

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** May 15, 2020, 11:10 AM

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

**Brian Lehrer:** It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC. Good morning again, everyone. And it is time now for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our lines are open at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AsktheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian.

**Lehrer:** I see that you announced earlier today that, absent serious danger, the NYPD will not take enforcement actions for failing to wear a mask or a face covering. And I assume this comes after the very disturbing video of the arrest of a mother with a very young child, as she was apparently leaving a subway station that she was being evicted from for not having her mask on properly. Was this a response to that?

**Mayor:** Well, it was a response to a number of things we saw. I mean, that was obviously a very troubling video and there's been a number of situations where I think there was just a lack of clarity and that contributed to a dynamic we do not want to see emerge. We've worked for six years to improve the relationship between police and community and really get away from all of the problems of the past that clearly plague us still. But, you know, I think it's fair to say when I came into office there were profound difficulties between police and community largely because of the unconstitutional and overuse of stop-and-frisk. And we've worked constantly to change that paradigm and draw community and police closer and create a neighborhood policing philosophy, and de-escalation training, and body cameras and, you know, get rid of marijuana arrests and so many other things.

This moment, a lot of community leaders, a lot of elected officials from communities of color came forward and told me they were very concerned that we might be at a moment where we started to lose some of that progress and that that affected my thinking deeply. And certainly, I know Commissioner Shea understood that and cared about that deeply as well. But also, we looked at the question of efficacy. I mean the vast majority of New Yorkers are practicing social distancing and are wearing their face coverings. And the answer I think is the positive rather than the negative. We're just going to do massive face covering distribution. We're going to have more and more civilian ambassadors out, people educating people, warning people, more and more community-based organizations, faith-based organizations doing that locally, and reserve the work of the NYPD for the most dangerous piece of the equation, which is gatherings,

particularly large gatherings. The larger the gathering, the more danger it presents to the health of everyone involved and then everyone else who might be affected by people getting infected at the gathering and bring it home to their families and people in their lives. So, that's where the focus will be, not on these individual situations. I think that's going to be healthier.

**Lehrer:** How do you explain the backsliding on your watch of progress with the NYPD? For so much of your tenure, you had Police Commissioner O'Neill who had, you know, a reputation as being a progressive, community-oriented police commissioner. I'm not as familiar with Commissioner Shea who hasn't been there that long. But this was one of your priorities from the start. You just acknowledged that community leaders have been saying there's been backsliding and now –

**Mayor:** Respectfully, Brian, that's your word. I'm not using that [inaudible] –

**Lehrer:** What was your – what was your word?

**Mayor:** I'm saying there was concern that this is something that's been going on for a few weeks, Brian. I want to really push back and say we've had neighborhood policing, de-escalation training, all of these things, deep seated for years. The entire composition of the NYPD has changed. It's now majority people of color and increasingly New York City residents. Everything has been changing. The first month or so of this pandemic in March, we did not hear particular concerns around policing, and we've only heard them in the last few weeks. There's no question, the philosophies, the approach haven't changed at all. But what there was, was a lack of clarity. I think our officers were affected by a lack of clarity of where they were supposed to be putting their attention, how to deal with a different situation, a different set of ground rules, and community members and leaders were concerned that if we didn't address it, it could start to cause some diminution of the progress. That's where I'm very clear, we heard it, we're making this – we're clarifying the instructions to the officers, clarifying the expectations for the public. But I do not for a moment – for God's sake, almost six-and-a-half years of incessantly changing the relationship between police and community, that is not undermined in just a few weeks, but if we didn't address it, there was a fear that it could be and that's why we took action.

**Lehrer:** But then how do you explain the fact that there've been now at least three, that I know of, videos of these bad arrests and those just are the ones where there happens to be a bystander shooting video and the numbers that show overwhelmingly the arrests for social distancing related things are of people of color – when it looks like a pattern like that and you talk about a few bad apples, you have to ask the question, is there something wrong with the barrel?

**Mayor:** No. And, Brian, I respect you and I respect the question but I think you are not reflecting the facts, respectfully. And I've said this publicly and I'm just going to call out any time I think people are offering an analysis without the benefit of facts. There's 8.6 million people here. There's 36,000 cops. The vast majority of interactions have been positive. In fact, there's plenty of examples we've seen during this pandemic of cops saving people's lives, helping people out in all communities, giving out face coverings, all sorts of things. And there's a handful of videos that have been very deeply problematic and unacceptable, but we are not going to – if I put it the other way around, I think you have to acknowledge the few bad apples and not condemn all the

people who are working every day trying to get it right, trying to work with communities. Do not condemn them, Brian, do not undermine their efforts, do not undermine the amount of change that's been made.

