

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** July 24, 2020, 11:05 AM  
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW**

**Brian Lehrer:** It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC and time now as every Friday at this time, for our weekly Ask The Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian. How are you?

**Lehrer:** I'm doing okay. Thank you. I'm curious first, how you're continuing to take stock of the NYPD as an organization? Last week, and we didn't have an Ask The Mayor last week, because I was off, the New York Times had a story based on more than 60 videos that show the police using force on protestors during the first ten days of demonstrations in the city after the death of George Floyd. It said a review of the videos shot by protestors and journalists suggest that many of the police attacks often led by high-ranking officers, were not warranted. In instance after instance, the police were seen using force on people who do not appear to be resisting arrest or opposing an immediate threat to anyone unquote. So I would like to know if you read that story and if it has affected what kind of systemic review you're doing of police behavior?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Brian, I want to talk about the big picture with policing in a second, but the bottom line is every single video that comes forward is assessed by the NYPD. We also, City Hall of course, review them. And the idea is to go and systematically, whether it's something from the protest weeks ago or whether it's something that happens now, which again, I hope is a rarity, but whatever it is, there's going to be a full review. Now, a lot of times that review is a lot more than just the video that is seen publicly. A lot – when you bring in all the body camera footage and every other available piece of information, a lot of times there's more to the story. But yeah, every single one will be reviewed. And what I want to do, and I don't think we've done this clearly enough, and I said it today in my press conference. We need to create a very consistent regular process where people can see updates on each and every one of those videos and know what the determination was. Because I think people deserve it. I think if there's a reason that an officer needs to be modified or suspended quickly, that should be clear. If they don't need to be, then that should be an answer and why. If there's follow up, a bigger discipline, that should be clear. We're going to be able to show all this now because as you know, and something I fought for for years was to get the law changed in Albany, so we could be transparent about police discipline. And we're now able to do it. I want to get this now to be the constant reality that people can see visibly.

But the other thing I want to say real quickly is that I want us to also realize while we're catching up on those videos, I really want us to focus now on binding together, police and community to

fight what has been a real challenge in recent weeks with shootings. And I honor the meaning of the protest and we're working on the reforms, but we also have a lot of work to do on the ground to address real issues around safety and stopping violence.

**Lehrer:** And obviously the City has to address the shootings. But based on that article and the recent disbanding of the plainclothes anti-crime unit for being too aggressive, has your mayoralty been a failure in reinventing the NYPD after ending stop-and-frisk, which was a central promise that you ran on to get elected?

**Mayor:** Brian, I respect you greatly, but the question, I just can't believe you would ask that and I'll tell you why. Because for six years we consistently drove down crime while reforming and changing the NYPD. It was not just ending stop-and-frisk. It was neighborhood policing, de-escalation training, implicit bias training, body cameras on all our patrol officers, a huge series of changes, that bluntly everyday people in neighborhoods around the city felt and told me they felt. And I think a lot of people are focused on a few weeks of protest, and that's not an unfair thing to focus on. But I think many people who didn't deal with the NYPD day in and day out over years and years in neighborhoods of working class people all over the city, may have missed some of the changes. But the changes have been very deep and very real. The anti-crime unit, that was my administration decided to make that change. And that as a unit, as we looked out over time, and certainly the Commissioner felt this strongly, although it had achieved some real things in getting guns off the street, he really came to believe there was a better way to do it. Now that's about 800 officers out of 36,000. So that's one piece of many, many pieces of reform that happened.

**Lehrer:** Six and a half years in. But the –

**Mayor:** Yeah six and a half years in, but Brian, it was not something we felt in the beginning. And as we experienced the other changes, the Commissioner came to the view that there was a better way to do it. Not every change and reform is evident on day one. Some of it has to be learned through experience. But the consistency of this reform agenda, I mean, it's clear as a bell.

