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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** I always hope to start out the week with good news for everyone. But this was a very, very tough weekend, and I was in the Rockaways last night with the family of Justin Wallace, and it was just the most painful thing. It was horrible. A ten-year-old child who should be alive today, should be in school right now, killed by a cowardly, horrible human being who fired gunshots just randomly into a home. The pain that Justin's parents are feeling right now, no parent should ever go through that. No one should ever experience that. Every parent, and I'm going to speak as a parent myself, fears constantly deep down that we might not follow the way it's supposed to in life. You're supposed to see your children live their lives out, and you're supposed to leave this earth ahead of them. These parents were grappling with the sudden, shocking, horrible loss of their beautiful ten-year-old child. They showed me videos and photos and told stories and they veered between shock and pain and rage, and they kept saying, we need to know that this killer will be found, and I told them, "Yes, the NYPD will find the killer. Yes, he will be brought to justice. He will suffer the consequences of what he did." The fact that this reality in our nation, in our city, that a child's life is taken by gun violence is something we are way too used to, is unacceptable, and we have work to do in this city. We cannot have this situation. Last summer, I had the same kind of painful, horrible experience with Davell Gardner Jr.'s mom and grandmother – in front of their house, hearing the loss they felt seeing it happen again. It's not acceptable. It has to stop. It has to stop. It's going to take so many efforts, so much work, but it has to stop because this is not a way for us to live.

We are doing everything we can here in the city, but we need help. We need help from the federal government. We need help from the state government. We cannot do it alone. What can we do? The plan we've put forward, moving our cops to the right places, focusing on the top hundred blocks where violence has occurred. The new cops coming out of the police academy, 850 last month, 600 this month using that new capacity, the right way. Working with communities, investing in Cure Violence and the Crisis Management System, community-based solutions to violence, getting our courts up and running. The courts are run by the State, but we've offered every form of help at vaccination space, whatever they needed. We need the courts at full strength so there are real consequences. These are things that are all happening now. They will all have an impact, but we cannot do it alone. The situation that we're seeing now is unacceptable. It's fueled by the proliferation of guns that got worse during the pandemic. We've all seen the shocking statistics about how many more people all over the country got guns during the pandemic.

Look, the NYPD is out there getting guns off the street all the time. Gun arrests are up 28 percent compared to last year. That's making a huge difference, but the flow of guns is endless into the

city. So we need Congress to act. Last night, after we spent time with the family, I saw the passion of the face of Queens Borough President Donovan Richards. He knows the Wallace family. He felt their pain very personally, and he said, we've got to stop the flow of guns. We need Congress to finally act, and he said something that really touched me. He said, is this the final straw? Is this the tragedy that will finally convince our lawmakers in Washington to act? We thought it was Newtown. We thought it was so many of these horrible mass killings. Is this the one that might finally wake people up?

Washington has the opportunity, the first opportunity in quite a while to act, we need them. We need the State of New York as well. We have been talking for weeks now with the State Legislature, and there's something that we can all do together that would really help. In conversations with the legislative leaders and members of the Legislature, we found a lot of common ground on a crucial issue. The issue of parole. This is an area where real change can happen quickly, and we need all the help we can get. Some good news today on this front, Assembly Member Maritza Davila has introduced a new bill that will strengthen the parole system. You'll hear from her in a moment. Here's the bottom line in the City of New York we focus on planning for when people are going to reenter society coming out of jail. We focus on really making sure people are ready, giving them a transitional job, giving them real support. Unfortunately, historically the State of New York has not done that.

As we've talked with legislators in the Senate and the Assembly, there's been a lot of agreement that that's not fair to anyone. It's not fair to the parolee trying to reenter society, who we want to rehabilitate. It's not fair to members of the community who are actually put in danger by the fact that there's no good alternative provided to a parolee. The sad reality is that the state government dumps state prisoners and parolees into New York City, often directly into our shelters, in a way that doesn't help anyone, and the facts are clear. State parolees are more likely to be shooting suspects than they have been in the past. They are four times more likely to be involved in gun violence than others who have been involved in the criminal justice system. We see a specific problem and we can do something about it and we can do something about it in a way that is understanding and compassionate, but also forceful re-entry planning, discharge, planning, housing, health support, including mental health support, making sure people have some employment. These are things that would make a huge difference and help keep us safe. I want you to hear from the Assembly Member who is carrying this bill, I want to thank her. I've known her for a long time. She fights so hard for our community. She's from her community, from the neighborhood. She's lived the challenges of her neighborhood in Brooklyn, and she stands up for people and she is leading the way to make a change that we need to make New York City safer. My pleasure to introduce Assembly Member Maritza Davila.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Assembly Member. Thank you, this is a really important moment for New York City. This is a kind of change we need. It can only happen from Albany. Your leadership is making a big difference. I know you're really a respected voice among the members in Albany, so thank you for your leadership, it's going to help us save lives. Now, I want to hear from another Assembly Member who really cares about these issues. He and I spoke recently about how important it is to help people come back the right way. If we're going to do

