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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY AFTER GREETING  
VOLUNTEERS AND DISTRIBUTING FOOD AT PATHHSEO SOUP KITCHEN**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Let me first wish everyone a very happy Thanksgiving. It is always life-affirming to see people who do such good work for others, and at Thanksgiving, it's especially appreciated – there are so many people in need, and there are those who make sure that they have the blessings of this country too.

I want to thank everyone at Caldwell Temple's PATHHSEO Soup Kitchen for the great work they do. I want to especially thank the program director Sandra Reyes, and – thank you, Sandra – and the pastor of this great temple, Reverend Monte Witherspoon-Brown, who also was a great colleague – you can join us. Come on over. Sandra, you too. Come on over. Pastor, I want to tell you, you were – you were an exceptional teammate there on the food line. We managed to get a good rhythm going there. And it was an honor to meet so many good New Yorkers who happen to be hungry, happen to be struggling economically, and were looking for a little bit of help, as Thanksgiving is coming. And so it was an honor to join with so many good people, so many volunteers, helping them out.

I also want to thank for helping us on the line, and for – I want to congratulate him as well – New York State Assembly Member-Elect Michael Blake. Michael, who is going to get sworn in what hour? Five o'clock today. As of five o'clock, I'll be calling him "Assembly Member." Congratulations to you. We look forward to working with you on these issues and so many others.

I want to thank colleagues from the administration, including our Director of Food Policy for the city of New York, Barbara Turk. I want to thank her for her great efforts.

Everyone is working together on the front line of the battle against hunger, and here, at this temple, they serve over 400 meals every Saturday. One house of worship, one neighborhood, over 400 meals every Saturday – this is happening in every borough, in every neighborhood, houses of worship of all different faiths, non-profit organizations.

This is a persistent challenge we face in our city, and it is striking proof of the inequality crisis. Too many New Yorkers are going hungry. 1.4 million New Yorkers are food insecure. That simply means they do not enough have enough resources for adequate food each and every day. They may have some good days, they're certainly going to have some bad days, but they don't have the security and the consistency that so many people expect in our society. 1.4 million New Yorkers don't have that – 1 in 5 of them are children. It's something we don't accept. It's something we're going to fight against with every tool we have.

And we are so appreciative for the food pantries and the soup kitchens that we support and work with through the Emergency Food Assistance Program that the city sponsors – 489 food pantries and soup kitchens. That's another striking indicator of the depth of the problem – 489 soup kitchens and food pantries we support each

year. From July to September this year, 2.7 million visits were paid to the food pantries supported by EFAP – 900,000 meals served in the soup kitchens supported by EFAP. It's an extraordinary need.

And the fact is, it's very discouraging to see the depth of the problem but what is encouraging is how many people are stepping up to meet it with every tool they have.

Would you like a coat? Let's get her a coat. I realize it's going to be a – it's going to be a long – a long session.

We have unfortunately, in the midst of this challenge, experienced a setback at the federal level, as have cities all over the country. With the cuts in the SNAP program – the food stamp program, right in the middle of what is a sustained economic challenge for our people – these benefits were cut and what has it led to – longer lines at all the different charitable organizations that feed people. It's led to soup kitchens and food pantries that literally have to turn away people for lack of resources.

We can't afford to wait for Washington to get it right, because it's clear – sadly they've been going in the wrong direction. So, we have to do everything we can locally to address the challenge. And we believe the core of that is addressing income inequality in all its forms. People are hungry because they don't have good enough wages and benefits, because the cost of housing is too high. And we're going at the core of those programs – all of the things that we're doing to raise wages and benefits through the action of city government, all the things we're doing to try to get people better skills, so they can get better jobs they can actually feed a family on – we talked about that earlier in the week – what we're trying to do in terms of affordable housing – over ten years, enough for a half-million people. These are the ways that we also address the hunger crisis. The best – the best way to turn around the hunger crisis is to help more New Yorkers get good paying jobs and an affordable place to live.

