



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

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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, COMMISSIONER PONTE ANNOUNCE
END OF PUNITIVE SEGREGATION FOR ADOLESCENT INMATES ON RIKERS
ISLAND**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: I want to start by thanking all of the officers who have gathered here – I'll mention some of the leaders of the department, but want to thank the individual corrections officers as well, who have joined with us – thank them for the work they do. It's important work, it's difficult work – we appreciate it very much.

I just toured two facilities here at Rikers, as I promised I would last month. We've been talking about a series of changes that we need to make and make quickly. We are pursuing those changes with great energy. And I wanted to come and see for myself how we are doing and what we have to keep doing to build on this success.

We know the history – it is a very troubling history. This was a place that became a less and less safe environment – an environment unfair, in many ways, to those who were incarcerated here, as well as those who worked here; and a place that did not provide enough rehabilitation, which obviously is core to the mission of this agency.

We wanted a decent and humane environment so the job could get done – not the de-humanizing environment that existed too often in the past. It is not only our responsibility as leaders to fix these conditions and move forward, it's our moral responsibility as humans not to create a situation where so many people had to experience so many difficult things – and I mean everyone who was a part of the reality here.

I have asked Commissioner Ponte – not only originally did I ask him to come and lead this agency, but I've asked him time and time again to find additional ways forward, to add to the pace of reform, to innovate, and he – time and time again – has answered the call and has constantly found new paths to making this a better place for all involved. And that is difficult work and I want to thank him for it – and I'm going to thank him again before I introduce him, because I can't emphasize enough what a tough mission this is, but also what a necessary mission it is.

I want to thank First Deputy Commissioner James Dzurenda; acting Chief of Department Martin Murphy; Assistant Chief James Perrino – Perrino, excuse me. I want to thank the two wardens who brought me on a tour of their facilities – and I was very, very impressed by what both of them are doing, and I thank them. I want to thank Warden Gumusdere and Warden Scott, and I also want to thank Deputy Warden Glenn – all of them for their leadership and the important work they do.

Now, we knew we had to make progress. We knew this was a case where we needed to move quickly. And progress is being made quickly. When we got together a few weeks back, we talked about the need to end punitive segregation for adolescents by the end of this calendar year. Under Commissioner Ponte's leadership, we have now ended all punitive segregation for 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds. We're using the new Transitional Repair Unit, which gives support and therapy to adolescents instead of relying on punitive segregation, which took us backwards.

And adolescents now have a chance to move to second-chance housing if they're well behaved. This is a situation that rewards good behavior, and aids in the rehabilitation process. These are examples of the reforms that we promised that are now becoming reality.

We know it is our mission to find a way to turn people's lives around. I've talked to a lot of people who work here today. It's very, very difficult work. But I hope you understand the people who do this work are motivated by the same feelings as our police officers, our doctors and nurses, our teachers. People who go into this work are trying to turn people's lives around. It is not easy, but it's what we have to keep working at harder all the time. We do not want to write people off. We know some people come here from very tough circumstances. We know people who've come here have made mistakes – in many cases, very dire mistakes – but our job is not to write them off, but to see if we can bring them back.

The problems at Rikers have literally been decades in the making. Things that have come out in the last year or two didn't just happen recently – they were the results of policies and choices and realities that went on for decades. Part of what I knew we needed in a corrections commissioner was a proven change-agent – someone who had been in the toughest circumstances and found a way forward. When I sat with Commissioner Ponte for the first time and heard what he had experienced – not only as a corrections officer himself, but as a leader who went from one tough assignment to another, all over the country, and found a way to turn things around – it was clear to me that he was the leader we needed – someone who understood the work of the people here, because he did it himself; someone who understood the process; someone who understood that no challenge can't be overcome, because, again, he took on some of the toughest situations in this country and prevailed.

He has replaced much of the senior leadership here. He has redesigned the Training Academy curriculum so staff here are better prepared to handle mentally ill individuals, better prepared to understand how to work with adolescents. And these changes also demand of us that we invest more resources here – and we have. We've invested \$32.5 million dollars in efforts to reduce violence and to increase support for those with mental illness.

