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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. So, the vaccine effort continues and it's stronger every day, reaching New Yorkers in every part of the five boroughs, making sure people are vaccinated, part of our goal to fully vaccinate five million New Yorkers by June, and we are well on our way. And I want everyone to remember, we have more capacity in this city to vaccinate people than we have supply. We keep pushing and pushing the federal government, State government, manufacturers to get us more supply because we could be vaccinating half-a-million people a week easily at this point. We can even do more going forward. But where are we today? Well, we had a good week last week, 340,000 vaccinations last week. That's strong, that's solid. We want to do a lot more each week, but here's where we are overall at this point. From the very beginning of the vaccination effort, there've been 2,405,191 vaccinations. So, this is building and building, but we're ready to take off and take it to the next level.

Now to continue to build up our vaccination effort, we're bringing on board more and more good New Yorkers to help us in this effort. Folks who want to serve their fellow New Yorkers, folks from the communities most affected by COVID, who want to give back, who want to help make sure that people get vaccinated and know it's okay, know it's safe, see people that look like them, see their neighbors helping in the vaccination process. That's what I saw in Co-op City on Saturday when I was up in the Bronx and this is what works. So, our Vaccine for All Corps continues to grow. This idea of bringing in everyday New Yorkers to help in this work, hiring thousands of people to help build the vaccination effort is exactly what we need to do to take it to the next level. So, our Vaccine for All Corps will be hiring 2,000 New Yorkers right away and putting them to work at vaccine sites all over the city. We're hiring directly from the community, particularly places where we need more and more neighborhood people to be involved in the vaccination effort and where people need the economic opportunity. We'll be hiring in the Bronx. We'll be hiring in the Rockaways. We'll be hiring Staten Island. All over the city, in the 33 neighborhoods that are hardest hit, have been hardest hit by COVID, focused hiring there in particular. So, anyone who is interested in this opportunity to be part of our Vaccine for All

Corps, you can see the jobs that are available by going to [nyc.gov/vaccinejobs](https://nyc.gov/vaccinejobs). And we welcome – we welcome New Yorkers to join this crucial effort to bring our city back.

So, we always talk about a recovery for all. A recovery for all is an economic idea, for sure. It means making sure that everyone has the opportunity to get their livelihoods back, to have a chance at a better life in the new New York City ahead, but a recovery for all means addressing injustices and addressing those who have been left out and those who have suffered as well. Let's talk about a couple of these situations today, where we need new approaches to old problems. First of all, I want to talk about our taxi industry. I want to talk about folks who make New York City work. Yes, New York City taxis are iconic. They're part of our identity. Yes, generation upon generation of New Yorkers has found opportunity by driving a cab. It is a classic New York story, but it's not a stereotype. I want to be clear. I don't see it as a stereotype because I've gotten to know so many drivers over the years, and I've heard their stories. I've understood that driving a cab was the pathway to opportunity. I've heard so many drivers talk about their families. Why do they work so hard, such long hours? Why do they do things that for most of us would seem like above and beyond? Because they want to do better for the next generation.

This is so many – for so many people, the classic story of parents giving their all for their children, of immigrants coming here for a life they could never have imagined in their homelands. That's the story of New York City taxi drivers, but taxi drivers have been through so much, especially, of course, during the pandemic where the industry has been hit so hard. And during that time, by the way, taxi drivers stepped up and helped us, helped our community. Taxi drivers were in the lead getting food to seniors who needed them, helping to make sure that people could get around even in the toughest times. But even before the pandemic, we know taxi drivers were dealing with a crisis because of what happened with the value of medallions. This is a very sad story. And it's a story with a lot of injustice in it because lenders took advantage of these drivers. And when I came into office and we realized the extent of the problem, we canceled medallion sales, we just wouldn't do them anymore. And we've been working to find ways to help drivers. And it's tough because so many people have suffered, but we now have a new option and a new approach. Because as of this weekend, when the Senate approved the stimulus package, we know that we're now going to have resources we didn't have before. And we want to apply some of those resources to help taxi drivers who continue to suffer.

Today, with stimulus funds, we're announcing the Taxi Medallion Owner Relief Fund, a new approach that will provide money directly to drivers and will help restructure the loans that they have so they can end up in a better situation for their future and for their family's future. This has taken a lot of painstaking work to figure out something that would work today and for the long haul. And I'm going to turn to Commissioner Aloysee Heredia Jarmoszuk, who has led the way. Our Taxi & Limousine Commission commissioner has studied the problem, talked to drivers, examined the industry, and all of the options. She's done it with a lot of heart and with a lot of concern for the drivers. And her central concern – I've had this conversation with her many times – is what will work, what will stick, how can we help these drivers now and tomorrow to finally get past this crisis and get to a better place. So, I want you to hear the plan that she's put together that I think will really help us move forward as a city and help our drivers, who we depend on so much. Commissioner –

**Commissioner Aloysee Heredia Jarmoszuk, Taxi and Limousine Commission:** Good morning. Today, the City, under the leadership and direction of Mayor de Blasio, commits to create a \$65 million Taxi Medallion Owner Relief Fund to support financially distressed medallion owners. This fund will offer owners a \$20,000 loan to use as a down payment to restructure current medallion debt and up to \$9,000 in debt payment support. Additional \$9,000. Owners can pay this money back over time at zero percent interest, according to their individual ability. This substantial upfront payment from the City will empower medallion owners to work with lenders to reset the terms of their loan. Restructuring these loans can be a lifeline to lift the weight of debt through lower monthly payments, reduced interest rates, and/or reduced principle. This plan will offer real relief to medallion owners and has the power to transform the lives of many of our hardest essential workers.

