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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS SIGNS PACKAGE OF BILLS TO IMPROVE
DIVERSITY WITHIN FDNY**

Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh: All right. Thank you everybody for being here. I'd like to acknowledge everybody who's up here with me. Of course, the mayor will speak shortly. Our chief of training, Frank Leeb, Deputy Mayor Banks who oversees the Fire Department, the speaker of the City Council, our Congress member — I've promoted you, sorry — our councilmember and chair of the fire committee, Joann Ariola, our CEO, Kwame Cooper, and the president of the UFOA, Jim McCarthy. Thank you everybody for being here.

This is a very special day for me. This is an issue that I have worked on not just at the Fire Department, my entire career has been about creating positive change for the City of New York and certainly positive change for an already great place, the New York City Fire Department. So it is my incredible honor to be standing here today with my partners in change and folks who I know feel as passionately as I do about the strength of diversity of the city and all of the wonderful things that diversity can do for our department, for our team.

I have said this over and over since I was appointed a few weeks ago, change and tradition can live side by side, and I know that because I have lived it. My entire life has been about honoring the greatest traditions of my family, even as we've incorporated change and wonderful new traditions into our lives. It has always made us better. I really think that is the story of the city. It's the story of the Fire Department. I know that this is an organization that we talk about with tradition, and it certainly has those great traditions. We will always be brave and honorable, but change has also been a fundamental part of our story and of the City's story. Without change, we would not be here. It is how we have risen from our darkest days. We've adjusted to the future.

Right now we look forward into a really great future, a new horizon for our city and our department. I'm so proud to be here celebrating that with my partners in government, and especially proud to be doing that alongside someone who has again lived those values. The 110th mayor of the City of New York, who has worn a uniform, who has spoken up for what is right even when it is hard, and is now leading us and guiding this agency. So I'm so proud to be here, so proud to be standing alongside him as he signs these bills, the 110th mayor of the City of New York, Eric Adams.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thank you. And that was really a powerful commentary because it does sort of lay out our pursuit. I think sometimes when we are moving in that direction, people tend to believe we want to tarnish tradition, and it's not. And that is, as the commissioner stated, that was my life. I appreciated every day of wearing the uniform of a member of the New York City Police Department, watching my kid brother follow me, and several of my first cousins followed me. It was a rich tradition, but they needed some change and I advocated for that change. And that's what we are here today. There's something that my high school classmate, the speaker of the City Council, Adrienne Adams, the two of us, knew that if we were going to take these positions, we were going to take the positions with the understanding of how we allow change in tradition to live side by side. And that comes with diversity.

Today we acknowledge two police officers who jumped on the tracks to save the life of a New Yorker. One of them was from Bangladesh, the other one was from Haiti. Our city is changing. Our city is evolving, I think it's evolving for the better. And when we allow the change to embrace the tradition we make ourselves a better place. No matter who we are in these various places of profession, at one time we were locked out. At one time, we were denied access, and through the change of time, we were allowed to open the doors to all groups and we produced a better product because of that.

And that was reflected, I believe, on November 5th, four of New York City bravest dangled from a rope, 20 stories above ground as they rescued their fellow New Yorkers from a burning building. We acknowledged them last week, and it's something we were going to continue to do, to point out what our first responders and members of the finest, the bravest, the boldest, and our healthcare professionals are doing every day. Those firefighters did not worry about their gender, ethnicity, or background of their colleagues or the people they were rescuing, they put their lives on the line for their fellow New Yorkers. They trusted each other to get the job done. Even as I sat here today and watched the different troops walk by holding the flag in front of them, you see that rich tradition and that comradery being built up. It starts here at the academy.

Today, I will be signing into law five bills that continue to promote diversity within the FDNY. Diversity that reflects both the demographics and the spirit of our city. And all of these bills have a significant reason and purpose. Intro. 516-A sponsored by Speaker Adrienne Adams requires the FDNY to recruit and retain firefighters from underrepresented groups and post an annual report on its efforts. Intro. 519-A sponsored by Councilmember Joann Ariola requires a survey of firehouses so that we can upgrade facilities to create a working environment that is suitable for a mixed gender workforce.

Intro. 552-A sponsored by Councilmember Kevin Riley requires the FDNY to produce a report on the demographics of employees stationed at each firehouse broken down by gender, race, or ethnicity, as well as the demographics of the residents who live within the immediate service area of each fire company. Intro. 553-A also sponsored by Councilmember Riley requires the department to offer trainings on diversity, inclusion, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment.

And Intro. 560-A sponsored by Councilmember Nantasha Williams requires the FDNY to submit an annual report on equal employment opportunity complaints and the actions including disciplinary actions taken in response to those complaints.

And I want to thank Speaker Adams and Councilmember Ariola, Riley, and Williams again for sponsoring these bills and helping us to build an inclusive, stronger, bolder, braver Fire Department. And we are excited about each step we take towards diversity, it makes us better as a city and it makes us better to do our job as first responders. Thank you.

