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****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

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**MAJORITY OF CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS JOIN
CLIMATE JUSTICE LEADERS, COMMUNITY-BASED
GROUPS AND STUDENTS TO SUPPORT AMENDED
BILL TO REDUCE PLASTIC BAG WASTE**

Charge for single-use bags reduced to 5 cents. Broad coalition now in support of passing amended legislation for Earth Day 2016

CITY HALL - A majority of City Council Members have signed onto Intro 209-A, a bill to dramatically reduce single-use plastic and paper bag waste in New York City. The bill's co-sponsors, Council Members Brad Lander, Margaret Chin and Antonio Reynoso, joined fellow elected officials, environmental leaders, climate justice groups, community-based organizations, and elementary school students from neighborhoods across NYC to rally for passage of the amended bill.

New Yorkers throw away more than 9 billion plastic bags each year, over 91,000 tons of solid waste sent to landfills, at a cost of over \$12.5 million. The bags, which are made of petroleum and take millions of years to decompose, get stuck in trees, litter streets and beaches, clog storm drains and recycling equipment, and become part of giant islands of plastic sludge in our oceans.

The amended bill includes the following changes:

- Change to 5-cent charge (from 10 cents)
- Requires more robust outreach and education about the bill in multiple languages
- Requires a study on the impact of the legislation on litter, solid waste, and bag use reductions, as well as the public's reaction to the law across demographic groups.

"New York City must seize this moment to get 9 billion plastic bags out of our trees, parks, playgrounds, storm drains, beaches, oceans, and landfills," said **Council Member Brad Lander**. "In city after city, a small fee has been overwhelmingly successful in getting people to bring their own reusable bags when they shop -- across lines of race, ethnicity, age, income and neighborhood -- and generated a 60% to 90% drop in plastic bag waste. We're thrilled that a majority of City Council Members have signed onto the amended bill."

"This amended legislation is the result of months of discussions with my Council colleagues about our shared goal of reducing the thousands of tons of single-use bags discarded every year," said **Council Member Margaret Chin**. "With these changes, I strongly believe we've achieved that goal while minimizing the effect of our legislation on low-income New Yorkers -- many of whom live in neighborhoods that are disproportionately impacted by our City's waste transfer system. I thank my Council colleagues for joining us in this effort, and I look forward to this important legislation being voted on and signed into law."

"As Chair of the Council's Committee on Sanitation, I am proud to support this legislation, which represents a big step toward the City's goal of sending zero waste to landfills by 2030," said **Council Member Antonio Reynoso**.

“Waste reduction is both an environmental issue and an equity issue, and we can all do our part by remembering to bring reusable bags. I look forward to working with my colleagues to pass this bill.”

“We have a moral obligation to do all we can to protect the environment for our future generations,” said **Public Advocate Letitia James**. “A modest fee for plastic bags will go a long way in reducing our dependency on plastics bags, alleviating millions of dollars in city spending to dispose of these bags and in supporting our small businesses who will not have to spend as much to purchase these bags. I applaud Council Member Lander for his leadership on this issue and urge all New Yorkers to continue our efforts to reduce our detrimental impacts on the environment.”

Under the amended legislation, retailers will be required to charge 5 cents for single-use plastic and paper bags (reduced from 10 cents). Customers who bring their own reusable bags will pay no charge. In cities around the country that have passed similar laws, upwards of 80% of customers bring reusable bags for most of their shopping trips.

Intro 209 previously had the support of 21 City Council Members (Lander, Chin, Richards, Koo, Levin, Crowley, Dromm, Levine, Johnson, Van Bramer, Cohen, Constantinides, Rosenthal, Menchaca, Kallos, Rodriguez, Cumbo, Miller, Torres, Reynoso, Mendez) and Public Advocate Letitia James. With the amendments, Intro 209-A is now also sponsored by **Council Members Cabrera, Cornegy, Ferreras-Copeland, King, and Williams**, for a total of 26 Council Member sponsors (a majority of the City Council).

The amended bill requires outreach and education about the bill in multiple languages, and establishes a program for reusable bag giveaway programs by retailers. The bill also calls for studies on the impact of the legislation on litter, solid waste, and bag use reductions, as well as the public’s reaction to the law across demographic groups.

The bill will apply to carryout bags from grocery stores and non-food retailers, as well as vendors who sell grocery and non-food retail items. It will exempt SNAP and WIC customers, as well as emergency food providers, to avoid additional barriers to food insecurity. The fee will not be required for restaurants, wine and liquor stores, garment bags, or pharmacy medicine bags. Produce, meat, and bulk food bags can still be distributed free by stores.

