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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Well, we have some very promising news today. The vaccination effort has been historic, continue to grow. I want to thank everyone, all the vaccinators, everyone at Test and Trace Corps, everyone at Health + Hospitals, everyone at Department of Health, and all of our partners out there – the hospitals, the clinics, the community-based organizations, everyone who's been a part of this. We have an important milestone today. We have now passed 4 million first doses – 4 million first doses. Why is that important? Because in New York City, the latest information is that over 95 percent of New Yorkers who get a first dose come back and get a second dose. Passing this 4-million mark means we continue to surge forward toward our goal. And you can see the results every single day. We're going to go over the indicators again – it is the clearest story you've ever heard. More vaccination equals less COVID, equals more freedom. More vaccine – let me do it again, more vaccination, equals less COVID, equals more freedom. That's what we're seeing right now.

Since day-one, 7,753,184 vaccinations in New York City and climbing every single hour. So that's fantastic. Now, the more we do the safer we'll be. We have proven, proven, proven that vaccinations work. Vaccinations are your ticket to freedom, that's what the CDC guidance tells us. Now, we need to get even freer with more and more vaccinations so that we can have the Summer of New York City. We could have an extraordinary summer of joy, but we all have to keep contributing, getting out there, getting vaccinated. What are we doing? Continuing the outreach. And we're encouraging whole families now to get vaccinated, because now five – excuse me, now 12- to 15-year-olds – 12- to 15-year-olds can be vaccinated. A whole family can go to a vaccination site together. We want to encourage that and we want to incentivize that. So today, vaccination site opens at the Brooklyn Children's Museum – amazing location. I was over there celebrating Holi. I love the Brooklyn Children's Museum, I used to take my kids there when they were young. As of today, you can go there, you can get vaccinated. You can get a free same-day admission to the museum right then and there, and a family pass – a family pass for your next visit. So, it combines a vaccination in a really encouraging, positive place – whole family can be there, but also incentivizes folks, because you get to enjoy the museum then and another opportunity after that. Tomorrow, Friday, Bronx Zoo we'll have a vaccination site. This is really exciting. You go there, you get vaccinated, and you get a free ticket for a future visit. And soon, we'll have the New York City Aquarium in Coney Island – same thing. You go there, you get vaccinated, you get a free ticket. This is the kind of approach that will really encourage families to come on out together.

Now, here's another thing you can do. If you love the idea of getting your young person vaccinated, your 12- to 15-year-old, or even older, go to the American Museum of Natural History. You can get vaccinated right there below the blue whale. We've talked about it before, but now that we have this new age group, I think a lot of young people are going to love the idea

of getting vaccinated there below the whale. It's something they'll be able to talk about for the rest of their lives, something positive, something fun. So, parents, whether you want to go to the natural history museum, Coney Island, Bronx Zoo, Brooklyn Children's Museum, and more coming, this is a great way to make vaccination even more fun, make it something for the whole family, make the whole family safe. We're really excited about this.

Okay. Now, what's it all about? It's about a recovery for all of us. Every single day, I'm going to talk about what it's going to take to build this recovery and vaccination, of course, is the number-one thing we need to do. We've got a lot of other things to do to not just bring the city back, but go places we've never gone before – get better, get stronger, get fairer. One of the things that people constantly refer to when they think about kind of better society, better city we want, we want to reach those who have fallen on hard times. I always say when it comes to the topic of homelessness, there but for the grace of God go so many of us. We want to help homeless New Yorkers who've been through so much in this pandemic. But what's interesting is, in the pandemic, we found a lot of the strategies that we've used, the intensive homeless outreach through the HOME-STAT initiative, the Journey Home vision, constantly reaching homeless folks and connecting them to Safe Haven shelter, the kind of shelter that a lot of homeless people are willing to accept right away, more and more of the specialized beds that will support people coming off the streets into permanent shelter, ultimately into permanent housing. Remember, 150,000-plus New Yorkers who were homeless were given permanent affordable housing. This process is working more and more, but we've got a lot more to do. And we saw even in the subway real success during that time, when the subways were being cleaned overnight, in particular, our outreach workers out there getting people to come in. We knew some things were absolutely proven. Obviously, the specialized beds to encourage people to come in work. We know they work. We have lots of evidence of it. 1,300 – we opened 1,300 more specialized beds to help homeless people off the streets. During the pandemic we did that, and we know it contributed. We know it helped. We know more outreach staff helps, because we've seen the miraculous work. If you see one of these homeless outreach workers, thank them. They do the Lord's work. They are amazing human beings who go, and they just keep working to connect with people in deep need, and bring them in. That Journey Home vision has been working. We've been adapting, but we've seen during the pandemic more and more ways to bring people in.

