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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** January 22, 2016

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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO ISSUES WINTER WEATHER EMERGENCY  
DECLARATION**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good afternoon, everyone. We are bracing here in New York City for the first big snowstorm of this winter, and we expect snow to begin after midnight and to accumulate rapidly as the morning progresses. For this reason, starting at 8 am tomorrow morning, I'll be declaring a local winter-weather emergency for New York City, and that will stay in effect through the day – Saturday – until the end of Saturday – midnight Saturday, going into Sunday. We will assess that condition as Saturday progresses. We might choose to extend it depending on conditions.

Now, a winter-weather emergency simply clarifies to the public that any unnecessary driving should be avoided. Unless it is urgent, stay off the roads – it's as simple as that. Make your plans now to not be on the streets of the city tomorrow, and I would say Sunday – likely, as well. Get done what you have to get done today. If you have to go out, rely on mass transit, walk if you have to, but do not bring your vehicle out tomorrow. And any vehicle that is blocking a roadway tomorrow that's making it impossible for our snowplows to get through will be towed.

Now, to be clear, a winter-weather emergency is different from a travel ban. We had the prospect last year of an extraordinarily large blizzard. At that point, we instituted a travel ban, which literally meant we would stop any vehicle – any non-emergency vehicle on the road. This is a different status – this is less intense, but still very, very serious. So, we're saying clearly to the public, stay off the roads tomorrow. If your vehicles are blocking the work of our snow plows, your vehicles will be towed. We want people to just limit travel tomorrow to absolutely urgent matters. And, again, that goal winter-weather emergency will begin at 8 am tomorrow morning – Saturday morning – will be in effect throughout the remainder of Saturday.

I want to assure my fellow New Yorkers the city of New York is fully prepared. All of the agencies present here are doing a tremendous job in their preparations. They are very experienced at dealing with snowstorms. They are in a high level of coordination. We are constantly monitoring the weather forecasts. We have seen some intensifying of this storm as the forecasts have come in, in recent hours. And so, we are constantly adjusting our operation to reflect the forecast we're receiving, and we're of course ready to upgrade our response even further. I've reminded you all in the past that storms can move more quickly or more slowly. They can be smaller or bigger than forecasted. So, we always plan for an even bigger storm and an even earlier storm. At this moment, we believe we'll see snow begin in earnest after midnight tonight – again, real accumulations, starting by about 8 am when we put that winter-emergency into effect.

Let me thank all of the leaders of the administration who are here and all the agencies represented. You're going to hear from a couple of them in a moment and you'll hear from others as we take questions. I of course want to thank our police commissioner, Bill Bratton; our chief of department, Jimmy O'Neill. I want to thank our senior director for climate policy and programs, Dan Zarrilli, who's here to talk about the precautions we've taken against coastal flooding; our buildings commissioner, Rick Chandler; our aging commissioner, Donna Corrado; our fire commissioner, Dan Nigro; and Chief of Department for FDNY Jimmy Leonard. I want to thank our first

deputy commissioner of transportation, Lori Ardito; general manager of the housing authority, Michael Kelly; deputy commissioner for water and sewer operations – environmental protection, Jim Roberts; First Deputy Parks Commissioner Liam Cavanagh; Dr. Jay Varma, deputy commissioner at the department of health; deputy chancellor at the Department of Education, Elizabeth Rose; Jackie Bray, from the Mayor’s Office; and Carlos Torres, the vice president for emergency management at Con Ed, who we’ve been working with very, very closely in these preparations. Obviously, we’re paying close attention to the impact this storm could have on our electricity supply.

National Weather Service has issued a blizzard watch, which means we can expect heavy snow, strong winds – we’re hearing winds of up to 55 miles per hour – and whiteout conditions. This is another good reason for everyone to stay off the roads – they will not only be snow-filled and slippery, there could be whiteout conditions, literally meaning a driver cannot see what’s happening in front of them. So, get what you need done today. Stay off the roads.

