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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Good evening, welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, July 13th, 2020. I'm Errol Louis. After a surge in gun violence over the past several weeks, late last night, a one-year-old infant boy was shot and killed in a shooting near a playground in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Loved ones, elected officials, and community members all gathered today pleading for an end to the violence. Earlier in the afternoon, Mayor de Blasio also traveled to the neighborhood and met with family members. Joining me now to talk about what he heard and what he learned is Mayor de Blasio coming to us from inside City Hall in the Blue Room. Good evening, Mr. Mayor

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. Very, very tough day.

Louis: No doubt. What did you learn by going to Bedford-Stuyvesant? And do you have any updates such as perhaps an arrest in this case?

Mayor: Look, I fully expect an arrest because I've watched over the last few years and NYPD has done a really, really good job of finding people in situations like this, but this is just so painful. I talked to Davell's mom and grandma and it's just awful. And you know, just seeing the pure pain these women are going through and the shock and I mean their home is right across the street from the playground, so they look outside their door, you know, where their child was killed. So it's very, very painful, and, you know, there's the folks I talked to Councilman Robert Cornegy and a lot of folks from the Cure Violence Movement, SOS and community members, there's a real resolute feeling that fighting back against this violence and, you know, ready to do whatever it takes as a community to stop it and we saw that in Harlem, on Saturday night as well, you know, community really coming out to fight back against the violence. I think we're going to need a lot of that this summer.

Louis: You got a question at your briefing earlier today that reflected something I'd been wondering about as well, when Commissioner Shea disbanded the anti-crime units that were the primary tool that was being used to intercept and break up guns seizures, and make sure that the gun trade was under pressure, if not completely suppressed. Was that replaced with something else? Is there some new strategy that's out there?

Mayor: Well, the concept that Commissioner Shea outlined at the time was to take the same officers and use them in different ways to use technology a lot more, to use precision policing a lot more, and you know, less about the kinds of engagement with the community that actually was creating a lot of tension and problems. So really to try and take that talent, because these are very talented officers and apply it in a different way. And I've watched Commissioner Shea for years, he's very methodical and strategic. So his view was he could get the same or better results

without having some of the negatives in terms of the community relationship and that's what he's in the middle of engineering right now.

Louis: Do you have any sense or has he indicated that there'll be some point at which they'll make a decision about whether or not the new strategy is working or not working? We don't know, of course in this particular case, if it was an absence of enforcement that led to a gun causing this tragedy or falling into the hands of someone who murdered this child, but those questions are obviously on the minds of the public, I would think?

Mayor: Yeah, but I think that's a bit of a misunderstanding. I don't blame anyone to ask the question, don't get me wrong, but we're talking about several hundred officers in the force of 36,000. I think we should not forget the entire NYPD is devoted to getting guns off the street. You know, every cop on the beat and the neighborhood coordinating officers and the executives, everyone works on this. So I think it is fair to say that that specialized unit, they certainly, you know, got a lot of gun [inaudible] and that's a very good thing, but there's a lot of other units and a lot of other officers who do that too. So I don't think it's like either/or. I think the point that Commissioner made was we're only going to achieve lasting security and peace with a deeper relationship between police and community. If this was something that was hindering that, take the same talents of the officers, the same energy and apply it in a different manner. Also, you know, that both Dermot Shea and, you know, a lot of the other leadership, the NYPD have now come up in the generation that's using technology a lot more starting with easy things like ShotSpotter, but much more systematic approach to policing. And I think that's going to yield a lot in the coming years.

Louis: Okay. We will obviously be looking for more updates on that particular tragedy. Let me switch subjects and ask you about Occupy City Hall. Right outside the building where you're sitting is what looks like a shantytown, no sanitation, there are reports of violence, a reporter was attacked just over the weekend. What's your sense of why they're there and to the extent that they're trying to convey a message to you, what does that message?

Mayor: Yeah, I wouldn't overstate the situation there. That that group has gotten smaller and smaller. The reporter in question has not pressed charges and if he does, of course, there'll be a full investigation. I don't want to overstate – of course, there's a police presence there and it is cleaned up every day. But look, as I said this morning, we're going to respect the right of free speech, but we also need safety and we need to keep things clean and that balance is being struck. And, but it's definitely a lot smaller than it was.

Louis: Yeah. I mean, I raised it just because it's kind of off limits at this point. You know, I mean, it's an area I used to travel to and through pretty regularly and now it's, you know, it's completely something else. Does it stay there as long as they choose to, or at what point do you sort of assert control over that public space?

