

Winning a Right to the Sidewalks: Street Vendors in New York

Ryan Thomas Devlin

Key Points

- 1 In January 2021, the New York City Council passed Intro 1116, a new law that added 4,000 new street food vending permits, lifting a cap on permits that had been unchanged since 1983.
- 2 This legal change was the result of a confluence of factors, mainly a leftward shift in the local political environment in New York, which proved friendlier to street vendors, and strategic political advocacy work undertaken by street vendors organized through the Street Vendor Project, a member-based vendor advocacy organization in the city.
- 3 Vendors employed four main interlocking strategies in their advocacy efforts: holding protests and actions, deftly utilizing social media, meeting and building relationships with individual politicians, and centering the voice of vendors by empowering them to share their stories of struggle with politicians and the public.

Introduction

“You know, it takes about ten, fifteen years,” former New York City councilmember Phil Reed said with a sigh during a discussion on vending politics back in 2009. “Every ten years or so, somebody comes along and says, let’s fix this thing!” Referring to Intro 621 of 2005, one of many failed attempts at vending law reform in New York, Reed continued: “Ten years, fifteen years... That’s how long it takes for the institutional memory to fade, for people to cycle through, and for new people to come on board and try to change things again.” Reed had been in city government for a long time and his cynicism felt well placed. For decades, before and after 2005, efforts at vending reform in the city followed a familiar script. Momentum would build, rallies would be held, laws would be proposed, hearings would take place at City Hall,



A street vendor in New York City in 2020.
Photo: Street Vendor Project

arguments would be made. But in a cycle as predictable as the seasons, the proposed changes would die on the vine, never even coming up for a vote. Vendors and their advocates would be left hoping that next time, maybe, things would be different.

And then, in 2021, they finally were. On January 28, a new vendor reform bill, Intro 1116, passed a City Council vote. The bill ushered in the first systematic reforms of vending law in nearly four decades, lifting the cap on full-time food vending permits that had been unchanged since 1983 and reorganizing the way vending laws are enforced and managed.

The passage of Intro 1116 marked a sea change in city politics, as vendors, advocates and progressive politicians were finally able to overcome powerful anti-vendor interests, including a well-funded and politically connected real estate lobby, to push reform through. How did this happen? What made Intro 1116 different from Intro 621, or Intro 1303, or Intro 261, or any number of previous attempts?

This Organizing Brief will identify and examine some of the factors that led to a different outcome in 2021, and seeks to draw out broader lessons that can apply to street vendor and informal worker organizations across the globe. It will begin by providing some context,

detailing the history of vending law leading up to 2021, and the problems that those laws caused vendors. It will then focus on some of the main factors that led to change in 2021, including the shifting political landscape of New York, the unanticipated ways the COVID-19 pandemic sharpened the argument for relief for informal workers, and the specific strategies vendors employed to harness and bend the shifting political-economic context into tangible policy change.

Research for this Organizing Brief included analysis of City Council hearing transcripts and city legal documents and a review of coverage in local print media and social media platforms.

Interviews were conducted with current and former leaders, staff and members of the Street Vendor Project (SVP), a member-based organization of street vendors in New York.¹ The organization, which has more than 1,800 active members, was founded in 2001 to advocate for and assist street vendors in New York City. It does street outreach with vendors, organizes collective actions, carries out political and legal advocacy for vendor rights and generally works to raise awareness of street vending issues in the city.

In addition to interviews with members of SVP, interviews were carried out with local

politicians who have worked on vending issues, including former councilmembers Phil Reed and Melissa Mark-Viverito. All interviews were done in May 2021, with the exception of the interview with Reed, which was undertaken in 2009 for a previous research project.

Vending Laws in New York and their Effects, 1983-2021

In 1983, the New York City Council passed Local Law 17, which capped full-time, city-wide food vending permits at 3,000. This was the first permanent cap on vending permits in the city's history and would remain unchanged for nearly 40 years, until the passage of Intro 1116 in 2021. It should be noted that while licences for food vendors are not capped, in order to operate a legal vending business in New York, one must also have a permit for the vending cart or truck. Limiting the number of permits effectively limits the number of legal vending businesses in the city. When Local Law 17 was passed, New York was a city still emerging from the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. To pull the city back from the brink of bankruptcy, city leaders prioritized real estate development and the upgrading of public space, particularly in the central business districts of Manhattan. Business and real estate interests portrayed vendors as disorderly and out of step with plans for urban regeneration. Local Law 17 was

¹ SVP staff and leadership interviewed for this brief include founder and former Director of the Street Vendor Project Sean Basinski, current Director Mohamed Attia, Deputy Director Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez, Legal Director Matthew Shapiro, Women & BIPOC Business Empowerment Organizer Rui Li, and Sonia Perez, a member of the SVP Leadership Board.

therefore part of a broader effort to bring New York's public spaces under control in support of urban redevelopment. The overarching policy approach of the time defined vendors as problems to be mitigated rather than as small businesspeople in need of support.