And let's be clear – I will say this a lot over the coming years – a lot of the problems here are mental health problems. A lot of them reflect a reality in our society that has gone unaddressed or under-addressed. A very substantial percentage of the people in this city, in this state, in this country, suffer from mental illness. Oftentimes it goes undiagnosed. Oftentimes they don't get the support and treatment they need – and, as a society, we don't talk openly enough about it. So we will always put front-and-center this reality.

Here at Rikers, approximately 40 percent of inmates suffer from some version of mental illness – and that is one of the fundamental realities – and that part of the population is in fact more likely to be involved in violence than those who don't suffer from mental illness. It's why we want to get to the root of the problem.

Today, I visited two facilities – the Anna M. Kross Center – and I toured two housing units, with a focus on inmates with mental health challenges: first, a CAPS unit – Clinical Alternatives to Punitive Segregation – and this is a unit that houses inmates with serious mental illness; and then second, the PACE unit – Program to Accelerate Clinical Effectiveness – that will open early next year. This is a unit that will provide therapy for inmates with mental illness who may be violence-prone – so literally, proactively addressing the potential of violence before it happens, making everyone here safer – protecting the people who do the work and protecting the inmates as well.

At the Robert N. Davoren Complex, I saw what had been a troubled facility that is now very much improving. In addition to ending punitive segregation, we've changed the inmate-to-staff ratio from 33-to-1 to 15-to-1. There's been a reduced use of force at Robert N. Davoren – there were 97 uses of force in January this year, only 31 in November – that is an extraordinary reduction – less than a third as many uses of force literally within the same year – that kind of turnaround has occurred.

And we are moving rapidly on our plan to install additional security cameras – 70 new ones this year, 200 more in the next several months – part of a commitment we've made that every sensitive location in Rikers will have security camera coverage – literally every place that needs it on this island will have it.

I want you to understand that these changes – I know it may sometimes be hard to believe after hearing that this is not just years, but decades in the making – it may be hard to believe that things can turn around so quickly – but I have seen this many times. I've seen what leadership can do when applied properly. And I've seen what veteran leaders and officers can do when they see a better idea – to spread that idea and convince others to join in. And that's why you see this extraordinary movement already, because there's a growing consensus here about the changes that need to take place.

And I want to give you one example – a 17-year-old young man – I believe I spoke with him – I will not use a name – he had served 110 days in punitive segregation – 110 days. Imagine a 17-year-old experiencing that and trying to grapple with that. But he was scheduled for 166 more days – more than well over half a year, he was going to be in punitive segregation. Instead, based on these reforms, he was put in second-chance housing, where he gets more support, and he is

showing real improvement. He has not had any use-of-force incidents since being put in second-chance housing. I talked to this young man, and it's clear – he's had his problems, he's had his troubles, but being given this chance fully registered with him. If he wants to turn his life around, this is the chance to do it – and that means no violence. If he wants to have a better life when this is over, he has to move away from violence, he has to work with others – he is learning that lesson.

These are real signs of progress, but we have a lot more work to do. We have an important proposal for enhanced supervision housing, which is a way that we will address our most violent prisoners. The Board of Corrections needs to approve this proposal. I strongly urge the members of the Board of Corrections to vote in favor of this proposal so that we can continue the reforms that are desperately needed here.

Again, we will constantly report to you the changes we're making and the results of those changes, but this is a long-term plan. Until there is consistent, lasting change, we cannot rest.

A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to bring forward Commissioner Ponte, and again express my gratitude. He chose to take on such a tough mission, but such an important mission – and I want to thank him. This progress we're making so rapidly is because of his leadership, because of the people that he's gathered around him who are proven change-agents, because of the talent he's identified internally, and focused on all coming together in common cause – and it's making a huge difference. I want to welcome our corrections commissioner, Joe Ponte.

Commissioner Joseph Ponte, Department of Corrections: Well, good afternoon, everyone. I just want to make a few comments. You know, it's unusual – I've worked in a lot of jails and prisons around the country – while jails and prisons are always a composite of our communities – every one of these offenders came from New York City, most of them will be going back to New York City, and many of them, you know, for whatever reason, we want to put them here and then forget about them. Under this administration, the mayor has not only talked about how do we take care of our citizens, and how do we treat them better, but also backed us with funding and support to get the job done.