Latest forecasts, again – snow beginning after midnight – heaviest snow expected between 8 am tomorrow morning and mid-afternoon tomorrow, and that could accumulate very, very rapidly. At this moment, we think it could continue to snow into Sunday morning, but that timeline of course could change. The expectation right now – between 12 inches and 18 inches. So, you’ve seen that number go up in the course of today. So, we’re predicting 12 inches to 18 inches in New York City.

In addition to the blizzard watch, the National Weather Service has issued a coastal-flood warning for areas of Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Southern Queens, and a coastal-flood advisory for the Bronx and northern Queens. We all of course will be in constant contact with the National Weather Service, who we regard as crucial allies in this fight throughout the duration of this storm.

Sanitation department, as always, take the lead in clearing our streets. They have done an extraordinary job over all the storms we’ve seen in these last couple of years, particularly last time when the roads were clear and they were able to do their work so well. They, I think, won additional respect from so many New Yorkers for the fine job they did. So, I want to thank all of the men and women who work for all the agencies represented, but a particular thank you to the men and women of the sanitation department who will be the frontline of this over these next few days.

2,300 workers will be in two split-shifts of 12 hours each at sanitation. 579 salt-spreaders will be pre-deployed tonight and ready to go. We have, by the way, over 300,000 tons of salt ready – so, we have a very strong supply on hand. We will have almost 1,800 snow plows out – many sanitation department, but also from environmental protection, transportation, and parks. In addition, fire department will increase staffing of firefighter, paramedics – paramedics, excuse me, and EMTs, and they will have specialized units out on the roads throughout the storm. This is true of the police department as well – both will have swift water rescue teams ready to go and high-axle vehicles ready to go. So, those two capacities focused of course on the coastal flooding dangers.

Department of Transportation is deploying crews to each of the East River bridges to conduct de-icing treatments and clear the walkways throughout the storm. Parks department has been working intently to add to sand dunes in some of the areas that might expect flooding and to strengthen the protection that are already in place. A lot has been done over the last few years to deepen our coastal protections. We are much stronger than we were a few years ago. Parks department has gone out in the last day or two and intensified and strengthened key locations in Coney Island, in the Rockaways, and in Staten Island. We’ll be monitoring of course 3-1-1 service requests for hazardous tree conditions. The city has a group of 200 arborists who will be ready to respond to any downed trees and any limbs, especially those that might pose a danger or might affect our roadways.

So, that's just an example – a set of examples of some of the things our agencies will be doing. Again – a very capable group of leaders, a very capable group of agencies ready to meet this challenge and to keep New Yorkers safe.

I just want to talk about just a couple of other points – alternate side parking suspended tomorrow. Again, if you need to get around – well, first, try to stay in to the maximum extent possible – if you need to get around, focus on mass transit. If anyone is having a problem with heat or hot water, it is imperative to either get it addressed by the property manager for your building, or, if you don't get results immediately, call 3-1-1. We need to know if you don't have heat and hot water so we can do something about it quickly while people can still move around easily. If there is a serious emergency, if someone's life is in danger, call 9-1-1. So, again, for heat, for hot water problems, for information needs, call 3-1-1. But if there is an emergency, if there's any danger to human life, call 91-1.

I want to ask all New Yorkers to look out for your neighbors, look out for the most vulnerable among us, look out for senior citizens and the disabled. Obviously, offer them a helping hand. Check in on your neighbors. If you see someone in distress – if you see a homeless person in distress, for example, on the streets, call 9-1-1 immediately so we can do something about it. Our Department for the Aging is out getting meals to home-bound seniors to make sure they will have extra meals for over the weekend. We appreciate that effort deeply. Our Department of Homeless Services is ramping up our HOME-STAT initiative right now. Additional outreach efforts are being made, and additional personnel being applied to outreach to the homeless. We've had just in the previous Code Blue nights over the last few weeks – 575 homeless individuals were brought into shelter. That effort will intensify tonight and over the weekend.

