



June 6, 2017

Open Letter to Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Members of the New York City Council

Dear Speaker Viverito and Distinguished Members of the Council,

We write as a coalition of ethnic and minority restaurant owners, community and environmental activists and clergy members to urge you to pass Intro 1480 – progressive legislation in the Council that establishes a convenient curbside program to recycle polystyrene foam.

Foam containers are critical to our business model - we could not survive without the clamshells and take-out containers that help us meet the needs of our customers. For many of us, take-out orders are about 40-60 percent of our business. This is true for thousands of African American, Caribbean, Asian and Latino restaurants across New York City.

We buy in bulk – the costs for goods and products are the second largest expense for a restaurant.

A recycling program would allow restaurants to avoid the higher costs of foam alternatives that a ban would force upon restaurant owners. At a time when many restaurants in the City are failing, we need all the financial help we can get.

We're appalled by what we're hearing from the environmental lobby, which is very powerful but does very little for communities of color. When was the last time the National Resource Defense Council tackled

an environmental issue that black and Latino communities care about? The truth is, many of these so-called environmentalists have been silent on matters that we care about the most.

A recent letter penned by Brendan Sexton and Eric Goldstein falsely stated that: “Not a single big city in America is today operating a successful recycling program for dirty polystyrene foam. Not one.” The truth is foam has been recycled for many years, and is currently recycled in hundreds of cities and municipalities, large and small, across the globe – from Riverside, California to Ontario, Canada to Yonkers, New York, and hundreds of communities in between.

A program to recycle 100% of polystyrene foam is much more sensible and beneficial than banning 20% of foam, and is better for the environment. Under the proposed ban, 80% of polystyrene will continue to be landfilled – at a great cost to the City and our environment.

If you want to avoid foam from ending up on our streets, why not toss it in with your bottles and cans to be recycled?

Mr. Sexton and Mr. Goldstein, Facts matter, Science matters. Times have changed since Mr. Sexton was at the Department of Sanitation: for instance, today we have e-mail and the internet, and we also have a recycling industry that takes advantage of high-tech equipment including optical sorters and melt filters that make foam recycling economically viable and environmentally effective. And New York City would benefit greatly by keeping pace with such advances in technology.

Therefore, we, the undersigned, are voicing our strong support for Intro 1480, and urge anyone who cares about the survival of minority restaurants and small business entrepreneurs to get on-board...and pass this bill now!

Signed: