

**TESTIMONY FROM NYCHA VICE PRESIDENT OF WASTE MANAGEMENT & PEST
CONTROL ALFRED FERGUSON
NYCHA WASTE MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND PEST PROBLEMS
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 2021 – 10:00 AM
REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 2)**

Chair Alicka Ampry-Samuel, members of the Committee on Public Housing, other distinguished members of the City Council, NYCHA residents, and members of the public: good morning. I am Al Ferguson, NYCHA's Vice President of Waste Management and Pest Control. I am pleased to be joined by Vlada Kenniff, Vice President of Energy and Sustainability; Brian Honan, Vice President of Intergovernmental Relations; and Josephine Bartlett, Deputy Director of the Pest Control Department. I would like to note that I have over 32 years of experience with the New York City Department of Sanitation. I started as a Sanitation Worker and rose through the ranks, ultimately finishing my career as the three-star Chief of Citywide Collection, Recycling, and Containerization.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the progress NYCHA is making in the critical areas of waste management and pest control. Ensuring that our buildings and grounds are clean and as pest free as possible is a top priority at the Authority. We know our residents are directly impacted by these issues, and we are working hard to ensure that NYCHA's waste management and pest control methods are comprehensive, modern, and adaptive as the industries evolve. We have made significant changes to our approaches in these areas; we continue to implement new strategies and have long-term projects on the horizon that will further improve residents' quality of life.

Over the past few years, we have created a dedicated Waste Management Department that focuses on preventing and combatting pest issues, developed IT enhancements that facilitate our work, and trained staff on Integrated Pest Management (IPM). NYCHA is budgeted for 131 exterminators, of which we currently have 109 exterminators on staff. This includes the 22 new exterminators that we hired as part of the Neighborhood Rat Reduction initiative. We are working on hiring additional exterminators. The NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services is in the process of certifying the new

exterminator civil service list. Our Pest Control Department is also in the process of onboarding additional exterminators by hiring residents via the NYCHA Resident Training Academy.

NYCHA's Action Plan on Pests and Waste

Under the leadership of Chair Russ, and in accordance with the 2019 HUD Agreement, we are transforming our organization to provide improved critical services to our residents and we are investing a significant amount of funding and human capital to ensure successful results.

The Federal Monitor, Bart Schwartz, approved our Pest and Waste Management Action Plan in January of this year. The Action Plan is our map to ensuring that our practices meet our goals of more effective waste management and pest control. It is our commitment to the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) at the Authority, and the creation of development-specific waste management plans for every NYCHA property. This is accomplished by targeted investments in capital upgrades and a willingness to re-envision our approaches to pest and waste management.

A key focus of the Action Plan involves improving the way NYCHA collects, stores, and removes waste to meet our goal to remove or store all waste in sealed, rodent-resistant containers once every 24 hours. This is so important because better waste management means fewer pests, as we're eliminating their habitats and sources of food. Today I'll describe some of the waste infrastructure upgrades and programmatic improvements that will enable us to achieve our waste management and pest control goals.

Sustainable Improvements to Combat Pests and Waste

Capital Upgrades

NYCHA's current waste infrastructure – which is responsible for managing over 200,000 tons of waste every year – is outdated. Since NYCHA's developments were

built, the amount of waste generated by Americans has tripled; at the same time, NYCHA's infrastructure hasn't received the investments it's needed to keep up with that increase. In fact, more than 80 percent of our waste assets are past their life cycle and need immediate replacement.

The Federal Monitor approved NYCHA's City Capital Action Plan last month, which unlocks over \$563 million in funding to help the Authority fully upgrade and modernize its waste infrastructure. Nearly \$9 million in State, City, and federal funds will be added to the City Capital Action Plan. A total investment of \$47 million toward Mayor de Blasio's Neighborhood Rat Reduction program has enabled us to accomplish the following:

- Install larger trash chute doors that can accommodate a standard 13-gallon tall kitchen garbage bag on the first level of 50 developments, which helps residents dispose of trash properly;
- Install new interior trash compactors at 38 developments, exterior compactors at 16 developments, and 10 bulk crushers and 20 cardboard compacting baling machines – all of which enable us to manage waste more effectively and efficiently;
- Install over 5,000 (out of 8,000) door sweeps that prevent pests from getting into our buildings; and
- Install 14 (out of 50) “rat slabs” that eliminate places for rodents to live, eat, and breed by replacing the original dirt basement floors with concrete.

With this total funding of more than \$619 million, we'll be able to replace aging waste, recycling, and bulk waste equipment at 324 sites across 197 developments. Better waste management means fewer pests and fewer pests lead to an increase in the overall quality of life for our residents.

Innovative and Sustainable Programs and Initiatives

In conjunction with the increased funding for infrastructure, we are making programmatic and design improvements. For instance, at the beginning of the pandemic, we instituted a “Clean to the Ground” initiative to keep waste yards trash and litter-free, an especially challenging task considering that stay-at-home mandates resulted in a significant increase in the amount of household waste that was generated at our developments.