And you may not know Commissioner Shea as well, and I respect that earlier point, but he was one of the architects of neighborhood policing along with Jimmy O'Neill and Bill Bratton, and he's been part of our leadership team from the very beginning of the administration. So, no, I don't want people – the number of arrests has been so few. The number of summonses since this crisis began, fewer than 10 summonses per day in the entire city of 8.6 million people. So, there's disparity and I don't accept the disparity. And I made that clear and the Commissioner understands it and we're going to work to fix it. But let's get really clear. When there's been fewer than 10 summonses a day that you cannot indict 36,000 members of the NYPD and the whole vision of neighborhood policing based on so little activity when you have to put that against everything that's been done in six-and-a-half years. So, I just fundamentally disagree. But it was right that when people said, 'Hey, watch out, if we don't make the right adjustment, it could start to undermine the progress we made'. That was a fair critique. I heard it. Dermot heard it, we acted on it.

**Lehrer:** And when – last thing on this – when Commissioner Shea said this week that there was a danger of violence against the police and he referenced past assassinations of police officers and assassination attempts, was that going too far? People need to be able to raise their voices in protest when there's something to protest without at every turn being, saying this is inciting people to anti-police violence.

**Mayor:** Well, I understand that concern for sure. And let me first affirm the positive of what you're saying. Absolutely, people need to be able to raise their voices. And it is crucial that if something's not good enough, people speak up because I'm listening. I know Dermot is listening, we'll do things about it. So, a hundred percent need that democratic process, the checks and balance that comes with a healthy democratic debate, and the cell phone videos are part of what has educated everyone about things that need to be better and about some individuals who are not doing their job right. And that's important, that's crucial. He was saying something else – and I think, Brian, this is a case where the Commissioner really spoke from the heart, probably a, you know, five, six minute statement that was very, very thoughtful and talked about the things that needed to be fixed from the past, the things we're doing now that are working, the things we have to do better.

But he also made clear that there has to be an understanding that we all are in this together. And I think that was what he was trying to get at. That when the concerns are raised, we have to raise them in the spirit of we're all trying to figure this out together and that's what the vast majority of people do. And then we have seen some people along the way who have used rhetoric that's just profoundly violent and negative towards police officers across the board no matter who they are, no matter what they do. And that is dangerous unto itself. And he's raised that because he has seen these tragedies happen to officers as well. So, I wish in this city we could take the kinds of steps in terms of policing, in terms of our mindset that we are seeing us all do together in this pandemic. In this pandemic, people are actually working together as one team of 8.6 million people. We've come a long way on policing and police-community relations but to really break

through to the next level, everyone's got to decide that we're going to work this out together. And that's what we've tried to build a foundation for in neighborhood policing.

So, critiques, yes, and in fact, a lot of the leaders I mentioned some particularly this morning, Borough President Eric Adams from Brooklyn and Congressmember Yvette Clarke from Brooklyn and also from Brooklyn, the Assemblymember Tremaine Wright, all reached out to me and the Commissioner and raised very specific ideas, very specific changes that they thought would work, helped us understand where there was a disconnect and we listened to those suggestions and acted on them. I think there's a lot of people in the city trying to get it right, trying to move us forward. And if we take the spirit that has pervaded in this pandemic and we apply it to the next wave of change we need in policing, I think we can actually get somewhere.

**Lehrer:** Celeste in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Celeste.

**Question:** Yes. Good morning, Mr. Mayor and thank you to all the work that everybody is doing with the city. I just would like to inform you, I am a home attending and a homecare. I take care of elderly age 90 years old and my agency has never, never give me gloves or masks or not even a call to see how I'm doing. They're not even have a form for us to connect with the agency because they are close and everybody's working from the office and when they call, the call shows no ID so we can call back. They want us to communicate with them via email and not everybody know how to use that. So, they supposed to have a guideline for all these agency, and provide the equipment for us to work, the PPE, we don't have nothing. The family is providing me, the gloves and the masks. Thank you very much.

**Mayor:** Hey Celeste, I want to make sure you give your information to WNYC so that we can understand what happened here and how to fix it. Celeste, what is the name of the agency you work for?

