

*At each of the City Council's stated meetings, council members introduce bills, most of which will never become laws (for the process by which bills become laws, [click here](#)). As a regular feature, Gotham Gazette discusses some of the legislation proposed at each meeting.*

At the February 1st stated meeting, members of the City Council proposed an unusually large amount of legislation. In total, 38 introductions and resolutions were put forward, including a bill that would extend city benefits to domestic partners, resolutions targeting racial slurs and overly thin models, and various acts concerning environmental protection and transportation.

### DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIPS

In the 1990s, city officials passed legislation to give domestic couples many of the same benefits granted to married couples. Critics say that such legislation was incomplete, because it did not simply give domestic partnership the legal standing of marriage, instead creating an incomplete list of benefits that domestic partners were automatically eligible for.

In the case that a city worker dies in the line of duty, for instance, a spouse is automatically granted health benefits that extend beyond the death, but a domestic partner must petition the city to have his or her benefits extended.

Council Speaker Christine Quinn wants to strengthen domestic partnerships by making granting domestic partners all city benefits awarded to spouses with a bill called the Domestic Partners Full Equality Bill ( [Intro 501](#) )

"We're introducing a bill that would make domestic partners fully equal to spouses in the law of the city of New York, to make sure that any right or privilege a spouse gets today or tomorrow or ten years from now a domestic partner will also get," Quinn said. "It's important for us to go back and make that statement."

### TRACKING POLICE GUN USE

With the killing of Sean Bell, an unarmed Queens man killed by undercover police officers, fresh in his mind Council Member Peter Vallone introduced a bill to add another layer of oversight on police firearms. If [Intro516](#) passes, the police department would be required to submit reports to the council on the number of rounds fired by individual police officers. These reports would state the number of officers who used their guns, when they used them, where they used them, and under what circumstances they used them. Shots fired during police training or lawful target practice would not be included in the report.

### CONSERVING CITY WETLANDS

New York City has lost eighty-six percent of its wetlands, according to the office of Councilmember James Gennaro. To protect the small slivers that remain, Gennaro is proposing a protection policy ( [Intro 506](#) ) to conserve, protect, enhance, restore and expand the wetlands of New York City and to standardize the city's approach regarding wetlands management.

“Another million people are expected to move into New York in the next 25 years,” said Peter Washburn, chief of staff for Council Member James Gennaro. “The time is now to take a look at how to decide what policies we should be recommending to the mayor to preserve these wetlands and make sure people don't just see them as undeveloped land.”

Arguing that wetlands serve an important ecological purpose, Gennaro's office wants City Hall to create maps identifying wetland areas and making sure they are protected from future city development.

Gennaro is also proposing the establishment of a task force ( [Intro 505](#) ) to determine how best to split up the responsibility of protecting wetlands between different city agencies.

### **BOATING SAFETY**

With this in mind, Council Member Michael Nelson has proposed two bills that would make sure people are being safe when they take to the city's waterways in boats or jet skis. Both activities have become increasingly common in recent years.

Because city waters also serve as busy commercial ports, Nelson believes it can be dangerous to operate small vessels without proper training. He is introducing a bill ( [Intro 513](#) ) calling for a requirement that anyone using small vessels (kayaks, canoes, rowboats, etc.) complete a boating safety course. The program would address boating safety in high traffic areas and basic instructions on the inland navigation rules. Boating without first completing the course would lead to a \$50 to \$100 ticket on for the first offense.

Nelson introduced another bill ( [Intro514](#) ) to toughen enforcement on speed limits in the water by installing photo-monitoring devices in regulation zones. Once the device observes a vessel breaking the legal speed limit it would take photos and video of the boat. Penalties would include \$50 fines or 90 days in jail.

Hearings on water safety will be held in March, and Nelson hopes to develop regulations on boating before Memorial Day.

### **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

Councilmember Lewis Fidler has introduced a bill ( [Intro 503](#) ) to keep privately run commuter vans from illegally picking up passengers at bus stops, arguing that these vans are taking business away from city-run buses.

The bill would require maps to be posted in every commuter van to display the van's licensed area of service. If passengers get on a commuter van outside its designated area, they would

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by Diego Cupolo  
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be risking a \$50 fine.

Jessica Lappin, meanwhile, has introduced legislation that would make life easier for those who ride the vans regularly.

City law now requires that people who use these commuter vans call ahead and log into the van's rider book every day. Lappin wants to simplify the process by eliminating the need for passengers to call ahead, so they can use the commuter vans freely. ( [Intro 512](#) ).

Several other council members proposed bills that would make special Metrocards available to certain riders.

Councilmember Helen Foster proposed [Res 694](#) asking the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the New York City Department of Education to provide grade school students with additional rides on their Student MetroCards or Supplemental Student MetroCards. Foster also wants the time limits extended to allow students to participate in after-school activities that may run late into the night; as of now the cards can only be used between 5:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m.

Council Member David Weprin proposed a resolution ( [Res 700](#) ), that would request unlimited Metrocards for all non-municipal first responders so they could use the subway to get to the scenes of emergencies.

## **PARKING**

Councilmember Daniel Garodnick wants to take what he sees as the first step towards cutting back on the abuse of free parking placards by municipal employees by requiring the mayor's office to list the number of placards distributed in its Mayor Management Report. ( [Intro 504](#) ).

Councilmember Vincent Gentile introduced a bill ( [Intro 509](#) ) that would require the mayor's

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Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting to notify council members and community boards when a movie shoot will restrict street parking for more than 24 hours in their districts, giving them time to adjust.

### **SKINNY FASHION MODELS**

Councilmember Gale Brewer introduced a resolution ( [Res 682](#) ) calling on the organization that runs fashion week to ensure that its models are not dangerously thin.

The resolution asks the Council of Fashion Designers of America to ban from Fashion Week models whose [Body Mass Indexes](#) are below 18.5 -- the level at which someone is officially underweight. Brewer is also asking the organization to develop a "proactive" education campaign for models, designers and others that would ensure the health of the models involved.

The resolution is based on an agreement between the municipal government of Milan and the industry organization that runs that city's fashion week which bans underweight models. But Shulamit Warren, Brewer's director of legislation, hopes that the resolution will also be seen in the context of City Hall's public health campaigns.

Healthier models, she hopes, will mean healthier New Yorkers.

"Other people do look at models or the clothes they're wearing, and base their own lives on that," she said.

### **THE "N WORD"**

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In observance of Black History Month, Council Member LeRoy Comrie proposed that people censor themselves and do not use the “N” word during the month of February ( [Resolution 693](#) )

“It’s a symbolic resolution calling for individuals and the entertainment industry to self-censor themselves and encourage discussion about the ‘N’ word,” said Rance Huff, director of communication for Comrie’s office.

Comrie argues the “N” word, which often shows up in popular media and hip hop lyrics, should not be accepted as an everyday term.

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