The cap on food vending permits created several problems for street vendors. Perhaps predictably, an underground market for food vending permits developed, as demand for permits far outstripped supply. The city charges \$200 for a two-year permit, but by 2020, the going rate for a permit on the underground market was between \$20,000 and \$25,000 every two years. Vendors who decide to pay the underground market price are forced to borrow large sums of money and often end up working long hours to turn a profit. Some never get out of debt. For those without access to loans or capital, vending without a permit is the only option.

New York is home to as many as 20,000 informal, unpermitted vendors. Many of the city's informal food vendors are women from Latin America who sell fruit, churros or tamales from shopping carts or other improvised stands. These women often turn to vending because it offers flexibility and a level of independence. But vending without a permit is a difficult job. As Sonia Perez, a vendor in Brooklyn and member of the SVP leadership board, said:

“Nothing has been easy. Street vendors have always had many obstacles, especially if we are women. People discriminate against us a lot, they attack us for being women. Sometimes people yell at us on the street, they insult us: ‘You shouldn’t be working here, you have to be working at home, you have nothing to do on the street.’”

Vendors without permits risk arrest and confiscation of merchandise by the New York Police Department (NYPD). “I have seen so much evil from the city towards us,” said Perez. “I say evil because it is not fair when you try to raise your family and prepare things at home to go to sell on the street, and in less time than it takes to put up your cart the police arrive and throw away all your sales for the day.” In addition to arrest and merchandise confiscation, for vendors without legal immigration status being arrested brings the risk of deportation. Particularly during the Trump administration, federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents would routinely skulk outside city jails and police precincts in search of targets.

All of this—the razor-thin profit margins, the debt incurred to pay the underground price for permits, the constant threat of tickets, fines or confiscation of merchandise, the spectre of arrest or deportation—enmeshes vendors in a web of uncertainty. This uncertainty in turn makes vendors easy targets for bullying and intimidation from a variety of

actors. Even vendors who have permits are often intimidated away from corners where they are legally allowed to vend by threats and intimidating tactics levied by building security guards, store managers or building owners. So, while a permit is not a cure-all, it does provide vendors with a sense of security and legitimacy. As Rui Li, the Street Vendor Project's Women & BIPOC Business Empowerment Organizer, said:

“Women disproportionately don’t have access to permits, and because of the unstable nature of their job, their livelihood and income could be taken away at any minute. So, I think for them it’s reassuring to have something that they can present, like, this is my business. I am allowed to be here, I have a right to be here.”

The Leftward Shift of Local Politics in New York and its Effects on Vending Policy

Legal complexity surrounding the regulations and the political risk associated with making changes kept vendor policy in New York at a stalemate for decades. Many local politicians, eager to seem friendly to immigrants but also loath to upset the real estate lobby, simply avoided the issue. And for the most part, powerful anti-vending interests were satisfied with this. Despite the fact that nearly everyone could agree that vending laws were suboptimal, the real estate interests organized

through Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)² worked to delay change, usually leaning on powerful politicians to put off or block votes on vendor reform. As one BID manager said in an interview:

“I know how [vending] works in [my BID], I have it under control. I don’t know what a better or new solution would look like, and you have to be careful when changing laws, because you don’t know how it will turn out. For me, the devil I know is better than the devil I don’t.”

By the early 2010s, however, the political tides of New York were shifting left. The real estate lobby was losing some of its clout and new progressive politicians were bringing the needs of low-income immigrants and people of colour to the forefront of the legislative discussion. The victory on Intro 1116 owes much to this changing context, but is also a story of street vendors’ persistence and political savvy. They were able to ride the progressive wave ushered in during the 2010s to push changes through the legislative process. It is also a story of vendors working through crisis and bending it to progressive ends. The inequalities exposed by COVID-19 and the horrors of

over-policing in communities of colour brought to the forefront following the murder of George Floyd³ both resonated with vendors’ demands for social justice, fairness and safety and helped to add gravity and immediacy to the push for more permits. This section will discuss some of these broader shifts and detail how street vendors and their advocates took advantage of these broader changes to win a tangible legislative victory.