rehabilitation, we have to do it the right way. But also, it's the way to keep people safe – everyone in the community safe. He is someone who has organized and fought for his community and now has gone to the Assembly to bring that same spirit of change to the work he does there. My pleasure to introduce the Chair of the Subcommittee on Re-entry and Transitional Services, New York State Assembly Member Kenny Burgos.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Assembly Member. And, Assembly Member, I appreciate what you said about what we have found works. When I came into office, at Rikers, there was one day a week for inmates for education training. We made that five days a week. There wasn't real intensive discharge planning. We put that into place. There were no jobs for people to go to, we gave transitional jobs to folks coming out of Rikers. These are the things that work. It's time for the State of New York to take that model and make it happen for folks who are coming out with even more serious challenges, coming out of the State system. And I really appreciate your leadership on this particularly chairing the subcommittee you do. So, thank you so much Assembly Member.

Now, everyone, I want to hear from one more member of the Assembly. And her vantage point here is particularly crucial. She represents a community in the Bronx that is dealing with so many challenges and knows too well the pain of gun violence. But she has been a difference-maker as a social worker. She understands that how we reach people, the systematic, focused way we reach people and get them help can make all the difference, and that we need solutions like this to actually save lives. My pleasure introduce Assembly Member Chantel Jackson.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Assembly Member. With your help, it can be done and it will make such a difference. And thank you, we talked about what it means to be a social worker. Now, as an elected official, you bring a powerful perspective, and we realize we actually can reach people and change their lives, but only if we actually take the steps to do it in a purposeful, intentional manner. So, thank you for your leadership.

Now, everyone, I want you to hear from one more expert. And what an extraordinary individual – I've gotten to know Julio Medina over the years, I've seen the work that Exodus Transitional Services does, helping folks reenter society, helping redeem lives, folks who otherwise might've gone astray again being put on a positive path, not committing acts of violence, not being victims of acts of violence. And this is the crucial thing to remember – parolees are very, very frequently the victims of gun violence, and too frequently the perpetrators of gun violence, because, in so many cases, there isn't an effort to keep them away from what were the negative influences of the past and the problems of the past. But at Exodus, we have seen a model that works to provide the transitional services, the help, the housing, the mental health support, whatever it takes. And Julio is someone who feels this deeply. He'll tell you about his own experience, but he has saved lives many times and I honor him for it. My pleasure to introduce Julio Medina.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you. Thank you so much, Julio. I really honor and admire your work. I appreciate that story you told, because it said it all. And I want all New Yorkers, just hear what Julio said about himself. Something went wrong in his life, 12 years in prison, and then he came out and for the last 22 years has been serving people in need, and helping rehabilitate, and helping save lives. That is what redemption is all about. God bless you, Julio. Thank you, brother.

All right. Now, this bill to reform parole, to make sure that people come back safely, to make sure that we stop the violence, we need this bill. We need to pass it this week in Albany. It can be done. There's a lot of support. Thank you to everyone who spoke and thank you to all the members of the Senate and the Assembly who have stepped forward and said, we have to get this done.

Let me say, that's what we think can happen this week in this legislative session. We've had ongoing conversations with Albany as well about the kinds of things that need to happen, going forward. I, for one, believe that the Legislature will be back later on this year. We're going to continue the conversations in the meantime. Criminal justice work needs constant assessment. We're unfortunately dealing with a very clear rise in gun violence here and around the country. We need to keep looking at our criminal justice laws, keep looking at other changes we need to make, and that's an ongoing conversation that we're having with the members of the Legislature.

Now, specifically, another area of concern – and I do not believe it will be acted on this week, but I think it can be acted on this year – is witness protection. We know how important it is to encourage witnesses to come forward. The NYPD has done a lot of work lately to re-bond with communities. This is something that Chief Rodney Harrison, our Chief of Department has talked about a lot. We need to reconnect the Police Department with communities. We need to get the comfort and the relationship and the discussion going that neighborhood policing helped create for six years, we need to amplify that again. We need folks coming forward when they witnessed a crime. But we understand that's particularly sensitive if someone witnessed the most serious crimes – obviously, violence, rape, homicide – witnesses can be scared. Witnesses can be hesitant. We've seen more of that hesitancy. Witnesses have cooperated only in 25 percent of the shootings this year. Just a few years ago, that number was 53 percent in 2017. Obviously, we need to keep adjusting our laws and our approaches to encourage witness cooperation. We also need to understand that while we're making very important reforms, and I commend the Legislature for so many of the reforms they've made, including in the area of discovery, we also have to look for any unintended consequences, and there are issues about some of the procedural requirements of the discovery law that have raised real concerns among the District Attorneys, areas where some smart tweaks and revisions could really help to ensure that we can get gun violence cases completed and make sure that folks who mean to do violence against their fellow New Yorker are off the streets.