**Lehrer:** Well, is it clear as bell? The news organization The City reports today that your administration did not disclose a report assessing your community policing initiatives, the long term ones that you're talking about, produced by the company Guidehouse and still you tout community policing as a success without citing metrics. So –

**Mayor:** Well, I couldn't – Brian, Brian respectfully, I don't know about that report honestly, but it's called – neighborhood policing is what we call it, not community policing, which was a previous and different initiative. But the six years of declining crime, the reduced use of force, again, Brian at a certain point people have to decide, do you want to look at all the facts or not? I've said on your show in 2019, we had 180,000 fewer arrests then last year of Bloomberg, but we've made the city safer at the same time. We have the lowest mass incarceration since the 1940s in this city. These are fundamental changes. And use of force 2018, 17 times a New York City police officer fired their gun in a confrontational setting like addressing someone else firing a gun. 17 times in the entire year, 2018. That's massive reduction in use of force. These things have to be paid attention to. And if honestly, if some observers or some folks who do the commentating, don't want to pay attention to these fundamental facts that affected tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people, okay. They can focus on just what they want. But

I'm telling you, I'm out in neighborhoods all around the city and people know that the fundamental nature of policing changed in this city.

**Lehrer:** What did the Guidehouse report tell you? And will you release it to City Council? Council Member Alikca Ampy-Samuel of Brownsville is quoted in the article in The City saying she'd like to see the report as soon as possible. And I guess questions, why she had to learn about it from a reporter.

**Mayor:** Yes, I don't know what's in that report. I don't know what the status is. I know that a lot of work that was being done was disrupted by the coronavirus crisis. But again, I'd have to get more information about it. Whenever it's complete, anything like that of course is made public.

**Lehrer:** Right. I gather, again, the article suggests that it's complete because the contract was to not pay them until it was complete. And they've been paid. That's all I know.

**Mayor:** Yeah again, Brian, I just don't know the facts of it. And I think it's one report. But again, trying to urge you to look at beyond one report from one organization, which again, when complete, of course we will make public. I'm trying to talk about life as it's lived in our neighborhoods. And I really think we should ground this conversation, because when I've been out recently in Harlem, in Bed-Stuy, in East Harlem, talking to people about what's happening and the concerns they have about violence and the desire to find a way to work with the NYPD, keep building that relationship. But of course, always constantly create more respect and more reform. This is what's really going on, on the ground in our community. So I don't know about this report, we'll certainly get you it as soon as it's ready. But the bigger question is how do we keep the city safe and continue to reform the NYPD? And that's what we're doing right now.

**Lehrer:** Lauren in Brooklyn. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Lauren, thank you for calling in.

**Question:** Oh, hi, Brian. Thank you so much. I'm sorry, please excuse my two-year-old in the background. So Mr. Mayor, you know, you talk about what's really going on in the city and I'm a public defender in Brooklyn. So the Office of Court Administration is all of a sudden opening the courts to in-person appearances. And I think that that is in direct response to the false statements you made that the spike in shootings is because courts are closed. We've been operating virtually. I know I heard you say that gun prosecutions aren't happening, which is patently false. I have arraigned gun cases multiple times during COVID. So now we have a situation where clients and attorneys are being forced to go to court in unsafe conditions. The ventilation systems in the courts are very old. We had been working with health experts to try to ensure that this was done safely. OCA was working with us and then suddenly decided they were no longer interested in what we had to say. Sorry. And you know, suddenly we're being forced to go back to court. So I'm in a high risk category. I have plenty of clients who are high risk. As you know, the majority of people who have cases in criminal court and family court are Black and Brown. They've already been hit disproportionately by COVID and now we risk another massive outbreak in this city. And we, you know, we risk people of color, again, being affected disproportionately. I don't know why you won't stand up to OCA and tell them that this is dangerous?

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor?