Bag fees have been adopted in cities including Washington DC, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis, and in countries including Germany, Belgium, Great Britain, France, Israel, and South Africa. When fees go into effect, more than 80% of people – across every community and income level – start bringing reusable bags most of the time. In a Washington DC survey, low and moderate income households (between \$25k - \$50k) were actually the most likely to reduce their use (84%), but across all income levels, the vast majority of residents reduced their use.

“NYC’s bag bill builds upon the lessons learned in all the cities that came before it, said **Jennie Romer, Attorney and Founder of plasticbaglaws.org**. “I’ve been involved with drafting bag bills all over the U.S. for almost ten years. We’ve seen that bag fees are most effective in changing consumer behavior to drastically reduce bag use. With a bag fee customers are presented with a choice of whether they want to buy a carryout bag for their purchases, and they become much more likely to bring their own bag or not get a bag for small purchases.”

“The NYC Environmental Justice Alliance remains proud to support the City Council’s Plastic Bag Reduction bill, said **Eddie Bautista, Executive Director of the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance**. “We hope to see this bill passed – and passed by Earth Day, because it supports both our long-term goal to both reduce waste as well as reduce impacts on the low-income communities of color that handle the vast majority of NYC’s waste. Roughly 100,000 tons of plastic bags are handled by NYC’s waste system every year -- this represents a tremendous burden on both the environment and on the environmental justice communities where waste transfer stations are disproportionately located. We are pleased to note that Council Member Lander has addressed potential impacts on low-income New Yorkers by exempting SNAP/WIC transactions from the fee and committing to distribution of free, reusable bags in low-income neighborhoods.”

Bette Midler, award-winning actress, singer, and founder of the New York Restoration Project said, “Plastic bags are a scourge; billions of them are used in New York every year, and thousands of them wind up in our trees, rivers, lakes, beaches and oceans. I have seen hundreds of pictures of wild animals and fish that ingested them and died, full of plastic refuse. New York has always led the nation and the world and now it’s time to take a stand against one of the most polluting inventions ever. Let’s get this bill passed!”

"Carryout bags are not free. Every New Yorker pays when we see our trees, streets and playgrounds littered with plastic bags," said **Marcia Bystryn, President of New York League of Conservation Voters**. "The disposable bags bill asks New Yorkers to pause for a second. When asked if you need a carryout bag, the choice will be yours. That pause can make a world of a difference for cleaner streets, a greener city and a healthier environment."

"UPROSE is proud to support this long overdue legislation, said **Elizabeth Yeampierre, Executive Director, UPROSE**. "We know plastic bags pollute our oceans, end up in the food consumed by frontline communities in the global south, and create needless truck traffic in NYC's low-income communities of color. Reducing waste is a climate justice priority."

New York State Senator Liz Krueger said, "There's no hiding the fact that we've got a plastic bag problem; we see it everyday in our trees, our streets, and our rivers. Plastic pollution costs taxpayers millions of dollars every year, not to mention causes significant environmental damage. Bag fees have a proven track record of significantly reducing plastic bag use in cities and countries around the world. I urge my elected colleagues in New York City to pass Intro 209 by Earth Day, and keep our city moving on the path to zero waste"

New York State Senator Brad Hoylman, Ranking Member of Environment Conservation Committee, said: "Each year Americans throw away more than 100 billion plastic bags, with New York City alone accounting for 5.2 billion. The result is an unprecedented ecological disaster that is threatening the future of our environment. I want to thank Council Members Margaret Chin and Brad Lander for advancing this legislation, which will help to create a more sustainable future and serve as a model for lawmakers in Albany."

"Reducing the use of plastic bags takes us that much further toward our goal of a sustainable world," **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer** said. "We should follow the path that other local governments around the country have blazed for us, and act now to reduce the use of plastic bags. I support Int. 209 and join those calling for its passage."

"When it comes to making our communities more environmentally secure, the status quo is no longer an option," said **Mark Winston Griffith of the Brooklyn Movement Center**, a Central Brooklyn-based community organizing group that is also a member of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance. "With this bill, I'm confident Central Brooklynites will quickly make the transition from local plastic bags users to role models on a more sustainable planet."

"Plastic bags litter our streets, clog our storm drains, and cost the city millions of dollars every year to transport to landfills," said **Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer**. "This small change will encourage the use of reusable bags, and experts predict it will reduce plastic bag waste by 60 to 90 percent. This is one of the most thoughtful plastic bag bills in the country."