**Question:** The first Chinese American Consul on Canal Street.

**Mayor:** Okay. And Celeste are you a member of a labor union?

**Question:** Yes.

**Mayor:** Which union are you a member of?

**Question:** 1199, I think.

**Mayor:** 1199, okay, good. Celeste, give your information to WNYC. We will follow up with the union. We'll follow up with the agency. No, this is – to me it makes no sense and it's unacceptable if any agency is not constantly checking on its employees to make sure they're safe and helping to get them what they need. The union, we've had a great working relationship with them. We've been working with them to get PPEs out to members, so, let's make sure you get connected to that. We've also been doing testing initiatives with the union for union members and that's another thing you can take advantage of. But I would say to all the home care agencies, step up, communicate. And Celeste is right, two-way communication, allow the workers to also

ask questions and bring forward their needs. And any agency that needs help, we will certainly work with them. But it's also, these are private companies, it's their responsibility to step up and protect their workers. And Celeste, we'll follow up to make sure you are protected.

**Lehrer:** Alright, Celeste, we'll take your contact information off the air. Hang on. Ralph in Brooklyn Heights, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Ralph.

**Question:** Hi. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. And I'm going to take the opportunity to thank you and all other City employees during this time to keep up the services as best as they can. My question is actually regarding the emergency crisis management in terms of the near future, for the next three to six months when we're going to see the rent moratorium expire all over the city and the state, and we will see a rising wave off evictions and basically also losing lots of the stabilized apartments due to evictions. And I was just wondering when you're going to start addressing this crisis and was hoping that the city would not take the same approach as with the corona crisis and wait until it's at our doorstep to address it.

**Mayor:** I appreciate it very much, Ralph. It's a very, very important question. First of all, one of the things I want to see the State do, and I've called for it, is to extend that moratorium on evictions, not just to whatever point we determined is the end of this crisis, but then at least two months beyond. We need to make sure that we have maximum opportunity to protect people, to get them back on their feet, to get them in a situation where they will not be threatened with eviction. And of course, anyone who is threatened with eviction, we'll provide legal support to. And before this pandemic, the legal support we were providing for free to people facing evictions had basically cut evictions in half. And that reality was growing, meaning fewer and fewer evictions were happening because landlords knew that tenants would have a lawyer assigned to them by the City and would be protected. And a lot of landlords have stopped trying to evict tenants wrongly. So we're going to be very aggressive about trying to get the moratorium expanded, making sure there's free legal services for any tenants who need it. And by the way, right now, any tenant who, there should not be any question of eviction, but if the landlord is talking about eviction, telling you you have to get out of your apartment if you're sick, anything you can call 3-1-1 and get support and get legal help right now.

But to your larger point, Ralph, I think it's a very good one. And this hinges on a couple of things. One, we need Albany to help us by passing the Home Stability Support Act. This would be one of the most profound things that could be done to stop evictions and to provide the support to everyday New Yorkers who are faced with eviction. And then second, the stimulus in Washington. If we could get a stimulus that mirrors what the House of Representatives is voting on today, if the Senate follows through, we'll be in a position to help a lot more people and protect them. So that's what we're going to fight for. But you're absolutely right. We need a proactive approach to protect people. But it begins with the State lengthening that moratorium and making sure it goes well beyond the immediate timeline of the crisis.

**Lehrer:** He threw in a dig there, the caller did, at the end of his question about not waiting until - I don't remember the exact words, but basically not waiting until, again I don't remember the exact words, by basically not waiting until we all [inaudible] until the coronavirus was actually on us to take action when he was comparing that to evictions. And I want to ask you about an

article in the New York Times today. Just one particular thing from it about the public health official who you've put your trust in more than your Health Commissioner, Dr. Barbot. And that's Dr. Mitchell Katz, who runs the Health + Hospitals Corporation. Very respected doctor. But so many well intentioned people got things wrong early on and the Times revealed communications from March and which quote in his March 10th email to top City officials, Dr. Katz made the case that keeping the city open was the best approach at that time. March 10th, his email said, quote, canceling large gatherings gives people the wrong impression of this illness. Many of the events are being canceled anyway and fewer people are going out. However, it is very different when the government starts telling people to do this. He wrote Italy, quote, is having a terrible problem that I do not believe we will have. So how's Dr. Katz's record in the light of day, if he's the one you're giving the contact tracing program to, rather than the Health Department, which already does contact tracing for a living?