Many medallion owners are struggling and have asked for assistance from the City. I speak with them every day. I have heard the pain in their voices that they have had to choose between making debt payments or providing their families with a roof over their heads and food on the table. We understand the gravity of their situation. They need help with this debt to survive. Demand for taxi trips is already starting to increase as our city's economy reopens. We need the taxi industry healthy and ready to put more cabs on the road to meet that demand. That is how the industry will truly recover. This new debt relief is just one part of the work the TLC has been doing to support the industry this past year. We have helped over 500 medallion owners with financial counseling at our resource center, and it is critically important that owners contact us now to schedule an appointment online [nyc.gov/TLC](https://nyc.gov/TLC). The driver resource center can help our licensees find other resources for relief as well. The TLC can connect medallion owners with many resources, including federal Payment Protection Plan loans. With a PPP loan, a medallion owner could find additional funding to cover critical expenses or reduce debt and survive the pandemic and get more taxis on the road to meet increased passenger demand. The PPP loan application period ends on March 31st, and we are here to help anyone who needs it. Schedule an appointment so that we can help you process the application for this federal program.

Our driver resource center provides financial and legal counseling for licensees and can help with applying for unemployment, cash assistance, rent relief, SNAP benefits, and Medicaid. In total the TLC helped guide our licensees to potentially \$1.4 billion in support through federal, state, and local assistance programs over the last year. And today the Mayor and I stand ready to implement the new Medallion Owner Taxi Relief Fund and commit to find new ways to engage and support the local taxi industry going forward to full recovery. Any medallion owners needing assistance with this or who are interested in this program, please email us [mrp@tlc.nyc.gov](mailto:mrp@tlc.nyc.gov).

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Commissioner. Appreciate it. And thank you, I know everyone at the TLC has been working now for years to help drivers in so many ways. And I think this new plan will be a difference-maker for many, many drivers, and that's part of how we move forward. And I said earlier, what we do in a recovery for all of us is address a host of challenges that weren't addressed before. We address injustices. We break status quo realities that we should not deal with anymore, we should not accept anymore. And this brings me to another topic that's so crucial. When it comes to those who are incarcerated in our City jail system, there is a history, and it's a history we have been working to overcome. And today is going to be a momentous day

of change when it comes to fairness for those who are incarcerated and actually creating a path to redemption, because, remember – I always come back to this point – it's called the Department of Correction for a reason. It's not about punishment. It's about redemption. And I've spent time at Rikers Island, I've spent time talking to the folks who are incarcerated, I've spent time talking to those who advocate for them, I spend time talking to our Correction officers. To get this right, you've got to listen, but we also have to be willing to change.

Now, I want to harken back to the story that gripped New York City, that woke us all up to the reality. Between the years 2010 and 2013, Kalief Browder was in prison at Rikers Island. For two full years he was in solitary confinement. The fact that anyone could be left in solitary confinement for two years is shocking to think about in the history of this city, especially in this century. The fact that anyone could have been put in a situation where instead of being redeemed their whole reality was made harder, their life was made worse, their ability to cope was undermined. Think about the mental health impact of someone being in solitary confinement for an extensive period of time. By the way, remember the original sin, all of this done to Kalief Browder for an offense – an alleged offense. And this is what I say – I say original sin. He should never have been in Rikers Island to begin with for having been accused of stealing a backpack. But imagine the pain he went through, the pain his family continues to go through. Imagine how much harm was done by all those years of unfettered use of solitary confinement. When I came into office, the whole truth of Kalief Browder started to come out, and I worked with our Corrections team, I worked with the Board of Corrections on changes, and we started to move away from solitary confinement. We found there was a better way and we found it was much more important to work on redeeming those who are incarcerated, to give them education and training, to show them a pathway beyond jail, to a better life, not to set back their progress with mistaken approaches like solitary confinement. We've said that we could do something very different. In fact, I came to the conclusion we could end solitary confinement entirely in New York City, something that has been done in very few places in this country. Working with our Board of Corrections, we've found a plan that will work, that will provide a safe environment for those who are incarcerated and officers alike, but will end the scourge of solitary confinement. And we're making good on that pledge to create change. We're making good on that pledge today. The Board of Corrections today is proposing new rules that will end solitary confinement entirely in our City jails.

We're going to go farther than any jail system in America by creating positive alternatives. And this came from work done by an extraordinary group of committed individuals who formed our working group to end punitive segregation, to end solitary confinement. I want to thank Jennifer Jones Austin, our Board of Corrections Chair for her leadership, and also the tremendous leadership of Vice Chair Stanley Richards, a man who has an extraordinary story, and it's an inspiring story, and who also serves as executive vice-president of the Fortune Society. If you spend time with Stanley, you hear immediately why redemption should be our approach, because here is an extraordinary man who went through his own challenges, and his achievements proved to us why we should remember to hear and respect and redeem every one of our fellow New Yorkers.

Here to talk to you about this new plan that will end solitary confinement once and for all, my pleasure to introduce Stanley Richards.

[...]