"Supporting this bill is supporting cleaner communities and a greener future for New York City -- from our streets to our waterways," said **Emily Nobel Maxwell, Director of The Nature Conservancy's New York City program**. "At the Conservancy, we work to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. This proposal would dramatically reduce solid waste from single-use bags while also saving taxpayer dollars -- a win for all New Yorkers, and for nature. Mayor de Blasio has an incredible opportunity to take a huge leap forward in the name of conservation this Earth Day. We encourage him to take it."

Council Member Fernando Cabrera said, "After close consideration and negotiation around the plastic bag charge bill, I decided to support it. I believe this policy will result in significant cost savings as well as clean neighborhoods. I am proud to join my colleagues in supporting legislation that will positively impact the environment for years to come. "

"Each year, thousands of plastic bags end up clogging our sewers and polluting our rivers, while costing the City millions of dollars", said **Council Member Elizabeth Crowley**. "This bill will encourage the use of reusable bags and make environmentally conscious decision-making part of our everyday lives. It's up to us to be proactive and take steps now to make sure the next generation inherits a stronger and healthier city."

"From Washington D.C. to San Francisco, cities around the nation have taken progressive steps to curb plastic bag litter. This legislation, if passed, will result in cleaner streets, parks, beaches and waterways in neighborhoods throughout New York City. We applaud Councilmembers Brad Lander and Margaret Chin for their leadership in

advancing this forward-looking legislation,” said **Eric A. Goldstein, NYC Environment Director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.**

“Earth Day is a national opportunity to demonstrate support for environmental protection. It seems only fitting that my colleagues in the City Council rally for Int. 209 to be passed by April 22, 2016. I am confident that this innovative legislation will reduce the plastic bag waste that we see all too well in our streets and in our parks, as well as pave the way for a more environmentally friendly New York City,” said **Council Member Andrew Cohen.**

Peter H. Kostmayer, CEO of Citizens Committee of New York City, said, “In 2008, the African country of Rwanda eliminated plastic bags in order to help promote eco-tourism and a cleaner greener environment than its neighbors. That practical law helped the country save funds that would have been needed to pay government employees to clean up carryout bag waste. So, in order to get New Yorkers to break their disposable bag habit, Citizens Committee coordinated 26 reusable bag giveaways. To date, nearly 6,000 large reusable grocery tote bags have been distributed to working class New Yorkers who’ve promised to shop without taking one plastic or paper bag... forever! Intro 209 is the type of progressive and common sense legislation New Yorkers will always be proud about. And we are finally catching up with Rwanda.”

Council Member Costa Constantinides said, "I join my colleague Council Members Lander and Chin in calling for Int. 209 to pass by Earth Day. We have already made a commitment to reduce our carbon emissions by 80% citywide and we need innovative solutions such as this to help us get this. This bill would bring us on that path by reducing waste and forming sustainable habits. Reducing our use of disposable bags would also benefit low-income families, who bear a disproportionate share of our waste infrastructure. The over \$12 million our city spends on sending plastic bag waste to landfills would be reduced. I look forward to seeing our city save green by going green."

Rolando Guzman, Deputy Director for Community Preservation at St Nicks Alliance, said, “The plastic bag bill is a fundamental step in the right direction for a more sustainable waste reduction in New York City. Our neighborhoods in North Brooklyn are overburdened by all the waste transfer stations that process almost 40% of New York City waste. OUTRAGE calls for fair distribution of waste transfer stations throughout the City, and we call on the New York City Council to sign into law this legislation.”

"Single-use plastic bags are a waste and can soon be a relic of the past, replaced by reusable bags that will help save the environment and everyone money," said **Council Member Ben Kallos.**

"This legislation is about environmental protection and waste reduction, and will hopefully reduce the number of plastic bags used by consumers. Plastic bags can be an environmental hazard and that's why this common-sense bill has widespread support from elected officials, environmental justice groups, students and others," said **Council Member Ritchie Torres.**

“Carryout bags in New York City do not come without a cost. The vast majority of plastic bags are not recycled. They end up being trucked to waste transfer stations and then to landfills, or littering our streets, green-spaces and sewers. Low-income communities and communities of color are unfairly burdened with handling the vast majority of trash generated by all New Yorkers. The resulting abundance of diesel emissions, dangerous hauling vehicles and waste in their communities are seriously detrimental to health and wellbeing. Passage of the carryout bag bill would reduce plastic bag waste and have a meaningful impact on NYC’s overall waste stream, resulting in tangible benefits for all New Yorkers--and in particular for environmental justice communities,” said **Erin Leigh George, Community Organizer, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**