We worked with our close agency partner, the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY), to obtain a sizable increase in the number of DSNY-funded bulk container dump tickets. This increase represents the removal of nearly 12,000 additional tons of bulk waste from NYCHA developments last year. We worked with the carting vendors who currently service most of our bulk containers to ensure that they increased capacity so that we could increase the frequency of bulk waste removal at our developments. To demonstrate the benefits of increased waste collection frequency at a small group of developments, we purchased two 6-yard rear-loader compacting garbage trucks that can each hold approximately three tons of household refuse per load. These trucks are equipped with the latest in Vision Zero safety designs (including 360-degree cameras for enhanced driver awareness) and have the latest in hybrid (diesel and electric) technology.

NYCHA has also worked with our Sanitation Department partners to develop a Recycling Reset pilot program to improve recycling rates at 12 sites: Baruch and Baruch Addition, Bushwick, Hylan, Butler, Marcy, Morris I and II, Riis I and II, Webster, and Morrisania. The results are tangible and sustainable – several sites, such as Baruch Houses and Riis Houses, are recycling at record high rates. When the pilot began in early 2020, Baruch Houses reported six bags of recyclable material for their weekly pickup; in November 2020, they reported 253 bags of recyclables. Riis Houses recorded 384 bags during the same period.

The Waste Management Department is finalizing the Individual Waste Management Action Plans for each of our developments. We have gathered development-specific data

via both virtual and in-person site visits over the past year. By cataloguing and mapping our current waste assets, and reviewing various critical aspects of waste management operations and development-specific challenges with NYCHA staff, we effectively created short-, medium-, and long-term action plans to improve waste management at each site. Some of the solutions include providing additional bulk tickets each month, as well as shepherding the procurement process for faster compactor replacement. We are also finalizing a newly created “Scorecard Cleanliness Rating System” with the assistance of the Federal Monitor. This will provide an objective rating regarding the cleanliness of critical areas in both the interior and exterior of all of our developments and will allow us to highlight areas that need attention and help redirect resources on a development level.

In 2019, the Authority released the NYCHA 2.0 Waste Management Plan, a comprehensive set of strategies for delivering state-of-the-art infrastructure and providing residents with convenient locations for disposing recyclables and food waste – all to greatly reduce pests and make our developments cleaner.

To advance the Waste Management Plan, this year we released Requests for Proposals for the redesign of seven waste yards, and for a new pneumatic waste collection system at Polo Grounds Towers, all to start construction in 2022. By 2028, we will have completely overhauled the waste yards at 194 developments. These redesigns will replace aging waste infrastructure with new yards that will have an increased footprint, have more operational functionality, incorporate additional much-needed recycling infrastructure, and have more reliable compactors, making waste handling more efficient, thereby improving the quality of life for our residents. The new waste yards will be more aesthetically pleasing than past designs, and will incorporate past resident feedback.

The pneumatic waste collection system at Polo Grounds will transport waste from each building underground to a centralized facility where it will be compacted in a sealed pest resistant container. This new system will reduce the amount of labor used to transport waste, and will minimize exposure to pests.

This summer, we are launching a mattress recycling program at 25 developments to containerize, remove, and recycle unsightly mattresses, while providing job opportunities for NYCHA residents. It will ultimately be scaled up to 100 or so developments.

Over the past year, we piloted two dedicated exterior cardboard compactors at Marcy and Morris I Houses. This resulted in the recycling of more than 116 tons of cardboard.

We are evaluating the use of in-sink food waste disposers at select sites to reduce organic waste from household waste streams, eliminate food sources for pests, and divert organic materials from landfills. Our Farms at NYCHA sites are also helping to achieve these goals: Since 2016, our lead partner, Green City Force (GCF), has collected over 21,000 pounds (or 10.5 tons) of compostable food scraps from NYCHA residents. One Green City Force alum and former NYCHA resident, Domingo Morales, is working to expand composting at NYCHA developments through an initiative he started called Compost Power. In 2020, Compost Power organized composting at five NYCHA developments that can now process at least 50 tons of organic waste per year. Compost Power provides NYCHA residents with the opportunity to reduce waste from landfills while creating more eco-friendly jobs.

Our waste management efforts are being carried out in partnership, through outreach and education campaigns led by NYCHA, residents, and other stakeholders. For example, NYCHA is developing a “Campaign for a Clean NYCHA” to better communicate with, and engage, residents on proper waste management and recycling programs. The Campaign is rolling out at five developments this summer. It will apply the tools of public awareness and behavior change to define and promote a positive waste culture at NYCHA. It will feature highly visible signage and other visual prompts developed in close collaboration with and input from residents, community-based organizations, and other advocates.

Mayor de Blasio's City Cleanup Corps Initiative has granted us \$7 million in funding to hire 1,000 seasonal workers who will help keep our grounds, playgrounds, and buildings clean and well maintained. This will include waste handling and assisting with our pest control work.