**Mayor:** Lauren, I appreciate the question. Obviously, look, anyone who has particular vulnerabilities, we got to do everything we can to protect, but – and I think there are ways to do it. Because we're constantly building back the city, restarting elements of the private sector, public sector, you name it, and finding ways to make it safe for people. So OCA of course, should do everything to make sure that each individual situation is addressed. But I -- you know, you and I will just part company, because I've been talking to DAs. Again, I'm telling you, I believe they should. And I join you in saying that they should, and I think they can. But I'm going to just -- we're going to defer because I have been talking to DAs, I've been talking to police officials and I believe them that there is nowhere near the level of activity that happened. I mean, it was just a pure factual statement. Sure, have there been some prosecutions? Sure. There's nowhere near the level of court activity that we had as recently as February, before the coronavirus. And we do not see the criminal justice system functioning.

And I didn't say it was the only cause of the shootings. And when people say that respectfully, you don't dignify your argument when you say, take very complex things I've said, and then represent it wrongly. The shootings have many, many causes. But one of the things that is holding us back from addressing it is we don't have a functioning court system. We have to have a functioning court system. If there's a way to do it, that, you know, specifically works around the health vulnerabilities any individual has, well then we have to go find that way. If there's ways to use remote activity that works? Great, but it's not an option to have a court system because it is one of the things contributing to our – the challenges we're facing as we're trying to address violence. And violence is taking people's lives. I mean, I was with the mom and the grandmother of the one-year-old child killed in Bed-Stuy. You know, they're dealing with a loss and there's other people in those communities who are dealing with losses and they want to see it stop. So, we have to have a court system functioning to address that.

**Lehrer:** And, Lauren, thank you for your call. Is the new partnership between the NYPD and community anti-violence groups showing any results yet?

**Mayor:** Oh, absolutely. And, Brian, it's a very important question. This is another one of the reforms we've made, which, again, I would urge folks who are observing and commenting and those in the media who actually want to get the bigger story to not just be focused on individual videos, but actually look at the big things that have happened. Years and years, we've been increasing funding deeply for the Cure Violence movement and the Crisis Management System. These are grassroots people in communities of color, some of whom, once upon a time, had their own trouble with law, who came back, and wanted to fight violence and decided to be interrupters of violence, mediators to stop violence. They've had stunning success and we have plenty of evidence of how it correlates to reduced shootings in many, many neighborhoods. Famous example, Queensbridge Houses, biggest public housing development in New York City. It went a whole year without a single shooting recently. And this was a place that for decades saw constant shootings.

So, the NYPD recognizes that this is an important piece of the equation. Now, these are credible messengers, Brian, which means they do not work in direct coordination with the NYPD. They are community-based people who keep their own independence, but there's a respectful relationship and an understanding that some of the most profound ways of stopping violence are community-based solutions. And I've been trying to highlight it more and more, including my

morning press conferences to show New Yorkers it's not just someone with a gun and badge. Sometimes it's someone who doesn't have a gun, doesn't have a badge, doesn't have a uniform, but is a member of a community who can best convince others to turn away from violence.

**Lehrer:** Another policing question, then we're going to move on to the virus. Rich on Staten Island, you're on WNYC. Hi, Rich.

**Question:** How are you doing guys? I have a question on the police budget. I understand there – they pushed back the current class, it was 1,163 and they moved eight people out of plaque enforcement, but has there been any analysis of police people – police officers assigned to non-police officer duties within the department?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Rich, that's a great question, and that's exactly what Commissioner Shea and his team have been doing, which is – we started early on in administration with civilianization, which is taking roles that were, you know, desk jobs handled by police officers that could be better handled or well handled, I should say, by civilians, equally handled civilians, and then that'll allow the police officer to be out in the community, doing what they were trained to do. Now what we're also seeing is there's more ways to get officers into frontline responsibilities from different types of units that can still get their job done with fewer people or different approaches. So, this is one of the ways the Commissioner addressed the current budget situation. It was actually to surge a bunch of officers out of other responsibilities into communities where they were needed most.

**Lehrer:** You put a Black Lives Matter mural on Fifth Avenue in front of Trump Tower, I guess to get in Trump's face for the rest of his life. But when actual Black Lives Matter protesters camp out under your window at City Hall and you've come under so much criticism and they try to stay there while the protest era goes on, you have them removed in a pre-dawn police raid. Is there any contradiction there?

