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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW ON WNYC**

**Brian Lehrer:** Brian Lehrer on WNYC. And back with us now is Mayor Bill de Blasio. Welcome back to WNYC, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you, Brian, and very happy holidays to you and all your listeners.

**Lehrer:** And to you. And listeners, we can take calls for the mayor at 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C on homelessness, which is a major policy focus this week, and which we'll spend a little time on to start out, or anything else. 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C – 4-3-3-9-6-9-2.

And it looks like homelessness is your major policy focus this week. Your commissioner of homeless services is out, and yesterday you announced the new HOME-STAT system, modelled on the NYPD's CompStat. Want to tell us how New Yorkers will see HOME-STAT at work?

**Mayor:** Well, they will see it at work. And that's the important point – that there will be regularly – constantly – city officials and folks trained to work on the needs of the homeless out on the streets. First, every day, we will be checking the reality on the streets of the city. It's going to be something we do five-borough, but with a particular focus between Canal Street and 145<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, because that is where most of the challenge is related to homelessness – street homelessness. So, we'll be checking every day, very visibly getting a count every day, seeing what the conditions are every day.

We will have the ability to send teams of trained outreach workers who can literally work with each homeless individual on what their needs are – encourage them as much as possible off – to, you know, get off the streets and get to the services we have available.

We'll have a very close working relationship with the NYPD – there'll be a group of about 100 officers specifically trained to work with the homeless, including folks with mental health challenges.

And every New Yorker will have the ability to pick up the phone, call 3-1-1, or go online to 3-1-1 and report a situation and know that there'll be a response within an hour. If there's any – you know, any homeless activity that needs hands-on response, we'll have teams very visibly out dealing with it.

Finally, we put all that information into a consistent database, so that we can figure out, with each individual on the streets – now again, street homeless – permanently street homelessness in the city is between three and four thousand people, and that's a number we need to get down. And so, we're going to have, for each individual on the street, an understanding of what they need to get off the street. They all got there. There was an individual path to the street. We've got to find the individual path back off the street and to a home and to a better life. And there'll be a caseworker assigned to each individual to figure out that path and to relentlessly pursue it, until we get people off the streets.

**Lehrer:** When you say anybody can call 3-1-1 to report a homeless situation that needs a response – how do people know what does need a response? I saw one version in the media that said to report a homeless encampment. So, do you want to talk about that word? I mean, it's not illegal to be homeless – so, what should people use as a guideline for when to call 3-1-1 about homelessness?

**Mayor:** That is a great question, and I appreciate that. First of all, encampments – literal encampments – Hooverilles, you know, mattresses and lounge chairs and all sorts of things grouped together – were allowed in this city, somehow tolerated for many years and decades. We've ended that. And in the last month, we have cleared out 30 encampments, and we're not going to allow them to reassert, because I don't think that's fair to either the homeless or the communities around them.

So, certainly, if anything starts to become at all a consistent grouping, where people are sleeping, that has to be reported right away. Anything that is perceived to be illegal activity – harassment, you know, someone's panhandling – we see some panhandling in the city; most of it is not harassing or threatening, but if it's every harassing or threatening, we need to hear about that right away.

Anyone acting in a way that might be dangerous to others or themselves, of course, that's a 9-1-1 call. But typical 3-1-1 calls are if we see any kind of, you know, appearance of something becoming more permanent, anything where we see harassment, anything where we see someone who is creating a public nuisance in a bigger way. And that will lead to, again, trained professionals arriving immediately to deal with the situation. What you're referring to – and I said this yesterday in my speech – is, under our laws, if someone is homeless, of course, they have a right to sit on a park bench and not bother anyone. People have a right to panhandle, even though a lot of us find it very obnoxious. They do not have a right, however, to threaten people. They do not have a right to block the ability of people to go where they're going.

So, it's important for people to report activity that concerns them. And that will allow us to instantly get teams out to address him.

**Lehrer:** Your homeless services commissioner is leaving that job. That was announced this week, so you're making a change there. But your deputy mayor, who was in charge of that, among other things, has been gone for months. Why is it taking so long to replace her, and how much does it hamper the reform effort that that position is not in place?