Thank you so much, Stanley. And, Stanley, I really appreciate all the work you put into this, and I appreciate just your lifelong commitment to changing what's wrong and to helping people find their way forward. It's absolutely outstanding. And I know in the work you do at the Fortune Society, every day you see those inspiring stories of someone who finds the right path. And I know you're shepherding a lot of people on that path, so thank you so much for all you do.

Everyone, I want you to hear from another leader in this field who has been fighting for changes. The fact is, more and more people have looked at this issue and realize there's a better way. And it takes risks to find a new path forward, but there's been some visionary voices out there, fighting for it, calling for it. One of them is the Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee in the City Council. My pleasure to introduce Council Member Keith Powers.

[...]

Thank you so much, Council Member. Thank you for all the effort you've put in, which has really helped move this forward. And I also want to say, another Council Member who's passionate about this topic and very much believes in the change is being announced today, wanted to be with us – Council Member Danny Dromm, the Finance Chair of the City Council, but he is getting his COVID vaccine today. And, obviously, at this moment, that is the number-one priority. So, we understood he couldn't be with us, because he's getting his shot. But thank you also to Council Member Dromm, for his extraordinary support.

Everybody, look, this can be done. And one thing we know is when New York City acts, it is noticed all over the nation. When New York City acts, many places emulate our action. We need to get rid of solitary confinement all over this nation. So, when the biggest city in America proves it can be done, it can be done safely, it can be done the right way, it could be done in a way that actually encourages rehabilitation, I think a lot of others will follow. So, this is really a momentous day.

All right, let's talk about today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 217 patients. Confirmed positivity level, 67.37 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.93 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,367 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID – today's report, seven-day rolling average 6.06 percent.

I'm going to say a few words in Spanish, and the topic is our taxi drivers and the relief we're going to provide them.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

**Moderator:** Hi all, we'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is TLC Commissioner Jarmoszuk, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, CEO of Health + Hospitals Dr. Mitchell Katz, Co-Chair of the Board of Correction Stanley Richard, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Emma from the New York Times.

**Question:** Hi. Good morning, Mayor. As you know, we've written a lot about this issue and we're curious, have you and your administration talked with taxi lenders and do you have a sense that the lenders will restructure the loans?

**Mayor:** Yes, and yes. And to tell you more is our Commissioner –

**Commissioner Jarmoszuk:** We've connected with various lenders and we believe that this plan is a win-win for everyone and I expect that the lenders were participating in this program so that we can get on with our recovery here in New York City for taxis.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Emma.

**Question:** And, as you know, the drivers owe an average of \$500,000 a-piece, and they've been asking for a bailout. So, what would you say to those who feel like this is sort of a drop in the bucket?

**Mayor:** Look, Emma, I think our obligation is to find a way forward that will work. We've seen different bailout proposals, some that would cost hundreds of millions, some that even went into a billion-plus. That's not possible for New York City. If there were an option on the federal level, that would be the one place that could be done. But here is a way to greatly improve the situation and it's based on real painstaking work to figure out what would actually support drivers under the realities we face. And I know the Commissioner really focused on that, a sustainable plan, something that would work, that would be manageable, that would help people move forward. So, this is what we believe can be done. The stimulus funds gives us the opportunity to do it and we're moving forward immediately to help as many drivers as possible.

**Moderator:** Next is Steve from WCBS radio.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Steve. How are you doing?

**Question:** I'm alright, appreciate it. First of all, I wanted to ask about a story we're working on this morning, I'm sure you saw the Times first report it, the lawsuit that the – that you're facing, the Governor's facing regards to what they allege is segregation in City schools and racist policies that have perpetuated segregation in schools. I wanted to get your general take on that notion, specifically it talks about Gifted and Talented programs, specialized admissions tests. I wanted to get your response, if you have one yet, in terms of that notion that there've been baked-in policies for decades in City schools that's perpetuated segregation and racism.

**Mayor:** Steve, thank you for the question. I won't respond to the lawsuit. I don't respond, of course, in detail to any lawsuit and I haven't seen what is specifically being alleged. I'll talk about the work that's being done. I think what is happening with specialized high schools admissions is wrong. I've made that abundantly clear. I fought intensely to change it in Albany. We weren't able to achieve it. I am certain that that will be resolved in the future, because it's just wrong. The status quo is broken. We need our specialized high schools to be representative, but we need to come up with a plan that all communities can feel good about and that everyone, every child is given opportunity in. When it comes to things like Gifted and Talented, that's an area where, again, I've been very clear that we need an entirely different system. So, we are ending the Gifted and Talented standardized test. We are inaugurating a brand-new system in September that will include a lot more kids, be a lot more fair in the approach. I think that will be a crucial effort, both to reach more kids and to diversify the students who get a gifted and talented education, our Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter will lead the way on that. We've had extraordinarily positive efforts – District 1, District 3, District 15, and more coming – to create diversity programs and desegregation programs from the ground up that I think will be the most effective and sustainable. We've put into effect the many recommendations of the school diversity advisory group. You know, there's a lot here. And, of course, we suspended middle school academic screens, and we've changed the high school district priorities – there's so much happening and more to come. So, Steve, I'm sorry for the long answer, but the fact is a lot has been done over these years and it's going to keep going lawsuit or no lawsuit, we need to create more diversification in our schools, it can be done, and there's the right way to do it which involves bringing parents in and working with them as a way forward. Go ahead, Steve.

