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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE WITH  
COMMUNITY AND ETHNIC MEDIA**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining all of us here. My colleagues in the administration and I are really glad to have an opportunity to be with you. And I'm going to just say a few quick things and then let's get right into our dialogue. But, first of all, what an amazing moment in our history. I can't say enough times – I can't offer my congratulations enough times. I'm going to keep doing it over and over and say, congratulations to President-elect Joe Biden, who I really think will help to heal our nation. And congratulations to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, who is going to do so much for this country, in so many ways, but, right away, is proving to our country that everyone belongs in leadership and everyone's needed in leadership. And also, to all the immigrants of this city in this nation, to see a daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants reach one of the very highest offices in the land. What an inspirational story – a reminder of what America is supposed to be about, a perfect renunciation of the anti-immigrant atmosphere fostered by President Trump. To see the people of this country now by 4 million-plus, it's going to be over 5 million votes, choosing with a huge majority this great ticket. And also, in effect, saying yes to the value that immigration brings our nation, saying yes to the positive reality of the American immigrant experience personified by Kamala Harris.

So, there's so much feel thankful for here and hopeful about. I want to say there's three things I'm focused on that are going to have a really powerful impact on all of us as New Yorkers. One, with Joe Biden, we're going to have a clear, consistent coherent national strategy to fight the coronavirus. Two, we're going to have a vaccine that we can actually believe in and trust. Three, there's going to be a stimulus no doubt in my mind, there's going to be a stimulus to help New York City get back on his feet and the whole country to get back on its feet. Now, those are the good things that we can talk about today, but there's something very sobering we have to talk about today. It's not about the election, it's about what we're experiencing here in the city, because of the coronavirus. I was very blunt this morning, the numbers are really worrisome and we do profoundly face the danger of a second wave of the coronavirus. And we have to take intensive action to stop it. And that's up to every New Yorker to wear their masks, to practice distancing to really be careful about gatherings, including the family gatherings that we love at the holidays. It's not the time for family gatherings, except for people who live under the same roof already. It's not the time for travel. Even if people want to go back to their homelands, as they do every year, it's not the year for it. There's too much danger. So, I want to encourage people to not travel and asking all of you as trusted messengers to discourage travel, discourage large gatherings, reminding people that indoors – gatherings indoors and without masks are really what could potentially be the fuel for a second wave. We can't afford a second wave. A

second wave will bring with it restrictions and loss of jobs and income and things that will set us back.

So, we need to fight together against the second wave of the coronavirus, because, you know, so many businesses have reopened, schools are back, so many good things have happened. We've got to protect those things. And small businesses, in particular, have been through so much. Many of them have been able to come back, so many are immigrant owned. So many of the restaurants, so many of the neighborhood businesses, they've been able to come back in a lot of cases, but with a tenuous situation. We've got to protect them by fighting back the coronavirus. And, obviously, we've tried to help with initiatives like Open Restaurants, Open Streets that have been great for the restaurants – over 10,000 have successfully participated. Now, the Open Storefronts Initiative, allowing over 40,000 retail stores to sell their wares out on the sidewalk in front of their stores now through the end of the year, through the holiday season, the biggest shopping time of the year. We're going to put this into effect aggressively right now, see how it goes. It might be something we do even more of in the future if it works. So, these are the things that will help us to move forward, fighting against the coronavirus, taking the right precautions, continuing to support the comeback of New York City, particularly at the grassroots with our small businesses. I say to people all the time, this holiday season buy local, shop local, don't go to online as much as you might have in the past, help our community businesses survive by spending your money there. A lot of people don't have as much money this year, I know that. But to the extent people have money to spend for the holidays, shop local, help the mom and pop stores in your community.

So, there's some quick openings just to say I have great confidence New Yorkers will take on this challenge we face with just as much energy and resolve as we did in the spring and successfully overcome it just like we did then. And now, I welcome a chance to speak with all of you and welcome your questions.

**Moderator:** Hi, all. We are going to start our Q-and-A today. With us, we have Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Bitta Mostofi, Executive Director of the Tests and Trace Corps Dr. Ted Long, Chief Equity Officer for the Test and Trace Corps Annabel Palma, and First Deputy Commissioner and Chief Equity Officer at the Department of Health Dr. Torian Easterling. With that, we go to David Brand from the Queens Daily Eagle.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for having this day. Thanks for talking with us.

**Mayor:** Absolutely, welcome.

**Question:** Yeah. So, I want to talk about the new ZIP code level COVID data that was just released. And so, focusing on a few places in Queens, specifically, starting with Richmond Hill, which has the second highest seven-day positivity rate in New York City – what's causing that in Richmond Hill. And is – are there specific events? Is there a specific location?

