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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS, DSNY COMMISSIONER JESSICA TISCH
ANNOUNCE NYC TO SOON BE HOME TO LARGEST COMPOSTING PROGRAM IN
NATION, PROVIDING EVERY HOUSEHOLD IN QUEENS WITH WEEKLY
CURBSIDE COMPOSTING**

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thank you. I was about to say it was going to be a peaceful day, then I saw Michael. [Laughs.]

Commissioner Jessica Tisch, Department of Sanitation: It's a good time.

Mayor Adams: Thank you so much. Really excited to be here today with our commissioner of the Department of Sanitation, Jessica Tisch, and my home borough president, when I grew up here, Borough President Donovan Richards. And I'm pretty sure we are going to see Francisco Moya and some of our other electeds and potentially Congressman Meeks because no matter where we go, the commissioner and I know, we hear it all the time, "It's about the trash. It's about the trash." And it's keeping our city clean in so many ways. That's why we're standing here at the Unisphere, doing great things for our entire planet, and that is recycling, renewing and protecting the environment.

Mayor Adams: Starting this fall, we are bringing guaranteed weekly curbside composting to the entire borough of Queens. This will make New York City home to the largest curbside composting program in the nation. The largest in the nation. Cities are the future. I say this all the time and when I speak with my colleagues across the country, we know that it is in the cities that we are going to make a determination of how not only do we protect the environment, but protect our citizens for the future. We are going to lead the way in fighting climate change, but we have to act in ways that are smart, targeted, and cost efficient.

Mayor Adams: That is the focus on why we looked at this program that was already in place and thought differently about it. When we suspended the composting program, I said that we are going to bring it back, but we're going to bring it in a more equitable and a more cost efficient way. That was our goal and focus and Commissioner Tisch rolled up her sleeves and clearly moved in the right direction. We are proud of the program that she's going to go into detail. This is keeping the promise that we stated. Beginning October 3rd, all Queens residents will receive weekly collection of yard, waste, food scraps, and food-soiled paper products. There's no sign up required.

Mayor Adams: This is a no-frill way of just getting it done without the bureaucracy and the difficulties of signing up for a program. You just put out your yard waste in a separate bag or bin — the bin that you see here. You can order special sealed composting bins online for food waste, and it is New York's favorite four-letter word, free. It's free to those who want it and it allows us to coordinate our efforts better. To make it even easier, the Department of Sanitation will deliver the bin to you, deliver to your home, and we will make sure that you would get it in time to be part of this important program.

Mayor Adams: When you think about it, almost a third of the waste is compostable, almost a third. That's a significant amount that won't end up in our landfills, but when it goes into our landfill, and the reason we are fighting against that, is because it produces methane, a dangerous greenhouse gas. That is why we're doing everything possible to keep it out of our landfills. When we talk about yard waste — Queens is home to 41% of our street trees, so there's a lot of yard waste that's collected and that's why it's smart to start here in this borough.

Mayor Adams: We're taking all that composting material and turning it into rich soil for plants that soak up carbon dioxide as they grow. It can also be used to produce renewable energy and from a discarded apple core or falling leaves that would normally go into the garbage, we can now use it to improve our environment. I have a composting bin right on my countertop at the office and at Gracie Mansion. We're going to suspend service for a few months starting in December, when there's almost no yard waste. And then again have a program, but smartly use the program, not just have it just to have it, but have it to reach a goal.

Mayor Adams: We found that studies have shown that in the startup phase, most compost comes from falling leaves, twigs and other yard material. But during the winter months, we don't have that same level of volume. But we're going to start right back up in March and keep the program going. We're launching in Queens because, as I say, there's so many of these neighborhoods deserve environmental justice and it produces a lot of yard waste. The administration is focused on both equity and efficient solutions.

Mayor Adams: We also have 250 smart bins for composting in all five boroughs. That's 150 more bins than what we promised. We exceeded the numbers that we promised. These have been a huge success and a perfect example of how we take a successful pilot program and make it permanent. Pilot programs allow us to roll out something in a permanent fashion so we can get it right and learn from what we produce. So this is a great day for yes — a city of yes — and getting things done the correct way. I want to turn it over to our commissioner, so she can go into the details of the program. But job well done in such a short period of time. Thank you.