**Mayor:** No, because it's not what you're described, respectfully. There was a period where there was a protest and we respected that protest and people around the city were saying they wanted a reevaluation of the police budget. And we ended up taking money out of the police budget, putting into youth programs, social services, rec centers in communities, broadband access, a whole host of things. When that was done, when the budget was done, literally the next day or two, a number of the protest leaders decided, whether they liked the final product entirely or not, but they had gotten their point across and some change occurred and they decided to go and protest in other ways or do other activities. And that grouping got smaller and smaller constantly. And what it became more and more was a place where a lot of homeless individuals were, it was getting less and less safe, less and less healthy. And we assessed it and we gave time to see exactly what's going on, but it was clear. It had become something very different and it was time to remove it. And I think it was the right thing to do.

**Lehrer:** Is there any lesson in the reaction of some of the homeless people or even the fact that they were there, finding some comfort there. Gothamist quotes one man identified as Romeo Thibou who says, 'like I was saying this whole time I was inside the park, when this finally does get shut down, I'm going to go right back around the corner and go back to being homeless. It feels like I'm homeless again. It's the same thing as before, but it's like a sense of comfort is gone.' A quote of that individual. My question is, is there any lesson from the statement like that

for the way the City provides for homeless people compared to how the spontaneous community did?

**Mayor:** Well again, no, I don't think there is and I'll tell you why, because I think you're reading into it and I think if you look at what's happened during the coronavirus crisis in terms of offering real shelter to homeless folks so they can get their fundamental health issues, mental health issues, substance misuse, whatever their challenge is, get it addressed and not go back to the street. We've actually seen a number of folks who have made the decision, I think, because of the disruption of the crisis to come in. We have a huge homeless outreach operation with the sole goal of giving people a long term better option that ultimately leads to permanent affordable housing. And, again, this has been something we've done on a massive scale, well over a hundred thousand people were in our homeless shelters. We got them to affordable housing. Folks who are on the street and dealing with profound problems were able to get help for free, every step along the way, to address mental health issues or substance issues, or be reunited with their family. We have that methodology. We've been deepening it for years now and that's available to anyone and that's a hell of a lot better than someone being out in the open in some kind of grouping that actually had become very unsafe and very unhealthy.

**Lehrer:** Gale, in Queens, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Gail.

**Question:** Good morning. Thank you. Mayor de Blasio, I really appreciate what you do. You have a thankless, impossible job, and I don't necessarily always agree with you, but I do appreciate your spirit.

**Mayor:** Well, thank you, Gail. I appreciate you for saying that. That is kind of you.

**Question:** Well, I just think you have an impossible, difficult job and that's how I feel. I need your help with something. It's the Get Food New York program. First of all, thank you for the program, it's a godsend. I've been using it almost from the beginning, but I do have a problem with it. There needs to be a diabetic option. The food that I receive – which is very nice – I receive the prepared food and it is very nice. However, it's based on processed carbohydrates. Every bit of it is either white rice, white flour pasta, bagels. It's just wrong for people who need a diabetic option. And as we all know, diabetes is one of the factors that increases the likelihood of someone contracting COVID. Please help –

**Lehrer:** Or having serious, serious effects at the very least. Mayor, can you help Gail with the choices in that program?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. And Gail, I'm so glad you called because one of the good things that happens on this show is that people help me see something that – where there's a gap or a problem that we have to address. So first Gail, will you please give your information to WNYC because we'll have someone follow up with you today, and I'm certain we can get you different options. I mean, we've been trying to develop in this program, obviously, choices that people need, you know, halal food, kosher food. We, obviously, have vegetarian options, but what we're learning is a lot of the historic approach to food needed to be modernized and made more healthy. We've been doing that in our school food program, but we have to make sure it's thoroughly done here in this emergency food program. So, please give your information to

WNYC. I'm going to work, based on this call, to make sure that we have a clearly stated diabetic option for folks who need it.