As we championed change in this organization, we've gone through and identified leaders who have gone out and really blazed a path for others to follow. Our thoughts were – first, RNDC, which is where our adolescents were. And everybody's aware the Department of Justice had written a substantial report on them. We started our reforms in April of this year, months before that report was issued and we're well along the way to accomplishing a lot of good things in that facility. And one of our leaders here today, James Perrino – who really championed the reforms for us, showing a different direction, showing a better way of doing corrections in this age. It's really all the staff needed. While it's not a perfect role – now, I'm going to echo what the mayor said – the fact that this is not easy work. It wasn't easy. Chief Perrino now has spent many sleepless nights getting his job done – many hands-on one-on-ones with staff to convince them

that we probably can find a better way of doing business. It's a lot of effort to get that done and we've taken facility by facility and applied that same approach. The AMKC – our biggest facility – another problem facility. Their violence levels have dropped substantially also.

We've chosen – Jim Dzurenda and I have chosen GRVC, which is our third most problematic place, as our next project. Last week, they had eight use-of-force incidents in comparison to 25 and 30 a week before. So, we know it works. We know we have staff willing to participate. We know we have the resources. All we need now is the time to process these changes.

So, I thank the mayor and his administration for his support. And I think we're well along the way here in Rikers Island, New York City Department of Corrections, to get this change implemented. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you. All right – we're going to do on-topic questions first. On-topic questions first.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: The one visit I remember in the past was when I was in the Urban Fellows program in the Koch Administration – that'll take you back. I don't believe I visited when I was a councilmember or public advocate – and by the way, that was a – these challenges today are very, very intense – that was a particularly troubled time, given the size and other issues happening in our society – the size of this facility and the other issues happening in the society at that point. But I spoke to a number of inmates, some of them who were young men with mental health challenges, some of those who had been violent and ended up in punitive segregation and now were in the second chance opportunity. It's one little snapshot, obviously, but it's hard to miss the human dynamics of these young people being given a chance to experience something different and to turn to a different path, and how they respond to it. It's very difficult work – I'd like to emphasize. For the officers, for the medical staff, everyone involved, this is sensitive, difficult work. Think about any other therapeutic dynamic where you're trying to help someone over a problem – it takes a lot of painstaking effort, a lot of conversations, a lot of figuring out what will get through. But I could see immediately just in my interactions with these young people that there was hope. I could see with the way talked to the officers and the clinical staff that order had been created, that there was an actual dialogue going on – and that's pretty admirable and pretty impressive – and we want to do a lot more of that.

Question: Mayor, just to clarify –

[Cell phone starts ringing]

– is solitary confinement the same thing as punitive segregation –

[Second cell phone starts ringing]

Mayor: Okay, wait – we have two phones going off at once. Could everyone silence your cell phones, please? Thank you.

Question: [inaudible]? And what do you do now [inaudible]?

Commissioner Ponte: For the sake of the public, it is. I mean, for us here in New York, punitive segregation is when you get – do something wrong, get an infraction, and you go in front of a hearing officer, and get sentenced to time. So, what they do now – and what most juvenile systems across the country have done is really manage the behavior without using punishment – so, short-term duration to calm kids down, to try to get them headed in the right direction, and then reintroduce them back into their group – so, it's no longer punitive seg – and there's a lot of risk to this. So, these aren't – these are kids who have had serious problems in the past, and officers have to develop good relationships with them, and it's a lot of conversations over a long periods of time – and it's no longer punitive [inaudible].

Question: [inaudible]

Commissioner Ponte: So, like – like, with your own kids – I mean, so, you get somebody that does something wrong, we don't lock them up in a cell. I mean, none of us do that. So, what do you do with a kid that's just assaulted somebody? So we're probably going to lock them up, we're going to send an officer down to talk to them, find out what's going on, what's – you know, it could be a mental health issue, it could just be bad news, but we're going to walk through their behavior and give that kid a plan when he gets out. It may be one-on-one, meaning when he gets out, there's an officer [inaudible] to gradually introduce them. So it's whatever the intervention is for that particular behavior and that child.

