

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Announces the Arrest of Andrew Abdullah

May 24, 2022

Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell, Police Department: Good afternoon, everyone, thank you for being here. We're joined today by New York City Mayor Eric Adams, Chief of Detectives James Essig and his team, Chief of Transit Jason Wilcox, First Deputy Commissioner Eddie Caban, CEO of the MTA Janno Lieber. Thank you once again for taking the time out to be here.

Commissioner Sewell: Today the manhunt for Andrew Abdullah is over. Less than three hours after the NYPD released his photograph to the public, Mr. Abdullah knew he had nowhere left to run. Your NYPD investigators identified him as the killer of Daniel Enriquez, through canvassing by our transit officers, community engagement, social media outreach, and excellent detective work. He was arrested in his lawyer's office this afternoon, and is now being prepared for arraignment. The murder of Daniel Enriquez was every New Yorkers' worst nightmare. Tragically, it's a scenario that we've seen play out far too many times before.

Commissioner Sewell: Andrew Abdullah was well known to the criminal justice system, but again and again, his repeat offenses were not enough to keep him off our streets. His criminal history stretches back to 2016 and includes charges of felony assault, robbery, attempted murder, and a still open gun charge from two years ago. The most basic purpose of the criminal justice system is to keep people safe. In the only state in our nation where a judge is not allowed to consider dangerousness when setting bail, this was yet another failure of that system, and now Daniel Enriquez is gone. His family and loved ones are suffering and they rightfully want to know why. Well, there is no valid reason why, because this horrific crime should never have happened.

Commissioner Sewell: I said two weeks ago, after the shooting of our officer Dennis Vargas, that we need to right these wrongs. The violence on the Q train last Sunday morning was committed by another repeat offender who was given every leeway by the

criminal justice system. We can not and will not stand for it. Today a killer is off our streets, and we turn our attention to getting justice for Daniel Enriquez and his family, that's our focus moving forward in this case. Along with the district attorney's office and our other law enforcement, that's exactly what we are going to do. I want to turn it over to the mayor, Eric Adams.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you, commissioner. Thanks to the good work of the men and women and our partners in law enforcement, we got him. We got him in a way that he did not cause more injuries to New Yorkers. I think the commissioner stated something that is important. We got a killer off our streets, but far too many killers are back on our streets through a revolving door criminal justice system that appears to pit NYPD and good New Yorkers against the bad guys. We were fortunate to have thorough police work here and the chief of detectives to lay out history.

Mayor Adams: Any reasonable thinking New Yorker is going to ask themselves, "Why is this person still on our streets?" ... So it's a tragedy, but the fact is, he is the poster child of many who believe they can create violence without any repercussion at all. It is too easy, too comfortable to use a gun, and there is a pervasive feeling among dangerous people that there's no repercussions for their actions for using [inaudible].

Mayor Adams: As we stand here today, we also want to have our hearts go out to the family. When [inaudible] an innocent person, he should have been sitting at his desk at Goldman [inaudible]. He should have been planning outings with his family, he should have been able to enjoy all the things that New Yorkers enjoy. We are mourning his [inaudible].

Mayor Adams: I spoke to his sister today, she was full of pain. She just can not find reasons why someone would [inaudible] the life of her brother. Hearing her words coming from the Bronx, the commissioner and I stopped to see the parents of an 11 year old baby that was prematurely taken from us due to gun violence. We see it far too often, and all of this is viewed by America's toxic gun cultures. [Inaudible] have to experience the loss, New Yorkers have to experience the trauma as we try and rebuild our system.

Mayor Adams: This is an impact, but we will respond accordingly and ensure our city is safe and our transportation system is safe. Part of our recovery is tied to the MTA, that's why we're glad to have the MTA as a partner as we move forward to rid it of the

violence that we're seeing. Daniel was shot, we feel it in our hearts. We lost a fellow New Yorker, one of the good guys. We are doing our job, I say over and over again. NYPD, with their partners, have removed over 2,900 illegal guns off our streets. As soon as we place [inaudible], more return with bad guys who feel comfortably enough, even after we arrest them, that they can come back out and wreak havoc on our city. The industry pumps guns into the community faster than we can take them out.

Mayor Adams: Arresting the shooter doesn't change what is going on every day in this industry, and we have to fight united to stop the flow of guns. The sea of violence comes from many rivers, we must dam each one. Today we dammed one of them, there are far too many more we have to dam without the help to carry it out.

Mayor Adams: I also want to put my heart out to the family members in the Texas elementary school, a mass shooting. Two babies DOA, possibly, 12 injured. These shootings are happening far too often, and the response is not meeting the level of threat and danger that we are experiencing, not acceptable. We will never surrender our streets to violence. I want to thank the men and women of the NYPD for apprehending this dangerous person off our streets.

James Essig, Chief of Detectives, Police Department: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I'm just going to walk you through the investigation, but before I start, with me is Hank Sautner, he's the Manhattan South Investigative Chief who chaired this investigation.