I want you to hear from the District Attorney of the Bronx. She has literally devoted her life to keeping the people of the Bronx safe. She's someone who believes in reform, but also believes in safety and believes those two ideas have to go together and can go together. She's proven it in the work she does with her extraordinary team in the Bronx DA's office. My pleasure to introduce District Attorney Darcel Clark.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, District Attorney. I really appreciate that. I appreciate your passion and your belief that we can bring all these pieces together to keep the Bronx safe and the whole city safe. And I think it's really important that people note you're the chief law enforcement officer in the Bronx, and you're talking about the community solutions as well. You really appreciate, and it's something I appreciate about you, the whole bandwidth – courts, DAs, police, but also Cure Violence movement, Crisis Management System. I'm proud to say we have doubled the number of members of Cure Violence, Crisis Management for this summer. It will triple for next summer working with the City Council. We aren't stopping until we stop the violence. But I really appreciate your support. And you're right, we got to keep working on the right laws and the right approaches and we can make a difference. So, I really thank you for your leadership.

**Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark:** Thank you. Thank you.

**Mayor:** So, I want to pull all this together. We've got a lot of work to do. We're dealing with a very big challenge. We need help. We need help from the federal government. We need a real effort to stop the flow of guns into New York City. We need help from the State government. We need those on parole to get support, not just to be dumped on New York City with no help. It's not fair to them. It's not fair to their families. It's not fair to people in New York City. And you heard from the District Attorney, you heard from people who support compassionately, folks who are coming back. We need to change, and I think we can achieve that change this week in Albany, the leaders you heard from believe it can be done. I believe it can be done. We need the people to call for it as well. Let's get that done. And then we got work to do. For the rest of this year, we're going to be dealing with a major challenge. We can do better with the laws that are good laws that are important laws, that are reforms we needed. We needed the discovery reform. It was the right thing to do. Now let's make some of the tweaks and revisions we need to protect witnesses, to make sure that the trials actually occur. We needed the bail reform law. It was the right thing to do. We made some tweaks, all working together with the Legislature last year. That was a step forward. There's some more to do. We're going to continue that conversation. When the Legislature comes back, there's another chance to act. But right now, the focus is on the parole bill. It will make a huge difference. It will help us stop violence, period. And save lives. So, to all our colleagues in Legislature, help New York City this week. You can do something historic and something that will protect your constituents and all New Yorkers.

Okay. Let me go to what we talk about every day of course, while we're fighting the scourge of gun violence, we're fighting COVID every day and we're building a recovery for all of us. And even though we're dealing with the challenges related to violence, thank God we can see and feel the recovery around us. I was all over the city this weekend. So, many people out, so many people engaging again, feeling more freedom because we've been fighting back COVID. You can see the level of activity rising, more jobs coming back. This is what we need. And it's also going to help keep us safe because I guarantee you more recovery equals less violence. Obviously fighting back the violence helps the recovery as well. We're going to have to do all of that at once.

But let's talk about fighting COVID, which has always been the prerequisite for ending this crisis. And when it comes to that, it means vaccinations. Vaccinations equal freedom. And we've got more good news today on the vaccination front. We now have hit the lowest COVID level since the crisis began. Today's COVID positivity in New York City, 0.71 percent. So, we keep setting new and better records, pushing COVID down, down, down. Why? Because of vaccinations. As of today, 4.4 million New Yorkers have gotten at least their first dose, 4.4 million. And again, overwhelmingly folks would get their first dose come back and get their second dose. So, these are signs of something good happening. Overall doses administered from the beginning, we've now passed 8.5 million doses. So, more doses than people in the city now. This is wonderful. 8.5 million, specifically 8,520,047 doses from the beginning.

Now, what do we have to do next? We have to focus on young people. And we're having a lot of success going out to communities, reaching young people, parents more and more, want their kids vaccinated. They want this to be a summer full of joy and freedom. They want this to be the summer of New York City. So, we are connecting with parents. We're connecting with young people. This is going to be a big part of what we do from this point on. Now, we know on top of that, that some people just need a little extra encouragement, a little extra focus. So, the incentives are helping with that. We've offered tickets to the Governor's Ball, gym memberships, staycations. Thursday, we announced the first set of winners – more winners this coming Thursday. But now this week's prizes, so, if you're out there, haven't decided yet to get vaccinated, but you're interested? Here's a chance to really get a wonderful prize. I think a lot of New Yorkers will want to get vaccinated when they hear this. 10 people will win six packs of 30-day unlimited MetroCards. So, basically six months of unlimited MetroCards. This is something of tremendous value to so many New Yorkers. So, if you're out there, you've been meaning to get vaccinated, you're ready to get vaccinated, just haven't gotten around to get vaccinated? Go to one of the City-run sites, sign up to get vaccinated, qualify for these MetroCards, amazing opportunity. These contests and prizes will be going on for weeks ahead. We think it's going to make a big difference. If you're interested, go to [vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/benefits](https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/benefits).