The second approach we're using is to try and go at the challenge that the federal government has created, by making the food stamp process in some ways more complicated than it needs to be. So, we've instituted many reforms to streamline the process, make it easier for people to enroll, or re-enroll. We want people who deserve food stamps to get them. We want them to stay with it. We want to make sure that they know they have a right to this assistance from the federal government. And we're finding ways to help people apply through their local community organizations, apply online – doing the kind of things that simplify what is a historically complicated process. We're also reaching out to people to let them know if they've missed an appointment or missed an opportunity.

The fact is that amongst our hungriest New Yorkers are our seniors. A lot of them face a host of challenges on top of hunger. We want to help them in particular, to get onto the SNAP program or to re-enroll into the SNAP program. Our goal is to reach 100,000 seniors who are eligible. We've reached 24,000 so far, we want to get to 100,000 who are eligible and would benefit greatly from these SNAP benefits.

So, the city is going to do everything we have in our power and we're then going to appeal to our allies in the non-profit community, like the New York City Coalition Against Hunger – been a fantastic voice in this city for change, always keeping our attention on the need to use the resources we have to feed people.

We've also had tremendous partnerships with a lot of the organizations who help the homeless, who obviously are also facing hunger challenges. The city is doing everything we can under the leadership of Homeless Services Commissioner Gilbert Taylor to help people get off the streets, get to shelter, get to good food. And we believe that that effort will be a crucial part of the equation, but we're also going to call upon our fellow New Yorkers to help in every way they can. There are a lot of people who want to volunteer. I'll talk about that in a moment. There are a lot of people who want to donate. Anyone who wants to help can call 3-1-1 – if they have food to donate, if they want to donate resources. You'll also hear from Joel Berg about other ways people can get involved. With the city doing all we can – and with the federal government having stepped back from some of these responsibilities – everyday New Yorkers can help us with their time, their energy, their resources, with donations of food – we want to emphasize that.

So, we believe the job is not done until everyone has enough to eat. This will be a long road. That's the only standard that we can hold here. And that's what we will focus on every day. Again, for anyone who can contribute food, who can contribute money to support those who are hungry, they can call 3-1-1 and get connected to the best place to do that. For people who want to volunteer – and so many people this time of year want to give of themselves, want to help others – they can call 3-1-1 or go to our New York City Service Program – [www.nycservice.org](http://www.nycservice.org). Again – [www.nycservice.org](http://www.nycservice.org). I just want to say a few words in Spanish before I introduce a few of my colleagues.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to bring up Commissioner Steve Banks of the Human Resources Administration – a man whose job encompasses so many of the core pieces of the fight against hunger. He's been a tremendous advocate before he came into government. He's been focused on the issue of improving every day our efforts to fight hunger and at HRA, he's making big difference. Commissioner Steve Banks.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Steve Banks, Human Resources Administration:** Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. The kind of work that's done here is really critical on the front lines of addressing hunger in the city. There's no question that we have food insecurity across the city. The mayor's program to address the need for living wages and the need for affordable housing is clearly the road to addressing food insecurity in the city. And in the short run, we're doing everything we can to ensure that we have access to federal food stamp assistance for New Yorkers in all five boroughs. There have been a number of reforms that we've implemented at HRA in order to ensure that some of the bureaucratic barriers in the past to applying for assistance have been taken down. As the mayor indicated, we've conducted outreach to seniors who were receiving Medicaid but not federal food stamps to address the ability to connect them to those vital benefits. And we're implementing an outreach process for New York City Housing Authority tenants who have not been receiving food stamps to ensure that everyone who is eligible is receiving those benefits. And food stamps are such an important part of the effort to fight hunger, but they're also a very important part of the economic drivers of our communities. For every dollar of federal food stamps, it produces \$1.80 in economic activity in the neighborhoods throughout the city. So, it's a very important resource and tool that we have. We're very pleased to be working directly with the Coalition Against Hunger and Joel Berg in all the efforts together to address this very serious problem. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

