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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** July 9, 2018  
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Mayor de Blasio is back from his weeklong vacation. But before he left we learned that more than 800 children tested positive for elevated levels of lead. Much more than previously made public, that's in public housing. I am now joined by Mayor de Blasio to talk about that and more. Good evening, Mr. Mayor, and before we get to questions of lead poisoning. I wanted you if you could give us an update on migrant children being held here in New York City. It's a big, big deal. You were denied a lot of information. Have we found out more?

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Only a little more and it's not coming from the federal government. You know, we are working with the social service providers who are helping these kids who are here in New York City by last count over 300 of them. But I have appealed to the federal government repeatedly to Health and Human Services, to Homeland Security. Tell us the facts about where these kids are, how many are there, when are they going to get reunited with their families. We're not getting any of that. Obviously what's happening here though is powerful. There's been a real groundswell in this country. By the way it's coming from Evangelicals; it's coming from republicans, not just from democrats demanding that these families be reunited. And I think it's making a huge difference, but that does not mean that the federal government is giving us a clear plan, and clear facts.

**Louis:** Are you hearing even indirectly, say from the social service providers because there's some court deadlines that are coming up pretty quickly that the federal government seems to be on track to miss.

**Mayor:** Yeah, I don't have any evidence that are going to make the court mandated goals. And I think it's horrible in terms of what's happening to these children, who've been kept from their families for weeks, and weeks and some cases months. Still no end in sight, still no plan, I mean how hard is it for the federal government to simply say we have to reunify these families, we're going to do it right away, and we're going to put real resources into it. They put a lot of resources into tearing these families apart, how about they put the same focus into reunifying them as quickly as possible.

**Louis:** Not that it makes all that much difference but do you think that's negligence or malice? Is that a feature or a –

**Mayor:** Well, the policy started with malice, there's no question. The quote on quote Zero Tolerance policy was really meant to undermine the ability of people fleeing oppression and violence to get asylum and really deviated from decades and decades of practice in this country, and republican, and democratic administrations. So that was malice. I think what's happening now is probably they're grudgingly having to move off of failed policy. They're probably not feeling a lot of motivation. And then I also question how effective they are. So, we've got some more work to do.

**Louis:** Okay, let's move to the issue of lead poisoning in apartments in public housing. This number that this larger number of over 800. I guess the question I have is we talked with one of your deputy mayor's, with Herminia Palacio just the other day. And she made it sound as if the information was kind of you know, bundled in a much larger batch of information that is sent once a year to the public, to the City council. Don't families have a right to know something a little bit more actionable than that? To know if they're in an apartment that's really not healthy.

**Mayor:** They do, and that information, you're right was made public in the past, but it wasn't made public in the past, but it wasn't made public in a way that was understandable as it needed to be, and we're going to fix that. Look, it's crucial we think in terms of families, and the whole concept of our administration has been to focus on children, focus on families. I am a parent, I would never want to see my children in harm's way, I don't want to see anybody else's children – child in harm's way. We need take in effect a Vision Zero approach to lead. We need to have the same kind of thing that we found that works so well in reducing traffic fatalities, and apply to the lead issue. Now, the good news is, New York City has seen some real progress. Since 2005 lead poisoning levels are down 90 percent. That's stunning; it used to be tens of thousands of kids each year. Thank god now –

**Louis:** Is that just for NYCHA or you're talking about citywide?

**Mayor:** No, citywide. And the amazing point here that people don't understand, we need them to understand is that decline, that's a stunning decline a 90 percent decline since 2005. So now instead of tens of thousands a year it's thousands of kids but that's still plenty of kids that we have to address. Now most of them are not in public housing, they're in private housing. In fact public housing accounts for a very small percent, less than 10 percent of kids who get exposure to lead. What we're trying to do now is take a very, very rigorous approach that really once and for all addresses this issue. We've seen we can make a lot of progress; we need to make a lot more. So there's three key things we're going to do. First, within public housing we're going to go and literally go through all of NYCHA and do an inspection of every apartment, even if a child is not there, every apartment that might still have lead in it. We believe that's about 130,000 apartments. This is a massive undertaking, it's never been done by NYCHA, or the City of New York previously. We know there are tens of thousands of apartments that we can safely say don't have lead. Why because either they were built after 1978 when lead was outlawed nationally or because they have been specifically inspected thoroughly and identified as an individual apartment not having lead. There's 130,000 more that we don't have that definitive