Commissioner Kavanagh: Another friend of the FDNY and an advocate, and certainly a first in her own right, as well as the mother of one of our future leaders, a paramedic in FDNY. So she is truly family to us. The speaker of the New York City Council, Adrienne Adams.

City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams: Thank you so much, commissioner. It is such an honor to stand here and call you our commissioner. It is such an important day, good morning everyone, it's an important day for the future of New York City, the Fire Department, and I also of course want to thank Mayor Adams for hosting us here on Randalls Island for this important bill signing ceremony. Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. I also want to thank my colleagues in the City Council for their leadership to advance this legislation that's being signed today, especially Councilmembers Kevin Riley and Nantasha Williams, the Black, Latino and Asian Caucus and Councilmember Joann Ariola, chair of our Council's Committee on Fire and Emergency Management. We could not have done it without your work and your support. I also, of course, want to again acknowledge our Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh, who is the first woman commissioner, I don't need to tell you that, of our city's Fire Department.

As the largest Fire Department in the entire country, responding to over 1 million emergencies every year, members of the FDNY exemplify bravery, courage, and sacrifice. They truly are without question New York's bravest. And as the mother of an FDNY paramedic, I know how hard our first responders work, how much they care and sacrifice for our city, and how much they mean to all New Yorkers. Yet for many decades, the FDNY has struggled to provide opportunities for all New Yorkers to serve our city. It's not representative of our city's rich diversity. And we must acknowledge these shortcomings if we want to make progress. Simply put, the diverse makeup of our city's neighborhoods has not been reflected in the Fire Department, and that's an outcome we can't accept.

The Fire Department, like many fire departments around the country, are disproportionately made up of white men. Only eight percent of our firefighters are Black, 13 percent are Latino, and just two percent are Asian. Less than one percent of our city's firefighters are women. Taken together, the racial and gender disparities are not just staggering, they're bad for the department, the communities they serve, and public safety. We undoubtedly celebrate the historic appointment of Commissioner Laura Kavanagh as the FDNY's first woman leader. But the reality is that more work is necessary to address the diversity of the department.

For decades, advocates and organizations like the Vulcan Society have fought to advance changes that the legislation passed by the Council aims to achieve. Many of our Black, Latino and women firefighters themselves have sounded the alarm about the need for their equal representation and treatment in the department in order to succeed in making the department more diverse. Their calls were not always heard, supported or considered, but indeed that's changing. This Council has been focused on advancing solutions to correct historic injustices,

including the lack of diversity and exclusionary practices that have prevented applicants of color and women from becoming firefighters and succeeding once they are firefighters.

My bill, introduction 516-A, requires the FDNY to develop and implement a concrete plan to recruit and retain firefighters from diverse racial and gender backgrounds and report on those efforts. The various parts of this legislative package should not be overlooked and together provide a comprehensive approach. It's not enough to just diversify the ranks of the FDNY through recruitment. As a city, we must ensure that our city's firefighters, like all municipal workers, are protected from harassment, discrimination, and other forms of bias. Firefighters of color and women in the department must be treated equally and have the same opportunities for advancement in their careers. This is how we create a fairer, more just and more equitable city.

Today, alongside my colleagues in the Council, I'm so proud to be here to witness the signing of the legislation we've championed with advocates of this decade's long struggle. Our work is not done, but we're another step closer to achieving the equity that we deserve and is needed to make us safer. So thank you again, to all those who have been a part of this struggle for justice and equity, including many who were not previously able to benefit from these changes, we dedicate this work and its accomplishments to your efforts. Thank you very much.

Commissioner Kavanagh: Thank you. Another friend and advocate for the New York City Fire Department and also someone who I believe counts many of our members as her constituents in the Rockaways, Councilmember Joann Ariola.

City Council Member Joanne Ariola: Thank you. Thank you, commissioner, Mr. Mayor, and Madame Speaker, it really is an honor to stand here as the prime sponsor of Intro. 519-A many of my constituents, as the commissioner said, are firefighters. Many of those firefighters are women, and they visited my office and said that they just don't have the privacy in the facilities that they need in order for locker rooms and for rest areas. And we immediately spoke with the speaker's office and with the mayor's office and with our commissioner, and that's why I was so proud that we are now at a point where we are going to survey firehouses and where they can, the female firefighters will be afforded the rest area that they need, the locker rooms that they need and the privacy that they need.

As chairman of the Fire and Emergency Management Committee, I was honored to be able to shepherd these bills through to a unanimous vote to bring them to the floor of the City Council so that they could be presented today to be signed into law by our mayor. I thank you for the privilege and the honor to do so, and I commend my colleagues in government, the speaker, Councilmembers Riley and Nantasha Williams, and everyone else who works so hard to bring these bills forward. Thank you.

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

Commissioner Kavanagh: All right. Thank you so much. FDNY has always set the bar for the fire service and we will in this area as we have in all others. So thank you so much and time to sign some bills.

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

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