**Mayor:** Thank you. And again, this time of year we think about those who are hungry, we think about those who are homeless. Our mission is to help anyone who is on the street get their shelter and help people from shelter into long-term solutions, long-term housing. And Gilbert Taylor is doing a great job as our commissioner for homeless services – helping to reach more and more people because that's also part of how we help solve the hunger crisis. It's getting people to a place where they can get the support they deserve. Commissioner Gilbert Taylor.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Gilbert Taylor, Department of Homeless Services:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor, my colleagues at HRA, the Coalition Against Hunger, and all of those who are here today. I want to say how incredibly important this work is and as we consider the correlation between poverty and hunger and homelessness – it's also interrelated. And so we at DHS are doing everything that we can to help all of those who are unsheltered, to come into shelter. And for the large shelter population that we currently have, we're taking two roads to really address that. The first is prevention. It's really just making sure that everyone is aware of our HomeBase

Program, that can offer concrete assistance to any family or individual who is at risk of being displaced from their home. And the second is really targeting resources to help those who have been living in shelter the longest periods of time to exit to permanent housing. And so, we join forces with all of those who are working on these issues to really take on the issue of inequality and to really focus our efforts in helping those who are in our shelters and those who are threatened with housing instability to stay out of shelter. So thank you all for the work that you do.

[Applause]

**Mayor:** Next, a voice in this city who has been really one of the leading voices on what we have to do as a society to address hunger. And I have turned to him for years and years now for guidance on the ways we can do this better. I want to thank him for being such a powerful voice – Joel Berg, executive director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

[...]

**Mayor:** Let's first take questions on this topic and then we'll take off-topic. On this topic – the hunger situation in this city. On topic – yes?

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Well I'll start and I'm sure my colleagues have a lot to add. I think it's the overall economic dynamics that we have been facing. It's a situation where we are now experiencing the results of the Great Recession continuing. Even if we've seen some short-term economic improvement, it still is coming on the heels of years in which people were declining economically. Meanwhile, the cost of living has continued to go up here in this city, particularly for housing. So we've got a structural problem on our hands. And that's why it needed a structural solution. We have to address it by creating affordable housing, by creating jobs, by making sure the jobs pay better, by helping get people to those jobs who often have been left out of our economy. Anyone want to add? Gilbert?

**Commissioner Taylor:** Just to add to what the mayor said, it really is a matter of poverty. It really is a matter of people who cannot afford to live in New York City as we want them to. And so, to the extent that there is more affordable housing, to the extent that there are opportunities for better employment – of high-wage employment – all of that will help to stem the tide of the shelter [inaudible] and to keep people in their home.

**Mayor:** On topic? Yes?

**Question:** I'm curious if you agree with Mr. Berg's assessment that the city hasn't done –

**Mayor:** With whose assessment?

**Question:** Joel Berg – that the city hasn't done [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Well I would say it differently. I have deep respect for Joel, but I would say it differently. I would say that we did not pursue all the avenues we could have in the past. I think some good things were done. But I think a lot of crucial opportunities were lost, a lot of – the problem went under-addressed. And I don't think – just follow on Joel's point here – I don't think the heart of the matter was addressed, which is an economic reality. So look, in the previous administration, food stamp usage went up a lot, which I think was a great thing. I was very deeply involved in that. But not all elements of it were reached, as you hear. There were still things we could have done to reach more people. Obviously I thought the fingerprinting dynamic, which went on for many years, was a huge mistake and kept a lot of people from food they deserve. But I think the bigger point is some of the structural issues were not addressed. And that's what we're trying to do.

**Executive Director Berg:** I have to just say –

**Mayor:** Please. We're going to talk about you behind your back.

**Executive Director Berg:** It's clear that I did not say nothing happened. I did not say nothing happened in the previous two decades. I said, this is the first time a mayor has personally made a substantive policy announcement on hunger, even though previous administrations may have done something – not all of which were bad. Never once did the mayor embrace this as a problem and say, it's my job to fix it. So I want to be clear. They did some good things, but not what is happening today.

