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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, it's so important to keep our focus on the future. And so, today, we're going to be talking about where we go from here and the path forward for this city and to recognize that there is a strong path forward, relies on also recognizing everything that has been achieved by the people of this city. We obviously have gone through so much, but we have fought back every time. Right now, we're facing the challenge of a second wave, but do not forget all those months where we fought back after the first wave, don't forget the way our economy has started to rebound, the jobs started coming back. And I'm going to talk about some new numbers that are important for you to hear that I think will give people some encouragement, because everyone's been working so hard to protect people's livelihoods and bring them back and it is having an impact. I'm going to talk about our schools, which we closed for the safety of all, but are coming back with a plan to intensify our safety measures and bring our schools back.

So, we need to reference all those facts and remember what we're capable of as New Yorkers and how that's going to move us forward. At the same time, we could recognize the real challenge we face with this second wave bearing down with COVID cases rising, all the things that we need to do to stay safe. So, let's talk about schools. I know it's on everyone's mind and it's on my mind as well all the time. We can and we will bring back our schools. It will take a lot of work. And I just want people to understand that from beginning, bringing back to the schools this next time will take an extra effort. It can be done. It will be done. And then, in the months ahead, we'll be able to do so much more as we start to feel the effects of a vaccine reaching the city. And, hopefully, that starts in the next month or two. But, in the meantime, to bring schools back, we have to take our core vision, which is health and safety first, and intensify it. The data and the science govern all our decisions. We saw these numbers rise. We made a decision based on the standards we put forward months ago. But now, a new reality is coming into play, the strong, strong likelihood that, in a matter of days, the State of New York will determine that New York City is an orange zone, according to State standards. Now, I'm not going to speak for the State or the exact timing. I'm just taking their numbers, looking at them and acknowledging the clear trajectory. And basing on what the State has said already, there is a likelihood, as soon as next week even, that New York City will be declared an orange zone. Once that happens, we will be in a position to take additional measures to reopen schools. And there's a clear protocol for that. It involves a lot more testing. It's a very conservative, cautious approach. Again, a lot more work, but we will go through that hard work together. I know how much parents want their kids back in school. I know how much educators and staff want to be there to serve kids. It will take a lot more testing, a very aggressive approach, very proactive approach, but we can do it. Testing has to be done, in

fact, in advance of kids and staff coming back to school and constant testing throughout the school year, much more than we've even been doing already, and we've been doing a lot.

Remember, in New York city, first of all, we opened our schools when almost no major city in America did. But, second, we put a strong testing approach into place and the situation room to act quickly if anyone in the school community tested positive and, when necessary, to close the school. That whole approach was working and working very well. We're going to now build upon that, intensify it and make sure that there's testing constantly. Now, I'm going to say it again as I said several times last week – if you're a parent, you want your kid back in school as soon as they reopen, get that test consent form in, because that will be absolutely required for any child to come into the school to have a test consent form on file. And that includes all those who opted back in to blended learning over the last few weeks.

Now, how will this work? Well, a lot of details have to be worked out between the City and the State, but we can say for sure that we're going to focus on the most important and most vulnerable elements of our education system. So, first of all, our special needs kids. And the families with special needs kids have been saying very, very clearly how much they need in-person education. I couldn't agree with them more. So, when we come back, the first thing we're going to focus on is getting what's called District 75 schools, special-ED schools, back and up and running across all grades. Next, the youngest grades, early child education, such a difference-maker for children, bringing that back. 3-K, Pre-K will be a high priority followed by elementary school. And we'll keep building from there. So, this is an initial vision – a lot of work to do to make it come together, but I want to give people a sense of how things are going to go in the coming weeks and the focus we're going to have as we build out this plan. Again, parents, this is going to require a lot from you. You've got to get those test consent forms in. You're going to have to help us with the testing of your child before we come back to school. It's going to be something that everyone has to participate in, but we can do it. I don't have a doubt in my mind we can do it. And our schools will come back with this plan and then more and more as the vaccine comes into play in the coming months.

So, anyone who believes in the power of bringing the city back, remember, you can do something about it. I just talked about what parents can do. Everyone can contribute to this city coming back, and it comes down to this, as always, wearing this mask consistently and practicing social distancing. But also, the choice we all have to make now at the holidays. I've talked about this. It's a painful reality. We're going to have to do something very different this Thanksgiving, very different throughout the December holidays. Do not travel if you can possibly avoid it. If you travel, it just greatly intensifies the exposure you could have and the risk you would take. Even if you're getting a test, you're still going to be exposing yourself to the challenges that come with travel and to a lot of places in this country that just are not as safe as we are. And I'll keep urging people, please don't travel. Please change your plans if you've made them. And if you do travel, take every conceivable precaution. And if you come back and you test out, that's great. But if you don't test out, honor that quarantine, we need you to. And, again, everyone, small holiday gatherings. If it's folks from outside the home, practice social distancing, wear masks. There'll still be joyous gatherings. Or, if you do it virtually, it will still be a joyous gathering. But let's just protect each other. I said it on Friday on WNYC, let's protect each other this year so we

can all be together next year. Let's protect each other this year, so people will still be alive next year for when holidays are in-person again.