So, we knew it. We saw the numbers in the subways. We saw what happened during the cleaning. We reported those numbers regularly, but there's one number that we didn't have at that time to report and that was the overall count of homeless in New York City. That's the annual federal count called the HOPE Count. It's done every winter. It is the one measure we have to tell us how we're doing from year-to-year. We now have the final answers from the HOPE Count of 2021. And here's the most important top-line, and it's an encouraging one – the HOPE Count shows us an estimated 38 percent fewer homeless folks on the streets and subways in New York City. This is an important development. It is the one objective measure we have and it's showing us that all this outreach is working more and more, and all of those shelter beds, those Safe Haven beds are working. So, what do we find? An estimated 38 percent decrease in street and subway homelessness. Overall, specifically in the subways, a 23 percent decrease. And decreases in every borough – that's comparing 2021 to 2020.

We know the X-factor here was more outreach, more beds. And the pandemic atmosphere, I think made a lot of homeless people think about their options in a different way. And there were

our outreach workers, right when we needed them to be in the right place, giving people that welcome to a better and different life. And in hundreds and hundreds of cases that worked and that was crucial. I want you to hear about it from our Commissioner for Social Services. He's obviously considered one of the leading experts on addressing homelessness nationally. He's devoted his whole adult life to protecting, serving homeless folks, helping them out of homelessness into a better life. Our Commissioner, Steve Banks.

Commissioner Steven Banks, Department of Social Services: Thank you, Mayor. Just very briefly, the numbers are important, but also what's important to understand is behind each of those numbers is a human being. And I've been with our outreach team, City staff, and not-for-profit staff out in the streets and out in the subways and you can see lives changing. It's work that requires consistently going back and back and back and helping rebuild trust for people who have fallen through every social safety net. They're understandably distrustful and that's where the importance of outreach staff is so critical to really make that breakthrough and transform someone's life. Now, before the pandemic, as the Mayor referenced, we issued the Journey Home report to build on HOME-STAT. The program that combines increased outreach, specialized beds and, of course, the ability to transition from transitional housing to permanent housing – supportive housing, of course, being the gold standard. And we said we could end a long-term street homelessness in New York City in December 2019. But we didn't simply announce that, we set about adding the resources and adding the additional pieces that were critical for our outreach staff. We've tripled the number of outreach staff from 200 to more than 600 and we're adding more even today to help with the recovery efforts to connect people back to housing. We increased the number of specialized beds from about 600 in 2014 to now more than 3,000, as the Mayor said, adding 1,300 in the middle of the pandemic using vacant commercial hotel space where we could. And more units are coming online. Supportive housing is coming online. And this approach is beginning to make a breakthrough for actual human beings. We see it in the more than the approximately 800 people who have come in from the subways during the pandemic and remained off the street. Remember, that's our gold standard. We certainly focus every night. One night is a victory, but we want to make sure that people stay off the subways and off the streets. And we've got 800 human beings who are off because of these efforts. And, overall, back to 2016, the beginning of HOME-STAT, 4,250 people have come off the streets either into transitional housing or permanent housing where they remain.

And the HOPE number, the HOPE survey shows us that – it's one night, but it shows us what our work 24-hours a day, seven-days a week, 365 days a year shows, which is we're beginning to make the breakthroughs. Look, I've spent, as the Mayor said, my life trying to help people in need. And I'm going to be the first to tell you, we have much more work to do. But I am inspired by the outreach workers and staff who are out there 24-seven, making that breakthrough, and the survey results aligns with what they and we are seeing every day, which is every day New Yorkers experiencing homelessness are saying yes to services because we're offering new things, new options, new housing resources to help bring people inside.

Mayor: Amen. Thank you very much, Steve. Steve, thank you for your leadership. Thank you to our Homeless Services Administrator Joslyn Carter. This is intense work. It takes passion and focus, but what you said that last point is crucial – we've kept creating new strategies, new approaches. We've listened to what works with real conversations with folks who are homeless. And we found some of the keys, some of the solutions. So, one example, these specialized beds, these Safe Haven beds that make all the difference in the world. When I came into office, there

were about 600 specialized beds citywide for anyone and everyone who was homeless. It was by no means enough. We have quintupled that number. And guess what? When you make more beds available in the right places, it has a direct impact. It gives people that incentive to come in right now. And that's what the homeless outreach workers say, come in right now, get food, get shelter, get medical care. And once someone's in, they can get help. If it's a substance misuse issue, if it's a mental health issue, they can get services, and then they stay in and they don't go back to the streets. And we've seen remarkable success. Long way to go, but let's be quick clear about the fact that a recovery for all of us – a recovery for all of us means reaching all of us. It means reaching folks who have been through so much. What we're learning through today's information is we can do that in ways we never imagined before, and let's go even farther.

