

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 20, 2020, 10:30 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. This has been, to say the least, an extraordinary year, an extraordinarily difficult year and painful year on so many levels, but also a year where New Yorkers have done amazing things to support each other and protect each other. And New Yorkers have been so vibrantly thinking about the kind of city that we need to be, going forward. People have really gotten involved and talking about how we have to address the disparities and the challenges, the unfairness that's still too much of life in this city that has to be overcome. And this is something that people are feeling, obviously, all over the country. And now, after months and months and months of all the frustrations, all the questions, all the challenges, two weeks from now people get an opportunity to decide the future direction of this country and to express everything we feel and use our democratic process to determine our course forward.

So, we're now in the final days before the most important election of our lifetime. We're going to talk today about some of the things that are so important to get people ready to fully participate. And particularly the fact that early voting starts this Saturday. So, it's really happening now and want everyone to know all the details, how to engage and get questions answered, make sure that everyone knows how to participate fully. But before that, let me give us all an update on what's been happening in our efforts to fight back the virus. And we're going through some challenges, but we're also seeing some really, really positive developments. And I want to talk about the importance of testing. Look, we've said it from the beginning, it just proves more and more true all the time – the more people get tested, the better we know what's going on and the better we can act. And from the beginning, we've said to people how important it is to just not doubt or question the testing process, but go out there and participate. It's very fair for New Yorkers, New Yorkers always asked tough questions, but really a lot of people talk themselves out of getting tested when it would be better for themselves and all of us for people to just go and experience it and participate and help us get the truer look on what's happening at this – over this whole city. So, that's why we have Get Tested Tuesday as a reminder to folks to folks who have never been tested – and there's still a lot of folks who've never been tested – or folks who haven't been tested in a long time, how important it is just to get out there and be a part of this. And it will actually give us the information we need to move this city forward.

And we're in the middle of a set of challenges, but they're challenges we can overcome. I've talked very openly about the fact there is a threat of a second wave, but we can stop that second wave. Absolutely requires people to participate and one of the best ways to participate is by getting tested. Now, in our school system, our public schools, we, from the beginning, determined that we would have a regular dealer testing program, a mandatory testing program

every month, every school. And as we have started that testing program, we've just seen remarkable results. And this is a testament to everyone in our school system, the extraordinary work – our staff, our educators, parents, kids – everyone has done to make sure our schools are safe. So, now, after we've had testing in hundreds of schools, 16,000-plus test results have come back, only 28 students and staff have tested positive in our entire school system after more than 16,000 test results have come back. That is a positivity rate of 0.17 percent. This is really extraordinary. I want to emphasize, we all focus on our challenges and our difficulties, but let's take a moment to celebrate what the people of New York City have achieved – a 0.17 percent positivity rate – that's unbelievably good. And that means that all of those precautions that have been taken in our schools are working. When we said we were taking a global gold standard approach to our schools, that's exactly what's happened. You go into a school building, you see so many health and safety measures layered one on top of another, but the proof is in the results. And these are amazing results. And this really bodes well for the future of our schools and our ability to fight and overcome this disease.

Now, I want to remind all parents, all staff, the entire school community, we really want everyone to get involved in testing. And to do that, we need people to fill out those consent forms. So, again, a reminder to everyone, particularly parents, go online, fill out that consent form. Go to your account with the school system and do it that way or you can fill out a paper form and send it back into school. But this testing is working and it's helping us keep our schools safe and is helping our city move forward.

Now, back to this historic moment – 14 days, two weeks to go. And, in fact, if you are really itching to vote, you can vote starting as early as this Saturday, October 24th. And early voting will continue from this Saturday, all the way to November 1st. Remember, voting is considered an essential service, just like the essential businesses that stay open. Voting sites will stay open throughout the city. All early voting and Election Day sites will be opened as planned, every borough, every neighborhood. And, of course, if you prefer not to vote on election day or not even to early vote, you can still vote by absentee ballot. That deadline is coming up soon. So, we are really pushing the Board of Elections to get clear information out, to not make some of the mistakes they've made previously and make this an easy, positive experience. But we're not just pushing them, we're doing our own work here at City Hall to get the word out, to encourage people, to give people answers, to make sure folks know that voting can be easy and safe. And our whole DemocracyNYC team has been deeply involved in getting people engaged more than ever before and showing people that everyone needs to participate. So, here to talk about this effort, my Senior Advisor and General Counsel to DemocracyNYC Laura Wood.

