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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. As we told you before the break, the City today announced that thousands of public housing apartments in Brooklyn and Manhattan will get as much as \$400 million worth of renovations next year and the private sector will be helping to implement those upgrades. I'm joined now by Mayor de Blasio to talk about that and much more. Good evening Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good evening.

**Louis:** The \$400 million will pay for what exactly?

**Mayor:** Well look, let me emphasize that what's great about this proposal in terms of our public housing developments is there's not additional City money going into this. This is actually allowing us – this approach – allows us to tap into federal money that supports these developments and also allows private entities and non-profit entities to come in and invest. It's a model we've used in the Rockaways, Ocean Bay. It's a model we've used in the Lower East Side, at Campos, it's proven to work and I got to tell you talking to residents in those developments, they are thrilled. I mean they are talking about full rehabs of buildings, the public spaces, the apartments, kitchens, bathrooms, everything is remade and modernized and it's a great way to help improve the quality of life for the residents but I want to emphasize from the beginning, public sector retains control. This continues to be affordable housing for the long haul at the same exact rents as anyone else in NYCHA would pay.

**Louis:** Right and the City continues to own all the housing stock and –

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Louis:** - and the underlying ground as well.

**Mayor:** Correct.

**Louis:** Yes. When people hear that something private is happening they often freak out and assume the worst and private in this case, in many cases, the management is actually done by a non-profit, so technically it's private but its people who are not in this exclusively for the money.

**Mayor:** Correct and look the beauty of the situation here is retaining public control, maintaining the same rent levels, but getting a better product. We need investment in public housing, hasn't been there for decades, we know the federal government started walking away in '80s, the State of New York walked away in the '90s, and NYCHA has been left fend for itself, a lot of times the City didn't do all it should have done. I'm proud to say that well before the recent settlement with the federal government, we put \$3.7 billion, new dollars, into public housing between capital funds and expense funds and that's making a difference but that alone is not enough to change such a huge situation. Public-private partnerships can play a big role and the goal right now with the current approach, 20,000 apartments. That's enough apartments for about 50,000 or more people, about an eighth of the total population of all of NYCHA will benefit from this approach.

**Louis:** Well yeah – I mean – not to go too much into the weeds but I saw from the press conference that, something I'd never even hear of called Section 9 is being converted to Section 8 –

**Mayor:** Section 8.

**Louis:** And it's going to apply I guess best to scattered site housing, not some of the big campuses necessarily but I'm just curious are you going to include these units in your overall 300,000 goal as far as apartments that are kept permanently affordable?

**Mayor:** This is a separate approach what we are doing through NYCHA. Obviously NYCHA has enough housing for about 400,000 people, the single most important element of affordable housing in the City. The goal for the overall affordable housing plan is to build or preserve 300,000 more apartments for over 700 – 750,000 people, we need all of that. We need to stop evictions, we need to protect rent stabilized apartments, there is a whole combination of things we're doing to protect affordability long term. But no, two separate pieces of the equation.

**Louis:** Oh, you know I raise it only because from early on I've heard administration priorities when it relates to that big number, first 200,000, now 300,000, sort of rises to the top and I'm thinking, you know, what a great to sort of make sure nobody loses focus on these units.

**Mayor:** Well I think the good news is there's tremendous focus on the housing authority now and there's obviously been tremendous investment before the recent settlement. The recent settlement now adds even more investment. So these are two pieces I think have to compliment for the long haul, I think they are both crucial to the future of affordable housing in New York City. The good news is this newer approach that we talked about today with public housing, it's now proven itself on the ground in New York City, it's an idea that has been proven to work, just go ask the residents in the Rockaways and Lower East Side, they'll tell you how satisfied they are. We want to apply it now on a broader scale.

**Louis:** Okay. Let me switch topics to the family separation crisis, not the substance of the crisis itself but your response to it. Why go to the border? I'm sure – well you would have heard, but you weren't here to hear it, but people were saying why is he doing that? The whole world is focused on this, we don't need one more public leader to go down there and say that this is horror, everyone already knows that.

**Mayor:** I think that's a misunderstanding of how change occurs. You need as many voices as possible to really create the energy for change, but most particularly, I went to the border with a bipartisan group of mayors, and there have been a lot of folks who've gone to the border. Some of them Democrats, some of them non-partisan, some of them faith leaders, you haven't seen a huge number of bipartisan delegations, I think was very important for mayors of some of the largest cities in America to go literally arm and arm, Republican and Democrat alike, and say this policy is broken, it has to be ended, we need to reunify these children with their families, we need to end the zero-tolerance policy, which is really making a mockery of the whole notion of allowing people seek asylum in this country, that's an age old tradition in the United States. I think sometimes when people say, oh you know you shouldn't go somewhere, there is a misunderstanding that sometimes going somewhere is the best way to have an impact on the issue, particularly if it's in coalition with other folks and a bipartisan coalition, we must admit, is a rarity today in America. It's a good and healthy thing.