Integrated Pest Management

An integral cornerstone of our new approach to pest control was the agency-wide rollout of the industry gold standard: Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM focuses on sustainable and long-term solutions that target the underlying causes of pest infestations. Exterminators perform a thorough inspection, looking for and removing sources of food and water as well as any points of entry. They perform exclusion work such as caulking and the installation of escutcheon plates while minimizing the use of pesticides.

We incorporated IPM protocols into our IT systems and issued updated standard procedures and guidance regarding IPM to staff. We have trained over 700 staff – caretakers, supervisors, and other property management staff – on the fundamentals of IPM, and we kicked off quarterly trainings on specific IPM topics. Resident education is an essential element of pest prevention. Educational materials have been created to inform residents about IPM best practices for prevention, including handouts, rent inserts, and a comprehensive NYCHA pest control webpage.

We have provided “targeted relief” to more than 6,200 apartments with recurring pest problems. The targeted relief program also involves inspecting and treating the adjacent apartments above, below, and to the left and right of the apartment that has an identified recurring pest problem.

A New Direction for NYCHA

While we know that more work needs to be done, it is clear that we are making progress. Reducing pests and creating cleaner communities is truly a collaborative effort, and by

working together – NYCHA employees, residents, community organizations, and City agency partners – we can continue to bring our vision to fruition.

We will keep advocating for the funding we desperately need for critical capital investments and we will continue to engage our residents to make sure that their needs and priorities are incorporated into the work we're doing to improve pest and waste management practices.

Thank you. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Testimony of Weronika Bzura Before the New York City Council Committee
on Public Housing Hearing on NYCHA Waste Management Issues
and Pest Problems
June 16, 2021**

Good morning and thank you for having me here today. My name is Weronika Bzura, and I am a legal intern at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. At NYLPI, our attorneys and community organizers work directly with community-based organizations and tenant associations to advocate for healthy housing and recourse for poor conditions. We want to stress the importance of remediating dangerous housing conditions that threaten the health of countless New Yorkers. The well-documented poor maintenance records of NYCHA, combined with plumbing issues, heat and poor air ventilation, exacerbate already existing respiratory conditions and other disabilities that public housing residents are facing. The COVID-19 pandemic only further highlighted the dangerous effects of these conditions, such as asthma and other respiratory conditions, that seem to continuously disproportionately impact low-income communities and communities of color.

Thank you to Chair Ampry-Samuel and the Committee for holding today's hearing to shed light on the Pest and Waste Management Action Plan as one viable—if belated—effort to curb some of the terrible conditions our NYC residents of NYCHA housing face on a daily basis. It is somewhat disappointing that it took the City so long to connect the dots that actually having a plan to manage waste effectively might go a long way towards curbing some of the other harmful conditions in NYCHA complexes. While we applaud the goals of the Plan, we want to remind the Committee and the City that community voices—and sustainability goals—should always be centered when developing and implementing the Plan.

The residents that are living through and experiencing these deplorable NYCHA conditions are the same residents that often struggle to have their voices heard or included by NYCHA in coming up with solutions to address these issues. As the committee discusses oversight of waste management and pest issues today, we would like to stress the importance of having resident involvement and participation at every stage. While NYCHA residents may be interested in improving these conditions, greater outreach is needed to ensure that there is enough residential knowledge, involvement, and participation for these efforts to be meaningful.

Waste reduction and diversion produces a range of environmental, financial, and social benefits—from conserving energy, to reducing the burden on landfills and other waste disposal methods. It is also critical to reduce air pollution, which is especially devastating to low-income communities and communities of color. Improper waste disposal can create or exacerbate hazardous public health conditions by contaminating water sources, creating breeding grounds for disease, and more. Waste reduction can be accomplished through different methods such as source reduction, recycling, reuse, or composting. Unfortunately, NYCHA's 2018 Waste



Management Report revealed that NYCHA's diversion rate was less than 2%. While the City's diversion rate is embarrassing when compared with other major cities such as San Francisco, it is still over 22%. This reveals a deep inequity in access to services to NYCHA residents.

The Pest and Waste Management Action Plan is a step in the right direction and will hopefully improve NYCHA's ability to address both the root causes of pest infestation and waste issues. Improving waste reduction efforts is very important because it will likely lead to improvements for other conditions as well. However, more can and should be done to ensure that we reach the city's goals. For example, NYCHA did not have recycling services until recently, and has never had the opportunity to source separate organic waste for composting. Composting could actually be a way to help manage pests and vermin. Improving and expanding recycling efforts itself requires greater residential engagement because we know that it only works if people participate, and that requires active education and outreach. In order to implement the plan effectively, infrastructural and building design improvements will be necessary, and there could be wide-ranging benefits to such investments. For example, NYCHA can and should work with residents when building recycling programs so that residents know where recycling bins are located, what goes in each bin, etc. Investment in this kind of outreach and infrastructural design would ensure higher engagement and therefore increase successful implementation.

We remain supportive of NYCHA's Action Plan, but urge the Committee, Council and City to ensure meaningful resident and community involvement and input, as well as greater accountability and oversight to ensure that these plans have the effect we want them to have. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.