Senior Advisor & General Counsel Laura Wood, DemocracyNYC: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. As the start of early voting approaches, we want to emphasize that voters don't have to choose between their health and their right to vote. And the DemocracyNYC team is working hard to make sure that New Yorkers know how to vote safely. To that end, with the Department of Health, we have developed a how to vote safely during COVID fact sheet. Starting this week, the fact sheet will be available at city COVID-19 testing sites citywide, including in the hotspot areas. And it can be downloaded at nyc.gov/votesafe in 13 languages – the top 13 spoken citywide. For those who choose to vote in-person, voting safely largely reflect the core four – wear a face covering; keep your hands clean; try to keep six feet apart from others, avoid crowds;

and, if you're feeling sick, pick a different day to vote. And this year, that is easy, because you can avoid crowds by voting early. Early voting, as the Mayor said, starts this Saturday, October 24th and runs for nine days through November 1st. That includes two full weekends and five weekdays with early morning and evening hours available.

Additionally, DemocracyNYC, in partnership with the civic engagement commission has developed PSA's on voting by mail, early voting, and voting rights at the polls. Starting this week, we will be running targeted ads in hotspot zones about voting absentee and early voting. These ads will run on broadcast, streaming, and social media platforms through November 1st. Lastly, we are making sure that New Yorkers have safe transportation options to get to the polls. As the Mayor announced last week, we've partnered with Curb to offer \$5 off yellow and green taxi rides during the early voting period. If you want to take advantage, you can download the Curb app and use the code "vote early" from October 24th through November 1st.

Today, we're announcing a partnership with Citi Bike. New Yorkers can get 50 percent off Election Day rides, up to \$10, from 4:00 AM to 11:00 PM on November 3rd. Use the code "2020 Vote" on the Citi Bike app to access the discount. Again, I want to encourage everyone to take the time to make a plan to vote, choose how and when it's best for you and make your voice heard. With that, I'll turn it back to the Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Laura. Thank you to you and everyone at DemocracyNYC. And I know for all of you, it is a labor of love to spread the word and get people engaged and make sure voting is easy and safe. And we're going to do that to make sure all New Yorkers get involved.

Now let's, let's talk about another effort where we worked so hard to get everyone involved. And I have to say, this is really ultimately a pretty amazing story and a tough, tough challenge that, as usual, New Yorkers met and exceeded all expectations – this is about Census 2020. We're now able to talk about our results. And I want to say at the outset, to talk about something where every conceivable obstacle was thrown in our way – the pandemic, all the fear and uncertainty, all the efforts from Washington D.C. to undermine participation, the horrible negative attacks on immigrants, everything that was done to make it impossible for the census to actually get a fair count in New York City. And yet, in the end, after all of this, the self-response rate from New York City – 61.8 percent. That's essentially identical to the rate in 2010, but with so many more challenges in the way. And I just have to say, when you look at this response, it makes me very proud of New Yorkers that people answered this census in such strong numbers. What a vote of confidence in this city. And also, what an amazing action by New Yorkers – with every effort to undermine and discourage them, they still came through. All of you came through. That's an amazing number, given what we were up against. We saw some really great results. Four out of five boroughs, in fact, reached higher response rates than in 2010. We saw in the African-American community, major improvements in the response rate. This is something that everyone should be proud of, but I particularly want to thank our incredible census team that took on this challenge. And they had no quit in them – no matter what was thrown at them, they kept fighting. And I want to thank our director, Julie Menin, and her whole team, and the incredible partners all over the city that joined together and they just would not give up. And when you

heard people say, make sure you're counted, they meant it. And they went out there and they did it. So, Julie, congratulations to you and your team. Tell us all about the final results.

Director Julie Menin, NYC Census 2020: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. And I want to thank you for your support of our efforts, and also thanks to the City Council. So, as the Mayor said, no census has faced headwinds like the 2020 census, whether it was the attempt to add the citizenship question, underfunding the census, constant attacks by the White House, or literally the Supreme Court cutting short our deadline by two weeks. And, if that were not enough, having the fact that when the first mailer went out in March to New Yorkers, COVID hit, and we were literally the epicenter of this global pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, our effort to open over 300 census centers was stymied. And I mentioned that, because in a city where a third of New Yorkers lack access to broadband, that is a true impediment. Now, before COVID hit a year ago, the U.S. Census Bureau predicted that our self-response rate would be 58 percent. And I'm so proud to announce today that not only did our team reach 61.8 percent, but we beat L.A., and Chicago, and Boston, and Philadelphia, and Miami, and Dallas, and Houston and many other areas. And we also beat the U.S. Census Bureau's prediction pre-COVID by close to four points.

So, why is that important? It's so important, because for every household over two people that is counted, that brings New York City \$7,000 per year, or \$70,000 over 10 years, not to mention, of course, the importance of the political representation. We could not, as the Mayor said, have done this without our closest partners, our citywide partners group, our complete count fund of grantees, faith-based organizations, labor unions, volunteers, and so many others. We have a slide here about the neighborhoods that have improved the most. So, I'll quickly go to that and you can see the Bronx-Parkchester, Queens-Laurelton, Brooklyn-Prospect Lefferts Garden, Staten Island-Park Hill, and Manhattan-Central Harlem, but we have so many other good stories to tell.

