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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. Earlier today, Mayor de Blasio had the help of some star power. He had the Hamilton creator, Lin-Manuel Miranda, on hand to open a new COVID-19 vaccine site in Times Square to help get theater, film, and TV workers vaccinated. All part of a push to get the industry back on stage. However, as the city celebrates another milestone, more than five million doses administered, we've got positivity rates that are still stubbornly high thanks to concerns over the spread of variants. Here now, to talk about that in much more we've got Mayor de Blasio, joining us from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Welcome Mr. Mayor. Good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Errol. And I want to emphasize that center in Times Square is for TV reporters too, Errol. So, spread the word.

Louis: Well, you know, I was glad to see that you had the president of my union. I am a member of SAG-AFTRA and very good to see that folks who have been out of work are going to get some help. And as people go and get vaccinated, I guess I have a broad question for you about what our return to normal is looking like? Should people not be traveling, should they not be going out to eat? Should they not be going on vacation? Are you going to be taking a vacation this summer?

Mayor: Got a lot of questions there. Okay, let me get the basic ground rules here. First of all, we got over five million vaccinations done. That is very positive news because it says we can get to our goal of five million fully vaccinated New Yorkers in June. That is a number that I came to working with our health care leadership as this sort of critical mass point. When five million people are vaccinated in this city, it changes the entire reality. So, I think you're going to see, in fact, notwithstanding the variants, I think you're going to see case levels start to go down more and more as we continue really high-level vaccination. Over a hundred thousand vaccinations on Thursday alone. Now to the questions you raise. Look, certainly, through June, what I'm saying, what our health care leadership is saying is keep the masks on, observe the social distancing, be smart about what you do. If you go out, make sure – if you go out to eat, for example, make sure that distancing is being properly followed. Make sure people are wearing masks when they get up from the table, all those basic things. As we get into the summer and the fall, my real hope is with more and more people vaccinated, we'll be able to loosen up some of those standards in a good way. But you know, the most important thing is to get to June, hit those big milestones and then we'll know a lot more about where we go from there.

Louis: Is your public health leadership, are they telling you everything will change at that point? Is it going to be kind of sudden, or are you going to see it ramp up? Because that's sort of the origin of my question. I would have thought with millions of people vaccinated at this point, the numbers wouldn't be quite so high as far as the percentage that are testing positive?

Mayor: Well, look, we've clearly seen improvement in the case numbers and the positivity levels. We've seen improvement in terms of the number of people going into the hospital. That's clearly gone down. And we are dealing with the variants, but I think we're out running the variants. I think we're winning the race. Particularly when we can put up days, you know, not just 50,000 people vaccinated a day, 75,000, a hundred thousand people vaccinated in a single day. We're going to be able to do that a lot. So, I would say to you, the numbers are starting to work in our favor. Is it going to be an on-off switch, Errol? No, of course not. It's all in steps. It's all incremental. But what we would say is when you get past five million fully vaccinated people, you're just limiting the options of where this virus can turn, honestly. You're just continuing to close the vice in on the virus and making it less and less of a factor. And at this rate we're going, we could get to six million people, we could get to more even because, clearly, we have the capacity. We just needed the supply. We believe May is going to be the big month where supply levels shoot upwards. But right now, look, we've proven we can get well past half a million vaccinations in a single week. We did 550,000 vaccinations last week alone. We can keep building, building, building, and that's what's going to ultimately squeeze out the virus.

Louis: Okay. Switching to education now. 50,000 students have opted for in-person learning. Do we have the teachers in place for that level of in-person education? And will it be all five days?

Mayor: We definitely have the teachers. What we're finding is with the middle school and high school kids, we can bring them into the existing classrooms. There will be some modification needed in some cases, but, basically, we can bring them in while maintaining the six-foot distancing. With elementary schools, we'll be able to do that for a lot of kids as well, still say at six feet because there's some classrooms that aren't even at the level they're allowed right now. But we can go to three feet when necessary. There's a process now put forward by the State of how to get there. We're going to work with school communities to get there. So, we feel good about space. We feel good about the number of teachers. Five-day, most kids are in schools that either are all five-day or majority five-day-a-week instruction. We're still building that out. We're still finding opportunities to get more and more kids to five-day. And obviously having the three feet rule in some places will help. So, I feel very good that you know, more and more kids will benefit from five days. Will it be every child? No, can't tell you that. But I'm happy that 50,000 kids who would really benefit from being in-person with educators are coming back on April 26th.

Louis: On a related or a different kind of education story. I was disturbed to see in the New York Post that Minisink, which is run by the Mission Society wanted to get permission to open a charter school. And they can't because there are no more charters. They needed to ask for State permission to get a change in the laws so that the 92-odd charters that are out there, that have either been surrendered, not used or terminated, could be applied here in the city. Was your administration aware of that? Are you interested in having more charters for community groups here in the city operate to help the kids of New York?

