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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Bobby Cuza:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. With the holiday weekend behind us, COVID-19 testing locations around the five boroughs are seeing long lines once again. To make it easier for New Yorkers to get tested, the City's opening 25 new testing sites, which includes mobile locations and self-testing centers and Health + Hospitals has launched a website that lists the wait times at city run testing sites. Joining me now to discuss all of this is Mayor de Blasio who joins us from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Welcome Mayor, thanks for joining us as always.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** My pleasure, Bobby. How are you doing?

**Cuza:** I'm doing all right. So, let's talk about testing. In recent weeks we've seen record numbers of people getting tested, but that has come with hours long lines, in some cases difficulty making appointments, so now this is an attempt by the City to remedy that, right?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. Bobby, look, let me make it really clear, I'm saying this from the heart. We need all New Yorkers to get tested. This is a call to arms. We need the people in this city to help us fight back the second wave and everyone can participate, but you've got to get tested. You got to do it once a month, or obviously anytime that you have symptoms, what we're doing is adding a lot more testing sites constantly. We're putting together these really helpful tools to show people where the least wait is and a lot of times that is our Health + Hospital sites. And I'm just saying it folks, look, it does not have to take a lot of time. You can find a site nearby and you can find out exactly the wait time is, but we need you to get off the bench and get in the game and help us fight back the coronavirus by getting tested.

**Cuza:** All right, Mayor de Blasio, let's talk about schools, and I always like to state my bias upfront. I am the parent to two young blended learners, pre-K and first grade, so ecstatic, I think might be the word to describe my feelings yesterday when I heard the news about schools reopening, but a lot of questions here. I want to ask you about testing. Now we're going to be testing once a week, 20 percent of the school population. How is this going to work? Who's going to administer the test? Where did those people come from? I know you said – I heard you say today this will not be a rapid test, but a kind of test where you might be able to get a result within a day or so. Is there going to be some sort of priority for those tests?

**Mayor:** Bobby, Bobby, so many questions. You are a parent of two young children.

**Cuza:** How does the testing work? Let's make it simple.

**Mayor:** Okay, so we've been testing the schools since the very beginning and the standard was typically once a month. We're now going to make that a once a week standard, the same way we've been doing up to now, Health + Hospitals and Test and Trace have been coordinating some of it's directly with their personnel, some of it's bringing in outside you know, non-profits and other companies to help us do it. It's been going really well. You've seen how remarkably few cases there have been in our schools, while we know that because we've done so much testing and it's gone so well. Look, we opened our schools with a gold standard. We were very clear, we took the best health and safety measures from around the world, layer them one on top of another, it worked, the schools were safe. Now we're going even farther. This is like gold plus, we are now adding weekly testing and to speak to you as a parent, every parent has to have the testing consent form on file for their child to be able to attend school because we need to make sure we can do that testing on a regular basis.

**Cuza:** So now that we're doing more testing, let's see if my statistical analysis here is correct, we're doing four times more testing right? Every week instead of every month. So by definition, even if the infection rate stays really low, we're going to get – we're going to pick up more cases, right? So do you and your education team expect that we're going to have to see more school closures as a result?

**Mayor:** Well, we'll certainly see some, but again, this gets to the essence of things to fight this disease. We've been asking parents from the beginning. If your child is not feeling well in the morning, keep them home. If a child gets to school and they get a temperature check on the temperature side, they do not go to their classroom, they go to isolation room and make an arrangement then to get the parent to pick them up. We really want to make sure we do not have to close down classrooms in schools, but if more testing sometimes leads to it, well that's because we have an accurate measure and we're acting on. Our situation room has been a big X-factor here. We didn't have it originally as an idea, we put it together right before school began. This has been one of the great X-factors in why schools have been so safe. So, Bobby, yes, sometimes it will lead to a temporary closure, but if that's part of what keeps everyone safe, that's something we're certainly ready for.

**Cuza:** There's been a little bit of confusion, I think because the State has had sort of its own parallel system with these yellow and orange and red zones throughout the city, these micro clusters, they're will close schools in some cases, but they can test out of those closures. What's going to happen now? Are you and the Governor on the same page here, is this new testing standard going to be the testing standard going forward, or could the Governor potentially come in and sort of unilaterally close the school in a red zone?

**Mayor:** So the Governor and I have spoken several times in the last few days and I participate in his press conference today to amplify the fact that we've really have some very strong, common views on how to approach the schools and what I've said to him is, look, we're going to go the extra mile here and do the weekly testing. And we believe that the track record couldn't be more clear, you know, that gold standard and then some of keeping schools safe has been proven now for months in every neighborhood. We feel very good about our ability now to keep schools open for the duration, linking up to the time when we have a vaccine. The State, obviously, will always look at each situation, but they've historically given local school districts a lot of room to make the decisions that are best for their kids and their families. And, you know, any State rules

we're always going to follow, but I think the fact that we have such a rigorous additional testing approach is certainly something the State feels good about.