Okay. Now, you can see the recovery growing all the time. You can see the comeback happening. But we want to amplify it. We want to make it bigger. And so, this morning we have a big announcement about a citywide celebration of New York City. A citywide moment to declare that New York City is back, a homecoming for New York City. Where New Yorkers come out together to celebrate and support our city. Where folks from all over the metropolitan region come back to their roots in the city, to support New York City's come back. This is going to be an amazing, memorable once in a lifetime week in New York City. It is the brainchild of Danny Meyer who has been serving, and I'm so appreciative, as the Chair of the New York City Economic Development Corporation Board, legendary for the work he has done in the hospitality industry and a great booster of New York City. When he came on board with our team, he said, let's do something to really pull all the pieces together. Let's have a homecoming week.

And then we said, what would be the focal point? What would be the highlight of this week? And we decided to do something classic, iconic, a massive concert in Central Park to celebrate

the rebirth of New York City. Concert will be in August. It will celebrate the summer of New York City, the comeback, and it will emphatically make the point there is no stopping New York. It's going to be a great lineup. And I know it's going to be a great lineup because we turned to one of literally the greatest figures in music industry history, Clive Davis. Brooklyn's own, Brooklyn born and bred, never forgot the city he loves. I turned to Clive, I said, I need the biggest, most extraordinary all-star lineup you can put together, heavy on New York artists. He said, I'm on it. I'm going to make it happen. So, in August, get ready for an unforgettable week, a once in a lifetime concert and a moment that really says New York City's back.

All right. As we do every day, let's do our indicators. And thank God again, the indicators give us good news. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report, 59 patients. This is unbelievable. This number is so low. The confirmed positivity, 8.47 percent, 8.47 percent confirmed positivity among the folks in the hospitals. Hospitalization rate 0.46 per 100,000. See that line just go straight down. That's what we need more of. Now, number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average. Today's report, 204 cases. Another example of just constant progress. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19. Record setting figure today, on a seven-day rolling average, 0.71 percent. People said a couple of weeks ago, oh, this is as low as it can go. Nope. It can go lower. And we're going to fight to make it lower. Go out, get vaccinated. Okay. Few words in Spanish now. I'm going to go back to the topic of how we stop gun violence.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, we turn to our colleagues in the media. And please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

**Moderator:** We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Marcos Soler, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, by Dr. Chokshi, and by Senior Adviser Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Marla from WCBS 880.

**Question:** Good morning, Mayor and everyone else on the call. The shootings over the weekend, especially the shooting of little Justin Wallace sparked a lot of debate among the candidates for mayor, with your former Sanitation Commissioner Kathryn Garcia saying there's something broken in our political system when public safety has become more about ideology than about following the data and solving the problem. What are your short-term solutions to getting these guns off the street and stopping this violence as we head into what could be a very hot and possibly violent summer?

**Mayor:** Marla, it's a combination and has to all be done at once. NYPD is getting the guns off the streets. We've been setting records this year for getting guns off the streets. That work must continue, must deepen. And I've talked to the leadership of the NYPD and they're constantly innovating new ways to get guns off the street. We need that. We need more federal cooperation to stop the flow of the guns into New York City. We need this legislation in Albany. That could happen right now, this week to help us address parolees coming back. All of these things, they are going to add up, but it's going to take intense constant work to fight back the violence. This is to me, a crucial moment for New York City. We've been through hell. We're coming back in so

many ways. The health situation is getting better all the time, our schools are coming back in September, our economy's coming back. You can see jobs coming back. The piece we got to get right now is public safety. We need help from Washington. We need help from Albany. And we're going to do everything in our power here to turn this corner. Go ahead, Marla.

**Question:** Can you tell us why the focus on State parolees? Is there evidence that parolees are committing these crimes? Why so much focus on that?

**Mayor:** Marla, this is something that our Office of Criminal Justice and I'll turn to Marcos Soler in a moment who's the director. Our Office of Criminal Justice here at the Mayor's Office has been tracking this reality. More and more in the recent months, we've seen a problem. NYPD has been calling out this reality too. We've been talking to our colleagues in Albany over the last weeks about it. This is something that we're seeing worse than what we saw in the past. And the fact that parolees are too often the victims of violence, but also the perpetrators of violence means we have to do something differently, we have to do it quickly. So, in terms of the evidence that we've seen from the beginning of COVID until now, and particularly picking up recently. Marcos Soler, would you please give a quick summary of the facts that you're seeing?