answer on. Our goal now is to do a very intensive inspection using the latest technology, it's actually an x-ray technology which gives a very intensive look at what's happening through the different layers of paint or one thing or another. We are going to then be able to say which apartments still have lead and which no longer have any lead and then those taken off the list and we focus on our attention on the ones where there is a challenge. That's 130,000 apartments, and then we will identify them and make public what's going on with them. And of course under Local Law 1 we are consistently now inspecting and remediating apartments.

Second, we are going to do an intensive outreach to any family, again most of these families are in private housing, but public housing, private housing all families for whom a child has a lead exposure level of five micrograms or more, we will know this because doctors will have to, doctors test them, are obligated to give that information to the Department of Health under the law – any family that is identified as having that challenge, we are going to be in constant touch with them, make sure the exposures are addressed, make sure the kids get the medical care they need.

That kind of constant, intensive effort, we think will turn around the situation for a lot of kids. Kids can have an elevated level, but if you focus on them and get them the help they need, that level can go back down and stay down. And so that – and the last thing gets to your core question about transparency. We need more transparency. So what we are going to do is quarterly reports that identify the NYCHA situation as a subset of everything in the city, that's going to start next month. So that information will be out there and it will be available.

**Louis:** Wow, okay. Wow, that's a lot of information. 130,000 apartments out of I think a total of 172,000 in NYCHA.

**Mayor:** That's correct, 170 – 175,000.

**Louis:** So that's like the vast majority, like two thirds of all of the units – how long might that take?

**Mayor:** That will take a while. I mean that is something we will ramp up this year, get done I hope as much as possible next year. But the difference here is there's never been a definitive survey. You know the previous legal requirements only called for a sampling of apartments rather than literally looking at every single apartment. This issue, understandably concerns people deeply – we want to give them definitive answers. If someone is in an apartment, we want them to know from the jump there;' no lead in this apartment, there's can't be any lead in this apartment. Or there is lead and here's what we are doing to address it.

Remember this is primarily an issue for kids zero to five. It's really important for New Yorkers to understand – zero to five-years-old, that's when lead can have a more meaningful impact on health, after that much less. And that's where all the focus was up until now. But we want to be able to say – oaky here's an apartment where we don't have a problem, here's an apartment where we do have a problem, here's what we are going to do about it, keep people informed of the steps we are taking. And any New Yorker who wants to get a test of their child can call 3-1-1, they can get a free test through our Health + Hospitals Corporation. If that tests prove that

there is an exposure level of five micrograms or above, they can get again, even in private housing now, the Health Department will come in and do an inspection of their home to identify if there is lead paint. We are going to take a very aggressive approach and again I make the parallel to Vision Zero – the way we’ve marshalled out forces, a whole bunch of agencies to do Vision Zero, we are going to do that here. It’s not just NYCHA, it’s HPD, our Housing Department, it’s the Department of Health, it’s Health + Hospitals Corporation, all are going to work together.

**Louis:** So there will be a public information campaign associated with this because that was one of the big tools in Vision Zero?

**Mayor:** Absolutely because we have made tremendous progress, if we can take lead exposure down 90 percent for the children of this city since 2005, we can go that final distance and once in for all end this problem.

**Louis:** Given the shortcomings that lead to this crisis within NYCHA, are you confident that that organization can take the lead on this or is this going to be primarily the Health Department?

**Mayor:** Well the inspection of the apartments we’ve done by private contractors using the most advance technology – NYCHA will be responsible for putting together those contracts and getting them in there. Look, I have a lot of faith in what our Chair Stan Brezenoff is doing, our General Manager Vito Mustaciuolo – they have shown tremendous vigor coming in taking the bull by the horns, addressing this issue. This was their idea and I think it is very – I bought into it immediately, their idea is to say let’s actually do that count that’s never been done in history, let’s get it right once and for all. It’s going to take a lot of money, a lot of effort but people will have peace of mind and will know once and for all what’s going on. I think it’s a great idea.

