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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: We're going to talk about several things today, but we should start by noting the most serious news of the day – that now, unfortunately, we now know that over a quarter million Americans have lost their lives during the COVID crisis, and it's important to pause and reflect on that. A quarter-million of our fellow Americans gone just in the course of months, and this crisis has been so staggering for all of us, and now a second wave bearing down on us in the city and the need to fight back, the need to have tough restrictions so clear now. We'll talk about that, and we're also going to talk about the things we have to keep doing to learn from this crisis and to recover, and to recover and have a better and fairer society, when we do. There's so much to talk about in terms of the disparities that have come up in this crisis and the things we have to do differently, so we're going to talk about that in a moment as well.

But let me talk first about our schools. I want to say at the outset, all the families, to all the parents, to all the kids, that it's a tough day. It was a tough decision yesterday. It was not something anyone could possibly be happy about, and I do want to say how much I feel and understand the frustration of parents that they want – so many of them want their kids to be in school, and that's what I fought for in opening our schools back in September against all odds. We will bring our schools back. This is the most important point. We will bring our schools back, but we're going to have to reset the equation. What's happened just in the matter of days, and you see it in the indicators we go over each day, is something is changing, it's changing rapidly in the city. We certainly see what's happening around the country. We've got to reset the equation. We have been safe – New York City has been extraordinary. The way we came back from being the epicenter of the crisis to being one of the safest places in the country, we got to keep it that way. We got to fight back the second wave. Our schools have been safe, extraordinarily safe. We got to keep it that way. We can't just stand pat with a strategy that worked before when conditions are changing, we need to reset the equation. We need to come up with even more stringent rules to make schools work and testing is going to be absolutely crucial.

A lot of people's frustration emanated from the fact that they thought there was another kind of disparity. They looked at schools closing, and a lot of people say, what about restaurants? Well, the Governor made clear yesterday that it's just a matter of time before indoor dining will close and other types of things, gyms, other things – anyone who heard those words, orange zone yesterday, the orange zone rules are clear and New York City will, before long, be in that orange zone status. I talked to the Governor at length about this yesterday, and that means those restrictions are coming. So, for everyone who honestly might feel somehow a little better, if they knew that indoor dining was going to be closed or gyms were going to be closed. I'm sorry to tell

you that for the sake of those business owners and everyone who loves those gyms and loves indoor dining, it's just a matter of time. It's very likely to be in the next week or two, and I think you're going to see that across the board, that there's going to have to be a lot of tough choices to move us forward.

But with schools, I am absolutely convinced we can work with all the stakeholders, work with the state, get to new tough standards and reopen, and we're going to let you know, in the next few days, what that looks like, what that schedule is, what it's going to require of all of us, because it will require all of us to participate, and parents, I'm going to tell you right now, we're going to need you to play an active role in helping us reopen schools, and that starts with getting those test consent forms in. A lot of parents have answered that call. I'm going to emphasize again, if you're someone who says, I really want schools open, the next thing you have to do is file that test consent form immediately. You can do that online. Get that in, so we know your child's ready to be tested because testing is going to be a crucial part of where we go from here to get schools open again.

In the meantime, we will provide support to families in a variety of ways. Obviously Learning Bridges, our childcare program will be open. That's on a priority basis, starting with essential workers and families in greatest need, but that will be available to help a lot of families. Devices for our kids. We've been continuing to provide free devices for all the kids who need the technology they need to learn. Any child who does not have a device or it's not working, or the service isn't working, you just have to call 3-1-1 and we will get you a device or a new service as quickly as possible. In many cases that just takes a day or two.

For families that need food, and as this crisis unfortunately deepens again, and the federal support hasn't come, the stimulus hasn't come, a lot of families need those grab and go meals from our schools, they will be provided continually at our schools, even as schools are closed for a period of time, the food service folks – I want to thank the food service workers who are doing amazing work – they will continue to provide food for families who need them, and that will be free, of course, so that will continue, and as the Chancellor always says, all children are learning today and we'll continue to learn in this all remote phase, and we will continue to do this work to get our schools back as quickly as possible.

So that's the picture with our schools. Let's go back to the question of how we're going to respond to this crisis more broadly and how we're going to come back from it, because remember we do have – every day we've got better and better news on vaccines. We have a new administration in Washington. That's going to totally overhaul the approach to COVID and make it, I think, much better and clearer. We're ready to distribute the vaccine right now in the city, right? As we speak, we're ready. So, we have to turn our focus constantly also to that recovery that come back, but how to make it a fair comeback. We can't repeat the status quo that was in New York City. That's not going to help us. We got to do something different, and COVID uncovered extraordinary disparities, but they weren't just healthcare disparities. Let's be very, very clear about it. The racial and economic disparities go a lot farther than just health care. They go to the fundamental reality of how wealth is distributed in the city in this nation, and if you talk about structural racism, just follow the money. It's quite clear, no matter how hard people of color have worked, they do not get their fair share of the wealth they create, and that's something