**Mayor:** Well, Brian, the question, I appreciate the line you're putting in the question, but I think the line is not an accurate one. So let me try and redefine here. First of all, every one of the health care experts that I've talked to, whether they work for the City of New York or whether they're federal, like Dr. Fauci, everyone has admitted throughout this crisis that they did not have all the facts because no one has all the facts on coronavirus. Every one of them has changed their estimation of what we should do over time. I literally do not know a single health care expert who's been you know, perfectly aware of everything that was going to happen ahead of the curve throughout all this. So I've listened to a variety of health care leaders in this administration and beyond. Always trying to figure out what is the right composite of information to make decisions. But none of them has had a perfect corner on the market of wisdom. They've all had times when, you know, they saw things according to the information they had. And a lot of times the information was partial and imperfect because that's in the history of this disease. So the question to my mind about Mitch Katz is what has he done in the middle of this crisis? What he's done is taken the biggest public hospital system in America and prepared it for battle and saw it through. Health + Hospitals, our 11 public hospitals bore the brunt of this crisis, starting with Elmhurst Hospital. And under Mitch's leadership, they held the line. This is a massive human challenge, dealing with a crisis that literally these hospitals have never seen before. A huge managerial and leadership challenge. A huge logistical operational challenge. And his hospitals held and he played a leading role in our efforts to keep hospitals holding throughout the entire city, which they did. So that was what he was charged with doing and he did it, I think brilliantly as did his team. And he has a massive operation. And the contact tracing effort is not what it was months ago when we were talking about – you remember Brian, the original cases, we had a handful of cases and it became like a few dozen cases. The Health Department did a great job going after those, they have some very, very talented people who do that work. But it was when we were talking about a very limited scope of this crisis.

We are now talking about widespread transmission in this city of 8.6 million people and we have to mount a vast testing operatus. Right now in the next week or so we are going to have 20,000 tests per day, I want to get us up to at least 50,000 tests per day, massive amount of contact tracing and that will involve thousands of contact tracers, easily could end up being five or 10,000 people. Then putting thousands of people into hotels with all the support they need. That is a vast operational approach, a vast operational mission that doesn't bear resemblance to what the Health Department does. They do great work and their expertise and a lot of their key people

have been brought over to be leaders in this effort that's housed at Health + Hospitals. But Health + Hospitals runs 11 major hospitals and 70 clinics. It is an operational agency that reaches deep into the city and employs thousands upon thousands of frontline workers. That's the model we need to do testing and tracing and isolation on a vast scale.

**Lehrer:** John in Manhattan, you are on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi John.

**Question:** Hi Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hi John, how are you doing?

**Question:** Yeah good. My name is John Peters. I've been trying to reach out to the Mayor for a couple of weeks. I'm businessman who's been in the catering business for 35 years here in New York. I have a large commissary. And I've heard the Mayor ask for people who are available to do large numbers of meals. We have that, we are able to do something like that. I have a staff, I have all the insurances, I have mobile kitchens, I have trucks and I have reached out via email via 3-1-1. I've never gotten a response. So I'm hoping that I can be pointed in the right direction?

**Mayor:** Well, John, you came to the right place. Brian, I thank you and WNYC always because there's been a good number of moments over the years where, because of this opportunity for me to directly connect with the people of this city, that people have gotten through who had great ideas or real needs or you know, things they wanted to do to help others and we were able to make it happen here. So John, please give your information directly to the folks at WNYC. Kathryn Garcia, our Food Czar, she and her team will reach out to you today. We need you, there's no question. The number of hungry people John, this is a very sad reality. It used to be, we thought that something over a million people were food insecure, meaning experienced hunger with some regularity in New York City just a few months ago. Now we think that number's over two million people. We need all the help we can get. So you're in and they will follow up with you and get you and your team in the game.

**Lehrer:** And you're right, Mr. Mayor, it's one of my favorite things to be able to do here on this show is play matchmaker.

**Mayor:** You're the matchmaker Brian.

**Lehrer:** When there's somebody with something to offer and somebody who needs to receive it. So John, hang on and we will take your contact information off the air. And I'm confident that that match will get made. Terrence in Queens, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Terrence.

**Question:** Good day. How are you Mr. Mayor? [Inaudible] a number of times and hopefully maybe after this conversation or this little question, someone can take my number and help me with my situation. I just want to touch on the young lady who got arrested with the child and it was so big. I worked as an officer for the Department of Correction. I have family members and I think that sometimes an officer in uniform has to take it a step, go outside of the box sometimes. You know I saw the video, I was disturbed by it myself. Sensitivity training over and over again for these times that we are living in. And also when you have long lines and out on 125th Street



today, they had one subway entrance that was open and it's just tons and tons of people walking back and forth. It gets very hectic. Officers are on edge. And I would just like to say that if you can get some of the older officers who got big awards in the department, sometimes talk to the guys who have like five years on the job or less. Just prep talk to them, give them some kind of insight and some, you know, not war stories, but just a little history about how to deal with the public and using community communications skills a little bit better. And I just, if you can take my name after the call and I can tell you more about my situation that I need help with. I don't want to say over the air?