**Director Marcos Soler, New York City Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice:** Yes, Mr. Mayor. A very quick summary – we have increase of about 10 percent of all shootings being driven by people on parole to about 17 percent, when in 2020 and when the pandemic started. And we don't see any signs that it is slowing down. And there are also indicators as a Mayor indicated, [inaudible] parolees are involved in shootings as also as victims in greater rates than before.

**Mayor:** That's the bottom line, Marla. And we'll get you all the background facts. But we have been watching this trend. It's gotten worse. We need to act on it quickly.

**Moderator:** The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. First question is about the mayor's race. Mayor, you have described it as very early in the process many times, but we are now only five days away from early voting. So, I wonder your state of where things stand now? And what specifically you made of AOC endorsing Maya Wiley over the weekend?

**Mayor:** Andrew, it's not late anymore. I'll give you that. But I still think a huge percentage of New Yorkers have not fully focused and have not made their final decisions. This is probably the most fluid mayor's race I've ever seen in my life. And obviously the focus on COVID, which is where people should be focused, have been focused, the fact that life has been disrupted, that it's a June primary, not a September primary. We've got ranked choice voting for the first time. It's a very, very fluid situation. So, I think people are finally starting to focus. The investigation now, the sort of careful thoughtful look at each candidate is what's going on in the minds of New Yorkers. And what I'd say to all of you in the media is, you know, this is the last chance for you to tell New Yorkers everything that you have on each of these candidates. Because there's so many New Yorkers that really don't know these candidates yet. And it's really crucial that they all get examined. And people get to make a decision with a lot more information on the table. So,



I honestly believe a lot of people are going to decide in the last day or two. And we got to shed as much light as possible in the meantime. Go ahead, Andrew.

**Question:** I did note you didn't answer my part about AOC endorsing Wiley. So, if you'd like to, as at the start of my second question, you can. My second question is about the Central Park mega concert. How many people you would anticipate attending this event? When you expect to have the artists finalized? And whether there are any concerns, not about the outdoor gathering, but about people gathering indoors after the fact?

**Mayor:** So, on your previous point, I'm not going to prognosticate about different developments in the race. I have a lot of respect for AOC. But again, there's a lot of moving parts to this race. So, it's just too early to tell what's going on here. On the concert, it's going to be amazing. I can tell you August. I can tell you all-star lineup. Specific dates being nailed down. Obviously, Central Park. We're going to have a huge crowd. We're going to keep it safe. I think given what you saw just this morning, on the COVID positivity on June 7th, and we're talking about a concert a couple of months away, I feel very good about our ability to keep people safe, outdoors and indoors.

**Moderator:** The next is Jenna DeAngelis from WCBS.

**Question:** Good morning, Mayor de Blasio.

**Mayor:** Hi, Jenna. How are you doing?

**Question:** I'm good. Hope you're well, too. So, it's great to see the vaccination numbers – you shared the numbers going up. But when you take a close look at the numbers by demographic, vaccinations are significantly lower in Black and brown communities. There's 25 percent of the Black community fully vaccinated, Hispanic, Latino is at 31 percent. So, what's being done by the City specifically to make sure that these communities are protected from COVID and get vaccinated?

**Mayor:** Jenna, nonstop effort. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, but I'll tell you the effort at the community level is extraordinary and growing. The outreach efforts overwhelmingly are focused in communities of color, particularly on young people, more and more. Because we think that's a tremendous area to reach a lot more New Yorkers. We think a lot of parents are going to be ready to have their kids vaccinated, particularly the youngest kids. It is about engaging houses of worship. It's about being ubiquitous in public housing. We're going to do all of the above. And the numbers keep moving. Dr. Chokshi can give you a flavor of what he's seeing, but we're seeing that gap start to close. Less and less hesitancy in communities of color, more people coming forward. But we've got to be there at the moment someone is ready. And look, I mean, we've got 4.4 million New Yorkers with at least one dose. We're just going to keep driving that. It's not going to stop. We're going to keep driving it and reach people at the right moment. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And as you said, equity has been a central pillar of the vaccination campaign from the

beginning. But this phase of our vaccination campaign has revolved around convenience and conversations. Convenience in the sense of being ubiquitous as the Mayor has said, making sure that we are getting further out into neighborhoods, including those neighborhoods that do have lower vaccination rates such as in the Bronx or in eastern Brooklyn or in parts of Queens, bringing our mobile vaccination efforts there and also partnering with those community-based clinics including federally qualified health centers who have been serving those communities for decades upon decades. And the second part is around conversations. It's really about having the questions that people have about the vaccines answered by people whom they trust. That's often faith leaders, it's community-based organizations, but it's also sometimes neighbors and family members. And so, we have worked in partnership with all of those groups to make sure that people are sharing their stories about why they chose to get vaccinated, answering questions, and having those one-on-one conversations that can change minds. And we are seeing that yield improved vaccination rates and we're going to continue focusing those efforts to get as many people vaccinated as possible in the coming weeks.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Go ahead, Jenna.

