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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS ANNOUNCES HISTORIC INVESTMENT IN PRESCHOOL SPECIAL-EDUCATION SUPPORTS AND EXPANSION OF ACCESS

Mayor Eric Adams: Great, great, great. Good morning. Good morning, all.

Just really excited about today and I cannot thank the chancellor enough about the initiative. It's one thing to put in place a vision, but it's another thing to execute. And he has successfully looked at all of those visions that I had on the campaign trail and he continues to just execute them. From the dyslexia screening to investment in foster care children to what we're doing around utilizing our schools, he just continues to execute the vision thinking differently. Understanding that this is a moonshot moment, that we must look at how we are using our schools to look after all of our children.

And far too often we have not accomplished that. And so just personally, I just want to thank him for his commitment and dedication to our children. And I know how important it is to deal with some form of disability, you hear me talk about it often on the campaign trail. Young man came to me the other day when we were walking through a school building and he said, "Mayor, I'm dyslexic. And you just empowered me with the possibilities and I hope one day I take your job."

And I said, "It's a good thing, it's a good thing." But that's what we want our children to aspire to do. And for far too long, students with disabilities have struggled in a system that wasn't fully able to meet them where they are. We really gauged what we were doing, meeting them where others are instead of meeting people where they are and taking them where they ought to be. The previous ideas of universal 3-K and pre-K did not account for children with disabilities. It was just wrong. It was unfair and it was wrong.

And parents knew that. Behind every special needs child is a special parent that is pushing against the obstacles of government so they can provide their children with the same opportunities that other children are receiving. And I disagree with the definition of universal that doesn't include all of our children. All of our children must be included and a true universal program prioritizes and serves every child, every day in partnership with families and reflecting the needs of the community.

Today we're making a historic investment in preschool childhood special education. And so by this spring, all of our special education students in pre-K and 3-K will have the supports they need to flourish both in the classroom and in life. All of our children. This is really exciting. We are stabilizing 3,000 enhanced seats and adding 800 new seats to serve our early childhood special education students. That's 800 more students and their families who can benefit from our services.

Because every minute of learning counts, we all know that. We will also increase the school day from five hours to six hours. Now all of our students with disabilities will receive the same amount of class time as their general education peers. Imagine that. Children who needed more were receiving less. That is just dysfunctional at its highest level. This will help our children absorb more and also reduce the parent's child care burden, giving them the support they need.

We will fund programs to recruit, train, and retain early childhood special education staff so that our most vulnerable students can be taught by experienced teachers. And this is so important here. We will increase pay so that our special education teachers are paid in line with teachers in general education programs. We weren't paying the same rate for doing a more difficult job. Just was not fair. This wage disparity has been going on for too long and it is stopping with this administration. It's unfair to our hardworking teachers and most importantly it's unfair to the students.

We attract and retain the best by paying fair wages. And that's what our students and teachers deserve and that is what we're going to give them. Our investments in early childhood special education... An increase in the number of seats is nothing short of transformative. Early learning is a key to success for young children, but it's particularly important for children with disabilities.

Early intervention helps them manage to overcome their challenges and most importantly, it changes lives. It changes lives for families, it changes lives for our children, it changes lives for our community. And my own life is proof of that, of how if you get early intervention, you get opportunities for your future. And so we are committed to making sure that all of our children receive the support they need and families receive the support they need.

I'm thrilled both inside and outside the classroom that we are making this historical leap forward and ensuring that universal means universal and not with an asterisk that does not include our children with special needs. And so to all our parents out there. We heard you, we responded, and we're going to continue to move in the direction to deal with those historical inequities that have impacted our children throughout this entire city.

And again, I personally thank the chancellor of the Department of Education for what he is doing and will continue to do. And I want to bring on my friend and the chancellor of this city, David Banks. Thank you, chancellor.

Chancellor David Banks, Department of Education: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you. Welcome everybody. I am very, very happy also to be here today. I have driven by this place many, many times. Before I became chancellor, my office was around the corner and I almost

got an office right across the street from here. And so I'm very familiar with the area, I live in Harlem as well. And it is certainly a thrill for me to be here at ABC Graham.

And I want to first of all acknowledge the leadership from this organization, the great work that they do here each and every day. As I came in, I spoke with Dr. Hazel Dukes. And she said, "Mayor Dinkins would be smiling right now." He's smiling down on us because this was one of his favorite places to be. And those of you who remember Mayor Dinkins, he loved children. Loved children above everything else. And apparently he'd visited this place many, many times.

