



Testimony

Of

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Before the

**New York City Council Committee on Health, Committee on Consumer Affairs and
Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management**

Regarding

**Intro No 57: To Prohibit the Sale of Recondition Mattress and Creation of Bed Bug Task
Force**

**Intro No 872: Disposal of Mattress and Furniture
Intro No 873-A: To Establish a Bed Bug Technique Training Program**

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City Hall,
New York, NY

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Rivera, Comrie and Jackson and Members of the City Council Committees on Health, Consumer Affairs, and Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. My name is Dr. Edgar Butts and I am Assistant Commissioner for Veterinary and Pest Control Services at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). With me today is Dr. Robert Corrigan, an urban entomologist with our Department. Also with me today are Barbara Flynn from the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, Andrew Eiler from the Department of Consumer Affairs, and Chief Peter McKeon from the Department of Sanitation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Intros 57, 872 and 873A.

Bed bugs are small insects that feed on human blood and are usually active at night when people are sleeping. Adult bed bugs have flat, rusty-red-colored oval bodies about the size of an apple seed. Bed bugs often hide in cracks in furniture, floors, or walls and can live for several months without food or water. In most cases, people carry bed bugs into their homes unknowingly in infested luggage, furniture, bedding or clothing. Bed bugs may also travel between apartments through small cracks in walls and floors. Physical impact to those living with bed bugs may start with initially painless bites which later turn into large itchy skin welts. These bites are a great nuisance and can have a negative impact on quality of life and the ability to carry on the activities of daily life, however, bed bugs are not known to carry disease.

Bed bugs have resurfaced in New York City in recent years. In fact, New York City is not alone. Urban centers throughout the United States, Canada and parts of Europe are experiencing resurgence in bed bugs, while other parts of the world have steadily endured bed bugs for many decades. In response to this resurgence, the city has instituted a multi-pronged approach to address the bed bug issue: 1) prevention through public education; 2) creation of guidelines and protocols for residents, health care providers, businesses and pest management professionals; and 3) a systematic responses to bed bug complaints, which my colleague Barbara Flynn will describe in her testimony.

As part of this city-wide effort, the Health Department has produced and circulated fact sheets on identifying and responding to bed bugs. Our "Stop Bed Bugs Safely" fact sheet is available via 311, on our website in Spanish and English and, to date more than 90,000 copies have been mailed. The fact sheet provides basic bed bug information as well as ways to get rid of bed bugs if the home is infested. Another fact sheet, "Stop Bed Bugs in Hotels Safely" geared towards the hotel industry is also available on our website. It provides simple instructions for hotels to address bed bug infestation as soon as they occur. Our website also includes a fact sheet for tenants and landlords on how to choose a pest management professional to manage bed bugs. With more than 1,000 pest control companies and thousands of licensed pest control professionals, choosing the right professional to do the job is a challenge. This fact sheet provides a list of questions for residents to ask the pest control companies and professionals before hiring them. Via the Health Alert Network, the Department has also issued clinical guidelines to health care providers on diagnosing bed bug bites and advising patients on safe bed bug control.

The Health Department is currently producing a more detailed guide to bed bug control modeled after successful guides on the prevention of rats, and the safe control of mice and cockroaches in homes. We expect to complete the guide by June and will initially print copies in English and make Spanish and Chinese language versions available on the web. We will be improving our website on bed bugs by providing additional resources, such as a guide that will also give advice

about what people can do to help control an infestation while awaiting a professional, or on tips to keep costs of extermination down.

The City has also implemented protocols to control bed bugs infestations in city housing. The New York City Housing Authority has trained all of its pest management professionals regarding bed bug control, and follows a protocol that involves working with tenants to prepare their apartments for their visit, applying pesticides on at least two visits where needed, cleaning and vacuuming baseboards and other surfaces, and educating tenants on appropriate replacement or isolation of infested furniture and bedding.

Similarly, the Department of Homeless Services has implemented a protocol to help prevent the spread of bed bugs in its shelters and homes. Shelter operators and their maintenance staff have been trained on the appropriate response to bed bugs, and reports of bed bugs may result in isolation of clothing and its separate laundering, thorough inspections, client notification and education, and repeated visits by pest management professionals. Last year the Health Department, Homeless Services and Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Program collaborated on the creation of bed bug guidelines for congregate living environments that has been widely circulated among the shelters. These guidelines are available online from the Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Program website.

While complaints regarding bed bugs to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development have increased significantly in recent years, there are currently inadequate data to understand the full extent of the problem in New York City, and the causes of the resurgence in bed bugs are not fully understood. Many experts believe that a variety of factors are involved, including more frequent travel, use of pesticides with less residual efficacy and perhaps some natural variation in the population of bed bugs. Clearly, we have much to learn about bed bugs and the impact on health and well being of New Yorkers.

To this end, the Administration agrees with the Council that there is a need to create a task force to examine the bed bug problem further and develop appropriate strategies to address it. Such a task force could bring together experts in the field to systematically evaluate, study, identify and recommend ways to control and eradicate the bed bug population in New York City. We believe this is a necessary first step and would support legislation creating such a task force. While it is possible that some or even all of the strategies proposed in Intros 57, 872 and 873A may ultimately be recommended by the task force, we reserve comment on these bills until the task force is established and able to more formally evaluate and recommend appropriate steps to eliminate bed bugs in New York City.

Before concluding my testimony, let me acknowledge Council Member Brewer's tireless advocacy on behalf of this issue—many of the initiatives currently underway are a testament to her perseverance in pursuing a solution to this problem.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.