Commissioner Tisch: Thank you, Mayor Adams. I am going to start my remarks today with a fact that may blow all of your minds. And that is that New Yorkers leave 24 million pounds of residential trash and recycling on the curbs every single day. That's three pounds of trash for every New Yorker. As the mayor said, we know that about one third of that, or 8 million pounds a day, is organic material. Today that organic material goes in the black trash bags where it's commingled with all the other household trash and it sits on the curbs, serving, as we've said before, an all-you-can-eat buffet for rats. Adding more insult to injury, it then gets landfilled, where the material decomposes and produces harmful methane gas for years to come. The new program that we're announcing today changes all of that. In its first instance, for the entire borough of Queens, which represents approximately one quarter of all organic waste in the city.

Commissioner Tisch: The program is designed to take the organic material out of the black bags, and instead set it out in rat-proof bins. Gone will be the nightly rat feast, but there's more. Instead of decomposing in a landfill and creating toxic greenhouse gases, the material will be composted and turned into soil or processed through an anaerobic digester and turned into renewable energy. So let me tell you a bit about how the program will work. Let's start with the very basics. We'll take your leaves, we'll take your yard waste, we'll take all your food waste. We'll take all food-soiled paper, that's napkins, that's paper plates. Just set it out once a week on your organics collection day and we'll come collect it. Leaves and yard waste can go in a bag on the ground, food waste has to go in one of the bins. Until October 1st Queens residents can order a free brown bin from us and we will send it right to their doorsteps. We're also proactively sending brown bins to every building in Queens that has 10 or more units. If you don't order a bin from us, no issue; you can use any bin that you want. We just ask that the bin have a lid to keep out the rats. I have long said that the next organics program that we roll out in New York City must be our last, so I want to take a moment to distinguish the program that we are rolling out today from previous programs attempted in New York City.

Commissioner Tisch: First, as the mayor said, it's the single largest rollout ever. On October 3rd, we are turning on the entire borough of Queens. Second, it is the most equitable organics program ever rolled out in New York City, and that is very much tied up in our decision to start in Queens, the most diverse county in the country. Third, the program is way more cost effective than previous programs and this is an area where the mayor pushed us really hard. Per district collection costs for this program are less than half the cost of previous programs. We achieved these savings by finding some extreme routing, fleet and workforce efficiencies. And finally, we do hope and expect that this program will be more effective than any program previously rolled out, i.e. one that people actually use because it's being offered as a stress free new service to all Queens residents.

Commissioner Tisch: For organics to work, it needs to penetrate beyond the true believers and for that to happen, it needs to be simple to use so here's what we got. No signups or expressions of interest or other hoops to jump through. Our trucks will roll to every address in Queens once a week, period. And no particular bin that you have to use. As I mentioned before, you can order a free brown bin from us, or you can use your own bin. I want to be very clear that while Queens residents definitely do have cause to celebrate today, we're not leaving the rest of the city out of the organics action. We are also announcing a massive expansion of our smart compost bins, like the one in orange. 250 new bins in total to parts of Northern Manhattan, the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn and Staten island. This blows past our previous commitment of 100 new bins.

Commissioner Tisch: New Yorkers want to do the right thing and with this program, it will be easy for them. Starting October 3rd in Queens, let's close down the rat buffet by getting food out of the black bags and let's shutter the methane factory by turning organic material into compost and green energy. And now it is my pleasure to introduce the Queens Borough President Donovan Richards. And I just want to say before it was Queens Borough President Richards and before it was Public Safety Chair Richards, it was Environmental Protection Chair Richards, so it is a particular pleasure to have him with us here today.

[...]

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Also, we're joined by our DEP Commissioner Rit Aggarwala. Rit, thank you for just your years as you help us clean up this environment. So why don't we open to a few on-topic questions and we do a few off-topics, right, Kate?

Question: You mentioned wanting to eliminate methane. Is methane not a byproduct of decomposition?

Commissioner Tisch: So what we're going to do with the anaerobic digesters is we capture all of the gas that would naturally come out of it and instead we sell it as renewable energy.

Question: And in terms of the soil, what happens, where does that go? What happens?

Commissioner Tisch: Yeah. Thank you for that question. Actually, we have bags of the soil that we produce at our Staten Island compost facility here today for all of you. That soil is produced pretty much year round. And we give it to the Parks Department, we give it to community groups, we sell it to landscapers. So it's a great product and we find lots of different uses for it. ... And we find lots of different uses for it.

Question: I know that this isn't a mandatory program because it's only one borough so far, but how will you encourage, especially larger buildings, to do this? Requires buy-in from the building manager and the super already sorting trash. Then I guess sort of another thing. I know if you lived in one of the community districts that had the original pilot, I know a lot of buildings just didn't do it because it was an extra burden on that. I don't know if there's any outreach or stuff like that.