**Question:** Thanks, I appreciate the detailed response. On an entirely different topic, there was a study put out yesterday that found New York City now has the worst congestion of any city in the US. It jumped [inaudible] spots up to the number one spot. Why do you think New York City has had specific challenges with traffic congestion that that other cities haven't seen in the past year?

**Mayor:** I'll start with my layman's analysis and I'll turn to our TLC Commissioner who is actually an expert, but I think the most obvious, immediate problem is the fact that in the pandemic more and more people turned to individual automobiles instead of mass transit. We've got to reverse that. We've got to reverse that aggressively, give people faith in mass transit again. Look, this is an occasion for me to say, if we're going to give people faith in mass transit, there actually has to be service there for them, and I think what the MTA is doing right now with the Long Island Rail Road is ridiculous. It's unfair to folks who are coming here to work and coming here to take advantage of everything in New York City. We need folks coming here as part of our recovery. So, the MTA should restore those cuts to the Long Island Rail Road immediately. They're just absolutely the reverse of what we need at this moment. But on top of that, if we want to really support mass transit, we've got to move quickly on congestion pricing, and I mentioned the other day I spoke to our new transportation secretary, federally, Pete Buttigieg, and told him this is a high priority for this administration. Let's get congestion pricing going. We need federal approvals to do that. I think that's going to help us both reduce congestion and provide more resources for mass transit, but as to the why, Commissioner anything you would add?

**Commissioner Jarmoszuk:** I think you've covered it well, sir.

**Mayor:** Well, okay. It all worked out. Thank you. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next. We'll go to Kristen from the Staten Island Advance.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you today?

**Mayor:** I'm doing well, Kristen, how are you?

**Question:** I'm good, thanks. I was hoping you could talk a little bit more about the homebound vaccination effort. I know you have repeatedly said that it is for seniors, but one of your staffers said that it's not just for seniors, it's for all city residents who are homebound. And I've spoken to some people who are home bound due to various disabilities, they tried to register, and they were told that they're not yet eligible because it is only for seniors right now. So, I was hoping you could just clarify that a little bit and say, you know, is it for all homebound people? And if it isn't when the effort will be expanded?

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Very important question, Kristen. I appreciate it. I'm going to turn to Dr. Chokshi, but just emphasizing, look, the State has approved a range of people for vaccination in general, obviously 65 and up, folks with serious pre-existing conditions, and we're working within whatever parameters the State has created. As you know, I'm hoping increasingly we'll be given local control of the situation so we can set the rules right for our community. But I also want to make sure that the website and the phone line give people the opportunity to sign up who are homebound for reason within the existing rules, obviously, but no, not just seniors, anyone who qualifies and is homebound we want to reach. So, Dr. Chokshi could you speak to that?

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and that's exactly right. The program will serve anyone who is homebound and eligible for vaccination in the early days, you know, the early stages, we are prioritizing our outreach for older homebound individuals, people who are above the age of 65, particularly because we have a relatively limited supply of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to begin, but as that expands, and in the coming days and weeks, and the timeline that the Mayor laid out yesterday, that will certainly extend to other homebound individuals as well.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Go ahead, Kristen.

**Question:** Alright, thank you so much. And I want to talk to you about vaccine appointments. A lot of appointments were rescheduled on Staten Island the last few days including on Sunday, I spoke with a couple who showed up for their 10 pm appointment and the vaccination site was closed. There were about a dozen other people there who had not received cancellations, you know, notifications from the city. So, I was just wondering if you could talk about what the supply issue has been this week, you know, and how many vaccines did the city receive out of how many it was supposed to that that caused these cancellations?

**Mayor:** What site was that?



**Question:** That was the Gotham Vanderbilt Clinic.

**Mayor:** Okay. I'm going to separate the two questions. I'm going to go Dr. Katz first on if he does know specifically what happened at Vanderbilt, that obviously is not acceptable and not what we want to see happen. And then Dr. Chokshi can talk about our supply levels. Dr. Katz, you start.

**President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals:** Yes, thank you, sir. And I have to start on sort of say with an apology because I have previously heard this issue and the reporter's question is correct. We ran out of vaccine at Vanderbilt, which is not our fault, but it is our fault, and that people were not given correct phone calls to tell them that they – that their appointment was canceled. We are currently working on rescheduling, all those people and I profoundly apologize to anybody who went to that site and did not get a call ahead of time canceling it. On the supply issue, sir, I think this is what you've talked about the need for local control. One of the challenges we face is that every week we get an unknown number of vaccines to each site on a particular day from the State distribution. Until that day, we don't know how many vaccines we're getting or to which site, and then we are meant to use them as rapidly as possible. This is what plan - what keeps us from making cogent plans that ideally, we would do weeks ahead on setting schedules, making sure that everybody who has had to be rescheduled is quickly rescheduled, but I can never reschedule anyone until I have the vaccine in hand., and I never know until it arrives how many injections I'm going to have. So, you know, this is why you keep calling correctly for more local control. But again, I'll close with apologizing to anyone who went to that Vanderbilt site on Sunday and wasn't told their appointment was canceled.

**Mayor:** Hey Mitch – thank you very much, Mitch. And I know when you say that you mean it and I appreciate, but very quickly, can you give any sense how quickly we can get those folks back in and give them their vaccinations?