I want to just offer a few words in Spanish, and then I want you to hear from two of my colleagues, and then we'll take questions on this topic.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

**Mayor:** Okay. On this topic, we welcome your questions.

Yes?

**Question:** [inaudible] are you worried that some people may have to evacuate low-lying areas on Staten Island, or Brooklyn, or Queens?

**Mayor:** Based on what we know now, and I'll welcome my colleagues to join in, I don't think we see an evacuation scenario right now, but we do want to warn people to be very careful as they're moving around because of potential flooding. That's why we have capacity at both the police department and the fire department ready to respond. And we're certainly going to keep people posted if anything changes, but, at this point, the important thing is to just take precautions, expect some flooding, stay off the streets.

Yes?

**Question:** Mayor, [inaudible] mentioned if it's really heavy snow then the front-end loaders [inaudible]. Could you explain more about what does that really mean – like, is six inches, 12 inches –

**Commissioner Kathryn Garcia, Department of Sanitation:** No, more when we're up in the 12 to 18 inches we would bring in both contractors, and we'd utilize all of our front-end loaders, and we would basically do an operation that's called Piling and Hauling, where we pile the snow up and then we move it out, and then we take it to our snow fields in our melter operations and there we melt the snow. We have several locations that we've coordinated with – the Department of Environmental Protection – so that that can go then into the sewer system safely.

**Question:** [inaudible] don't know it yet?

**Commissioner Garcia:** I really don't know yet. It would be – based on a 12 to 18, we are likely to be in that operation. But should the storm shift and we get closer to a six to 12, we might not need to do that.

**Mayor:** Just on the previous question, I just want to clarify that, again, we do not see a scenario where there's going to be a need for an evacuation at this moment. We do have evacuation sites ready. We have 16 sites ready that can be up and running within a matter of hours if anything were to change.

Yes, Anna?

**Question:** How's the preparation going on Staten Island? A lot of times Staten Islanders are worried they're going to be forgotten, because it's happened in the past.

**Mayor:** Well, we haven't forgotten them at all, and our preparations are the same in all five boroughs – obviously, depending on need. As I said, work is being done right now on Staten Island to reinforce dunes and to make sure that we have a lot of preventative measures in places in the coastal areas. All the things I've talked about – the water rescue capacity, high-axle vehicles will be on Staten Island, as well as other areas. So, there's going to be a strong response across all five boroughs.

Yes?

**Question:** Mayor, you criticized Governor Christie for not returning to New Jersey, and now he's made a decision to come back. Do you have any response to that?

**Mayor:** I think that's a smart move. I think this is obviously a storm that is gathering strength, and all local leaders should be at their posts.

**Question:** Mayor, Governor Cuomo's going to give an update in a short while at 3 o'clock. I'm just wondering how the communication and the collaboration that you talked about yesterday has been with the state?

**Mayor:** I spoke to the governor earlier. First Deputy Mayor Tony Shorris has been in touch with his counterparts in Albany, and also with the MTA, so there's a high level of coordination. Again, based on what we've seen to-date, this is not a scenario where we expect a situation as we feared during that potentially huge blizzard last year where there would be any reason to shut down MTA operations. Now, let me clarify, again, the MTA and the state will make the ultimate decision, but we will be in close consultation. We know in these kinds of storms, bus routes of course are affected, sometimes the over-land elements of the subways system – but, from everything we can tell right now, a lot of the subway system will be unaffected, or, at least, continue going on, and there's a high level of communication and coordination.

Yes?

**Question:** What changed with the storm where the prediction is now 12 to 18 inches?

**Mayor:** This is the nature – again, my colleagues can add if they have something more than what the common-sense answer I'll give, which is that we constantly are in communication with the National Weather Service. They're updating their estimates based on the movement and the actions they see of the storm, and they have now said that they believe 12 inches to 18 inches is more accurate for New York. But these situation can change very rapidly, which is why we'll constantly be providing updates.