Okay. That is a quick update on the school's front. Now, let me talk to you about what's going on with our economy and our budget. And this is crucial. We have some new information here that's really important. And we knew from the beginning that this virus was going to wreak havoc on people's lives, first and foremost, in terms of their health. And we mourn everyone we've lost, but we also feel such pain for everyone who lost their job, everyone lost their livelihood. So much pain in so many families. But we have now real data, real evidence of the power of a stimulus, of what the federal government can actually do to help people, because we now have a better sense of what the previous stimulus packages did for New York City. Our Office of Management and Budget has totaled up everything, the impact of those individual checks that were sent to people, the \$1,200 checks, the unemployment benefits, the PPP loans for small business – all of that combined, the impact on New York City has been \$40 billion. This is new information. It's very important information. When you combine all those previous stimulus programs, \$40 billion reached the people of New York City. And that is part of why we have been able to make it through, even with all the challenges. Now, it's also proof positive of why we need a new stimulus quickly, because all of those good investments are now wearing off and people are running out of money and they're running out of time and we need another stimulus and this is exactly the right time for it.

Now, I want to give you an example of what that has meant first, in terms of our economy, then we're going to talk about our City budget. Go back to February – it's amazing to think this is not ancient history. February 2020, this year, New York City was arguably at its all-time economic high, the peak of our economic strength in our entire history – 4.7 million jobs, all-time high, 3.4 percent unemployment as of February – record low. That was just 10 months back, that we had this extraordinary strength. Along comes the horror of COVID, decimates our economy. Between March and April, the immediate aftermath of the worst of what we went through, almost 900,000 jobs were lost in this city. But then we started to feel the impact of that federal stimulus, that \$40 billion we're now recognizing the full impact of. \$40 billion came into the city over the course of months. People worked hard to bring their businesses back. Everyone worked hard to bring down the COVID levels and open up the space for economic recovery. As result of all those efforts, at the end of the spring, going into the summer, now over 300,000 of the jobs that were lost have been recovered. So, it's an amazing beginning. We lost 900,000 jobs, but 300,000 are back already. We've got a long way to go, but so important that this city's ability to rebound is already in evidence. Now, unemployment is still way too high – 13.2 percent, way too high. Not something we can ever accept. Many people suffering, a long way to go – parts of our economy that's going to take a long time to bring back, but you now can see the impact of a stimulus, the way it kept people afloat, the way it helped people bring back their businesses and the way it could do that again, and the sheer impact of New Yorkers doing the right thing and fighting back this disease and opening up the space for us all to recover.

As we face the danger of a second wave of COVID, again, there couldn't be a more important time for a new federal stimulus. And it is going to be the difference-maker – it's the only thing that could be the difference-maker. New Yorkers are doing a hell of a job fighting back this second wave. We're in real danger here, but people are fighting, they're doing the right thing.

But, again, we're running out of time on the economic side as well. We need that stimulus to keep people going – and that means now. This Congress that's in Washington right now could pass a stimulus to help New York City and the whole country. And then, the new administration could do even more in January and February. And that's going to mean everything starts to move. People have the money for the basics. It's going to help jobs come back. It's going to help us expand our reopening of our schools. Everything gets a boost from a stimulus, protecting all our essential services. It's the difference-maker.

So, now, let me talk about what we have achieved in part with the help of that stimulus money and other federal support and what it means for where we go from here. And this now takes us to our City budget. Lord knows, we had to make extraordinary changes between February – I put forward a preliminary budget for this fiscal year in February, what a different world that was by April, when the next budget submission was due. We had to change everything by June. We ended up with a budget that looked very, very different from what we thought it would. We had to cut a lot and there's a lot of things that we thought were important, but we just couldn't do. And a lot of savings have to be found and found quickly. And a lot of jobs were either cut back or not filled. We were able, through those actions, to keep ourselves going, to keep essential services happening for the people of the city to help spur that recovery. We've got a lot more to do. So, today, we're releasing our November financial plan. This is something that happens each year. Normally we wouldn't be highlighting it as much, but it's important because there's some major changes and it speaks so powerfully to the impact of federal support. So, the budget now for New York City, for Fiscal '21, the fiscal year that we are in now, will now be \$92 billion and remains balanced. And that is because of federal support. Overwhelmingly, the money that came from that first stimulus, that ended up in people's pockets, some of that turned into revenue for the City as well, but also the direct grants that came to the city through stimulus, and, of course, FEMA aid, which has been absolutely crucial. We have depended on FEMA so intensely in this crisis. And even though we're still not seeing the kind of reimbursement that we deserve or any other city deserves, and that still needs to be addressed, the FEMA aid is coming in and is playing a huge impact. And that is all about the things that we have focused to protect people, feeding people, making sure no New Yorker went hungry, making sure we could build a strong Test and Trace Corps., which has been crucial to holding back this disease, everything we had to do to get our schools open, all the things we've been doing, all the health and safety measures. You've heard about them, the gold standard we set for our schools, layering health and safety measures one on top of another, that all costs a lot of money. But that FEMA aid helped, the federal grants helped, and now we're in a position to say that we could pay for these dire needs because we got federal support. If we could get more federal support, it would be transcendent. It would help take us forward into our recovery.