Just briefly on the data, our team sent 7 million texts, 4 million phone calls. We had over 1,000 events. And, through our outreach, we assisted half-a-million households to actually complete the census. And the digital ads drove over 1 million clicks throughs to the census website. We had 34 media campaigns in 27 languages. And we had everyone from Cardi B, to Alicia Keys, to Lin Manuel Miranda, to Kal Penn, as well as every-day New Yorkers. And while we certainly have so much to be proud of, the fight isn't over. So, I do want to close with the fact that we want to ensure that the count is accurate. President Trump will be an office in December irrespective of the election. And so, we will obviously closely monitor the data, because we know certainly that there were some issues regarding the door knocking. And we also remain a plaintiff on the case led by Attorney General Tish James before the Supreme Court on November 30th in the Trump Administration's attempt to exclude undocumented some Congressional apportionment. So, we need to still remain vigilant.

But, in closing, this campaign really proves that through the right and smart investment and outreach, New Yorkers really come through and we are thrilled with the results today. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Julie. And, everyone, look, this is about the future of this city. So, your effort to respond to this census now is going to give us a much greater sense, a much greater

ability to get our fair share. And this is what the census was always about, getting our fair share, and, because New Yorkers came through, we're going to have much more chance of actually getting what we deserve from Washington. But, as Julie said, these next weeks ahead are crucial to make sure that what happens from this point on is fair. And that's why we're going to be engaged in the court process to make sure that what happens in Washington now doesn't further undermine a fair account for New York City. So, thank you, Julie. Thank you to your whole team.

Okay. With that, everybody let's go to indicators. Okay. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold 200 patients – today's report, 62 patients with a confirmed positivity rate of 19.7 percent for COVID. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold 550 cases – today's report, 496. And number three, percentage of people tested citywide positive for COVID-19, threshold 5 percent – today's report, 2.52 percent. And today's seven-day rolling average number is 1.58 percent. A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, we will turn to our colleagues in the media and 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, we have Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, Laura Wood, Senior Advisor and General Counsel of DemocracyNYC, and Census Director Julie Menin. With that, we'll go to Narmeen from PIX 11.

Question: Hi, Mayor. Good morning. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Narmeen. How are you?

Question: I'm doing well. I'm wanted to touch base with you a little bit more about those daily indicators and whether you've had any more conversations with the Governor about what could potentially be coming tomorrow about those zoning changes and the maps changing at all. I know a lot of folks are waiting to hear what would come.

Mayor: Yes. Look, we are also waiting to get the final word from the State, but we're hopeful about Central Queens. Obviously, we have to look at data every single day and sometimes you have a variation in the data that causes a concern, but if we continue to see what we've seen for the last few days I have every expectation that the State is preparing to act to remove restrictions in Central Queens. But, again, pending final confirmation, pending final look at the data. We got some more to do in some of the other neighborhoods, but I have to say, again, what we're seeing in Central Queens reminds everyone that we can move through this quickly; that if folks go out and get tested, that we can get through this quickly; if folks do the social distancing and wear the masks, we can get through this quickly. So, hopefully, we get good news on Central Queens soon, and then the other areas soon thereafter. Go ahead.

Question: Mayor, sticking to that a bit, I know you were a bit reluctant to talk about a ZIP code by ZIP code understanding of how the numbers are doing in other red zones. But I wonder if you can give us a better understanding of how other parts of Brooklyn and Queens are doing outside of Central Queens? Are we seeing a continued leveling off? Is it slightly going up? Is it going down? Is it where you want it to be?

Mayor: Yeah, we're definitely seeing a leveling off all over the city. As you saw, that seven-day rolling average number – knock on wood. We have every single day more work to do. And again, we're not out of the woods in those red and orange zones, but, in general, the city continues to do well. And the key here is across [inaudible] to encourage more testing. We have a lot of areas where I'd like to see more testing. We definitely want to keep reminding people – I know there's fatigue out there, but how important it is keep wearing the masks. So, that work is going to deepen. We're going to address these immediate problems and then continue to do that outreach all over the city. But over [inaudible] –

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

Mayor: Good, Jacob. How are you?

Question: I'm doing great. So there was a report and I just wanted to see if you can confirm that you met with Orthodox Jewish community leaders yesterday, and the report says that both community leaders and yourself expressed certain regrets on the approach they took early on. I wanted to see if you can expand on that – whether you think that the community and city government is on the reset.

