

GALE A. BREWER
COUNCIL MEMBER, DISTRICT 6
MANHATTAN

DISTRICT OFFICE
563 COLUMBUS AVENUE, AT 87TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10024
(212) 873-0282
FAX (212) 873-0279

CITY HALL OFFICE
250 BROADWAY, ROOM 1744
NEW YORK, NY 10007
(212) 788-6975
FAX (212) 513-7717

gale.brewer@council.nyc.gov
www.council.nyc.gov



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DEPARTMENT OF SANITATION RULES HEARING
OCTOBER 21, 2010
TESTIMONY OF COUNCIL MEMBER GALE A. BREWER

I am Gale A. Brewer and I represent residents of the Upper West Side and Clinton neighborhoods in the City Council. I appreciate the efforts made by the Department of Sanitation to address the bed bug epidemic that our city has been grappling with, an issue I have been working on since 2006.

I introduced a bill, Intro 0872-2008, in November 2008 that would require all bedding and furniture set out for collection by sanitation workers to be both completely contained inside a sealed plastic bag and labeled with a sticker or decal indicating that it may contain bed bugs. Both the bags and the stickers would be provided by the city according to proposed legislation. The rules the Department of Sanitation has proposed, which are the subject of today's hearing, would require all bedding set out for collection by sanitation workers to be similarly contained inside a sealed plastic bag.

DSNY's proposed rules and my legislation are intended to curtail the proliferation of bed bugs throughout the city and protect the sanitation workers who are responsible for handling these items on a daily basis. I would like to work with the Department on policies to address these issues. However, as proposed, the Department's rules leave many key questions unanswered. For example: Who would provide the aforementioned bags (large enough to cover a disposed mattress)? Where could New Yorkers obtain these bags? In addition, the Department recommends a violation for noncompliance - in multiple dwelling buildings, will the responsibility for preparing the mattresses fall upon the tenant or the landlord and management company? We must be careful that these rules help tenants and landlords work together to effectively curb the bed bug problem, while ensuring the health and safety of the sanitation workers.

In March 2009, a bill I introduced was enacted as Local Law 14 of 2009, creating a Bed Bug Advisory Board. Their report, released in July 2010, stated that "proper disposal of infested items is essential in order to prevent further dissemination of bugs during the disposal process," and called for guidelines regarding the proper disposal of bedding. The report recommended that

infested items be rendered unusable, completely sealed in a suitable material, and marked with a prominent standardized sign, created by the city, warning that the item may contain bed bugs.

While there is a perception that New York City has become the 'bed bug capital' of the United States, we can learn from other cities that are also struggling to address the national bed bug epidemic. Cincinnati established bed bug furniture pick-up procedures and a hotline in September 2007. Their Department of Public Services, which handles waste collection in the city, asks its citizens to wrap and completely seal all bed-bug infected items in plastic, and then collects them on regularly scheduled collection days. This is done for the health and safety of city employees and to avoid further infestation.

In Boston, for the last six years, the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation has been working with the Inspectional Services Department, which oversees sanitation in Boston, to publicly distribute bright orange stickers produced by the city for discarded furniture. Through this program, outreach is increased during the month of September, when college students move into the city and begin scavenging for furniture. The stickers say: "Caution: this may contain bed bugs. Do not remove!" and include an image of a bedbug. John Meaney, Boston's inspectional services director, said of this September's campaign: "We think it went great. There was a lot of public awareness about it this year, and there has been constant press over the past four or five years about bed bugs."

Although my bill is a work in progress, I believe that together we can address this issue legislatively by incorporating both the recommendations of the report issued by the Bed Bug Advisory Board and examples of successful bed bug awareness and eradication policies in other cities.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Sanitation on appropriate legislation to establish feasible disposal procedures for bedding. Thank you for holding a hearing on this issue.