And so in the spirit of Mayor Dinkins, we are here today to try to do the right thing on behalf of the children, their families and the educators who work with them each and every day. I can't thank the mayor enough because when you have the right nexus between a mayor and a chancellor, you can really move mountains. And we have that connection. He has laid out the vision well before I got here and pushes me and our team regularly to continue to do the right thing on behalf of all of our kids, even under very difficult circumstances.

But the challenge and the charge for us is very clear. Do the right thing for the least of these. And we are fully committed to doing that. And I do that with folks like Dr. Kara Ahmed, our deputy chancellor for Early Childhood. I have learned so much about this entire sector really from her and I appreciate very much her leadership. Christina Foti, who heads up our work in special education. We have a very good team and the mayor and I have talked for a long time.

We said that the DOE and so much of... We don't produce the kinds of results that we need to be producing. But what I have found is that there are wonderful and smart and amazing people, we just got to align our work and our efforts and the investments in the right way if we really want to see significant change. And that's something that we are committed to doing. I'm thrilled that we have several of our deputy chancellors here as well. First, Deputy Chancellor Dan Weisberg is here as well as Kenita, Kenita Lloyd. So we are well represented from our offices here today.

Last week, many of you heard... A week or so ago we announced our plans to reimagine special education. And we put together a working group task force that are the people who have been leaning into this space for a long time. They know all the issues around special education and what it will take for us to turn this around. And so we are going to be listening to them and they're going to lay out a blueprint that we fully expect to adopt and to follow as a path forward for special education.

But today, we're making a renewed investment in an expansion of special education access across the entire sector. Today is a very important day because this expansion will open enough preschool seats to serve every single preschool child with disabilities across the five boroughs. Did y'all hear what I just said?

Audience: Yes.

Chancellor Banks: Noah heard it. Thank you, Noah. I don't know if the rest of them are with me, Noah, but this is a big deal. Because for far too long, this term "for all" has been thrown around. But in this sector, for all did not necessarily mean for all. And I would hear over and

over and over again from parents who have children with special needs and they say they had no room at the end for us. We certainly hope that with the mayor here and you as the chancellor and your team, that you would see us and recognize that our child matters as well. And the mayor said, "We see you, your child matters, and we're going to do everything that we can to make sure that your child gets all the services that they need."

And for far too long, our young people with disabilities and their families have been overlooked by a system that quite frankly was not built for them. They were not a priority. And in fact, what we started to have over these last several years was an explosion of these Carter Cases. And some of you from the media have heard me talk about this before.

Parents who would leave the system to get the services that they need for their child and that they are legally bound to get. And the New York City public school system would simply pay these private places to provide those services. And the mayor and I talked about it all the time and said, "We should be providing those services for our children." And that is what we are connected and that's what we are committed to doing.

So to that end, we're making a significant investment today in the early childhood special education across 65 provider contracts which are going to result in 3,000 enhanced accessible special education seats across the sector. 3,000, including 400 brand new seats and an additional 400 this spring. So what this means is that we're making our early childhood education seats accessible and excellent for all of our children. It's one of the things that the Deputy Chancellor Ahmed talks about all the time.

It's not just the quantity of the seats, it's the quality of the seats, the kind of experience that young people are getting at a place like this right here at ABC, where they're getting a top flight educational experience. We're not here just to be babysitters. Children as young as those who are coming here are getting the seeds planted and the strategies every single day that helps to build their learning. And it's critically important that we do that and we are committed to continuing to do that.

But this expansion also brings early childhood special education programs in line with our 3-K and pre-K general education programs. As the mayor pointed out, we're going from five hours a day to six hours and 20 minutes a day, which provides extended childcare for working families. If you know if your mom or dad and you are at work, there's a big difference between having your child in the facility for five hours versus six hours and 20 minutes. Makes a difference. Because if you have other children, they're in school for six hours and 20 minutes. So it all aligns. And so we heard them and we are making sure that we are delivering on a promise to do better.

Last thing I want you to do is listen to this. As the mayor also pointed out, previously there has been a significant pay difference between special education early childhood instructors and their general education peers. That's what happens when you don't think it's a priority. So due to this inequity, we have historically struggled to retain staff that can deliver services for children with disabilities. And that's ending today. That's why we're increasing the pay for special education instructors across early childhood. That is worthy of a round of applause.

