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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT M/WBE CITYWIDE
PROCUREMENT FAIR**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Well, good morning, everyone.

Audience: Good morning.

Mayor: Come on, folks. We're here to make some social change. Good morning, everyone!

Audience: Good morning!

Mayor: There you go. First of all, I want to thank our commissioner of Small Business Services, Maria Torres-Springer. You'll be hearing a little more about her in a moment, but I want to thank her for the leadership that she's provided and for everyone who put together this wonderful gathering. I want to thank, of course, BNI – BNY – excuse me – BNY Mellon for hosting, because every great gathering that's going to make an impact on people's businesses and people's lives needs a great place to meet. So we want to thank them for giving us this opportunity. I want to thank all of you for taking the time to be here, because this is important – it's not just important in the work you do – for so many of you, building your own business – what we're talking about here today will have far-reaching consequences for this city. This is humanly important.

You know, we depend upon folks who are creating businesses all over this city, women and people of color living out their dreams to create something that they believe in, that is all about their vision for their lives, their creativity, their entrepreneurship. We simultaneously know that what you're doing is going to have a big impact on a lot of folks at the grassroots. A lot of folks will get jobs and opportunity because of you – and many people will get jobs and opportunity because you're there who wouldn't have it if you weren't there. So – as we begin today, I would like to restate the mission. I think in a lot of the work we do in public life, that a sense of mission sometimes gets forgotten along the way, so I want to restate the mission. We are here to support you because you help to create opportunity for people all over this city and you particularly create opportunity for many people who haven't had enough opportunity. And for that, I want to thank you. I want to thank you for what you do – it means so much to New York City, and it means so much to our vision for fighting inequality.

We talked about this a lot – and I want to state it again because I think it's so important. If we were to accept a status quo of growing inequality – not even just plain bad, static inequality – growing inequality – a status quo where fewer and fewer people actually have the opportunity to live a stable and decent middle class lifestyle. If we accept that reality, if we accept an ever more stratified society, it will be at our peril – it will be a danger to our future, to our children's and grandchildren's future. This is a matter of our own security and stability. We think a lot about security in terms of public safety – and that is obviously our number one goal – but there's other ways to think about security and safety and stability – and some of those most pertinent ways are

economic. If we don't have a society that's truly for all, if we don't live up to the ideals of this nation each and every day in a way that people can see and touch and feel and believe in, we won't be as strong as we're meant to be, we won't be as strong as we were in the past – we won't have the future that we're capable of. So I want to put your work in context.

This is – I believe, with no fear of contradiction – this is the greatest city in the world. It is the greatest city in the world in one measure because it's the most diverse city in the world, because we took the strength of peoples from all over the nation – we took the strength of people who often had not had a chance to live out their dreams and put their imprint on society. People came here all together and created something greater than the sum of the parts. That was true for decades and decades – it has to be true again – and we're at one of those moments in history where it's hanging in the balance. We're trying to fight inequality every way we know at the local level. We wish we had more help from what is unfortunately a dysfunctional federal dynamic. We wish the federal government as a whole – particularly our friends in the Congress – could focus on moving all of us forward and creating opportunity and investing. That's not happening right now – it may happen at some point in the future. But for us, we have to work with the tools we have. And this administration believes you are a fundamental part of this change, a fundamental part of this progress, because you reach the grassroots – you reach where people live.

When you start a business, you're going to employ people who need that opportunity – again, some of whom would not get it but for you. When you build out your business, more and more people get a chance. When your business thrives, more and more people get a better salary. So this is absolutely the reality – you are part of the solution. Our job is to elevate your work and support your work. And – just one more thing – and I've got a few other things I want to say, but I want to just frame just one more point – a lot of people said to me over the last couple of years, well, can a city actually address such a difficult problem as inequality? And I said, well, first of all, you have no choice but to address it – even if the federal government isn't where we need it to be. We have no choice but to address it in every way we can. That's why we're going to build 200,000 units of affordable housing. That's why we did paid sick leave for a million more people. That's why we're doing everything we can to raise wages and benefits, to take burdens off of families. That's why we did pre-k, that's why we did afterschool. It all fits together. It's ways of giving people a little more opportunity, more money in their pocket, easing their burdens, helping the way forward [inaudible] greater economic strength.

So my answer to folks who say what we can't do because we're just one city is, look at all the things we can do – and we must do. And we must hold on, we must keep fighting inequality until the day when our national government joins us in that struggle. And that puts you in the spotlight, because what you can do – person by person – is so profound.

