



**New York City Council Committee on Health
Oversight – Use of Pesticides on City-Owned Property
Intro. 1524-2019
January 29, 2020
Emily Walker, Director of Outreach & Programs**

Good afternoon. My name is Emily Walker, and I am the Director of Outreach & Programs at New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I want to thank the Committee on Health for letting us to testify at today's hearing.

We are testifying today to express concerns with Intro. 1524, which would institute a ban of all non-biological pesticide use on City-owned property. NY4P believes the legislation as written would be overly restrictive, and would have adverse impacts on management techniques used by NYC Parks, particularly in natural areas and park properties that present safety challenges for manual control of weeds and invasive species. While we agree with the spirit of the legislation as it relates to lessening the use of pesticides in our parks, we do feel that an outright ban on non-biological pesticides will create maintenance challenges that threaten some of our most unique open space assets.

Our parks system includes a variety of unique natural areas, many of which have been sites of targeted restoration in recent years. Work done by the NYC Parks Natural Resources Group has included restoring native plant populations in our natural areas, and managing the spread of invasive species. From a management standpoint, the ability to engage in invasive species removal in some of these locations is dependent on the targeted use of synthetic pesticides, which would be banned by Intro. 1524 in its current form. Even with the historic investment of \$44M in the expense budget for NYC Parks in the FY20 City budget, the agency lacks the manpower that would be needed to effectively manage the control of invasives in these natural areas. Additionally, some of the areas targeted for invasive species removal include fragile native plantings, which would be destroyed or compromised by soil compaction and trampling by maintenance workers. These are very real considerations that we urge the Council to take into account as it weighs this legislation. NYC Parks also has many planted areas that exist in active roadways and medians. Some of these sites present significant safety challenges for maintenance workers, and the use of synthetic pesticides can help NYC Parks crews effectively target problem areas, while minimizing the risk to maintenance and operations crew members working near active roadways.

The agency currently does not use synthetic pesticides in playgrounds or parks that are largely accessible to the public. We agree that synthetic pesticide use should be limited as a management means of last resort, but still understand that there are management needs in our parks system that require their use for effective control of invasive species. We think it is worth noting that the only staff who are legally allowed to apply these pesticides are licensed professional who receive NY State certification – this is an important distinction to make. The NYC Parks crew members who engage in this work are highly trained, and held to a high standard professionally in order to be certified to use these substances in our parks.

It is also worth noting that current management techniques for the control of Dutch Elm disease and the Emerald Ash Borer require the use of synthetic pesticides that would be banned by the legislation. As we seek to protect these invaluable and vulnerable members of our urban canopy, we fear that the legislation would have the unintended consequence of impeding the real progress that has been made in recent years to protect our American Elm and Ash tree populations.

In an ideal scenario, synthetic pesticides would not be needed to help maintain our parks and green spaces, but we don't yet have a full suite of management options on hand that make it feasible for agencies like NYC Parks to effectively manage the invasive species and pests that present an existential crisis to the remaining natural assets that we have. We would point the City Council to the City of Portland, Maine's pesticide ordinance, passed in 2018, which takes an approach of minimizing the use of synthetic pesticides, while also finding a balance of allowing the use of them in certain instances where few other options exist, especially as it relates to controlling plant or insect species officially designated as invasive, and plants that present a physical hazard to City workers, like poison ivy. While we appreciate the Council's intent in making the City and its agencies take a more thoughtful and restrictive approach in their use of synthetic pesticides, we also believe the bill as written leaves little room for important management considerations. We urge the Council to revise the legislation to account for some of these changes.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I'm happy to answer any questions the Council might have.

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For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. www.ny4p.org