**Mayor:** It does not hamper the reform effort for a variety of reasons, including – I'm putting a lot of time into it personally, our First Deputy mayor Tony Shorris is putting a lot of time into it. And we are very focused on ensuring that these reforms happen. The – and obviously the plan that we released just yesterday – and then previously, the plan for 15,000 units of supportive housing happened in the last weeks, as we've been working in a very hands-on fashion on this.

We look forward to naming a replacement for the deputy mayor in the coming weeks. We look forward to finding a new homeless services commissioner. But in the meantime, over the next 90 days, there's going to be a full review of the structure of the Department of Homeless Services – a 22-year-old structure that, as we've worked with it, we increasingly believe it needs substantial reforms. So, our Human Resources Commissioner Steve Banks, who is one of the leading experts on homelessness in this city, will run a full review of the Department of Homeless Services – working with First Deputy Mayor Shorris, working with our Director of Operations Mindy Tarlow. And they'll come back with a report saying – here's what we should keep doing this way, here's how – things that need to be changed, here's how DHS and HRA should interrelate, and that's going to guide how we proceed. But in the meantime, we will – we will find a new homeless services commissioner ready to help us make these big changes.

**Lehrer:** Amber in Crown Heights, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Amber.

**Question:** Hi. Mr. de Blasio, I was a huge supporter of yours. I was actually – I actually appeared in one your campaign videos.

**Mayor:** Wow. Thank you.

[Laughter]

**Lehrer:** Is this call a – Oh, I'm sorry, obviously not, go ahead – I stepped on the punchline. Go ahead, Amber.

**Question:** Yeah, no – I've been really disappointed with the way the city's handled homelessness and housing in general. It seems like, you know, [inaudible] campaign promises and nobody is standing up to the real estate lobby. And, you know, housing inequality is still a major issue in the city, and it seems like there is no, sort of, real solution here.

**Mayor:** Well, Amber, look, thank you for your support and I appreciate the question, and obviously, you know, you're asking it from the heart. It's a tough situation, because people want to see immediate change on affordable housing, and it's the kind of thing that takes time. And I don't feel happy about that fact, but it's the truth.

We've, so far, already financed 30,000 units of affordable housing, and that number is about to go up. And people are going to start being able to move into that affordable housing as it's built, or, in many cases, we're also going to be able to preserve affordable housing in place. It doesn't solve the problem quickly enough. We know that. I've said, my plan is for enough affordable housing for half a million people. That's what we thought was the largest plan that we could afford as the City of New York, but there's still going to be a lot of need after that.

But I will disagree with you fundamentally on standing up to the real estate community, because I've said very clearly to them, they have to create affordable housing going forward, or we are not going to support new development. That's the big debate that's going on right now on mandatory inclusionary zoning – never been done on this scale anywhere in the country before. We're saying, if you want to develop, you must include affordable housing. We're also quite clear that there should no longer be tax breaks for luxury condos – that's the fight we waged in Albany over the 421-A issue – still being played out, but because of our efforts, we're very hopeful that we're going to end the practice of tax breaks for luxury condos, and require developers to include affordable housing any time they get a tax break. So, I hear your frustration, but I would argue the facts are that a lot of things are starting to change.

**Lehrer:** On the other side of standing up to the real estate lobby, we had a guest yesterday who was a homeless mother of three living in a shelter, having trouble finding a landlord to take her LINK voucher as part of the rent. I wondered why, and we got several calls from landlords who are both not trusting of the permanence of the voucher, and not trusting of you. Here's 20 seconds of a landlord caller – Nick, in Brooklyn.

**Question:** He cannot speak to them to explain to them the program, to explain to them that [inaudible], to explain to them that he'll make sure it's sustainable. They don't trust him. He never reached out to them. He never talks to them. So, they don't trust him, period. They don't want to hear it. They're afraid if the program gets cut, they're going to be lost.