**Cuza:** So the school's reopening plan only applies to the younger grades, pre-K and K-5, talk about middle schoolers and high schools –

**Mayor:** Bobby, I'm going to stop you there. It's pre-K, 3-K, it's K-5, in any kind of building, whatever the K-5 component is that will be open, and its District 75 special education programs.

**Cuza:** And understandably you know, the focus is on that for now, but I know you said middle schoolers and high schoolers for now they remain at home and maybe after the holidays, you'll be able to take a look at that. But it seems like for now there's no plan. I mean, is it a plausible scenario that middle schoolers and high schoolers may not be back in person at all until we get a vaccine?

**Mayor:** No, I expect them back certainly well before we have a vaccine, but I – when I say vaccine I mean widely distributed. We expect the vaccine as early as you know, the month that starts tomorrow in the first doses, we expect more and more supply with every passing month, January, February, March. But I am very hopeful that we can get middle school and high school back soon, the first thing we have to do, because this is, again, this is different. This is approach now that we expect to take us through the remainder of the school year until the vaccine has opened up the situation so much so that then we can bring everyone back, and that might be this school year, that might be next school year, we can do that, but what I know for sure, this model we've put together now is the model we want to use for the duration of this school year. So, we're starting with District 75, pre-K 3- K and K - 5. As soon as those are fully implemented, I want to move as quickly as possible of course, next to middle school, but we know we've got just a few weeks before the Christmas break. We knew we needed a little time to get this first phase ready and then I'm very hopeful after the Christmas break as soon as possible thereafter we'll move to middle school. But we got to see, of course, the overall health situation, how the city is doing, and make sure we have all the pieces ready for that.

**Cuza:** Governor Cuomo today was sounding the alarm about hospitalizations Statewide which are now up to the levels we saw back in May, but in the city hospitalizations, relatively speaking, haven't seen the same spike that we've seen in the positivity rates. So is the city doing better than the rest of the State? And is that now the better metric than that positivity rate?

**Cuza:** The City is doing really well in the scheme of things on hospitalizations, and it's not just hospitalizations themselves, very, very importantly, how many people end up in the intensive care unit? How many end up intubated? And, of course, most importantly, most humanly and sensitively, how many people do we lose? That's what matters most. What we've seen is the city hospitals, public hospitals, private hospitals are doing very well and I think that says so much about the fact that New Yorkers have been really good about mask wearing, are by and large practicing social distancing, obviously it says a lot about how our schools have been safe. We need to keep that going and the Governor is sounding a very important alarm here. Again, it's a call to arms. We need to make sure we never end up in a situation like we did in the spring and so much of that depends on individual behavior and really respecting the fact that we have to avoid any kind of large indoor gatherings. We have to ensure that people wear those masks, indoors and outdoors. These are the things that make a difference.

**Cuza:** All right, it's time now for a quick break, I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio when we come back, stay with us.

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**Cuza:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I am joined once again by Mayor de Blasio, who is standing by inside City Hall. Mr. Mayor, I want to ask you about this Supreme Court ruling from last week. I'm sure you saw this. The Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn had sued New York State. They objected to some of these COVID regulation, specifically the restriction that they could only have 10 people at a religious service in these designated red zones. This did not affect – this did not pertain to city regulations, the City was not party to this, but the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Brooklyn Diocese. Amy Coney Barrett, the new Supreme Court justice who tilted the court to the right, really the decisive vote here. I just wonder what your take was on this and you know, what you think of the church's position that it amounts to religious discrimination to have these kinds of restrictions on the church, when you have people going to big box stores and even shopping at liquor stores?

**Mayor:** Well, Bobby, look I don't think it's discrimination at all. I think this is an honest effort by the State to protect people, to, you know, protect people's health in the middle of a pandemic, and I'm really surprised that the Supreme Court majority in this case – you know, this was not a situation in my view where there's the larger question of constitutional rights. This was about public safety, and by the way, the ability of states and cities to protect their own people in a crisis I think, you know, New York's own Justice Sonia Sotomayor, you know, powerfully spoke about the fact that in this kind of crisis, the court need to respect the ability of local officials to figure out what would save lives, and what's a more essential right than the ability to save the lives of our people. So I think this was a mistake by the court, and look, as you said, you know, it does not affect the city's approach. We're going to keep doing everything we can to protect people, but I just, I wish the court had looked at the facts on the ground and how many lives we've lost and how important it is to take every precaution, particularly with indoor gatherings.