Okay. I mentioned at the top, the indicators continue to show the power of vaccination. Here we go. We're going to go over them and proof is in the numbers. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 90 patients. 90 patients with a confirmed positivity level of only 16.67 percent. So, we've really seen that number go down, that's very telling. And the crucial figure, hospitalization rate per 100,000 – look at that, down, down, down, this is fantastic – 0.89 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on seven-day average – again, great news, constant downward pressure, this is fantastic. Today's report, 513 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report on a seven-day rolling average – look at this one – 1.37 percent and going down because vaccinations are going up. So, good news today. Over 4 million New Yorkers – in fact, I have the exact number now – 4, 157,600 New Yorkers have gotten their first dose. And that means the vast, vast majority of them will get their second dose, be fully vaccinated, and that means a safer city for everybody.

A few words in Spanish back on how we protect and support people who have been homeless and bring them home.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Good morning. We will now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we are joined by Commissioner for Social Services Steve Banks, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and Dr. Mitch Katz, President and CEO of New York City Health + Hospitals. Our first question for today goes to Andrew Siff from NBC New York.

Question: Good morning, everyone. Mayor, I wanted to ask you this – yesterday, I spoke with some restaurant owners who said that they're sticking with 75 percent capacity, because in order to go to 100 percent capacity, they'd have to find the vaccination status of their customer to get around the six-foot rule, and they're finding it just easier to keep the spacing and keep it less crowded. Based on where your indicators are headed, do you think we're a few weeks away, maybe July 1st, from where COVID is so low, close to zero, that it's no longer relevant at that point, whether a customer has or hasn't been vaccinated?

Mayor: Real important question, I appreciate it, Andrew. And I appreciate that you're out there listening to folks making sense of these rules and raising these questions so we can keep

perfecting. Look, I put forward July 1st and I meant it and I believe in it. I think by July 1st – it may not be exactly zero, but I think we can really deepen this progress, and the number I just announced to you about first doses is very promising. What I'd argue is, after July 1st, unless the data tells us something very different than what we're seeing now, I do believe we can have a full reopening with very few restrictions. There might be some specific types of environments where there's restrictions, or, again, private entities might make their own choices, but I think the direction we're heading is fewer and fewer restrictions as we get more and more people vaccinated. So, I think I've rarely seen anything in life where, sort of, cause and effect are so clear. Every day, more and more vaccinations and everyday COVID goes lower and lower. So, let's keep doing that so we can get to that point where the rules get even simpler and things open up even more. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Folks in Midtown today who were planning to burn a big pile of masks as a symbolic end to the pandemic, I'm wondering what you think of that. They're actually going to be doing one of your favorite songs, Disco Inferno, as they burn this pile of masks. What do you think of that? And whether you think it's worth reminding folks to hang on to some masks too?

Mayor: There's a variety of lines I'd like to quote right now from Disco Inferno. But I get the feeling – Bill Neidhardt is glaring at me. He does not want me to say those lines. They would be taken out of context. So, I'm going to – I'm really restraining myself, Bill. This is troubling, because that was a very big song when I was in high school and I'm having a moment here. But let's just say that I appreciate that people are – you know, they went through so much. And New Yorker showed incredible discipline, they really did. I always say, this is a heroic city, what people did to fight back COVID. And folks are going to celebrate their freedom in a variety of ways, but the best way is to go make sure everyone in your life is vaccinated so we can ensure this freedom is lasting and reaches everyone.

Moderator: Our next question goes to Erin Durkin from Politico.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. On the homelessness statistics you gave out, first of all, can we just get the actual numbers? I don't think that was given – how many was the count this year versus last year?

Mayor: Yeah, and I know everything's in the press release, but Steve Banks will give you more detail right now.

Commissioner Banks: The number was – let me just read from it – 2,376. The number last year was 3,857, and the number and the year prior to that, 2019, was 3,588, and just to emphasize –

Mayor: Go ahead, Steve. You want to add?

Commissioner Banks: I'm just going to emphasize the point the Mayor made earlier. We added 1,300 beds and the specialized facilities between the time of the count in 2020 – I'm sorry, the survey in 2020 and the survey in 2021.