Mayor: Yeah. I don't know that particular situation you're referring to. What I do believe, and we've got a lot of charters out there of many different kinds. You know, I think some are doing great grassroots work in the community. Some I'm not so moved by their approach. And I think their approach is counterproductive. It really depends on the charter. But what I can tell you about our traditional public schools is they've been heroic. Our educators have been heroic. Our school communities have been heroic during this crisis and we're going to bring them back very strong. September is going to be school open for everyone. I want to emphasize that. The plan and I believe we're absolutely on the way to it, five days a week for every child who wants to be in-person in September. And so that's where my focus is. That's where the vast majority of our kids get educated and we need to make them better all the time. And we need to have an extraordinary comeback here in the public schools starting in September.

Louis: But this is the pattern that I've talked about with you. It comes up year after year after year. Charters are providing extraordinary performance as a sector. They keep running into legal problems that prevent them from expanding. And they're looking to you and this administration for help. It doesn't sound from what you just said, that you have any interest in providing that help?

Mayor: Well, as I said, we've worked a lot with charters that do the right thing. And there are some really great examples of this, charters that serve kids with special needs, serve English language learners, serve kids who are not good at taking tests, and are not, you know, academically strong, but still need loving caring educators. There are some charters that do that really, really well. And we do work with them. We have partnerships with a lot of them. There are some, as you know, I feel and a lot of people feel, do not live up to those standards that we hold for our traditional public schools. This is still a tension and in fact, in recent years, more and more evidence has come out that some of the charter networks systematically exclude kids rather than trying to reach every child. But the bottom line, again – we can talk about charters all day long, but I'd rather talk about where most of the kids are.

Louis: Right. But see that – that's the attitude that people find so frustrating. Mission Society is the oldest charity in New York. Minisink, you know, I went to Minisink as a kid, my dad went to Minisink as a kid. They've been dealing with kids in Harlem, you know, in an exemplary fashion for literally generations. They want permission to be able to do more for kids. And so I bring this to you – you either haven't heard of it or not concerned, or you just want to deal with something else. How do people figure out how to build on a sector that when it comes to math is performing 20 points ahead of district schools, and when it comes to English performing ten points ahead?

Mayor: Well Errol, look again, we work with charters that are actually trying to reach all kids and we work well with them. There's lots of ways that organizations that want to work with our schools to educate kids, we can bring them in and work in partnership. We do it all the time. We will continue to do it. We've created new schools that are traditional public schools with organizations like you're talking about. So there's lots of ways to work together. I've been clear about what I think is the challenge we face with a very, very diverse world of charter schools. They're not a monolith. But there is a range of difference in that world that I think is worth talking about. I think the most important thing though – I'm sorry, we've got the vast majority of our kids in our traditional public schools that have gotten better and better each year. Highest graduation rate we've ever had. More and more kids taking AP courses, obviously Pre-K for All, 3K For All, making schools better, computer science for all. This is the way forward to put our

energy into making all of our public schools great. This is really what we need to focus on. And we've proven that you actually can make a whole lot of progress in a relatively short period of time.

Louis: Okay. We've got more to talk about. We're going to take a short break now. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor Bill de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, this weekend a 12-year-old was shot in Brooklyn. Last week, there was a tourist shot in Midtown. They're separate incidents, obviously, different circumstances, but they highlight this concern that as more people come out into the streets and we get into the summer, the ongoing spike in violence is going to continue. What's the strategy to deal with it? What would be your message to residents who are concerned that they're at risk?

Mayor: Yeah, I totally appreciate that people are concerned after what we went through last year and it's still – there's too much violence and it has to be addressed. And here's what we're doing. We're bringing back the city. That's the first thing. It's really the most essential thing, Errol, is the recovery of the city because this violence grew out of empty streets and people not having jobs and kids not in school. We're reversing that trend rapidly. Hundreds of thousands of jobs coming back to school will be fully open in September for all the kids who want it. These things make a huge difference, but in terms of policing, look, we've got a lot more work to do, but what we do know is this, and it's worth noting, you know, a lot about the history of policing in New York City, index crime, the lowest it's ever been in the CompStat era right now, gun arrests, the highest they've been in 25 years. So, the NYD is doing a lot of the things that work, where we must do better is with gun violence. And I think that is about policing and getting guns off the streets. It's about deepening the ties with community, which I think a number of the recent reforms will help with, but it's also about getting the court system back. We have a lot to do in the city and I take responsibility for that. We also need the State to take responsibility for fully reopening the court system. We can do it now. We have vaccinations. We have a much better circumstance. Getting the courts back so that those who have committed crimes are found guilty actually get the consequences they deserve. That's a crucial missing piece of this equation.

Louis: What is not happening when it comes to the courts or have they not been high enough priority? I know a lot of the judges were probably just, based on their age, in a high priority group. And then, of course the court officers were law enforcement, essential workers. I would think they would have come in pretty quickly as well. I mean, is that what the barrier is at this point?