At the same time, we have to do things constantly to tighten our own belt. And we have the furloughs that we moved for City officials, senior officials, management. Everyone was asked to sacrifice. New Yorkers are all hurting. It was important for your leaders and the people who run the City government to sacrifice as well. So, we did the furloughs. The savings that we've found, we have a whole set of agreements we've come to with our labor partners that result in savings. But in addition to that, \$1.3 billion in new savings being announced in this November plan. And that is for both this current year Fiscal '21 and for next year Fiscal '22. So, the budget reserves – these reserves continue to be strong and we are going to continue to protect them. And that's

something that has been a crucial, crucial part of our work as well, and has helped us work our way through. We made a big focus for years on reserves, kept them strong. We're going to continue to have a strong reserve as we go forward.

Now, what I've told you is at least some good news. There's some good news – a lot of federal money came in. There's some good news – it really helped families keep going. There's some good news – it helped us, the City government to keep going. But there's not only good news, to say the least. There's some bad news on the budget front as well, and that's what we see for the next fiscal year. Right now, an almost \$4 billion gap looming – \$4 billion now, but, of course, that gap could easily grow. If there's not a stimulus, we're going to see less and less revenue coming in. If there's not a stimulus, the State of New York is going to be in dire, dire shape, and, unfortunately, might have to pass on cuts to localities. So, as much as I'm happy to give some good news, I have to also frame the reality that comes into play very soon. Again, almost \$4 billion that we don't have to keep ourselves going next fiscal year. And we have to present a new budget in January that will be adopted in June for the new fiscal year. And, right now, we don't have a way to close that gap without federal support. That's why it's so crucial that we see action at a federal level.

And I'll conclude this before going to our indicators with this simple point – new administration coming, thank God. Vaccines – now here. Thank God, that's huge. The way forward is clearer than ever. With a stimulus, all of these pieces come together. It's the perfect time. Without a stimulus, we struggle. We struggle in many ways and the suffering continues. And we know that it's at some of the most dire points, that some of the greatest things are achieved. Sometimes, in a moment of crisis, people rise to a higher level. That's what happened in the Great Depression. That was what led to the New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. We need this again. We need this Congress to act. We need our new president to act in this crisis to find a way forward beyond anything we've seen previously so we really can come back strong.

Let me go over today's indicators. Number one daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold 200 patients – today's report, 100 patients. Confirmed positivity, 43.27 percent. So, again, that positivity rate has gone up. That's the number – excuse me, the percentage amongst those patients who actually are proven to have COVID – that number has gone up a lot in recent weeks. That's a real concern. The 100 patients, too many, but, again, we see an interesting gap here in that, that number – it does not grow consistently so far. We are not out of the woods, but, again, an interesting and important point. That number has not been growing as markedly as we might have expected, and ICU's have not been as full as we might have expected, but we are far from out of the woods. Now, number two, this is clear as a bell and, again, continues to be a huge challenge – new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold 550, that's been blown by many times over here, and we're now at 1,381 cases. So, very, very tremendous concern there, but some of that accounted for by more testing and we encourage constantly more testing to get us the truth about what's happening. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, threshold five percent – today's report, 2.95 percent. The seven-day rolling average, 3.06 percent.

Okay. Few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, we turned to our colleagues in the media. And please let me know the name of the outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q and A. With us today we have Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Budget Director Jacques Jiha, First Deputy Budget Director Ken Godiner, Deputy Director for City Revenue, Policy, and Planning Francesco Brindisi, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask you about subway pushing. They have been more frequent, they're on the rise. How are you addressing the mental health issues involved with those accused? And what do you say to New Yorkers who are getting increasingly worried and afraid to use the subway?

Mayor: Juliet look, I'm real concerned and we got to make sure that New Yorkers have confidence that they can go and use the subway and know help will be there for them. So, NYPD is going to be increasing its presence in the subways. That will be very visible. We continue to expand our mental health efforts. The thing we've got to do is find people and get them help before something like this happens. And we need medical intervention, which our City agencies will do. If we find someone who we think might be a threat to themselves or others, we're going to get them to a medical facility, get them tested and evaluated. If it's someone who should not by law, be on the streets, we're certainly going to act. But I also would say Juliet, New Yorkers are strong, resilient folks. We know that we can overcome anything. So, I understand the fear, but people should know that we're going to get that presence out there to keep people safe. Go ahead.

Question: Yeah. So, have you spoken with Commissioner Shea? Are there – when you say more police are going to be on the platforms, how many? Is there an announced effort to do this? Will Transit, extra Transit police or MTA police be there? How does that work?

Mayor: Well, it's – look, the whole approach the NYPD takes is to adjust constantly. This is what CompStat is all about. If there's a greater need in the subways, we'll move additional officers in the subways. That's the plan. We'll get you the exact details of the numbers. Clearly, it's going to be about presence and visible presence and moving that around to where PD assesses the need. But this is exactly what a CompStat and precision policing all about. If there's a particular need, we're going to move our officers there and people are going to see it. And I think that's going to be reassuring to people.

Moderator: Next is Emma from the New York Times.

Mayor: Emma, can you hear us?

Question: Hi. Good morning, Mayor. Yes. Sorry for the delay.

Mayor: No worries. How are you doing?