Mayor: Yeah, and Erin, before your next question, this is something, you know, when you're leading an operation like this, or you're CEO, you hire really good people on you ask them, what do you think you should do? And Steve is one of the nation's leading experts on addressing

homelessness, and I said, what should we do? And he said, we need more beds, and we need them in the right places. I remember these conversations vividly. If someone is homeless and they're thinking about coming in and the outreach workers have been really persuading them and talking to them, listening to them, and they're on that cusp where they might come in, the bed being available right then matters, and it has to be in the right location, and once someone's in, the chances of us keeping them in are really high. We've never done that before in the history of New York City, never had this kind of intensive outreach, person-to-person to bring homeless folks in, and had a bed available where it was needed when it was needed on this kind of constant basis. It's making all the difference in the world, and remember everyone who's homeless went on a very tough, sad journey from a more normal life where they had a home ended up on the streets. We need to reverse that journey. We need to bring people back home, and that takes a lot of personal connection, a lot of dialogue, but also having the right answer for them at the right moment. Go ahead, Erin.

Question: Okay. Thanks, and then you know, the other thing that's changed within the last year is the homeless folks being placed in hotels, and I know that's something that you kind of are not fond of as a matter of principle. It sounds like from what we've heard, a lot of the homeless individuals who have been able to get the hotel rooms actually kind of like it. I don't know if you have considered whether that may have played into the numbers on the street going down, and if so, you know, do you still plan to terminate that as soon as possible, or you know, what's the timeline on that right now and where do you stand?

Mayor: Sure. I'll give you the overview and then pass to Steve on what feedback they've gotten, watching the process and what people looking for. I would only editorialize on that point [inaudible] expert that what I think the vast majority of homeless folks are looking for once they get help and they get treatment, if they have an issue that requires treatment is, are looking for a long-term solution, and that's where the permanent affordable housing, the housing that's there to support them, makes all the difference. I think that's the ultimate answer and that's where we found a lot of success. But to your first question, Erin, we from the beginning said the only reason we went into hotels was because of a global pandemic. As that pandemic in this city is receding, thank God, we intend to leave the hotels, bring homeless folks back to shelter facilities, where they can get a lot more support facilities built to support them. That's what they're there for. The hotels were only a temporary emergency measure in the weeks ahead or more to say on it. We'll reverse that and bring people back to shelter. But of course in the meantime, get as many people to permanent housing as possible. So, on the feedback you're getting from homeless folks, Commissioner Banks.

Commissioner Banks: So, I think it's important, Erin, to focus on two different aspects of the challenges we have here. One aspect is persuading people to come in off the streets, and for that we've developed these specialized beds, special services, as the Mayor said, we want to have them as close as possible to where people are so that there are as few barriers as possible to someone coming inside, and then of course we need to connect people to permanent housing. But the other challenge is simply the operation of our ongoing Department of Homeless Services shelter system, and that is a network of shelters for single adults, historically going back to the Callahan Decree in the early 1980s. It's been a congregant system and in order to save lives in a 10-week – 8-week period of time, we moved 10,000 people out of those congregant shelters in order to reduce density, and we moved those people into commercial hotels. So, it's two different approaches. One approach was to bring people in off the streets, and the other approach was to

save lives. As the Mayor indicates, the health indicators are going in a very different direction than during those eight weeks more than a year ago when we began to move 10,000 people into commercial hotels to save lives. Now, we're in a very different place and we're working with the Health Department on the next steps for that challenge. But I want to make sure people don't conflate these two different challenges of two different approaches, obviously, no matter which challenges you're experiencing, you need permanent housing, but the approach to sheltering has been – depends on the system that we're talking about.

Mayor: Okay, go ahead.

Moderator: Our next question goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor, I'm on the phone.

Mayor: Juliet, now you sound like yourself again? See, it's a beautiful thing.

Question: Yes. It's the phone, the phone.

Mayor: It's called a phone, Juliet. It's called a phone. It was something that really worked for a long time.

Question: All right, good. I'm glad this is better. So, I wanted to ask you, how do you plan on vaccinating homeless, or having them tested if you're returning them at some point to the congregate shelters? Is there a program for that or what do you need to do?

Mayor: Absolutely. I'll have Commissioner Banks speak to it. There has been now, for quite a while, a vaccination effort. It's made a lot of progress. We're going to keep that going. Whatever resources are needed to get people vaccinated and get them tested. The good news, Juliet, is we are able now to move resources around in a whole different way, because we're having so much success with vaccination and with reducing COVID. So, it'll be a priority to make sure that homeless folks get that support. Commissioner.