Mayor: Well, I think we absolutely need a positive reset, Jacob. It was a very moving meeting, a very productive meeting, a group of leaders from Brooklyn and Queens, some of whom I've known very, very well for as much as 20 years and a very honest meeting. We really took our time to talk through everything that happened from the beginning of the pandemic and how painful it's been for everyone and how confusing it's been. But I think what the meeting really helped me to appreciate is that so many people in the community have suffered and they need to know that we, as the city government understand their suffering, understand the difficulties the community has gone through, understand the fears that people have rightfully of discrimination, and that we need to hear each other more and understand each other more. I did express my regrets – look, I think in the beginning of this process I thought we had done some good work to communicate with community leaders about how important it was to all work together, and I thought I saw really good results from that. Honestly, I did see really good results from that. We had amazing support from community leaders and institutions, and I said at the time, including doing really tough things like closing houses of worship voluntarily at the height of the crisis in March and April.

But, you know, I look back now and understand there was just more dialogue that was needed. I certainly got very frustrated at times when I saw large groups of people still out without masks, but I think more dialogue would have been better. So I certainly want to express my regret that I didn't figure out how to do that better, and obviously, you know, that one night in Williamsburg, I let my frustration and concern get away with me and I should have been more careful in my

language and I've expressed my apology for that before, but I think it was a good, honest conversation about how hard it is to get people in the community to understand in an ever-changing environment why the information coming from the government is something they can have faith in when there's been so many changes, so many mixed messages – so many mixed messages from Washington D.C., and I think the, the number one takeaway from the meeting was more dialogue, more communication is the way forward. Go ahead, Jacob.

Question: You mentioned mass testing and that the numbers are leveling off in certain red zones. Do you have a specific indication where mass testing has indicated a better sample of what the real positive rate is? Or is it just leveling off because we are seeing people comply more carefully with the guidelines?

Mayor: Look, I think it's honestly a bit of both Jacob. I think what we learned long ago in places like Sunset Park and Soundview is when you alert people to a problem and you educate and you do mask distribution, things like that, it really does help get folks to be more disciplined. We certainly see in the red and orange zones, more and more people wearing masks more and more people practicing social distancing – that really helps unto itself. But I think obviously, you know, anytime you get more testing, you get a better look at things, and in a lot of the city, I think folks were getting to pretty low levels of testing, and, you know, there's still, as I said, a lot of New Yorkers never got tested at all that actually makes it harder to understand what's going on. So I think we clearly are seeing an uptick in testing now that we've sounded the alarm and it does not surprise me at all – the more testing, the clearer picture, and typically what we found is the more testing, the better of the picture becomes.

Moderator: Next up is Bob from the Chief Leader.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: How are you, Bob?

Question: Okay. I'm a little bit concerned. I did see this study from the New York School of Global Public Health that looks at a TWU Local 100 and the status of the workforce. They're, they're reporting that based on their survey, which does reflect the demographic of the workforce, our essential, brave workforce – one in four TWU Local 100 members working for the MTA may have contracted COVID, and 90 percent through getting the virus at work. This is the first of its kind, it has some limitations, but I'm wondering – this doesn't show that we really need more attention, even as we struggle with the election and the rest – looking at the occupational consequences of living with this virus.

Mayor: Yeah, Bob, that's a really good point. There is no question, you know, so many frontline working people showed up and put themselves forward to protect everyone else and help everyone else and keep the city going and keep, you know, in the case of our transit workers, because of them, all of the other essential workers were able to get to work and keep the city going and starting with the health care worker. So the transit workers played a really heroic role, but we do need to look really carefully at what the lasting impact is and support people. Right now we're obviously trying to overcome the crisis in front of us, but I think you're right, that this

is going to be an important issue going forward in the city. How can we help those who did so much for us? Go ahead, Bob.

Question: As a follow-up, one of the things that comes out of this survey that's of concern and kind of ties into the overarching theme of the election, is that the members responding are evenly divided with like 31 percent to 32 percent not having confidence in any vaccine that the government might offer. Can you talk about, and we're dealing with this now, the challenge of, of having – you know, this is a town and first responders remember the EPA guarantee about the air being safe to breathe in Lower Manhattan. How can government rebuild this trust it is suffered quite frankly, through this crisis?

Mayor: Bob, you, I've known you a long time and you often ask profound questions, and this is one of them. I'm going to start and turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi, cause we all were talking about this yesterday. I guess I'd say simply this, there is been for years and years a degradation of trust in all institutions in American society with very few exceptions, and if we wanted to have a longer discussion, we would go back to the Vietnam War and Watergate and all the things that started that in motion and the truth that came out that didn't use to come out, and I think it's gotten a lot worse in recent years, and I think history is going to show that that lack of trust was deeply intensified during the time of the Trump administration, but that is not a permanent feature. It's something we can overcome, and I think what you find is that people actually do have a lot of trust in that, which is most local to them. Maybe it's at the neighborhood level, maybe it's their labor union, you know, maybe it's a clergy member or faith group, but there are still places where people have trust. We've got to rebuild a bigger trust. It's going to take a lot of work, but I do believe it can be done.