**President Katz:** We are – we have already begun to call them, sir, because I was alerted to the problem Monday morning. So, I know yesterday they began to call, and I will check and see today how many people they've been able to reach.

**Mayor:** All right, but since it's a small number of people, I just want to state the obvious, we should be able to reach everyone today, and I assume we can accommodate them today or tomorrow. I mean, they deserve preference if they were bumped previously. Right?

**President Katz:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**Mayor:** And Kristen will be our watchdog to make sure that happens, and thank you Kristin again for raising an important issue and helping us correct problems, and Dr. Chokshi on overall supply.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, sir. Thank you. Just to add briefly, our overall supply last week was about 200,000 first doses of vaccine that were delivered to New York City as a whole for this week. It's a slight increase to about 205,000 doses, those were first doses that will be

delivered between today and tomorrow. And for last week, all of the supply that was supposed to be delivered was delivered, but as Dr. Katz has mentioned, we need a longer window, a longer road to be able to say, we know we're going to get this allotment for this week, this allotment for the subsequent weeks as well, so that we can plan out appointments in a way that better serves New Yorkers.

**Mayor:** And last point, just Kristen, to put it in perspective, you know, I told you last week was 340,000. We absolutely could be doing 500,000. So, you know, we are between 150,000 and 200,000 doses short each week of where we could be. And I've had this conversation with White House officials. You know, it's just a simple number. If you – if between the federal government, state government manufacturers today, they gave us 200,000 additional doses for this week, we would use them all up. That's the scale, that's the gap, but once that gap gets closed, our numbers are going to shoot upwards because we have the capacity now and we're adding to it with our Vaccine for All Corps as we speak. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next is Andrew from WNBC.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and all on the call. I'm going to follow up with that and ask a question about – we've got a tip about appointments at Bellevue, at a vaccination site there that I believe in the last few days' people were showing up for say a three o'clock appointment and they weren't getting vaccinated until 6 pm. I'm wondering if you think that's going to become more of the norm as vaccine supply rises, but maybe we don't have enough vaccinators or what might the explanation be for a three-hour wait?

**Mayor:** Well, it shouldn't be a three-hour wait in terms of – we, again, we know some people are showing up very early, just abundance of caution, but when it comes time for someone's scheduled appointment, it should happen on time or very close to it. I'll let Dr. Katz speak to that. But again, Andrew, it's not lack of capacity. I want to be abundantly clear. We could be doing a lot more vaccinations right this minute, and we're adding 2,000 more members of our vaccination team to get ready for when we do have finally more vaccine coming in. Look, I've told you I want to do 500,000 vaccinations a week. I think we can go beyond that substantially. So, we're building capacity. I want to have new centers open in communities that don't have them yet. I want to have centers that are not 24 hours and can be go to the 24 hours. There's lots we could do if we had supply, but the problem is supply, supply, supply, it's not capacity here, it's supply. But Dr. Katz to the Bellevue situation, can you speak to that?

**President Kat:** Yes, sir. I'll have to check. I have not heard that report. I've been by the Bellevue Center several times and there was no line the times that I went. It is one of our major sites. I am glad that it is an inside site with a large waiting room, so at least I know people were not outside waiting, but I don't – I can't explain – I will check right after this call and find out why there was such a long wait. Certainly, we are having an issue as we spoke on the previous call of people arriving several hours earlier, and so if it's a popular time and multiple people come, and we have been trying to accommodate people. We have not been sending people home who come earlier and if this problem continues, we may have to reach that point where we tell people, I'm sorry, you have to go home, your appointment isn't for multiple hours. We've been doing our best because we don't like people coming and going because of the exposures. Once they're there, we

try to accommodate them, but if that's resulting in longer wait times for people who had an appointment and came at their appointment, that's a problem, sir. So, I will work on it today.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Go ahead, Andrew.

**Question:** On a separate topic, yesterday 21 women in the New York State assembly wrote a letter essentially saying let Letitia James, Attorney General James, finish her investigation, put a pause on the calls for the Governor to resign and just let the investigation go forward. That was echoed by Senator Schumer, it was echoed by Hillary Clinton and others. I'm wondering, do you agree with what seems to be that forming consensus on the part of some that the investigation is underway, people can put the brakes on here, or do you disagree with that opinion?

**Mayor:** I think the strongest clearest statement came from the majority leader of our State Senate, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, who, you know, is one of the most important leaders in the State and responsible for making sure the State moves forward and is saying that right now that's not viable, and Speaker Carl Heastie obviously amplified this. There are too many destabilizing things happening right now with the Governor and his administration in terms of the ability to get the work of the State done, and I think more information is going to keep coming out. So, of course, we need the full facts from the Attorney General's investigation. Absolutely. But I don't think there's any contradiction between the Attorney General fully pursuing the facts as quickly as possible and recognizing the fact that there's a dysfunctional reality in Albany that is making it harder and harder for government to do its work.

**Moderator:** Next is Michael from the Daily News.

**Question:** Morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey Michael, how are you?

**Question:** I'm doing all right. I've got a question, a follow-up to Andrew's question. Yesterday you said that – and I'm paraphrasing a bit probably here – fewer and fewer people believe the Governor, you know, in the context of what the Senate leader said. Do you believe the Governor, you know, in his response to these allegations, do you think what he's saying is credible at this point?