Commissioner Tisch: Yeah. Thank you for that question, Katie. A few things, we took a good hard look at all of the past and present composting programs that have been rolled out in New York City. The item that you point out that some of the larger buildings didn't participate and therefore their residents didn't have the ability to participate in the program, that jumped out as a big learning from those programs. What we're doing in this program is we are automatically sending a brown bin to every building in Queens that has 10 or more units.

Commissioner Tisch: Everyone else, if you live in a smaller building, you just fill out a form and we'll send a bin to you. We believe that by sending the bins to those larger buildings, we will make it easier on building management to accommodate the program. And actually instead of easier on building management to accommodate the program, I would say harder for them to tell their residents that they are not participating in the program. What I would say to residents is if you live in a building and you want to participate in the composting program, say to your building manager we know that you have a brown bin. It was delivered to you. The City of New York delivered one to you. Where is it? I'd like to put my food scraps inside.

Question: In a threatening tone, I guess, if they don't have that?

Commissioner Tisch: I don't know — did you read that as threatening?

Mayor Adams: I thought it was a New York tone.

Question: I just think it's the question of, this had happened in the pilot era and a lot of people just used those brown bins for whatever they felt like. I just don't know if it really could catch on in a larger building.

Commissioner Tisch: Katie, as we discussed before, we can't make this... I think we can't and we shouldn't make this mandatory at this time partially because it's only being rolled out in Queens. It would be an undue burden on building managers in Queens. What we'd really like for this program is for Queens to show the rest of the city that this can be done effectively, that people will participate. In all seriousness, we really ask all building managers in Queens to participate in the program. We are making it so easy. There are no signups. You're getting a bin for free. You don't even have to ask for a bin, we're sending it to you. We're really trying to do everything we can to learn from the mistakes of previous programs.

Question: What is the history of composting in the city? I'm not sure the previous... What about the other boroughs? Is this going to be rolled out in the other boroughs?

Commissioner Tisch: A lot of drama. There have been composting programs that have been rolled out in the city going on 10 years and they get rolled out and then they get paused and then they start up again. We designed this program to be the last composting program that we roll out in New York City. This is by far the cheapest, the most efficient, the easiest for New Yorkers to use. This program takes from all of the learnings of the previous decade of programs and addresses any and every issue that we saw. The great hope is that Queens residents will use the program. We know it's an affordable program for the city and we'd love to roll it out beyond Queens. We just need to see what happens in Queens. I'm very hopeful.

Question: Do you have any estimates on how many people are already doing this on their own in the city or in Queens or wherever?

Commissioner Tisch: Right now we have seven districts operating in a voluntary pilot. That pilot's different. You have to sign up and express interest and jump through a lot of hoops to participate in it. What we've found is we have less than 10% of buildings participating in those programs. I believe that New Yorkers want to do the right thing. If we make it easy enough for them, they will do the right thing. We really have framed this program and developed this program not to be another requirement on New Yorkers but to be a net new service that we are offering them. You have leaves and yard waste, you already naturally separate that stuff out. There is no fuss, no muss with separating yard waste and leaves. Just put it out on your organic day instead of your trash day.

[Crosstalk]

Mayor Adams: How are you? These are our great Park workers. Take care... [Applause] You go right over to your bin. See Michael? You see how easy this is.

Question: I thought you were hands on.

Mayor Adams: Look at that. You all can buy one of these at any of your home goods stores and it works. Thank you for keeping our parks clean, okay? [Applause] So we're going to do a few off-topics, so we're going to spare you all this incoming. I see you brother.

Question: Can we talk about the migrant situation, what is the status now? Have you found places for all of them and what do you think about this program?

Mayor Adams: First, I'm not quite sure how you got that headline this morning because in our conversation yesterday, no one said that migrants didn't come here because they didn't feel safe. We were very clear. The misleading information that was coming out of Texas, people thought when they got off the buses they were going to be arrested or apprehended. I think that Governor Abbott — what he's doing is just so inhumane. We were happy to have a mayor who greeted the asylum seekers instead of placing them on a bus with a 44 hour ride, very few breaks, no food, no direction and clear information. It was a good job with the coordination of volunteers and what our office did in the morning. Our goal is every asylum seeker that comes to New York, we are going to get them shelter and support that they need.

Question: Mayor, you are speaking about resources. What specifically are you asking from the federal government? What specific number when it comes to financial aid? I also heard that you guys are providing hotel rooms for asylum seekers. Just hoping to clarify with that and have you spoken to Schumer or any of our other federal partners about the assistance needed for the city?

