

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Hosts Event on New York City's Social Safety Net

March 12, 2022

Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright, Strategic Initiatives: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Mayor Adams. Good afternoon, our esteemed elected officials, our commissioner for the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, Commissioner Mayuga. Community partners who are here, thank you so much. Our direct service providers and all of the New Yorkers who work on behalf of working class New Yorkers. I want to extend a deep thank you to Union Settlement—David Nocenti, our leader. Where is he? There he is. Yes, there you are.

Deputy Mayor Wright: Union Settlement was founded in 1895 and for 127 years has really been a haven for East Harlem, providing childhood education, mental health, Earned Income Tax Credit services, and countless other programs. We are so grateful for the steadfast leadership of this institution in this important community. So thank you so much for having us.

Deputy Mayor Wright: Right here, in this space, Union Settlement, over 350 dedicated employees work every day with scores of volunteers to make sure that our social safety net catches everyone. So we really want to applaud the amazing work that they've done and continue to do and particularly in the midst of this incredible pandemic that we've experienced. So thank you again.

Deputy Mayor Wright: Today is really about lifting up—not just the social safety net—but Mayor Adams has really declared it a springboard. It's not just a net that catches people when they're in need, but it's the thing that helps propel them forward. Things like the Earned Income Tax Credit that puts critical dollars in people's pockets. Things like quality childcare that's affordable and accessible. These things are enablers to help propel people forward. That's why we're here today—to really lift up the need for that, particularly at this time, and the need to really significantly partner with the state in order to make that happen.

Deputy Mayor Wright: The first person to introduce is really a testament to it, Miss Rosa Diaz. Her daughter doesn't quite know yet what a big deal she is, but she's going to find out. Our children, they never quite understand. But Rosa Diaz is an institution in East Harlem—really changing people's lives, and really helping propel them forward. She's been able to really benefit from things like Earned Income Tax Credit and other programs so that she can do what we need her to do and really be a leader and driver for this community. Thank you so much, Rosa, and happy to have you join us today.

[Applause]

[...]

Deputy Mayor Wright: Thank you so much Rosa, who works hard every day as a paralegal and still finds time to do all those amazing things. Now to introduce the champion for our communities, Mayor Eric Adams.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you so much. You know, sometimes when you are busy saving people, you don't realize the impact of that. Rosa, you're symbolic. For the people who helped my family at Easter time, they would put socks and shoes on the back porches. Thanksgiving time, they will leave canned goods so that we can be able to celebrate Thanksgiving. Christmas time, they would wrap gifts, and for those of us who remember, they used to do something called a sous sous where they collect money to help us pay the mortgage on our homes. I am mayor because of the Rosas in my life. And somewhere there's a young person who's going to reach their full potential because of what you're doing.

Mayor Eric Adams: But what is extremely therapeutic, when you're going through pain—help people who are going through pain and then you see your real benefits that you have. So she's fighting to put food on the table and make ends meet. She's also committed to helping others. That's a special person to turn their pain into purpose, and so I thank you. I really thank you, and you touched me in a real way.

Mayor Eric Adams: It's good to be here with a good team. You know, [inaudible], good to see you. Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Workers Protection. And, you know, just one of my favorite elected officials, Edward “Eddie” Gibbs, the assemblyman here. A powerful story, powerful narrative of overcoming adversity. Just so significant every time I'm around Eddie. Brings me a great level of joy because I see

the full potential of what we all can become. A bend in the road is not the end of the road, as long as you make the turn and you've made the turn. And now you're in Albany allowing other people to make the turn at the same time.

Mayor Eric Adams: So again, I thank the Deputy Mayor Wright. She, you know, all week you've been rolling out some good stuff. You've just been rolling out—yesterday, we rolled out our program for children, the Summer Rising program. And the partnership that she put together with our corporate business leaders. She just continues to hit it out the park as well as our other deputy mayors.

Mayor Eric Adams: So we just heard, you know, the power of the Earned Income Tax Credit and you probably walk down the block and talk to the average person and say EITC—they have no idea what it means and what it represents. That is something we're going to lean into by mobilizing our energies to knock on doors, sign people up. Barriers to benefits should not prevent people from getting benefits. Rosa's story is typical of the average resident in this area that is in need of assistance so they don't slip through the cracks. The EITC is one of the most effective poverty reduction programs in history. It is extremely effective. It's real money in the pockets of everyday New Yorkers who are in need, particularly those in low and moderate income families in households that have qualified children. It gives them the ability to claim these tax credits.

