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

**Errol Louis:** Mayor de Blasio took the subway this afternoon in an effort to ease fears of New Yorkers in the wake of a horrific stabbing spree in which two people were killed and several others wounded. A 21-year-old man is now facing murder charges as the MTA requests additional police officers underground. Mayor de Blasio joins me now from the Blue Room inside City Hall to talk about that and more. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

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

**Louis:** Just fine, thanks. How was your ride? I assume you got a seat on the 6 train.

**Mayor:** No, I stood but I wanted to, you know, spend time out there showing folks that we're all together in this and talking to our police officers. And what I heard, Errol, was they hear constantly from straphangers how reassured they are to see the police presence. We have about 2,400 transit cops normally. We're adding 500 more immediately. And look, we're going to do whatever it takes to keep the subways safe and to show people that they can be comfortable, they can be safe. This is a horrible, horrible crime. Thank God the NYPD caught the assailant, but we got to keep showing people that the subways are going to be safe and they're going to be crucial to bringing back New York City strong. And so, we're going to have the presence to do it.

**Louis:** Now, Mr. Mayor, we've seen it reported that this person had multiple contacts with the criminal justice system and with the health systems. Do you know if he had any kind of contact with Thrive or other mental health professionals who work for the City?

**Mayor:** The information we have so far is that he did not have contact with mental health service providers. From what we know so far – and it's preliminary, it's important to say that, Errol – we don't see any indication of mental health issues having manifested in a way that led to him being directed to those services but we need to know a lot more.

**Louis:** On the correctional side, do you have any sense of whether the new or newish, I guess they're a year old now, bail standards played a role in all this?

**Mayor:** Not yet. I would say from what I'm understanding very preliminarily, this is not someone with a lot of history of violence. So, it's a very curious case and troubling case why if someone didn't have that kind of history of, you know, diagnosed mental health challenges or particular violent interactions, how this is happening. But again, we need to know a lot more. We got to get the full picture here and we got to see what it tells us. There are people sometimes – we've seen this unfortunately in the past – that out of nowhere, something horrible manifests. But what we're trying to make sure is if we see any indication of a mental health challenge that

we get that person to services right away. That is the crucial change we've tried to make over these recent years is making sure that anybody, including their family members, their loved ones know if they're seeing a sign of a mental health problem, they can call 888-NYC-WELL. We can connect them to services, getting our different City agencies to all coordinate if they see someone with a mental health challenge, getting them the help they need. We got to do a lot more of that and in fact if we get stimulus dollars from Washington this is an area where I want to see more investment, getting all our agencies doing more and more to get people mental health services.

**Louis:** But then I mean you just said a minute ago, the MTA has asked for 500 additional cops. They are going to be provided immediately. The MTA is asking for 1,000 more on top of that. I thought we had established that you know basically more people with guns is not necessarily the most wise or effective way to deal with these kinds of problems.

**Mayor:** There's a couple different points here. So, first of all, I made the decision with the NYPD, with Commissioner Shea that we needed to put 500 more cops into the subways immediately to show people that we were going to keep them safe, to keep confidence high that people could move around the city safely. But again, that's on top of 2,400 transit cops who are out there every day like the cops I saw today on the subway who have been doing this work for years and years, keeping people safe. I think it's really important that people see that they are being protected. The MTA itself is saying they are going to be giving us 500 more cops for the subways. We've heard that in the past. It hasn't come to be. If that does happen, Errol, it's really important that those MTA cops get trained by the NYPD that know the subways the best. But on top of that we need a lot more mental health services in our whole society unquestionably. I think it's – all of the above is the answer. You're talking about a pervasive challenge in our society that went unaddressed for decades. So, we need the clear evidence of public safety, people need that. They need that reassurance. We also need much more pervasive mental health services available to people who need it especially early in their experience with a mental health problem.

**Louis:** But we're not doing all of the above. I mean after so many years of discussion of this very topic, we're not sending 1,000 social workers and mental health professionals into the subways, right? I mean do those people – do those people even exist?

**Mayor:** Actually – no, wait a minute. We're sending hundreds of outreach workers into the subways regularly to reach folks who happen to be homeless. It's been actually very successful. These outreach workers – we've talked about this from time to time as part of the Journey Home initiative, they've actually had amazing success getting people into where services are, the Safe Havens with mental health services, with substance misuse services to help people stay off the streets and change their life. We've continued to invest in those outreach workers because it works and we've continued to invest in rapid response mental health teams, and one of the things we're doing now is the crisis call teams where if someone calls the NYPD about a mental health problem, there is no violence indicated, we're going to be sending social workers and medical professionals and EMTs, not police officers, more and more. So, all of those investments are being made but we need to do a lot more. This is again a generations old problem that now I think we're finally beginning to address the right way but it's going to take a lot more investment.