This is real stuff. This is not rhetoric. Well paid, well supported, trained, satisfied instructors are vital to the operation of these programs in the future of our children. We had several instructors over the years who would leave because they also have to figure out how to take care of themselves and there are better paying opportunities in other places. We need them to stay right here in places like this to work with our babies. And so we're working to continue to close that gap and I'm really excited about it.

And so in closing, I just want to say while we may not have created many of these issues that we inherited as an administration, we recognize that it is our responsibility to fix it. Pre-K, 3K, early childhood programs are tremendously important. And the prior administration understood that, and I will continue to salute them for all that they did in actually making sure that they got this in place. But there are huge gaps and those are some of the gaps that we are addressing here today.

So I'm thrilled and delighted to serve as the chancellor at this critical moment in time and to continue to do, above all else, listen. Listen to the people, listen to the communities, listen to our families, listen to our providers, listen to our children who tell us what they need. And you do this when you have a mayor and a chancellor who are fully aligned and work on behalf of all of our young people to make our communities better. When places like this flourish, Harlem flourishes. And when places like this flourish all over the city, our entire city flourishes.

And I'm going to do everything I can to be committed to uplifting that and making it happen. And I can't do it without great leadership that's on our team driving this work. And I'm thrilled to introduce you at this time to take us the rest of the way, our deputy chancellor for Early Childhood, Dr. Kara Ahmed.

Deputy Commissioner for Early Childhood Education Kara Ahmed, Department of Education: Good morning. And thank you everyone for joining us today. And thank you to Chancellor Banks and to Mayor Adams and for continuing to prioritize early childhood education, our youngest learners and their families. In an equitable society, a high quality early childhood experience must include all children. And thanks to Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks, our team is empowered to imagine and create a comprehensive system that serves all children from birth to five.

We've already begun the work necessary to provide a seat for every young child with a disability based on their individual strengths and their learning needs and we will not stop until that goal is actualized. As part of this important work, I am so excited through this contract enhancement that we can be in partnership with such an outstanding network of state approved nonpublic special education providers, enabling the DOE to ensure a full continuum of programs and services to meet all children's needs, such as Program Director MaryEllen Rooney from the ABC Graham School, which is where we are right now. Big round of applause.

I'd like to thank MaryEllen not just for hosting us today, but for her dedication to our children each and every day, along with so many other providers that are here today like Dawn Saffayeh from HeartShare, Melissa Hendricks from Life Skills, CGYs and Michael Brown from New York Center for Child Development. These are all providers who dedicate their lives, their careers to our children each and every day. So a big round of applause for them.

These providers are the cornerstone of early childhood programming for children with disabilities and for their families who rely on their care and support. Yet these programs have historically faced severe challenges, as you heard the chancellor and the mayor say, in hiring and retaining teachers and teaching staff because of pay disparity in comparison to general education early childhood contract providers. These staffing challenges have contributed to a severe deficit of much needed special class seats, leaving hundreds of children, who are disproportionately children of color, without programs and services that they need, and quite frankly, that they're entitled to.

Through this contract enhancement though, we are marking a turning point, changing a reality that didn't have to be but just was. Among the currently 65 programs participating, staff pay is being increased, helping to stabilize approximately 3,000 existing seats across the sector, retaining teaching staff and thereby ensuring that children with disabilities have continuity of care and learning with the teachers they have formed strong and trusting relationships with.

Through these 65 programs, 400 new special class seats are being created and we're increasing educational access to young children with disabilities across the five boroughs. This commitment by our administration not only increases pay, fosters stabilization and actually increases new seats, it also increases the school day, as you heard the chancellor speak about, to match the length of a school day of 3-K and pre-K programs across our portfolio.

We will also be providing dedicated site support to work in partnership for providers in implementing assessment, screening tools and curriculum. And we also will be providing funding to promote the least restrictive environment for children per their individual needs. So while there's been incredible progress made, let me be clear, this is certainly just the beginning. It is not nearly mission accomplished. We have a lot of work ahead of us and we aim to continue on this path, as you heard the mayor say, to keep adding new seats between now and the spring to profoundly increase access to education for children with disabilities.

However, none of this work could be possible without our invaluable partners that have helped to move our collective vision forward and who we rely on to helping us continue to make progress. Partners like our Chair Joseph, who's always a champion for all children and in particular children with disabilities. So we thank you, chair, for your support. We thank Pam Madeiros and Chris Treiber, who's here for their advocacy and commitment to children in their families not only in New York City, but across New York State.