**Mayor:** David, an important question. I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Torian Easterling, who has been doing fantastic work helping to lead the effort in neighborhoods all over this city to fight back the coronavirus. We talked about this a bit this morning, New York City has not seen major

sites driving spread as you've seen in some other parts of the country where you really could identify a major outbreak to a specific site, whether it was a bar, a restaurant, a rally, something like that. We have not had that so much here. I think it's much more diffuse. It's smaller family gatherings. It's, you know, much more individual, if you will. Clearly, have not seen a problem in our schools in general. We've had incredibly low positivity in our schools, so that's not it. We don't see that kind of ability to pinpoint. In some neighborhoods, masks usage has been less, and we have to work on that. In some neighborhoods, testing has been less. But it really comes down to then going into that neighborhood and really pushing hard to get people to engage. And typically, they have, and people have responded when we do that kind of outreach. Dr. Easterling, do you want to speak to that?

**First Deputy Commissioner and Chief Equity Officer Torian Easterling, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Yes. Thank you, Mayor. And I totally agree with your response. We continue to see most likely household contacts. People are going more indoors as the weather is getting colder. Certainly, community transmission is up as we've also seen people coming out into the community. But, as the Mayor said, you know, the data's not really pointing to any smoking gun, nothing that really is saying that there's a super spreader event. And so, we'll continue to look at the data and allow it to guide our operations. But, certainly, as we work with community partners, as we identify local leaders to continue to make sure that we're getting the message out, following core four, making sure that individuals are getting tested and avoiding gatherings as much as possible.

**Moderator:** Thanks. Next – before we go to our next question, I want to remind all the participants that due to the high number of participants today, we're taking one question per reporter. Next, we have Albert Friedman from News Report.

**Question:** Hi, good afternoon. You know, in America, when we finish one campaign right away we begin the next campaign. So, now comes the mayor campaign, where I'd like to know what instructions are you giving to the many, many candidates who want to take your job? And will you be endorsing anybody?

**Mayor:** Albert, it's good to hear your voice. We've been through many campaigns together. And look, obviously, I think we're all still focused on the results of the presidential campaign and so much to do in terms of starting to work with a new administration and hopefully a stimulus even sooner, potentially, than the new administration. So, I'm certainly not yet focused on next year's campaign. I don't think most New Yorkers are. I'm going to see how things play out. I don't have a preconceived notion of how I'm going to approach it. But I do want to make sure there's a really powerful debate in the city about our future direction. So, I'm going to be talking about what I think is important for the future in New York City, how we come back strong, how we address some of our disparities and problems. But I think – I think, actually, it's going to take a while for every-day New Yorkers to pay attention to next year's race, because there's still so much going on right now, especially this intense new challenge of a potential second wave that we – we need to put everything we've got into this. And, Albert, I know you looked very closely at the situation in Brooklyn and Queens. There's good news in that, in that we identified a problem, we acted on it, the community engaged. The community leaders, community institutions played such a good role – more testing, more mask usage. So, we've proven that we

can overcome problems, challenges, but we have to do it even more intensely now, because the second wave is bearing down on us all over the city. So, that's where people's first attention should be, making sure we do not have to experience a second wave and the restrictions that come with it.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Abu Taher from Time Television.

**Question:** Hello, Mayor. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good. How are you?

**Question:** Good. Thank you so much, Mayor. Mayor, you mentioned immigration, and my question is –

**Mayor:** I can't hear your voice well –

**Question:** Do you hear me?

**Mayor:** Yeah.

**Question:** Mayor, can you hear me now?

**Mayor:** Yeah.

**Question:** Okay. So, as you mentioned about immigration, and, you know, since Trump came into power, the immigrant community, they're scared. He built up the wall, he built up – he separated the children, he stopped the green card – you know, issues – and all kinds of executive orders he issued. And, as you mentioned, that the immigration would be [inaudible] could you please specify, what do you think? I know you are – you are not the authority to talk about, but can you just tell us, what do you think how Joe Biden could ease the immigration instead of create all kinds of irritation and fear among the immigrant community?

**Mayor:** It's a great question, Abu. I think you're going to see such an immediate change. Joe Biden is just a generous, positive human being. He's a healer. I think he's going to send an entirely different message and I think that's going to help to bring down the temperature. Donald Trump has been inciting negativity and aiding and abetting groups that are anti-immigrant, that are racist. I think you're now going to see a president bringing us back to a more positive place. Clearly, moving to get rid of some of the things that were so openly discriminatory. I'm quite certain he will move to bring back a respectful immigration process that understands the greatness of this country based on immigration and welcoming people from around the world, a process based on hope not fear. And I'm certain he will take action to address the many ways in which there was discrimination against Muslim people by actions of the Trump administration. So, I'm very confident that he and Kamala Harris and their team will systematically undo what Trump did, both the message and the policies.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Javier Castaño, from Queens Latino.

**Question:** [Inaudible] President-elect Biden mentioned that one of his priorities is going to be coronavirus. What are you expecting from him? And are you willing to fine people who don't follow protocols in the City of New York?

