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Jessica S. Tisch Commissioner

**Testimony of Jessica S. Tisch  
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**FY 2023 Executive Budget Hearing**

**New York City Council Committees on Finance and Sanitation and Solid Waste  
Management**

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Good afternoon Chairs Brannan and Nurse, and members of the City Council Committees on Finance and Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. My name is Jessica Tisch, and I am Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2023. I am joined by Gregory Anderson, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and External Affairs, Bridget Anderson, Deputy Commissioner for Recycling and Sustainability, and Chief Javier Lojan, Acting Deputy Commissioner for Financial Management and Administration.

I am delighted to be here in front of these committees today, and I look forward to working with you and this entire City Council to clean up our streets and make New York City a more vibrant and sustainable place to live. A goal that I know we all share.

I'm a lifelong New Yorker, and that means I've spent my entire life admiring the work of the Sanitation Department and its 10,000 members of service, who have spent the last two years showing that they are the epitome of essential, the epitome of the neighborhood hero. They care about clean streets, they care about giving their neighbors the peace of mind they deserve, about getting our City moving and keeping our communities safe, healthy, and clean.

As this is my first hearing in my new role as Sanitation Commissioner, let me take a moment to introduce myself. I've worked in City government for nearly 15 years. Most of that time was at the NYPD, and more recently, I served as Commissioner of the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications during the pandemic. I consider myself to be an effective problem solver who knows how to get things done for New Yorkers and will run through a brick wall trying!

I've applied a can do attitude to things like overhauling the City's vaccination approach, bringing down 911 response times, ending the digital divide for homeless children and their families, and

rolling out body-worn cameras to every uniform member of service at the NYPD. And that's what I'm going to continue doing as Commissioner of the Department of Sanitation.

Over the past three weeks, I've gone to 6 a.m. roll call at garages in every borough; I've spoken to hundreds of Sanitation Workers about the work they do day-in and day-out, largely unseen from the public eye; and I've visited our Marine Transfer Stations to see the results of more than a billion dollars in investments in sustainable, effective, and equitable waste management infrastructure.

I've been getting under the hood of this Department, meeting with every Chief and Borough Chief, understanding and digging into the Department's programs, policies, and priorities. And I feel quite blessed to be doing it.

### **Investments in Cleaner Streets**

I want to be very clear up front that I agree with New Yorkers who feel that our City is meaningfully dirtier than it was before the pandemic. And that is not acceptable. I've long felt that to fix a problem you have to understand it, and the good news is it's patently obvious to me what happened here; and the even better news is that with your help and partnership, the Adams Administration will be addressing it aggressively.

**First: Street sweeping.** Effective July 5<sup>th</sup>, we will finally be sweeping the streets again, which will make a meaningful difference in the cleanliness of every neighborhood in this City.

The partial suspension of Alternate Side Parking was a pandemic measure to let people stay inside more, but it went on for far too long and it largely sidelined the most effective clean-streets tool we have in our arsenal, the mechanical broom.

When I say the mechanical broom, or street sweeper, is the most effective clean streets tool in our arsenal, I mean it. They don't just sweep the trash on the streets to curb, they suck it all up inside the cab. In fact, on an average shift, a single mechanical broom can suck up 1,500 pounds of street litter! That's taking 1,500 pounds of litter off the City's streets on a single route!

The dirty little secret here is that when ASP went to one-day a week, instead of two, in practice it was like having no cleaning on lots of blocks in the City. Don't get me wrong: that's not because we stopped sending street sweepers to do their jobs. It is because the policy created a world where too many people saw a once-in-a-while ASP ticket as just the cost of doing business. Our sanitation workers operating the brooms estimated that 50+% of cars didn't move for ASP under the more limited pandemic rules.

So the pandemic policy change had a disproportionate effect on the amount of cleaning the agency could do — it was intended to halve it, but in practice, it more than halved it. It follows that restoring ASP to twice a week should more than double the amount of cleaning we can and will do.

The restoration of full alternate side parking regulations comes with a headcount increase of 41 Sanitation Workers that had been cut in January 2021 and \$1.9 million in additional funding in FY2023.

**Second: Bike lane sweeping.** This summer, New Yorkers will see a new fleet of mini sweepers (that can also be used as plows in the winter), that will be performing year-round cleaning and maintenance of the City's growing network of protected bike lanes.

Bike lanes are a great thing, but the program was rolled out nearly a decade ago, and over 100 miles of protected bike lanes have been built out, without a practical plan in place to keep those bike lanes clean. That ends now. With the advocacy and partnership of Commissioner Rodriguez and the Department of Transportation, we are addressing this issue.

This starts with a capital investment of \$6.7 million in a fleet of mini sweepers, beginning with 10 units with sweeper attachments this summer. By the end of next year, we will have a permanent fleet of 45 total units in two different sizes to clean and plow even the narrowest of protected bike lanes.

We also have \$2.8 million in new expense funding in FY2023 to provide person-power to operate and maintain this equipment for years to come and purchase a suite of attachments that will make them some of the most versatile units in our street cleaning arsenal. This new staff will allow us to sweep protected bike lanes year-round, with a goal of sweeping every lane once a week.