But the other thing to note is the sheer magnitude of the program, because as you said, you've been part of it from day one. I announced this week, it's been a hundred million meals provided for free to the people in New York City by the New York City government. And, Brian, how powerful a point against the backdrop where in Washington they're still discussing whether there needs to be a stimulus or not. I mean look at that for a moment. It's gotten so tough for so many New Yorkers that we did a hundred million free meals already in just four months and the need is growing all the time for Gail and for so many other people. So, the thank you, Gail, that's really helpful feedback.

**Lehrer:** Politico New York has an argument now about how – I mean, an argument, it's sort of an argument. It's an article that kind of is based on the premise that you're reaching out now to business leaders in the city for help with things like this, but that you haven't built the relationships with them over the years because of your focus on inequality and wanting to raise taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers and things like that. And so you're having to develop those relationships starting from way behind. Did you read that article and what's your reaction?

**Mayor:** I didn't, although it was summarized to me. So, I think, look, there's an underlying truth in the fact that my focus has not been on the business community and the elites. And bluntly – I mean, my predecessor certainly focused that way and many mayors have. And I think that's, unfortunately – I think this is a profound problem. And I am tempted to borrow a quote from Karl Marx here when he says –

**Lehrer:** They'll love that on Wall Street –

[Laughter]

**Mayor:** Yes, they will. But, you know, there's the famous quote that the state is the executive committee of the bourgeoisie. And I use it openly to say, no, I actually read that when I was a young person, I said, well, that's not the way it's supposed to be. The business community matters. We need to work with the business community. We will work with the business community, but the City government represents the people, represents working people and, you know, mayors should not be too cozy with the business community. Governors should not be too cozy with the business community. Respect them, listen to them, sometimes they have great ideas, sometimes they offer real help. There are more and more people in the business community, to be fair, who are seeing the problems and the inequalities, and actually are starting to speak up about it more. But I want them to act.

There was a New York Times article about Davos a few years ago. It was very telling and they said, you know, everyone was talking about the income inequality at Davos and they were all wringing their hands. But then when speakers got up and said, okay, so you need to raise wages and allow unionization of your companies, or you need to raise taxes on the wealthy, those ideas were immediately dismissed. And that's been my experience. I've met with business leaders from day one, and I do have – some folks I've really found some good common ground with, and they really want to help New York City. But a lot of folks have just sort of hit a wall when I say, guys, you're going to have to pay more in taxes, and we're going to have policies that favor

working people more like rent freezes, which we've done now multiple times, and things that really have to shake the foundations of our inequality. And there is a tension there, but in terms of the comeback, I'm talking to a lot of business leaders. I'm looking for where we can find common ground. And I know a lot of them do want to help New York City. And I do appreciate that.

**Lehrer:** Derek in East Harlem, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Derek.

**Question:** Hi, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** How are you doing, Derek?

**Question:** Good, thanks. I live in East Harlem and at the behest of the city's massive marketing campaign, I got tested for COVID on July 7th at the NYC-run site East 111th even though I'm asymptomatic. Like I said, I got tested on July 7th, but I didn't get my results until yesterday, which is July 23rd and well over two weeks later. So, I'm hoping you can help me understand what would explain this massive waiting time. And I'm wondering if through the citywide issue. And like I said, it's also worth noting that I'm white, but I can't ignore the fact that East Harlem is a predominantly Hispanic and Black community with a poverty rate that's higher than the citywide average. Are other areas of the city grappling with the same wait times?

**Lehrer:** Thank you, Derek.

**Mayor:** Yeah. Thank you, Derek. Derek, actually, you could help everyone. If you'd give your information to WNYC and let us do a follow up with you. That's a ridiculous wait time. It should never have happened. So, there is no explanation for that. Something is wrong and we need to go trace back what happened and what happened at this particular center. That is abhorrent even compared to some of the challenges we faced in recent days.

**Lehrer:** But you know that's a fairly common – this is not your fault, but I think it's a nationwide, you know, backlog because of the rises in other states. But I have friends who've waited six days, ten days. So, this is an issue. And, so, go ahead and finish your answer, and then I'm also curious to hear if you think that this is making it harder for the city to do whatever phases of reopening you're trying to work on.