Yes, Rich?

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, how important is it for the police and fire departments to have people keep their vehicles off the streets so that the avenues can be cleared, the streets can be cleared?

**Mayor:** Let's hear from them – Commissioner Bratton?

**Police Commissioner William Bratton, NYPD:** Well, we would certainly encourage people to – who have the ability to get to their vehicles – off the public streets, driveways, parking lots. Fewer cars on the street makes it easier for sanitation to plow and certainly makes it a lot easier for fire and ambulance vehicles to move around the city. So, where possible, we encourage people to get their cars off the street. And, as the mayor's already indicated, during the storm itself, we encourage them to stay off the street with their vehicles so that we in fact can move the emergency vehicles in. As importantly, sanitation can do a quick job at cleanup so that things are ready for Monday morning.

**Mayor:** Commissioner Nigro?

**Question:** Commissioner –

**Mayor:** Hold on one second – Commissioner Nigro?

**Commissioner Daniel Nigro, FDNY:** Well, similarly for us, especially for our ambulances, we've had problems in previous storms when blocked by cars, and we want to be able to get to New Yorkers in need with our fire apparatus, with our ambulances. So, as everyone else said, we encourage everyone to stay off the streets tomorrow. Let them clear the streets and let us through.

**Mayor:** Right. And so, I want to – again, I'll keep saying it because I want people to feel it personally. I want all New Yorkers to feel this is their responsibility and their mission to stay off the streets, get your cars out of the way to the maximum extent possible. Remember, it's so the streets can be made clear for Sunday and Monday. It's also so we can save lives if anyone is in danger. If our emergency vehicles can't get through, they can't save people's lives. So, I think there's a very good self-interest – it's the moral thing to do, but there's a self-interest for every New Yorker to heed this warning.

Go ahead.

**Question:** For the commissioner, can the police give any fine if they're, like, actually, in the road in the middle of the storm?

**Commissioner Bratton:** We will have close to 100 tow trucks available to move vehicles that are inappropriately, illegally parked – vehicles that might be blocking the streets. So – that we've got sufficient tow trucks to stay on top of that situation. Once again, if you're towed by us, you're going to pay the fines and the inconvenience of having to go down and wait in line to get your vehicle back. So, the best way to avoid the fine and waiting in line is basically stay off the street.

**Mayor:** Yes?

**Question:** What about the fire hydrants for the fire department. Obviously, people [inaudible] know where their hydrants are, but if you're talking about 18 inches coming in, 55 mile-per-hour winds, some of those hydrants could be covered. In terms of an emergency, do you encourage people to shovel those hydrants out? Or will you guys handle it [inaudible]?

**Commissioner Nigro:** Not only do we encourage it, it's their responsibility. So, if you're a homeowner with a fire hydrant in front of your home, or a business owner with a fire hydrant in front of your – you're responsible

for clearing that. So, we put people out – we put people out to do that, but we ask each and every New Yorker to help us and to keep the – again, in your own self-interest, keep the hydrant in front of your home or your business clear so we can use it.

**Mayor:** Any other questions on the storm? Any other questions?

Alright, I will reiterate by way of conclusion – 8 am tomorrow morning is when this will get serious. We need everyone off the roads. Obviously, if a car's blocking the road, we will tow it. If anything changes and that timeline is either going to be earlier or later, we will provide an update, but I think we've been given enough evidence already today that this storm is very dynamic, that we should recognize that the 12- to 18-inch prediction is one that could change again – could obviously get worse. So, I want people to take these warnings very, very seriously. Most importantly, do everything you need to do today so you can stay in not just Saturday, I think, Sunday – it's going to be very hard to get around as well. So, plan on staying in both days, but especially Saturday, which will be the brunt of the storm.

Thank you very much, everyone.

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