**Third: Litter baskets.** We are committed to cleaning up our City. We hear your complaints about the overflowing conditions and agree that they are not dignified or ok. In FY22, we have more than doubled the litter basket service from pandemic lows in FY21 to 588 weekly trucks. We would appreciate any additional funding to expand services and stand ready to implement. The Adams Administration looks forward to working closely with the Council to determine an appropriate level of service for all New Yorkers.

Can I guarantee you that New Yorkers will never see an overflowing litter basket again? No. But we will work to ensure that these conditions are minimized and call on all New Yorkers to do their part to keep our City clean. Overflowing litter basket issues that remain will be the result of misuse of the litter basket rather than lack of service. Litter baskets are for walking trash only – the coffee cup – as opposed to residential or commercial trash. And when they are misused, it creates a blight on our communities.

**Fourth: Rats.** On my third day on the job, I was thrilled to join Mayor Eric Adams, senior Administration leadership, and several Council members to unveil the City's first Clean Curbs bins in Times Square, the first step in an effort to containerize trash that used to be piled in bags on the street, serving as a free all you can eat buffet for rats.

DSNY and SBS recently announced the Neighborhood Challenge grant program for BIDs and community-based development organizations to make public space and cleanliness improvements with a particular focus on BIDs in underserved communities. The Department

received 29 applications for funding last month, and a second round of grant applications will open this summer.

The City is moving ahead with a five-borough approach to the Clean Curbs pilots, deploying bins for residential, BID, and commercial waste using a combination of public and private funding. This new five-borough approach includes \$1.3 million in new funding in FY 2023 and recurring in the out years.

**Fifth: Dog poop.** New Yorkers see it everywhere. And it has become a bigger problem over the past two years. Yet, in 2020 and 2021, a grand total of **zero** summonses have been written to people who don't pick up after their pets. That changes now. This is about decency, courtesy, and respect. And the Department of Sanitation won't tolerate it anymore.

**Sixth: Illegal dumping.** For those who are unfamiliar with the term, that's when a business, which is required to dispose of its waste itself or through the use of a private carter, decides instead to leave piles of trash bags in a vacant lot, or even on a sidewalk. Illegal dumping tends to be a bigger problem in the most underserved parts of the City. It's a huge issue in Hunts Point and East New York.

Here, we are taking a several pronged approach. We have precision cleaning teams in each borough whose main job it is to clean known dumping locations; but continually chasing dumps doesn't solve the problem, because it keeps happening. We have also stepped up our enforcement efforts over the past three months, investing in cameras in known dump locations to catch illegal dumpers in the act. When caught, an illegal dumper is subject to a \$4,000 fine and if they're using a car to transport the material, their car will be impounded. I want to be very clear that illegal dumping is a theft of public space. And I can think of no more important use of our enforcement teams' time than ensuring that those who are knowingly dumping their trash in our communities be held accountable for it.

**And seventh: Derelict vehicles.**

There are citywide problems and there are local ones. Derelict vehicles are a local issue but with big implications to quality of life in the outer boroughs. We see this problem in parts of the Bronx, Southeast Queens, and Central Brooklyn. Not only do these vehicles become eyesores, they also prevent our brooms from cleaning the streets. I'm going to refocus on getting these vehicles off the streets and we will be partnering with our counterparts at the NYPD to get this done. Clean streets should be the reality of all New Yorkers, regardless of where they live.

I want to be clear that I do not believe in enforcement for enforcement's sake. And there are many problems that you can't and shouldn't enforce your way out of. That can be dangerous. But, I do believe that enforcement must be a tool in our arsenal to deal with that very small percentage of New Yorkers and New York City businesses who choose not to do the simple, right thing; who choose not to abide by the straightforward laws and rules that relate to the cleanliness of our City. As an example, at 2 in the afternoon, New Yorkers should see virtually no trash bags piled up on the streets. But we do. In every neighborhood and every community in our City. It can be a business that has decided to put their trash out early. Over. And over. And

over again. Or a big chain retail store that rarely does its duty sweeping in front of its storefront. We have heard this a lot, in particular in Bay Ridge.

Well, to all the residents that have complained about this type of thing to 311 and the Department of Sanitation, I say, I hear you and we are going to do everything in our power to correct that behavior, and if we have to write summonses, well then so be it.

### **Zero Waste Programs**

I also want to commit to you that my obsession with the cleanliness of our City today will not be to the exclusion of the important work we have to do around securing our collective future. To the contrary. Our work around sustainability couldn't be more urgent. And I'm committed to elevating environmental justice as a core principle in all aspects of our work – that of course includes the successful implementation of the ambitious Commercial Waste Zones program, as well as following through with the groundbreaking Waste Equity Laws that the Council passed during the last Administration.

The Executive Budget includes \$29.1 million in new funding in Fiscal 2023 to expand our commitments to zero waste and sustainable waste management long term.

Most importantly, we have \$17.9 million in new funding for organics programs in FY2023, nearly zeroing out the reductions in organics funding under the Preliminary Budget PEG program. Managing organic waste, which makes up 34 percent of our waste stream, is an important part of achieving our zero waste goals, but we must ensure we do so both effectively and cost-effectively.

