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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. The City is preparing for a major tropical storm, which is set to hit the five boroughs tomorrow with strong winds and heavy rain. Emergency Management crews have been putting up barricades and sandbags in flood prone areas, including Lower Manhattan. Joining me now to talk about that and much more from the Blue Room inside City Hall is Mayor de Blasio. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good evening Errol. How are you doing?

**Louis:** I'm just fine, thanks. I know you're busy getting ready for this storm. Let me raise a question that I know you heard some version of earlier today, which is Lower Manhattan, very important area. Very flood prone area, as we've learned the hard way. But that's true of the East Shore of Staten Island, or the Rockaways, Coney Island, and a number of other areas, what steps are being taken to protect those areas?

**Mayor:** So, this really is a matter of the specific storm, Errol, and the projections that we're getting from the National Weather Service, the specific approach that Emergency Management takes based on that information, to then model what the impact would be. And that says that the specific impact that they're most worried about is Lower Manhattan, not those other areas, thank God. There'll be some, you know, the traditional kind of flooding you see with any major accumulation of rain, but not the kind of surge that we're worried about. The kind of thing we saw during Hurricane Sandy. The only place right now, we see that happening in a major way is Lower Manhattan. That's why they activated the measures for there.

**Louis:** Okay. I mean, I certainly don't understand all of the hydrology. I think that is the term. But you know, right across the harbor from Lower Manhattan, you've got, you know, Downtown Brooklyn and some other areas that, understandably, I think a lot of your constituents are worried about.

**Mayor:** Well, look, every storm is different and we base the information on the specific projections. And when we see these tracks that they provide, the National Weather Service provides for storms, which are generally pretty accurate. Granted, you can have last-minute variations, but we're able to pinpoint usually pretty closely where something's going to hit, when it's going to hit, with what severity. The specific way this storm has projected to hit, that's where the problem is Lower Manhattan. The good news is because the timing has changed a little bit, it hopefully will be even less impact. But look, this is based on everything we learned since Sandy, making adjustments. And we continue most importantly to put in permanent anti-flooding, anti-

surge measures all over the city. I use the example earlier today, the Rockaway Boardwalk, five-and-a-half miles, built as a storm barrier. A whole lot is going to happen on the East Side of Manhattan, from the 30s all the way down to the Battery in the coming years. We have major protections that have been put in place in Staten Island. This is going to be something we continue to do over the years to make the city more resilient.

**Louis:** Okay, let me switch topics. I got a lot of tweets and I have heard from people by phone about what's going on the Upper West Side, where some of the residents say, some of our viewers say, that there are some folks who have been moved into shelter in hotels up there, who have been, for the neighborhood, very disruptive. That there's substance abuse, there are people who are kind of congregating unmasked, and there's a lot of worry up there. I was wondering if there was anything you could tell the folks on the Upper West Side?

**Mayor:** Well, we've got to address this anytime we see these problems. I don't want to see people congregating unmasked, and I don't want to see anything that's disruptive to the community. And I don't want to see people's health endangered, even among the folks who of course are homeless. The issue here is you remember a few months back when the coronavirus hit hard, we all worked together. Our health agencies, Homeless Services, City Council, to try and figure out how to address the fact that we had a lot of homeless folks in relatively close quarters in our homeless shelters. And we needed to spread them out to keep everyone safe. And so job one was to figure out a way to get people into different facilities, different hotels, etcetera, to spread them out. That, thank God, was an important plan and generally worked and created more safety for those homeless folks. Now we've got to address any issues that might've come as a result of that. And then ultimately, of course, pull people back from those hotels into the shelters when the time comes, when the health situation improves some more. But anything that is happening on the ground, the Upper West Side, or any place else, my instruction to Homeless Services and to all City agencies, Sanitation, NYPD, everyone is when you see a problem, we need to address it aggressively so neighborhood residents do not have those kinds of concerns.

**Louis:** I wanted to ask you as well, I guess this is a somewhat related issue. There are people who have noticed that there are any number of residential blocks that also have a police precinct on them. And in a way that hasn't been done before, you know, having a precinct nearby, it's like a 24-hour operation. There are always a lot of cars that are parked. Many of them are parked illegally or up on the sidewalk and so forth. But in a number of cases what the cops have done is just simply sealed off the block so that it's essentially a long parking lot. And if you live there, you kind of have to get somebody to move a barrier so you can get in and out. Is that a temporary situation? Is that a permanent situation? Is that the new normal?