we have to do more to change in this city, in this country, and that's what our city task force – we've had great leaders in all of our city agencies that have focused on this issue. Leaders of color in every city agency who will have used their experience, their creativity to come up with new solutions, our Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, and First Lady Chirlane McCray have led the way with the task force coming up with a variety of new approaches, and one of the ideas that is most powerful is what we term as equitable ownership, meaning making sure that there actually is a kind of redistribution of wealth that will change people's lives more profoundly, and that means that people of color get to own in this society, that they get a much greater share of the pie and what is rightfully theirs. That hasn't been the case, and that's why initiatives like special approaches to supporting minority and women owned businesses were created years ago, but they haven't done enough and we need to go a lot farther, and the way to make the MWBE concepts come alive is to up the ante all the time. We've been doing that for years, but we need to do it again, and when it comes to the ownership stake that we need women and minority owned firms to have one of the areas to look at is in affordable housing, because there's going to be a lot of investment going forward in affordable housing. One thing the city will never stop doing is investing in affordable housing. There's a lot of work to be done. There's a lot of construction to be done, and firms led by people of color need many more opportunities to have a piece of that pie. So, our Department of Housing Preservation and Development has been leading the way with a new approach, and I want to thank everyone there for their creativity, their energy, and here to talk about what equitable ownership will look like in affordable housing is our Commissioner for HPD Louise Carroll.

Commissioner Louise Carroll, Department of Housing Preservation and Development:

Thank you, Mayor de Blasio, and thank you also to Deputy Mayor Thompson and the First Lady for your leadership on the Task Force for Racial Inclusion and Equity. Lots of businesses have grown in the city from startups to wealthy companies. Many of them grew by doing a lot of work with New York City government yet rarely have we seen minority and women owned firms, MWBEs get this kind of opportunity for success. This is wrong, and this administration is working very hard to change that. Minorities and women-owned businesses, they form 85 percent of the population. If they don't prosper, the city doesn't prosper. Most MWBE firms are part of Black and Brown communities that have been hardest hit by COVID. These firms hire and train workers in their neighborhoods. Many workers have lost jobs due to this pandemic and these workers need help right now. So, dollars spent with MWBEs, when will enable people to get back on their feet. This is part of how New York City will recover from this pandemic. More than that, money spent with MWBEs will help repair the damage caused by decades of exclusion of people of color from business opportunities and jobs, and even more, more than that, when MWBEs and community not-for-profits own property, it is harder to dislocate them from their community or gentrify them out of their community. That is why starting now, HPD, when we award sites for affordable housing development, we will only consider teams that have an MWBE or not-for-profit partner, and that partner, must own at least 25 percent of the project. In the past and MWBEs and not-for-profits have been included in development teams, but when it comes to the money, it just wasn't there. We are putting an end to that. From now on and MWBE or a not-for-profit must both have a meaningful ownership stake in a project as well as a financial stake in a project.

New York City is a great place. It has helped so many people from every corner of the country and indeed every corner of the world, people like me, get a foothold in their business or launch their careers. The people in this city have gone on to help others. They've gone on to invent things and build things and are admired everywhere, but it all starts with opportunity. When we open the doors of opportunity to all people, we unleash a flood of talent, and what that does is benefit all of us. We know that many people in the city see real estate development as something that happens to them as opposed to something that's happening for them. We're determined to change that in our housing policies. Our new policy is effective immediately. It will be in a request for proposals that HPD is issuing tomorrow for the development of vacant land in the Bedford-Stuyvesant part of Brooklyn. But this is just the beginning, there's more to come, and I thank you again, Mr. Mayor, for your leadership on this important issue.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Commissioner, and Commissioner, you said a lot of important things there, but I want to harken back to the point you made about the city's greatness and who contributes to our greatness and who gets recognized and who doesn't get recognized. If I remember correctly, your family's originally from St. Lucia?

Commissioner Carroll: Yes, sir.

Mayor: And you know, you came to this city and brought your skills and talents, and now you're creating affordable housing for all New Yorkers. This is the New York story – that everyone has had opportunity, but not everyone has had equal opportunity, and that's what we need to fix, and actually making sure that the money is distributed fairly and putting tough rules in place to do it. It makes a world of difference. So you heard from the Commissioner – her story is an example of exactly what we want to foster and support, and you heard about the new approach, but now I want you to hear from someone who can tell you what it means for the businesses that will have the opportunity to grow and to reach out to their communities and bring more and more people into that opportunity, and it really is important to understand on a human level, what it means every time a minority and women owned business gets a contract. What literally happens to create empowerment in that community. So here to speak about it, and her story is one of great success. She is the CEO and founder of RF Wilkins Consultants, Francilia Wilkins Rahim, we welcome you.

