



Testimony

of

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before the

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Good morning Chairperson Reynoso and members of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. I am Corinne Schiff, Deputy Commissioner for Environmental Health at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. On behalf of Commissioner Bassett, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Mayor's Neighborhood Rat Reduction Initiative.

In July 2017, Mayor de Blasio announced a \$32 million, multi-agency effort to reduce the rat population in neighborhoods with the highest burden of rat activity. The Initiative builds on decades of rat control work at the Health Department and relies on evidence-based practices to target the most infested areas of the city.

Rats thrive when they have ready access to food and water, a place to live and effective transportation routes. That means that reducing the rat population requires managing garbage, eliminating nesting areas and repairing cracks and holes in sidewalks and buildings. Safe, targeted baiting is the final piece of an effective integrated pest management program, known as IPM. Rats do not observe the property lines we've created or distinguish between public and private ownership. Nor do they operate during business hours. We all know rats come out at night. To be successful, then, everyone in a neighborhood must work together, across our usual boundaries and in times and places that matter most to rats.

The Department's approach to rat control is multi-pronged and data-driven. In our "rat indexing" program, inspectors walk block by block to check every property for signs of rats and conditions conducive to rats. We also inspect properties in response to complaints. When rat signs or rat conditions are observed, property owners receive Commissioner's Orders requiring them to remediate and, if they fail to comply, are issued violations subject to fines. Our licensed pest management professionals conduct exterminations, and in our Rodent Academy, we offer

free classes for property owners and managers to learn IPM techniques. We publish guidance materials in multiple languages on rat reduction and prevention, and we make inspection results available online on the Rat Information Portal.

Our inspection data enables the Department to analyze which neighborhoods in the City carry the heaviest rat burdens. Using those data, and knowing that successfully combatting rats requires collaboration, in 2015 the Department dramatically expanded its pilot Rat Reservoir program to bring enhanced rat control to 45 communities across the City.

A Rat Reservoir is an area that provides an ideal ecosystem for rats; even if a significant number of rats are eliminated, the rat population is quickly replenished, making long-lasting reduction especially challenging. In each Rat Reservoir, our inspector conducts a detailed, block by block survey of rat activity and conditions that can support rats; and a case manager trains building managers in IPM, works with Business Improvement Districts to address litter and activate neighborhood businesses, works with sister agencies to address issues on public property, and provides technical assistance to property owners ordered to remediate. Where a property owner fails to comply with a Commissioner's Order to conduct baiting, the Department's pest management professionals will conduct those exterminations and bill the owner for the work.

The Rat Reservoir Program has had excellent results. In just over two years, ten of the 45 Rat Reservoirs – more than 20% – launched in 2015 have “graduated,” and we've achieved an 80% reduction of rat signs and conditions conducive to rats in 15 of the parks within the Rat Reservoirs. We continue to monitor areas that have been graduated to ensure that the reductions in rat activity are maintained.

We know that some areas of the city, though, need even more intensive support to

address the underlying, structural and behavioral conditions that support high rat populations. In July of 2017, the City launched the Neighborhood Rat Reduction Initiative, which expanded the areas of focus around 15 Reservoirs located in core areas of the Bronx, Brooklyn and lower Manhattan. These three areas – the Grand Concourse in the Bronx; Bushwick and Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn and the East Village, Lower East Side and Chinatown in Manhattan – have higher rates of rat activity than other areas of the city. The Neighborhood Rat Reduction Initiative includes a renewed focus on reducing rat activity within NYCHA developments, around schools, and in parks in these designated areas and has a broad focus on reducing rats’ access to food.

The Mayor’s Neighborhood Rat Reduction Initiative brings together multiple city agencies to provide that concentrated effort. This portfolio of work includes improving garbage management through increased trash pick-ups, placement of rat-proof and rat-resistant waste containers in parks and on sidewalks, placing new trash compactors in NYCHA developments, and improving school garbage management. Under the Initiative, a stoppage team is repairing cracks and holes to make it harder for rats to emerge above ground, and concrete rat pads will cover dirt basement floors in NYCHA to eliminate nesting areas. Multi-agency inspections in buildings with significant rat activity are holding private-property owners accountable, and targeted exterminations in parks and other city-owned infrastructure will help eliminate rats. We were excited to announce just yesterday the Health Department is launching dry ice extermination in parks, a method that promises to be extremely effective at killing rats quickly and painlessly, while also avoiding secondary effects on wildlife such as hawks.

We are confident that this comprehensive effort to address neighborhoods burdened by high rat activity will achieve long-term improvements. But we can only truly succeed if everyone

works together. The suite of legislation to be introduced will support key parts of the program and is fundamental to its success. We want to thank the Council for being a critical partner in this exciting initiative.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to take questions. Commissioner Garcia will first address the legislation under consideration today.