The election of 2013 marked a major change in the local political landscape of New York. For 12 years, mayor Michael Bloomberg had presided over a pro-development consensus in the city, with Bloomberg himself claiming that New York should be thought of as a “luxury product”.⁴ In 2013, voters signalled their dissatisfaction with growing inequality. Bill De Blasio won the race for mayor by emphasizing a need to reconcile a socio-economic environment in New York that had become like “a tale of two cities”. The City Council also experienced a leftward shift, as Melissa Mark-Viverito, a progressive and staunch advocate for vendor rights, was elected as City Council Speaker with the power to drive and direct the agenda of the

legislative body. Sean Basinski, former director of the Street Vendor Project, said:

“I remember very well when Melissa got elected Speaker. And it was like, alright! Great! Now is our chance to do it! She had been probably our closest supporter so what more could you want? It seemed like it was, you know, written into history, this was going to be perfect.”

Mohamed Attia, current director of SVP remembered:

“De Blasio sounded great and Melissa, I mean, c’mon! Number one street vendor supporter! So when that happened we felt now was the time to start the lift the caps campaign because we have the Speaker, and the Mayor seemed good, so let’s do it.”

Unfortunately, even with new, friendlier politicians in positions of power, vendors saw the same script starting to unfold. A bill to lift caps on permits, Intro 1303, was proposed in October 2016. As the bill wound its way through the legislative process without progress, vendors became more and more concerned. “It was a little bit nerve wracking

² Business Improvement Districts are common across the United States. In BIDs, property owners in a specific geographic area organize and fund a quasi-governmental agency which works to supplement city services like street cleaning, public space programming, beautification and marketing. Through lobbying and political activity, BIDs also serve as an advocacy arm of the real estate industry in New York.

³ In May 2020, George Floyd, an unarmed black man, was killed by Derek Chauvin, a white Minneapolis police officer. Footage of the murder sparked protests across the United States and in political circles it sparked what has been termed a “racial reckoning”, leading to increased focus on the effects and persistence of racism. Many formerly moderate politicians tacked to the left during this period, to demonstrate solidarity with protestors and left-wing movements/activists.

⁴ Cardwell, Diane. 2003. “Mayor says New York is Worth the Cost.” *New York Times*, 8 January.

that it was taking so long, but we thought they would figure something out,” said Basinski. Mohamed Attia recalled:

“There was a lot of back and forth, a lot of back and forth with the Administration and at some point, I remember in summer 2017 things were so quiet. We didn’t hear from the Administration, we didn’t hear from the Council. We had been pushing really hard, like ‘c’mon people! What’s going on here?”

What was going on was that Mayor Bill De Blasio, who in his years as mayor has disappointed nearly every progressive constituency he made promises to, ultimately bowed to the real estate industry. Matt Shapiro, SVP Legal Director, said:

“It fell apart in the span of a few weeks. I have a feeling that the BIDs and other property owners were calling up the mayor’s office. Somebody got to De Blasio because De Blasio’s folks were calling council members telling them to not vote for the bill. To drop their support for the bill.”

Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, the champion of the bill, was clear about what happened, laying the blame squarely on the mayor. “My mistake was I counted too much on the Mayor, Bill De Blasio. But the Mayor wasn’t interested. His team was putting up too many obstacles for us.” In the end, like so many vendor reform bills before it, Intro 1303 failed to even come



Vendors on the steps of City Hall in 2019 advocating for New York City Council to pass Intro 1116. Photo: Sarah Reed

up for a vote, dying in committee with the end of the council session in December 2017.

But the disheartening loss on Intro 1303 is a critical part of the broader story that ultimately ended with the success of Intro 1116. After the bill failed in 2017, vendors were upset but resilient. As Sonia Perez said:

“We felt betrayed because we had lobbied with so many politicians, met with council members, assembly members, and in the end they turned their backs on us. But I said that we were not going to give up, that we should start again and express with more force the points on which they failed us. We needed to demand our rights as workers.”