Francilia Wilkins Rahim, R.F. Wilkins Consultants: Thank you. Thank you, Mayor. Thank you for having me. I also want to thank the First Lady and Deputy Mayor Thompson for all of the amazing leadership on the Task Force of Racial Equity and Inclusion. And, last but not least, I want to thank you, Commissioner Carroll. Thank you. You know, it was only June when myself, the New York Real Estate Chamber and the Black Business Collaborative came to you on behalf of black business owners across New York City. We came to you and many other agency officials. We were concerned. We were concerned, because COVID was impacting 40 percent of Black business businesses across the United States. We were concerned, because when we looked at New York City, we saw that Black businesses were not having equitable access to New York City contracts. When the collaborative came to you, we wanted to see a shift. We wanted New York City contracts to reflect the Black population across the city. We wanted Black developers to have ownership across affordable housing development. We wanted oversight over agency-wide procurement. And, Commissioner, you heard us. So, thank you.

You know, the truth is, challenges for Black businesses did not start with COVID. For far too long, we have been able – not able to have an equitable access across contracts. Every day, I speak to developers and business owners who say, why should I even try to participate and bid when I will be overlooked? Why should I try to access a development team when I may just be leveraged as a M/WBE check? You know, when I look at these things, I understand the concerns. These developers would share that Black businesses hire Black subcontractors, Black developers hire Black subcontractors, who in turn hire Black workforce, who, in turn, come from Black communities – a lot of the communities where affordable housing is being developed. So, it only makes sense that affordable housing developers look and represent and feel and understand the communities that development is happening in.

You know, to conclude this, I just kind of go back to my story. In 2011, I founded R.F. Wilkins Consultants. At that time, I had no money. I had no relationships. I had very limited access. Today, we hire a diverse community of people. Mayor, you just talked about the New York story, and the New York story has been my story. Not only do we have hire a diverse community of people, but we have implemented some of the most difficult logistic project management and compliance projects across the State of New York. Every day is difficult, but I truly stand on the back of the Black business owners who came before me. Today is not only about contracts, it's about nourishing the Black ecosystem. It's about nourishing Black businesses and activating the next generation of leaders who will hopefully see more Black businesses, more Black business participation. There's still so much more to do, but we have business owners who are ready for a piece of the economic pie. We have a forward-thinking Mayor. We have agency commissioners, like you, Commissioner Carroll, who will ensure that Black businesses are not lost in the implementation of M/WBE programs. Every step towards equitable participation for Black businesses, every step towards acknowledging the disparity – and the disparity Every step towards supporting Black business growth is a step in the right direction. So, Mr. Mayor, thank you, thank you, thank you for your commitment. And we look forward to partnering with you in the future and continuing to support the growth of Black businesses.

Mayor: Thank you. Thank you so much, Francilia. And what a powerful presentation. I can see why you succeeded. And I really appreciate your energy and I appreciate your hopeful message, even in a tough time. But Francilia's story, another great New York story. It's a reminder that great story can't just be for some people and then the ladder gets kicked away and others don't get to participate. It has to be for everyone. It has to be for all the generations coming up. And when we actually act with that spirit of fairness and equity, amazing things can happen. And one of the things I felt as I was listening to you was, you were already seeing the future, that we, again, we are going through so much, but we've got to get one foot into the future. And if we do the smart approaches to share the wealth in a better way, a lot more people are going to prosper and it's going to bring this city back a lot stronger. So, thank you for helping us light the way, Francilia.

Okay. Everybody, let's conclude with our indicators and go over these now. First, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold 200 patients – today's report, 115 patients with a 34.45 percent confirmed positivity level. Again, we're watching this really carefully. This is the indicator that has been different than the others. Very

concerned, to say the least. Haven't seen as much growth there as expected, that's a good thing, but we are watching very, very carefully. So far, again, our hospitals are doing quite well handling the challenge. Number two though, is a different matter, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold 550 cases – this number just keeps growing and this worries me a lot, 1,255 cases. Now, we want to keep testing everyone. And again, I'm going to constantly remind people get out there and get tested. And that will account for some of the growth of those numbers. But, clearly, the trend goes beyond simply the fact that more and more people are getting tested, got keep a close eye there. And now, the percentage of people tested citywide positive for COVID-19, threshold five percent – today's report, 2.36 percent. Today's seven-day rolling average 3.01 percent.

Okay. A few words in Spanish, back on the topic of how we ensure fairness and opportunity for all the people of this city.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's 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 is HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll, Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, and Francilia Wilkins Rahim, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. Mayor, you spoke repeatedly this morning about new tough standards and more stringent rules that you'll need to get the schools back open, but other than getting a higher percentage of kids, educators, etcetera to get COVID tests – and you mentioned the need to get consent forms – what possible tough standards are you talking about? You're already disinfecting the buildings, you're already requiring masks and PPE, so what standards are you talking about?