**Mayor:** No. Go ahead.

**Question:** Okay. Shifting gears here, thank you for the succinct answer. You know, I wanted to talk to you about housing. I think Errol mentioned some of this last night, but I wanted to try to get a little deeper into it. You know, looking back on your time as Mayor, I wanted to get a sense – knowing all you know now, what do you think you would have done differently as far as affordable housing in the city, dealing with homelessness. I mean, some have criticized you for the way money has been spent on handling homelessness, I, you know, I get it's a huge issue to deal with. What would you have done differently and what kind of counsel would you give the next mayor coming in on, you know, how to deal with homelessness and affordable housing moving?

**Mayor:** Yeah. crucial and vast question, Michael, but a very important one. Look, I have criticized me. I've said that it took me too long in the beginning to understand that we needed a very different approach on homelessness, and, you know, I needed to focus early on, equally on shelter – folks who are in shelter and folks were on the street and we just weren't calibrated right in the beginning. But I'll tell you the way forward I think we have now developed. We created the HOME-STAT approach, which is that very intensive outreach effort to identify a person by person what each homeless person on the street needs to come off the street, and that has resulted in thousands of people coming off the streets. The last count I heard from Commissioner Banks was about 4,000 people over the course of that initiative have come off the street and stayed off the street. We created the Turning the Tide plan, to get out of the pay by the day hotels, to get out of the scatter sites, create purpose-built shelters that one day I truly believe will be converted to affordable housing. You know, we created the, the vision for 15,000 supportive housing apartments, the most the City's ever attempted, and that's moving a pace now. I think a lot of these things are right. Getting folks if they, God forbid, someone's homeless, making sure there's close to their home community as possible, that wasn't done in the past, we do it now, it's really helping. But most importantly, the Journey Home Vision which takes that HOME-STAT model and then deepens it with the inclusion of safe haven units, safe haven spots for homeless folks that really give homeless folks who are resistant to coming in off the street a much more supportive, smaller atmosphere, mental health services, substance misuse services really helps turn lives around, and that's been working even during the pandemic, getting hundreds and hundreds of people in off the streets and keeping them off the streets. So, I think now that combination of strategies is the way forward for New York City.

On the affordable housing side, very quickly. Look, the number one thing I now realized that we needed to do, thank God we were able to do because a lot of us fought for a Democratic State Senate, and got a Democratic State Senate, and got the changes to the rent laws, so we could pretend protect the tenants of New York City more strongly. We finally have those strong protections over 2 million rent stabilized folks, we showed that the Rent Guidelines Board could be objective and fair to tenants, not just serve landlords. We did rent freezes and lowered rent hikes, that was necessary. Our affordable housing plan, our core affordable housing plan is going to reach 300,000 apartments built or preserved in the next few years. That absolutely should be continued. So, I think in some of these places, it took time to figure out the right solutions, but we have a lot of the right solutions now, and most especially with public housing, I talked about this on NY1 last night, --what our NYCHA Chair Greg Ross has put forward is absolutely the smart plan, to actually achieve the \$40 billion – and I want to emphasize that word – \$40 billion of capital funds that we need to truly repair and rehabilitate all of our public housing buildings and give our residents a fair and decent life. Chairman Russ's plan is the way to do that, and I think we've embraced that plan and now working with the Biden administration and they are, I think, enthusiastic about the plan. We can actually get something done that will be transcendent for public housing. So, sorry for the long answer, but I think we have now the building blocks to solve a lot of these problems and I'm proud that we put them together, even if it took some time. I think we have the right formula now. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next is Narmeen from PIX 11.

**Question:** Hi, good morning, Mayor. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good Narmeen, how've you been?

**Question:** I'm doing well, thank you. You've talked a number of times about the importance of mom-and-pop pharmacies and the need to include them in the vaccination rollout. However, I wanted to bring to light a couple of issues we've learned about a couple of local pharmacies – Rossi Pharmacy in particular, we had a lengthy conversation with them out of Brooklyn. They get about 200 vaccinations or vaccines rather a week, but they've found it difficult to fill appointments. They say they are not showing up on city and state sites when people search to book appointments. They've had to resort to cold calling themselves, and walking out into the neighborhood to bring folks in. They are restrained by that 65 plus category, and can't openly vaccinate all eligibility categories, and I just want to get your reaction. Should it be even happening this way? And I do want to add that this one particular pharmacy has found a way to partner up with a mutual aid organization to get their vaccine doses out to a senior center to make sure they get used properly.

**Mayor:** Well, a very thoughtful and important question, Narmeen. I thank you for it. I'm going to turn to Dr. Chokshi. He and I have talked about this several times and I've talked to community pharmacists about how much they want to be in this work and how much we need them in this work, especially in a lot of communities where an independent community pharmacy is one of the central ways that people get their health care. The challenge again is supply, supply, supply. We have not had enough supply and to the extent we've had supply, we've tried to use it in the places where we thought we could have the biggest impact, which is in the community vaccination sites. But the goal as we get more supplies, get more and more to the community, independent pharmacies, as to the question of whether they can be accessed to those appointments via our website and all, that's a great question. Dr. Chokshi, you want to speak to that?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, sir. Thank you so much, and I'll start by just emphasizing how much we believe in independent pharmacies, also known as community pharmacies, as a linchpin to our vaccination efforts. We know from, you know, the neighborhoods that we ourselves all live in how important they are to the health care infrastructure in a particular area. Already tens of thousands of doses have been administered through independent pharmacies across New York City. But as the Mayor has said, with additional supply, we can do much, much more beyond that in the coming weeks and months. For any pharmacy who wants to be listed on the website, which is [nyc.gov/vaccinefinder](https://nyc.gov/vaccinefinder), we make that available. So, I'm happy to have our team follow up with the specific pharmacy that you've mentioned. And the last point that I want to make is just to maybe frame a part of your question a bit differently in saying that, you know, pharmacies calling their own clients, their customers is isn't so much of a cold call. That's actually what we want them to be doing because that's where people are used to going for their health care. So, that's something that we're actually encouraging pharmacies and particularly independent pharmacies to do because it leverages the trust that already exists in communities.