**Lehrer:** By them, he's referring to landlords in general. So, how do you respond to his specific concern, which another landlord caller also cited, that they can't be sure if this voucher program will last because programs come and go, and then they might be stuck with tenants who may not be able to pay their full rent? And how do you respond to his general sense that you're not reaching out well to people in groups who aren't your allies, which we've heard before from critics?

**Mayor:** Well, it's – again, you're putting a lot together in one place, so let me try and unpack it a little. We've had several meetings here at City Hill, in which I participated, with landlords and organizations representing landlords, to tell them directly from my mouth that this LINK program will be here for the long-term – because it's something I had believed in from the beginning. In fact, Brian – you know, a little bit of history – I spent eight years as the chairman of the general welfare committee in the City Council, fighting exactly for these types of efforts – the rental-subsidy efforts and the anti-eviction legal services that stop people from becoming homeless to begin with, and allow people to get out of shelter and to have some permanence. By the way, 22,000 people, since I came in office, we've gotten out of shelter and into housing, because we've used these tools. Now, I've made very clear to a number of landlords and their representatives that we are absolutely committed. The reason they're cynical – I don't blame them for their cynicism – is in the previous administration, these programs were cut. We're making clear that – it's the exact thing I ran to do. I said from the beginning, this is exactly the kind of strategy I wanted to employ on an ongoing basis. So, as long as I'm here, those LINK subsidies will be in place. In fact, we've been expanding them intensely. As to the bigger point, you know, look, I always am interested in the notion when people say someone is not reaching out. And yet, we've had a lot of outreach meetings involving me, and many others involving leaders of my administration, responding to the concerns of landlords, and more and more landlords are taking part of the program, because they see the consistency of our approach. So, as to Nick's concern, I would happily tell Nick directly, the LINK program is here to stay. You should get yourself involved with it, because it's something that will help a lot of people in need, but it also will be consistent income that landlords can depend on.

**Lehrer:** Denise, in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Denise.

**Question:** Hi, how are you? Thank you so much for taking my call.

**Lehrer:** Sure.

**Question:** Okay, my question regards the mayor's new supportive housing initiative, and my concern is that the siting of the units – where they're placed – will exacerbate residential and school segregation and [inaudible] poverty. And it seems right now that these units are being built in existing low-income neighborhoods. So, will Riverdale and Park Slope get the same number of units as Tremont and Brownsville? I just worry that neighborhoods with more money and power will not get their fair share of these units. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Yeah, Denise, it's a very fair concern. I think the fact – not only are we devoted to a city for everyone and to making sure there's placement of facilities as broadly as possible, but, in fact – you know, a controversy you might have just seen in the last few days on the Upper West Side, where, you know, we have a plan to put permanent supportive housing in place for veterans, and, you know, there's obviously a neighborhood that is affluent. Some people think, you know, if it's permanent housing, that that's appropriate – others up there don't. But, in fact, we're looking for locations all over the city. The supportive housing effort will start physically next year – about 250 apartments – and we hope to go very fast through our commitment of 15,000 apartments, and we want them everywhere. In some cases it's going to be in existing buildings, and in some cases, new buildings will be built. But it really comes down to, where are the buildings we can work with? And we need the space, and we will take it in every and any community.

**Lehrer:** So, let me pull back the lens for a broad view, and ask you – Mr. Mayor, you officially reach the halfway point of your term on New Year's Day. So, as they do in the progressive schools, would you give yourself a self-assessment? What's your own midterm grade for yourself? What do you see as your biggest successes, and areas that need improvement?

**Mayor:** A lot needs improvement – I'm very clear about that. And that's the way I think about myself, and my work, and the work of the administration – we have to constantly work to get better. I'm very humble about that fact. The problems that we were just talking about in the last minute are – they're moving. You know – the thousands of homeless folks on the street, the thousands of folks in shelter, the folks who need supportive