**Mayor:** Well, they're two very different issues, Javier. On the question of fines, when it comes to quarantine, the answer is absolutely yes. We've, obviously, tried not to find in the first instance if we could get the problem addressed, right? This has been true whether you're talking about small businesses, whether you're talking about individual families and quarantine – across the board, our preference in terms of enforcement is, first, just try and fix the problem. Some people, you know, talked about fines and enforcement. We said we'll use fines and enforcement when absolutely necessary, but the goal is to fix a problem. And if we don't have to burden a small business or burden a family with, you know, additional cost, we'd prefer not to. That still remains true, except the fact is that the second wave is bearing down on us and quarantine is going to be especially important, and quarantine related to travel is going to be especially important. So, I think it's fair to say, we will use fines and penalties when needed. We will talk about it too so people understand how serious we are – never arbitrarily, but enough that people certainly understand that we mean it, and where we see the need for a fine, we're going to do it. On the President-elect, I think the very fact that he's going to set a sane, calm, clear tone, and provide a vision of how to address the coronavirus instead of the kind of denialism we've seen from President Trump. I think just having a president who accepts national responsibility, wants the federal government to lead the way with a clear science-based approach, that's going to make a huge difference. I'm certainly someone who believes we need a national mask mandate. I hope the President will work on that. I think we needed travel restrictions, that people shouldn't even get on a plane unless they have proof of a recent negative test. I hope he'll work on that. But I think it's that, and then the vaccine – that there'll be a much clearer process for scientific vetting of the vaccine that will give people confidence that they can safely take it. I think that will make a huge difference in terms of our ability to distribute the vaccine and get people bought into it.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Ricot Dupuy from Radio Soleil.

**Question:** Good morning, Mayor.

**Mayor:** How are you, Ricot?

**Question:** Hanging in there. Hanging in there. The Republicans gained seats in Congress and in various State Legislatures. What impact do you expect that to have on the coming census-related redistricting? And do you see the prospect of us losing some seats – Congressional seats?

**Mayor:** Well, it's an important question, Ricot. Look, the redistricting happens at the state level. Obviously, the pivot there was the New York State Senate, that remains in Democratic hands. I think that is going to give us a much fair districting process that's not going to be biased against New York City. The census is the other crucial part. We ended up matching the census from 2010 in terms of the performance in New York City, which was a miracle. And I commend Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson and Census Director Julie Menin and their team. They did an amazing job. And, remember, proportionate to the nation is what matters. And we actually ended

up having better standing in 2020 proportionate to the rest of the country than we had in 2010. That's really important in terms of number of Congressional seats and federal resources. So, I'm hopeful on that front. Ricot, the other thing I'd say is I don't want to overrate what happened on Election Day in terms of the setbacks that Democrats experienced. I think what happened here is – we were paying attention to polling, which we probably should never do again, bluntly, and people had very, very high expectations – “blue wave.” What we saw in the end was a resounding presidential victory. I mean, let's be very clear, Joe Biden's going to end up winning this race by probably over 5 million votes – that's amazing, that's huge, unprecedented. And his electoral college victory is going to be very strong, including winds in places like Arizona, that Democrats haven't won in a long time. So, if you take the national picture, resounding, clear presidential victory, at least a net gain of one in the U.S. Senate, possibly one or two more, depending on what happens in Georgia in January. The House, there was a loss of some seats, that's meaningful, but the House is still clearly in Democratic hands. And then, you know, State Houses around the country, there was not a huge amount of change, that's true. But even New York State, the original projections were, you know, some big change that didn't come to pass. In the State Senate, a loss of a few seats, but a gain of some other seats too. So, you know, I think the big story here is what happened with the presidential election, and that ended up being extremely favorable for Democrats and, ultimately, very favorable for New York City.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Gregg McQueen from Manhattan Times.

**Question:** Hi. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good. How are you doing?

**Question:** Doing well, thanks. My question is about City funding for nonprofit organizations. When the latest budget was adopted, there was a retroactive cut of \$20 million per year from a program that would help nonprofits cover their overhead costs. And we've spoken with several organizations that have voiced concern that the decreased funding will leave them unable to provide adequate services. And they're also saying it's difficult for them to plan for the next fiscal year without knowing the amount of funding they'll get for those indirect costs. Will you be making any attempt to restore some of that funding for nonprofits?

**Mayor:** I'm certainly sympathetic. We put that funding in place explicitly to help shore up nonprofits that do so much for this city. We really rely on them. They've been going through a lot, even before the pandemic. We wanted to do more – in fact, this administration, we did cost of living increases for their employees. We've done a lot of things to try and help nonprofits, but then we hit the horrible fiscal crisis that came with a pandemic and we couldn't do some of the things we wanted to. And, right now, we still can't. If there's a very ample stimulus, we might be in a position to do more. So, at this moment, I don't foresee an immediate change. But I do foresee now – couldn't have said this on Friday, but I can say it today – I do foresee a stimulus. It's a question of amount. A very generous stimulus will allow us to do a lot more for nonprofits. A meager stimulus will just help us to keep going, but not necessarily help us do all the things we want to do.

**Moderator:** Next. We have Kowshik Ahmed from the Weekly Bangalee.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. Good afternoon. How are you?

**Mayor:** I'm doing well. How are you?

**Question:** I am fine. Thank you. [Inaudible] this opportunity to ask you this question, and we have been watching that you are working relentlessly since the pandemic began in our city. Every morning, you are giving the briefings to the media. A lot of people died in COVID-19. A lot of people affected in the city. There was a big problem with the [inaudible], meanwhile, a big budget deficit and the federal government's non-cooperation. You are encountering all these odds. Mr. Mayor. I want to know what is your personal feelings about going through all these odds and situations?

