

Opinion

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GOVERNMENT

Westchester board faced down mob by voting to regulate garbage haulers

Acting unanimously, members of the Westchester Board of Legislators have given their county the mechanism to regulate and clean up the mob-dominated garbage industry that has controlled private collection for the past half-century or more.

In a historic vote Monday night, the board acted both wisely and bravely in representing the interests of municipal, commercial and residential customers as well as independent garbage companies, unstained by organized crime, that want to operate in a competitive market.

This was probably the most important vote taken by the board in the two-year session that will end this December. If estimates are correct, garbage-collection fees will fall as the law is implemented.

The new trash-hauler licensing law will empower a county commission to apply strict standards to protect municipalities, county government and private customers. The law, modeled after a successful one in New York City that is said to have lowered garbage-collection bills by 57 percent, is intended not only to screen out companies and officials with dirty backgrounds, but rid contracts of abusive terms that entrap customers.

We commend, in particular, the efforts by county Legislator Thomas Abinanti, D-Greenburgh, and his task force that authored the legislation. Their investigation confirmed what was generally known, that the stifling of competition was driving up costs

by dividing the county into territories controlled by individual companies.

When an obstacle recently arose that threatened to delay passage and implementation of a new law, Abinanti ironed out a timetable with County Executive Andrew Spano's administration that was satisfactory to both branches of government. We now urge Spano, who has supported such legislation, to immediately start the search for an executive director of solid waste licensing. Haulers, under the regulation, will have to apply for a license by March, 15, 2000. Fees from those licenses are designed to cover costs of implementing the regulations.

Also to be commended are those customers, particularly from industry, who stepped forward and gave the garbage task force the facts and figures needed to bolster the case for regulation. That was no easy task, considering how the mob-dominated companies have controlled so long with strong-armed tactics and other forms of intimidation.

They were emboldened, we believe, by the conviction and jailing of Thomas Milo and others on fraud charges, and the fining of Milo's companies Suburban Carting Co. and Trottown Transfer Inc. on charges they conspired with other carters to control the industry. Arrests, indictments and convictions were the result of an intensive investigation by the U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of New York and other branches of federal government.