**Louis:** As far as you know, does the system as it exists now with the improvements that you've put in place, does it have the wherewithal to determine whether or not the suspect in this case, who apparently has had multiple contacts with medical establishment and the criminal justice system, was he on anybody's radar?

**Mayor:** That's what I want to know more about. What is interesting, Errol, just preliminarily, we are not seeing what would have set off the alarms which would have been diagnosed mental health problems and especially a record of violence. Those two things do trigger a specific response by our City agencies to make sure that people are getting specific help and those issues are being addressed including by the criminal justice system. So far, we are not seeing that and I want to know a lot more and I'll keep you updated as we get information. But we also unfortunately know sometimes it doesn't manifest until a horrible moment like this and again this reminds me always of how the best way to address mental health is as early as possible in someone's experience. A lot of people – and I don't know where this individual lived throughout his life – but a lot of places, there is no effort to diagnose a mental health problem. One of the things we're going to be doing starting in September is universal mental health screening in our schools for all our students. That's not just good for our kids in school. That is about identifying any early mental health problems and getting kids into regular support, regular support and treatment. This is the kind of thing we're going to have to do systematically for years and years if we really want to address mental health on a more foundational level in our society.

**Louis:** One more piece of the puzzle. Governor Cuomo announced earlier today that the overnight closures of the system are going to be shortened to just two hours. I'm wondering if City Hall was consulted about that and how it will affect your ability to connect people with homeless services.

**Mayor:** Not consulted. I'm someone who did agree with the original concept of the cleaning during the overnight hours. I actually joined Governor Cuomo for that announcement. I think it made a good impact in terms of reassuring people they could come back to the subways safely. What I'm going to demand here is that the NYPD – excuse me, the MTA, I'm confusing my acronyms – what I'm going to demand is that the MTA make sure that they keep doing that cleaning. If they can do it in those two hours, that's great, that's wonderful. But straphangers need to know the subways are going to be clean. That is the State's responsibility, the MTA's responsibility. If the subways are clean and people feel confidence in them on a health level as well as a public safety level, that's what will bring them back. So, if this new approach will achieve that goal, I say amen. And obviously, we ultimately want to get back to 24/7 service. But we got to keep the subways clean and something that people are comfortable with in the meantime.

**Louis:** Well, I only raise it because we did a fair amount of reporting on homeless outreach workers waiting at the end of the lines so that when the closures were happening, instead of people just being kicked out of – off the trains and into the trains, there'd be somebody there to help them. At this point under the new system, if people just, you know, take a walk or get a cup of coffee, if they can wait 100 minutes, 120 minutes, they can just go back to living on the trains.

**Mayor:** You know, I hear that concern, but I think the more important piece of the equation – this is where I agreed with the MTA – was if you shut down the station for cleaning, it's

obviously an opportunity for outreach workers to engage people. That has been really effective. I mean we saw the numbers. I used to give them on a daily basis for a period of time in the beginning. Really impressive numbers, how it helped get people into shelter and Safe Haven, and give us a chance to really turn people's lives around. A lot of those folks did not go back to the streets which is, you know, really important. So, what I'd say, Errol, is we want to help people who are homeless. We want to get them out of the subways and give them a better life but we can't do that unless we get an opportunity to engage them deeply. We have seen at the end of subway lines that's happening more than ever. So, that's the part I want to make sure we don't lose in this equation.

**Louis:** Standby, Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break now.

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**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall, where I am once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, more people are now eligible for the coronavirus vaccine. The system is flooded by that increase. Is there any, or is there going to be a central place to learn when new appointments are made available or are we going to be stuck with the process of, you know, you log on and you search and you search and you search to try and find that appointment?

**Mayor:** Well, Errol, we're constantly improving that process. I'm going to have a lot to say on that this week about specific changes we're making so it's easier. But I want to note what we're seeing is really increased numbers of folks getting vaccinated. Last week on Thursday, we had over 50,000 people vaccinated in one day. Last week was actually our strongest week, over 300,000 New Yorkers got a vaccination last week. Something is moving effectively here. And even though there's understandable critique that the systems need to constantly be made better, I agree, a whole lot of people are getting vaccinated. We're well over 1.3 million vaccinations since day one now, and it's really steadily increasing. So, yes, we got to improve, but clearly a huge number of people are finding their way to that vaccination. I was in Sheepshead Bay at Sheepshead's Nostrand Houses on Friday, a specific vaccination campaign for seniors to live in public housing, in NYCHA. Folks were really enthusiastic about the fact that vaccination was being done right there in their development. And there've been a lot of outreach to them, a lot of seniors came down and did it because it was right there. That's what I want to do a lot more of. I think that's, what's going to really encourage people.

**Louis:** There's a New York Times story about a 31-year-old software engineer for Airbnb who created something called TurboVax, a free website that compiles the availability from the three main City and State vaccine systems, sends the information in real time out by social media, he spent like 50 bucks to build a system. In a case like that is there a way, or would you consider sort of grabbing on to a grassroots system like that and maybe help him, or have him help you rationalize and improve the system?