**Mayor:** Okay. Yeah. If you give your information to WNYC, I'll have my team follow up. And to your point Terrence, I think you're hitting the nail on the head. Look, it is tough on New Yorkers right now. Everyone's going through a lot. A lot of families are going through a lot of pain. May have lost a loved one or someone's sick or they've lost their livelihood. There's tremendous frustration. We're all cooped up. There's a lot of anxiety, a lot of fear about what happens next. And then you throw into it, our officers are trying to do their best in the great unknown. They're dealing with a lot of frustrations too. I think you're exactly right. The answer is to constantly retrain, to give clearer, better instructions, which is what I announced today. And something again, Commissioner Shea and I are responsible for, when we see something isn't clear, we got to fix it. That's what we're trying to do with these new instructions today.

But the training and the retraining, this is something Bill Bratton started and it's absolutely been the difference maker. This is where the de-escalation, which is unquestionably occurred around the city. You've just – I've talked to people in communities all over the city who say they have a different reality with policing. They have seen a lot less of what they used to see in the past. Starting with when we got away from the stops that led to many fewer negative encounters. But the de-escalation training has done immense, has created immense progress in terms of avoiding incidents. And people need that training all the time. And our officers actually, let's face it, the kind of what we do in way of training has been disrupted in this crisis too. A lot of things have been disrupted. So it's up to all of us in leadership to make sure that the instructions are there and really find a way to keep that training happening. And then as soon as we're past this crisis, double down on the de-escalation training because it works. But I think you're obviously right Terrence about using the folks who really understand it best to teach particularly younger officers, the approach. That's a great idea. And we'll follow up with you on, on your concerns.

**Lehrer:** We've just got a few minutes left and I want to ask you about school for the fall. You said something this week about possible staggered schedules if you try to open? What's your thinking as of today? And I'm curious if you're influenced at all by the news this week that the whole University of California system, 23 campuses announced that they will only have online learning again for fall semester. And I realized that's college, not pre-K through 12, but California is less hard hit than New York. And I'm curious what your thinking is now and if that informs it at all?

**Mayor:** That's a good question. And we are 3K through 12, more and more I'm happy to say. And in fact this week –



**Lehrer:** Just after I got used to not saying K through 12 anymore. [Inaudible] Now it's 3K through 12, yes.

**Mayor:** You are evolving Brian, I have faith. And in fact pre-K admissions letters went out this week and a good public service reminder to any parents who didn't apply to pre-K because of all the tumult of recent weeks. You still can, you can reach out to 3-1-1 and get information and our website as well and applications are still open. But anyway, quickly to your question, now I want to be clear. Plan A is still plan A. Plan A has been for weeks full reopen. Remember we're almost four months away. I mean it's not tomorrow, it's a ways off and a lot is going to happen between now and then. So plan A is reopen schools as normal. Then you have a variety of plan B, C's, D's. That could be staggered schedules, that could be a mix of in-person learning and an online learning. There's lots of things we have to work out. How are we going to test teachers and give them the help, the PPEs, whatever it takes? But it's going to be a safety first mentality. But plan A is reopen schools on time.

So now the question of Cal State. Look, I noted it but I do think it's really different because in a university structure you can do online learning arguably a lot more effectively and a lot easier. Talking about adults, every single human being who was a student at the university except for very few, is already an adult and in principle can take a lot of responsibility for their learning and can, you know, deal with the flexibility of schedule and one thing another. But kids, especially younger kids, they immensely benefit from being in a classroom setting. And we know online learning is good and it's been a Herculean effort by our educators here in the city, but it's just not the same and it's not as effective. So I'm going to stick with plan A, but it's going to be a decision that we finalize when you get a lot closer and it's going to be about health and safety first.

**Lehrer:** Quick follow up then we're really done. How does the outbreak of that toxic shock like syndrome among children with three deaths and more than a hundred cases in New York inform your thinking about school?

**Mayor:** Well, we have one death in the city and that's one too many. The other two deaths happened outside the city. But it's very worrisome. I mean, now we're talking about over a hundred cases. And this is something that was not on the radar of the medical community just a few weeks ago is anything systematic. And now we see something that's really a concern. And the number one thing to say, Brian, to all parents, all family members, is if you see those symptoms, the rash, fever, vomiting, if you see those kinds of symptoms, call your health care provider immediately. Particularly if they occur in combination because early detection can really be the difference in saving a life of a child. But we take it very seriously. It's a hundred plus kids, obviously our school system is 1.1 million kids but we take it seriously and we're going to watch that one very carefully as part of the health and safety considerations before we decide on what happens with the reopening of schools.

**Lehrer:** Thanks as always Mr. Mayor, talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Thank you Brian, take care now.

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