**Mayor:** Yeah. So, a couple of quick points. One, we, first of all, are seeing the problem, particularly in the urgent care centers, more than we've seen in our public ones. Our public hospitals and clinics, but we're still seeing individual cases like Derek's, that just don't make sense and must be fixed and there's something structural that has to be addressed. And sometimes it's just plain bureaucratic problems that have to be overcome. We, for weeks and weeks, we kept expanding testing and we actually were able to sustain, you know, pretty fast turnaround times – two, three, four days kind of thing. It got really bad for a week or two as the national uptick occurred. You're absolutely right. And a lot of labs that we had depended on were being overwhelmed by demand from other places as well. Some of that has been addressed now by getting the labs in New York City to use different approaches that make it more efficient. This was described in our press conference yesterday morning with our Test and Trace Director, Dr. Ted Long.



So we now think the citywide average, if you take all the different testing centers, the citywide average is back down to the point where the typical person gets it within a few days. But, no, the problem – to Derek's question, the problem has not been localized to any particular community or communities of color in particular or more wealthy communities or anything like that. It has been specifically because of that horrible uptick that happened around the country. But we think we have now stabilized it. That said there will not be enough security on this issue and, Brian, to your question, yeah, we need to get results on a timely basis. If we have occasional fluctuation, it doesn't change our core strategy, but we do need to get results in a timely basis to be maximally effective.

The federal government has to – has to use the Defense Production Act at this point to kind of nationalize the approach to the laboratories. There has to be much more laboratory capacity created. There has to be industries converted to doing the chemical reagents – producing the chemical reagents needed for the testing. This is, I mean, right now, look, the surge around the country – the testing demand will have to go up for months and so the federal government has to step in and create more national capacity, or we'll often be dealing with this problem. I think we're in better shape here in many ways than almost any place else in the country in terms of being able to speed up testing and having the lab capacity. But this is a bigger problem for the country that has to be addressed.

**Lehrer:** I know you got to go in a minute. Have you changed your thinking at all or does it keep developing on how you open schools based on the studies coming now from Israel and South Korea, that show middle and high school kids are spreading the virus at home after school, more than the younger kids. And anything else you want to say on anything as we wrap up?

**Mayor:** Yeah. It's an important question. So, we are watching those studies carefully, watching the experience in Israel. Israel's experience is different than ours. They came back real quick. They got burned as we've seen in many states in this country. So they – we really are basing it on our own reality. No plan right now to treat different age levels differently, but that might change with time. The central plan right now, I talked about it a lot in different press conferences this week, the central plan is, we're coming back in September, the goal is to maximally have kids in the classroom. It will depend on each school's physical capacity to see how many days in the classroom, but a typical kid will be in a classroom two or three days. We announced that we're building out a very aggressive childcare program to try and help families that need childcare. We'll start with 100,000 seats for kids and we're going to build from there. But what we're seeing is we got a lot to do over the next six weeks, but the basic contours, which the CDC has been real clear on to their credit – and the State, the City, everyone agrees – social distancing in all classrooms. We're going to convert every interspace in the school building into classrooms. We're going to have face coverings on everyone, hand washing stations, hand sanitizer stations, a whole host of measures to keep each school safe and remote learning will be a constant. It will be a constant during the week at some point for every kid and anyone who would prefer for their kid to be at home the whole time can have remote learning, you know, the whole week.

But we did do a survey of parents, Brian. We got 400,000 responses, which is pretty stunning, and 75 percent want their kids back in school. And we're going to do that and we're going to do it safely. We're going to do it carefully. And we're going to watch the health care situation and always that's going to be the ultimate decision point is, are we able to hold the health care situation where we are now? Then, of course, we could open school. If it gets better, even better.

If it gets worse, we're going to be real honest about that and be careful and decide how that affects the final decision.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, we always appreciate you coming on and answering listener's questions and mine on Ask the Mayor. Thanks so much. Talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Take care, Brian. Thank you.

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