**Question:** I mean, do you have a personal message to the people who still, despite, you know, people being in the houses of worship in all of these places still are just not taking it –

**Mayor:** Yeah –

**Question:** – To try to really close that gap.

**Mayor:** Thank you. I'll offer my personal message, and I want Dr. Chokshi to offer his as well. Here's what I want to say. Look, I'm going to speak as a parent, protect your children, get them vaccinated. The vaccine is safe, it's the Pfizer vaccine for kids 12 to 17. We want our kids safe. It is the number one thing we feel as parents. Here's the way to do it. It's proven, it's safe, it's free, it's effective. So, I'm appealing to parents. This is the time to protect our children with the vaccine. Dr. Chokshi, your appeal.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Thanks, Mr. Mayor. Well, I'll share what I've said to my own patients, which is that vaccines help us develop a community without disease. And that's the bottom line. We have safe, effective vaccines that have already saved lives both here in New York City, as well as around the world. And so, you know, for yourself, for your family members, for your neighbors, for our city, vaccination is the key to a safe summer, and to all of the joy particularly the things that you may have missed out on over the last few months.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Paul from the Staten Island Advance.

**Question:** Hey. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing?

**Mayor:** Good, Paul. How have you been?

**Question:** Good. Thank you. Congresswoman Malliotakis and Borough President Oddo held a press conference earlier today, essentially the Army Corps of Engineer declined to handle environmental remediation work for the massive seawall project. We're just hoping to get your reaction and see where the City stands on that work.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Paul. Yeah, this ball game ain't over. Let me tell you, I spoke to the Borough President about it. We've got to get this done. We're going to appeal to the federal government. I spoke to the Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland, on this topic. She was very receptive to understanding what the federal government could do because as you know, this is on federal land where some of the crucial work has to happen. We are not going to give up, we're going to get this done one way or another. We really have to have the federal government involvement. We need the Army Corps of Engineers, the parks service, whatever combination, the Interior Department, whatever combination to get it done, but we must get it done. So, I'm not giving up. I know Borough President Oddo is not giving up. We'll be engaging both our U. S. Senators. We got to get this done. Go ahead, Paul.

**Question:** Thank you for that. Also, a video – we published a video over the weekend of essentially a fox attacking a turkey. I just wanted to get a sense of where the City is on addressing some of the wildlife concerns in Staten island, the deer, the turkey, etcetera.

**Mayor:** Paul, that – look, an ongoing issue in Staten Island, in other parts of the five boroughs, and all over the country now. I mean, wildlife is coming into cities. It's a major change in our lives. Parks Department plays a role, ASPCA plays a role. There's different elements to the equation. We're going to keep working on our tactics to get it right. It's a tough situation because it's new and unpredictable. But, look, I appreciate that people are concerned about safety. Homeowners are concerned about their property. All I can say is we're going to keep working with the people on Staten Island to address these issues in a smart and effective and a humane way.

**Moderator:** The next is Jake Offenhartz from Gothamist.

**Question:** Hey. Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey, Jake. How have you been?

**Question:** I'm okay. I wanted to ask you about the new curfew at some parks that we're seeing. Over the weekend we saw SRG officers arrest 23 people in Washington Square. In some cases, this was violent. We also saw police seal Tompkins, East Village, without any notice to the community, hours before its scheduled closure. So, can you first say whether you think the curfew at Washington Square Park should continue this weekend and did you direct the NYPD to close down Tompkins on Saturday, or was that a decision they made on their own?

**Mayor:** On that one, it's a situation that we're seeing in a couple of places, as you said, Jake, and that's a decision that local police commanders have to make based on what they see. So, I just was not involved in that one, but I understand and appreciate that if they see a situation where it makes sense to effectuate a closure, I think that's the smart thing to do. The Washington Square

Park curfew, we've had many conversations here at City Hall and with One Police Plaza about that, I think it's also the right thing to do for this moment. I'd like to see the point come where it's no longer necessary, but we've had a series of issues and problems. And I think a proactive approach is the right way to do it. Go ahead, Jake.

**Question:** Okay. So, I guess it sounds like what you're saying is you are okay with police making a decision to unilaterally close parks without any sort of public notice to the community. I think a lot of New Yorkers would point out that seems like, kind of, an infringement on the public square. And I'm wondering what your response to that is. And I also just wanted to get you to kind of respond to what I heard from some police this weekend. Basically, we saw them shut down this impromptu dance party around a speaker. I saw them tell a band that they couldn't play at Tompkins where they've been playing for much the last year. And I heard from an officer that this is because there was no parties in city parks. Do you agree with that statement and are you concerned about the way police are enforcing these rules in public parks right now?

