



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**ANTONIO REYNOSO**

Brooklyn Borough President

**City Council Committee on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management  
Oversight hearing: The State of Recycling in NYC 9/20/22**

Good afternoon Chair Nurse and members of the committee, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I appreciate you holding a hearing on this important issue, because the fact is, the state of recycling in New York City is discouraging.

Increasing our diversion rate from landfill helps the city by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from landfills and waste trucks; keeping plastics out of our environment, especially our oceans, waterways, and storm drains; and it saves the City money. Yet while our current diversion rate of approximately 17% is higher than the national average (which is about 5-6%), it's still lower than some other US cities, such as Los Angeles, which diverts about 60% of its waste. Not to mention other countries like Germany, which has a national diversion rate of about 70%. New York City always strives to be the national example, but in this case, we are falling short.

For too long, our recycling capabilities have been dependent on global markets, a problem that was exacerbated by China ending its international purchasing of recyclables in 2018. In response, we need a new, comprehensive set of innovative policies that not only help us recycle more, but also address the creation and dissemination of single-use plastics before they ever reach the recycle bin. Intro 494 will help us get there by finding the right policies that will work for our city.

That said, we already know some other solutions that we can start implementing today. These include:

- **Pass Intro 559:** aka the "Skip the Stuff" bill, which would create an opt-in mechanism for single-use plastic utensils, napkins, and condiments from restaurants, food delivery apps, and online delivery platforms. So many of these items are immediately thrown away, especially when people can eat at home with their own reusable utensils. I hope to see this bill get a hearing in the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection soon.
- **Enforce the plastic bag ban:** As Chair of the Sanitation Committee in the previous two terms, I was proud to champion ridding our city of plastic bags. However, earlier this year, a report in City Limits found that limited education and enforcement efforts have hampered implementation, especially within smaller businesses, where cost is a concern. The City should continue to do public outreach and education about the policy, including giving away reusable bags.

- **Prioritize recycling in the implementation of Commercial Waste Zones:** I was concerned to learn that before RFP responses were finalized, DSNY implemented a last-minute change to the requirements giving more flexibility to the pricing differential between recycling and refuse. I am hopeful that this has not disincentivized respondents from submitting robust waste diversion plans, and encourage DSNY to place a high priority on proposals that will push our commercial recycling efforts forward.
- **Pass the Zero Waste bills:** The bills heard at June's Sanitation Committee hearing, including Intros 274 and 275 on the City's zero waste goals, Intro 280 on establishing community recycling centers in every community district, and Intro 244 requiring universal curbside organics collection, would be transformative. I was pleased to see the recent expansion of curbside organics collection in Queens, but will continue to push until we have a citywide, mandatory program that runs year-round.
- **Support State policies for Extended Producer Responsibility and a Better Bottle Bill:** As I mentioned, we must work on curbing plastic waste at its source. Especially as more people are ordering delivery, regulating packaging is becoming more critical. One of the reasons Germany has such a robust diversion rate is that the country has had strong regulations requiring producer responsibility for packaging waste since 1991. Governor Hochul has called for a statewide EPR policy, but ultimately it was not included in this year's budget. Additionally, an updated Bottle Bill that expands the types of beverage containers covered and increases the deposit amount would improve what's called "New York's most successful recycling program."

I know these are just a few of the many potential policies that our City and State can implement to improve our recycling rate, keep these harmful plastics out of our landfills and waterways, and promote environmental justice for our communities. I appreciate your time today and look forward to working with you on these efforts and more.