The world changes at the grassroots. Real social change comes from the grassroots, up. And it comes, literally, by a person getting a job, or a family getting a decent income, or a child getting an education. That's literally how it works – person by person, family by family. And you have an opportunity to be such a profound part of that. It's what you believe in, because you built these businesses and so many of you support these businesses. Our job is to propel your work forward.

Now, you're going to hear, later on in this program, from four M/WBE leaders – people who exemplify what I'm talking about, who had a vision, who created – and because of that vision, so many other people were helped. I bet so many people in this room will feel those stories are familiar. Doesn't matter what business you're in, doesn't matter what your dream is, I bet you'll feel some immediate kindred feeling about the dreams of the four people you are going to hear from, and see in them and their success, a lot of what you've achieved as well.

Everyone in this room who has started a business, who is building out a business, who is preparing to start a business – you know it's a competitive dynamic out there. You know it's difficult. You know that the profit margins are thin. There's not a lot of room for error. By your nature, you're the kind of people who are willing

to take those risks for something that you believe in. So, I appreciate your courage. I appreciate your courage, because it's not easy to start a business. It's particularly not easy to start a business in such a tough, competitive place as this. And yet, when you succeed – and people in this room, you either have succeeded or you will. I have that faith. When you succeed in the toughest playing field there is, you can do it for the long haul. You can achieve a lot for so many people.

I like to tell a story – and I'm very, very proud of this. You know, we all have to appreciate what's in our gene pool, because a lot of times, our ancestors did a lot more than we could ever dream. You know, they went through a lot of challenges that we could never even conceive of. So, my grandmother came from a very, very small town – really out of the way rural town in southern Italy. And she came here over 100 years ago and she didn't have a formal education. She came with a sister and her mother. So, three women came together. They had other relatives here who helped them out, but they decided together – three women – to form their own business. This is about 1910, give or take. They decided to form their own business, here in New York City. The only thing they really knew to do, that they thought they could turn into something they could use as a skill to create products that they could sell – they knew how to do embroidery. It's a great skill in their hometown in southern Italy, so they started doing embroidery. They started selling embroidered items. Then they said, let's make dresses. They started – turned out a whole women's fashion line. And they started their own shop and they named it after themselves. And in effect, said to the world – give or take 1910 – that they had a women-owned business. They called it the Misses – M-I-S-S-E-S – the Misses Briganti.

So, they announced to the world that, here it was, an immigrant, woman-owned business. And they believed they could make it in New York City. And of course it was competitive. Of course it was tough. But they were very, very proud of what they had to offer and they didn't see limitations – they saw possibilities. And, by the way, they had just gotten here. They were just learning the language, and yet they found their way.

I look at that with tremendous respect and honor, because for all of us who have grown up with some greater advantages of education or being born here into the culture – there's a lot of things that have made life easier for some of us. For a lot of other people, there aren't those advantages. And so, for my own grandmother, she had to find her way with her sister, with her mother. And if you had been to this small town, you would say, there is no way in the world that someone coming from there could possibly make it in the mean streets of New York City. But like so many of you, and so many of your ancestors, that miracle occurred and that's what we celebrate today. So, the notion that people will overcome these challenges is a given. Because there are people here willing to do the work, willing to take the courageous leap and build. Our job is to support you in that. And so, the question becomes, show us – everyone in this room should ask of us – show us product. Show us progress. I'm happy to say we have some. We're off to a good start.

In fiscal year 2014, the city awarded \$690 million dollars, in contracts, to certified M/WBEs. \$690 million dollars – that is a 57 percent increase over the previous fiscal year. That, my friends, is real money.

[Applause]

And that is a beginning. That is a beginning and we are committed to increasing that number. Another fact – from January 1st of this year to October 31st, with Maria Torres-Springer's great leadership, SBS certified 749 M/WBEs –

[Applause]

– which brings us to a total of 3,802 certified firms. So, 3,802 is a good number that we expect to make better, but look at the fact that 749 – a very high percentage of those were achieved just in the last year because of Maria and her team. So it's a strong start with so much more to do. We want to see our business community reflect all of our people. We want to see job opportunities for all our people. And part of why I am convinced that we can and will make a lot more progress – this is just a beginning – is because of the people on our team

who will lead this effort. A lot of times, I think you can tell – history teaches us that effort will either succeed or fail, will go farther or less far, depending on the leaders who are chosen, what they represent, what they believe in, their style, their forcefulness, or lack of forcefulness, their vision. Well, I believe in forceful change agents. And I mentioned my grandmother – I can assure you that I come from a long line of powerful, forceful women. They taught me everything I know. And so, when I meet powerful, forceful women, I say, I want to hire that woman and put her in a position of power to make change. So I'm going to introduce you to three women who have an opportunity here to build upon this progress intensely and will do so.

