

**Testimony of Melissa Iachan at
New York City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste
Management Hearing in Relation to Paper Carryout Reduction Fee
Dated April 16, 2019**

Good morning, my name is Melissa Iachan, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Environmental Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. NYLPI has advocated and litigated for environmental justice in New York City for more than two decades. NYLPI's Environmental Justice program has long focused on the detrimental effects of the City's waste system, and I have worked in the area of waste regulation for five years. NYLPI has been a member of the Bag It coalition for several years, and we strongly supported the BYOBag Bill that the New York City council passed a few years ago, so we are encouraged to see our City finally on the precipice of seeing meaningful reduction in harmful waste streams like disposable bags. Thank you to Chairman Reynoso for holding this hearing, and to the sponsors of this important bill Council Members Lander and Chin, and a special welcome to the Sanitation Committee to Council Members Chin and Constantanides.

We are thrilled that the state has passed a ban on plastic bags, which are a scourge to our environment on many levels. However, all precedent indicates that to truly reduce single-use disposable bag use by consumers, the statewide ban should be accompanied by a fee on other single use bags such as paper bags. Thanks to the preconsidered intro bill being heard today, New York City has the opportunity to join other green cities in ensuring that the statewide plastic bag ban be accompanied by a single use paper bag fee to truly reduce our waste as a city, as well as continue the efforts to reduce our carbon footprint.

Plastic bags alone make up about 2 percent of the city's residential waste stream according to DSNY, and single-use, carry out bags account for 1,700 tons of residential garbage each week. This amounts to 91,000 tons of plastic and paper carry out bags each year, costing the City a whopping \$12.5 million annually to dispose this material. Single use bags are a particularly harmful part of our waste stream despite making up a relatively small portion of it, largely due to:

- Harmful byproducts and the high amount of fossil fuel-based energy used in manufacturing plastic and paper bags;
- Greenhouse gas emissions from the production, transport and ultimate disposal of high volumes of single-use paper and plastic bags;
- Plastic bags' detrimental effect on machinery at both putrescible and recycling facilities—these bags get caught on sorting equipment, and cause all sorts of costly malfunctions; and finally
- The litter and visual clutter from the lightweight plastic and paper bags that are blown out of garbage trucks and dumpsters, ending up in our streets, parks, trees, and waterways.

Communities of color and low-income communities who have historically borne the brunt of our waste processing systems can attest to the particularly harmful side effects of having seemingly never-ending amounts of plastic and paper bags in our waste stream. Not only do they require more diesel truck trips through their neighborhoods, but because these polluting trucks queue and idle along their neighborhoods' streets on their way to dumping, these lightweight bags litter the sidewalks, streets, parks and playgrounds far more than in communities where garbage trucks idling are not such a frequent sight. Residents of these neighborhoods are more enthusiastic than ever to adapt their habits, and in fact reusable bag giveaways have been most successful in these communities, and the rest of the City should follow suit.

In order to truly reduce this harmful waste stream, we need to alter our City's behavior and habits. This takes time, willingness, and ultimately requires incentivizing. What we are seeing is a willingness and even a desire like we didn't see 6 or 7 years ago when the effort to ban single use bags began in earnest in our City. With the requisite desire and willingness, the proposed carryout bag fee provides the incentive for people to start carrying reusable bags with them, the missing piece to truly ensure we become a more sustainable city.

What's more, we know that this formula—plastic bag ban with a fee on other single-use bags—works. In [Portland, OR](#), a plastic bag ban without a fee on paper resulted in a 491% increase in paper bag use, and an almost \$5 million increase in the cost of bags. This makes no sense for any city, environmentally or financially. Meanwhile, a plastic bag ban with a 10 cent charge on paper reduced paper bag use

by 30% in the first year of [LA County's bag ban](#). The charge also offsets the stores' costs of distributing paper bags, which can be two or more times as expensive as plastic bags. Additionally, where a fee/ban hybrid has been established, costs of fixing recycling sorting machinery from tangled plastic bags has been reduced by several million dollars, as have sanitation department costs for collection and disposal of these bags.

I know you have heard and will hear even more supportive statistics that illustrate the effectiveness of a ban and fee hybrid, so I won't repeat them all again here. Suffice it to say that today's preconsidered intro proposing to impose a modest five cent fee on single use and carryout paper bags, in combination with the recent statewide ban on single use plastic bags, has the potential to drastically improve our City's environmental record, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and bring us significantly closer to our goal of achieving zero waste. We strongly support this legislation, and again thank the Sanitation Committee, the City Council, and DSNY for being here today to ensure that we enact the most sensible and effective policies together for a greener and cleaner New York City for all our residents.

Thank you.