**Mayor:** Look and when you, when you list it all out like that, it, it feels you know, almost the intensity comes through when you list sort of all the things we've been through, and I'll tell you something that's very interesting about just the human reality, is that the way all of us have had to adapt really, really quickly. I remember I was talking to someone about the city – the miracle of New York City in March, which we went through so many horrible things, but also the extraordinary speed with which New Yorkers adapted and started addressing the problems we were facing. So do I feel the strain that we've all gone through these last eight months? Absolutely, and I feel the pain of so many families who've lost people, but I also feel, first of all, it's my job to remind people of our strength, remind people we can make it through, we will make it through. Celebrate the good, give people guidance and direction. That's what I have to do, even on the tough days.

But I also truly take inspiration from New Yorkers, because look at – in the course of March, look at what the healthcare heroes did. Look what the first responders did, look at what the everyday people did, learning to make the adjustments in their lives and protect each other, and protect their family, protect their community. It was heroic and it remains heroic, and so I feel the strain. Everyone feels a strain, but here, unlike some other places, we have the benefit of knowing that we did something great to fight back this disease. Now our greatness is going to be tested again, and that's why for all of you, I'm really beseeching, we need all of you to remind people that we still have a chance to fight back the second wave and win, but everyone will have to be a part of it wearing the face masks, social distancing, avoiding big gatherings, and it's really hard for all of us, but avoiding gatherings, avoiding family gatherings, not traveling. This is the only way to stop a second wave and we all have to be devoted to it.

**Moderator:** Next we have Edwin Martinez from El Diario.

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

**Mayor:** I'm well, how are you?

**Question:** Fine. Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. One of the biggest complaints you and Governor Cuomo have faced during this pandemic from immigrants is that many families, they feel that the city and the state really having helped them a lot in terms of financial support, and

they also haven't received money from federal government because they don't have papers. My question is this, since you said that we will start seeing changes with Biden as a president, do you think it's going to be possible that these families will receive some money from the city also in order to try to go ahead and recover, and also another change that maybe could be possible would be the immigration reform. Do you think those things are possible with Biden as president?

**Mayor:** I want to separate those two. I think it looks sometimes it's a sad responsibility to tell people things that are not ideal, or they don't want to hear, and aren't necessarily even fair, but we are not in a position as the city to provide direct financial aid to families that certainly need it, but are undocumented. We're not in a position to do that. We don't have the money to begin with. We don't have a stream of money from the federal government that we can use, and even though I'm very hopeful for a stimulus, I do not see with a Republican Senate, I do not see that stimulus being constructed in a way that can involve direct financial aid to undocumented individuals. I think that's just the sad reality, but the fact in this city is we support everyone. We support New Yorkers, regardless of documentation status with something else that matters tremendously. Even if it's not direct financial aid, with the food program that we've been providing to all New Yorkers, no New Yorker should go hungry, regardless of documentation status, it's available to everyone. Healthcare is available to everyone for free. NYC Care is a plan to provide quality health care through our public hospitals and clinics to any New Yorker, regardless of documentation status. We have this now on a level, no place else in the country has guaranteed healthcare for all. Obviously, we have the eviction moratorium to make sure people still have a roof over their heads. So, we do a lot, but not everything.

On your second question. I am hopeful for immigration reform. I think the vast majority of the American people want immigration reform and even a lot of Republicans want immigration reform is certainly want to keep the dreamers here. They want to figure out a better way to allow people to come here and work. They understand that there's so many families need to be reunified. I think we do have an opportunity for immigration reform, and I think vice president Biden is exactly the kind of president we need to achieve it because he understands how to strike the right kind of compromise in the US Senate. So, I do believe we could see that again over the next couple of years, comprehensive immigration reform.

**Commissioner Bitta Mostofi, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs:** Sir, I'd like to just jump in there too, as well to just underscore that you know, we were very happy to work closely with the Open Society Foundation on the distribution of cash assistance to families. We reached over 76,000 individuals and their families across the city with direct cash assistance. We've also worked closely with the organizations that we partner with to ensure that they have the ability to enroll those individuals and their families in the food assistance programs that the Mayor mentioned, which are, which are available to all regardless of status. We've also made sure that no family had to go without assistance in paying the dignity and respect that they showed to a loved one who lost their life through burial assistance for all which is still available for those who haven't sought that assistance, and lastly, we worked really closely to ensure that there is assistance and support around rental needs working to actually direct some of the folks that came through our network of organizations to the FASTEN program that's providing rental assistance. So we're still doing that work to ensure that all of our families and communities have a response

to the things that are of greatest need, which are really the rental assistance and food as we've seen through our program, and we'll continue to do that work regardless of where the federal government is at. The last thing that I will say is folks are still concerned about seeking assistance because of the public charge rule. We really want to encourage them to call our legal helpline, 1-800-354-0365, to talk to a lawyer and make sure that if you are eligible for assistance, you are accessing it without fear of immigration status.