But on this specific issue of the vaccine, your parallel to 9/11 is a very, very good one. That was actually – that decision by the EPA was one of the most tragic decisions in recent memory in the history of this city, and it still hasn't been examined enough, but it's an exact example of why people question government across the board. When it comes to the vaccine, I think people will believe it more if it's really consistently validated by health care professionals. There is still a lot of respect for the health care profession. So I think if you hear a consensus of health care leaders, that will be the single most important factor in giving people comfort in taking the vaccine. I think the second will be watching friends, neighbors, family take it, and then see if it works and they feel good about it, and then, you know, slowly but surely getting more comfortable with themselves. That's my kind of common sense view, but let me have Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi speak to this as well.

Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma: Sure, I can go ahead and start. No, I think everything that the Mayor said is, is right on target, and I can tell you from my own personal experience working on you know, devastating outbreaks throughout the world, that that loss of trust in institutions and science is really what helps fuel and propagate epidemics. So when it comes to something as important as a vaccine I do feel confident that, you know, the scientists working in FDA and in fact, the scientists working at the companies that are developing this are really committed to making sure that any vaccine is safe and effective. Nevertheless, we have seen the possible influence of pressures on organizations and institutions. So it's very incumbent upon us as you know, the health officials that are, that are cast with helping New Yorkers, you know, fight this

virus, making sure that we independently and accurately also assessed and endorsed the quality of the information, and then of course, for people to have discussions with their trusted advisors –obviously their family and friends and colleagues, but also their medical providers, and, and I do have a lot, a lot of confidence that if there is that independent assessment outside of the federal government and industry that we will be able to gain the trust when there is a safe and effective vaccine developed.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi, you want to add?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Yes, thank you. I'll just add one brief point here, which is a first to underline yes, how important and how much of a pillar this idea of addressing trust will have to be to our vaccination strategy for COVID-19 in New York City. The piece that I wanted to build upon is the idea that health care providers, clinicians will be a central part of this, and in fact, in the study that you cited, Bob, one of the things that that rose to the forefront was the idea that people still do trust their doctors as someone who has practiced primary care for several years you know, there's no substitute for the relationships that are developed with ones patients going through thick and thin with them for, you know, momentous decisions like these. So a big part of what we will do is not just the overall, you know, citywide, public messaging about the science, about the validity of the studies that we're looking at, but really working hand in hand with trusted community physicians and other health care providers as well.

Mayor: Go ahead.

Moderator: Next we have Yoav.

Mayor: Can you hear us?

Question: Yeah. Can you hear me?

Mayor: There you go.

Question: Okay. Yesterday you mentioned that you had some concerns about the level of testing in the Brooklyn cluster. The only data that we have available is over a four-week stretch. So I'm wondering if you can just perhaps provide more specifics on what's happening there, and if you have any more recent data or your team, would you guys be able to provide it? So we have a more clear picture of what's happening?

Mayor: Yeah. We'll keep providing, you know, any data we can with the clear point I made yesterday that we want to make sure there is not further confusion. The City put forward a vision of how to address this immediate problem. State had a different approach. We're aligning to the State's approach. We really want to make sure that alignment is clear going forward until this immediate problem is over. When this is over, I want us to resume what we've done with our data, but in terms of testing and this was actually a topic. Last night at the meeting I had with community leaders we've seen some really positive examples of high levels of testing, and Williamsburg is a good case study here in Williamsburg. There's been a lot of focus on testing, a

lot of community support for testing and lo and behold, you see those numbers have stayed stable and lower.

We have some parts of Brooklyn where we just need to convince people more. That testing makes sense and testing is safe and testing is reliable, and the conversation last night, it gets to the same trust point was really helpful in the explanation of why people, in some cases, don't trust testing all the different things that have been spread to discourage people from testing. Some of it aligns to the reality of, we saw back with the measles crisis as sort of the anti-vaxxer movement, a variation on that, just discouraging belief in science, belief in anything the government is doing. Some of that is ideological. Some of it is folks hearing rumors that if they got a negative test, it wasn't going to be counted, and therefore, why should they go out and get tested? We have to actually do a better job of addressing each and every one of these concerns, and Dr. Katz, who was a part of the meeting last night was really struck by that point that if folks don't believe that their test result will be accurately reflected that actually discourages testing instead of encouraging it. So we have to go a lot deeper into the community to say to everyone. In fact, Williamsburg's a great example. The more you get tested, the better look we get at what's happening in the community and the greater likelihood that the proof is there that restrictions can be removed. Go ahead.

Question: Well, to be honest, I don't want to waste my second question on a follow-up, but I was thinking, you know, more specifics as far as, you know, what neighborhoods and what the numbers show. I wanted to ask about a different issue, which is the City's creation of a nonprofit, and it looks like a purchase of Reliant, the bus company. Just wondering why it makes sense during a financial crisis to make a move that appears to be intended to save money over the long term, but where all of the investments are going to be on the short term.