housing, our veterans – all this moves me. And what particularly moves me is when we have children in shelter, which has grown over the last decade as a challenge, and we have to address it. So, although I'm pleased that we've made some real progress, Brian, and we've started some very, very big initiatives, I don't feel any sense of resting on laurels. I feel a sense of, there's a whole lot more work to do. Now, what I'm very happy about is – look, we have hit a number with pre-k that is gratifying, because it means so many children's lives are going to change. We now have the official count for this year – 68,500 kids in pre-k. To me, when you think about two years ago in this city, we had only 20,000 kids in full-day pre-k. We now have 68,500, and that will be happening now every year from this point on. That's the kind of thing we came here to do. It's going to change kids' lives for the long-term; it's going to save families a lot of money; it's going to make our school system stronger. As you heard – 30,000-plus units already of affordable housing moving. Look, we know we're changing the reality on key issues like policing. The city is getting safer. Despite some of the hype and the critics out there, the numbers show it across the board – the city's getting safer. We still have a lot of work to do, but it's getting safer. We have, in real terms, 2,000 more cops coming online next year, between the new officers that are in the budget and the officers who will go to the streets through civilianization. So, the city's getting safer while, at the same time, we did greatly reduce stop and frisk. So, I think the city's getting fairer at the same time. So, I would say, Brian, on the big – the big initiatives – on pre-k; on improving the relationship between police and community while keeping the city safe; on building affordable housing; on municipal IDs, which now 670,000 New Yorkers have taken advantage of, and is having a real impact on people's lives; on paid sick leave – there's a host of areas where we've achieved core agenda goals. There's a lot more to do. So after two years, I would say we've shown we can get a lot done for the people of this city, but I have to earn it every day, in terms of the ability to show people that every day we get – we get up in the morning, and we get some more done.

**Lehrer:** Are you saying that the biggest area of improvement to come is on the – is in the topic of homelessness?

**Mayor:** I think, you know, on homelessness, we – it's quite evident, I've said it, that I have not communicated sufficiently, and that's part of why I gave the speech yesterday. And I haven't been vivid enough in showing people all the investments we've made and why they are beginning to work. And I say beginning guardedly. 22,000 people out of shelter and to housing – I use this number – you'll appreciate the historical perspective – the amount of people we've gotten out of shelter into housing in two years is the same amount of people as were homeless totally overall in our shelter system at the beginning of the Giuliani years. So, you know, the city has changed, and this is a tough reality. The city, because of economics – because wages and benefits have been stagnant, the cost of housing has skyrocketed – we have gone from a homeless system that used to deal with 20-something thousand people to a homeless system that has 58,000 people in it today. Of course, this has to be one of my key concerns going forward. We've got to show the things that are working; we also have to show the people of the city we will relentlessly find new approaches, until we find the ones that work for the long term.

**Lehrer:** I just want to follow up on your saying the city is safer. The murder rate has gone up – we talked about this last time you were on – a bit, but it's not a lot, but that's – those are lives, and it's the first time in many years that the murder rate has gone up. And yet, most of the other major crimes have gone down to new record lows. How do you explain that disconnect?

**Mayor:** Well, I think the big picture is – and it's very consistent – major crimes down. They were down last year; they've gone down even further this year. Shootings down this year compared to last, gun arrests up about seven percent. The big – the big reality is crime is going down, and I've got 2,000 more cops who will be on the streets next year with more training and more technology than they've ever had. So, we believe – and Commissioner Bratton and I firmly believe – we have the opportunity to continue to drive crime down further, and to get at quality of life issues more, because cops who don't have to focus on violent crime can focus on quality of life. Why do we have, at this point, 19 more homicides than last year? 19 more homicides than last

year citywide for the whole year is 19 more than I accept, obviously. But what it is is a small change in the scheme of things. We're going to have the – I think it'll be the third best year for homicides ever in the history of New York City. And we have to take all these new resources and drive that number down further.

So, I think the NYPD is obviously doubling down now on the gang and crew issue. And certainly a lot of these homicides, tragically, have been young people in gangs and crews attacking each other. You will see a lot more emphasis on disrupting gang activity as we go into 2016.