**Mayor:** Bitta there was a court decision recently on public charge, right?

**Commissioner Mostofi:** Yes, there was. There was a positive decision out of the seventh circuit, unfortunately that was temporarily stayed. But what we have seen with the litigation over and over again is that this is frankly a rule that is illegal and, ultimately, we will prevail on this litigation and strike it down.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Mariela Salgado from Univision 41.

**Question:** Hello, both. Hi, Mr. Mayor, hi Commissioner. I hope you're all well, nice to see you.

**Mayor:** It's great to see you, how're you doing?

**Question:** We're doing great, thank you. We're working here remotely from our Univision car, but I know how busy you are and we have a lot of people on the line so one thing to you Mayor would be now that we're afraid of the second wave, people are going to have more tracking or more testing in schools. I know that there's like a miracle that kids somehow seem to be doing well in schools, even though they're gathered there more than you would normally want, they seem to be okay. So that's – I don't know if there's any way that the Commissioner could answer in Spanish that the President-elect has said that the number one thing he will do is the DACA reversal. He wants everybody to have DACA, but a lot of the questions that we have in Univision are people from TPS, they're wondering the now due to Eta, if they will get something like the TPS that they did from [inaudible]. Wonder if that's something that you're hearing? Thank you so much.

**Mayor:** You're very welcome, and I don't know Commissioner Mostofi, that second part is to you, and I don't know if you speak Spanish well enough to cover that in Spanish right now. You'll tell me. Okay.

**Commissioner Mostofi:** Mariela certainly thinks so, and he usually pulls it out of me. So, I'll comply. I will say briefly first in English that we are we have actually reached out to the Honduran Consulate to understand the impact of the hurricane on the families and communities there, and certainly have heard from community members their concern and as always DACA recipients and TPS holders in our city are a priority for us. These are folks who have been here in some cases for nearly two decades, who are the primary breadwinners of their families, and for whom we have advocated for and will continue to advocate for with any administration.

[Commissioner Mostofi speaks in Spanish]

**Mayor:** And finally, on the point about schools just want to keep reminding everyone our schools have been extraordinarily safe. I just have the most up-to-date testing numbers here. Since we began the school year, 105,000 test results for students and staff in our schools, 105,000, and what has come back: only 169 individual cases. So still, almost only one in a thousand people in our school system experience in the coronavirus. Far, far better than what we're seeing in our general society. So, the schools have been safe and that's a blessing.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Rong Xiaoqing from Sing Tao Daily.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, thank you for hosting this roundtable. I talked to a nurse practitioner yesterday and he said he thinks the most critical problem for the pandemic control is a lot of people do not follow the current time instructions strictly because they can't afford it. So his idea is instead of – in the next a stimulus plan, instead of distributing checks to everybody, the money should be used to compensate the lost income for the people who have to quarantine. I know this is at the federal level, but what do you think about this idea? Are you going to suggest those to the president-elect or is New York possibly can launch our own version of this?

**Mayor:** It's a really interesting question and an important question. I would state the obvious to begin with it's a very commendable idea as something we would look at if we get federal resources, for sure, but you know, whether it's a direct federal program or something funded through the city, we would need the resources to do it. But in the meantime, I'm glad you're raising it because we try to make clear to anyone that needs to be in quarantine, that we're going to support them in every way, and I want to turn to Annabel Palma, the Chief Equity Officer at Test and Trace Corps, just to make sure everyone who's here for the roundtable understands all of the ways that we do support people in quarantine, everything that we can get them, which means that the quarantine experience is fully supported. You make a very good point about potential lost income, and I don't take that lightly at all. We need to see if we can address that with the new administration, but we do a lot to try and make sure the experience goes well and that various needs are covered and costs are covered when in quarantine. Annabel, you want to speak to that?

**Chief Equity Officer Annabel Palma, NYC Test and Trace Corps:** Thank you, sir. I will add that, you know, for families we offer free hotel rooms [inaudible] need to safely separate from your loved ones. We have resources from food to transportation to ensuring that no one goes without [inaudible] this time. Or we ask people, you know, if you need access to any of these resources, you can call our hotline at 212-COVID and we will connect you to the resources within your community that you need for you and your families and your loved ones to continue to get through this tough time. We understand that folks, you know, have to continue to go to work, and so we will continue to ask the individuals that have to, you know go outside of their homes to protect themselves and their loved ones by socially distancing and wearing their face coverings and practicing the core four. But again there are resources that the city has generously put together to ensure that no one goes without [inaudible] during this time, especially, you know, families in the hardest hit areas that we seen in early March and April, and so by reaching

out and calling our hotline at 212-COVID, you can access these resources including a free hotel room, again, should you need to separate from your friends?

**Mayor:** So really emphasizing if people need free hotel, free food, free medicines, they're going to get it. But also, reminder your questions so important that remember there's paid sick leave there too, and that's a city law, and obviously a lot of companies provide their own policies. Union members have their own policies. They even go farther. So, depending on the individual, if they have to miss for quarantine purposes that's obviously something that is applicable under paid sick leave, and that's another way to cover that lost income.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Manzoor Hussain from Dunya International.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor, nice to see you again.