**Mayor:** Jake, I don't know about that statement. I didn't really fully understand that statement, but let me speak to the bigger question you're asking, and I appreciate your saying the public square and what is that balance? This one of the most open cities in the world and it will always be and it must be. When we see a recurrent pattern of problems, we've got to address them proactively. Addressing them reactively, it just doesn't work as well, and unfortunately can lead to more conflict. And I think we all agree, we need a more peaceful dynamic in our communities. So, we've learned a lot of things in the last year or two. And one of the lessons is proactive action is better. It's something that happens rarely, honestly, it's not needed in the vast majority of places, but it is needed sometimes. It's something we want to do carefully, sparingly. In all situations we understand the importance of dialogue and particularly having our community affairs officers up front, trying to resolve issues whenever possible, but sometimes the best way to avoid conflict and also address real community concerns about noise or violence is to do something proactively. So, we'll do it when necessary. I don't think you'll see it that often, but we'll do it when necessary.

**Moderator:** Next is Shant from the Daily News.

**Question:** Yeah, thanks for taking my question, Mayor. I guess, yeah, following up on Jake's question, you know, a video that circulated from the curfew enforcement over the weekend, showed officers in riot gear, chasing people through the streets. I mean, I think, you know, there were kind of flashbacks to last summer where there are much – where there were similar scenes, albeit on a bigger scale. So, I guess, you know, to put it simply is, officers in riot gear the right answer? Is there a less heavy-handed way to go about curfew enforcement if that's what this – what you want?

**Mayor:** Yeah, and I appreciate the question, Shant, because we all use that term. We're all used to that term. Good observation was made by Deputy Commissioner John Miller that when there are officers, unfortunately, confronting people who are throwing projectiles at them, most notably bottles, to put on a helmet is the right thing to do to protect the officer. That's the extent of the gear change in most cases. So, I do think it's fair to say this is a not-an-overly-dramatic action to simply provide some protection to officers. What we need to do is have folks who have

a disagreement, not throw things, talk about it, work it through whenever humanly possible. It is not the same as last summer, obviously, we don't want it to be the same as last summer. What we're going to do consistently is set clear rules, have community affairs upfront. But if, unfortunately, folks initiate violence towards our fellow New Yorkers or towards police officers that has to be addressed. That's very, very few people, Shant. Let's be clear. That's very few people at this point. When it happens, we'll address it. The vast majority of New Yorkers just want a peaceful summer. Go ahead, Shant.

**Question:** Yeah. So, thanks for that. I mean, I guess in a slightly related vein, there's this kind of new theme in the mayoral race, the two front – two of the front runners, Eric Adams and Andrew Yang, sounding strongly pro-cop, anti-budget reductions to the NYPD. That's raised criticism from people like AOC saying frontrunners might take the city back to Giuliani-style over-policing of the city, which is something – really a hallmark of your administration was fighting that style of policing. So, I guess the question to me is why aren't you coming out in favor of one of the progressives, like your former employee, Maya Wiley, who is, like, very anti-Giuliani style policing?

**Mayor:** Well, Shant, fair question, but a much more complicated reality than that. We cannot go back to the years of Giuliani when this city was horribly divided, and it was setting us back. We cannot go back to the years of Michael Bloomberg and the unconstitutional and broken use of stop-and-frisk. The best years were the six years before the pandemic. Everyone saw it with your own eyes. Crime went down six years in a row, better relationship between police and community, a constant series of reforms. That combination worked. We can get back to that. We will stop this gun violence. We will turn the corner. We can't go back to the bad old days in any sense. Some people say, bad old days, they mean the 1970s, but there was also the bad old days of Giuliani and Bloomberg when people's rights weren't respected, where there was a massive split between police and community. We can't have any of those things happen. What I anticipate is as we get past the impact of the pandemic, we will go back to the full use of neighborhood policing, full active courts, consequences for crimes, we'll turn the corner on gun violence. We'll invest more in communities, Cure Violence movement, Crisis Management System. That's the way forward. I'm watching all the candidates, Shant. And it's not as simple as you know, one wants to go back to Giuliani and the other one doesn't. It's not even close to that. There are a number of candidates who want to keep making reform and keep the city safe. And that's the direction I believe in. If at some point I think it's important to say something about specific candidates. I certainly will.

**Moderator:** The next is Katie Honan from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you?

**Mayor:** Hey, Katie, how are you been?

**Question:** I'm good. I wanted to ask a follow up on what you were speaking about earlier, particularly with the death of Justin Wallace. I know you were focusing a lot on parole and the parole law, but in this instance, I guess, what does that have to do with this instance? I don't know if they [inaudible] information about the suspect. But could you speak a little bit about

what the City will do in terms of getting – I guess, getting guns off the street, which seems to be the issue at play here.