**Mayor:** Oh, we'll work with anyone who can help us do it better. There's no question about that. Now the specific example here, again, one of the things that's a challenge with the vaccination application for the appointments is we do need to get a certain amount of information and we do need to make sure it's accurate. So that's why it hasn't been as easy as some other things that we engage people on. But yeah, we'll work with anyone if they got an idea that might actually work, and I'll make sure my team follows up and sees if that's something we could do better.

**Louis:** Great. There was a discussion that's been ongoing, and it continued today when the Governor gave his briefing on nursing homes and how and when information was given to the public about mortality rates and other problems as the COVID crisis hit nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Do you have a reaction to the Governor's explanations about what happened and why?

**Mayor:** I haven't seen what he said today. What I can say overall is we need a much fuller accounting of what happened. It's clear that information was not provided that the people deserved. We've got to understand it fully. We need everyone to come clean and we got to make sure it never happens again, but something like this never happens again. And clearly, we got to look at the whole approach here because the State had a responsibility and obviously something went wrong.

**Louis:** Do you feel like you and the systems that are under your control that you have sufficient and accurate data about what has happened in some of these congregate settings?

**Mayor:** We have a very different reality than the State. There's a big difference when you're much closer to the ground and the people you serve. You know, when we saw a problem in a particular location that was part of our domain we responded intensely, quickly. There's, again, a much deeper sense of connection and accountability. This is something that I think we need to examine. This is another reason why we need to restore local control at this point in this crisis. It's time. We've seen so many examples of our local governments, county governments, towns, cities, across the state, had their hands tied, you know, really had our hands tied with bureaucracy and red tape that made it much harder for us to do our job. It's time to return control to the local level because we're actually more directly accountable to our people.

**Louis:** I don't even want to say if you could do it again, because I keep hearing from credible sources that we should expect there to be a future pandemic, right? I mean, I think there's been two or three just on your watch in about eight years. What systems need to be in place that we don't have in place to ensure full cooperation and more effective communication between the City and the State?

**Mayor:** I think the notion of "full cooperation and effective communication" is one that we have to question from the very beginning. I've worked with the different levels of government now for decades, and there's not a great history. Historically, you go over – you know, who, no matter who's governor, who's mayor, who's president, the three levels of government don't coordinate particularly well. It's just a blunt reality. Now I will tell you when President Obama was in office and we had the Ebola crisis, much better. When the federal government's leading on something of this magnitude, it makes everything better. And that we saw was a much smoother situation. There were still real disagreements between the City and State, but we had federal leadership. That made everything work. In the end, the best way to guarantee results is to determine what has to be handled at the local level and empower the local level. You guys are going to hold me accountable in a way that doesn't happen in Albany. And it's the only way in my view to actually make sure there will be results. So, I think there will be – hate to say it – there will be at some point in the future, the danger of pandemic again. Part of why I want New York City to be the public health capital of the world – and I use this phrase very specifically, the public health capital of the world – is that we have now learned strategies that work to fight against

pandemics, even stop them from happening. And we have the approach here in the city, a real public health, grassroots approach, egalitarian approach, that really could be a model for the rest of the country and the rest of the world. That's to me, the future, a grassroots outreach effort around public health that's ongoing with guaranteed access to health care, which we have here in this city, but not in our nation. That's how you stop the pandemics of the future.

**Louis:** Okay. I mean, you know, when it comes to government and cooperation, I think of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, which offers another kind of a model. But I think the key thing there is, those people get together and they work together full time, so that there's already existing relationships and you don't have to kind of create them on the fly during an emergency. Let me ask you a final question, Mr. Mayor, for this week. You said recently that you're planning to revive your property tax reform effort before leaving City Hall. I'm wondering who's going to be your ally, who will be your allies in getting some movement on that question because every class of property owners has its own group of advocates who want to keep things exactly the way they are now.

**Mayor:** Great question, Errol. Look, we have the preliminary report out. We're going to have the final report out in the next few months. What I think you're going to see is a lot of people in the Legislature are going to want to make these changes because we know a lot of neighborhoods are getting a really raw deal right now. And a lot of them happened to be a working class and lower income communities. A lot of them happen to be immigrant communities and communities that are primarily people of color. And our tax system unfairly burdens those communities. And I think there's actually a power in this moment of history where people are demanding equality and fighting disparity. Well, our property tax system is riven with disparity. You look at that original framework that our commission put out, I think there's people in neighborhoods all over the city that are going to immediately say, hey, you know what, this is going to bring more fairness to me and my family. And that's going to be a really substantial support base to get this done.

**Louis:** Okay. We will leave it there for now. Thanks so much for joining us. We'll see you next week, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank, Errol.

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