not at odds with one another. For example, DOHMH works diligently to fight childhood obesity and diabetes, yet we are negating these efforts by serving children foods that perpetuate the very same diseases. While DOHMH's campaign to combat the negative health effects of sugar-sweetened beverages is commendable, we have notoriously ignored processed meats, which pose an even larger threat to our children's health.

We must be part of the solution—not part of the problem. We have an opportunity to play a major role in reversing this trend not only in Brooklyn or New York but across the country and the globe. Given our city's purchasing power, we have a chance to expand the market of healthy, nutritious alternatives to processed meats.

Based on the evidence, it is clear that New York City should adopt Resolution 238 to create a clearer path towards healthier children, healthier schools, and ultimately, a healthier city and world.