Commissioner Banks: So, as to testing. When testing became more widely available in the city last May and last June in 2020, we implemented an outreach testing program to, on a rotating basis, bring testing directly to our single adult shelters, including the temporary commercial hotels, as well as in our specialized beds for people who have come in from the streets and the subways, and we've administered 67,980 tests, and we have a currently a 1.2 percent positivity rate, which is in line with the overall city rate. As to vaccinations, when the state determined that people experiencing homelessness or working in congregate shelters would be eligible for vaccines, we stood up a supplemental program at the Department of Homeless Services to supplement the overall city effort, and I can report to that through our direct effort – which also includes direct outreach into a single adult shelters and the commercial hotels where single adults are being temporarily sheltered – we've administered more than 18,000 vaccines to both clients and staff who work in congregate shelters, and we have nearly 12,000 fully vaccinated people through this program. This is of course supplements the overall city effort.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Okay, great. Thank you. So, there have been lower vaccination rates predominantly in the Bronx and Brooklyn. So, how are you addressing that?

Mayor: Juliet, here's what we find is working in New York City and it's working all over the country, and again, you got now over four million people with a first dose, something's working. We want to just double down, reach all the other folks who are now going to be ready. It's more and more local outreach. It's knocking on doors. It's having vaccination sites and buses and vans that can be right in the middle of the neighborhood or outside a house of worship. It's NYCHA senior centers, community centers, all this stuff works. It's just more and more and more folks going out, knock on the door, iPad at the ready, setting up an appointment right away, bringing people who are ready that moment, right to a center or a bus outside. All of this. We know it works. We just got to do more and more and more. You saw – you're the person who discovered the Times Square vaccine hawkers. I mean, that kind of approach really worked, and you saw the video yourself, Juliet, that proves you can get, it's amazing who you can get to come in for a vaccine, and the fact is the incentives also help because they create energy and focus, and some people of course, who are on the fence, like, wait a minute, I want that incentive. I want those Nets playoff tickets or whatever it may be. Also, the last point, the reality of the 12 to 15-year-olds changes the discussion because now it really can be a family thing to go and get vaccinated, and parents want to protect our kids. I think that's going to drive the numbers up too. So, it's all those approaches and just incessantly. We're not, we're not going to stop until we reach everyone who can and will be vaccinated.

Moderator: Our next question goes to Marla Haskell from WCBS 880.

Question: Good morning, Mayor. I wanted to talk to you about the spate of violence last night in the city. You increased the number of police in the subways, and there was another slashing at the Union Square station. There were seven shootings in the city, including an eight-year-old boy shot in St. Albans. The president of the Sergeants Benevolent Association always outspoken is critical of city and state lawmakers, saying that police should not be blamed for the violence, that the laws have been changed and are creating this violence. Do you believe that some of these reforms have gone too far and are making the city less safe?

Mayor: Marla, thank you for the question. Look, we're going to turn this around. The most important thing to say is we're going to this around. I said the other day, recovery equals public safety, and public safety equals recovery. I really believe it. The recovery, no one's missing it, everyone's seeing it. More and more jobs coming back more and more activity, more and more people in the subways, that alone and the public safety professionals say it. The more people go into subways, the safer they're going to get. So, one of the most important elements is heavy, heavy on vaccination. Bring back to the economy, bring back the jobs, bring back the tourism. That's going to have its own positive impact, but we got to keep getting it right with public safety. That's why we have the largest NYPD force in the subways in over 25 years, and that will have more and more impact over time, but it's all the other things we've got to do too. We've got to keep deepening the bond between police and community. We've done that intensely over the last year. You saw the amazing figures this week – NYPD recruitment of African Americans a stunning success, very important sign for the future. The investment in community-based solutions to violence, crucial. The courts finally coming back, crucial. This'll be the game changer. The gang takedowns you heard about in Brooklyn a couple of weeks ago, all of this is going to have more and more effect. So, we should look at everything, and I've obviously said

there's some of the things in the laws I think deserve to be looked at, but in the end, we got to take all these strategies and apply them intensely, and that's what turns around, and that's what history shows us. When we apply strategies like this in the past. There's just no doubt it works. Go ahead, Marla.

Question: You want more people to take mass transit? And yet we had another slashing at the Union Square station last night. It just seems like you know, there's a lot more police, but maybe they're not in the right place at the right time. Can you be more specific about that deployment? And also, the effort to help the homeless and the mentally ill. Is that effort as effective as you had hoped?