**Mayor:** How are you doing? Please speak up a little bit so I can hear you well.

**Question:** Glad to see you again.

**Mayor:** Good to see you.

**Question:** So [inaudible] the future of New York City on pandemic [inaudible] the previous president's anti-immigration policies. So, do you have any message for both the communities of color [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Look, I think we have a lot to look forward to a lot to be hopeful about now because it's like the thorn has been taken out of our side. Donald Trump may continue to try and be a negative voice in our society, but he'll never be the same again. He has been rejected by the American people and his message of hate has been rejected. His anti-immigrant message has been rejected and not by a little bit overwhelmingly you know, a victory of over 5 million votes speaks volumes. So, I think we are in a position to turn the corner, to have a more country, a more respectful country. This city has always believed in respecting everyone, every background, every faith, coming from every country in the world, that's who we are, and now we'll have a president who believes in the same and will be backing us up and supporting us. So, I'm very, very hopeful about the healing that will take place. We have a lot of work to do. We have to overcome the coronavirus. That's going to take a lot more work, but I do think you're going to see a steady calming and at a much more positive environment and much more effort across the board to respect and embrace people of every background.

**Moderator:** Next, we have Zawadi Morris from the Brooklyn Reader.

**Mayor:** Zawadi, are you there? Maybe you're on mute.

**Question:** Pronounced my name wrong.

**Mayor:** Oh, he's got the name wrong. What's your name?

**Question:** Zainab.

**Mayor:** Okay. Sorry about that, go ahead.

**Question:** No, it's okay. So, a study was published last week that suggested that New York City's firefighters and EMS workers were 15 times more likely to be infected during the first wave of the pandemic. I was just wondering if the City had more current numbers of infection rates among the City's first responders?

**Mayor:** I don't. I have not heard the most recent numbers. I don't know if Dr. Easterling or Dr. Long happened to have those numbers by chance? Either one of you?

**First Deputy Commissioner Easterling:** No sir. Not at this time, but we can certainly follow up.

**Mayor:** Okay. We will follow up and get you that. Okay. Yeah.

**Moderator:** Next we have Fern Sidman from the Jewish Voice.

**Question:** Thank you so much for organizing this round table. I hope you and your family are well. Just wanted to ask you in terms of Governor Cuomo's announcement concerning the red zone in Brooklyn. It's received a lot of publicity. It's now that zone is considered yellow or orange. I know that former Councilman Chaim Deutsch had been sending out emails, asking people in the community to get tested so that we can prove the infection rates are going down, therefore have the restrictions lifted. Can you speak to that issue and tell the people in the former red zone, what kind of restrictions will be lifted? Will the children be able to go back to school? Will businesses, both non-essential and essential be open for business? And will life resume at least semi normally in that area?

**Mayor:** Yeah, I will. Fern, thank you for such an important question. Look, the – I'll give you the overview. Obviously, the specific guidance from the State of New York is what's the definitive answer, but the basic answer is this – we've seen tremendous progress. We just heard, you know, today more progress. As the communities come out of red, obviously red is the thing we want to avoid the most where the greatest restrictions existed, including the greatest restrictions on businesses and houses of worship. So now those restrictions are starting to be relaxed. You can have more people in a house of worship for example. Obviously in terms of schools -- red and orange come with schools being closed, but the State did put forward a policy last week for how individual schools could reopen by going through additional steps. But much more importantly, to the core of your question, Fern, I want to thank everyone in the community who did so much to overcome the crisis we had in the last few weeks. I saw so many community leaders who stood up and provided great leadership, community organizations, synagogues, yeshivas, so many that did so much good work to inform the community, to encourage testing, to distribute masks. We saw a great uptick in testing. That's been crucial, a lot more mask wearing. That's been tremendously helpful. And so now every one of the communities that had been in red is either gone to orange or yellow. That's fantastic progress. And we want to get to the next stage where they're either all yellow or out of yellow, into green. And it proves it can be done. But what we're going to have to be careful about not only in Brooklyn, but in the whole city is not letting down our guard now. People learned a lot the last few weeks about the importance of

mask wearing, social distancing, and testing. Now we have to keep that up. We have to keep that momentum. Because the disease is bearing down on us citywide now. And so, what I'm hoping Fern, is that the new approach that people have taken will be consistent until the coronavirus is defeated altogether. But the good news is certainly increasingly stores are going to be able to reopen. Schools are going to be able to reopen. Still a little more work to do in a few areas, but we can see we're absolutely moving in the right direction. When all of that can get back and people can get back to work. Kids can get back to school so long as we hold the line now, citywide. Now the venue becomes citywide, protecting against a bigger crisis that would lead to much bigger restrictions. That's what we all have to fight against now.

