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Council Member Targets Law Transforming City Newsstands Into Kiosks

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A Queens lawmaker plans to introduce a bill tomorrow to overturn a law that would transform the city's 291 newsstands into uniform kiosks — the second challenge to the plan in as many months.

Council Member Hiram Monserrate said the measure is needed because he believes lawmakers were misled about the impact the kiosk plan would have on newsstands operators when they gave it the green light last year.

The New York City Newsstand Operators Association filed suit last month to block the law, claiming that upward of 67 newsstands would be permanently

closed or forced to relocate. City officials insist only 10 or 11 would be affected.

"It is clear that the information we were given before the original vote was incomplete," said Mr. Monserrate, one of three lawmakers to oppose the plan. "Now that it is clear more small-business owners will be affected than originally stated, we have no choice but to repeal this law."

Transforming the city's newsstands is part of a larger "street furniture" project known as Local Law 64 that includes revamping 3,500 bus shelters and creating 20 pay toilets. Mr. Monserrate's measure would only affect the newsstands.

Under the law, endorsed by the

Bloomberg administration and widely supported in the council, a private franchisee would assume ownership of individual newsstands and replace them with identical kiosks at a cost of about \$40,000 each.

In return for the exclusive advertising rights on the structures, the franchisee would pay the city an estimated \$400 million over the next 20 years.

Mayoral spokesman Jordan Barowitz said it would be highly unusual for the council to reconsider a law it overwhelmingly supported.

The intention of Local Law 64, which was passed in October, was to improve the appearance of newsstands and other street furniture on city sidewalks

and to make them more accessible to disabled pedestrians.

Barring an injunction from the legal challenge by newsstand operators, the city is slated to be reviewing bids from prospective franchisees on September 14. That date had been pushed back from August 5.

Robert Bookman, a lawyer for the newsstand operators, welcomed the new legislation, saying the council had a responsibility to right a wrong.

"The question council members are asking themselves is, 'Would I have voted for Local Law 64 had I known the truth?'" Mr. Bookman said. "I think the answer for any council member who has spent time on this is no."