Mayor: Look, I have a lot of respect for the people that are at the Office of Court Administration, and I know they've been under a lot of pressure, but right now I think the facts on the ground have changed, exactly for the reasons you say, Errol. There's been plenty of time to vaccinate judges, court officers. I've said long ago, we'll set up centers to vaccinate jurors and reward people for becoming jurors. But right now, we also know millions of people have been vaccinated. So, there's plenty of folks who could be turned to for jurors who already have long since been vaccinated. It's about the will to move forward. We've got to get the courts back. It's affecting everything. And certainly, go right down to the neighborhood, right down to the officer

on the beat or the neighborhood resident, we can't get it right until we bring back the thing that always was the crucial piece of the equation, that if someone was arrested, there was a trial, there was a decision, there was a consequence, if someone's found guilty. We haven't had that consistently in a year now.

Louis: Is there – if that's your theory, is it possible that bail reform actually does come into play? I know it's been a talking point by people who never wanted bail reform in the first place, but in this case, somebody who's thinking about doing something impulsive and violent and criminal, I don't know that they're necessarily – I wouldn't expect that they're thinking about, well, the courts are overwhelmed, and my case isn't going to come up for six months. They're thinking about what's going to happen in the moment, what's going to happen that day, perhaps that weekend. And one thing that they do know is if they play their cards right, and have a little bit of luck, they're not going to have to spend the weekend in jail.

Mayor: Look, I can't get in the minds of each person. I can tell you that there are people out right now who would normally be going through a trial process and if that trial meant that they had to have a consequence they would be receiving that consequence. And then there was others, if they're found not guilty, then that's the right decision. But the fact is we don't have that consequence happening. And then that affects everything else. I've talked to a lot of folks in all different parts of the criminal justice system, who acknowledge that it is really about the final consequence of the process when there's been a full trial and there's a determination. Everything else in the system revolves around that. But if there is no pathway to a consequence, I think it is one of the factors that's contributed to why we're having this uptick in violence. And it's a fixable problem. It really is. Again, NYPD, we have to keep doing more in the city, we have to keep doing more to bring the community and NYPD together. There's a lot – most importantly, bring back the city, the economy, the life of the city, but what would help us so much would be for the State to really step forward and just get those courts up and running again.

Louis: Earlier today, you mentioned that you think New York, in trying to pick your successor, they are looking for a progressive mayor. They're looking for progressive leadership in this city. It's unclear what all progressive means, right? I mean, you could ask ten people, you'll get 11 different opinions. But one thing that has been a theme that is of some concern, at least to me, I'd love to get your take on this is that progressive is a social – being progressive is associated with wanting to do the bare minimum as far as traditional police interaction when it comes even to violent crime, that the idea is to constrain, remove. In one case, you know, Tiffany Cabán, who is a progressive candidate for City Council, says she wants to disband the NYPD ultimately. When you have people saying things like that, progressives are not going to necessarily be seen as relevant and effective and trustworthy when it comes to dealing with the issues that you and I are talking about right now.

Mayor: Yeah. I agree with your concern. I'd say this, I think the most – the simplest most straightforward definition of progressive right now revolves around, first of all, looking at economic issues, the willingness to tax the wealthy at a level that really is their fair share, and demand that there be more equality in this society economically, more support for working people and labor. I think that's a core, core progressive value, and you see some differences among the candidates on that. I think when it comes to social justice, when it comes to policing what would unite millions of people in this city is a desire to see consistently more fair and non-discriminatory policing. I think the vast majority of New Yorkers believe, of course, there's a

role to play for police. But they want it to continue to be more responsive and respectful of communities. We've tried to do that in a lot of ways – long ago ending stop-and-frisk, more recently with the reforms we put in place like the disciplinary matrix and getting communities into the selection of precinct commanders. This work has to keep going on, but I don't think progressive means not believing there's a role for police. I think progressive means ensuring that we continue to reform policing and make it respectful and non-discriminatory.

Louis: On a related note, this is something one of my former students, Christine DeRosa, was working – has been working on this is the published story. Over 1,500 students were restrained, meaning physically placed in handcuffs and so forth by school safety agents of the NYPD in the year between the first quarter of 2019, first quarter of 2020. In a lot of cases, we're talking about really, really young students, under 12 years old, who have had metal handcuffs placed on them in a lot of cases. That's not supposed to be City policy, but the way the current policy is worded, it's not necessarily clear that that should never happen or that must never happen. There's always these kind of open-ended discretion, well, if your superior officer says, it's okay, you can do it and so forth. I guess I wanted to get your response and also ask if the NYPD could respond to this because they're – they just haven't commented on this. We've been asking.

Mayor: Yeah, well, we'll certainly make sure they do respond. I haven't seen the report you're referring to. I'll just make a broad statement. We've been moving consistently to reduce the use of restraints. That should be obviously kept to a minimum. It is important to let the voices of the educators be predominant in a lot of these decisions. That's why we've made many, many moves for years now to ensure that the building leadership, educational leadership has much more of a say. There are exceptional situations. I'm the first to say it. And I'm saying it as someone who was a public school parent. There are some situations where there's real danger and something has to be done urgently. But those are rarities. So, the goal is, of course, to reduce any use of restraints to the maximum extent possible. And this work continues. This is work that we're doing all the time, training school safety officers differently, again, bring the educational leadership to the fore. This is an area where you're going to see continued reform.

Louis: Okay, we will leave it there for now. We'll talk again next week. Thanks very much for spending some time with us, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Errol.

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