All the effort, organizing, and relationship building with politicians that went into Intro 1303 was not for naught. Melissa Mark-Viverito said:

“The groundwork was laid, and even though Intro 1303 didn’t pass, things were set to pass the bill to the next council. I handed the ball to [Councilmembers] Margaret Chin and Carlos Menchaca, who took up the cause. I asked them to please see this through, because it was important to me.”

Turning Promises into Action: Organizing for Victory on Intro 1116

After the failure of Intro 1303, vendors went back to work, organizing and advocating for Intro 1116. They had a reliable sponsor in Councilmember Chin, but they still needed to drum up support among other councilmembers and the public. Vendors did their part, laying out a strategic plan and using the leverage of the political moment to sway individual politicians and the public towards their cause. To do this, street vendors followed four main strategies:

- Protests and public actions that were targeted at specific politicians, using iconic backdrops such as Times Square or the Brooklyn Bridge.
- Social media campaigns that built public support for vendors and pressured politicians.
- Building collaborative and positive working relationships with key politicians that solidified alliances.
- Putting the stories of individual vendors at the forefront of organizing and advocacy, in order to personalize and humanize the struggle.

All of this organizing was made more difficult when COVID-19 hit New York in March 2020.⁵ Shelter-in-place orders and social distancing mandates forced vendors to adjust their strategies, but also helped expose deep inequalities and strengthened the case for change. As Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez, deputy director of SVP said:

“Vendors were considered essential workers and they put their bodies on the line, they were on the front lines of the pandemic and were not receiving any relief. We were able to unpack that down to Intro 1116, to present it as a specific policy change that could help. Exclusion is a government failure. Leaving people without a social safety net is a government failure. Being able to highlight that was critical, saying here’s one way that small businesses could actually have relief, if they had the appropriate vending permits.”

Protests

Despite the pandemic, vendors took to the streets, holding protests and rallies in the districts of councilmembers who were on the fence about supporting the bill. In August 2020, vendors held their first in-person protest since the pandemic began. The protest took place in Times Square, in the heart of Corey Johnson’s council district. Johnson succeeded Melissa Mark-Viverito as Council Speaker.

⁵ For more on how COVID-19 affected street vendors in New York, see WIEGO and Street Vendor Project (2021), available at https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO_FactSheet_NYC_SVP_web.pdf.

Unlike Mark-Viverito, Johnson was not a reliable supporter of vendors. As the summer of 2020 wore on, Johnson had still not signalled that he would allow Intro 1116 to come up for a vote. The protest in Times Square, which drew large numbers and favourable press coverage, turned up the pressure on Johnson. A month later, vendors held their second targeted protest at City Hall, calling on the Mayor to support the bill. Like Johnson, De Blasio had been relatively silent on the issue, not signalling support but also not explicitly opposing the measure. Vendors felt that both Johnson and De Blasio could move to their side with enough public pressure, and the protests were part of that strategy.

Later in September, street vendors culminated their public actions with their largest and most visible protest—a march across the Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall. This protest was aimed at getting more public attention and continuing the pressure on politicians who remained on the fence. According to Kaufman-Gutierrez, the Brooklyn Bridge march was powerful.

“We got a ton of press on it which was really great. And frankly we put the city to shame through the press. Because that’s one of the only ways that they’ll listen.”

Ultimately, the protests paid dividends. Corey Johnson eventually signalled his support and agreed to bring the bill up for a vote. Mayor De Blasio, while still tepid, also

signalled that he would not block or veto a bill if it passed. Despite the challenges and dangers posed by the pandemic, vendors used limited and targeted protests to great effect. Masked and socially distant, they showed their determination and communicated their needs in a way that garnered attention from politicians and the public alike.

Using Social Media

In addition to protests, vendors applied pressure through the use of social media, an even more critical strategy given the lack of opportunities for in-person interaction with politicians during the pandemic. “Twitter storms are really effective because it’s about beating the drum beat so that it’s always present, so that people are always talking about vending, so that it never leaves the politicians’ minds,” said Kaufman-Gutierrez, who coordinates SVP’s social media presence. But social media was not just for getting politicians’ attention, it helped build a critical mass of support among everyday New Yorkers, particularly young progressives who are at the leading edge of the leftward turn in the city’s politics. Kaufman-Gutierrez said:

“Instagram was really good for building up the public image of street vending and vendors themselves and sharing stories of vendors. We gained like 6,000, 7,000 followers over the last few months. So that’s been huge in terms of our pull. A lot of young influencers

really like street vendors! And in New York, everybody posts ‘protect street vendors.’”