Mayor Eric Adams: There are real numbers. 840,000 working New Yorkers are allowed to get this benefit to put money in their pockets. It helps with foods, it helps with bills, it helps rent, it just helps period. That's the bottom line. And anyone who had to put their hands in the cushions of a sofa to find a coin to get that MetroCard or to pay for the increase in the things you need, you understand how important this Earned Income Tax Credit is. And right now too many New Yorkers have fallen through our social safety net. They're struggling to keep roofs over their heads and to provide for their families. And you know what I know—COVID made it worse. These are the communities that were impacted. Low wage employees. I watch their businesses close at restaurants, close office spaces because—I say all the time, you can't tell a commuter when you have a job that needs you to be inside. And so COVID impacted these families. And we need to make sure that we're here to lift them up.

Mayor Eric Adams: In the two areas we're focusing on today—calling our partners in Albany to look at the Earned Income Tax Credit. We're going to do our share with a \$250 million contribution in our budget. We need Albany to approve this. And we need

Albany to also match us to the tune of \$250 million. The electors in Albany, they understand how important this initiative is. We're looking for their support as they move forward with their budget process. We're here clearly to say that we're here for working class New Yorkers. Our preliminary budget reflected that, and if the state matched this investment, which would expand the state's match from 30 percent to 45 percent for New York recipients, it just gives us an opportunity to put money directly into the pockets of New Yorkers.

Mayor Eric Adams: But also childcare. You know, Rosa wants to make sure her daughter—and I don't know if you noticed, but her daughter and I both had matching beads going on. I used to have that look when my mom used to take me somewhere, you know. But we are proposing a tax incentive to spur action for childcare. We want not only residential locations, but also commercial locations to retrofit their spaces for childcare. And we are hoping we could have the tax incentives that would allow the expansion of childcare. Childcare impacts on the ability of families to get back to work, particularly when it comes down to women—Black and brown. Women are normally home dealing with childcare needs.

Mayor Eric Adams: So when you combine the Earned Income Tax Credit call from the state and the childcare tax incentives, it is a real way to help everyday New Yorkers to move forward. I know this story too well—mom did a double shift. She worked hard to provide for my five siblings and me. I know that that same scenario exists today for everyday families. We could do this together. That's why we're taking the moment to reach out and tell our partners in Albany, we need you at this time. New Yorkers need you. Families need you. And this is a way to give them the assistance that they need and assistance they deserve. So I'm glad to have my partner here, the assemblyman, to add to this call to get Albany engaged during this budgetary season. He sees firsthand how important it is to have these benefits for families. So I want to just take a moment and just bring up the assemblyman to say a few words in response. Assemblyman.

[Applause]

[...]

Deputy Mayor Wright: I think at this point, we're going to take questions. There you go.

Question: [Inaudible]... the earned income tax credit, the 800,000 figure that you're putting up with [inaudible].

Mayor Adams: 250 million, we are contributing, and we want this state to contribute an additional 250 million. The 840,000, those are the families that are eligible. 840,000.

Question: So the state would have to have the match in the state budget in April?

Mayor Adams: Yes. Yes, and our 250 million allows an increase, but the state matching that with the 250 million allows us to reach an area putting almost \$1,000 back into—additional back into the pockets of New Yorkers.

Question: How much do people get a month from this? Is there a rough estimate?

Mayor Adams: Let me bring my number expert here. You know, no, I didn't pass math well.

Commissioner Vilda Vera Mayuga, Department of Consumer and Worker

Protection: Thank you, Mayor. Basically, right now, based on the percentage that the city is allowed to contribute for the families, it's about \$120 that the families are getting. So what we're looking to do is obviously increase the number of money in the family's pockets.

Question: [Inaudible]

Commissioner Mayuga: No, it's the tax credit that they get as part of their tax return.

Question: [Inaudible]

Commissioner Mayuga: Yes.

Question: [Inaudible]

Commissioner Mayuga: Yes.