**Mayor:** Yes?

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, the other day Commissioner Banks testified [inaudible] to the City Council. During his testimony, I think one councilmember there [inaudible]. I was wondering whether you'd make the issue [inaudible]

**Mayor:** I don't think the problem is elected officials. I think as a society, we have to address this question more. Obviously this something I've worked on for years as chairman of the General Welfare Committee in the City Council. And I think because of the sheer extent of the problem, it's hard for people to focus on. It's a painful reality. I mean – quoting the number again so I get it right – 1.4 million New Yorkers who are food insecure, 1 in 5 are children. In some ways, when you think about a lot of the issues we focus on in public life – when you look at a lot of the issues that gets talked about in the media – you know, we often want a problem that has already an immediate solution. It's a human tendency. This one is huge and complicated and deep-seated. So, I think a lot of people care. I don't think it gets enough examination in general, partly because it is so challenging with such a big fundamental challenge. But we're focused on it. You know, the whole team here is focused on it. And again, I – to pick up on Joel's point – I'm not going to be comfortable while there are people hungry in my city – just as clear as that. I'm not going to believe we have completed our mission if there are people who are hungry. So, we're trying to fight inequality writ large. We have a very substantial agenda. But within that, one of the simplest measures of whether we have a just society is if all our people have enough to eat. It's not like the food doesn't exist. It's not like the resources to pay for the food don't exist. And our society as a whole – the baseline question – are we going to feed all our people? That's what we are committed to. On topic? On topic going once, going twice. Off topic.

**Question:** What are your thoughts, your reaction to what happened last night in Missouri, on the lack of indictment, the [inaudible] protests [inaudible] that might happen [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Couple of different points – let's talk about the human piece first, because that's the most important piece. A family lost their son. They're in a lot of pain. They've been in a lot of pain ever since the tragedy occurred. In the end, what we all try to do is alleviate people's suffering, and so the first thing we should think about here is the Brown family, and what they continue to go through. And the second thing we think about is the wishes of the Brown family, which were really clearly stated. As they are the ones who suffered the most, and they said, we have to make a lot of changes but not through violence. So, it's a sad day for America that people chose to pursue violence when it's quite evident that not only did the family not want it, it's not going to get anyone anywhere. We have to make profound changes in our society. We have to make profound changes in our city. But they will not be achieved through violence, they'll be achieved through a peaceful protest, they'll be achieved through legislation, they'll be achieved through elections, and this city actually is an example of that – because the number of stops is down, because marijuana arrests are going down, because the police force is being retrained, because we have an inspector general, because we have the reinvigorated CCRB – all because the people demanded it, through peaceful means. That's how real change occurs. So, I hope that lesson will be learned in this process. I don't make it a point of critiquing the judicial process – I don't think that's productive. But I think there's a much bigger point here, that we have to make change. Here in this city, we've

started – much more to do. And I think we have to remind people that one of the things we're proud of in this city – and you saw it last night – is there will be protests, as part of a democracy. But in this city, we respect that, we allow protests to happen the right way, and generally speaking, in a way that really fosters non-violence and people participating in their society in the right manner, so that's where we're going to remain focused.

**Question:** [inaudible] do you know how hard Commissioner Bratton worked [inaudible] your reaction was [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Well, two very different points – one about the perpetrator, and another about the commissioner. I mean, it was absolutely a cowardly and inappropriate act for anyone to assault a public servant who's – you know, any public servant, but particularly a public servant who's doing so much good – I found it fundamentally inappropriate. Again, if someone wants to express their opinions, they can, but that was a very cowardly act. Thank God no harm came to the commissioner. A couple of officers did experience some negative effects from what hit them, and they did go to the hospital – thank God they were okay, and they were released. But second, I want to say it's a measure of the leadership of Commissioner Bratton that he was at the site, supervising the situation, and was absolutely unflappable throughout the whole thing. He called me afterwards, cool in the saddle as always, and I admire that. Other questions. Yes.