**Cuza:** Mr. Mayor, let me ask you a question relating to homelessness. The city's plan to move some 235 homeless men out of the Lucerne Hotel on the Upper West Side to a Radisson Hotel down in the Financial District had been blocked by a group in Lower Manhattan that had sued in order to stop the move. A judge last week ruled in the City's favor, so this move will now move forward. I wonder if you can tell us the timing on that and you know, was this the desired outcome in this case?

**Mayor:** Yeah, look this, this whole situation came out of a crisis. Our intention was not to use hotels but to keep folks who needed shelter in a setting where they could get a lot of support in a shelter that was made to be a shelter and help them on the way back to self-sufficiency, that's the whole idea of our approach, our policy to help homeless folks. The hotels were only used in the atmosphere of a crisis because the congregate settings were too full for the COVID era and we needed to find any additional locations. But in the case of the Upper West Side, that meant three hotels in close proximity. It was not anything anyone would want to have done. So what we're doing is having a facility in Lower Manhattan, a place that doesn't have a lot of homeless shelters, it's going to be a long-term shelter facility. There's going to be more services available

for the homeless folks to help them move forward in their lives, closer to medical care, and folks will start to move out of Lucerne to the new facility over the course of the next few weeks.

**Cuza:** On a sort of related topic I wanted to ask you about hunger. There was a study out recently from the Robin Hood Foundation that was really stunning. Something like 32 percent of New Yorkers reported that they had been to a food pantry sometime in the previous 12 months. I know the City has been doing a lot in terms of its emergency food program spending, I think something like \$170 million on that program. Is this sustainable and this hunger problem seems only to be growing worse, right?

**Mayor:** It's a very, very tough situation, Bobby and no one should underestimate the extent of hunger in this city, because here we are in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, remember 900,000 people lost their jobs after the crisis hit in the spring. Now thank God about 300,000 of those jobs have now come back, but it's still a massive dislocation. We've made something very clear. I've said it repeatedly. No New Yorker can go hungry. No New Yorker should go hungry. We are going to provide free food for anyone that needs it. They just have to call 3-1-1 and we'll direct people to the hundreds of school sites that are giving out free food to kids and adults, multiple meals a day, soup kitchens, food pantries, or even home delivery for those who need it. So yeah, it costs a lot – it will be hundreds of millions of dollars, but Bobby, I can't think of anything more important we could have done in this crisis to make sure people in need had enough to eat, and that's what New York City's done.

**Cuza:** Mr. Mayor, we've learned in recent days that the Democrats have won a supermajority in the State Senate, as some of the results have become final from the election. Is this a good thing? I wonder whether you think now having a veto proof majority in the State Senate could move the Senate to the left on some issues, whether it's taxing the wealthy, marijuana legalization, an eviction moratorium, what's your take on this?

**Mayor:** Well, these are all areas where we need change. So I'm glad you mentioned all of them. We right now, the wealthy are not paying their fair share in taxes. I fully hope that the New York State Legislature will tax on the wealthy who have done extremely well – you look at the stock market, wealthy people have only gotten richer during this pandemic. Working people, low-income people have been suffering, middle-class people suffering. It's about time we had higher taxes on the wealthy. We absolutely should legalize marijuana in the state, and I am hopeful the super majority in the Senate will help get it done. We need to legalize it with the right health and safety measures and fairness for the communities that suffered so long, Black and Brown communities that suffered because of the broken marijuana laws of the past. There are so many things that can happen here with this supermajority in the Senate. So I'm thrilled about it, and I got to tell you, Bobby, I worked hard in 2014 and 2016, 2018. I tried with all I had to support the Democrats in taking back the State Senate, and when we got there in 2018, what an amazing night that was. This is even better to have this kind of strong, strong Democratic majority. This is I think what it's going to be for years and years to come. It's good for the State, it's definitely good for New York City as well.

**Cuza:** There's a bill in the State Senate to extend the eviction moratorium for the duration of the pandemic and for a year thereafter, is that something you'd support?

**Mayor:** I support having both a moratorium during the height of the pandemic, but then also putting in place immediately a payment plan approach that says for – look, for anyone who can pay the rent, they should, let's start with a really important point. I want to say this out of fairness, there's lots of mom-and-pop landlords out there, small buildings. People should not withhold the rent if they could afford the rent. But for many people, they just don't have the money. It's not their fault. There should also be an option to be able to pay overtime, and that's something the State still hasn't acted on. I hope the legislature will do that because there's a lot of people who want to honor their obligation to the person who owns their building. There's a lot of folks who have a mortgage and you know, are struggling, but if you don't have the money, you don't have the money. So I think that payment plan approach is a needed element in this equation as well.

**Cuza:** Mayor de Blasio, that does it for us. Our time is up, but we always appreciate you joining us and we will see you next week.

**Mayor:** Alright, Bobby, take care.

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