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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE U.S.
CONFERENCE OF MAYORS' WINTER CONFERENCE PLENARY SESSION**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Mayor Landrieu. I really thank you for your leadership in this organization and for pulling us toward this kind of conversation, Mitch. Anyone who spends time with Mitch Landrieu understands how much heart he brings to this work and I know what you've done – devoted to the youth of your city. This is the conversation that we need to have here and all over this country.

I want to of course thank my colleagues who just gathered in the panel. All of them are doing such important work in their cities – Mayor Fischer, Mayor Barrett, and Mayor Pugh.

In a moment I'm going to speak very briefly because we want to get on to a real hero, and I want to say with humility that a lot of what we've been able to do in my city and I imagine it's true in a lot of other cities when it comes to reaching our youngest children in particular a lot of that was one person who actually got us all to think about these issues as a nation decades ago. I think it's safe to say if Marian Wright Edelman had not started the national conversation, had not forced all of us recognize how important early childhood education is, I'm not sure we would have made the progress we've made, I'm not sure it would have been possible without that one indispensable voice and that visionary understanding.

So, you're going to hear from her a moment but I'd like you applaud her right now.

Marian Wright Edelman, thank you.

[Applause]

And that has meant in my city that we committed – number-one agenda item when I took office four years ago was pre-k for all our kids, full-day high-quality pre-k. We achieved that goal. It is having an amazing impact for our families and now we are setting an even more audacious goal, 3-K, I call it. We want every three-year-old to have early childhood education for free. And we think that will change the future of our entire city.

It's not only about lifting a burden from the parents in the here and now, parents who have to work, parents who do not have money – working class, middle class parents who don't have money for early childhood education programs which can cost easily \$500 to \$1,000 a month and up but also it is changing the trajectory of our school system and our city because every child, equally, will get a strong start.

I'm very, very hopeful about what that means. But I want to talk to you about another piece – and I'll be very quick – another piece of the equation when it comes to our young people and that is – and we heard in the previous panel – the relationship between our young people and the larger society around them and most especially with our police officers and how much we have to change that and how much we can change that.

And I want to use the example of my city and I want to tell you we've been through our share of tough times. New York City a couple of decades ago was a painfully dangerous place and the relationship between police and community was often fraught.

And even though we got safer over the last couple of decades, the relationship between police and community continued to be tense until just a few years ago because of policies that were actually creating a rift. There was too much focus on arrests. There was the unconstitutional use of the policy of stop-and-frisk. What this did was create not only a rift between police and community, it created an institutionalized disrespect for young people of color and in particular for young men of color.

And you know in my city that means we were literally as a matter of official policy denigrating the very people who would be the majority of our city in our future and who we would depend on to produce the leaders of our future. It was so painful to watch.

And I heard this from parents, I heard it from grandparents that they put their heart and soul into trying to bring their kids up the right way, trying to give them the right role models, the right ideas. And then because of a policy that made our officers encounter so many young people in a way that treated them like they were suspects of a crime no matter what they had done, no matter if they had done anything – that good work of parenting, all the positive examples were being undercut.

By the way, our officers didn't like it either because they were not able to do the job they wanted to do in fighting crime and building a bond with communities. They were filling out quotas and it wasn't getting us anywhere. We changed those policies.

And I have to tell you how quickly change can come. We said that we did not buy, in New York City, a conventional wisdom that was handed to us. The previous assumption had been either you get safety or fairness but you can't have both. You can have law and order or you can have respect for all people but you can't have both.

And I and a lot of other people – there was a whole movement around this – said no, we must find a way to have safety and fairness walk hand in hand and I guarantee you, and every mayor in this room knows when you put forward an idea there will be plenty of naysayers – the

naysayers said, no it's a stark choice and if you bend towards a more just society you will pay the price with chaos and disorder and growing crime.

I will have to note you this is still a message unfortunately we hear too often from the White House and the Justice Department, even though in our city and other cities as well, we keep proving that that previous mythology was false. I can report to you today that New York City is the safest big city in this nation. I can report to you today that we in the year 2017 had crime levels that were last experienced in New York City in the 1950s, that the last time we had this few homicides in New York City, the Dodgers were still playing in Brooklyn.

[Laughter]

That's how much change has happened but it didn't happen because of policies that emphasize force and arrest and aggression. It happened through policies that emphasize trust and building a bond between police and community and trying to actually build human relationships.

Our vision of neighborhood policing instructs our officers in an entirely different way. It instructs them to de-escalate conflict. It instructs them to recognize the opportunity to build those human relationships.

Our Chief of Department Terry Monahan said the other day – he said, look we're inventing an entirely new type of policing because it shakes the foundations of what we assumed before and now puts the emphasis on the human relationships. Guess what that has resulted in – officers now learning the names of community members, simple things like saying good morning, giving them their own cell phone number and email address. And what is happening? Those officers are getting a lot of very powerful, productive communication from the community, community members coming to them, helping them to know what they need, where is an illegal weapon, where is a gang problem about to emerge, where are drug dealers operating. This information that officers had to search for in the past, community members are now giving them proactively.

And they feel, and I've heard it from our officers and I've heard it from our neighborhood residents – our officers feel because now they are staying in the same community longer with the mandate to build those relationships, our officers feel this is my community to protect and the community residents feel these are our officers and we are here to protect them too. That bond, that mutual respect that trust starts to permeate. And it has resulted in lower levels of crime. It is not just feel good, it has resulted in lower levels of crime.

So I'll finish up with this point – we believe fundamentally in New York City, that we have become the safest big city in America because we turned to our communities, not away from them. Because the human factor matters a lot more than the conventional wisdom ever recognized. Because when you teach officers things like de-escalation of conflict and implicit bias training to help every one of us as human beings weed out the biases we all grew up with, every one of us – take them out of our work and actually see each person as the individual they are. It opens up a line of communication that's extraordinary.

And nowhere is that more deeply felt than among our young people. And I could give you example, after example that I've heard from our officers of how they are now engaging in real

conversation with young people – understanding what they are feeling more but also gaining their trust so the young people also want to talk to them, want to work with them.

I'll give you one quick vignette. I was at a meeting with some of our police leaders from Brooklyn and I asked them how the neighborhood policing intuitive was going and they told me, you know, different numbers, different examples. And then one of our captains of a precinct said to me, oh you know we are doing a lot of things with the community like for example the prom dresses. And he just started on to another sentence and I said wait a minute captain, what do you mean the prom dresses?

And he said well, at the precinct we started talking to a lot of the young people and a lot of the teachers and they said one of the real challenges was, you know, the prom is something that kids look forward to their whole lives and there are a lot of young people who couldn't afford the right clothing and a lot of young women in particular felt very self-conscious about that so the precinct took a collection to buy some of these young women prom dresses so they could feel that incredible moment in their life was all they hoped it would be. Think about what that communicates to all the other young people and to the families of that neighborhood that their officers cared enough and understood enough about them to do that for them.

So my friends, I just leave you with this – when you hear stories like that and you see them in action but you also see the total impact it can have, that that building of trust can result in so much more safety and can create a reality where everyone actually feels they are on the same team. It's not easy, it's not perfect but it is working. And if one thing summarizes the work of mayors, who understand the grassroots better than anyone – we are the builders of trust. We don't care who is out there trying to divide us in our society, we are the builders of trust and trust can lead to a safer society and a society that truly respects our young people, that's the way forward. Thank you so much.

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