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** I think in government in general, there's always better things we can do – there's always money we can save for the taxpayer, there's always more efficient ways of doing things. It's a given. I've spent a lot of time in government. I think anyone who really understands government would say, we're – it's an unfinished work at all times. It's, you know – always progress to be made. And if you can't find some better ways of doing things, you're not trying hard enough. So, that's point one – we're saying to every agency, look for ways to do things better, look for ways to save money, look for where our priorities should be, because sometimes we have a program that's not working. The letter says very clearly, if a program's not working, let's end it, or if a program's not working well enough, let's phase it out. So, I think that's one part of what we're saying. I think the second part of what we're saying is, think about what we're trying to achieve. Think about the mission we've set forward in our platform, and make sure the work in your agency is aligning properly to it. Because, for example, a lot of times you find in government there's a program in place from a previous administration with different values, that maybe were a priority for that administration, and aren't a priority for us, and we don't find it to be effective. Equally, you might have something that was leftover from a previous administration – or several administrations ago – that's working great, and you want to make sure you keep. But the point is to constantly look at it with a critical mind. So we said to every agency, look for savings. And we said to every agency, evaluate whether your programs are working, and if there are some that they are not good enough that we should change.

**Question:** [inaudible] grand jury [inaudible] last night [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** I found out from various members of my staff, saw some of the footage – saw a lot more of it this morning – obviously, very, very disturbing. No, there was not a family – formal family discussion. I think – yeah, I hope we reflect upon this – there's so many different pieces of this, but one of them is there's a way to encourage peaceful protest, and remind people that that's the only effective way to create change. And obviously it's been a very tortured path in Ferguson. This is not news to anyone – from the very beginning of this crisis. We approach policing and the relationship between police and community very differently here in New York City. So, I was very, very sad. I think everyone feared something like this might happen, and lo and behold, it did.

**Question:** [inaudible] DOI report said [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** It was a mistake. I think, by definition, we were in a public building. The media should have been allowed. I don't think that – for that kind of public event, there were lots of people there, absolutely, and I think that a mistake by my team, and a mistake we won't make again.

**Question:** Mayor, I'm just wondering if you could speak – last week you said New Yorkers shouldn't rush to connect all the dots, [inaudible] Eric Garner incident, the incident in Ferguson [inaudible] Akai Gurley – and I'm just wondering, you know, the people who are connected those dots [inaudible] Al Sharpton last night [inaudible] perception from the public that you're part of a [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** I just have a different view. I don't fail to understand why people would, I just have a different view. I think each and every incident is different. I think the underlying issues we're facing are what we really need to focus on. And we have to reform the relationship between police and community – we have to do it very deeply, we have to do it all over the country. Obviously, in New York City, we've embarked on a very intense program of reform, and a fast program of reform. Stops are down – you can see immediately, there's been a huge reduction in – in fact, in the last week, a 60 percent reduction – six zero – in the number of marijuana arrests. The retraining of the police force is unprecedented – the new inspector general, the reinvigorated CCRB – I mean, these are the kinds of things that will lead to lasting change. This is what the discussion should be about. The individual incidents are tragic, and we feel them so deeply, and everyone needs to be fully investigated, needs fully to be adjudicated through the court process, but the heart of the matter is, are we changing the way we do things. In this city, we are changing the way we do things – we have a lot more work to do. And that's what I'm solely focused on, is making those changes and making them as effectively and quickly as possible. Did you have one? Oh, she had your question. Okay.

**Question:** [inaudible] parole center coming to Gowanus [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** I don't know enough of the details, to be honest with you. Obviously I know the neighborhood very well, but I don't know enough of the details of this particular proposal, so I'd like to reserve judgment until I can get you a more complete answer.