**Mayor:** And look, Narmeen – thank you, Doctor – Narmeen, this all goes back to the central concept: we need the freedom to vaccinate. Give us the ability here in New York City to control

our own destiny, and we're going to lean more into those independent community pharmacies. We want to give them as much freedom and flexibility as possible because that's where so many people go for their health care. So, you know, we need supply, and we need the freedom to vaccinate and that's going to help us provide vaccine to these independent community pharmacies. Go ahead, Narmeen.

**Question:** Thank you so much for that answer, and I do want to emphasize this pharmacist in particular says he sees the need in his community. When they find out that he has vaccines, they're happy to come to him and learn more about the vaccine, even when they've been hesitant. So, thank you again for that answer.

I wanted to also touch on the taxi medallions. My phone's been dingling off the hook since you made the announcement, I've been covering this extensively. But I want to get your response. Also, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance put out a response on Twitter saying that this doesn't do much for them. I'm going to paraphrase some of it, but "it's a cash bail out for lenders," they say, "while we are left to drown in debt, foreclosure, and bankruptcy. No debt forgiveness, no collective solution, no justice. It's a disgraceful betrayal from a city that already has blood on his hands." That again is from the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, and I just want to get your response to that because while we have a lot of positive reaction coming in, we have this from the Alliance.

**Mayor:** You know, I will just say, as – I'll turn to the Commissioner, but that very statement speaks volumes. The Taxi Workers Alliance – I respect them. We've worked with them on things like the minimum wage. We've found common ground on important issues, but that statement really does not respect the hard work that was done to find a viable solution. It's really easy for folks to call for things that aren't going to work and feel like, you know, that sounds good. But what we've actually been trying to do is the hard work of figuring out a sustainable solution, and our Commissioner cares deeply about the drivers and was not going to offer a plan unless she believed it would actually help them in the long run and be workable. So, again, we'll listen to all voices, but our job as the government representing the people is to come up with a solution that will actually work. Commissioner, why don't you speak to that?

**Commissioner Heredia Jarmoszuk:** I'll say that \$65 million is a massive commitment from the city and a very clearly articulated commitment to the yellow taxi segment that is part of the city's infrastructure. And I'm very proud of this plan. I'm going to work very quickly to ensure that it is implemented so that we can deliver the support that the industry needs at this critical time.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Ariama from Kings County Politics.

**Question:** Hi, good morning.

**Mayor:** Hi, Ariana, how are you doing?

**Question:** Ariama, with an M, sir.

**Mayor:** Oh, I'm sorry, say it again?

**Question:** Ariama.

**Mayor:** I'm going to get it right – Ariama.

**Question:** Yep, thank you. Awesome. So, just to stay on the taxi question really quickly, how do you square away putting more cars, more taxis on the road with environmentalists who are, after last year especially, want the city to be more walkable and take cars off the road?

**Mayor:** Well, that's a good question, and I'm going to turn to the Commissioner for her view, but I would say, look, taxis, for-hire vehicles are another form of mass transit. They're not individual automobile ownership, and they're obviously collective, you know. People use them for a brief period of time each day, and lots of people use them in the course of the day. I think that's a lot better than a whole lot of individual cars moving around. But again, we're always going to be very mindful of what the right number is, and that's part of why we've been careful about how we use caps and all in the middle of all these challenges we're facing. So, that would be my big frame in the answer to your question. Commissioner, would you speak to it?

**Commissioner Heredia Jarmoszuk:** So yellow taxis, as the Mayor just said, are an extension of our public transit system and the good news about taxis and the amount that we have, is that they are fixed amount. There are 13,587 medallions that hasn't grown in a very long time, and they are critical to getting New Yorkers and visitors around during regular times and, have proven a critical component of transportation during the pandemic. We are always looking at ways to see how we can be more environmentally friendly. I'm very excited that we have seven yellow taxi Teslas on the road right now, and we are in conversations with our fleet owners, our individual owners and Tesla to see how many more we can get on the road, and I envision a day where half of our fleet will be environmentally friendly, and not have that footprint that it has now.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Ariama.

**Question:** Thanks, and my second question, just to go back to the vaccine update, what's the hiring process going to be like for the neighborhood job?