**Mayor:** Errol, I'm not familiar with the specifics of what happened to every precinct. I know obviously a few weeks back there were issues about security at precincts that had to be addressed. My sense is that it is something more temporary, but, you know, I can find out more about what the NYPD's latest thinking is. But, you know, when we see a specific situation where there's the issue about security, there's always going to be measures taken. But that's not the kind of thing I assume would be permanent.

**Louis:** Yeah. I mean, right outside your office, the area, right under the Brooklyn Bridge at Chambers Street, we're not talking about a precinct now. We are talking about a major thoroughfare for the city and that's all sort of blocked off, barricaded at this point. Is that part of the, sort of the cleanup and the follow up to Occupy City Hall?

**Mayor:** Yeah, look, that whole reality was in that plaza area. Obviously, there was a lot of cleanup to do. And we're going to restore it and then make sure it becomes an open pedestrian area again, as it's meant to be. And that's the process we're going through right now.

**Louis:** Okay. I noticed today, perhaps you saw it as well, an op-ed in the New York Daily News by two City Council members, both of whom are apparently heading to bigger and better things. So, that's Donovan Richards, who's the nominee to become the Queens Borough President, as well as Richie Torres, who appears to be the nominee to become a member of Congress, both writing that member deference, that deferring to what the local City Council member wants about a development project in his or her district needs to perhaps yield, in the case of Industry City to the much greater, broader need to get lots of jobs in place. So, I'm wondering former Council Member Bill de Blasio, what you make of that argument? I know it's come up before.

**Mayor:** Sure. And you know your history. Yeah. Look first of all, I have not seen the op-ed, but I can tell you this much. I was a Council member. I do understand why over the years special consideration was given for a Council member's knowledge of their own district and their representation of their own district. I also think it's true to say many, many specific projects have ramifications far beyond one Council district and are about job creation or other things that we need as a city. I think that the goal here is to strike a balance, to make sure the community's needs are addressed in every project. That's part of what's great about the ULURP process, really giving communities a chance to comment and giving them some real leverage in the process. But also thinking about the larger ramifications. And certainly, that's what I'd like to see happen in general. And I think there's still space for that here.

**Louis:** Okay. Do you have any particular preference about the outcome of that particular project, the proposed expansion of Industry City?

**Mayor:** Look, that specific project, that's not sponsored by the administration, like some other land use initiatives where we play a leading role. That's a private application. Obviously, it would bring a lot of jobs and that's something we would appreciate in this city, but again, that's really between the private developer and the Council to work that through.

**Louis:** Okay. All right. Stand by, Mr. Mayor. We'll be back in a second.

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**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again, joined by Mayor Bill de Blasio from the Blue Room. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about the schools plan, the plan to return to school. Your proposal has been submitted, the preliminary version of it, I guess, to the State. What we've heard so far from the Governor and from some of his top aides does not sound terribly encouraging. They said among other things that New York City's proposal seemed to be

about 30 pages compared with 60 pages for, you know, Yonkers and 90 pages for Albany or something like that. How are things going and should we expect the State to rewrite your plan for you?

**Mayor:** Errol, it's certainly not the number of pages that matters, it's what the content is, it's what it says. And, you know, for months and months, folks at the Department of Education have been working nonstop to get ready for something we've never dealt with before, constantly communicating with parents, with educators, principals. You know, think about it for a moment, the Department of Education went to the, you know, really, really focused effort of finding out what parents thought and they got over 400,000 parents responding to a survey. And, overwhelmingly, we heard the parents want the kids back in school. There's been a lot of careful work done to get ready, and that plan reflects it. We're talking about constant cleaning of school, social distancing constantly in schools without exception, the classrooms are going to be distanced, face coverings for everyone in the school, you know, all sorts of things, hand washing stations and hand sanitizers stations, obviously a blended learning schedule, a full remote system available for any families that prefer that. This is a very elaborate structure. It's been put together with nonstop input from the unions involved, and it will keep evolving over the next five weeks and improving. So, I feel like we're where we need to be to get ready for opening day.

**Louis:** When I read some of the details of it, one thing that struck me right off the bat was that you know, if you really think about it within a school building, if something like four or five people turn out to have tested positive, it's possible that hundreds will then be sort of rearranged reshuffled. The school would close. It would be an immense amount of inconvenience. And I'm just thinking in just the law of numbers, which suggests that out of 1.1 million kids, we're going to see that scenario, and we're going to see that scenario over and over again.

