

## PRIVATE WASTE HAULERS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO DUMP ON THE SOUTH BRONX MUCH LONGER

*The provision is part of a much larger bill to overhaul the city's inefficient and largely unregulated private waste industry.*

by Alexa Beyer / July 9, 2019



*Labor unions and environmental advocates gathered on the steps of City Hall on June 26, in support of a bill that would overhaul the private waste management industry. By Alexa Beyer.*

**A bill in the city council seeks to overhaul an industry that advocates say has run amuck, dramatically cutting back on the use of waste transfer stations**

The days of Hunts Point and Port Morris serving as dumping grounds for New York City's trash could be numbered. A new bill in the New York City Council would dramatically reduce the volume of trash truck trips from other parts of the city to the South Bronx, north Brooklyn and southern Queens, the three neighborhoods that have long been saddled with much of the city's waste.

Intro-1574, introduced by Councilman Antonio Reynoso (D-Brooklyn) in May and heard by the council on June 26, proposes dividing the city into separate zones that would each be served by just one private carting company. In the current unregulated arrangement, roughly half of the city's trash is collected by private companies. Those companies compete for trash anywhere in the city, no matter how far their trucks must travel to pick it up.

If the bill passes, the city would award specific zones across the city to haulers, based on how environmentally sound their disposal plans to waste transfer stations are, and how close they are to the neighborhoods they would serve.

“While there will still be too much transfer station capacity in the South Bronx, we believe the bill has the potential to substantially reduce truck traffic coming in and out of the neighborhood,” said Justin Wood of New York Lawyers for The Public Interest.

Advocates say the bill would have a positive impact on the health of South Bronx residents, by reducing air pollution.

“With all those truck miles off the road, that helps us reduce not only our greenhouse gas emissions but improve our air quality overall,” said The Point CDC’s environmental programs director Fernando Ortiz. Growing up in the South Bronx, “You see all the waste trucks. Either you or someone you knew suffered from asthma.”

The carting provision is part of a larger bill to impose regulations on the private waste industry. Whether it becomes law will depend on negotiations in the council, activists caution. The bill also calls for transporting some trash via barge on the East, Bronx and Harlem rivers.

The private waste companies’ trucks routinely take circuitous routes, driving recklessly through the city’s streets to meet their quotas. In some parts of the city, 50 different carters now serve a single neighborhood. That arrangement poses a safety threat for drivers and crew members who endure long, grueling shifts, and for pedestrians in their line of fire. The inefficiencies make traffic and pollution problems worse, advocates and environmentalists complain.

In addition to addressing safety and environmental problems, the new bill would address labor issues, said Bernadette Kelly, a representative for the Teamsters and a Local 210 member who testified in favor of the proposed one-hauler-per-zone provision at the hearing.

“Today, at any of the carting companies, a young person would be lucky to get paid minimum wage with almost no benefits,” said Kelly, pointing out that workers made a living wage and benefits when she worked for a hauler decades ago. The stable customer base that companies would serve if a new, exclusive-zone system were created would mean carters “can commit to all of those things without [having to compete with] another carter who treats its workers like trash, offering to charge a dollar less per ton.”

An investigative series by Pro Publica, which looked into the death of a 21-year-old Guinean immigrant in Highbridge in 2017 while carting for Hunts Point-based waste giant Sanitation Salvage, helped establish momentum for zoning. The light that reporting shed on the dangerous working conditions in the industry ultimately forced the city’s Business Integrity Commission to suspend the Sanitation Salvage’s license. Soon after, the company that had been one of the industry’s largest and most influential shut its doors.

Although not a sponsor of the bill, Councilman Raphael Salamanca Jr. introduced other legislation at the June 26 to ramp up oversight of the industry.

Reynoso’s proposal to cap the newly formed zones with just one carter each, a move pushed for by the Teamsters, breaks with the Department of Sanitation’s proposal to allow up to five haulers per zone.

Some opponents of the bill say that restricting the number of hauling companies will lead to higher prices and less efficient service for customers.

Others contend that it concentrates even more power in the very companies the council wants to reign in. Stephen Leone, president of Industrial Carting, a small Brooklyn-based carter with 25 employees, warned that Intro-1574 “will create a competition to see which two or three waste companies have the best financial wherewithal to survive the duration of an initial bid term,” after which, “no competitors will be in place to prevent them from controlling the city in perpetuity.”

Councilman Mark Gjonaj (D—Bronx) said a zoned system could shift power back to the Mob, which has historically controlled the industry and allegedly extorted customers. In that scenario, city government could be susceptible to bribery while overseeing bidding, he argued. After Gjonaj proposed competing legislation last year to block the council from considering a zoned system, a related ProPublica investigation found that he had business ties to one of the private trash companies that maneuvered to thwart Reynoso’s bill.