Question: When you talk about – I'm good. So, can you talk about this nearly \$4 billion budget deficit? What do you say to critics who say you need to do more to address it now? And are layoffs still on the table?

Mayor: Yeah, Emma, we're constantly doing the work of tightening our belts. That's what the furloughs were. That's what the \$1.3 billion in savings, new savings over two fiscal years we're announcing today. That's what the savings we found from our labor partners. All of it is about getting us through to a stimulus, so we can move forward. If there is no stimulus, we're going to have to make extremely difficult choices. And again, Emma I think it's really important to recognize our own almost \$4 billion, it's a \$3.8 billion deficit for the upcoming year, could be magnified if there's no stimulus, the State will be put in an awful place as well. And that's going to mean additional cuts. So, at \$3.8 billion could go up really quickly.

What are we going to do? We're going to have to consistently cut things back. And it's not something we want to do Emma. We do not want to take away essential services from New Yorkers. We do not want to lay people off. If we don't have any other choice, that's what we have to do, obviously. So, unfortunately, it's impossible to take layoffs off the table for next year. We're trying to avoid any layoffs for this fiscal year. And, certainly, with the unions we've come to agreement with, we will avoid layoffs for this fiscal year. But we haven't come to agreement with every union obviously. And the real challenge that we're looking at now is just the sheer totality of next fiscal year. So sadly, and no one wants it, but sadly layoffs could well still be on the table going forward certainly for next fiscal year, if we do not get that stimulus. Go ahead.

Question: And in terms of the labor deals, what do you say to critics who say that you're kicking those costs down the road, that you're kicking the can down the road? Why push those back to next year?

Mayor: Because we, first of all, we need relief immediately to be able to continue to provide City services and to be able to keep people employed. I value every single of our public servants and our employees as people who help other people. I also recognize they're breadwinners for their family. We do not want to put people out of work. We do not want to reduce services exactly when we're trying to come back and when people are in such dire need. So, this was a way of getting us to next year. But we've said all along, the only way we can actually make all of this come together is with the stimulus. Because we didn't – New York City didn't create the pandemic. New York City did not create this crisis. We received the pain of this before anyone else. And the federal government was supposed to protect us. Obviously, that didn't happen. The federal government was supposed to help us out of the crisis. Some of that happened, but not enough. This is an international and national crisis. So, for us to just keep hanging on is the right approach to get to the day where there's actually the federal support we deserve and which I absolutely believe is within reach. So, we can move forward. But if we get what we deserve, we won't lay off anyone. We'll keep doing the work of serving people.

Moderator: Next is Juan from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: How are you?

Question: I'm very good. Thank you. So, knowing that the holidays are coming, that even the State, Governor Cuomo yesterday said that he's expecting a spike in new cases, knowing everything that is going on with this second wave, do you think it's realistic or pragmatic to think that New York City is going to be able to reopen schools before the new year?

Mayor: Juan look, it's tough, but we know that our parents who have their kids in school in blended learning, want their kids back in school. We know we established an incredible success with safety. We showed that gold standard really worked in terms of keeping schools safe. We've got to give parents this option again, but it'll take a lot of work. It'll take a whole lot of work. So our goal here is to put that together, no matter how much work it takes, no matter how much testing it takes, we're going to need a lot of parent participation. And this is crucial, and I'm saying it to all the parents of New York City. If you want your child in school, you really have to help us out with those consent forms. If we say, we need your child tested in advance of school opening, whether that's something we provide at the school building or someplace else, we need parents to follow through. But there is a path and we want to get schools open as quickly as possible. Go ahead.

Question: And then the New York Times just reported this morning that Polly Trottenberg, your Transportation Commissioner will be leaving your administration next month. Recently we've seen several departures. Given the fact that next year will be extremely challenging for the city, how can you assure New Yorkers that you will be able to recruit the best talent to help you bring the city back in your last year in office?

Mayor: It's an important question, but I'll tell you right off the bat, we already have the best talent. We have a very deep bench. Every single one of our commissioners who has succeeded has succeeded because they had a strong team around them, their own talents, of course, but they also had a strong team around them. And we've got a lot of good talent to draw upon. We may, in some cases, bring in someone from outside, but in most cases, what we'll do is simply work with a very deep bench we have. Polly has done an extraordinary job. I want to thank her. You know, I remember in the very beginning when she and I talked about Vision Zero and we knew it would be extremely difficult, nothing like this had ever been tried in such a large American city, obviously. But we believed. And she did an amazing job with her team bringing Vision Zero to life, working with NYPD, TLC, everyone. And this is something for the ages. That this city, a place, you know, known for such intensity and so much activity has actually been the place leading the nation in terms of how to be safer. How to protect people with an entirely different concept. And that's something Polly played such a crucial role in and that's for the ages. And she's done so many other great things at the Department of Transportation, the busways and the select bus service. So many things she should be very, very proud of. So it's been a great run having her for the time of this entire administration. And I know she'll do great things ahead and I want to wish her very well. But again, she's got a great team she's assembled and we'll be able to continue that work.