Mayor: Yeah, well NYPD is looking at that regularly and you know, I think it's quite clear again, naturally it has started to change. I think you'll see more of that. And you know, again, I think we'll strike a balance. This is the kind of thing where it's important to, you know, be looking at the big picture and that's what we're trying to do here. So I'm comfortable – it has gotten steadily smaller, plenty of ways that people can move around it, and I think we'll be okay in the long run.

Louis: Let me ask you about something that comes up as we get near the end of the middle to the end of any month, which is the question of paying the rent. With or without a moratorium on evictions, the bills are piling up for people who have been out of work for quite a while now and increasingly are wondering how they're going to get the money to pay these accumulating debts that they owe to these landlords. What can you say to those folks about what they should be doing or where there might be some relief?

Mayor: So, it's a couple of things, Errol. First of all, I want to be clear to any New Yorker who's in a really tough situation now that you know, there's always food available for free. We will make sure every New Yorker who needs food gets as much as they need for free. There's always health care available for free through our Health + Hospitals and Clinics. The rent, you're right, is the big challenge because we don't have a mechanism for covering rent. The federal government obviously with the next stimulus bill, if, when, how it happens, that's an opportunity to put a huge amount of rental assistance for New York City and the rest of the country. That would be the best solution. But the other missing link is in Albany. I think we need to see action, whether executive order or legislation to give everyone who just simply can't pay the rent, give them up to a year of a grace period and the ability to pay on a payment plan thereafter.

If people don't have an income, they can't pay the rent, and they should not be evicted, and they should not become homeless, and actually Albany has the power to give them a pathway going forward and to tell landlords that, you know, the money will eventually be there, but that folks who don't have money, don't have a choice. We're also going to provide legal services for free for anyone who's facing an unfair or illegal eviction, because we can't see these folks become homeless. So that's what I can tell people. You can call 3-1-1 and get free legal help if you need it, and obviously food, you know, health care, you can get those through 3-1-1 as well. But we really need Albany to act, to give people the ability to do a payment plan long-term, and we need money in the stimulus for rental assistance.

Louis: Okay. Stand by, Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a break here. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio. We're going to talk about the school reopening plans in just a minute. Stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again, joined by Mayor de Blasio from the blue room inside City Hall. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about the plans for reopening the schools. As you know, you sent both of your kids to public school - for a parent to make an informed decision about what they're going to do in September, they've got to have a lot of information about transportation, about what happens when the kids are there. What happens after school? Can they get home safely? There are questions about the staff and so forth. Is your administration working on that level of detail about what people can expect before they make a final decision about whether to send their kids back?

Mayor: Absolutely. Errol, you hit the nail on the head. I was a public school parent, both my kids went the whole way through pre-K to 12th grade, and I remember all the juggling that Chirlane and I used to do, schedules and you know, everything kids needed and jobs and everything. I understand people are going through that. Although bluntly, tragically, a lot of people don't have a job, but are still deeply concerned about making sure that their kids get a

good education and that they're safe. So yes, the answer is with every week we're going to fill in more and more of the blanks. Give people a clearer and clearer sense of everything that we can do, how we're going to do the schedules for each school, the cleaning regimens, the ways we're going to make sure that if someone isn't healthy, they don't come to school. The ways that we're going to make sure that there are after-school options where we can provide them, childcare options where we can provide them all of that we're going to lay out in stages, and then Errol, it's important to know there'll be a moment coming up when parents can decide if they want their child to go back to school, or if they prefer their child to do the distance learning, the remote learning.

Now, at any point, a parent who decides they would prefer remote learning, even if they start with their child in school, at any point, they can say, "hey, you know what? I'd rather go to remote learning," and that can happen instantly. The other way will be done on a quarterly basis. So upfront before school begins, parents will get to say, yeah, I want my child to actually go to the school building, and as I said last week, that's probably going to be two or three days in the classroom each week. But what we're going to allow is if a parent, you know, is in the remote learning and wants their child to go into the classroom at some point in the school year, they can do that. That'll be on a quarterly basis because it'll take a little more arrangement and logistics, but the point is lay out the details to parents, let parents decide, and then as things move along, parents will have additional opportunities to switch, if they choose to.

Louis: Is there a scenario you're considering where there'd be a 100 percent distance learning? I mean, that's what the Los Angeles school district, and I believe San Diego also announced today that they're just going to keep it all distance and what you lose in the preferred method of teaching you back in certainty so that everybody can plan around one scenario.

Mayor: Yeah, there's truth in your statement, but I don't fully agree with it. You lose educational quality, you lose socialization, you lose, you know the ability of parents who do have to go back to work and a lot of parents do have to, and a lot of parents want to, to know that their kids will be in school at least part of the week. The fact is we will have only a fallback plan. I want to be really clear. Will we have the ability if we had to, if we had no other choice, could we go to all remote? Yes, we could. We know it because we've just done it for four months, but it is not our preference. Where the preference, the priority will be to get the maximum number of kids back to school for the maximum days per child in the classroom, but always have that remote option for any child and any parent who prefers it and always have the ability, God forbid we have a resurgence, we could go to a 100 percent in relatively short order if we needed to.