Mayor: Let me tell you about my experience with the schools that certainly led me to believe this was good policy, and we saw this with the work of our Custodial Services team as well. When we had, that was the first experience we had of saying, how do we have such crucial services in our schools that are not part of the public sector, and it led to all sorts of problems, the history around, you know, going back decades around the problems with Custodial Services was pretty clear. We created a public nonprofit approach that really improved the Worker Custodial Services and became the template for what we looked at here with school buses.

With school buses, and I go back, you know, not only as someone who was a school board member in Brooklyn long ago, but also as a public school parent, the whole reality of school buses has been, you know, many, many companies, all different, question marks every year about how the school year would begin whether the service would be there. Obviously the threat of strikes, so many different pieces, and the question always was could we create a more rational approach? So having school bus service increasingly under a nonprofit umbrella is very much in the immediate interest in New York City and the long term interest in New York City, and I believe firmly, it will lead to more reliable school, bus service, safer school bus service, less disruption, and ultimately will save us money. So I think it's a very smart direction for the City. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we have Erin from Politico.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask about the testing in schools. So only 20 percent approximately so far of parents have returned these consent forms. So how is that working when you're, you know, if your number comes up and this random choice, and you haven't filled out the form at this point, has anyone been forced to go to remote because they're not getting tested or are you just skipping over them and hoping they'll figure they'll fill it out eventually, and you know, why is this number so low at this point?

Mayor: Erin, very good question. Your, your second option is exactly what's happening and that's what was the plan from the beginning? We knew it would take time for parents to focus on this. We knew there'd be valid questions that we had to answer. So right now we've had plenty of folks to be tested, not a problem at all. We're going to keep getting more and more consent forms – they've been coming in steadily. I don't see a problem in the short term. I think what's going to happen is, you know, you just need an available pool depending on the school, it's 10 percent to 20 percent of students, and staff, educators, the whole community, and so far, we've had plenty of folks to get tested as we go forward. We have to keep getting back more and more consent forms, no doubt. But I think we're on the right trajectory. Down the line, if we have a problem, we'll address that, then we've been very clear about how that would be addressed, but that's not a problem right now. Go ahead.

Question: Alright, thank you. And then we haven't talked for a while about deaths from this disease, but, you know, with this latest spike, I just wanted to get the update, obviously it's thankfully so much lower than it was once, but what are we seeing on average in terms of, you know, New Yorkers who are still dying from this disease in terms of the numbers and it, you know, has it gone up at all with the latest outbreaks?

Mayor: It's a crucial, now the most essential question really, and I appreciate it. I'm going to just say something and turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma. You know, I try to be always the person who puts things into as plain English as possible as a layman, but this is what struck me as I've looked at this challenge over these last weeks, the number of hospitalizations daily really hasn't moved a lot. The number – the percentage of COVID positivity among the hospitalizations, hasn't moved a lot. The citywide seven-day average hasn't moved a lot. These are really hopeful signs, but what's been extremely striking and thank God that the number of deaths has not been increasing markedly, and, you know, we're dealing with something very different here, obviously, then we dealt with in March and April, but our profound concern is to not let this challenge gather steam and not allow a second wave in the door. So, so far it has been absolutely better than what we went through, but we still have to stay very vigilant. Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thank you for the very important question. The Mayor is right that we are not seeing an increase in overall deaths and that's been true over the last several weeks to several months, you know, the total number of deaths per day is averaging in the in the single digits, and we do have this specific sample on our data page for the Department of Health. Of course any death is something that we hope to avoid and so we will not, you know, we will not end our efforts to try to prevent as much of that suffering as possible to save as many lives as we can. One really important consideration to point out about this is that we know that hospitalizations and deaths lag in increase in cases. We saw that earlier

this year, and we're seeing it, you know, around the world in places that are experiencing much more significant increases. And so that's why it's so important for us to stay focused on the cases, the test positivity, things that are earlier indicators so that we can avert as much of that suffering as possible.

Mayor: Dr. Varma, you want to add?

Senior Advisor Varma: Nothing else for me.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: Next. We have Gersh from Streetsblog.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call.

Mayor: How are you Gersh?

Question: I'm always good. Thank you. Over the summer, the city had mass protest over police misconduct. Some of which led to incidents that you yourself agreed were not well handled by the NYPD. Now we are at the precipice of an election in which the president has not indicated whether he will step down if he loses, and in fact has hinted that there will be violence. Given that such a scenario might involve millions of New Yorkers taking to the streets, and given that the NYPD's union has endorsed the president, we need to know the extent to which you, the Governor, the Police Commissioner and others have really gamed out the various scenarios to deal with the potential for widespread unrest and violence, and the possibility that the police force has conflicted members. Now, I know you can easily dismiss this question as private talks for now, but the public needs to know the details and the extent of your discussions.