And in the words of Pam, today we celebrate a battle long fought. Thank you to our incredible early childhood team who is here helping to get the work done, and in particular, Jodina Clanton and James Morgano, who have been extraordinary leaders in this work, and I've learned so much from. And thank you to Randy Levine from Advocates for Children who has been an incredible partner and who I have not only learned so much from as well, but who always takes the time to commend our team on the progress we're making, while gently and yet strongly reminding me, "Deputy Chancellor, there is still work to do," and she's very right. Please join me in welcoming Ms. Randy Levine.

Randi Levine, Policy Director, Advocates For Children: Thank you. My name is Randy Levine. I'm the policy director of Advocates for Children of New York. In recent years, we've heard from family after family with the same story, their young child had autism or other complex disabilities and needed a seat in a preschool special education class, but there was no seat available. Many of these children were sitting at home waiting months or longer in violation of their legal rights. In fact, at the end of the last school year, 800 children were waiting for seats in their legally mandated preschool special education classes. And in recent years, parents of children with disabilities have watched the expansion of 3-K and pre-K and wondered why are there no seats for our children? Why are our children's teachers paid less than other 3-K and pre-K teachers? Why is the school day length for our children shorter than for other children in 3-K and pre-K? And why do our children always seem to come last?

Today, we are celebrating an important step the city has taken toward helping preschoolers with disabilities and their families. We thank Mayor Adams, Chancellor Banks, Deputy Chancellor Ahmed, and their teams along with the city council, including Chair Joseph and the comptroller for moving forward with the contract enhancement for 65 preschool special education sites, with the expectation of opening as many as 400 needed seats in preschool special education classes this spring. These classes are desperately needed. But since they won't fully close the gap, we also appreciate the commitment being made today by the city to ensure that there is a preschool special education class for every child who needs one this spring. We plan to hold the administration accountable for delivering on that promise. The city has a legal obligation and a moral obligation to do so. We look forward to seeing the city's plan to open all needed classes to make sure we end this school year with no child waiting for the preschool special education class they need. Thank You.

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Thank you, Randy, for your advocacy and your work, always. As you heard from Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks, we cannot say we have a pre-K or 3-K for all program, because for all has not included our children with disabilities, and in particular black and brown children across New York City. My colleague Mark Traeger often notes that this is a civil rights issue that far too long has not been addressed. And so, he's absolutely right, and it is our honor to have Dr. Hazel Duke's, president of the NAACP New York State Conference with us today, as Dr. Dukes has dedicated her life to human rights and equality and has a deep understanding of the need for systemic change to ensure the rights of all of our children are being met. Thank you, Dr. Dukes.

There is no one better that can speak firsthand as to what access to high-quality care and learning means to children in their families than the parent of three-year-old Ryan, who attends the ABC Graham Community School. I'd like to have you join me in welcoming Mrs. Baez.

Katyria Rotestan Baez: Good morning, everyone. Thank you, sorry, I'm nervous Dr. Ahmed for introducing me. Thank you, mayor. Chancellor Banks. My name is Katyria Baez. I am a proud mother of two young boys, Noah Mason Baez and Ryan Baez, and a stepdaughter. Valerie. I want to thank MaryEllen and the superhero team in this school for not only making it easy for the solution for the new journey in Ryan's life. Ryan is three years old. He was diagnosed with autism. With Ryan's diagnosis, MaryEllen helped me through the transition for

the early intervention and finding the right therapists for Ryan, occupational therapist, physical therapy, and speech therapy.

Ryan entering this building every day made it easy for my family and Ryan's new journey. It warms in my heart every morning walking Ryan to the front door to drop him off. Ryan is so excited to see his school. He actually runs into the school and sometimes forgets to say goodbye. But that says it all.

That says it all for me, because that just goes to show me that Ryan is comfortable with his environment and his new settings. The programs like this here in ABC Grant School have changed Ryan's life and my family as well for the better. I am so pleased and excited to know that families throughout the city in every borough will have the same opportunity for their child. Today, I speak for myself and other parents. It is our children's world, we are just living in it.

We must not be afraid to advocate for our child, to ask questions, to listen, to help our students have a better, brighter future. I am glad for this administration to be helping me in this effort. I'm also thanking Ryan's brother, Noah, for being his go-to buddy and through this process. It's been a very tough one. I don't only speak for myself, I'm an advocate for all the parents there is. It's difficult out there. This is a stepping stone and I'm grateful to be a part of this world, because it's their world, we're just living in it.

So again, Ryan has a great support system: his dad, myself, his sister, Valerie, his brother Noah, and more. We are so blessed with the community that has helped us and continue to help every other child. I'll continue to be the advocate for our kids. Thank you so much.