**Mayor:** The number one thing that we need that we can't control is the efforts to stop the guns from coming here from out-of-state. Let's be honest and clear about this. The thing that would help us the most is actual federal laws to stop the massive proliferation of gun ownership that has occurred during the pandemic. So, the NYPD does constant activity to stop the flow of guns into New York City but the whole structural reality of this country is broken. That's the thing that would help us the most. But that being said, we don't have that yet. So, we have to act on every other piece of the equation. What folks at our Office of Criminal Justice will say, and the NYPD have said, are the parole issue is looming larger and larger. It's something we can fix. It's something we can address right now. We've proven it with the City jails. So, the reason we're talking about it today is, for weeks and weeks we've been trying to create some momentum in Albany. We finally have that momentum. We can get this bill done now. In combination with more police efforts to get guns off the streets, in combination with efforts to stop retaliation by the Cure Violence movement, Crisis Management System, in combination with getting the courts 100 percent up and running, in combination with gang takedowns, which you will be seeing more of coming up – we need all of these pieces to turn the tide. Go ahead, Katie.

**Question:** Thanks. And on a completely separate topic. What more can you tell us about this homecoming? It seems – so far seems a little Manhattan-centric. I know you usually have a little bit of love for the other boroughs, the outer boroughs. So, I call Manhattan an outer borough, but that's me. But what else can you tell us about what would be planned that week for the rest of the city?

**Mayor:** I appreciate Manhattan deeply, but my heart is in the whole of New York City. My heart's in Brooklyn, my heart's where I come from, and my heart's in all the boroughs that make up seven million of us. So, this focal point is in Central Park because that is obviously an iconic location and a place where we can put together an amazing, huge concert to celebrate our rebirth. But there will be major activities in all five boroughs. So, I want to be clear – more details to come, but this is very much a five-borough vision of a homecoming week. We want people to come out, participate – all the people in New York City to participate, but we also want people to come back to New York City from the whole metropolitan area. Look, folks in the suburbs and the tri-state area appreciate and love New York City. And for most of them, New York City is where the roots are. Time to come home, time to help us move forward. This homecoming week is going to be something very, very special.

**Moderator:** Last question for today. It goes to Yoav from The City.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. I just wanted to ask you what – when the last time you met or spoke with the [inaudible] was if you recall.

**Mayor:** Certainly it's been many months since I spoke to anyone connected to that organization. I can't tell you the exact day, but months and months for sure. Go ahead, Yoav.

**Question:** I just wanted to go back to the curfew at Washington Square Park. I guess there's a group of people that feel like the balance between public access to public places and the need for police to keep these areas safe, and some that are made in favor of the public safety aspect. You had the barriers up around the Columbus statues for many, many months. You had barriers outside of precincts for many months. You had full streets that were closed off in public plaza. And I just wonder, I guess, whether you think the police are managing to strike the right balance here.

**Mayor:** I do. I do. Yoav, it's a really good question. And, again, I appreciate it when Jake said, you know, the protecting the public square, I value that deeply. Look, we saw for years in this country under President Trump an assault on our democracy. I think a lot of times you and others are asking questions saying, are we protecting our democratic norms, are we protecting freedom of speech, freedom of assembly? Of course, we are. And we will always – New York City is the open city. New York City is the most small-d democratic place in the country, a place for everyone. We will always protect that. We also have gone through an unprecedented crisis that we're still living with and we had to strike a balance. And one of the things that I decided a long time ago was we were not going to take the kinds of risks that could lead to the loss of life. We were not going to see a situation of upheaval going on for months and months and months, and we were not going to see the attacks that we saw on property in some of the other cities in this country that went on for weeks or months. We weren't going to see attacks on civilians or people in uniform or police precincts. We weren't going to have any of that here. We were going to have peace. We were going to have the ability to move forward out of this pandemic. It took a lot of work to strike that balance, but it was struck. We learned lessons, there's things we have to do better, but when you're talking about parks, for example, in residential communities, places where we've seen some consistent problems, getting ahead of those problems, having an earlier closing time, being smart about it, I think is the kind of thing we do now at this moment in history to get through some of the challenges we're facing, but we will overcome those challenges. And I think this is a moment that won't last long if we all do what we need to do.

So, this is a perfect way to conclude. Look, we've been through the greatest crisis in the history of New York City. We're coming out of it really fast. COVID, lowest rates since the beginning. Jobs coming back, activity coming back, schools coming back, but there's still work to do, particularly for the summer to assure public safety and to finish our comeback. Once we do that, I think we move forward really fast and deeply back to where we were before the pandemic. We had the most jobs in our history and so many things that were working right in this city. We were the safest big city in America. We will be again. We've got work to do. We need help from Albany this week, we need help from the federal government, and we're going to help ourselves. But there's no question in my mind, we turn the corner on all of this, and we move forward. Thank you, everybody.

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