Mayor: Andrew, we're working that through, but we want look at geographical issues, we want to look at test positivity levels, we want to look at a lot of things. I don't think it's entirely helpful – your question's totally fair, but I don't want to start, you know, just surmising and throwing things out randomly. We're looking anything and everything that can contribute to making it safer in an atmosphere where the positivity levels around us are growing. And this is the X-factor we've got to keep in mind. When we came up with the original plan in August, the City, as a whole, was doing very, very well. And yet, you remember, so many people said, don't open schools, it's too dangerous to open schools. We said, we'll put together a gold standard, the cleaning, the ventilation, the social distancing, the mask wearing, all these things – the testing – and we'll prove to you that schools can be safe. And we did. Now, we see a gathering storm and we're fighting back the second wave. We are pausing. We are resetting the equation. We need to come to a new agreement with the State, with the people of this city, with parents, with all the folks who work in schools on what's going to work for this new time. But, clearly, more testing is crucial, and clear standards that everyone can understand, and being really clear that we want to take the bar even higher. We said we had a gold standard and it was, now we've got to find

out how to even add to that by looking around the world, figure out what's worked, what would be additional elements, because we do see the impact, unfortunately, COVID is having a lot of communities. And for schools to be open, we have to be absolutely certain we can keep our kids and our adults in the school system safe. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Are you being unreasonably optimistic when you suggest to parents and families that this might only be a short-term shutdown? At the same time, you're saying that indoor dining and gyms are about to close, that all of New York City is about to be designated in orange zone. And we know with Thanksgiving and Christmas coming up and seemingly uncontrolled, small gatherings taking place indoors, shouldn't we expect that the seven-day average will go much higher than three percent? Couldn't this school shut down last into January or even longer?

Mayor: Every question you had – you had a lot of points in there, Andrew – everything you said is a fair concern. I didn't hear a single thing that I'd say, how dare you – no, I thought all of that was fair, but I'd say a couple of things. One, New Yorkers are clearly getting the memo that we are in a tough new situation. People are acting accordingly. You see really extraordinary levels of mask usage out there. I am certain a lot of people have canceled their travel plans. I am certain a lot of people are going to keep their holiday gatherings very limited. I think people are making those adjustments right now. And, in fact, these other limitations, coming with the orange zone are going to help us knock down the disease. That's the whole point of these kinds of restrictions. They help turn things around. We've got to set up a structure led by our health care leadership that we believe will keep the school safe. Now, we've got a running start, because we've had schools be extraordinary – extraordinarily safe so far. So, we know something that we did not know in August and September, we have a body of evidence of what works. Now, you're adding to the equation a tougher dynamic, but we believe we can compensate for that tougher dynamic with additional measures. That's what we need to do quickly, put that into play, and then go make it work. So, yeah, a tough environment around us, but I really think as the other restrictions come into play and as New Yorkers change their behavior, we have the opportunity to start driving these numbers back down.

Moderator: Next is Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. As the public schools are being closed now, and we know there may be some more closures coming with New York City being put into an orange zone soon, are there any exceptions going to be made for special needs students for whom the remote learning is really not feasible?

Mayor: A very important question, Reuvain. Thank you for that. This is one of the topics we're going to be talking with all the stakeholders and with the State. Unquestionably, the kids who have the greatest needs are our special needs kids and the kids for whom in-person takes on even greater value is our special needs kids. Their families need it. So, this is part of the discussion of how to come back quickly with a special focus on special needs kids. Again, my plan is to come back in a matter of days with an update to the people of this city of how this is going to look. But I can tell you right now, we need to prioritize special needs kids. Go ahead.

Question: And now that the public schools are closed citywide, and, as we said, the whole city might go into an orange zone, would you consider a suspending alternate side, considering, you know, that the parents can't bring their kids to school? The kids are home from school all day.

Mayor: First of all, I think from what the Governor said yesterday, and the numbers certainly reflected – I don't think it's if the city is going into an orange zone, it's when the city's going into orange zone. Again, I'm being very straightforward to all the folks. I've heard the comments about, you know, how could indoor dining still be open and gyms? And I wish they could stay open, I really do, because I feel for the business owners, I feel for the people who have put their lives into building up a business, I feel for the people who care about those businesses. But, Reuvain, it's not if, it's when. And by any normal count, just looking at the State's own number system, we're talking a week or two before we're in that orange zone status. I'm sorry to say that, but that's the blunt truth. In terms of alternate side, we're going to look at that again. We don't have a determination on that. We're not in the situation we were in, in the spring. It's, thank God, not that kind of dislocation happening in the city, but we're certainly going to look at alternate side parking and reevaluate situation as these changing dynamics occur. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Emily from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mayor de Blasio.

Mayor: Good morning, Emily. How are you?

Question: I'm well. How are you? Did you watch Governor Cuomo's news conference yesterday?

Mayor: It did not. I got a summary of the different announcements he made, but I didn't watch the actual news conference.

Question: Have you been in touch with him today? And when you spoke with him yesterday, you noted, of course, that you had several conversations with them about new restrictions for the city, what he looks to do with the city. Did you tell him the schools were closing or did you ask him?

