

Date: July 7, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact: Catherine Cioffi
Communications Director**

Office - (914) 995-2932

Cell- (914) 954 -5579

CCioffi@westchestergov.com

County’s Consumer Protection Department Clarifies “Covid-19 Fees” At Local Businesses

(White Plains, NY) – The Westchester County Consumer Protection Department has been notified that retail businesses in our County have been adding COVID-19 related fees to bills, so the Department believes it’s important to clarify the County law in this area for both businesses and consumers.

County Executive George Latimer said: “We have an entire department here in Westchester dedicated to making sure you aren’t getting ripped off. I am proud of the work our Consumer Protection team does and particularly appreciate their work during this time of great uncertainty as the County moves towards reopening.”

Pursuant to the Westchester Consumer Protection Code, businesses can add these fees, but consumers must be clearly notified about the fees at the point at the point of sale while they are involved in making a decision during a consumer transaction, not at the last minute when they get the bill. It is a violation of the consumer protection code: “To sell or offer for sale any consumer goods or services at a greater price than the price displayed or advertised therefor.”

Consumer Protection Department Director Jim Maisano stated: “We request that business should post signage in retail stores that are clearly visible to consumers upon their entrance into store and while shopping or ordering. If a retailer is passing along these fees, consumers have the right to know about those fees and costs before making their purchases. These fees should be set forth on price lists at retail stores and on menus at restaurants.

Consumers need to know that there are no “COVID-19” or “Pandemic” tax or fees that has been placed on goods and services, so these fees are being added by the stores and restaurants on their

own. Further, Consumers should never be charged a price above posted prices (outside of sales tax). If there is two tier pricing (Cash vs. Credit), both prices must be clearly posted.

If consumers believe they were not provided adequate notice of these fees, they can file a complaint on the Consumer Protection Department's webpage: <https://consumer.westchestergov.com> or call the Department at 914-995-2155 with questions.

About Westchester County

Westchester County, located in the heart of the historic Hudson Valley, covers 500 square miles and has a population of just under a million. Originally home to Native Americans, who were members of the Lenape tribe, it is today a rich mix of many cultures and landscapes. The County is a blend of bustling cities, quaint villages and picturesque towns as well as open spaces and a network of beautiful parks. Westchester is made up of 6 cities, 19 towns and 20 villages. Westchester County is known for top-notch public schools, and a high quality of life. The County is also an intellectual capital, boasting a highly educated workforce, competitive colleges and universities, Fortune 500 companies, world changing non-profits, and cutting-edge research centers. Westchester is led by County Executive George Latimer, who took office in January 2018 as the ninth County Executive. Using inclusion and openness as a foreground, Latimer is fighting to make Westchester a destination for all people to live, work and enjoy. Learn more about Westchester County by visiting www.westchestergov.com