Mayor: Dave, I don't – I can see – I can see the look on your face, so I'm going to try and add, as your fellow layman. I think this is – think about what a guidance counselor does, think about what a therapist does, think about the people we've all come across in our lives who try and help us deal with problems or challenges. You've got kids, in many cases, who come from very difficult circumstances, to say the least. Those with mental health issues get – in these models – get the kind of support anyone else with a mental health issue should get – sometimes it's medication, sometimes it's therapy – you know, individual therapy, group therapy – it's all of those tools that have been proven to work – and, again, there are so many tragic situations in this society where people went off their meds or didn't get mental health services and we saw some very, very bad outcomes. Here, to the great credit of everyone around me, when they see a child acting out, they try to get them the support they need to see if they can turn them around.

Question: [inaudible]

Commissioner Ponte: We're still negotiating. The U.S. Attorney and some of the staff – not the U.S. Attorney, but some of the staff did come through here two weeks ago, three weeks ago. They liked what they saw – and I'm not speaking for them, you can ask them directly. We're still actively negotiating that settlement.

Mayor: We'll go to this side, and then we'll come back – yes.

Question: Mr. Mayor and commissioner, some advocates have expressed concern about the criteria being used for this enhanced housing unit – the new [inaudible] unit. Can you clarify what criteria would be used to put inmates in this unit? And where did the idea come from? Is it being used anywhere else in the country?

Commissioner Ponte: So, as Jim can verify, coming from Connecticut, administrative segregation is a tool most correctional systems have – and that’s a fairly long-term lock-down unit. Here in New York, we’ve created something that’s going to provide safety – meaning staff and inmates are going to be safe. So, they’re grouped in smaller numbers, they have more staff supervision, and most of the activities occur in the cellblocks. So, it’s a modification of most programs – it’s much less severe and it’s intended to make staff and inmates safe. Our rates of violence in these jails – in many of our jails – is really problematic. So, we need to find who’s driving the violence – and we’ve identified that group – and we need to manage them differently than we currently do. So it’s – in most systems, you would have something similar to this. This is – this is better than anything I’ve ever seen, in the sense of seven hours out-of-cell time [inaudible].

Question: So – so New York would be the only one having – having it the way you’re proposing it?

Commissioner Ponte: Yeah. In place of what would normally be called administrative seg, which is simply a classification placement – if you’re dangerous, you know, that’s kind of where you’d be placed – I think the city policy would be probably better than any place I’ve seen – in the sense of activity, out-of-cell time, and all those other things.

Question: [inaudible]

Commissioner Ponte: Yeah. So, we’ve – throughout the policy, we’ve had a lot of meetings with ACLU, advocates, and – so, we’ve been, this past week, kind of putting things into policy that answered some of their concerns. You know, it won’t be in the rule, but it will be in the policy to give us flexibility as we manage it.

Mayor: Who else? Yes.

Question: Commissioner and Mr. Mayor. Commissioner, you spoke a little bit about the most – you know, the process of sitting down with staff here, explaining to them what [inaudible] could be, what it takes to kind of convince them. And I’m wondering if you can tell us if there would – you know, [inaudible] how this is going over with staff on the ground and also, you know, with the unions [inaudible]?

Mayor: Before I – before I bring up the commissioner, I just want to say, any systemic change is difficult and takes time. Culture change takes time. You know, you look at a lot of different agencies in this city government – we’re trying to do things differently. If you look at what we’re doing with 200 of our schools, where we’re no longer going to have DOE work rules or UFT work rules; if you look at the retraining our police force – these are all efforts to move us to a more modern and effective approach, but they don’t happen overnight. Leadership leads the way.

There is a constant discussion that has to happen internally, and people who are veteran leaders are the people who say, “You know what? This thing is working and we all should go with this – this is going to be better, this is going to make us safer, this is going to make us able to do our jobs better” – and it spreads and it spreads. I’ve made the parallel that a lot of what Commissioner Ponte has done in his career is similar to what Commissioner Bratton has done in his – they’ve both been consistent change-agents. And they’ve done it – in both cases – by that same model – have a reform vision, move key leaders with it, who then spread the word, and repeat, repeat, repeat – and over time, it really takes – it’s – you know, it fully develops, it really becomes a part of the day-to-day life of the place – and that’s how change happens. It does take time.