**Louis:** Okay thank you for that information. Let’s take a short break now. I’ll have more with Mayor de Blasio when we come back in just a minute.

**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall and once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. Mr. Mayor I understand you have a meeting tomorrow with Andy Byford of the MTA, what’s on the agenda?

**Mayor:** Well I want to absolutely talk to him about the future of the MTA. I’ve been saying for a long time we need to come to grips with the ongoing financial needs of the MTA. Now look, I think Mr. Byford has put forward some impressive ideas already. He’s acknowledged the extent of the problem – tens of million – tens of billions – excuse me – dollars that will be needed. He’s put forward a very good plan I think in terms of buses.

What I want to say to him is next year becomes crucial, what we need to win in Albany once and for all the long term funding. Now I believe in the millionaire’s tax. I think a tax on New York City millionaires and billionaires is the best way to address this issue once and for all. There are other obvious ideas out there, congestion pricing and others, but let’s get it done. It can be done through nickel and diming. We need a sustainable, large revenue source then we can do the fundamental work that has to be done.

The second thing I want to talk to him about, let's stop the extraneous efforts. The pretty lights on bridges and you know the various amenities in stations, those things are nice, no one cares about those compared to making the trains run on time. Getting the right equipment, getting the right signal systems, focus on the basics. And then lastly what my board members have been talking which is efficiency with our money. I mean this is overwhelmingly the MTA operations in New York City are paid for by New Yorkers in a variety, their fares, their taxes, all sorts of ways.

We've seen money spent in a very inefficient way and we've seen a huge amount of money that goes to things like the East Side Access, which is not particularly productive and is tying up a lot effort and resources that we need to go into the much more heavily used subways and buses in New York City. Let's get our priorities straight and let's come up with a more efficient using money. So that's what I'm going to push him on, I'm very hopeful, I think he's bringing a lot to the table and I'm hopeful about what we can do going forward.

**Louis:** We'll look forward to hearing about that. Private waste hauling, we understand that your panel is moving near to a decision point, the City Council is going to take up some legislation, you got a letter from REBNY and a bunch of other industry players today saying that they don't like the direction in which you are going. What is the status of all of this? And I wanted to ask you in particular about Mouctar Diallo, the young man who died under the wheels of a waste hauling truck last year and really kind of galvanized a lot of people, certainly for me, made it clear that something has to be done.

**Mayor:** Something does have to be done. I think this is the time when it's going to happen. This is an industry that has had a huge number of problems. Obviously everything from criminal issues in the past, to pollution issues, lack of safety protocols, noise problems, you name it. I hope - and I think City Council is very receptive to this idea - that we can really strengthen the hand of the Business Integrity Commission, give them a lot more tools, a lot more teeth to work with in their regulation of that industry. I think the notion that our sanitation commissioner, Katherine Garcia, has put forward decentralizing the industry, make it more local is right on the money. It's going to help take trucks off the streets which is also a congestion issue.

There is a profound problem here, and I – with all due respect to REBNY – the status quo does not make sense with this industry anymore. It's time for much tougher regulation. And any industry that's associated with noise, pollution, congestion, possibly crime, certainly safety issues, it's time to get a lot tougher so I'm hopeful we will be able to do that in the coming months.

**Louis:** The argument in the other direction, as I've asked a number of people about, one of the Councilmen last week as a matter of fact said that, well prices will go up for small businesses if the kind of regulation your talking about is put in place.

**Mayor:** First of all, I mean that's always thrown out there. I – forgive me for being a little cynical about that – every time we attempt a reform in this city, the answer is prices will go up, or people will lose their jobs, you heard about a minimum wage increase, paid sick leave, it goes

on and on. Safety and health for New Yorkers comes first. So if we have an industry unfortunately associated with a lot of negative impacts, we have to change it. We can't see people dying because of an industry that is reckless and I think that will prove in the end to be the right policy, I doubt it's going to have any serious impact on cost. If it has a modest impact on cost, it's worth paying in the final analysis.