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Thank you, Mrs. Baez, you're going to make me cry now. Mrs. Baez and Ryan serve as a reminder to all of us as to why we must get this work right and why we must get this work done. I thank again Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks for making this historic moment a reality and for their commitment to children and their families across New York City. Thank you so much.

Mayor Adams: Do a few on topic?

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Yeah, we're going to go on topic.

Question: Yeah, mayor, I was hoping we could just hear a little bit more about the contract enhancement. When will that go into effect and will it result in special ed, pre-K teachers at all sites making the same or just these 65 sites?

Mayor Adams: Sure.

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Thank you so much for the question. The contract enhancement has already begun. As you heard us say, 65 programs have already been approved this past November through the PEP process and are in the process, many of which are already now registered through the comptroller's office and the rest just are awaiting. That will create an increase in teaching salaries to bring them up to the same salaries as that of other contracted

providers in early childhood education. That work will continue. So as other contracts are registered, more and more providers and their teaching staff will receive the same.

Question: So if someone's contract right now doesn't have that enhancement when it's up, they'll get the enhancement? Is that correct?

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Yes. When they are registered, then the enhancement goes into place. It's helping to stabilize, as we've talked about, a number of existing seats, right, so that we retain teachers, we retain those seats, and that children still have access to those seats, as well as create new seats, which is absolutely the need.

Question: Yeah, so all of these services are going to kids once they've already been identified and found to need these extra supports here, can you talk a little bit about what, if anything, announced today will go into helping to identify these students, where we're also at with that now coming out of the pandemic, making sure kids are getting what they need?

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Absolutely. All of our classrooms across our portfolio are supporting children exactly where they are and determining what their needs are, and if there are needs for additional services, related services within the classroom that they're already in, which would be considered an inclusive classroom, or if there is a need for a special class that's integrated setting or a special class. Through all of this, the work is partially around our 4410 contract enhancement, but the work that continues to happen across early childhood education is about deepening and deepening the effective practices that we have in place for inclusive classrooms to really ensure that children are served in their least restrictive environment based on their individual needs.

Question: I wonder if you could tell us how much this whole program is going to cost and what exactly was the salary for the teachers before this and what will it go up to so it's competitive, so dollars and cents?

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Absolutely. We have earmarked monies for about 130 million over the next two years to support this program, which is vital for the children across New York City. We're actually raising the salary to that of the same as the collective bargaining agreement for our other provider teachers that are part of the contracted programs. They're going to be going up to about 68,000, close to 70,000.

Question: From?

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Roughly anywhere from 50 to 58,000.

Question: So this will really make it easier for you to recruit teachers and keep them?

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Recruit teachers and retain them. When you hear from families across New York City, especially families who have children with disabilities, they talk often about making sure that they have adults that they can rely on, and that once their children are in

these trusting and safe relationships, they don't want to lose them. And so we don't want to either.

Question: The other question I have, if I could just follow up, is, so when these children get out of the 3-K and the pre-K, will they be getting the same services as they go through the system?

Deputy Commissioner Ahmed: Yeah. So we have a wealth of services in the Department of Education to support all children and all their needs. So children with disabilities through K through 12. Absolutely.

Question: Mayor, when advocates for children said that last year 800 kids were sitting in their homes waiting for city services, imagine what those families were going through. I wonder what your message is to those families today?

Mayor Adams: We heard them. We committed. We are delivering. And the biggest advocate for children is Eric Adams. I'm the mayor of the city and I have an obligation that all families are treated equally. And I'm going to continue to push the city in that direction.

Question: Do you have any more on-topics?

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you.

Question: I have one more on topic for the chancellor.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: When you were talking about universal, was it universal?

Chancellor Banks: Sure.

Question: Is it correct that as we sit here today, you have more seats for the general ed, pre-K and 3-K than students. Is that right?

Chancellor Banks: Yep.

Question: So can you explain that disconnect that you have more seats for the general and no seats for the special needs, and how that could have coexisted for so long?

Chancellor Banks: Well, we were asking the same questions. It was a disconnect. And you had a misalignment of seats. And what our goal was in seeing all of these disparities in different parts of the city where there are not enough seats in one neighborhood and then in another part of the city, it's a whole different story.

So our job really was to balance all of this so that we're responding to every family that needs a seat and an appropriate seat will get a seat. We asked that very essential question. Why is it that

all children with special needs, there are no seats for them. That's the way the program was designed. And we're here to fix it. And that's part of what we're doing here today,

Question: Designed by the de Blasio administration?