**Louis:** The thing that occurred to me, which is not incompatible with going to the border is, you know, Cayuga services, some of the other nonprofits that are working with these migrant children also have very big and important contracts with the City of New York. I would think that instead of begging for information from the federal government, you can say to these providers, look, if you're going to continue to do business with us, we will now invoke a clause – that I'm sure is there in every contract – saying you got to tell us what you're doing if we ask you and then just ask them and we then we can get our hands around the dimensions of the crisis –

**Mayor:** Well, that's what I did on Wednesday. I went to the Cayuga Center, got a lot of answers, got much better answers than I got from the federal government, and I went out and told the people of this city right after, did a press conference. The next day I was down in Texas with my fellow mayors.

So, I think both of these pieces are important. Let's address what's happening right here in this city of course with these kids but also let's try and stop the overall mistake and stop the broken policy that could send a lot more kids if we don't really fix it.

Right now even with the President's executive order we haven't really see anything change. The number of families – kids, I should say, is about the same today as it was last week. I've asked the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services, the federal government to give us an answer. What's the plan? When will these kids be reunified? How many kids are here? Where are they?

We're not getting any of those answers. But you're right, the social service providers have been forthcoming. There's two others. There's Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services, also

in the city. My team's met with both of them. They've been great. But they don't know what's happening next.

**Louis:** There are some institutions – some of the airlines have said we're not going to transport these kids. These are some individuals who have said, I'm just not going to have anything to do with this, I think it's so deeply immoral, problematic, unacceptable, choose your word. Would you consider going down that same path as the Mayor of New York and saying these agencies are going to have to pick and choose, either you do what ICE is having you do with these kids which we think is immoral, unacceptable, and so forth or you work with the City of New York?

**Mayor:** I don't feel that and I'll tell you why. I don't think they caused the problem. I think they're trying to address the damage that's being caused by a broken policy. These kids have gone through a lot. I want to just describe it to you because it's painful. The youngest kid that's been there at the Cayuga Center – nine months old. All these kids, separated from their parents.

I asked the folks there how do they get in touch with their family and they said, well, sometimes the federal government gives us a way to connect the child to a parent or grandparent and sometimes they don't. They said some kids literally have a note in their pocket with their parents name and phone number. Other kids are too young or lost the note, don't have any way, don't even know where their parents are – some so young, they can't even say their parent's name.

So, humanly, just think about how heartbreaking it is. These kids ripped from their parents, 2,000 miles away from them in a whole different country. I think these folks at Cayuga and the other centers are trying to support these kids and help them including with the real trauma they're going through.

If not that kind of organization, I don't know where they would be. I know they wouldn't be with their parents. That much we still know. So, I'd rather at least they be in the hands of professional, compassionate people.

I think for the folks who are saying, we don't want to participate, I get that impulse but I think the best way to achieve that is to demand the end to the zero-tolerance policy and demand a plan for reunification.

**Louis:** Okay, we've got more topics to get to. Let's take a short break first. I'll back with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute.

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**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. We all saw, Mr. Mayor, that horrific televised murder for all intents and purposes, up in the Bronx where a young man apparently in the case of mistaken identity, to make it even more tragic, just stabbed for all the world to see. What is going on up there?

**Mayor:** It's a horrible, disgusting incident. Look, the NYPD will speak to the details. Obviously we believe it's gang related and one of the things I'm emphasizing is the NYPD has been doing a

lot of gang takedowns, serious numbers of arrests, weapon seizures. This has become more and more of a constant in the way we're policing now through precision policing but that doesn't bring back this young man.

And you know here we're talking about a teenager who wanted to be a police officer. That was his whole goal. He was part of our Explorers Program. I spoke to his mom last night who I really admire for the way she brought up her son and she was very strong and holding it together.

I said, we're going to find a way to honor him and name something after him as part of the Explorers Program because we want the next generation of young people who want to serve in the police to know about the young man who didn't get a chance to and be inspired by him.

**Louis:** Does the NYPD have orders to basically target these gangs and simply disassemble them? Because you know once in a while we see this and it frankly it looks sort of like drama, you'll see these gigantic RICO cases made and there'll be a daisy chain of like you know 30 kids pulled out of a housing project, and it has the look and feel of frankly of something that's kind of for show as opposed to actual violent gangs that are out there doing these kinds of [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** We're going after the gangs that do the real violence. One of the most shocking things I've heard from Commissioner O'Neill, I heard it from Commissioner Bratton before him, you know, it's in the single digit thousands in a city of 8.6 million – it's several thousand people who do most of the violent crime, the truly violent crimes.

**Louis:** Then we should have all of their names at this point.

**Mayor:** Well, that's why we have the gang database and we take that seriously. I know there are some advocates who have raised questions about it. I obviously believe in being very, very protective of Constitutional rights but it's also important to recognize this is where a lot of violence is coming from. The NYPD is very careful in how they keep that database. They use it as a tool for protecting people and they have very strict standards. But yeah, our violence problem is largely a gang problem and yes there is a constant effort to systematically dismantle them and to build cases that will stick.