**Louis:** Okay. Let's talk a little bit of politics, was your weekend with Bernie Sanders, was that business? Was that government? Was that politics? What was that?

**Mayor:** A real warm friendship has developed between our families going back a few years. We were up in Burlington and we all had dinner together and – obviously – look it was such a privilege to have him at my inauguration and we spent time the night before and he and Jane very kindly invited us to come up this summer. We were planning to be in that part of the world and it was really wonderful. It was sweet to just spend time with him.

**Louis:** Okay, looks real nice. Let me ask you about this whole question of where things stand with progressive candidates? I talked to you right before the congressional primaries, you said look Joe Crowley is a progressive, so is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, does it – it seems to matter to some voters, significant, perhaps, number of voters. Who's the progressive that they want? Are you still sort of indifferent about that? Is there –

**Mayor:** Help me understand what you mean.

**Louis:** Well I mean – look does it matter which progressives win?

**Mayor:** Well, okay. The – I think right now what's happening in the Democratic Party, it is absolutely in every part of the country, is a good and healthy debate about our future and it's probably something we needed to do many years ago and a kind of grassroots candidate has emerged, which I think is very healthy. A lot of folks, and I'm in this camp are saying, let's get back to our roots as Democrats, progressive economic policies, populism in the best sense of the word. Really connecting to working people and showing how we can tangibly improve their lives, challenging the status quo, challenging the powerful, and look I always say one of the easiest ways to know if you're dealing with a true progressive is to ask the question are they willing to tax the wealthy more? And that's an immediate litmus test. I'm certainly willing to tax the wealthy more, I think the wealthy have seen incessant reductions in their tax levels in this country –

**Louis:** When I look – you know there was supposed to a deal, I don't remember if you weighed in and helped bless it – but between the IDC which said it would go out of business and reunite with the main Democratic caucus in the State Senate, and I turn around and every day I'm looking at more and more, you know, sort of ads, endorsements, and activity as people go out and say, you know what, we weren't part of that deal. We are challenging these former IDC members and it looks like we've got like a whole series of sort of primary faction fights going on. Are you going to get involved in that and do you think it's healthy?

**Mayor:** First I've said, you know, I'm going to make my decisions about the 2018 in this State and I'll certainly talk about it when the time comes but it's not that time yet. On the question healthy – I – look, my point of view is, I think you said a lot there, a certain group of people got together and made a deal and that's fine, a lot of other people weren't part of that and if they choose to do something that's obviously there right. But the underlying issue is what matters.

There is tremendous frustration in the Democratic Party with Democrats who people believed did not stick to the ideals of the party and allowed some of the things that have happened in this State to happen. I mean let's face it, the State has some of the most backwards election laws in the entire country, some of the most backwards campaign finance laws, a culture of corruption in Albany, you go down the list, what Democrat could feel good about these things?

And certainly in terms of the bread and butter issues, we're losing affordable housing too much of the time because we don't have the strong rent regulations we need, that's going to be up for grabs in Albany next year. Thing is a huge litmus test issue for progressives. Are you willing to go and fight for stronger rent regulations and take on the landlord lobby to do it? If you are, in my view, you are a true progressive and a true Democrat. If you're not you're working against everyday people who need affordable housing. I think there are organic things that these issues are coming and I think it's in many ways very healthy.

**Louis:** Alright good. Before I let you go, Cynthia Nixon is raffling off a bong as a fundraiser. It reminded me of that Christmas party when we were up at Gracie Mansion with the political press and you got a gag gift of a bong. You didn't touch it. You wouldn't let anybody photograph you anywhere near it –

**Mayor:** Times have change Errol.

**Louis:** Is she making a mistake you think?

**Mayor:** I think for someone like her who has said that she is in favor of legalization, you know, it obviously follows and I think if someone was not it might be a different issue but I think in her case I follows.

**Louis:** Okay for her and not for you. Good enough, thanks very much, we'll see you next week.

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