Moderator: Next is Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I was just quickly reviewing, you know, some of the State's guidelines for reopening schools once the orange zone designation is in effect. And I mean, it just looks like a huge logistical challenge, entailing testing opportunity on school grounds or facilitating testing from other places. Making sure you know, the right population is being tested. So, can you say if the City is laying the groundwork for that logistical challenge now? And what steps are taking place?

Mayor: Yeah, Shant. I've been on a number of calls with our health care team, Test and Trace, all the folks who have done great work putting together our testing capacity. Our Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog has been in the lead of that. Our Director of Operations, Jeff Thamkittikasem has been in the lead of that with so many other colleagues. Absolutely what we're doing is turning our capacity to how we would build that out. We're going to have to even add more capacity to do this. But the point I would say is it can be done. It absolutely can be done. We proved with the monthly testing program and with the weekly testing in the yellow zones, it can be done. We proved we can keep schools safe and the situation room I want to thank Commissioner Melanie La Rocca and her whole team. They've done an amazing job with the situation room. We've proven that works. Our stakeholders all agree that that's been a huge success. It's going to mean more testing. It's going to be a big logistical effort. It's going to take a lot of parent involvement and we have to do it in stages, most likely. Starting with special education, but it can be done. And, Shant, the other thing I'd say is this is a point along the way. We're going to fight back this second wave. We're going to get through the holidays into a time where we're going to start to feel the impact of the vaccine. It will take months and months, obviously for the full impact to be felt. But with every passing month, once we have the vaccine, with every passing month, I really believe we can make things better. So we're going to be constantly doing the work of bringing our schools back farther and farther and getting more and more kids back in the classroom. So, no time like the present to start that work. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks for that Mayor. So, switching gears, I wanted to get your take on the part of the mayoral race, namely in-person fundraisers. You know, you've repeatedly urged people to avoid gatherings during the holidays, but over the weekend, one of the candidates, Eric Adams held two in-person fundraisers. His campaign, you know, says all safety precautions were taken, but there seemed to be a lot of outrage over that online. I was wondering if you have any comment on those fundraisers, if you are aware of them? And more broadly, would you urge mayoral candidates to refrain from in-person fundraisers given the current climate?

Mayor: I think people have to be careful, Shant. I think the entire concept here is to really follow the rules. Whatever we do in this city is about following the very clear guidelines our health care leaders have laid out for us. So, I understand the candidates have an election coming up really quite soon in the scheme of things. I understand that they need to get their message out. And it's important for the people to hear their messages and make a decision on who will be the next mayor in this time of crisis. But what I'd say is be really strict about following the rules, whatever form their activities take. They have to be really, really careful and show people that they're following the rules. I know they can do it, but they have to just be rigorous about it.

Moderator: Next is Maya from Patch.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

Mayor: Good, Maya. How are you today?

Question: Good. Thank you. I've been told that some local lawmakers have had trouble getting new testing sites approved in their districts. And that they've made many suggestions that were ultimately rejected. Can you talk about the criteria that you use to determine new testing sites and especially given the hours long lines we've been seeing both at City sites and urgent cares, what you're doing to streamline that process?

Mayor: So, Maya on the lines you know, and I'll let Dr. Chokshi get in on this one obviously. I would say until very recently we saw – we didn't see lines for quite a while. Then we saw them more at the urgent cares then we saw them at Health + Hospitals. Obviously, we're having a particularly intense moment because people are preparing for the holidays. So, I don't think this is necessarily going to be the norm going forward. But what we've just been doing in general is expanding testing capacity to the maximum we can. There are obviously some limits. You need the test materials, there's staffing, there's processing, you know, you can at any given moment, you can only go so far. But we're trying to constantly push farther to see how much more we can do each day. As for finding sites I mean, we're obviously led by the data and the science and you see the ZIP codes now every day, you know, where we're trying to put our emphasis. Elected officials are trying to serve their community. That makes sense. And sometimes what they ask for really fits the overall priorities. And sometimes it doesn't. We work with them in each case. I'm looking forward to us having more and more testing with every passing month. And that's going to help us answer more and more of those requests. Dr. Chokshi you want to talk about the lines and how we're addressing that?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I'll just start by echoing that it's exactly right, that the City sites are ones that we hope more New Yorkers will take advantage of. We do know that there have been some longer lines at City sites as well, but on the whole City sites do have capacity for you know, for this major upsurge in demand that we're seeing. There are a few things that we have done to try to address you know, the particular increase in demand that we've seen in recent days. One is making sure that for those units, those testing units that are mobile, we're bringing them to the brick and mortar sites where we see longer lines. So, essentially shifting supply to match up with demand. The Test and Trace Corps and Health + Hospitals who have been leading all of this work are also making sure that we're distributing self-collection kits to people who are waiting in those longer lines so that they can actually perform the swab on their own, drop it off to decant you know, some of the people who are waiting there. We continue to increase the number of both brick and mortar sites, as well as those mobile units that I described. And also bringing more testing to the major transit hubs ahead of the holidays, including JFK, LaGuardia, Penn Station, Port Authority. So, we'll continue to try to smooth out the supply with the demand. I do want to just say, you know, ahead of the holidays, we are clear, public health guidance is the safest thing to do is not to travel. And that is also a very important message along with our message to get tested.

Mayor: Thank you, Doctor. Go ahead, Maya.