This new funding allows us to expand a program that we know works well – and sets the stage by educating the next generation of New Yorkers. In partnership with DOE, we will begin expanding compost collection to all New York City public schools, nearly doubling the size of the school composting program that exists today.

The budget includes funding to expand compost collection to all public schools and to provide the education and support that school staff, including principals, custodians, teachers, and food service workers, need to successfully divert their organic waste. I thank the Council for their advocacy for this measure, and we look forward to working with you to ensure the rollout is successful at every school in every neighborhood.

We will also leverage these expanded school organics routes to expand access to composting for residents. We will add 100 new Smart Bins near public schools for parents and community members to drop off their food scraps. These bins, which are accessed using an app or a free RFID card, will be collected using the same trucks that already service our public schools and will be sited to maximize equity in our network of drop-off sites citywide.

The new funding for organics programs also continues and baselines \$3.5 million in annual funding for our community composting partners and food scrap drop-off sites that was first added to the budget in FY 2022. This will support an expanded network of 221 partner-hosted

drop off sites in every community district citywide and provide vital support to our non-profit partners that educate New Yorkers about the importance of composting and the connection to healthy and vibrant neighborhoods. I met last week with many of the volunteers who work these sites, and they are a blessing to this City.

Lastly, this new investment provides baseline funding for the Department's annual fall leaf and yard waste collection program for the first time in many years. This program may be just four short weeks, but it regularly collects 3,000 tons or more of leaves and other yard waste to be converted into valuable and nutrient-rich compost.

The Executive Budget also includes \$2.6 million (\$400k in FY2022 and \$2.2m in FY2023) to support the relocation of the Lower East Side Ecology Center compost site, which has been temporarily moved out of East River Park to facilitate the construction of the East Side Coastal Resiliency project.

We won't stop there. I'm taking a comprehensive look at our composting programs past and present to figure out what works and what doesn't. This Administration is committed to making strides on organics, but we can't throw good money after bad. I look forward to working with you all to discuss these programs and developing a path forward for the future.

Aside from composting and organics, the Executive Budget funds two important programs that will help us plan for a more sustainable and equitable future of waste in New York City.

First, it includes \$7.9 million in FY 2023, and \$8.4 million total, to conduct a new Waste Characterization Study. The Waste Characterization Study gives us the clearest possible picture of what New Yorkers throw away on a daily basis and helps us tailor existing and new programs and policies in our efforts to move toward zero waste. It will also be our first opportunity to see the detailed impact of bans on foam products and single-use plastic bags.

In addition, the Executive Budget includes \$550K in funds for the first phase of planning for our new Solid Waste Management Plan. This plan, on track to be completed in 2026, will be the first major update to the City's landmark 2006 comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan, which laid the groundwork for our sustainable and resilient network of marine and barge-based transfer stations that we rely on today.

### **FY 2023 Executive Budget**

Now, I will take you through the more technical details of the Department's FY23 budget.

DSNY's Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget includes \$1.83 billion in expense funding. This is broken down between \$1.06 billion in Personal Services to support 9,444 full-time positions and \$775 million in Other Than Personal Services, or OTPS.

For Fiscal Year 2022, the expense budget increased by \$100.2 million from the Preliminary Budget to the Executive Budget. This increase is largely due to Personal Services adjustments

due to increased spending in the current fiscal year and adjustments to reflect actual spending during the 2021-2022 snow season.

For Fiscal Year 2023, the expense budget increased by \$50.4 million from the Preliminary Budget to the Executive Budget. This increase is primarily driven by the new initiatives I mentioned earlier in my testimony, as well as adjustments to motor fuel and heat, light and power budgets to reflect increased costs for these line items given market conditions.

DSNY's Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget includes \$3.41 billion in capital funding in the 10-year plan, \$1.23 billion of which is for garages and facilities, \$1.96 billion for equipment, \$59.2 million for IT, and \$164 million for solid waste management infrastructure.

The Capital Budget includes funding for several major facilities projects currently underway, including:

- Construction of the new Staten Island Districts 1 and 3 Garage, managed by DDC, which has an overall budget of \$198 million and is forecast to be completed by 2024;
- Construction of the new Brooklyn District 3 Garage, which has an overall budget of \$204 million and is forecast to be complete by 2024; and
- Upgrades to the facility that will serve as the new home for the Manhattan District 11 Garage, which has an overall budget of \$26.9 million and will be substantially complete later this year.

## **Conclusion**

I'll just close by saying: I see these committees and every member of the City Council as partners in achieving all the goals discussed today. I have worked closely with the Council for over a decade, and your feedback, input, and even your criticism have consistently elevated my performance.

My door will remain open at all times, and I will not shy away from tough conversations about the steps we need to take as a City to keep New York healthy, safe, and clean. I look forward to many years of collaboration with each of you and with the many stakeholders that play an important role in our work. Thank you, again, for this opportunity to testify today on the Department's important work. My colleagues and I are now happy to answer your questions.