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A Solid Solution to New York's Waste Issues

Sen. Martinez introduces a refuse reduction act that strengthens recycling and doesn't dump on consumers.

ALBANY, N.Y. – To protect both consumers and the environment while addressing New York's growing waste crisis, state Sen. Monica R. Martinez has introduced the [Affordable Waste Reduction Act](#) (AWRA), a producer responsibility program designed to reduce waste, modernize recycling, and shift costs away from households and municipalities.

Modeled after a widely regarded resource management program in Minnesota, the AWRA requires product manufacturers to join and fund a producer responsibility organization (PRO), which will oversee waste reduction, recycling, and reuse initiatives subject to approval by the state's Department of Environmental Conservation. Fees collected from producers will be used to upgrade New York's aging recycling infrastructure, expand access to recycling programs, and support public education efforts to help New Yorkers recycle more effectively.

The proposal shifts the financial burden of waste management from municipalities and consumers to producers, requiring manufacturers to take responsibility for reducing their products' environmental impact. It also incentivizes companies to design packaging that is reusable, recyclable, or compostable and gives producers time to adopt new materials and technology.

Additionally, the legislation includes exemptions for essential medical products such as infant formula and prescription medications, ensuring continued consumer access while prioritizing public health. It

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also establishes performance targets for recycling, composting, and waste reduction, with oversight from a multi-stakeholder advisory board.

“The ability to buy the products people need and want while protecting the environment shouldn’t be an either-or choice, but unfortunately, it’s often framed that way. The Affordable Waste Reduction Act makes it possible to cut waste, modernize recycling, and invest in New York’s economy without burdening already stretched consumers or taking products off the shelves,” Sen. Martinez said. “Holding producers accountable for the post-consumer refuse costs of their products ensures they take responsibility for reducing waste while encouraging innovation in packaging and supporting environmental efforts. This approach strengthens New York’s recycling infrastructure, keeps costs down for consumers, and supports a more sustainable future.”

New York has debated packaging reduction and extended producer responsibility for years, but these previous proposals have largely stalled due to concerns about unrealistic business mandates and higher consumer costs. The AWRA takes a balanced approach, providing a practical framework for waste reduction without increasing prices or restricting access to essential products.

In a [*Long Island Business News*](#) opinion piece, Matthew Cohen, president and CEO of the Long Island Association, a leading nonprofit and nonpartisan business organization, said, “While past legislative efforts have fallen short and its draconian measures would have had disastrous impacts on both businesses and consumers, the Affordable Waste Reduction Act introduced by New York State Senator Monica Martinez offers a commonsense solution. If passed, it would strengthen our recycling infrastructure without burdening residents or hindering the growth of the private sector.”

Waste management, of course, is an issue all too familiar to Long Island and the greater New York City metropolitan area. In 1987, a garbage barge carrying more than 6 million pounds of trash from the town of Islip and New York City set sail for North Carolina, only to be turned away due to health concerns. For nearly two months, the barge was towed more than 6,000 miles in search of a disposal site. The incident is widely credited with helping to launch the modern recycling movement.

Today, Long Island faces another solid waste crisis, as the region’s largest landfill, operated by the Town of Brookhaven, is set to close within the next few years. This will increase Nassau and Suffolk counties'

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dependence on recycling programs as a key solution. Enacting the Affordable Waste Reduction Act will raise desperately needed funds to invest in a stronger and more efficient recycling system, not only for Long Island but for the entire state, reducing reliance on landfills while keeping costs low for New York's residents and consumers.