Mayor Adams: Yes, we have a call set up with the White House. They want to help, they made it clear. They want to give us the assistance that we need, our team, and I will be on that call. We are going to brief our Congressional delegation to share what we need. Our deputy mayor of human services is doing a complete analysis of what's needed and what the dollar and the price tag. This is a moving configuration right now, because we are averaging roughly... anywhere, it could be from a number to 50 a day to 100 a day. And so, until we can wrap our heads around that exact number, we have to go with an estimate, but we need the resources to assist. When it comes down to hotels, we have a requirement and a mandate by law as being a right-to-shelter city. We have a requirement to house within a period of time, and we're going to use every available means to do so. And that is what we are doing, and we're living up to that mandate.

Question: So just in terms of... I know you said that it's an estimate at this point, I think, so we don't know how many have arrived so far. And going forward, what does it look like and how often and how many people are going to be arriving from Texas?

Mayor Adams: Well, the governor of Texas has made it clear. What we always knew he was doing, he finally acknowledged. He is shipping people who have traveled for months, packing them on buses and sending them to New York. Our social services agency will give you the exact amount, but we're talking about thousands that are here and that we are providing services for. What also was extremely revealing yesterday is that there were some who wanted to go to other cities where they have families, and they just packed them on the bus without any direction. And we learned that many people had to be reticketed. They wanted to go somewhere else, but they just specifically targeted New York. They being the governor of Texas. It's just a mean and cruel thing that he's doing. Someone seeking refuge for leaving a horrific environment, and this is how we're treating them in Texas. Not the people of Texas, but the governor of Texas, but that's not who we are as New Yorkers.

Question: What's your message to him, the governor? I assume you haven't spoken to him. What's your message to him?

Mayor Adams: Be a true American. This is a place where the Statue of Liberty sits in the harbor, and we say, "Bring us your tired. Those who are yearning to be free." That's what these asylum seekers are doing. And I don't think anything is more anti-American than shipping people on a bus, 45-hour trip, without any of the basic needs that they have or direction or coordination. Coordination. We have no idea the number of people, we have no idea of where their final destinations are. He's just totally disregarding of the human part of this. There's a humanitarian part of being an American, and I think that there's nothing more anti-American than what he's displaying right now.

Question: To use yesterday's bus arrival as a microcosm of the situation at large, the one that you were at. Only 14 got off. Where did the others get off? Where were they expected to go and where are the shelters that take the 14 and whoever else arrives in the city?

Mayor Adams: Well, we do not place people in shelters based on their demographic, their ethnicity or their need. We give shelter, and wherever there's an available bed, we give the shelter for that. And out of just right to some form of decency and privacy, we're not going to pinpoint and say, "This asylum seeker went to this shelter." That is not what we're going to do. From my understanding, the question about where did they get off of, the lack of coordination with the bus. They're not parking in the Port Authority. And so, we don't know what trips were made, what stops were made along the way. And so, if you are dropping people off along the way in a new country, and you may not have a full understanding of the language, it's just inhumane. At least if we know how to coordinate this, we can provide the services like we did. The commissioner of immigration and our other commissioners were there. We can coordinate better instead of having people brought to the city without any support.

Question: And the ones that got off the bus in New York, where did they get the tickets? Because I believe some of them then left the city.

Mayor Adams: There were some amazing partners there who were identifying those who needed to be reticketed and they were assisting. And our goal is to bring them into our shelter. Some did, some did not, some were able to be reticketed and went to new locations. But our goal is to get people in shelters, have the intake, do a complete analysis of their needs, and then as much as we can, accommodate those needs.

Question: Can you say the new locations they went to?

Mayor Adams: I don't know. They had those one-on-one conversations with them.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Now again, on the asylum seeker issue. Last Friday, you said you were talking to the administration. You've said before that you guys have been in talks, your administration and theirs, Biden's. Why is it taking so long to get an answer? And on the resources question, I understand it's funding you're seeking from the federal government, but are you also seeking resources like the National Guard? Are there other things specifically that the city's determined it needs to address the situation?

Mayor Adams: We are at the point where we are managing this crisis. You know what I always say, we pivot and shift based on the needs that are in front of us, but we know we're not going to

wait until it is unmanageable. Right now, it's at a serious state. We know that we have a homeless crisis in the city. And right now, we're at a state where we must get the assistance from the federal government. On Friday, the teams were speaking on a lower level, and now we're going to have a higher level conversation with the White House. And they appear to be extremely receptive to the needs. So they see what's happening in the city, and we're looking forward to those conversations. Okay.

Question: Do you have any sense of when you might have a final answer from the White House on it?

Mayor Adams: I believe the call is today, but as soon as we do, we're going to let you know. Thank you. Thank you all.

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