Mayor: Yeah. I would not dismiss the question Gersh. I think it's a fair question. It's something that Commissioner Shea and I have talked about, and that kind of work to prepare is happening right now in the NYPD and at City Hall and we are going to have a very clear approach because I'm not going to be surprised if there is a prolonged count, recount, whatever it may be in this election and extremely strong views, and a lot of people out expressing themselves, and we have to protect the right to protest, and, you know, we expect and should be ready for a lot of peaceful protest, and obviously wouldn't have to deal with it if anyone attempts violence and we have to stop that violence. I think the – something that's been very sad to me in recent months, never experienced this before in my, you know, many years working around this city is people literally saying that they think what a leader of the PBA says reflects the whole NYPD, and that's just false. That's painfully, bluntly false. And I don't know what happened in this city that that could become so unclear. I think it's something we're going to have to work on a lot going forward, but no, the PBA leadership does not speak for the men and women of the NYPD. I would tell you having gotten a real good sense of the members of this police force, they hold a broad, broad range of views. I would note, again, this is a majority people of color police force and a police force that is very, very substantially city residents. It's not one thing or another, it should not be stereotyped.

And so, you're going to have police officers that have views across the spectrum, but I also think we've seen overwhelmingly officers leave their politics at home and they go and do what has to be done to keep people safe and to respect peaceful protest, and any officer who can't or won't do that we have to discipline and we have to address, but I don't get an indication that that is a widespread challenge. I know a lot of people feel it. I know there's a lot of fear. I think there's a lot of fear on so many fronts right now, but it's not what I see in all that I work on day to day with the NYPD including right down to the grassroots level. And I know that the leadership, the NYPD would not tolerate people, bringing their politics into the work. So, very fair question, Gersh. We have a lot of work to do to prepare but if you go by the history of the city, a peaceful protest is a New York City tradition and it's been honored and respected and managed, you know, peacefully, and that's what we intend to do. Go ahead.

Question: Appreciate that answer. Let me come at it from a different perspective. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in an interview said we should plan for massive demonstrations in the streets to make sure that people retain their power for, you know, but the people defenders, the police force again may not be on the side of those demonstrators based on the fact that the majority of the police force lives in the suburbs, it's union has endorsed the president, doesn't that concern you at all?

Mayor: Gersh, again, I wish I could help people understand what I've seen over decades and decades. I'll try my best. Of course, if you say it like that, well, who wouldn't be concerned, but that's not the reality that I've experienced. It's a very professional police force. Now I was asked the other day when I was on Ebro's show about what it was, what I thought about it today, and I said, let me explain what I think about a police force today versus what I thought about the police force when I worked in this building for Mayor Dinkins, and back then, I think it was a police force that was much less likely to honor and, you know, and balance all of its obligations. And we saw some troubling things in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, I think it's a different reality. There are individuals who have done some things absolutely wrong, and they need to experience the right punishment. But if you talk about the police force as a whole, spend time talking to officers, this is my challenge to all of you in the media. Go talk to everyday officers. First of all, I will challenge everyone's assumptions and everyone's sense of how politics works. Talk to officers. If you take a representative sample of our police officers, that means most people you will talk to are people of color. It means that almost half the people you're talking to live in New York City. You are going to find many, many officers who believe there needs to be real change in our society. You are going to find many officers that believe there's still a lot of racism that has to be overcome. Now, you're going to find that an officers of all different backgrounds, and then you'll find officers who may have a more conservative view as well, but you're not going to find one thing, and then as you go up the ranks, you will find a very professional group of people, also diverse in their views, but who believes deeply that their job is to protect the democratic process and protect peaceful protest.

And I've spent so much time listening and with a critical ear because of the, you know, the work I did years ago and the world I came out of, I had every reason to have a critical ear, but no, I just disagree with that assumption. I think it would be more constructive for us to say, okay, let's talk about what it's going to take to protect peaceful protests. You're absolutely right. We should assume there'll be a lot of it, and if there's any effort by President Trump to undermine

democracy and stop the will of the people, I would expect New Yorkers to turn out and fight against that, and then peacefully, and I would expect partisans of President Trump to come out. The NYPD's job is to make sure that all of that is handled peacefully and honored. Unquestionably they're up to that job and they believe in that job, and my job is to make sure that happens, and then if any individuals do the wrong thing, there has to be consequences for them. Go ahead.

Moderator: Time for two more. Next up is Alejandra from AM New York.

Question: Hi Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

Mayor: Good, Alejandra, how are you?

Question: I'm good. Thanks. I just have one question, another reporter asked my second one. There are a handful of City Council Members calling for a moratorium on shelter transfers until there's a COVID vaccine. I'm curious to hear your thoughts on this, and if you would consider imposing a moratorium until there's a vaccine available, or at least in total positivity rates in Brooklyn and Queens are lower?

