



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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**Testimony to New York City Council
Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management
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Thank you Chair Nurse and Sanitation Committee members for the opportunity to speak today. I'm Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso. As the former Chair of this Committee, I want to thank you for holding this hearing today about this very important package of legislation that will help bring our city closer to its stated goal of sending zero waste to landfills by 2030.

I say "stated goal" because, though Mayor Adams has said on record that he wants to achieve it, the truth is that since Mayor de Blasio announced the zero waste by 2030 target, we've barely made any progress toward it. Our citywide diversion rate is stuck somewhere between 16-18%, meaning we are still paying for the vast majority of the waste we generate to be trucked to out-of-state landfills, which costs money, contributes to climate change, and exacerbates health issues in environmental justice communities. Making the progress we need is going to require quick implementation of smart policies like the ones being considered today.

Intros 244 and 281

Because approximately 30% of waste that New Yorkers send to landfill is organic waste, changing the way we handle the food we throw away will help us make the largest gains toward this goal. The new school organics program and associated smart bins will help, but the scale isn't enough to really tackle the issue. Intro 244, requiring a citywide curbside organics collection program, is the best way to get this done efficiently.

In more than one previous hearing, this administration has responded to questions about expanding organics collection by saying they don't want to "throw good money after bad." However, studies show that investing in a robust organics collection program would do exactly the opposite. Last year the Independent Budget Office found that increasing participation in the curbside program would reduce per-ton collection costs significantly – as they put it, "the more curbside tonnage, the cheaper per ton it becomes to pick up any of the waste streams DSNY collects." Even if this required extra trucks, the study found, the associated increase in emissions would be more than offset by diverting the organics from landfill.

Unfortunately, we lost our opportunity to plan for this in the FY 23 budget. But now we have a full year to get this legislation done and plan accordingly. In the meantime, we do need to shore up our community-based drop-off sites, as proposed in Intro 281, which are the only option for so many New Yorkers who don't currently have access to the curbside program. However, I want to be clear that adding more drop-off sites is not going far enough to fixing this problem. Universal curbside collection is the true solution. In the long term, we'll not only be helping the planet, we'll save taxpayer money, too.

Intro 280

Intro 280, which would establish community recycling centers in every community district, was conceived of during the height of the pandemic when cuts to DSNY recycling programs were at their worst, yet it remains relevant today. Proper disposal of e-waste and hazardous materials is important, yet compliance can be tough. The City's by-appointment e-waste pickup program is limited in scope, and larger buildings must opt-in. The hazardous materials program requires residents to transport their materials to a drop-off site. With only one drop-off site per borough, too much of this type of waste currently ends up in landfill. Creating community-based drop-off centers is a smart solution. Residents can also have the option to bring their organics, textiles, and larger items that cannot be collected at the curb.

Intros 274 and 275

I also want to lend my support to Intros 274 and 275, which codify the goal of sending zero waste to landfill by 2030 and require the City to report on their progress toward it. This mandate could spur new investment and innovation from DSNY; for example, the EPA reports that communities that have implemented an incentive-based Save-as-you-Throw model have seen significant increases in recycling and reductions in waste. DSNY has studied this model but has not yet taken steps toward implementation. This, along with other transformative programs such as commercial waste collection zones (which I am very much looking forward to seeing begin this summer) and policies to limit single-use plastics, could help us make huge strides toward our zero waste goals.

Thank you for your time today. Let's keep working together to make our streets cleaner and our waste management systems more sustainable.