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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS LAUNCHES NYC LEGAL FELLOWS PROGRAM, NEW MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CITY AND MAJOR LAW FIRMS

Brendan McGuire, Chief Counsel to the Mayor and City Hall: Good morning, everyone. My name is Brendan McGuire. Thank you all for being here this morning. We have a lot of lawyers here in City Hall today. That's definitely not always a good thing, but today, it definitely is. We have an important announcement that we hope will bring more lawyers into this building and into the rest of the administration. And for more on that, I'll introduce our mayor, Eric Adams.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thanks so much, Brendan. And this is just really part of the continuation of what this administration stated we were going to do, creating partnerships with our public sector. And this is probably one of the most significant aspects of it and that is bringing in legal minds to help us deal with many of the challenges the city has faced over these last few months. We had the challenges of how we dealt with the pandemic, how we dealt with monkeypox, how we dealt with the migrant and asylum seekers. And our lawyers have been stretched thin making sure that they can keep up with the pace of the legal challenges that we were facing. And I really want to commend the corporation counsel and our entire legal team, how they have burned the midnight oil to come up with these real answers in real time, in our morning briefings, being prepared in the courtrooms, and executing a very clear plan on how to protect the citizens of this city.

And today, we're really excited. This is an initiative that Brendan McGuire, my chief counsel — he brought this to me several months ago. I thought it was too good to be true, getting legal fellows to come in and assist us on the dime of the law firms in the city. And you always love when the law firms are going to do something pro bono. That's a great word. And so, we are here today to announce the inaugural class of legal fellows. And they're doing more than providing a legal opportunity to our city, but it's providing opportunities for these lawyers. It's unimaginable those who have served in public service, they would tell you the rewarding feeling of that. I spoke a few weeks ago to one of the creators of the Peace Corps where, years ago, people used to go away and do service and they came back different.

They felt different and they treated people differently. And having young attorneys at the beginning of their legal careers come into government and provide public service in a public sector environment, it can only help develop their full personhood as attorneys. And this is a

major, major investment being made by our law firms. It's an investment into our future. These attorneys, these legal fellows, will be working for one year in one of the agencies, one of the nine agencies that are behind us. Each one of them are talking about the national challenge that we are facing with an attorney shortage. And they were excited about this program and we are excited about this. The legal fellows will gain valuable experience in public policy and bring the experience and perspective to their work in the private sector and deepen the relationship between the city and generations of lawyers that will be in the city for many years.

Our program is part of a long term effort, as I stated. We're bringing in tech experts. And I've been asking our tech industries to loan us some of their people to solve some of the problems that we are facing. Bringing in people in healthcare professions. We are looking towards the private sector and we're asking them, "Do your part. Be a partner with us." And these law firms have stepped up and clearly indicated their willingness to help the city during these difficult times. Too often, lawyers must devote themselves entirely to one aspect of their work for their entire career. That is not here. When you work in city government, you are going to get a full taste of all of the problems that a city of this size is facing. And we want everyone to have a chance to serve this city, help this city, and help the city move towards the future.

So it's a win-win. We're excited about it. The lawyers will gain experience in the public service and the city will gain from their experience in looking over some of the legal items that we are facing. We are proud that this class of fellows will provide support and our lawyers across the city because it is about giving that support. All of our legal teams, all of our counsels, and all of our agencies are inundated with the various legal issues that are facing us. And so when you are looking out for the 8.8 million people to give you a sense of pride in your city and it gives you the level of commitment so that we, as a city, can do what I always state. We can get stuff done.

And I want to thank the law firms in general. Specifically, I want to thank a longtime government employee, private-citizen, and advocate for the city, Randy. Just has been amazing throughout the years that I've known him and always willing, even during our transition, to step up and give his insight and foresight on how to form government and how to operate in government. And so I really thank you for what you are doing and I thank all of the counsels we have here and the representatives from our different law firms, stating that we are wearing one jersey. And that jersey that states team New York. Thank you very much. Brendan.