**Mayor:** I'm going to differ you a little bit there, Errol. First of all, I'm looking at this as a parent, my kids went to New York City public schools the whole way through, pre-K to 12th grade. I am setting the standard, I know the Chancellor is too, that we want this to be exactly what we would want for our own kids. And I think the way we have it set up, where if you find a case in a classroom or in a pod, if you will, and that's the only place you find it, those kids, those adults quarantined, the rest of the school keeps going. If you find multiple cases, you're going to do an investigation to see if they link back to the school or possibly someplace else. And whether you can do a quarantine of a certain number of people, or whether you have to close the whole school. But you're talking about limited periods of time any way you slice it.

I don't think you're going to see, you know, the number of cases all hitting at once. I think you're going to see some schools might have one at a time, some schools may have a couple. If they even do and they have to shut down, it's for a limited period of time and we have the remote as a fallback. So, there'll be some off-and-on realities in the beginning in some schools. I'm also not going to be surprised, Errol, if you see schools that go a substantial amount of time and don't have a case. I mean, we're looking at the last 24 hours, 263 cases in all of New York City, according to our testing. That's a very small number for a city of 8.6 million people.

So, I think we're ready for those different eventualities. And it's going to take a little while to get used to it as per usual in life. But my message to parents and to educators is we're going to have

really tight rules and we're going to be working to keep the disease from spreading in our schools and from the spreading in our community at large. And if we do that continually well, as we have as a city now for months – I mean, we've been below three percent infection rate now for almost two months, which is extraordinary given where we came from. If we keep doing what we're capable of in this city, we can drive that down even further and make it a lot simpler to keep our schools going.

**Louis:** What are the standards going to be or what's the process going to be for school buses – not public transportation, but the yellow buses?

**Mayor:** Yeah, we're going to have them going. But we have a space reality. You can't put as many kids on a school bus if your social distancing, obviously. So, there'll be a lot of precautions in place – kids wearing face coverings, constant cleaning, a lot of precautions, but one of the most important precautions is not to overcrowd the school bus. That means there won't be as much room. There won't be as many kids who can take the school bus. That's a challenge. And look, some families can address that immediately with mass transit or with their own vehicles, or some kids are still able to walk the distance, but it's going to be a real problem. The thing to remember, Errol, is it's a problem for whatever the amount of time until we get a vaccine and make sure people have a vaccine. Is that three months, is that four months, five months, six months? We don't know, but I think it's a very strong likelihood before the school year is done, the vaccine will have been developed and kids would have gotten it. And then we get to return to the normal use of school buses and, you know, the, having the normal number of kids in the school building,

**Louis:** Right. Going back to your experience as a parent. And what I know a lot of parents are thinking, even the blended approach, two days in school, three days at home, or vice versa, which days those are really, really matters, right? I mean, people have to try and coordinate, you know, spouses and work schedules and who's going to be around and transportation. Saying that it's say Monday and Wednesday is very different from saying it's Thursday and Friday, right?

**Mayor:** Yup. Look, first of all, it's a great question, Errol. First of all, you're going to have – according to the survey of 400,000 parents, we're going to have about a quarter of parents to start with their kids remote anyway. So, for them, their kids are going to be home. For the rest of the kids, every family's going to get their schedule. Those schedules should be out around August 15th. So, about four weeks before school begins. That means families will have an opportunity to make what adjustments they can. Now, a lot of families, very sadly, are home because there is no work. Other families, their breadwinners are home because they're working remotely. So, they have a little more flexibility that way. But there are definitely people who have to go to work, don't have great childcare options. We're going to make childcare available. We've already announced a hundred thousand childcare seats.

And then, you know, you're a parent – you know, some parents will find an opportunity with family to take care of the kid on the off days. Other parents will work with their fellow parents and sort of take turns on some kind of schedule. It's not going to be easy, but again is this for three months, four months, five months, six months. We don't know how long this interim period is before a vaccine, but it's not forever. And New York City parents are very creative, very

resourceful. We're going to help them every step of the way. I can at least tell you they will have their schedules very soon so they can start to make those arrangements.

**Louis:** Okay. We'll check in as we get closer to a D-Day and we'll wish you the best of luck in getting through the storm tomorrow. And we'll talk again next week. Thanks, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Errol.

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