

# Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams and Acting Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanaugh Deliver Remarks at FDNY Medal Day Ceremony

June 1, 2022

**Acting Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanaugh:** Good morning. Thank you to everyone joining us here today as we honor and celebrate the extraordinary work of our firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, fire and EMS officers, dispatchers and fire marshals. Medal Day is always the best day of the year in our department and it is such a great feeling to be back here on the steps of City Hall, where Medal Day belongs, to recognize such incredibly heroic acts of valor by the men and women of the FDNY. So thank you to the mayor and everybody at City Hall for hosting us today. Let's give them a round of applause.

[Applause]

**Acting Commissioner Kavanaugh:** And welcome to the family, friends, brothers, and sisters of our honorees. Your energy, support, and joy is what makes this such a special event. Over the next hour, you will hear remarkable stories. Moments when New Yorkers cried out for help and the FDNY answered that call. When families were trapped by flames and our firefighters bravely crawled past those flames to find them and bring them to safety. In times when patients were in desperate need of medical care and our EMTs and paramedics arrived to render aid in extremely dangerous conditions.

**Acting Commissioner Kavanaugh:** Every day, FDNY members courageously risk their lives to save others and to rescue them from harm. Among the stories of heroism today, and the many awards that will be presented, it is a new medal to be awarded for the first time this year. The Yadira Arroyo medal, named for EMT Yadira Arroyo, whose life was cruelly taken in the line of duty in 2017. Several of our medals are named for those who gave their lives in service to others. People like firefighters Lawrence Fitzpatrick and Gerard Frisby and EMTs Christopher J. Prescott and Tracy Allen Lee. This new medal,

named in honor of EMT Yadira Arroyo, is a renewal of our promise to never forget her and the amazing life of service she led. Her family is also here with us today, so let's give them a round of applause.

[Applause]

**Acting Commissioner Kavanagh:** Congratulations to the inaugural recipients of this medal, EMTs Tiffany Robledo and Christopher Juanilla and Lieutenant Dwight Scott, for their well-deserved recognition for not only stopping a dangerous individual who was harming others, but for then treating the seriously injured patients with the utmost care and compassion. You truly went above and beyond and, in doing so, you are honoring the memory of EMT Yadira Arroyo.

**Acting Commissioner Kavanagh:** And when we speak of medals named for those who gave their life for our city, there is of course, legendary Chief of Department Peter J. Ganci, whose name lives on in so many ways in the FDNY, including our highest medal awarded to a firefighter each year. Congratulations to firefighter Darren Harsch of Squad 270, who receives this prestigious award named for one of the bravest of the brave, for his rescue of a fellow firefighter from a major collapse inside a burning building in Queens. To save the life of anyone is an incredible act. To save the life of a fellow member is another level of gratification and reward for our members and several of them are honored along with firefighter Harsch today for their tremendous life-saving efforts at that fire.

**Acting Commissioner Kavanagh:** To all of our members honored today, thank you for your extraordinary bravery. I know you will all say, again and again, "I was just doing my job," and that is true, but you did so much more. The impact of your acts will be felt by the people you saved across the city for generations to come. And someone will thank someone in uniform today because of what they saw here at this ceremony. You demonstrated once again why the FDNY is truly the best Fire Department in the world. Thank you all. Congratulations, once again, enjoy the celebration and the day and stay safe. Thank you.

[...]

**Mayor Eric Adams:** I want to start my comments with a question. How many of you here in the audience, how many of you are mothers of firefighters? Just raise your

hands. You are the one that got my attention. As I was watching you, I thought about my mother, who transitioned last year when I was campaigning. I remember retiring, walking off the stage and hugging mommy. And I felt the full weight of her body in my arms. She did every one of the 22 years that I did as a police officer.

**Mayor Adams:** My younger brother, Bernard— Mom would not sleep until she heard from us and knew that we got home safe. And although we are honoring the men and women who carry out the courageous duties, doing it because we felt it was the right thing to do, there's something special about a mother of a firefighter or a police officer or EMT or EMS. They realize every morning when their son or daughter performs their tour of duty, they realize at any moment, someone can knock at the door and say their baby's not coming home. But in spite of that, they hold rosemary beads, they pray, they hope that they can reach a point that they can finish their career and go on with their lives.

**Mayor Adams:** So this is a moment for them as well. This is a moment to say thank you. Thank you. Thank you for the families who are here. Thank you for these babies who are sitting on the laps of their moms and dad and grandparents, that they don't get the full clarity and understanding of what this moment represents, but with time, they're going to reflect on this. And, thank you, yes, this is home of the free and the land of the brave. And that's why we call it the bravest.

**Mayor Adams:** I just want to ask you to do something for me today that I'm going to continue to say every time I'm in front of a microphone. Let's go home and read the Pledge of Allegiance. I think we've lost who we are as a country. I'm proudly to pledge my allegiance to the flag of United States of America. This is who we are. This is who we are. Now I say this over and over again. This is an American moment. These are American families. These are American heroes. It doesn't matter if you are in the military field, fighting a battle of international warfare or if you're dealing with domestic violence right here.

**Mayor Adams:** We should never allow people to interpret who we are. Yes, bombs bursting in air gave proof through the night that our flag is still here. Our flag is here because of these men and women that we're honoring today. Many of them are part of the military or former members of the military. You're in the armed services. You're ready to lead. Ready to lead. And we're not perfect. We're not perfect, and we don't have to be. Because valor is not perfection. It's dedication. It's commitment. It's loving

what you do. And I love being the mayor of the city of New York because I love the people that are in the City of New York. And so we honor you today. We know the commitment and sacrifices. You know what? We don't always get it right. We don't always get it right, but today we're getting it right. We're saying to the men and women that put their lives on the front line, thank you. Thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** And we're saying it not as a ceremonial moment, but from the bottom of our heart, thank you. I saw the fire in the Bronx. I saw the soot and smoke on the firefighters that came out. I was there on Queens when you lost one of your heroes. I watch every day as my EMTs and EMS members go and respond to dangerous environments. So words may not mean a lot, but it's meaningful today. So to the firefighters who are here at this impressive display of support for your brothers and sisters, to the family members, to the children, to all of us, to those of us who consider ourselves New Yorkers and who consider ourselves Americans, this is a great moment for us. Thank you very much.