This is another very important piece of the connection between the NYPD and our DAs and our federal prosecutors. We need to build cases that will stick, that will put people behind bars for a long time if they're truly violent.

I think what's happened in recent years, the NYPD is finding more and more good ways to do that and you're seeing these takedowns that really have a lasting impact on safety in different communities. The folks who did this horrible crime, I am very certain they will all be rolled up and they will all spend a lot of time in prison.

**Louis:** Okay. Let me switch to the school desegregation plan that you've sort of announced and the contours of it that I guess [inaudible] taken up in Albany probably next year. There is an argument out there that you've got five selective schools that are essentially under City control.

They're not under the same requirements as Tech, and Stuyvesant, and Bronx Science. And you could implement whatever plan you want with those. Why not do that?

**Mayor:** There is an argument, but our Law Department feels it's a gray area and considering that we may have resolution on this literally in a matter of months. I would much rather go for a single clear policy that answers once and for all this question. The proposal we put forward combines the grades that young people get in their school, in their middle school. With the scores they get on universal State tests. It gives each young person a composite score and then selects accordingly. So a real cross section of their work in the three years they were in middle school. This means every middle school will be represented in the specialized schools. We predict about 45 percent of the kids in specialized school going forward would be African American and Latino, look a lot more like New York City. Educational quality, academic performance levels essentially the same. So we think it's fair all around. If we can get that resolution from Albany that's the best way to solve this. And from my point of view, look I don't want to have to deal with two separate approaches for different types of schools or potentially having to take what are now specialized schools and call them something else or any other things that might be necessary. I'd rather solve the problem overall.

**Louis:** Are you confident that this could be done without devolving into sort of an ethnic political spoils contest which is what it sounds like at times?

**Mayor:** It's New York City, we're a big complicated place, there's a certain amount of – we love our city, but there's a city amount of tribalism that goes with being in this place. But look, I've seen people of all different backgrounds rally around this concept. For one reason [inaudible] tremendous concern among parents for years about high stakes testing. And I talk to some parents literally today in Brooklyn who, when they really thought about and heard that there's a single test is hiding a kids future, they agreed that that's really outlandish. By the way, no college does that, no graduate school does that. It's an arcane system onto itself.

So I think one of the most powerful unifying elements of this is let's stop judging kids by a single test. Whatever background you are, let's get a real look at your abilities. There's a lot of brilliant kids who just don't test well. They'll now have a chance, because we're looking at the totality of their work. But the reason I think we can avoid this becoming divisive is one, it's so blatantly unfair now, it can't go on this way. Two, it can't be, we can't have our best schools so exclusionary to a single test. It doesn't make in today's day and age. Three, working with the Chancellor, we talked about creating more and better options for all of our students going to middle school. We're going to look at expanding the number of specialized school seats right now in the schools we have. We're going to look at building out other great options. And there are a lot of other great high schools they don't happen to be specialized schools. If we can do all of that right, we can get to a point that people feel good about.

**Louis:** Okay, I'm sure you saw the editorial today about the yeshivas. Your former Chancellor said it would take about two months to get to the bottom of these credible allegations that as many as 39 yeshivas are not complying with the law, they're not teaching the kids everything that they are supposed to be taught, the full range of subjects. And we're going now into three

years since that should have been done. Aren't folks right to assume that this is just not a priority, it's not going to get done.

**Mayor:** No, I've talked about this a lot, as you many know it's a community I had a lot of history with. We believe the most important thing is to make the change, meaning to make sure the schools that might not have been achieving the best standards get there. There's been a long series of meetings, dialogues trying to get on the same page. I think we've made a lot of progress with some of the yeshivas. There have been other yeshivas that have not been forthcoming. We're going to present to the State Education Department soon a report that provides all of the experience we've had with all these yeshivas. So this – as you know there's been some law changes in Albany. Ultimately the State Education Department has to decide the next steps.

**Louis:** But we have to at this point I think we have to ask what does soon really mean? I mean we've heard soon for three years now.

**Mayor:** Look, I think we've been very clear about the fact, because that's – I don't know the specifics that you're quoting. I've said many times what we've been trying to do is figure out how to achieve lasting change, and as you know with entities that are not publicly controlled you can you know make pronouncement and feel good about yourself or you can actually roll up your sleeves and try and figure out how to make the change. I'll give you an example. When we first started the pre-K initiative there was a lot of hesitancy in the yeshivas. A lot of them said they wouldn't participate. We believed it would be good for everyone involved. It took a good year or two to really come up with an approach that everyone could believe in. There's been a similar reality here, a lot of dialogues, some real movements, some real changes. I think ultimately that's what's going to win the day and make the education for these kids better. But yes everything is going to be turned over to the State Education Department and then they will decide the next steps.

**Louis:** Okay, we're going to leave it there for now. Thank you so much for coming by. I see you endorsed a bunch of incumbents against the young progressives. We'll find out how all of that works, but you're going to get some heat for that.

**Mayor:** The incumbents are progressives too. Sometimes the incumbent and the challenger can be a progressive.

**Louis:** Okay, indeed. We shall see, we'll let the voters decide.

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