First, our M/WBE director is Maya Wiley. And I want you to hear this carefully – our M/WBE director for the city of New York is Maya Wiley. But very very importantly, that is not her only title. The title most people know her as is, counsel to the mayor. She is my counsel at City Hall. She is in the middle of, veritably, everything we do at City Hall. And she has devoted so much of her career to promoting equality in many, many forms. And she started an enterprise of her own. It happened to be a nonprofit focused on social change. She is – she was the founder and president of the Center for Social Inclusion. And when I appointed her M/WBE director, it was with a very conscious notion that the person who holds that portfolio should not be somewhere far away from the mayor – shouldn't be segmented away from the core of government. That person had to have a powerful role right in the middle of City Hall to be effective. So the notion was, let's really make this a priority by choosing someone who's in the center of the action, and that's Maya. Let's thank her for what she does.

[Applause]

I mentioned earlier – and you heard from our SPS commissioner, Maria Torres-Springer – so, she's in charge of that extraordinary progress we made on certifying M/WBEs. And a lot of people know it's a complex process to navigate when it comes to procurement in the city and Maria's job is to get a lot more people in line to have that opportunity and to demystify and simplify in every way possible, to make sure that people have an opportunity to truly compete and to win contracts. Again, Maria comes by this world view in a way that's very familiar to me, given the story I just told you. She is the daughter of Filipino immigrants – folks who came here and struggled and found a way and were tremendously devoted to the next generation, including their daughter. And when Maria first told me her story when I interviewed her – it is one of those amazing stories that so many people in this room can recognize, of parents who just did everything they knew how to do to create opportunity for next generation. And they didn't necessarily know what it looked like from their own experience for their child to get a first class education at a globally renowned university or go on to play a leading role in government. They just knew that they would do anything and everything for their daughter to find a way for her. What I like about Maria is she has never ever forgotten that. You can hear it in everything she does – the urgency of the work she does and you're going to experience and see her get a lot done for this city as she continues to build opportunity. Let's thank Maria for all she does.

[Applause]

The final member of our power trio – I think you guys need uniforms or something –

[Laughter]

– is Lisette Camilo. Lisette – when I remember talking to her about this role as the director of the Mayor's Office of Contract Services – this is not a role for the timid. It's not a role for anyone who's not ready to slay the bureaucratic dragon because let's face it, contracting in government is complicated and often way too slow. Lisette was willing to go in and do something about that and she also has that energy of someone whose had to struggle and strive – daughter of Dominican immigrants, clearly fueled by her own family's experience and her understanding that if government can't get to people, if it can't actually reach people with the change that we're supposed to make, then we aren't doing our job. It's as simple as that. If the process is so complicated that no one can access it, or only the same old folks get the contracts, then we aren't doing our job. Lisette has that

drive – that focus. She also has a tremendously nuanced sense of how to achieve these changes. She has a great legal mind. She understands the procurement rules inside out and she understands the lives of people she serves – not just from her own experience. She worked in the labor movement. She helped immigrants legally with their challenges. She’s really lived it and now is bringing this to bear. Let’s thank Lisette for her great work.

[Applause]

And now, power trio, you have to stand and receive applause as a power trio. Please.

[Applause]

So, the city has a lot in the way of plans and ability to reach people, a lot that we can do to answer the real world needs of businesses that are building and trying to create opportunity. We have classes to help firms get bonded. We have loan programs. We have the NYC Teaming program which helps firms partner up together to win city contracts. We have Strategic Steps for Growth, which is a nine-month training course to help businesses grow. We have the Real Estate Developer Program. There’s a host – excuse me, a host of opportunities that we have created. And today’s your opportunity to learn about these, to take full advantage of them, to meet these wonderful leaders, to get to know them, to really get plugged into all the city is doing and all it has to offer so we can help you succeed. Your success is our success. Your success is this city’s success. Your success means opportunity for so many. And if we’re going to create a more just and equal New York City, you have to succeed. That’s the way we look at it. You have to succeed and we will be there with you. Before I step aside and let the program begin, a moment in español.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

And for all that you do and all that we will do together I say, muchas gracias a todos. Thank you, everyone.

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