Louis: There's one complication in all of this of course, is that there are sort of dual lines of authority. If I understand what the Governor said today properly you and all of all 700 school districts are going to have to submit plans to the state by the end of this month, which they will have to approve before moving forward. Is that right?

Mayor: Yeah, but I wouldn't call it dual lines of authority. Look, we have historically local government, state government, federal government, and there's always oversight from the other levels of government. That's normal, the emergency heightens that obviously, but you know, the Governor put out some broad plans, which are good plans, which we're going to be able to work within. We'll submit our vision for restarting schools. It is already being seen as a national model because of the sheer size and importance of the New York City public schools. I expect that the

state will either agree or say “hey, can we work on some revisions,” and then we'll move forward. I think the central question is what happens in the weeks leading up to school with the healthcare situation, and if we can continue anywhere near we are now we'll be in good shape because obviously, I mean, we're, we're so proud. I'm so proud that New Yorkers have achieved the goal of the last 24 hours without a single death. But also you've seen for weeks now, the healthcare indicators have been very stable and low. So Errol. I think that's actually the single biggest question, even more important than what the federal or state government does is can we hold the healthcare situation or even make it better because that's the gateway to opening up school again?

Louis: Well, I mean, yeah, on that same point though, when the Governor says, if certain numbers are exceeded, if it looks like there's a resurgence of some kind or an outbreak, the entire region shuts down, New York City, in other words, so that if a spike, you know, in the North Bronx, the entire school system would have to be shut down. Right? I mean, that, that seems a very fraught situation going forward.

Mayor: I would just want to be clear from what I've seen so far. I don't read it that way. I read it as much more about the larger citywide indicators. I mean, if there's specific hot spots or something we have to deal with, of course we can do that, but we haven't actually seen that in recent months. We've seen very in real consistency across the five boroughs. No, what I understand from the state is they're looking for, if there's a major uptick in, for example, the infection rate, the percentage of tests that are coming back positive. Remember, Errol the last few weeks we've been at 1 percent or 2 percent positive with now 40,000 tests per day in New York City. I mean, that's pretty astounding. Governor's vision is if it gets up much higher than that would affect whether school was open or not. But again, knock on wood. We have not been anywhere near that level in a while.

Louis: When I think – I haven't been in as many school buildings as you have by a long shot. I haven't been in as many as I would like to by a long shot, but there are a lot of buildings where I just can't imagine social distancing happening. You know, when people are already sort of, you know, in a pre COVID era, squeezing 28, 29 kids into a classroom, there's almost no scenario where the proper distancing would even be possible. Do you have some sense from the Chancellor or from anybody else about what the maximum number of kids you'd be able to comfortably accommodate under these scenarios?

Mayor: Yeah, I think, and I'll use PS 372 where my kids went in Brooklyn, an old Catholic school building, very much what you're describing, you know, not exactly spacious and modern. You're talking in a classroom like that 10, 12 kids that you can have in a classroom. So I think you're, that's the kind of level we're talking about and other, you know, you'll have bigger spaces, gyms, auditoriums, other types of rooms, where you can have more kids and the more modern the school, the more likelihood that you have more space to work with. But what we know is Errol, first of all, you know, that survey of 400,000 parents, I mean, you and I have read our share of public opinion research – 400,000 respondents and 75 percent said they wanted their kid back in school, but we also know that means 25 percent right now do not, and we have to assume there'll be a substantial number of kids who will not be in the pool of kids going to school. When you think about that, that affects the equation. Then the fact that we're going to do a split schedule. So now you think about a school and, you know, if it was a hundred percent capacity before and you'd take away 25 percent of kids off the top, and then you're going to do split

schedules. So, you know, only half of the remaining kids would be in school at any given point in time, you start to see how you actually can fit it into the space you have.

Louis: Okay. We will be watching to see how that works out. It sounds like an intense level of, of complexity, as you know, again, in a pre COVID first day of school in September, there's a fair amount of chaos, you know, cause if even, you know, 2 percent of a million kids are not where they're supposed to be. You're talking about 20,000 kids who need a placement. So you've certainly got your work cut out for you.

Mayor: Yeah, and we're going to be doing a lot of communicating with parents over the next two months. We got about two months till school begins. We're going to be in constant contact with parents more than ever before for the very reason you state.

Louis: Okay. Thanks very much, Mr. Mayor, we'll check in again with you next week.

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