



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 25, 2018

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

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON MSNBC WITH RACHEL MADDOW

Rachel Maddow: Joining us now is New York City's Mayor, Bill de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, thank you very much for being here, it's nice that you're here.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: You're very welcome.

Maddow: You said last week when the existence of this facility and its use of housing – not housing but serving these kids, first came to light you said that it was a surprise to New York officials, that the federal government did this without ever notifying anyone in New York.

Mayor: Yes, we heard about it the same way the media heard about it. And I was over there Wednesday, at that very center. And I got to tell you, it was just shocking. I went around a corner and there are 30 or 40 young kids in a classroom. Turns out the vast majority of them were from Guatemala, they were around, somewhere between five and ten years old, most of them. And here's what we know – that some of them, like Jessica which was so painful to watch. Jessica has been able to at least talk to someone. Some of these kids have no idea where their parents are, they haven't talked to anyone from their family and I asked the case workers there, how do you know how to find the family members? And they said some of these kids come in so young, one nine months old that went into that center – some literally can't say their parents' name and the only way they can find the parents in some cases is that they have a note in their pocket with their parents' name and phone number. But they said some kids don't have that note, some kids lost that note, some kids are too young – don't even know their parents' name. And there is no idea of when they are going to be reunited. And this is just unbelievably painful for these kids. We've sent mental health professionals in to try and help here. These kids are going through a trauma that could have really lasting consequences because if it's anyone of us, as a child taken from our parent with no end in sight, imagine what that does to the mental health of a child.

Maddow: As a news agency when we spoke to the woman who provided this footage, who really smuggled this footage out – she told us that she was concerned about whether or not there was adequate staffing at this facility, given the fact that the number of kids has increased so rapidly and that it's, with this new policy, particularly younger kids, much younger kids undertake a much different type of care. That's a concern on its face. It would also seem to me that while you have to do as well as you can in terms of staffing these facilities and giving these kids everything you can, there's no level of staffing that can make up for the fact that they have

been taken away from a loving parent who didn't want [inaudible]. And so how does this – I mean you've said very clearly, the federal government has not taken responsibility for getting these kids back to their parents.

Mayor: They have no plan. There's not even a semblance of a plan.

Maddow: Well they are here.

Mayor: Yes.

Maddow: Who all – if the federal government isn't going to do it, who is?

Mayor: We are trying to actually. So the City of New York is providing legal help to the kids and we are trying to connect them with the parents when we can identify them, and working with legal aid organizations at the border. If we can get the parent a lawyer and get the kid a lawyer, we have the possibility of getting the reunification to happen. We are also going in with mental health and physical help professionals because the folks at the Cayuga Center, they really are trying their best, I believe it. But they didn't expect this influx – they don't have enough health professionals on site so our public hospitals are helping now. And the number one thing we are finding again is mental health challenges. Look at Jessica in that video, look how distraught she is. Look how shocked she still is from the experience.

Maddow: Yes, she's a little kid.

Mayor: She's a little kid and she doesn't know what's going to happen. And so we are trying both to keep these kids together and give them support here and now but also give them the legal help to get reunified because there isn't a federal plan, we're all going to have to do it ourselves as Americans who care about these kids.

Maddow: There was a report a few days ago that a number of kids have ended up in the hospital including at least one kid with suicidal ideation if not a suicide attempt. Are we facing serious and acute mental and physical stuff that's manifesting as these kids needing to be hospitalized or taken away even out of relatively supportive services like we see here?

Mayor: Absolutely. So there was not a plan here to help these kids deal with their physical needs or their mental health needs. They were kept in originally detention facilities so we heard from the folks at the Cayuga Center that some came with lice, some came with bed bugs, some had chicken pox. They were in a situation where diseases spread. That's the physical, that's actually the easier part of the equation but no one accounted for the mental health side. And the trauma is lasting. We know of all the horrible moments in history when parents were taken from their children. And we know that that is a lifelong trauma. It's happening right here, in our name, with our taxpayer dollars, and we got to stop it right away and if the federal government won't answer it, I really do think it's up to all of us, city by city to find any solution we can to reunify these families.

Maddow: New York City's Mayor, Bill de Blasio. Mr. Mayor thank you.

Mayor: Thank you.

###