Chancellor Banks: I didn't design the system, we inherited the system. But we are here to fix these inequities that we inherited.

Question: All right.

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Question: Mayor Adams, Jack from the New York Post. Sorry.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: It's been two weeks since you announced your mental health plan. NYPD of course has yet to be trained other than a memo giving directions. Has your administration adequately trained police to conduct your mental health plan? I suppose if not, why?

Mayor Adams: Okay, first, you're right. It has been two weeks to address a generational problem, and we are going to get it right. And I said this over and over again, for whatever reason, it's not resonating. This is not a police-driven initiative. This is an initiative where mental health professionals are driving this initiative. They are the lead. They have been already partnering with law enforcement personnel on the ground to enhance how we give clarity to those who are doing this job.

So yes, two weeks is not a long time. We're going to make sure our officers are trained. We're going to make sure they execute this plan appropriately so that they can make the best decision for people who can't take care of their basic needs, and they are a danger to themselves and others. And so as we continue to evolve, we are going to produce a good quality product.

Question: Yeah, good morning Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Adams: How are you, Juliet?

Question: All right. How are you? Good. Can you talk about the New York City Speaks survey, what issues it's identified, and what the follow-up is with that?

Mayor Adams: I'm really excited about New York City Speaks and I think we're doing a program today at Gracie Mansion around it. One of the key takeaways, number one, I think we had about 16,000 young people that responded. And overwhelmingly, housing. Housing, that was one of the top issues across the board, all age groups, the need for good, quality affordable housing, public safety, was crew shooting healthcare. But it was a clear indicator that housing was at the top of the list. And the total survey was one of the largest surveys that was actually

carried out. Thousands of people responded. Because we wanted to hear directly from New Yorkers and drive our policies according to what New Yorkers were saying.

Question: That's direct. So housing is the issue. So now what?

Mayor Adams: Last week we rolled out an extensive plan, Get Stuff Built. And it shows that we are in alignment with what New Yorkers want. Even as that recent poll came out, 90 percent of New Yorkers are talking about public safety. I think what people are missing, the loudest is not the majority. When I am out among New Yorkers, I'm hearing directly from them. On the train this morning, people were telling me that, listen, we're seeing more cops on the train. We feel safer. It's about being on the ground and hearing directly from New Yorkers, not just those who are the loudest. The loudest, they're just not the majority.

And so last week we rolled out our housing plan. It's too bureaucratic, too difficult, too challenging. And it's only the start. Our best stuff is still in the pipeline that we are going to roll out. 2023 is going to be a Aaron Judge year for me. This is my year, man. This is my rookie season. And we rolled out some good stuff. 2023, we are going to a whole other level, the stuff that we have in the pipeline that we are getting ready to roll out. The city has not been operating. I think Andrew's question said it right.

When my son was a child, I always talked about him on the rocking horse, rocking back and forth, back and forth, working up a sweat. And it dawned on me, movement is not progress. Just because we say we have a 3-K program and we don't have bodies in the seats, how's that progress? That all sounds good. And that's how our city has been operating for a long time. I just refuse to operate for that. We have to produce a product for taxpayers. And housing is one. We have to build more. We have to stop the protests and marches for more housing and then turn around and say, "Well, don't build it on my block." It can't go together. If we need housing, then everyone should be saying, "Build on my block."

Question: Hi Mayor. Troy from The New York Times.

Mayor Adams: How are you?

Question: My colleagues recently reported on some serious allegations against the Petrosyants brothers. Are you concerned that they've been using their relationship with you to court investors for new projects? And are you reconsidering your relationship with them?

Mayor Adams: No. Next question.

Question: Another one of my colleagues, my colleagues at the Daily News reported on allegations of inappropriate behavior against a spokesperson-

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry, allegation?

Question: A spokesperson for Social Services. Were you aware of these allegations against Witt before hiring him, and do the allegations concern you?

Mayor Adams: Social Services?

Question: Yes.

Mayor Adams: Which one? Yeah, yeah. Who were we talking about?

Question: Allegations against Witt. Stephen Witt.

Mayor Adams: No, just learning of the allegations. People stated their interactions were unfair or the comments he didn't like. This is the first time I'm hearing about it. Stephen Witt has been in the public eye for a long time. And so if people had those comments, I don't know why they're coming out with them now, but this is news to me. But I've known him as a good journalist. And Gary Jenkins interviewed him and made the determination to bring him on.

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