

What Jane Fonda Really Thinks of New York's Fashion Act

By Jasmin Malik Chua



Jane Fonda

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The past year has brought increased scrutiny throughout the fashion supply chain, specifically within the textile industry. Join our webinar “Brace for Impact: Addressing Impact in Your Supply Network & Product” March 8 to learn what to do.

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A groundbreaking [New York](#) bill that seeks to hold major fashion companies accountable for their

environmental and social impacts has attracted the endorsement of some of Hollywood's glitterati, including Jane Fonda, Leonardo DiCaprio, Rosario Dawson, Shailene Woodley and Cameron Diaz.

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"As a climate activist, I want to support the efforts to push major apparel and footwear brands to do what is needed to bring fashion in line with what climate science is saying: We must stop polluting the environment, cutting down forests, despoiling our oceans and creating forever waste," Fonda said in a statement. "Right now, the fashion industry has a larger carbon footprint than France, Germany and the U.K. combined and is on course to take up more than one-quarter of the carbon budget by 2050. This is untenable and yet the industry faces no regulations and is free to exploit the least protected regions of the world."

Sponsored by State Senator Alessandra Biaggi and Assemblywoman Anna R. Kelles, the [Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act](#), also known as Assembly Bill A8352, will require brands and retailers that make at least \$100 million in revenue and conduct business in New York to divulge their environmental and social impacts and establish binding science-based targets to ensure that they're reducing their greenhouse-gas emissions in line with the Paris Agreement's goal of keeping temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. They will also have to map at least half of their [supply chain](#), disclose the annual volume of material produced and reveal the median pay of their supply-chain workers as measured against local minimum and living wages.

"Unlike many other industries that are already regulated, the fashion industry has for too long operated in a black box," Biaggi said at a rally in Manhattan during New York Fashion Week earlier this month. "New York State is a fashion capital of the world, if not the fashion capital of the world. New York State has a moral obligation to lead the way, not just for the state of New York, but also as a model for other states across the country because of a lack of federal regulation and legislation. It means that the states have an urgency to act."

Though the bill was introduced last month, the work behind it has been more than a year in the making, Biaggi said. A seed was "planted" in her mind even earlier, back when she was learning about fashion's regulatory Wild West as a student at the Fordham University School of Law over a decade ago.



New York State Assemblywoman Jessica González-Rojas speaks at a rally for the [Fashion Act](#) held in Manhattan on Feb. 12, 2022.

“We are in a climate crisis—we absolutely cannot wait,” Biaggi said, noting that the fashion industry is responsible for between 4 percent to 8.6 percent of the world’s carbon emissions. “In addition, we cannot leave out the critical infrastructure of the industry—the people who make it run. [We have to] make sure that they are treated with dignity, that they are paid a living wage and they can actually provide for their families at a time when we know that income inequality is on the rise. But this bill is not a punishment. This bill is an invitation to the fashion industry to join us and be a leader for other industries in making sure that we are not only leading on the climate crisis but that we are charging the way.”

Speaking at the same rally, Maxine Bédar, director of the New Standard Institute, one of the Fashion Act’s co-sponsors, raised the memory of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, which killed 146 garment workers, most of them young women, at the current site of New York University’s Brown Building in Greenwich Village.

“A special state commission was set up to review conditions not just in the building industry, but across a wide range of industries, including the chemical industry,” she said. “It was the most significant effort yet undertaken by any state. The commission resulted in legislation that granted workers long-denied rights such as worker safety standards that became law in the state of New York,

setting an example for the rest of the country. The ascension of these working-class voices laid the groundwork for even more sweeping broad forms, [paving the way for] the New Deal in the wake of the Depression.”

More than a century later, industry campaigners are fighting the same battles, even if the battlegrounds have shifted. “Instead of a fashion industry that was at the time by far the biggest employer in New York, we now find an industry spread across the globe exploiting cheap labor and environmental protection whenever they can find,” Bédard said. “And we have a highly skilled, vibrant, though hollowed-out local industry that needs support and a level playing field where local companies are not made to compete with the lowest global standard.”

The Fashion Act has attracted widespread praise, but also criticism, both from parties that say it’s trying to do too much and those who insist it doesn’t go far enough. Two separate coalitions of businesses and civil society groups, one focusing on [human rights](#) and the other on [textile reuse](#), have dispatched letters to the bill’s authors over the past few weeks requesting amendments that they say will improve the measure’s effectiveness before it can be called to a vote in late spring. Meanwhile, brands and retailers are already sweating over the legislation’s implications for their businesses.

“While everyone supports the intent [of the bill], the practical application and what it could actually require fashion companies is making a lot of you and me nervous,” Angela Santos, a partner who leads [ArentFox Schiff](#)’s task force on forced-labor risks in the supply chain, said at a webinar last week. “It imposes a heavy burden on fashion companies to know and be responsible for their entire supply chain. This is challenging in an industry that has little visibility beyond the first or second tier, which many of you have seen firsthand with the forced labor detentions that many of you have experienced. Companies are also concerned that they will need to divulge trade secrets and name confidential suppliers due to the supply chain mapping requirements. On the environmental front, some of the impacts are difficult to quantify, particularly when a fashion company does not have visibility or control over its suppliers.”



The Fashion Act rally gathered sustainability champions on Feb. 12, 2022 in Manhattan.

Businesses have also balked at the Fashion Act's so-called "private right to action" provision, which allows private citizens to compel compliance, as well as the potential reputational harm of publishing shortcomings in their supply chains. "Many companies are really actually worried that this act is going to put them out of business," Santos said. "We've heard that this bill will or will not pass by this spring. So we'll see. We're watching this closely."

Biaggi and Kelles previously told Sourcing Journal that they'll be incorporating the concerns they've heard into a final bill so that it can have the "greatest positive impact" on the industry.

"We share a common goal of ensuring that the Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act drives the most positive change for the people most impacted by the fashion industry," Biaggi said. "Since announcing this bill, we are grateful for the attention and input we have received from all stakeholders. The success of this legislation is dependent on a wide coalition of support, and we look forward to meeting with as many stakeholders as we can to advance the strongest piece of legislation that can be passed in New York."

Bédard, advocating for the bill's passage, told rally attendees that the industry cannot afford to wait "for another season."

“While some parts of the sector are trying to make serious change, the other part of the industry spews chemicals into rivers, greenhouse gases in our atmosphere and microplastics in our ocean, all while relying on exploited hidden human labor,” she said. “We ask, we urge, we plead with our representatives to stand up to the part of the industry that does not look bravely to the future that instead relies on the exploitation of land and people for continuous growth for growth’s sake, to set a common floor for doing business and get the Fashion Act passed today.”

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