**Mayor:** Excellent question, and we, again, we want to really encourage people who want to be part of this, you know, I think heroic vaccination effort to come forward and we're focusing on the 33 communities hardest hit by COVID. I'm going to turn to – I don't know if Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Katz has most of the details, which one of you would like to speak to it?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Sir, I'm happy to start, thank you, and you're exactly right. The focus on this is to serve communities through vaccination by actually hiring from the communities that have been hardest hit, and so the jobs are being posted at [nyc.gov/vaccinejobs](https://nyc.gov/vaccinejobs) where it also walks through the precise process of applying for a job. But almost as important is the recruitment that we'll bring to bear working with community-based organizations, and I'm really grateful to the small business services for organizing this effort as a whole leveraging their

connections with organizations, with respect to actually recruiting from those communities. Once that happens, there are a range of jobs. Some are nonclinical that require no health care experience. Others are clinical: for example, the people who are actually administering the vaccines, and so there's a process to get the best qualified candidates to rise to the top and actually get matched with the jobs that are available.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Okay, go ahead.

**Moderator:** Last, we'll go to Yehudit from Boro 24 News.

**Mayor:** Boro Park 24.

**Moderator:** Boro Park 24 News. I'm getting a little casual. Sorry, guys.

**Mayor:** Yehudit, are you there?

**Moderator:** We lost Yehudit. We're going to go to Gersh from Streetsblog.

**Question:** How are you guys doing? I get to go last again, Mr. Mayor, I guess, which is always a lot of fun

**Mayor:** You know, Gersh, it's like cleanup hitter, just a lot later.

**Question:** No, I just, you know, because I know everybody hangs up and we get to talk like gentlemen, you know. I'm doing eighth grade English with my son right now, so now I'm failing English for the second time. So, anyways—

**Mayor:** That was a quotable quote.

**Question:** I want to ask you – there's a certain, there's sort of an absurd quality to your taxi bailout plan announced today, especially given an earlier answer that talk about the yellow industry. You know, it's capped at 38,000 medallions, but you know, the city has done very little to regulate Uber and Lyft, which during the height of its business, you know, before the pandemic, was handling like a million cab rides a day. So, that's really the elephant in the room here. I know the Council has a plan to charge Uber and Lyft like 11 cents a minute for when they cruise empty causing all that traffic. So, maybe you could talk a little bit about that. I mean, the administration doesn't seem to be talking about regulating Uber and Lyft?

**Mayor:** You know, Gersh, I always know where you stand on an issue and I appreciate it, but I think just your question does not pay attention to the extremely rich history here. 2015, this administration fought hard to deepen regulation of Uber and Lyft. Unfortunately, the City Council did not agree. That was a mistake. They should have. We came back later with the City Council and did what should have been done earlier on create a lot more regulation, and, you know, we've added a number of pieces to that regulation, some of which we had to fight out in court, and you can tell that you're being aggressive towards a massive multinational corporation when they constantly take you to court, and we have continued that fight. So, I would just



disagree entirely. I think we've been constantly focused on trying to put the right limits on there. Commissioner, would you like to add?

**Commissioner Heredia Jarmoszuk:** No, the for-hire transportation industry, as the Mayor said, has a very rich history. There, I think, is a happy medium for all segments of the industry to co-exist and, and that has to come through better and improved regulation, which we're committed to doing as, as we have been since the beginning of this administration and as we demonstrated in 2018 and as we're demonstrating today.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Gersh.

**Question:** I'll ask a different question. So, I just got off the phone before the call with Transportation Committee Chairman, Ydanis Rodriguez at the Council, and he told me the Council – look, they're open to negotiating with you on that bill to move the NYPD's Collision Investigation Squad to the DOT. But at the end of the day, if your administration does not negotiate, and you've said, you're against the bill, the Council will pass the bill setting up what would be the first override of a de Blasio veto. So, that's historic, first of all. So, what do you think of that? And will you negotiate on this bill?

**Mayor:** I think we can find a good solution. What we've talked about before – I have a lot of respect for the Councilmember. I think we're all working together on this. There is an element of this work that should be done by DOT. There's an element of this work should be done by the NYPD there are different functions. A criminal investigation, obviously the NYPD and a investigation to determine better approaches to traffic design should be done by DOT, and we can do both in different ways and that's what we'll work through. But I don't think, I mean, I, again, I know you have a flare for the dramatic, and I appreciate that, but I don't think it's something that evades our ability to find common ground. I think we are going to find common ground because we have two things we need to achieve, and we will achieve them both.

Everybody, as we conclude today, I just want to take a step back where we were earlier and talk about what this moment means. It's a moment in history we're all going through together. It's a difficult moment, it's a painful moment, but it's a moment of change too. It's a transformative moment. We just saw this weekend, something we could not have possibly imagined previously, the U.S. Senate passing a \$1.9 trillion stimulus that will change so many people's lives for the better and help us recover. Lots of things are happening now that were considered impossible before, and this brings me back to the topic of justice, social justice, making bigger changes, and that's why we need to get rid of solitary confinement once and for all this takes a lot of work to get, right? I want to thank everyone who's done this work. I want to thank Commissioner Cynthia Brann and her team at the Department of Correction. They have done immensely difficult work to figure out what will create fairness, and justice, and humanity, but also keep everyone safe. I want to thank Jennifer Jones Austin and Stanley Richardson, everyone at the Board of Corrections. I want to thank all of the advocates have been part of this process, and I want to thank everyone at the Correction Officers Union who have been speaking about what they think is right and safe for everyone. We've been working with everyone to try to get this right. But one thing I know for sure, the era of punitive segregation is ending must end, will end

in New York and it will end this year and that's going to move us forward. Thank you, everybody.

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