Mayor: I let him know – we had very good conversations, we had an under number of conversations yesterday – I let him know that first we had seen the number come up. We were checking it again because it was literally exactly 3.00. So I told him we were quickly making sure that number was accurate. And then I told him that that would activate the closure. And we talked about what would happen next and what it would take to bring the schools back. But we also talked about the orange zone. He made very clear to me that by everything they were seeing, it was moving in that direction and essentially given that New York City would end up in the orange zone and that we all needed to prepare accordingly. And we talked about the interplay of that reality with the school's reality, just what I was talking about earlier, that hopefully that's going to help us continue to drive down the numbers overall and what it would take to bring schools back.

So I think it was a very good conversation, very clear. And, you know, at the time he was going out to his press conference was just about the time that we had to make our announcement because we had to let schools know. Once we had concluded all of our recheck and our discussions with the State, we had to let schools know, so they could take the actions they needed to to give out whatever devices they had available, give out whatever materials they needed to give to kids and prepare for the shutdown. So that's how it played out yesterday.

Moderator: Next is Nolan from the New York Post.

Question: Good morning, everybody.

Mayor: Hey, Nolan, how you?

Question: I'm all right. Mr. Mayor, this three percent standard has been around for a long time, and I know you keep promising that the State and the City are working together to develop a plan to reopen the schools at hitting the three percent threshold. Why wasn't one already crafted?

Mayor: Nolan, look, it is obvious question and I will just tell you in the real-world dynamics, we're dealing with that we've all been trying to see if we could take every conceivable action to avoid the closure to begin with and that's where the focus has been. All the actions in terms of testing, public education, outreach efforts, zones, anything that could help us not get to this point. And obviously there's been a lot of other things we had to prepare for as well. So what I have learned sometimes is sometimes it is hard to imagine the next phase until you get there, you do your damndest to plan ahead, but you can't always do that. We have a really ever-changing situation here, but the conversations are quickly progressing. Think some of the lines are already becoming clear what it's going to take. And again, we need a little time to reset in any scenario, to get to this new approach we need a little bit of time to reset the equation. So either way you slice it and we give people the update and the next few days that will then take a little bit of time to implement it and make it work for our schools. Go ahead.

Question: And sticking with the three percent threshold, one of the concerns or one of the factors in the decision making apparently was if the workforce would show up to schools provided the three percent was hit. You have repeatedly said there was no formal agreement between the city and the teacher's union over the three percent rule. Was there an informal agreement? Was there a gentleman's agreement? Was there some sort of understanding that you and Mike Mulgrew that if three percent were to happen, the schools were to close and that it was an invaluable agreement [inaudible]?

Mayor: No, it's just – I appreciate your question, but it's just not how things happened. Look, what we saw after September was a workforce that wanted to be in the schools, and in fact, one of the interesting things I think has not been represented sufficiently in the public discourse is how intensely teachers felt the impact of being around kids again. I heard this constantly that it was one thing, you know, in July or August, to think about it, people were obviously concerned about the health dynamics, but once they got into school, then we heard from a huge number of educators and staff they wanted to stay there. They felt it was their mission. So in fact, even the

first day when I was out in Elmhurst at a pre-K, you could just – the excitement among the adults was extraordinary.

No, the deal was we had a call back before the final decisions about school opening with our health care leadership, I remember very vividly the discussion of the three percent and the feeling that we had to set a very strict standard. We had to have in effect a social contract with the people of the city, with the educators and staff, with the parents, we said, we will protect your children. We will protect everyone in the school community. We're so certain we can do it, we're going to set this gold standard in terms of all these precautions, and we're going to put a very tough standard on when we close. We wanted it to be a tough standard and people heard that, and it was actually one of the things that encouraged people to come back and to participate in the field comfortable. We weren't going to change that, once that standard was set, we were going to live by it. But Nolan, remember the reason we're having even the discussion is because unfortunately the second wave has been bearing down on us. That's not a fiction. That's a fact. And the three percent is a very real number. So it was not a collective bargaining issue. It was not a deal with the union. It was something our health care team and I decided separate from any discussions with the union, because we thought it would be the thing that would give people confidence that they could come back, and it did. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is James from PIX 11.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and to everyone on the call.

Mayor: Good morning, James.

Mayor: Good to see you. Look at the end of last week, you let parents know that they should prepare for schools to close and eventually, obviously, they did. Now you're saying restaurant and gym closures will almost certainly happen. So what's your specific message of preparation to owners of restaurants and gyms? And how do you feel about the economic effects of those closures?

Mayor: I feel very, first of all, humanly very sad for these business owners, a lot of whom I've talked to. Here we are talking about how to support small businesses and MWBEs, and that is our future, so the notion that for another period of time, they may have to be shut down. It's very painful. It's horrible for them. It's horrible for their employees. And I always come back to the family, mom and pop store that people put their whole life into. I don't want to see this happen to them, but you know, the facts, the science, the data are just screaming at us right now that we have a huge challenge and we have to beat it back. James, remember our hospital system is strong right now. Thank God we're not seeing the ICUs is flooded. Thank God the number of people we're losing is stayed low and we need to fight to save every life.