**Lehrer:** One more call. Jed in Fort Greene, you're on WNYC. Hi, Jed, you're on with the mayor.

**Question:** Thank you. Good morning. I wanted to tell a short anecdote, and then I have a question for the mayor. On Monday, my daughter went into her public high school and a friend of hers was, for the first time, exhibiting her beautiful hair. She's a Muslim girl, who usually wears a hijab, a head scarf. And my daughter, thinking it was a move of liberation, complimented her on how beautiful she looked. And the girl responded, quaveringly, that she wasn't wearing her hijab because her parents asked her not to wear it because she thought – they thought it was unsafe for her to wear it in public spaces. And to have the situation where we now have two groups of parents in our society warning their kids that they're potentially unsafe in public spaces – it's just a horrifying development.

**Lehrer:** And what's your question?

**Question:** I wanted to ask the mayor if you would consider an initiative for the first week of the year where business leaders, educators, and other leaders of the city encourage their employees, their students to all take some action in public spaces to show that we're all one, and that together we can do great things.

**Lehrer:** Jed, I have to get an answer for you because we're running out of time. Mr. Mayor, we have about two minutes.

**Mayor:** Yeah, I think it's a – I think it's a great suggestion. We are doing a lot in our schools in particular, to educate our kids about respecting all cultures and respecting the Muslim culture. I was out at a mosque two weeks ago in Jamaica, Queens, sending a message that we will not tolerate violence of any kind against our Muslim fellow New Yorkers. We will not tolerate any kind of bias. It's a very painful vignette that Jed tells, and I appreciate his suggestion. We're going to look for ways like that to very vividly show our fellow New Yorkers who are Muslim that we have their back, and they are part of what makes the city great.

**Lehrer:** And on the city being jittery right now, we had call-ins the last couple of days for Muslims, on they themselves feeling caught between ISIS and Islamophobia. How about the city being caught between ISIS and Islamophobia?

**Mayor:** I think the city – look, we are living in a challenging world, but that doesn't change who we are. This city right now – the best protected city in the entire country – we have the best ability to both prevent terror and to respond, if God forbid, there were a lone wolf attack or anything like that. We've obviously pumped up our anti-terror capacity in the NYPD by over 500 officers and a specially trained force. There – my point of view is, New Yorkers should rest assured the NYPD is doing an extraordinary job protecting them. But meanwhile, the city is in a very strong place. We are thrilled to say we have the most jobs we've ever had – literally 4.24 million jobs in the city. We had 56 million tourists last year. There are so many signs of this being a place that people not only here, but all over the world, regard as safe and thriving, and we have to have that confidence ourselves. We know there's dangers out there, but, you know, the NYPD has shown its ability to protect us. The people in the city in many ways have been voting with their feet, and people from all over the world voting with their feet, having confidence in New York City. So, we're going to protect the people of the city. We're also going to make sure that we remain unified. We're not going to let those who overtly seek to divide us – and

that's one of the ISIS strategies, is to divide us and divide us from our fellow Americans and fellow New Yorkers who are Muslim. We're not going to let them do that. We're going to continue to be resolute and be who we are as New Yorkers.

**Lehrer:** You mentioned jobs. I will let you get in one happy thought on this very strong annual jobs report from the State Labor Department. Two years in a row, the city added more than 100,000 jobs – 8,500 on Wall Street, above expectations; eight percent in accounting and advertising; six percent in construction – all according to Crain's. Any 30 second word to the skeptics who said your liberal policies would scare away business?

**Mayor:** Well, you just answered it. The tech sector – now over 300,000 people employed in technology in the city – we are – and booming and growing, and I think amazing growth potential in that sector. Life sciences – so many areas that this city has even greater potential to reach economically. So, yeah, I would say to the skeptics, look, it's quite obvious. New York City is working economically – lowest unemployment we've had in almost a decade, highest number of jobs we've ever had – a lot of sectors. It used to be a very Wall Street based economy; now it's an economy that's very diverse and getting stronger all the time. So, New York City is working, and the progressive policies are necessary to make sure that that economic strength is actually treated in an inclusive way, and it reaches all five boroughs, and it reaches a lot of people who were previously left out.

**Lehrer:** Mayor Bill de Blasio, merry Christmas, happy New Year. Thanks for coming on the show a number of times in 2015.

**Mayor:** Thank you Brian. Happy holidays to you, and again to all your listeners.

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