This collective support for vendors on social media has remained fierce; even months after 1116 passed, an anti-vendor tweet from mayoral candidate Andrew Yang prompted a deluge of angry rebukes in support of vendors, causing Yang to apologize.

Building Relationships

Strategies like protests and Twitter storms are adversarial in nature. They seek to influence political decisions through pressure. But vendors and their advocates knew that building friendships and alliances with politicians was just as important. For example, they worked with Bronx councilmember Vanessa Gibson distributing food during the height of the pandemic. “We saw her every week for six weeks and did food distribution, got to know her team and she became a really powerful supporter,” said Kaufman-Gutierrez. The Street Vendor Project campaigned for politicians who signalled support on vending issues and worked with politicians to help solve problems. “We maintain those relationships with politicians,” said Kaufman-Gutierrez, “like if one councilmember calls us and is like, there’s a problem with a vendor in my district, can you help out, we need to go.” Speaking of SVP’s relationship with Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Director Mohamed Attia related:

“Every time she hears an issue with the street vendors in her neighbourhood she reaches out to me and she’s like, ‘hey Mohamed, I received some complaints about such and such vendor in such and such place, can you help here?’ And then I just run the next day or whenever I get a chance, to talk to the vendors and try to address the problem.”

“So it’s not just asking for things,” added Kaufmann-Gutierrez, “it’s also appreciating the politicians and supporting them on social media and coming out in person to things.”

Sharing Personal Stories

In nearly all of the actions mentioned above, an important component was sharing vendors’ stories and making sure that individual street vendors were at the forefront of the discussion. Mohamed Attia said:

“I always believed that sharing the personal stories are effective anywhere. When we meet groups and people and elected officials, we always amplify the vendors’ stories and get our members to be leading the conversation with their stories, with their experiences, sharing what they deal with, sharing how the vending system impacts their livelihoods and sharing how their life is right now with the status quo and how it will be changed dramatically if the vending system was changed.”

“We protested in front of their offices so that they would listen to us,” said Sonia Perez. “Let

them listen to our stories, as the people who are experiencing what’s happening, what one goes through working outside on the street.” The personal engagement paid off, according to Mark-Viverito:

“SVP really stepped into this by making sure their organizing was centred on vendors. They empowered vendors, they humanized them by letting them tell their stories. They made the argument that the work vendors did was as valuable, as dignified as restaurants or BIDs... For politicians, supporting street vendors became a way to show you were on the side of excluded people of colour. How could you not support women, mothers, who are out there trying to make a living and support their families? The politicians who didn’t support vendors looked increasingly out of touch.”

Passing Intro 1116 into Law

This work, persistence and strategic alliance building ultimately paid off. Councilmember Margaret Chin was able to shepherd Intro 1116 through the legislative process. After holding rallies in his district and targeting him with Twitter storms and phone banking, vendors were able to convince the Speaker, Corey Johnson, who had not been a strong supporter of vendors, to bring the bill up for a full council vote. And finally, on January 28, 2021, vendors and their allies got Intro 1116 across the finish line, as it comfortably passed a full council vote. Watching the bill pass over Zoom, from multiple computer and phone screens across

the city, was perhaps less climactic than being together in council chambers at City Hall, but for the vendors and advocates who worked on the campaign it was a tremendously fulfilling victory nonetheless. For the first time in nearly 40 years, the cap on full-time food vending permits was lifted, giving more vendors a right to the city’s sidewalks and public spaces. “The street belongs to those who work it,” said Perez, “or as a Mexican adage says, the land belongs to those who work it. We work on the street, we belong in that space.” With the cap on permits lifted, more vendors can now say that with more certainty.