Mayor: Thank you for the question, Alejandra. Look, in everything involving our shelter since this crisis – our shelter system I should say – since this crisis hit, we've turned to our health care leadership, we've turned to our Homeless Services leadership to determine how to keep people safe and made the decision, obviously, you get a lot of people out of congregate shelter and into hotels. We have a very different reality now, we're watching it constantly, but right now we have a very different reality, thank God, a much better health care reality. And even though the process of going back to congregate shelter will be a long one. I think on that level I don't expect to see a lot of changes in terms of going back to congregate shelter anytime soon.

But in terms of going, for example, a situation like we're talking about now, getting out of a hotel to get people to an actual shelter with services, I still think that makes sense. In fact, it's the safer option because the services are there, the health care is more available, and we also have to remember, you know, we have to be able to pursue more than one goal at once, and the hotels just are not the ideal option for homeless people. It's not the best way to support them on their path, you know, out of shelter and to affordable housing. So I would not think in terms of a blanket approach, I think we have to put the health care considerations front and center, and we have to be particularly careful about anything that might involve going back to a congregate setting, and none of the things that have been talked about in recent weeks have to do with those congregate settings. Those are whole different topic that we have not addressed so far. Thank you, Alejandra.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Mayor: Katie, can you hear us. Hello?

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: Try again.

Question: Hello. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Now I can hear you.

Question: You got me. Great. Thanks. I wanted to go back to something that Yoav had asked, and it is regards to the data, you know, there has been a discrepancy between the City and State data since COVID began, there were always difference numbers. They said it was down to some sort of delay. So I guess the question is why now that you have parts of the city shutdown due to rising COVID rates, why now would you stop releasing this data that could be the difference between a child going back to school or not? It seems that again, it's sort of, you're afraid we're going to be confused, but I guess we've been confused since March because it's always been this. So why not just release the data as you have it so we all know what's going on?

Mayor: Yeah, I understand the question, I would just disagree that because there's been a difference in the data before we should take an action now based on that, I would say, no, we have a very specific and very brief reality. Literally a matter of weeks from everything I can see. I presented a plan. The State came in with another plan. We're aligning to the state plan. I want to get through this period. Again, I'm hopeful very soon we're going to start to come out of restrictions in central Queens, and then in the other parts area over the next couple of weeks, clear the slate and then what I want to do is go back to a focus on providing the data regularly by ZIP code and make that the coin of realm, and we're going to have that conversation with the State as well about the virtue of that approach because I just think it's easier for everyone to make sense of. But I want us to get through this immediate period without creating even another level of confusion, and then we're going to clear the slate and start over and put out the data on what we think is the most accurate basis. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks. And my second question is a follow-up to something that Erin asked, it is in regards to the permission for, I guess, the – to get tested in schools. I know it's a 20 [inaudible]. So is there a concern that there are students who could have COVID but are not being tested because those consent forms are not filled out? And if so, I mean, is our percent positivity rate in schools, could it not be completely reflective of the reality of in our schools?

Mayor: Well, Katie, I understand the question, but I would say, you know, the results we're seeing in the schools, first of all, are just extraordinarily clear and consistent. We're talking about the monthly testing that we've now started. We're talking about the new testing we're doing in certain areas based on the State mandate. Everything has been coming back the same, very [inaudible]. You remember, even before school began, we started with several tens of thousands of teachers and staff, we tested ahead of school, consistently we're seeing incredibly low positivity rate. We're also encouraging families to go get tested outside of school and making that free and available any time. So I do not have the impression that, you know, the approach we're taking is missing any kind of bigger reality. I think it's so consistent the numbers we're getting back. We're going to encourage parents in every way to sign those consent forms. I do think some parents have questions they need answered. They need to talk to doctors, we're facilitating that, or they need to speak to someone in their own language, we're facilitating that.

There's legitimate things we have to work through with parents, but I think what you're going to see is the vast majority of parents over time are going to sign up. They're going to think it's something that is good to do, and if some choose not to, that's their right, but I think the results right now are really speaking themselves.

Okay. Everyone look, as we conclude, again, two weeks to an extraordinarily important day for this city, in this nation, and I think we have to think of it this way, that we've been through so much, we now have to really look forward. We have to look forward to the changes ahead and the hope ahead. I often get a lot of wisdom from the person I share my life with, and our First Lady said to me the other day, think of three things, election, stimulus, vaccine, and I think she's right, that those three key moments are going to really help us forward. And I think we're going to see hope by the people coming out and expressing themselves. I think there will be a stimulus not soon enough and big enough, but there will be a stimulus sooner rather than later. And there will be a vaccine. I don't know anyone in the health care profession who doubts that there will be a vaccine and it will happen in 2021. So, let's focus on the future and let's focus on the rebirth and let's see this as the first step to that rebirth together. Thank you, everybody.

###