**Question:** [inaudible] follow-up?

**Mayor:** Please. At least you admit it.

**Question:** [inaudible] how is the city getting prepared [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Sure. Well, we – I think we all have learned a lot this year about the topic of snow. Our Sanitation Commissioner Kathryn Garcia is – has been talking, over the last few days, with City Hall about the preparations. She's a very effective operational leader, and she and her team are ready. We have very substantial reserves in terms of salt. We have our equipment ready. Everyone's quite aware of the fact that this could hit on one of the times you'd least like it to hit – on Thanksgiving Day. We don't know enough about the exact extent of the storm, but I've been saying to everyone wryly inside City Hall – remember from our experiences last time, the numbers can change very rapidly. And you know, the weather service does the best job it can to give us a projection, but it's always a certain amount of give in that projection, so what can seem like 6-8 inches can suddenly turn into a foot of snow, and you have to be ready for that. So, we're in a ready position, and we have our personnel ready, and we'll judge literally hour by hour as we get closer. The one good news story is, if we do experience this on, you know, late Wednesday into Thursday, Friday, those are days that school obviously will be off, on Thursday and Friday, and that's a bit of a blessing. Yeah, I got one, and I'll get two.

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Well, at the deadline point, I'd just like to clarify. There's obviously a budget process starting, and everyone's quite aware of that, and we mean them to work with us in the existing budget process – the next milestone being January.

**Question:** So is this still the approach you're going to take [inaudible] economic hard times [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Well, I mean, you know my aversion to hypothetical questions. I will simply say, we know there's a whole range of tools you can use if there is an economic downturn, if our fiscal health is challenged. And we know what those are, and we're ready to use them if it comes to that. But right now, I think we're in a more foundational place. We want people to look at their agencies and decide if there are some things that aren't working well enough, if there are some things that should be changed. Over time, if we have to get into more of a numerical exercise, we certainly know what that looks like. But this is actually about looking at the foundations of an agency and decide if changes need to be made.

**Question:** [inaudible] Eric Garner case, what are your thoughts on whether or not [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Again, I don't pretend to know the facts of an investigation. I think it's very, very important for people in public life to respect the investigatory process, the grand jury process, and any other investigations or follow-up that may be undertaken – you know, if the federal government, for example, gets involved – that is a distinct part of our government. I respect all of those efforts. Our job is always to cooperate. It's just not appropriate for someone in my position to critique a judicial outcome. I don't believe in that. But look, there's a lot of effort being put into making sure there's – both there is a thorough investigation, and an appropriate outcome.

**Question:** What's on the menu for Thanksgiving? Are you going to have it at Gracie?

**Mayor:** It will not be at Gracie. I'll be in Connecticut at my cousin's house, and there will be turkey – I was – it's very traditional, which I'm fully in favor of. I'm a progressive in all matters except for Thanksgiving dinner. I'm a traditionalist when it comes to Thanksgiving dinner. So, I know there will be turkey, stuffing. I believe there'll be both apple and pumpkin pie. I feel very enthusiastic about this opportunity.

**Question:** You're very hungry, mayor. Can I ask you about the convention? I just wanted to know, how many businesses are going to have to, sort of [inaudible] or shut down because of security concerns. There was a report today in Politico that said that was going to have to happen [inaudible] Atlantic Avenue?

**Mayor:** I don't start with that assumption. I think that is a process we go through. Look, as we said yesterday, there is going to be now over the next, give or take, two months, a very intense process working with the Democratic National Committee on their contract process so they can weigh all three cities apples to apples. They'll look at everything – they'll look at the resources we can bring to bear, they'll look at the security dynamics, logistics, you know, how we work with the surrounding communities and businesses. We made clear in the gathering yesterday, where a lot of those community organizations and businesses were represented that we want to work with them to maximize the positive impact of the convention. We think there's going to be a huge positive impact, and from folks – from the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, and from the Restaurant Association were enthusiastic as could be at the prospect of all the business that would come in through the convention. So, our job is to maximize economic opportunity, minimize any situation where there would have to be any disruption of business, but that's going to be a process that plays out in the details. One thing we can say for sure, NYPD is the best security partner that the DNC could have, and they'll know what we need, and they'll know how to make it work as flexibly as possible, so I think we're going to have a very, very positive economic impact on the surrounding community. Thanks, everyone.

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