The Effects of Increase in the Number of Food Vending Licences and Next Steps in Advocacy

Intro 1116 addresses longstanding problems with the vending system in New York. Most importantly, it lifts the cap on food vending permits. Every year between 2022 and 2032, 400 new permits, known as “supervisory licences”, will be issued by the city, for a total of 4,000 new vending permits over 10 years. While there were about 5,000 food vending permits available prior to the passage of Intro 1116, only 3,000 allowed vending year round anywhere in the city (see chart 1). The rest had various limitations on things like products sold, location of business or season. Intro 1116 therefore effectively more than doubles

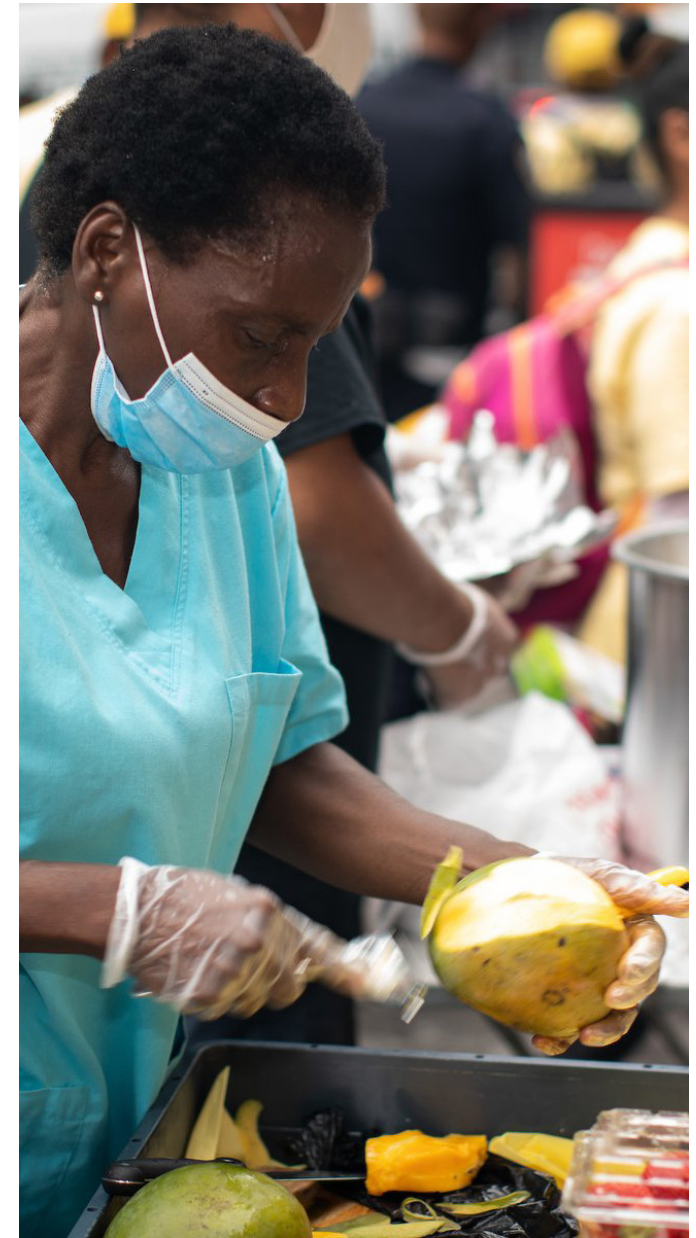
the number of full-time city wide food vending permits.

Simply by increasing the supply of permits, Intro 1116 should put a dent in the underground market. But a separate provision in the new law seeks to address the underground market more directly. The lack of any previous provision requiring permit holders to actually operate vending businesses is the legal loophole that enables the formation of an underground market. For new permits issued under Intro 1116, the person issued the permit must be present at the vending operation. This ensures that the new permits will be used by the permit holder and not rented out.

Intro 1116 also addresses the issue of vending management in the city. For decades, street vending in New York was a bureaucratic labyrinth. About half a dozen different city agencies had some sort of responsibility for vending oversight and enforcement. Often agency rules and policies contradicted one another. Vending rules and regulations were difficult to follow and nearly impossible to enforce with any sort of consistency. To address this problem, and to quell worries of anti-vending interests that adding more vendors would just add to the challenge of enforcement and regulation, Intro 1116 amends the city charter to create an entirely new Office of Vendor Enforcement and a Vendor Advisory Board.

The idea of moving the management of vending from the tangled and overlapping jurisdiction of multiple city agencies into one centralized office had been floated a number of times since 1983, but was never put in place. The new Office of Vendor Enforcement will include a dedicated enforcement unit of specially trained inspectors. For vendors, this new unit should improve things on the street. Previously, with the NYPD holding primary responsibility for enforcement of vending regulations, vendors were subject to intimidation, threats of arrest, and often received spurious tickets from police officers with little knowledge of vending law. Vendors have long demanded consistency in vending enforcement, arguing that arbitrary and unpredictable enforcement of vending laws severely inhibits their ability to make a living on the street. The hope is that the new Office of Vendor Enforcement, overseen by a Vendor Advisory Board that includes vendors as stakeholders, should lead to more consistent and fair enforcement of vending laws.