**Moderator:** We have our last two questions for the day. Next we have Indrajit Saluja from the Indian Panorama.

**Question:** Good afternoon Mayor, how are you, sir?

**Mayor:** I'm doing well. How are you?

**Question:** Very fine, very fine. Thank you so far so good. All the good news are coming through. And the biggest news that you are giving today is hope that we will soon overcome coronavirus in New York, at least. Having said that Mayor, my concern today is you're – I know your love for the Sikh community, for the Sikh temples and for the Hindu temples all right. And I'm a Sikh, you know, if you don't, if you remember me. Sometimes know, I feel a little concerned that after having done all the good work in distributing face masks, in educating people about social dispensing and a face covering, what I find is – and I have been a visited to some places that somehow that there is some laxity. There are more people than should be admitted into a temple. So, my question to you Mayor is are you keeping some kind of an eye on places of worship to ensure that social distancing and face covering are being followed so that they spread of coronavirus could be prevented? How does the City –

**Mayor:** So, a very important question and look, I want it – no, I appreciate the question. The faith community, the faith leadership all over the city, every faith has been extraordinary and united. What we saw in March and April was unbelievable. People united across all faiths and did some very, very difficult things to protect their communities, including deciding not to have worship services. That was a decision of many faith leaders and organizations in common. That was an example of the greatness of New York City to see everyone working together with that same vision of how to protect people. As the worship services have reopened. It's been very clear, they still come with restrictions. So, we want to be very respectful of every faith tradition and every community, but we do need those restrictions to be followed. I'll turn to Dr. Easterling who can mention the Health Department's approach, but I'll offer the overview with this point. We want to work with every faith community, with every clergy leader. We want to respect everyone, but it is very important that houses of worship recognize the limitations that the State has set. And really understand this is more of a matter of life and death again than it's been at any time since March and April. Because we do see the second wave potential and we have to fight it. So making sure the houses of worship have the proper social distancing, the proper limits on the number of worshipers, the face coverings is crucial at this moment to fight back the second wave. Dr. Easterling, you want to add?

**First Deputy Commissioner Easterling:** Yes. Thank you, Mayor. Thank you for the question. I think the Mayor hit all of the important points. I think what I've seen over the last several months is just overwhelming support from our faith leaders and our houses of worship. The several calls that we have led along with our Community Affairs Unit and really talking about the guidance. And I think that we have to continue to stay vigilant and, you know, and keep with our messaging around the importance of [inaudible] making sure that individuals are getting tested and understand how important it is to avoid gatherings, especially indoor. And so, you know, what we've talked about with our houses of worship and our faith-based leaders really making sure that they are working with us both the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, as well as my colleagues. We have Dr. Ted Long and Annabel Palma on the line, you know, really making sure that you're working with us. As we do work with our faith-based leaders to make sure that you have all the materials, make sure that individuals know how that they need to follow up with our contact tracers if someone tests positive. We're also making sure that as far as reopening that houses of worship are prepared if they're going to do so. We've always said that outdoor gatherings are best, but even as the weather is changing to really think about if this is the right time to reopen. And so making sure that individuals understand how important it is that they have to really abide by the State criteria around the percentage of people who can be indoors. We certainly want to continue to work with you and certainly happy to follow up with you if there's anything else that we can help provide.

**Mayor:** And on this – hold on one second. I want to make a quick point about, and I'm going to ask Ted Long to repeat his favorite phone number, that whenever a house of worship or faith leader knows of a case in their faith community, in their house of worship, it's really important to make sure that the Test and Trace Corps is notified. That we can do the right kind of contact tracing, make sure that all the rest of the congregation is safe. So, Test and Trace gets information from many sources, but I want to really encourage faith leaders because your words will make such a difference, to participate actively with Test and Trace, to keep your congregation safe. And I'm asking all of our journalists' colleagues to get that word because faith communities, faith leaders are looking at what you all write and what you all broadcast, of how important it is to stay in direct touch with the Test and Trace Corps whenever there is a problem in a congregation. So Ted Long, why don't you tell people your favorite phone number?

**Executive Director Ted Long, NYC Test and Trace Corps:** Thank you sir. My favorite phone number is 2-1-2-COVID-19. Not only is that a way to get in touch with us, but as a faith leader, you can let us know if you want us to bring testing resources to your church, your synagogue wherever you want us to be. That's how you can reach out to us and let us know where we can be, how to help you. Thank you.

**Mayor:** And Ted listed churches and synagogues, but mosques, temples, you name it. Every faith tradition respected. But a lot of faith leaders have been talking about wanting more testing to come locally. Test and Trace Corps can work with you to achieve that. Who was jumping in there?

**Chief Equity Officer Palma:** I was sir. To just simply state that we've worked closely with our colleagues here, as well as the Community Affairs Unit to distribute PPE, including to the Sikh community which has been one that we've engaged with. And I think now maybe three or four

rounds helped to distribute PPE to some congregations. So that's something that we'll continue to do as a part of the outreach that we're participating in.

**Mayor:** Excellent. I know we have one more question and then I'll have a brief wrap up at the end. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Last question for today is for your Yochanon Donn from Mishpacha Magazine.