Mayor: Marla, first of all, is something that we deepen every day. The new officers are coming into the subways. That's going to have an impact. There's just no doubt about you put more officers in the subways, it's going to have an impact. It's going to help. The outreach efforts have been growing in the subways and the facts are now in. It has been working. People are being convinced to leave the subways, go into shelter. That changes the situation. We announced just weeks ago, the new mental health intervention teams, the mobile teams that can go wherever there's a need. All of these things work. We got to do more and more and just keep applying them consistently. I'm absolutely convinced this is the path. Every one of these strategies works. We've seen it before. We know it works. It's about applying them consistently, and it's also a person-by-person thing. If it's a case of someone with a mental health challenge, we got to find that person and we got to get them in and get them the help they need every single time we do that. It's good for everyone.

Moderator: Next, we have Nolan Hicks from the Post.

Question: Hi, good morning everybody.

Mayor: Hey, Nolan. How are you?

Question: I'm good. I'm not on the DL.

Mayor: Wait, what? I couldn't hear that?

Question: Right. It's a terrible Mets joke.

Mayor: What did you say?

Question: Forget I even attempted it. I'd like to follow up on the questions about subway crime and caring for the city's least fortunate, the mentally ill. Would you describe the violence situation in the city as a crisis? And if not, how would you describe it, with shootings up nearly double year over year?

Mayor: It is something that came from a global pandemic and a perfect storm last year, and we are going to turn it around and we see evidence of it turning around. There's a problem. There's no question. There's a real problem, but the solutions are being put in place, and as I said, one of the biggest things that will change everything is the recovery itself, and I don't know anyone who is arguing that the recovery isn't happening. You can see it before your eyes. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: Secondly, on the question of moving folks from shelter to hotels last summer as the pandemic was raging, there were real reasons for doing that, and I know we've put this question to DSS a number of times, and we never really got a good answer out of them, but I'm wondering how many people who were in city shelters and receiving help for mental illness fell out of treatment during the move to hotels. How many people who were traditionally showing up for a bed and for treatment in city shelters when they got moved to hotels stopped coming in and stopped getting treatment and stopped taking shelter.

Mayor: Yeah, I'll turn to Commissioner Banks and say obviously every effort was made in the hotels to provide services. I think there was a huge, your right, the pandemic was disruptive to people in general, and part of why I believe in the shelters that were built for shelter is that they are the best place to give people those services. But I know a real effort was made to try and keep as much continuity as possible, even with the disruption of pandemic. Commissioner, you want speak to that?

Commissioner Banks: Nolan, I just want to challenge one aspect of your question, which is if you are an excellent not-for-profit provider, you know, care for the homeless, you know, Project Renewal, I could name so many excellent providers that provide services for clients who are experiencing mental health, as well as homelessness – mental health challenges, as well as homelessness. They provide mental health services in a congregate shelter, and now they have the same client group that's moved to a commercial hotel. There's no question that there are greater challenges with people behind closed doors in terms of providing those services, but you have the same provider that knows that client that had been serving them in a congregate setting is now serving them in a commercial hotel setting. So, I acknowledge the challenge of changing the venue from a congregate setting and being able to respond to people in that environment compared to someone behind a closed door, but I don't want to lose sight of the extraordinary work that providers have done, who are expert in providing mental health services, who transformed their model of provision of services from a congregate setting to a hotel setting, and they're continuing to do that. On the other hand, as the Mayor has said, you know, we have ultimately, we said to ourselves in 2017 Mayor? That the city had used commercial hotels for too long going back to the 1960s and that we would set about ending the use of commercial hotels and providing a more appropriate shelter setting. And we had been making significant progress on that before the pandemic hit and then we obviously responded to the emergency by moving people out – 10,000 people out to save lives. But ultimately commercial hotels could be converted to permanent housing, but we've found over the years that it's not the best environment to deliver services in, but there are excellent providers who are providing them in congregate settings now providing them in in hotel settings. I think the premise of your question is that people are going somewhere else for services, as opposed to getting them onsite.

Mayor: Look, I'm just finishing one point on that, really important and we're going to be coming back to this issue in the course of the year, we said years ago, 2017 goal, get out of commercial hotels, get out of scatter site apartments, that process has been continuing through everything, and we'll have more to say on that as we go along. The future is getting fewer and fewer people to be homeless to begin with through a lot of preventative efforts, but also if they need shelter, to do it in the right location, purpose-built location, and then move them quickly to affordable housing. That's the game plan we're working on now.

Moderator: Next, we have Henry Goldman from Bloomberg.

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

Mayor: I'm all right, Henry. How you been?

Question: I'm good. Very good.

Mayor: I'm very proud of myself, I did not recite lines from "Disco Inferno". I caught myself. It took a lot of restraint. Can think of several that are at the tip of my tongue, really want to, but I'm not going to do it, Henry.