While Intro 1116 marks an important step in the right direction for vendors, it is not a cure all. First, it only addresses food vending. Licences for vendors of non-food items are still capped at 853, a number that has remained unchanged since 1979—even longer than the food vending permit cap. For food vendors, there will be challenges to formalizing their businesses once they receive permits. Many vendors currently selling food without permits



*A woman prepares fresh fruit to sell in New York City, where the cap on food vending permits has been lifted.
Photo: Street Vendor Project*

sell home-cooked goods out of improvised vending units. Once they obtain a permit, these vendors will be required to prepare their food in a health-department-approved facility and must sell their goods from a stainless steel vending cart approved by the health department. This will add significant costs to their business; costs that they hope to recoup with more stability and security. But upgrading and formalization will nevertheless be a double-edged sword.

For all these reasons, the work does not finish with Intro 1116. The window opened by the rise of left-wing politics in New York may not stay open forever. As Melissa Mark-Viverito mentioned:

“There is always the worry that the pendulum starts swinging back the other way. The two leading candidates for mayor are more moderate. How will the next administration treat the vendor issue? Will they go back to catering to BIDs? This is why getting things done at the state level is important.”

Mark-Viverito’s comment alludes to work currently underway beyond New York City, at the New York State level: proposed legislation that would legalize all street vending in the State of New York and limit the ability of municipalities like New York City to put caps on licences or permits. This follows a model

already undertaken by vendor advocates in the State of California.⁶ Working with progressive New York State politicians like State Senator Jessica Ramos and State Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas, vendors hope to move this legislation through the state legislature in Albany in the coming year. Ramos and González-Rojas, both children of immigrants, represent neighbourhoods where the Street Vendor Project has strong organizing roots, and are strong supporters of the vendors’ cause.

The next fight will no doubt be as challenging as the last one, but vendors are optimistic. According to Sonia Perez:

“As I tell my fellow vendors, we must not give up. Intro 1116 is the first step and we can achieve the next step by educating ourselves and demanding respectfully and clearly what we need to make a living on the street.”

Chart 1: Breakdown of Food-Vending Permits			TOTAL
Full Year, City-Wide Permits	3,000		3,000
Full Year, Bronx Only	50		3,050
Full Year, Brooklyn Only	50		3,100
Full Year, Queens Only	50		3,150
Full Year, Staten Island Only	50		3,200
Full Year, City-Wide Preferential (Veterans)	100		3,300
Full Year, Place Specific, Fruit/Veg Only	1,000		4,300
Bronx (350)			
Brooklyn (350)			
Manhattan (150)			
Queens (100)			
Staten Island (50)			
Temporary (Apr-Oct), City Wide	1,000		5,300
Full Year, City-Wide Permits added by Intro 1116	4,000		9,300

⁶ For more information on the California State Legislation (SB-946) see: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB946



A vendor in New York City, where a new law has added 4,000 new street food vending permits. Photo: Street Vendor Project

WIEGO Organizing Briefs contain information on organizing strategies and practices in the informal economy. This series aims to support organizing efforts and disseminate better practices.

WIEGO Organizing Briefs are part of the WIEGO Publication Series.
See www.wiego.org/wiego-publication-series.

About the Author

Ryan Thomas Devlin is a professor of Urban Planning in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University and a Visiting Professor in the Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment at the Pratt Institute. His research focuses on street vending and informal urbanism in cities of the Global North. rtd2101@columbia.edu

Acknowledgements

This paper would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of members and staff of the Street Vendor Project, who took time out of their busy schedules to be interviewed and share their experience of organizing around Intro 1116. Additionally, Juan Sebastian Moreno carried out and translated Spanish language interviews, and was a critical member of the research team. Thanks also to Sarah Orleans Reed, Caroline Skinner, Jenna Harvey and Pilar Balbuena for their comments and feedback on initial drafts.

W I E G O

Women in Informal Employment:
Globalizing and Organizing

About WIEGO

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection and voice. WIEGO promotes change by improving statistics and expanding knowledge on the informal economy, building networks and capacity among informal worker organizations and, jointly with the networks and organizations, influencing local, national and international policies.

Visit www.wiego.org.