Question: Yeah. I also wanted to ask about some of the areas where the COVID positivity rates have been spiking. Some officials have told me that they haven't been getting very much data at some point no data, from officials with the contact tracers, Department of Health on where cases are coming from. I've also been told, they found out about those local upticks themselves from the public data page and that they weren't notified in advance by the City. So I'm wondering what you're doing to keep local lawmakers informed about those localized spikes and possible transmission sources in their districts?

Mayor: Thank you for the question Maya. I'm going to start and turn to Dr. Chokshi again. I really do appreciate – I was a local City Council member. I was a school board member. I totally understand the sense of, you know responsibility they all feel to their local communities. And that's a really good thing. I would say, first of all, we're putting up that data publicly for everyone to see including elected officials. They know it's there. They know they can draw upon it. They know they can ask whatever questions they need from it. We don't necessarily have a separate operation that constantly updates the elected officials as to what is up online visibly. They know where to find the information. In terms of specific sites. Again, what we've said over the last few weeks, when these questions have come up is we really don't have a lot of substantial sites where we've had a lot of cases. What we are seeing primarily is a handful of cases in specific sites, not the kind of dramatic numbers that you've seen in other parts of the country associated with individual sites. And where there is a concern, the Department of Health shuts the site down. So, it's quite obvious when that has happened. People can see it because the business, or whatever it is, has been shut down. But, again, that's not the norm. So, what I'd say is, with Dr. Chokshi and the Health Department I do think we can redouble our efforts, for example, if a store gets closed or a school gets closed, redouble our efforts to allow – you know, make sure an elected official is notified, but I think most of this stuff is pretty clear and if any elected official has questions about it, we're always making people available to answer them. Dr. Chokshi, do you want to speak to that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, Sir. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. First, yes, I'll say that our data is transparent and available, refreshed each day at the ZIP code level on our website. And we have had specific conversations with a number of elected officials and their staff to make sure that people know how to navigate the site, how to distinguish between various elements of the data that we have there. In addition to that, second, we have very regular conversations with both elected officials, but also other leaders in the community, whether they're faith leaders or people who lead nonprofit community-based organizations. Those are happening on, you know, at least a weekly cadence and sometimes even more frequently. But with that said, certainly, you know, if there are specific officials who would like even more information or for us to make sure that they have the most up-to-date information about what's happening in their community, we are 100 percent committed to engaging with all of them. And then the final thing that I'll just say briefly with respect to sources of spread, beyond what the Mayor has already said, is that we know, again, both from our experience here in New York City, but also around the country, around the world, a major source is smaller social gatherings. And that is something that is of the utmost importance as we head into the holidays, knowing that people from different households may be gathering, may be convening. It is so important to stay safe. First, avoid those types of

smaller social gatherings, if at all possible. And if you do have to have them make sure that you're following rules around distancing and wearing masks, because those have been major contributors to spread.

Mayor: Thank you, Doctor. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Arthur from FOX5.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. I hope you and your family are well.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Arthur, and to you and yours. How are you doing?

Question: I'm doing great. Thank you. My question is one on race. You articulated the Tale of Two Cities early on. The question is which of the two cities do Asians belong to? And I ask this because your actions on specialized high schools, which was dropped, in effect, treated Asians as a class of New Yorkers who are deemed okay to take hard-earned opportunities from in their perspective, yet Asians are a minority and despite the myths, as you all know, the vast majority of Asians struggle as their fellow citizens that are African-American and Latinos do in the city with things like income and housing and education. And yet even with Asian-owned small businesses devastated by the impact of the pandemic, leaders there say they've been excluded from your Racial Inclusion and Equity Task Force. At a September roundtable to support entrepreneurs of color, Asians apparently were not even mentioned once. So, the question is, in which of the two cities do Asians belong to?

Mayor: Well, Arthur, it's such an important and honest question, and I appreciate it. So, let me give you some quick points. First of all, this is a city that is almost two-thirds people of color, and that clearly includes our Asian communities. So, if we're talking about a history of institutional racism and exclusion that has affected Asian communities deeply, unquestionably, not only in the past history of this country and this city, but even to today. If we're talking about economics, you're absolutely right. So many Asian-American New Yorkers struggle economically. So many immigrant families are struggling to make it in this city and pass something better along to their children. If we don't say that often enough, that's something we have to fix, I have to fix, and my team has to fix. The task force includes leaders of color across the administration, all agencies, including Asian leaders. And we have a number of East Asian and South Asian, Southeast Asian leaders in this administration. And they participate deeply.

I would say to you, looking back on what I think was a painful episode, as we try to address the injustices with our specialized high schools, I do think that there were instances in which we didn't articulate – I didn't articulate well enough, the Chancellor did not articulate well enough, the administration did not articulate well enough our vision, which was not to take from people so that some other people could have justice, but to somehow create more fairness. I don't think we did that well enough. We can do both. We can create more justice and more opportunity at the same time. So, Arthur, it's a very good question. A very important question. I've said before, I want to say it again, I apologize to members of the New York City Asian-American community who felt that the specialized high school vision was meant to exclude them. It was not. It was meant to help ensure that Black and Latino New Yorkers who are being excluded painfully,

horribly from specialized high schools would have opportunity, but not to in any other way, take away from another group. And we simply didn't handle that right, and that's my fault. I'll take responsibility for that. But the issue is still very much alive, Arthur.