Commissioner Ponte: I would only add that, you know, until I served time in many department of corrections [inaudible]. But – but, you know, the juvenile system was remarkable – and coming here to New York, I could’ve told Chief Perrino – you know, here’s a program, go do this. And we didn’t do that – and I think the chief [inaudible], when I outlaid – gave him an outline of what we were going to do here in New York City, I think he felt that was probably – should’ve been in one of the mental health [inaudible]. I mean, that’s how – that’s how – kind of, this is where we were and this is where I’m asking people to go. And so we said, “Look, let’s do some road trips – let’s go to Mass;” went to Washington State; went up to Maine – so, we looked at a lot different places with groups of staff – union members, command staff, line staff. They saw it work, so we didn’t have to force it on them. They were willing to say, “Hey, that really works.” So it was a system – again, Jim championed that for us here – it took a lot of time, a lot of people, a lot of road trips – just went back up a few weeks ago – to really redefine what we’re doing. And so, it really is convincing people through seeing rather than telling them, “Yeah, this is a good model, use this” – and it’s worked really well for us.

Mayor: And just one amplification – imagine if you’re – if you’ve been in a situation where people are suffering from violence and you go to another state, and you have your fellow corrections officers saying to you, “We tried this thing. We didn’t if it worked, but it did – and it made us safer, and it worked, and here I’m going to show you” – and someone you can relate to directly showing you what actually worked – nothing can be more compelling than that. Yes –

Question: Mr. Mayor, now that you have ended punitive segregation for teenagers, another issue that’s come up a lot is adults who are put into punitive segregation who are mentally ill, and the negative effect that has. Are you moving towards reforming that aspect of this? Are you considering changes to punitive segregation for adults who might be – who are mentally ill, who have no benefit [inaudible]?

Mayor: I’ll let the commissioner speak to the specific use of punitive segregation. But on the question of the mentally ill – again, we are trying to address some of these challenges at the front end of the process. There’s a lot of people who should not even be here, because their fundamental problem is a mental health problem, not a law enforcement problem. As we’ve said, in terms of some of the reforms we discussed, some people wouldn’t be here if they had a small amount of money to make bail, and they’re no threat in any way – they had a non-violent offense. There’s all sorts of examples of things we can do differently to address the front end of the problem and reduce some of the population here, which in turn will allow these professionals

to do their job better if they're dealing with fewer and fewer people who shouldn't be here, and bringing those mental health challenges that are best handled in a different setting. But I'll let you speak to the second.

Commissioner Ponte: Well, the issue of today – that there are no severely mentally ill, by definition – DOH definition – in punitive seg. We've stopped doing that here probably two years ago, so it's a pretty progressive design. Those that do end up with some level of mental illness, that's a second definition that we're working with DOH to try to find that a little bit better, because there is another group that's not severely mentally ill, but has some level of mental illness, that may be adversely affected in punitive seg setting. In our reforms, we reduce the penalty from 90 days to 30 days. So if you get found guilty of any infraction, once we've made these changes, you'll – you only can be sentenced to 30 days. So that's knocking a good deal of time off. There's 1,000 inmates in the system today pending punitive seg time – 1,000. We are going to take all that historic time and wipe that off the books. So all those things – guys that have gotten out, coming back – they're not going to owe time anymore. And we're going to clean up the backlog of those that – that function of the system really didn't work, because those inmates that had committed infractions never really went to punitive seg.

Question: [inaudible] the 90 days is for all adults or – ?

Commissioner Ponte: All adults. All adults, yep.

Question: Hi. I wondered if you could [inaudible] plan itself, and I guess it's your only plan [inaudible]?

Mayor: I wish I could remember more specifically that far ago. Look, we – obviously, it's a fiscal plan that needs work – there's no question about it. We have a particular focus on areas that will create safety and security, like the cameras. But, you know, we have a capital plan coming up. I was talking to the commissioner and to the warden earlier about some of the things that would be priorities in that capital plan. There's going to be a very formal process around that, as always. But I'm quite aware that this is, you know, a set of facilities that could use some more support.

Question: [inaudible] when you measure the acts of violence [inaudible] – if a inmate throws a human waste cocktail at a corrections officer, does that count as an act of violence?

Commissioner Ponte: It is. It's an assault – it's measured differently, but it's an assault.