"I recently signed on as a co-sponsor to the proposed legislation on plastic bags. Of great importance to me was that the fee was reduced to 5 cents and recipients who are engaging in a SNAP/WIC or food pantry transaction will be exempt. I know that currently many New Yorkers recycle plastic bags by using them as garbage bags and to scoop poop when walking their dogs. However, there are many supermarkets that double and triple bag items and there are individuals who don't recycle at all. Many of these bags end up in our sewers, streets and trees. Other cities have taken notice to the harm plastic bags cause our environment. It is time for New York to do so as well," said **Council Member Rosie Mendez.**

“I don’t want to live in a sea of plastic when I grow up. There should be a charge so more people will use reusable bags so the environment will be more clean,” said **Michelle Aklufi, Ms. Wilen’s 3rd grade class, NEST+m.**

"I think most can agree that this topic isn't pleasant and can frankly be annoying. But no one can disagree on how bad plastic bags are, so we have to move forward with a way to try and deal with it," **Council Member Jumaane Williams** said. "My issue is how is it going to affect poorer, black and Latino communities. All the data in other cities show that the concerns are not real. In addition, a request for a study has been added in the bill so we can revisit this in two years. Paralysis is not an alternative."

"Everyday in the Rockaways we see the impacts of a disposable city on our shorelines. We urge the Mayor and City Council to take action on disposable bags by this Earth Day," said **Jeanne Dupont, Executive Director of Rockaway Waterfront Alliance**.

"NYC plastic bag litter is an environmental and health problem run amok, contributing to the 165 million plastic fragments flowing from our local waterways into the ocean daily. Now is time to pass the bag bill, protecting our waterways, our seafood chain, and the health of our communities for generations to come," said **Debby Lee Cohen, Executive Director and Founder of Cafeteria Culture**. "With summer approaching, the urgency of this issue has moved up a notch. Warmer climates have long witnessed plastic bag litter as breeding grounds for disease carrying mosquitoes. What are we waiting for?"

Roland Lewis, President and CEO of Waterfront Alliance, said "Passing the Bag Bill is one more important step toward getting dangerous and polluting plastics away from fish and people that that enjoy our harbor and waterways."

"Single-use plastic bags live long after you're done with them – clogging landfills, trees, waterways, and streets. We owe it to ourselves and to the environment to reduce our consumption of disposable bags, and this bill will get shoppers to be mindful of the financial and environmental cost of single-use plastic bags on our City," said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**.

"Surfrider Foundation and its thousands of members across the country proudly support Introduction 209 in New York City. We urge our City Council and Mayor de Blasio to join us in supporting Intro 209, a critical step toward protecting oceans, waves, and beaches in New York City and around the world." said **John Coghlan, Rise Above Plastics Representative for Surfrider Foundation, NYC Chapter**.

Cindy Wheeler, Beacon's Closet, which already has a BYOBag policy said, "BYOBag policy at Beacon's Closet is about positive reinforcement. Our customer base is concerned about the environment as our business model is essentially recycling clothes. There is an active moment where something might click with a customer, when they are participating in our program by paying that extra few cents, and they just might remember to bring their own bag the next time.

"Plastic bags are too frequent visitors in our neighborhoods and at our great national parks like Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City. We need to be free of plastic bag waste not just for the health of wildlife but also for our ability to experience New York City's great natural places. Reducing plastic bag waste in New York City is common sense," said **Cortney Worrall, Northeast Regional Director of the National Parks Conservation Association**.

"Passing this bag bill would not only affect the shopping behavior of millions of New Yorkers, but would send a really important message to every other large city in the world considering such a move," said **Jacquelyn Ottman, Founder, WeHateToWaste.com**.

"Plastic bags do not belong in our oceans or on our beaches! The American Littoral Society urges the Council to pass the bag bill by Earth Day," said the **American Littoral Society**.

"The League of Women Voters of the City of New York urges the Mayor and the City Council to celebrate Earth Day by passing Intro 209. Other cities have learned that paying for takeout bags dramatically cuts down on single use plastic and paper bags, the amount of garbage discarded and collected, and encourages the use of reusable bags. Our city will benefit enormously when people remember to carry reusable bags instead of using disposable bags. There will be less trash going into landfills and we will save millions of tax dollars. There will be less plastic bags polluting our streets, our sewers and our waterways, less bags dangling from tree limbs. Passing this bill will say to future generations that we cared about disposing less and leaving them a cleaner environment. Please pass Intro 209 by Earth Day, said **Mary Ann Sullivan, Environmental Action Director for the League of Women Voters**.

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