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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS BILL HEARING AND SIGNING

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good afternoon, everybody. Today we're going to hold a hearing and signing for four bills to establish a retirement savings program for New Yorkers. This is something we've been working on for a long time, finally coming to fruition. And to expand the Right to Counsel and educate tenants about their rights in Housing Court. So, today we're looking at Intros. 888-A, 901-A, 1529-A, and 2050-A. We're also holding a public hearing on the bill that makes the Open Streets program permanent. This is a wonderful addition to the city. That is Intro. 1933-A. So, we will be holding a hearing today, but the signing will come at a later date.

Now, let's start with retirement savings. Today, we fulfill a commitment from the State of the City actually back in 2019 – a vision related to retirement security for New Yorkers but it's a vision that we could not fulfill because of a different administration in the White House in Washington. I'll leave it at that and say with the election of 2020 a door has opened now to finally be able to protect New Yorkers who don't have sufficient retirement savings. So, this is a really important step to create our own New York City Retirement Savings Program for New Yorkers who work in the private sector and don't have a pension or retirement plan of their own. Over a million New Yorkers work a whole lifetime but don't have anything to show for it once they retire. They've earned, obviously, through their hard work, the right to retire in peace and security. And that means financial security as well. These two bills ensure that New Yorkers will have more savings for their retirement and will have that ability to breathe a sigh of relief that they know there's something to protect them up ahead. So, that's crucial – those two bills.

Now, another crucial point today, we're talking about the needs of tenants who have gone through so much in the pandemic. So many people have worried about keeping a roof over their heads, struggled to pay the rent. The legislation today ensures that the rights of tenants are respected, and we have to make sure that tenants know if, God forbid, the landlord that they have brings a case against them in housing court, that they know their rights and they know where to turn to for help. So, these two bills today educate tenants about their rights in housing court and expands the City's Right to Counsel law citywide. This is what a recovery for all of us means, protecting everyone, giving everyone economic security, protecting the rights of working people, making sure that people can stay in their home, that they can retire in peace. This is the kind of city that we need to keep building.

And we're also going to talk today about Open Streets, I mentioned earlier. Open Streets have been a revelation, something that came out of the pain of COVID but proved to be an amazing positive addition to this city. We've seen how effective Open Streets are. We've seen the energy

created. I remember vividly walking down Fifth Avenue in Park Slope, Brooklyn, my neighborhood, and seeing just an incredible kind of carnival-like atmosphere, something very positive that came out of a tough time but now it's something that we're going to make permanent. So, the hearing today, the bill signing coming up later, but this is about making sure New Yorkers get the most out of life in the city and get to enjoy their neighborhoods to the fullest. That's a great step forward for everyone.

Okay, summarizing the bills. Intro. 888-A creates an opt-in auto enrollment payroll deduction IRA program for employees who are not offered retirement plans through their private employers. Intro. 901-A establishes a retirement savings board to facilitate the implementation of the Employee Retirement Program. Intro. 1529-A requires the Human Resources Administration's Office of Civil Justice to collaborate with community groups to educate tenants on their rights in housing court. And Intro. 2050-A speeds up the timeline for full citywide implementation of the Housing Court Right to Counsel law, moving it from July 31st, 2022, to June 1st, 2021. Meaning just days from now. Finally, Intro. 1933-A would require the Department of Transportation to operate a permanent, wonderful Open Streets program.

I want to thank everyone who has been a part of all these bills including our Department of Finance Commissioner Sherif Soliman, the city's Chief Pension Investment Advisor John Adler, our Social Services Commissioner Steve Banks, our Transportation Commissioner Hank Gutman, and, of course, Speaker Corey Johnson. Thank you for helping to make all this great legislation happen. And now I want you to hear from sponsors and key legislators in each of these cases with this legislation. I know each of them is proud today. They have every right to be. First, the sponsor of Intro. 888-A, Council Member Ben Kallos –

[...]

Thank you so much, Ben. And I know this has been a labor of love for you and thank you for sticking with it. You're right, we had a little hiccup with the Trump years, but the Biden years are a much better time for working people, and the doors opened again so we can get this done. So, thank you for your leadership, Ben. And now, I want to turn to the Chair of the Committee on Civil Service and Labor. He is also the sponsor of Intro. 901-A and he is a champion for working people – Council Member I. Daneek Miller.

[...]

Thank you so much, Council Member. And I know as chair of this committee you really think about all the time about what we need to do to help working people. Well, what we're going to do here is going to reach up to a million New Yorkers and give them the security they need. So, I know this is a day you should be very, very proud of, and thank you for your leadership.

Council Member I. Daneek Miller: Thank you, absolute game-changer.

Mayor: Now, let's go and talk about, as we said at the beginning, talk about the rights of tenants and protecting tenants. So, this has been an area that this administration has focused on, the Council has focused on. Extraordinary work has been done particularly when it comes to the

Right to Counsel law, and I want to give a lot of credit where credit is due, to Council Member Mark Levine who has really championed this notion for years. And it's a notion that was groundbreaking in this city to ensure legal support for everyday New Yorkers, particularly low-income New Yorkers so they could protect their homes, protect their families. It's an idea that's now been emulated around the country. So, congratulations, Council Member Levine for that. And today we take another step. The sponsor of Intro. 1529-A and Intro. 2050-A, Council Member Mark Levine –

[...]

Okay, Council Member, we didn't get all of that, but we know you're happy today for good reason. And congratulations, I know, again, this has been a longstanding effort on your part, and a labor of love. So, another step forward today. Now, we're going to hear from folks who have signed up for public testimony. First, Beth Finkel – an old friend. Beth Finkel, good to have you here from AARP New York State.

[...]

Thank you, Beth. Thank you for your advocacy. I know this is exactly the kind of thing you and your colleagues at AARP have been leading the way on. So, thank you. And now, he got a shout-out earlier from Chair Daneek Miller, my pleasure to welcome Corey Bearak.

[...]

Thank you very much, Corey. And thank you for sticking with this issue for so long. Persistence pays off, so thank you very much. Next, we're going to talk about the Right to Counsel legislation. And here from the Right to Counsel Coalition, Randy Dillard.

[...]

Thank you so much, Randy. And thank you for acknowledging all the good folks who have worked so hard for this day. Thank you for your efforts as well. And now, on the topic of Open Streets, again it's been such a great victory for this city – my pleasure to introduce Erwin Figueroa of Transportation Alternatives.

[...]

Thank you so much, Erwin. Thank you to you and everyone at Transportation Alternatives for working so hard to get us to this day. And as I said, we're going to be signing the Open Streets bill a little bit later on but for today we'll sign the four other pieces of legislation. But first just a quick few words of summary of today's hearing in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let us sign the legislation –

[Mayor de Blasio signs Intros. 888-A and 901-A, and Intros. 1529-A and 2050-A]

Okay, so, these four laws are now signed. They are now law. And this is all really, really good stuff, helping to move this city forward in building a recovery for all of us. With that, this hearing is adjourned. Thank you, everybody.

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