**Question:** Yes. Hello, Mr. Mayor great speaking to you again.

**Mayor:** How are you doing?

**Question:** Yeah, I'm good. I'm just wondering, maybe it could help me out over here. Since the beginning of the second wave in the fall, we in the Jewish media were pushing the message wear masks, test, avoid crowded areas. The biggest hindrance to getting this over from back to our readership is constantly the same. When you have these huge exceptions over the summer, the Black Lives Matter protests. And now over the weekend, the rallies of the presidential election results. You know, you have given reasons, different reasons for this, but for many in my community who already feel targeted by these enforcements, I would note particularly by the Governor's rhetoric calling COVID a quote unquote Ultra-Orthodox Jewish problem and take away the funding and the fall into line. So, it just boils down to government is not allowing us the first amendment, right to pray together, or open business safely, but is giving preferred political groups their first amendment right to protest and celebrate when their candidate wins. Can you give us a reason we can tell readers why they should think government takes COVID seriously, no exceptions? You know, people are dying so this is very important.

**Mayor:** I know, I appreciate the question and I know you're asking it sincerely. And I understand why there has been concern and we need to have more of a dialogue, I really do. I want to emphasize the difference between the different expressions that people have made. And by the way, they've been across the political spectrum. We can look at different types of protests from the summer, but you can also look a few weeks ago on Staten Island, a thousand or 2,000 people gathered in support of President Trump. The outdoor protests obviously we're concerned about any time people gather, protests, rallies, you name it. There've been outdoor celebrations in the community. While we are concerned about that, we're particularly concerned about that when people are not wearing masks. But the much greater problem has been indoors, the much greater problem has been indoor gatherings without enough masks. That's when we take a problem of COVID and we now turn it into a much greater, more intense problem. That's why there is a different kind of concern when you talk about a school, a house of worship, or a business, all of which are indoors. And in too many cases, in many different communities, we didn't see enough masks wearing. We had a particularly intense problem in Brooklyn and Queens. But we all worked together to fight that problem back. And this is a good example of community leaders, community organizations, helping to guide the community, working with the government to get that done. We managed to really push back that problem. And now, as you can see, there's very few restrictions compared to what there were before. We need to keep that going. Again, my greater concern, I do understand your point, but my even more essential concern is if people continue to have a dialogue, as we're going into the colder weather and more and more people

are going to be indoors anyway, if they're still debating whether it's important to keep social distancing or important to wear masks, as more and more people are going to be indoors, you're going to see sadly the disease come back again. And then that inevitably will lead to restrictions on everyone, every community. Because the second wave is growing in this city.

So I do hear the point. I don't believe it's fair to say that the health care decisions have been made on anything, but the data and the science, because the health care decisions have been consistent. Had a problem in Brooklyn and Queens, it has been addressed in large part. It's being improved upon greatly. Now we see a problem in Staten Island and to some extent in the Bronx as well. We're going to focus on those areas. Previously it was places like Sunset Park, Soundview, Southeast Queens. It's been different communities, different ethnicities, different faiths, different boroughs. The science and the data tells us where we need to go. And that's what we are going to keep doing. But I'd asked you since I do appreciate your question. I ask you to please use the power of your platform and everyone who's joining us today, use the power of your platforms to remind people that some things are not political at all. It is not political to avoid large gatherings indoors, to recognize that's just a matter of health and common sense. It should not be a political question whether a mask works or not. This is not a question. This is something our doctors, our scientists have made very clear. It has made a huge impact. Everyone should be wearing masks because it's the right thing to do to keep people safe. We don't have any debate on the science here. Why don't we all agree the way to stop the second wave is to avoid big gatherings indoors, wear masks all the time and get past this moment in history so we can keep everybody moving forward? Keep schools, open businesses open. If we don't do that right, we're all going to suffer together. It's not going to be about one community or another. It's going to be all of us. And we don't want that for any of us.

Let me conclude with this. I keep coming back to the heroism that New Yorkers have shown, and this is the good news. And this is the thing that should uplift us. You know, our colleague from I think it was the Brooklyn Reader asked the question about first responders. Our first responders have been selfless. They've been extraordinary. They've gone out there and put themselves in harm's way to protect all of us. Our health care heroes, the health care workers who've done amazing work. It's our job, obviously, to protect them, to make sure they get the support they need, the PPE. To make sure they stay healthy. We're testing them all the time obviously. Their heroism was what we first saw in March and April. On top of that, we've seen another heroism. The everyday heroism of New Yorkers. Wear a mask, who do the social distancing, who help each other support each other. And now we're going to ask for yet another type of heroism. And this is the toughest in many ways for everyday people, because we're going to ask you one more time to not do some of the things that you so desperately deeply want to do. You want to, so many people want to be with their loved ones at the holidays, want to enjoy large gatherings of family, want to travel to where their loved ones are, who they haven't seen in a long time because of this pandemic. You want it even more because of the pandemic, but it's exactly the wrong time because we have to fight the pandemic back now. And soon there will be a vaccine and soon we'll start to beat the coronavirus once and for all and reopen everything. But in the meantime, we have to be incredibly strong to get through these next few months, to get through these holidays together. So, everyone, please help all us of your readers, your viewers, your listeners, to know that it's going to take some real sacrifice and strength to get through this next period. But we can do it. New York City did it before. New York City became the envy of

the nation, how we overcame the coronavirus in the spring. We need to do it again for all of us. Thank you everyone for joining us. Really appreciate this dialogue and look forward to seeing you again soon. Take care now.

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