Commissioner Mayuga: Right now they get 125. Because that's all the max that we can do based on what the state is allowing us to do. The state allows us to do more and also joins us in these efforts, we're going to be able to bring more than \$1,000 for the families in their pockets like the mayor indicated.

Question: Thank you, Mayor. My question has to do with mayoral control. I know that some lawmakers in Albany do not want to include it in this year's budget and it's going to expire in June. So what is your reaction to that?

Mayor Adams: We're hoping that they do, you know, as we mentioned the other day in front of Bayside High School, my alma mater. It helps stabilize the unstable two years that our children experienced. And we know this time of the year, as a former state senator, there's a lot of conversations about placing policies into the budget. We hope—we're hoping that they look at how important it is to send a strong message to our parents and students that we know what the next school year is going to look like. Because remember, it expires in June, when the session expires. To go to June without knowing what we're going to look like is just not the right thing to do. So we were going to continue conversations with our colleagues. We're happy the Governor understands how important this is. And we're looking forward to asking them continuously. Let's put this in the budget.

Question: The gun unit that is supposed to start on Monday. Can you give us some idea of what can people expect to see? Will they see anything?

Mayor Adams: Yes. Yes, the commissioner, we speak every morning about this. She has well trained men and women assigned to the unit and I don't want to take her thunder. She's going to roll out the exact plan. I know she made an announcement, I think yesterday, that they're going to start on Monday. But she's well prepared. And you know, people were asking when is it going to start? When is it going to start? It almost felt like when I took my son on road trips, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" You know, we want to get this right. That's so important, to get it right. And it has to pass her smell test, then it has to pass mine. And I was not going to put out a unit that was going to go after those who are carrying illegal guns unless I felt comfortable that we were not going back to the days of being abusive. So she wrote out a complete plan. I believe Monday is the day she's going to execute.

Question: [inaudible] people without going into a [inaudible]. Are people going to see more cops on the street or is it more like [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: I like that. Yes, they are going to see cops on the street. And remember, policing is a visible presence, the omnipresence, the blue and white vehicles that everyone likes to see. But there's also the unpredictability of policing. And those are the unmarked vehicles that we're going to use. But every officer will have modified uniform apparel, because one of the complaints that we heard was that people were jumping out of the cars in civilian attire, you didn't know who they were and that was a problem. So we remove that problem to make sure we get the benefit of being unpredictable, but at the same time, get the presence of the police officers. So it's a combination, because you should never allow policing to be just predictable in blue and white vehicles. So it's a combination.

Question: Mr. Mayor, can you please give us a reason why the husband and Brooklyn Democratic Party chair resigned from [inaudible] at City Hall?

Mayor Adams: Because he was—there was an error made in placing him in a managerial position. Our HR personnel made that error. And I figured he was in one of our human services areas. As a district leader, he's a district leader, he cannot fill a managerial position. And once that was identified, we rectify, you know, when things are brought to my attention. You know me, I'm getting stuff done. No use trying to act like, you know, let's see if we can cover something up. No, if it's wrong, we got to make it right and we have to make it right immediately. That is how I'm going to operate as the mayor.

Question: Why wasn't the error spotted before?

Mayor Adams: Sometimes, you know, to be human is to error. I must have said this one thousand times, I'm perfectly imperfect. And if I'm perfectly imperfect, my team is going to be perfectly imperfect, because we're in a perfectly imperfect city. So we're going to make mistakes. And when we make mistakes, we correct the mistakes, you know. And trust me, it's not going to be the last mistake I make. That's me. This is life.

Question: Last question, going back to the gun unit, you just mentioned one of the previous issues with that unit. Were there any other things? Because the commissioner

said they want to examine the mistakes of the past with that. Anything else that you want it to get right this time in your eyes?

Mayor Adams: Definitely. No, without a doubt. Here's what we were doing in the past. We were going to a community. Based on the crime numbers in that community, we criminalized everyone in that community. So if you are a Black and brown young man and you live in an area where there was high crime, you was subjected to over aggressive policing, instead of what we call precision policing. We know the gang members are. We know who the trigger pullers are. We're zooming in on them. We're not zooming in on an entire community. And that is what was done previously. With changing that mindset of—just because you live in an area where crime is located, that you should be treated as though you are a criminal that is not going to be part of this community and that is what we put in place. Thank you.