Question: Well, I'm impressed that you were just a high school rocking out there. I was already going to Studio 54 and –

Mayor: Oh, Henry, Henry, little street cred here. Okay, and what exactly were you doing at Studio 54 Henry? Tell us more.

Question: I was dancing and participating and observing as usual.

Mayor: Very good. Nicely handled. All right, what's on your mind?

Question: Well, I want to get to – I want to speak about this homeless thing or ask you about this homeless situation from the point of view of the hotels. Hotels are struggling. They're a crucial piece of the city's economic infrastructure. There was a report earlier this week that only 29 percent of Americans are even going to consider traveling to a city this summer. There's some talk about possibly eliminating or reducing their hotel occupancy tax, which would probably have a negligible effect. But my question really goes to the impact of taking these 10,000 people out of hotels at this point, which have been for many hotels a safety net for the industry, and all of a sudden that drops out, are you considering any aid to the hotels? I know they're pushing back on the property tax, they're paying 18 percent interest on delayed property tax payments, they're hurting. So, when you remove these 10,000 from hotels, do you have any plan for them?

Mayor: It's a very fair and important question, Henry. First of all, we have provided some relief that was just announced. Second of all, I think the timing is working organically. It's becoming time to move folks back into shelter settings because everything that's happening fighting back COVID, as that is happening, we actually see more and more travel, more and more tourism, more and more business travel starting to pick up. I think this summer is going to be a time of intense activity in this city and a lot of people coming here because it's going to be a lot better choice for every reason for a lot of travelers than going overseas, which they might have done in the past, or even some other parts of this country. So, as folks who happen to be homeless come out of the hotels into shelter, those rooms are going to be opening up, I think there's going to be a very strong clientele coming in who want those rooms. So, I think the two pieces are going to balance pretty organically. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay, my second question has to do with a report that came out from Cornell Tech this week, a whole bunch of suggestions that they're making for the next mayor of tech in the city, but one of them was to establish a broadband development corporation tasked with the creation of the city-wide open access fiber network and utility corridor network. If you can

swallow sentence. Basically, they would like to have a kind of semi-public corporation that developed citywide access to the internet. I'm wondering what your reaction is to this idea, are there any challenges or blocks or impediments to doing this? And if there aren't, why hasn't the city gone this route over the past seven years?

Mayor: Well, I'm glad you're raising it, Henry. Look, Cornell Technion has really been a great success story unto itself. Yesterday we were having one of our recovery meetings and we were talking about the tech community in general. Now, well over 350,000 jobs in our tech industry, tech community here in this city and growing, really important to note, and growing, more and more investments coming in, more and more companies actually taking more space in the city right now. So, it's a tremendously positive future for tech in New York City. I want to look at this report, obviously increasing broadband access has been a priority for us, we made a series of announcements this year about that and making sure it's equitable access. So, I want to see what they think we need to add to our strategy, and I'll engage them and see what we need to do next. I'm very happy to hear that new ideas are being put out there because the more we make broadband access real for more, more New Yorkers, the more our economy moves forward and the more equity we have.

Moderator: We have time for two more questions today. The next question goes to Angelica from AM New York.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: Hey Angelica, how are you?

Question: Good. How are you?

Mayor: I'm feeling all right.

Question: Good. So, some reporters already sort of touched on the shooting last night in Brooklyn and Queens, with one of those incidents leaving one man dead and a child wounded, but I want to focus on the city's response to them in particular. What is the city doing to get guns out of the streets ahead of the summer?

Mayor: So, Angelica, a couple of quick points. It always bears saying for the first time in a long time, we actually have a chance of addressing the root cause of all the guns in our streets and that's the problem in this country of guns coming from other states, particularly from the south up to New York City. There is a chance the Congress will act and really start to cut off that supply of guns coming into the city. That would be so important to everything we need to do, but while we're hoping and praying for that, the solutions we have, look, court system coming back, finally, it's here, and we're starting to see – we need to see every borough, the court system full strength immediately because there are so many prosecutions ready happen right now on gun offenses. We saw a major gang takedown in Brooklyn a few weeks ago, more are coming. A lot of the worst actors are about to be taken out of circulation. That's going to help us intensely. NYPD overwhelmingly, when God forbid there's a shooting, they know exactly who did it very quickly and they find the person. So, the more that those folks actually realize the consequences because there's a functioning court system and God forbid someone has to go to prison, but if they have to go to prison and that consequences necessary, it also sends a message to everyone

else that if they try something, they will be caught, they will be prosecuted, there will be consequences. They will do time. So, this whole structure is now moving for the first time in over a year, and I think that's what's going to really power turning the corner here. Go ahead, Angelica.