The specialized high schools still don't make sense. Again, Stuyvesant, I think it was two years ago, you know, between African-American and Latino students, three percent in a city that's over half African-American, Latino. That doesn't make sense. That's not fair, but we don't want to hurt Asian Americans or white New Yorkers either and their kids. We've got to find a way to create more justice, more consistency, more fairness while increasing opportunity for everyone. And that's on us to present that vision now and put it into effect as much as we can in the 13 months ahead. And then the next mayor has to really build on that because that's where the tale of two cities is also quite evident, Arthur. If you look at our specialized high schools, no one could say that's what we aspire to. We have to do better. And in our screened schools as well. Go ahead, Arthur.

Question: Thank you. Thank you, Mayor. As a quick follow-up to that, can you say right now that you will direct the M/WBE to include Asian businesses?

Mayor: Again, I want to be careful in this answer because there's a lot of angles to this. I want to make sure that we are uplifting anybody who has been left out. But we also see in the MWBE programs a lot of challenges that are still not being addressed. You know, I think, Arthur, that these programs are still not reaching a lot of the people they were meant to help who have been, you know, the most excluded for the longest in this country. So, I want to make sure we maximize opportunity for Asian communities, for sure, and Asian businesses. But I also want to acknowledge that we still have a long way to go to achieve the very original concepts of why we're even doing the M/WBE work together. I'll get you a more detailed answer because I want to make sure I say it exactly right, having consulted with our M/WBE team, but much more to do on that front for sure.

Moderator: Next is Reema from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today?

Mayor: Good, Reema. How are you?

Question: I'm good. I'm good. Thank you for asking. So, my first question, I wanted to just ask about reopening. I think you may have addressed some of this, but – and some of it might be my confusion. But you mentioned that the City would be able to take additional measures to reopen schools if the city becomes an – like, a State-imposed orange zone, which to my understanding, I think as people have outlined means extra testing in schools, and then there's a bunch of other rules to actually get back into the building. So, I'm wondering since the city isn't in an orange zone at this point, but you are, it seems looking – you're looking at ways to reopen with increased testing, why can't the City start taking those measures right now.

Mayor: That's what we're ramping up to do, Reema. But let's be clear about how the piece is going to come together. You're not confused. Let me give you some positive reinforcement. You

are not confused. These times we're living in are confusing, ever changing reality with COVID, and very difficult standards have been set to address things. We recognize and appreciate the State's role. The State has set out its vision around orange zones, the way they manage orange zones. This came in part from the original proposal I put forward when we saw the problems in Brooklyn, Queens. I had a different approach, and I might do things a little differently, but the State has the right to apply it the way they see fit. They came up with these color zones, and the orange zone has a clear set of criteria of how you get into it and what it means to open schools within it. We know we'll be in an orange zone again, as early as next week. The planning and the logistics it'll take, which was referred to an earlier question, real challenging stuff, but it can be done. So, we're ramping up right now, retooling our testing operation to go focus on the schools that we would reopen first. And again, that begins with District 75 with our special education schools, because it is much more intensive testing. We're not going to try and open everything simultaneously. We would do this in waves. But it does require a lot of new work and we need the time to get ready to get things in position to do that. I think it's all going to line up because again, I think the orange zone – sadly, I wish there wasn't going to be one, you know, I wish I wish we were doing better in terms of COVID, but it's coming, it's coming soon. So, I think the pieces are going to line up pretty consistently. Go ahead, Reema.

Question: Okay, my second – and thank you for the positive reinforcement. My second question is about Learning Bridges. We know, you know, the City has said that there hasn't been a lot of uptake in Learning Bridges, and we've heard that the hours and locations can be inconvenient. And then there were – I believe there was a report in CBS today that kids with disabilities are being turned away from these sites. So, does the City understand why there's been less enrollment than expected and what are you doing to make sure that the program is more convenient for the families who actually need it?

Mayor: Thank you, Reema. The – first of all, I have not heard of anyone turned away. So, I'm not negating that report, I just have not heard that having had a lot of conversations with a lot of people about Learning Bridges. I've not heard that. The capacity of learning bridges has been consistently expanded. We have been expanding it with the assumption that once we saw that school, unfortunately, had to close for a period of time that we would need even more. But what has been clear is there has not been the uptake we expected. I want to emphasize any parent who wants to take advantage of Learning Bridges, you know, it's quality childcare in a safe setting. It's first and foremost now for essential workers as we are doing with this danger of a second wave. But also, there are prioritized slots for families in shelter and others who have particular challenges. And then if there's more beyond that still available, anyone can apply. And anyone who wants to apply can call 3-1-1 and learn how to apply and get their name in.