Essig: On Sunday, May 22nd at approximately 11:42 AM in the last car of a Manhattan bound Q train, while it was approaching the Canal Street station, eyewitnesses stated that a male was pacing back and forth inside the train car muttering to himself. The only distinguishable words heard were "no phones." The male suddenly, and without any prior interactions or provocation, walked up to our victim, a 48 year old male named Daniel Enriquez, and shot him one time in the chest. He was later pronounced dead at Bellevue Hospital. A nine millimeter shell casing was recovered on the scene. As soon as the train stopped, the perpetrator exited the train onto the platform and fled on foot up the staircase. As he reached the top of the staircase at Lafayette and Canal Street, he handed off the firearm to a homeless male identified as Jabar Balding.

Essig: Mr. Balding was apprehended and interviewed. He stated that he does not know who the perpetrator is and just randomly handed him the gun. Further investigation and in-depth interviews later led to the recovery of that gun. It is a nine millimeter Ruger

firearm reported stolen in Hampton, Virginia on November 18th, 2019. It is a ballistics match to the shell casing on the train. Investigators were able, through video taken on the train by passengers and video at the turnstile gate, to get a description of our shooter, which was a male Black with gray sweatpants and a black hoodie.

Essig: Approximately 11 minutes later, transit officers responding to the scene stopped the suspect. He had altered his appearance. Later, detectives recovered video of that male removing his hoodie and carrying a backpack. That male was identified as Andrew Abdullah, a Nine Block gang member. He's a male Black 25 years old with a date of birth of December 2nd, 1996. His last known address is 580 Flatbush Avenue. He has eight prior arrests, including an assault in August 2016, an assault in April 2017. In May 2017, he was a defendant in a Polo Grounds gang takedown by the Gun Violence Suppression Division. He was charged with attempted murder, robbery, and conspiracy in the first degree. For that he received a 30 month sentence with two years post-release supervision. He was out on June 11th, 2019 and was on parole until June 11th, 2021.

Essig: He was again arrested on January 25th, 2020, this time with a loaded firearm, a 40 caliber. He was remanded, later made bail, and his next court date is June 6th, 2022 for trial hearings. On March 24th, 2020 when he was arrested for assault three, domestic violence. On June of '21, he was arrested for criminal contempt, and just last month, April 2022, for grand larceny auto where he stole the Lexus, he has a court date for June 14th for that. He is also wanted for a strong-armed robbery on the streets of Manhattan, which occurred in February 2022. He was apprehended a short time ago by a regional task force in front of 49 Thomas Street. He is being charged with murder in the second degree and criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree. With that I'd like to turn it over to the MTA chair before we take questions.

Janno Lieber, Chair and CEO, Metropolitan Transportation Authority: When I first saw the images from the MTA cameras on Sunday, I was worried about how the police were going to catch this guy, he was wearing a hoodie and a mask. Then I said to myself, "It's the NYPD, they'll get him," and here we are. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, thank you, Commissioner Sewell, thank you to everybody at the NYPD. The NYPD is as good an investigative force as any in the world. New Yorkers know the NYPD is going to get the bad guys. On behalf of Governor Hochul and on behalf of subway riders and MTA workers, thank you.

Lieber: But we also need to focus on what the mayor is saying on how we need to make sure that we don't just catch bad guys after the fact, that we get them before the crime occurs, that we interdict. That's why I am so appreciative of Mayor Adams' omnipresence strategy for promoting transit safety. He and the police commissioner are committed to doing what's necessary to stop bad guys before they get into our system, at the fare gates, but also by having transit officers on platforms and on trains.

Lieber: I recognize that doesn't mean that every train, every day, and every platform every minute of every day will have a cop, but this is important work. It is an important change of paradigm and it [inaudible] of leadership before [inaudible] and I know it will continue. Over time, I believe that we will help, with the mayor and the police commissioner's strategy, to restore the riders' sense of safety which has been so harmed, so eroded, by this terrible incident, and to restore confidence in the safety of the mass transit. Thank you.

Question: My question is for Mayor Adams. [Inaudible] coordinated with the suspect turning himself in [inaudible] throughout the day, it's coordinated. Do you want to talk about the conversations you had? Can you confirm, is he working with the administration? Is he working in its own capacity? especially with the footage, to kind of... in his instance, he said that you were happy that he was assisting the suspect and turning himself in.

Mayor Adams: Well, we always encourage, particularly the religious leaders, I have a good relationship with many of the religious leaders throughout the city. When it was placed on my radar, that this person wanted to turn themselves in, I communicated with law enforcement because it's about getting the [inaudible], that's what we did. That participated in assisting us to do so, we say, thank you. The good guys won today by getting him off the streets.

Question: Does Richard Whitehead... you have a relationship with him, but is he working in some formal capacity with the administration?

Mayor Adams: No.