McGuire: Thank you, mayor. And thank you for your support throughout the development stage of this program. This administration is full of lawyers because the mayor values the judgment, the rigor, and the creativity that a good lawyer can bring to the table. There may be some days he regrets the number of lawyers he brought in, but I think more days are better than others. (Laughter.) He also understands, importantly, I think, that lawyers are the foundation for good government in any administration. And so I'd just like to make three brief points about the objectives and the promise of the Legal Fellows Program. First, every day, our team here tries to view each challenge as an opportunity. And this program is an example of that. The city has never needed lawyers as more than it does today. There are currently hundreds of lawyer positions vacant, and the city's lawyers at the Law Department and within its agencies do incredible work every day even though they are shorthanded.

But we also recognize that, as the legal capital of the world, our city is home to the most talented, hardest-working, and most civic-oriented group of lawyers on the planet. And many of them want an opportunity to do purpose-driven work in service of the public. And some of them are fortunate enough to work for law firms that are committed to providing them with such opportunities while at the same time helping the city in its time of need. And as the mayor said, this is a win for everyone involved. The second point is that there's no doubt that our class of fellows will experience engaging, challenging, and meaningful work. As a lawyer for this city, that's a given. But what will be more valuable for these lawyers than the work they experience is the people that they experience. The collection of lawyer leaders and general counsels that the mayor has assembled in this administration is second to none.

And each of them will serve as a role model for our fellows next year. And I'm grateful that some of them have agreed to join us here today. Three of the five deputy mayors that the mayor has appointed are actually lawyers. Two of them are here right behind me, Deputy Mayors Joshi and Williams-Isom. Each of them is a quintessential lawyer leader who have had and continue to have an extraordinary impact in public service. They've also been clever enough to find jobs where they don't really have to deal with lawyers that much. We're also joined here today by Chief of Staff Frank Carone, a longtime advisor to the mayor, who similarly has applied his experience managing a law firm in the private sector to the management here of City Hall. And the mayor's reliance on lawyers does not end within City Hall. He's entrusted some of the most challenging and important agencies and mayoral offices to the leadership of lawyers.

And we're joined here today by some of them whose agencies will serve as hosts to next year's legal fellows. On behalf of Chancellor David Banks, who's a lawyer, we're joined here by First Deputy Dan Weisberg, also a lawyer. We're joined here by DOI Commissioner Jocelyn Strauber. On behalf of Mayor's Office of Risk Management and Compliance Director Marjorie Landa, Jean-Claude LeBec is here. And we also have the heads of several host agencies here who I think I have on good authority are delighted that they're not lawyers. But I want to just mention them and I apologize if I forget anyone, but we have Renee Champion from Office of Labor Management. And we also have Deanna Logan from the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, who is a lawyer. That's exactly right. I apologize. And next to her, Lisa Flores — you are not. (Crosstalk.) And Lisa Flores.

So I just want to thank this group of my colleagues here for their support of this program. And then finally,

I'd just like to express my gratitude to the eight firms who have agreed to invest in this program and in the city. Firms of this caliber that are represented here today receive many, many requests and demands on their resources and on their people and they're very careful in how they spend their time and those resources. And we so appreciate, as the mayor said, that they see the value in this program for their lawyers and in particular that they've agreed to partner with the city at this time of the city's need. We really do hope that this is just the beginning and that this will enable us to expand our relationship with each of you going forward.

And so with that, I'd like to introduce, as the mayor alluded to, a real supporter of this administration and someone who from day one was a strong supporter of this program and who's also obviously no stranger here to City Hall, Randy Mastro of King & Spalding.

Randy Mastro, Partner, King & Spalding: Thank you Brendan. Thank you. I'm here on behalf of all of these great law firms, but I'm from King & Spalding with my partner, Craig Carpenito, to say how honored we are to partner with the city administration on this rewarding program which reflects the very best of New York's legal community. Now, I used to have the office right down the hall here. I know the value of public service, but I also know in the private sector we have an obligation to give back. So to be a part of this brings back a lot of fond memories of public service and how we will be able to share it with some of our young lawyers.