But the overall numbers of cases keep growing and we've got to do something different to fight this back. So the state standards are clear. The Governor did exactly the right thing. He said, look, everyone, this orange zone status involves real restrictions, it's coming. You can just see by the chart of the State numbers, it's coming. It's, you know, a week or two away by my account and it's – what do you do to prepare? I say to the business owners, you know, I would say no,

that this is a very strong likelihood, prepare, and I hope them the very for them the very best in the meantime and that they can do anything they can to tide over. We'll help them in any way we can. Anybody who needs help can call our Small Business Services Department. They'll always try to find ways to help a business. And the other thing I'd say is unlike any discussion we had before a few weeks ago, now we have vaccines. There's light at the end of the tunnel. We have different leadership coming in Washington. Hold on in any way you can, because in a matter of months, we're going to be in a much, much better situation. So there's hope. Go ahead, James.

Question: Thank you. And can you explain the process by which the school closure announcement was made yesterday? I mean, the news conference kept being moved back in time until it happened mid-afternoon with the closure announcement. What happened leading up to that announcement? Why did it take all day? Was there maybe a chance that you and others involved, maybe even the teacher's union were considering possibly not closing?

Mayor: James again, I wouldn't say all day. I understand everyone's impatience on such an important matter. You're talking about a difference of four or five hours, which really isn't earthshaking in the end and parents had been warned in advance and they heard the news, you know, by around two o'clock so they could prepare for the next day. And I don't – I'm not saying that with anything but sorrow and understanding that it's a burden for parents, but again, one, we had the irony of the number landing exactly on the razor's edge at 3.00, and we needed to go back and make sure that was accurate. Two, we needed to have real conversations with the State about what would happen next and that, as I said, what became not just a conversation about what happens next with the schools, but what would happen next with the whole city. And the Governor and I talked through what he was thinking and what he was preparing to say about orange zones, and it made very clear the direction that we were going to go in. So we needed to, it became a much bigger conversation. We decided it was important to get all those pieces clarified and then go out with a lot of the answers in place, and that's what it came down to that we had a lot to work through, we worked it through, and then we announced it. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next we have Jacob from Jewish Insider.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, you said that we might go into a full lockdown if the rate goes up –

Mayor: Yeah, Jacob, I'm going to stop you. I'm sorry to interrupt. Orange zone is not full lockdown. I really want to be careful about that. Orange zone is definitely a better status than a red zone and not a full lockdown. So I just want to make sure we don't overstate. Go ahead.

Question: Right, but I was saying that once you go into an orange zone and you reach the peak and you get into a red zone, that means a lockdown, so my question is that if that is the case where you not look any more at certain ZIP codes and neighborhoods, but as a New York City as a whole?

Mayor: I think first of all, I want to respect the State's role in making the ultimate decisions, but what I'd say to you is, I think right now we're moving rapidly away from – right now, away from ZIP code focus in to something broader. And again, this is all evolving with the facts and the data, the ZIP code information we provide still has a lot of value because it's directing where

we're sending testing, where we're sending outreach, and we still have a lot of ability to hopefully contain problems, neighborhood by neighborhood. And the ZIP code information is going to have tremendous value going forward as we fight against the disease. But right now, again, it is an overwhelming likelihood, and I think it's this close to a certainty, that New York City will be in that orange zone status in a week or two, that's as far as we can tell right now, the whole city.

So I don't think for the immediate future, it's going to be done on anything more regionalized from what I'm hearing from the State so far. I do not assume we have to go to red zone. This is something we, again, I keep telling people if it's a fight and I think a lot of people are fighting back. The orange zone alone is going to have a very big impact and if people are really smart about not traveling and really careful about holiday gatherings, I do not think it's a foregone conclusion you end up in a red zone. So, you know, people are concerned about ending up in the red zone can do something about it with our own behavior, and we've proven before how much impact that can make. Go ahead, Jacob.

Question: So some people are confused, you know, with the reopening process, the closures with the ongoing bickering between you and the Governor. Can you look people in the eye and say, all decisions that are made are done with the main objective of defeating the virus, or until we have a vaccine not to meet any metrics or any goals?

Mayor: I couldn't understand – I'm sure I can look people in the eye, but I couldn't understand where you were going there. Could you just state it a little more simply? What is the question?

Question: That all the decisions are made or not to meet any certain metrics or any deals with the labor unions, but the main objective is to actually bring down the infection rate, defeat the virus, or until there's a vaccine?