Question: All right. So, in regards to what you spoke about with housing with New Yorkers now, there's no doubt there's a huge crisis and a lot of advocates have been critical of the city plans addressing those issues for a few years now. But because you've been talking about bringing people into shelters, I'm curious what is the city doing to make shelters safer, so folks feel more comfortable going to them?

Mayor: So, Angelica, I'll turned to Commissioner Banks. There's been a series of moves before the pandemic to make the shelter environment safer. Commissioner could speak to that. Also, the safe havens, the smaller facilities unquestionably are regarded by homeless folks as shelter – as safer, and they prefer those smaller facilities. That's why we keep building out more of those. In terms of COVID, there's been a tremendous effort to make sure that the health care needs are addressed. The success you heard from the Commissioner of very low positivity, thank God, and that will continue because we've learned, again, as we learned with our public schools what that gold standard of health and safety measures is, we'll be applying those of course in shelters as well as we get rid of COVID once and for all. So, Commissioner, just an overall safety approach?

Commissioner Banks: Thank you, Mayor. The overall approach has been an investment in security services and investment in mental health services, an investment in repairs, we've provided about a quarter of a billion dollars in investment to our not-for-profit providers to deal with disinvestment in order to improve the operations and obviously the security as well in the shelters. I think it's important to remember though the context in which we're operating, which is, our overall shelter census now is 48,492. That's the overall Department of Homeless Services traditional shelter census 48,492. A year ago, it was 56,461. The dramatic drop there is largely attributable to the reduction of the numbers of families with children coming into shelter. The eviction moratorium is helpful, but that has accelerated pre-pandemic trends in which we had driven down evictions by 41 percent in the city, and as the Mayor said, moved out actually, you know, more than 165,000 people connected them to permanent housing to avoid going to shelter or move them out. But within that shelter system census drop for the Department of Homeless Services shelters is actually a significant increase in the numbers of single adults in shelter. And so single adults are coming into shelter, not just to the Safe Haven and Stabilization Beds, the low-barrier beds to help bring people in from the streets, but people lost their housing for other reasons are coming in record numbers to the Department of Homeless Services single adult shelters. That is an illustration of the challenges of housing affordability in the city, but I think it's also a recognition of the improvements that we've made in the shelter system with our not-for-profit partners who have done a tremendous job in improving safety in those shelters.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Our last question for today goes to Yoav from The City.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to check in on the question of whether there'll be a fully remote learning option in the fall. Earlier this week, New Jersey announced that it will not be doing so. How close are you and by when do you plan to make the decision?

Mayor: We'll have an update in the next few weeks. We continue, you know, Chancellor and I have talked about this a lot, looking at all the facts, but the bottom line is the central goal is get all our kids back in school in September. But as to the specifics, you're going to certainly hear from us in the next couple of weeks. Go ahead, Yoav.

Question: Okay. And in February you told the State Legislature that you were planning to convene I believe some public hearings on the Property Tax Commission and that there would be a report released by the end of the year. I want to ask about the status of that, but also, as far as the report, what is that going to prescribe? Is that going to be a recommendation for how to change things? Is that just going to be an analysis of the current situation? So, I guess what will actually be the impact of that report?

Mayor: So, really important question. So, one, I want to check my facts, Yoav, but my understanding is the hearings have been scheduled and we'll get you the details on those. To your question of the specific nature of the next report. So, the first report from the Property Tax Commission laid out the basic framework, the problem, and the kinds of reforms we needed. And it was quite clear from that report, the direction we needed to take, to address the inequalities and the imbalance, and some of the lack of transparency, et cetera. The next report will come out this year, it will be the specific solutions. It will be the roadmap to solving the problem. This is an amazing group, this Property Tax Commission has really experienced, smart, capable people, put a lot of time and energy into it, they will lay out specific solutions, and then it's up to the legislature, of course, to act on them. We look forward to that.

As we conclude, everyone, look today we're talking about things that we said we could change and we have changed, and this is the New York City spirit. We're going to be putting out a lot more information about the real progress that's been made in addressing homelessness, new approaches that work, this is important to recovery, but everything we're doing is about a recovery for all of us, and it all starts with believing New York City can achieve great things. We keep seeing it, because we have New Yorkers, we have the persistence, we have the focus, we have the spirit, we have the ingenuity. More to come, but we are unquestionably building a real and lasting recovery and a recovery for all of us. Thank you, everyone.

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