Question: [inaudible]

Commissioner Ponte: Well, there's no retribution for an assault. So, because somebody assaults you, to stop their aggression, our rules are you need to stop – [inaudible] or physical assault. So if the inmate came up and punched me and then put his hands up, I stop – and that's what our rules are today. So it wouldn't matter if there's a camera there or not – once the aggression stops, our policy says you stop – only the amount of force necessary to stop the aggression.

Mayor: But there's consequences for the assault.

Commissioner Ponte: Yes, absolutely. Right, there's criminal charges for the assault.

Question: [inaudible]

Commissioner Ponte: It's different in different places, as you might believe, so we better manage that today. So we've had a number of those kinds of assaults – arrests for those kinds of events has gone up more than 200 in this past year. So we're very aggressive at pursuing criminal charges in those cases.

Question: [inaudible]

Commissioner Ponte: So it's 30 per infraction, and if you've committed a serious infraction while you're in punitive seg, you come out for seven days prior to going back in. So, there's a break in the time. As for adolescents, we try not to segregate at all. We try to give them as much group time as possible. But if somebody misbehaves, they may be in a cell for a period of time until we can get them back on track.

Question: How long –

Commissioner Ponte: It's a [inaudible] on the behavior. So it's not time – you're not sentenced for that. We're constantly trying to get the – in this case, the adolescent back to normal. So [inaudible] somebody talking to this individual – it's not just locking them in the cell – we know that has no impact.

Question: Commissioner, about the enhanced supervision unit – could you tell us a little more about the programming during out-of-cell time?

Commissioner Ponte: Right, so they're – they have access to everything that the normal population does. But these are very violent inmates, so most of these guys have committed very violent acts. So what's worked in Virginia and other states is what's, kind of, a journal program. It's a self-reflection – it gets you to look at, kind of, “what got me here,” and how to avoid those things in the past. So those are the things that we think we'll put in place that'll really change the individual so that, when we put them back out, they'll be safer and we'll be safer.

Question: I just have two questions – and I apologize for being a little late on this – [inaudible]. I was struggling to understand – why appoint a chief of department who the city's Department of Investigation suggested against?

Commissioner Ponte: Okay, so the recommendation not to promote was based on something that happened four or five years ago – underreporting of incidents at a particular facility – that there was no nexus to that individual – in this case, Clemons – to the conduct. So, they said it probably should have – he may have been careless, but it didn't change anything – he didn't order people to underreport. So that's why I felt, with 35-plus years of experience, he was a good candidate for chief.

Question: [inaudible] the number of stabbing and slashing overall is up this year. Is that a concern? I mean, I know you were talking about progress being made and you looked at other statistics, but overall [inaudible]. Any reason for that, and any concern?

Commissioner Ponte: It's a major concern. You know, let it be clear – if we don't have safe jails, no programing works. We don't – it doesn't matter if it's mental health programming, journal programs – we need safety in our jails. So, part of that is contraband control, part of that is screening who's coming to visit, part of it is better searching in our facilities – so, all pieces of a bigger problem, but we need safe jails. We need to get that number down.

Question: Follow-up on the DOJ report. That report included 16, 17, and 18-year-olds – I know because of a [inaudible] on 18-year-olds are a little bit in limbo, but [inaudible]. What happens to 18 year olds now and what does that mean for negotiating with federal prosecutors?

Commissioner Ponte: So, they are included in the DOJ report. Part of what we've done – in Maine, we took adults, 18 to 25, and put them in the juvenile facility, in the same programming. We think that's going to be very successful and it started in April of this year. So, talking with the Board of Corrections, and we've designated a group of 18 to 21-year-olds – [inaudible] how do we program that group so it's not just 18 year olds? We think many of things that we do with adolescents will work with this other group, but it's a bigger group, much more difficult, more costly. So we're really – what BOC has asked us to do is, "Tell me what your programming needs will be," to get the programming level that we need with this 18- to 21-year-old group. So, we're in the process of doing that.

Mayor: Last call, on topic. Yes?

Question: How long has this journaling program been going on and what kind of results are you [inaudible]?

Commissioner Ponte: We haven't started yet because we haven't started the unit. Commissioner Clarke – Secretary Clarke, in Virginia – it's been an effect there for probably about three years. And the good thing is – and we talk administrative seg – in safe systems, these inmates have been in administrative seg five, six, seven, eight years – long-term isolation. He's only had one inmate fail who he's put through this program. It's a long program – it's not a 30-day program. It's a year to get through all the steps, but he's only had one inmate fail – and that's pretty compelling for us to take a good look at it.