Mayor: Yeah, Jacob, look, first of all, I respect the question, but let's be real here. We were the epicenter of the crisis. We fought back based on decisions made by the City and State, both, and again, a lot of directional unity. Sometimes we had disagreements. That's fine, but the broad direction was very conservative in terms of health care, very strong focus on science and data, brought this city back, made it one of the safest places in the country. Then we said, we're going to open schools. I couldn't tell you, the thousands of voices that said you can't open schools. It won't be safe. We did it. We made it safe. Then we said, look, there's going to be a standard of what it would lead to a closure schools. We kept to that standard. Folks who say that's anything but a focus on science and data are not looking at the facts. Now, again, I've asked – I've been asked this question, where do we get the three percent. I can happily have some of the participants in the original conference call talk to you. The three percent decision was made with our health care leadership before school started, and of course with our education leadership out of both abundance of caution and a belief that we needed a social contract with our parents, with our educators, with our staff, that we need to show we meant so much business in terms of opening school safely, that we would stake our claim at a level lower than anybody. Lower than the World Health Organization or the State or anybody. That's how confident we were that we could open schools safely, keep them open. We made that decision. I'm absolutely convinced Jacob, it was part of what allowed us to open schools and gain people's confidence. And it will be part of

what allows us to reopen schools that we kept faith with what we said. It was not about any specific union or all unions. It was about a much bigger consideration of what would work for the city. And I was on that call, our health leadership, our educational leadership, I remember the specific call. That's how the decision got made. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Matt Chayes from Newsday.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. For Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Varma – consistency or promises aside, as we speak here in now, what is the scientific and epidemiological basis for the three percent threshold versus a higher one?

Mayor: And I will say, as they get into this answer, Matt I certainly remember Dr. Varma's voice on that call. He and I had quite a dialogue on that call about the three percent and what it would mean in terms of case numbers, et cetera. I believe Dr. Chokshi was on that call too, the day we decided the three percent. So go ahead into it. First, Jay, and then Dave.

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great. Thank you very much. So we'll go back in time. So when we were making the decision about what threshold to use as the Mayor had said, we were very concerned about making sure that our school system was the safest possible. And quite honestly, we chose an extremely conservative approach. And at the time we were making that decision, there was a very conscious reason to do that. We needed to make sure that our school system was safe so we could open it up for in-person learning. We chose three percent because based on what we predicted to be the number of tests that we would be doing in New York by the time the schools were opening, we believed that that was a reasonably good threshold to estimate how much transmission there might be broadly in the community as a whole. And because we didn't know at that time how safe we can really make our schools, we were concerned that this would mean that teachers, students would be – have undiagnosed infection, coming into schools and potentially transmitting it to other people. That was one concern.

The second concern is as part of our approach, our rigorous approach, we chose a very conservative standard for closing classrooms and closing buildings. And we were concerned also that as the transmission in the community rises, this would result in a lot of disruption to classroom and building closures. So those two considerations together, us not knowing how well we would do at protecting transmission in the schools. And second, our concerns about the disruption of a classroom and building closures were the reasons for that threshold. Now we know more. The beauty of science is that, you know, you change your views on things when the science and the evidence changes as well. So I think that gets to the point that the Chancellor and the Mayor have made, that we are going to work very actively to focus on this new phase and how we can modify our proposals to adjust for a new phase of the epidemic.

Mayor: Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, sir. Well, I think Dr. Varma explained it quite well. The one point that I will add to it is that you know, the other thing that is different now compared to a few months ago is we have further layers of protection that we have built into our approach for schools. So you know, I know that

there has been a lot of focus justifiably on the percent positivity as you know, one of the key indicators and thresholds. But really I think of it as one of three you know, overall pieces with respect to how we should think about this epidemiologically. So the first is what's happening citywide. That's what the test positivity tells us. The second is what's actually happening within the school. And so that's why the school testing regime that we've put in place gives us valuable additional information as Dr. Varma said. The third really important piece is the situation room that the Department of Education, the Test and Trace Corps. and the Health Department and others have really collaborated on to make sure that we act very quickly when cases are identified within the school. So those three pieces working in concert, give us a much different instrument to be able to understand what's happening with spread. But then most importantly, to take micro targeted actions that help us keep students safe.

Mayor: Go ahead, Matt.

Question: Okay, so going forward to you, meaning Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma think the standard should be higher?

Mayor: Well, I'm just going to say one thing as we lead into them. We are right now, unquestionably going to be having higher standards and working with the State and other stakeholders on that. And I think it's self-evident from the numbers we're seeing why we need to change the approach, but doctors, you can go into detail.

Commissioner Chokshi: Sorry about that Jay. I'll just start briefly to say yes. You know, the short answer is yes. There will be higher standards. And that's our commitment both because of what we have learned over the last few months, but really importantly, because the broader context that we're in is that we do see cases on the rise across New York City. And so we have to redouble our safeguards in schools as well as in other places.

Mayor: Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Varma: Nothing more for me to add.

Mayor: Okay, great. Go ahead.