Question: For Mr. Mayor and the police officials here, regarding this suspect, he, Bishop Whitehead, told reporters that the suspect apparently has no memory, no

recollection, was surprised to see his image. Is that what he is telling you? How does that sort of fit in with the overall picture we talked about the dilemmas?

Mayor Adams: This is going to be decided in court, not with any civilian. The court is going to determine, any parts of this case, determine how this should be handled. We're not going to do or say anything that's going to interfere with the prosecution of this dangerous person.

Question: Can you folks talk about dealing with this local pastor and how you guys were to arrest [inaudible] 49 Thompson Street? I know they're still saying he surrendered, but how do you guys find [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: No, we're not.

Question: An impromptu question. He muttered to himself saying "no phones," is that a window to a possible motive? Was the suspect on the phone, pulling his phone out?

Essig: No, we don't know why he says it. We believe that it was maybe he wants nobody to take phone cameras of the incident that was about to go down.

Question: Okay. [inaudible], the commissioner talked about, right now, the justice system. Based on the record as Chief Essig just laid out, [inaudible] what our breakdown should be for time on parole based on your [inaudible]?

Commissioner Sewell: I think we've been very clear that we would like judges to be able to consider dangerousness, and clearly with the history that the chief laid out, there are times in this case where a judge could have considered possibly that he may have been a danger to society and he should not have been on the street.

Mayor Adams: I want to touch on that also. He attempted murder, he had 30 months, he shot someone, so he failed the first time, he murdered someone this time, that's the breakdown. We should not be plea bargaining these cases, particularly in gun violence. We're laser focused on gun violence, and we should not be plea bargaining these cases on gun violence. Here's the person that shot someone, robbery, when you look at the top charges, he was able to plead down to, I believe, an attempted gun possession. That's just a breakdown in how we're not taking his stuff seriously.

Question: Maybe too early to notice, but did he give up a big fish, so to speak?

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry?

Question: Did he give up a bigger fish, so to speak, did he know much about...?

Mayor Adams: There's no fish bigger than the person that pulls the trigger.

Question: Chief Essig, did he make any statements as he was taken into custody?

Essig: No, he's represented by counsel, no statements.

Question: Mayor Adams, just to go back to, what is the connection between the bishop and Abdullah? Why was he involved in any way, shape, or form?

Mayor Adams: That's something I think that you have to ask the bishop, I don't know the connection. All I wanted was this bad guy off the street, and whoever wanted to participate in a system that's doing so in any way, that's good enough for me. He could answer that question, I can't.

Question: Were you aware that apparently—

Mayor Adams: Are you talking to me or the chief?

Question: Abdullah wanted to surrender to you, Mayor Adams, was that a part of the conversation as well? What do you [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: This is an active case in front of the D.A., and I'm not going to say anything that's going to impede the investigation at all. If the district attorney wants me to come in and sit down and have a thorough conversation, I'm willing to do so, but we're not going to do anything to allow this person to anywhere impede the trial and conviction of him.

Question: This is a question from my office. You had Bojang surrender, Abdullah now made an arrangement to come in. [Inaudible] turn himself in. Any pattern there or is it something that's just coincidence or is there some fear that they [inaudible]?

Essig: I'll turn it over to the chief, but I would say that we had a significant amount of assistance from the public in some of these cases. We also had extraordinary detective work, we put the information out, we put pictures out, we put his image on social media. We pretty much, in many cases, we shrunk his world. In these instances, people realize they really don't have too many places to go, so we really want to make sure we get the information out there and get people to help us with these investigations and these apprehensions.

Question: Can you elaborate on a possible motive?

Essig: That's a big mystery in this one, like I said, he was just pacing back and forth. There was a lot of other people on that train, he just targeted this poor individual and for reasons we don't know.

Question: Could we get some more details about what that initial interaction was like when NYP stopped him? You guys said it was just 11 minutes after the incident occurred.

Essig: Yeah, the officers were responding to the shooting. There was a description put over, as I put out, the sweatpants, gray sweatpants, and a black hoodie. They observed him walking away from the subway, it's a short block and a half away. They stopped him, talked to him, asked [inaudible] and they were satisfied with the answers. He had a different colored shirt on, and he had a back [inaudible] radio to the officers on the scene [inaudible] description, but he did show us his ID. He leaves when we later review the video from the train and we see that distinctive orange shirt, now we go back there, we retrieve more video, catching him taking off the hoodie and we're able to put that together. We have his ID, and that's how we identify him.

Question: Hi chief, can you tell us what happened today? I think you thought he was going to turn himself in and then he had to be picked up by, I believe the Regional Task Force.

Essig: Yes.

Question: What happened there?

Essig: Well, Regional Task Force was looking for him last night, we had numerous locations throughout Brooklyn. We received word this morning that he was going to turn himself in. He was given ample time to turn himself in, and Regional found him in front of 49 Thomas today and brought him in.

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