Phil Walzak: Let's do a little bit of off-topic –

Mayor: A little bit – yes?

Question: The Cuomo administration today [inaudible] ban fracking upstate [inaudible] citing health [inaudible].

Mayor: I applaud Governor Cuomo. I think it's the right decision. And we – a lot of us have watched over recent years, with a great deal of concern, as more and more information came in. I think when the fracking industry started to expand into this part of the country, we were legitimately all concerned about other things too – about our dependence on foreign oil and other dynamics. But then, consistently, more and more reports, more and more evidence came in of the potential for vast environmental danger – particularly to our water supply. And I became convinced a few years ago that this is something we have to entirely rethink. And I think what the governor's done is the right move for New York State. We can't undermine our environmental future – and Lord knows, if there's one thing you cannot plan – play fast and loose with, it's our water supply.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: [inaudible] we think they must denounce violence. I think everyone has to denounce violence against police officers. Look, this is so fundamental – and I said it on a nationally televised program yesterday. The – you cannot talk about social change and then commit an act of violence against a police officer. It makes no sense, it denigrates the cause, it undermines the legitimacy, it's illegal, it's wrong, it's immoral – you could go down the whole list. I would say this to any protester anywhere – respect the police, listen to their instructions, work with them. If someone in your midst discusses the potential of attacking the police, you have to turn that person in. You have to help the police stop that. You have to work with the police. If you see someone about to commit an act of violence – by the way, not just against the police, against anyone, or against property – you have to stop it. So, all protesters really have to take responsibility for the larger group they're a part of. Now, look at a few days back – 25,000 people marched peacefully through this city. There were no serious incidents and that was an extraordinary example – 25,000 people all in one place, all acting peacefully. That is an example of how good this city is. A few very bad apples decided to attack our cops – it's unacceptable. So I will make very clear when I meet with this group that, if they want to promote their message, they need to send a message loud and clear to all protesters – respect the police and no violence of any kind. But I also will certainly listen to the about their views, but I think what's the most important thing I can do is reiterate to them the reforms that we are already making and make clear that I think they're going to have a huge, positive impact on the relationship between police and community.

Question: Mr. Mayor, some recent polling has shown there's a bit of a racial divide in people's opinion of you, in the city. And I know you've often [inaudible] but I'm wondering what you think – you know, closing in on the end of the first year – do you think that you've been able to unite the city? What do you think about how people have received you?

Mayor: I think there's majority support for what we're doing and it's a vision I put forward last year that we are implementing very consistently. And, I think – I've said this yesterday as well – this has been a very painful time for our city, for our nation. It's not surprising that people in this moment would be more pessimistic. But in general, I think there's clear support for the agenda, for taking on inequality, for creating affordable housing, for pre-k, for bringing police and community back together, for reforming and improving the Department of Corrections. I think this agenda has buy-in, and we've only just begun it. And I think part of what happens is people

need to continually be given proof of forward motion. I don't blame them for that fact and we're going to continue to do that. So I'm comfortable with where we stand. Go ahead – Gloria and then Rich.

Question: I'm just wondering if I could get your thoughts on the president's announcement today on Cuba. You've traveled there in the past [inaudible] –

Mayor: Mhmm.

Question: I just wanted to get your –

Mayor: Although I haven't seen all the details, if the president is seeking to normalize relations, I think he's doing the right thing. I think this is decades overdue. Here's a country we've had differences with, but look at the countries we have diplomatic relations with all over the world that we also have differences with, and still maintain some actual relationship. By the way – part of how you bridge those differences is to have diplomatic relations. I – I would argue that some of the challenges we've had as a nation with Cuba pale in comparison to the experience so many Americans had in Vietnam, and yet we normalized relations with Vietnam many years ago. So, I think the president is doing the right thing – I think this is part of moving us forward, and I actually think it will help the democratization process in Cuba. The more the American example is there, I think the more chance that that country will democratize.

Question: My follow up on that would be, how did you like Cuba when you were there?

Mayor: I thought it was beautiful. And I think this might allow – if the normalization process continues – more Americans to experience their beaches. It's good for everyone. Thanks, everyone.

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