Moderator: Finally, we have Marcia from WCBS.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call. I guess the question that I have is the number of people today who've been critical of the way the closing of the schools was handled, most notably Jumaane Williams and Mark Treyger, the head of Education Committee, who said that we're being led into chaos because there were no plans to reopen. But also that there were no plans to really make sure that people who didn't have devices or didn't have internet connections had them. And what both the Public Advocate and Chair Treyger said was that the sad thing was that we entered the school system, opening them, knowing that there were tens of thousands of people, kids who did not have devices or internet connection and we are closing schools with the same situation. So what would you like to say to them and their criticism of the lack of a plan and the lack of equipment?

Mayor: I think they just don't have their facts, right. And I'll let the Chancellor join in on this. You know, I appreciate that there are professional critics in this society, but I really think there has to be recognition of the work that people did to close the digital divide, to do something that had never been done before, back in April, as the pandemic was horrendous, to put these devices in the hands of kids. And I don't quite understand why the same question keeps being asked when in fact, the evidence is that immense work was done to provide devices, to address any problem with devices, to provide service if they need a different service. That work has literally been done now, family by family, for kids in shelters. Sometimes it's true that we don't have as many devices as we want to. But the bottom line is it's just been an endless effort to provide free technology to any family who needs it. And that's never stopped, and it's been consistent. And I think it deserves respect and the people who've done the work have really put their heart and soul into making sure kids got what they needed. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I will only add Marcia that you know, since March we've delivered – ordered and delivered over 350,000 devices. As students have devices, sometimes it's their own devices. It's devices they've gotten from the school and those devices break. Then it becomes a need for another device. We've ordered over 100,000 devices again. We have about 40,000 of those devices that are arriving on a daily basis. And we're inserting LTE cards into those devices so that students are able to connect to the internet. So this is a constantly moving number. It's not a set number that remains static and then nothing happens, so you fill it, or you don't fill it. So this is a constantly evolving situation. And the other thing that I would mention is that there is a real supply side issue here. We are not the only school system in America, actually in the world that is ordering computers and devices. So the manufacturers are having a hard time filling these orders. And while we've been prioritized and we're getting these devices ahead of many other systems because of our size, it's just important to recognize that as the Mayor has stated, we are literally putting a computer device in the hands of every one of our 1.1 million students, with also understanding that devices break, with also understanding that sometimes there's connectivity issues, with also understanding that not all families have come forward and said, I need a device. So I'm just going to remind folks that you can go onto our website, schools.nyc.gov. It's very simple there to request a device. You can also call 3-1-1 and you can also make sure your school knows that you need a device. Any of those methods, we'll make sure that we get you the technology that you need.

Mayor: Go ahead, Marcia.

Question: So another question that they ask is that if you knew going into opening the schools, that there was a possibility of a second wave and a possibility that you would in fact reach that three percent, why was there no plan to figure out how you were going to come back once you reached that number?

Mayor: Marcia, it's just there have been a lot of different pieces we had to account for. For a long time, we were doing really well in this city. For a long time, it looked like we could hold off a second wave. We're still battling the second wave right now. And where we are in the city is so much better than other parts of the country. So our focus was not on what to do if, our focus was getting our schools up and running, unlike any of the large urban school systems in America. It

was getting our schools up and running, making them safe, supporting our kids and families. That's where we've been putting our time and energy. And in recent days, this the first time we had to confront the notion that we might hit this standard. We've been working to set a new standard in a new environment, not a theoretical one, we could have said a long time ago, but a one that actually fits this moment and the facts we know now, and the better information we have on what works. And we're going to come out with that standard in a matter of days. And it will take a few days to apply it. But our goal is to come back as quickly as possible with even higher standards and make it work. So I, you know, the what-ifs I don't get lost in. We've got work to do right now, but what we do know, which we didn't know back in August, we now have proof positive, we can keep our kids, our educators, our staff safe. And we're going to reset the equation for the new facts we have. And make them safe again and get our schools back.

So, everyone, as we conclude today, look, everyone's been through so much, I know. And it's, everchanging, you know, a lot of times the questions I get, whether it's from the media or everyday New Yorkers, it's the same point. Why is everything changing so much? Let me tell you, I wish the coronavirus would ever give us a stationary target, but it is the most moving target situation I've ever seen in my life. That's the coronavirus, always changing, always clever unfortunately, trying to outwit us, but we need to outwit it. So, we do that by doubling down on what works. The testing, the mask wearing, being smart about avoiding those large indoor gatherings, avoiding travel. This is how we fight back. The schools have been shut temporarily, but only temporarily. They will be back and there'll be safer than ever. The city is going to go through some tough times in the coming weeks, but we'll fight back. And the vaccine is coming. We couldn't say that even just a few weeks ago. Now we can say it with 100 percent assurance. So, let's double down on this fight. Let's overcome this moment. And I have not a doubt in my mind that New York City will come back and we will be stronger for this painful experience and we will make it a better city. Thank you, everyone.

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