But I think the important parallel here, and I imagine you saw this, Reema, we thought in the spring and summer that our regional enrichment centers were going to be a lot more full than they were. As you know, never saw the kind of enrollment we expected. We ended up having to cut back a number of those centers because there just weren't people using them. Why? I don't think we have a perfect picture. I think, unfortunately, one of the reasons why is very much about COVID. So many people are home. A lot of people who, thank God, still have a job are working remotely. A lot of people who don't have a job to date are home for that reason. I think for many families, there's been a decision to keep their kids close, rather than taking them to childcare or

some other kind of option. I think that's part of what's happening here, but the bottom line here is for families who qualify Learning Bridges is something we will provide for sure. And we'll do it for free. And if we have to keep expanding it, we'll keep expanding it. And obviously we're working really hard to get to the point where schools are back open and that's going to be an option a lot of families will, of course, prefer.

Final point, Reema, on that report you gave, again, I had not heard about that, but presuming it is accurate and not wanting to ever belittle a situation like this, if a child was turned away, a family qualified, their child was turned away, that's just wrong. And we won't allow that. We'll track down that situation and make sure that that child gets a seat in Learning Bridges for sure. Go ahead.

Moderator: For our last question today, we'll go to Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yes, Katie, how are you today?

Question: Good, thanks. Happy Monday. I wanted to ask you a question. I hope you got a chance to read it. It's from a colleague of mine writing about the hundreds of deceased New Yorkers who are being stored in morgue trucks in Brooklyn. This is, you know, most from COVID, but some other people who died during the height of the pandemic. And I'm curious, you know, when he spoke to officials at the Medical Examiner's Office, you know, this was sort of due to, obviously they were very overwhelmed. This was unprecedented, but we are curious, you know, they use a lot of temporary measures to kind of get through the peak of the pandemic. And are there any plans from you to increase money to OCME if there is a second wave. You know, God forbid there are increased deaths because of this, but I don't know if you have any plans to increase the funding there or make any changes.

Mayor: Well, thank you for the question, Katie. It's a sad, sad, but real question. You know, we've made clear whatever we need to do to support the Medical Examiner's Office we will. A lot of extensive efforts were put into place back in the spring, very, very tough time and tremendous support we got from the federal government. That's one of the places where the federal government really did step up and help us. And I'm very thankful for that. But the sad reality to that story, I haven't read it, but I got summarized to me is, you know, those who we lost, their families are still trying to determine the best way to provide services for them. And just have been struggling because of the pandemic and other challenges. So, we're trying to work with each and every family of those we lost who are in that situation to make sure that they can have the kind of services they want to have at the right time. But we'll provide the support we need to. I don't see, thank God – I don't see anything like what we went – happened in March and April. We haven't seen some of those particular warning signs yet, thank God, but we are very, very vigilant but we'll make sure the Medical Examiner's ready either way. Go ahead.

Question: Thank you. And my second question is about, you know, the upcoming closures in the orange zone. You know, this has been asked multiple times, I guess, throughout this whole pandemic, but the small businesses and just business in general that will be affected the most by

these closures, I know obviously everyone's waiting for a federal stimulus, but is there anything more the City can do to help these businesses? I hear from a lot of business owners who are really desperate, there's no other way to put it because of – just everything is falling down on them. They can't pay rent, their revenue has completely been cut. So, is there anything more the City can do to offer assistance financially, especially, to a lot of these businesses?

Mayor: Katie, it's a question – it has been asked a lot of times. It's also a fair and important question. There's a lot we can do to help each business. It is not what we ideally would like to do. You know, the thing that would help businesses the most is to get an infusion of direct assistance, cash assistance to keep going, because you're right with the orange zone will come restrictions again, and businesses will have an even tougher time. And, you know, we – no one likes to see that. They're going to suffer as a result of that, but this is what we got to do to keep everyone safe and to beat this back because we saw in the late spring and in the summer, when we beat back the disease, then businesses can reopen. That's good for everyone. That's what we're trying to achieve once and for all. With a vaccine coming, I really want to believe, you know, this could be the last great battle we're going through right now before the COVID war is over. So, you know, if we can get through this immediate challenge and then the vaccine starts to arrive, it will take time obviously to be fully implemented. But if the vaccine starts to arrive, we get better leadership on COVID in Washington, we get the impact of the stimulus, we're going to see each month get better, even if it's well into next year, before we get to something like normal.

But I think the bottom line is any business with a challenge should talk to Small Business Services. Sometimes there are very particular things we can do that really help, dealing with a lease issue, legal help, loans, getting rid of fines that were unfairly given. There's all sorts of things that can be done. We don't have a ready supply of money to simply deliver to them, even though I would love to and they deserve it. It did come from the federal government initially, we need to see it happen again. That's the only true solution, that small business support will be a key part of the next stimulus.

Okay, as we conclude, look, we've talked about a lot today, but it comes down to something real simple. We've got to fight back the second wave. We still can. We get through these holidays, we have a chance to really turn the corner, but it's up to every one of us. The fact is that the reason New York City got strong again over the summer was because of each and every one of you. You have to make that choice again. So, really, please be very thoughtful and mindful about these holidays, do everything you can to stay safe, help us turn this last corner so we can beat this disease once and for all, and bring our city back. And when we do, I don't have a doubt in my mind that all the energies, all the pent up energies of the city will surge forward to give us an extraordinary recovery, but we need every one of you to be a part of it. And then we need our colleagues in Washington to do the thing that they should have done a long time ago and give us one more big stimulus to get us on that clear path to recovery. And I know it can be done and we've got to fight for it. Thank you, everybody.

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