Now, when the call came from the city administration to participate in this program, we at King & Spalding of course responded to the call. But when it came from this mayor, Eric Adams, it was an easy call. Mayor, we know we appreciate the challenges ahead on crime, on gun violence, on homelessness, on asylum seeking, on issues relating to the environment and civil rights, on bringing the city back from COVID and bringing people back to the office. We, as I look here behind me with leaders of so many of our city's leading law firms, here to support you in that effort because we like you, Mr. Mayor, love this city and we want to see you succeed. Because when you succeed, we all succeed on behalf of our city.

So I see here this the first step in an army of lawyers from the private sector, an army of litigators prepared to help you address the challenges through our legal system that you face. Because, Mr. Mayor, we support you, we want to see you succeed and we thank you for giving us this opportunity on behalf of our great city. So thank you, Brendan. Thank you, mayor. Really appreciate it.

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you. Well said. If he wants, on-topic?

Question: Hi. Good morning Mayor Adams.

Mayor Adams: How are you?

Question: Good, thanks. I have a guess a couple questions about the program initially. I know Brendan did say that there's hundreds of vacancies within the city for jobs for lawyers. If after the year long fellow — I believe it's a year long fellowship — if some of these fellows say, you know what, I really want to work in the city agency, will those jobs be available to them?

Secondly, what else is the city doing to address this huge vacancy? I know people say there's low pay, some people don't like that you have to be in the office five days a week. I don't know what the policies that some of these law firms or what else beyond this fellowship is the city doing to hire full-time, not just fellows?

Mayor Adams: Well first, as you have noticed throughout the last 10 months, this administration is really equipped to manage crises. The reason you are not talking about COVID a lot, because we managed it. The reason I don't hear any more questions on asylum seekers, we managed it. We managed monkeypox. And so sometimes when you manage these crises, you don't even realize the normality of your life returning because we are doing a good job of managing it.

What we don't do is just do one path. We have a crisis right now, a national crisis, not a New York crisis. A national crisis in employment. There's a transformation of post-COVID, what work looks like, the entire country is wrestling with that. So we need to deal with the immediate concerns and be creative in doing so, and that is this program. It's a level of creativity to deal with the immediate concerns.

Then we have a long-term plan of how do we really recruit in city government? City government for far too long rested on their own success that everyone came to them. Those days are over. We have to now be competitive and recruit talent that we want. But while we're doing that recruitment and bringing people in, we need to deal with the immediate crisis that's in front of us, and that is how this administration function.

We're going to bring on this immediate help, the cavalry. Today you're hearing the bugles, that they're coming in to help. But we have a long-term plan to recruit. And that means going out and not just waiting for people to come to city government, but going out and finding the talent.

Question: And here's an opportunity for a fellow because they're being paid by their current law firm.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: I'm sure (inaudible) rate that they're at. What is the pathway for them if they want to actually come to the city, they'll take a pay adjustment or how does that work?

McGuire: So it's a good question. We're going to see how this goes. This is not designed to poach talent from the law firms. They have invested a lot in these lawyers. But the goal here is really in addition to addressing the short-term needs of the city that the mayor described, there's also a long-term effort here to try to further expose lawyers in the private sector to all that city service has to offer. And to encourage those lawyers should they choose to, at some point in their careers, to devote a chapter of their careers in service of the city. So the hope here is that this first class will serve as a group of ambassadors going back into their firms and into their networks to try to communicate to their colleagues and their friends that this is really a path that is well worth considering for a lawyer in the city.

Mayor Adams: And I think that's so important what Brendan stated, because Brendan was in private practice, Frank was in private practice. There's a calling. When you get a taste of changing the lives of people on a citywide and in some cases a national... The work Brendan and Judge Hinds-Radix and others, AG James did around ghost guns, that's a national game changer. The things we're doing around asylum seekers, what Deputy Mayor Williams-Isom is doing. People are calling us all over the country to talk about how we manage.

And so when you get a taste of public sector work, it's a game changer. So there may be some who come in, go back to their firms, and then a few years later say I want to go back. I want to make an impact. I've done well in my life. I'm doing well financially. I want to now go back and help. And so I think the model of service, I think everyone should experience public service at one time. Even if they go on to do other things with their lives, public service allows you to have a full scope of what is happening in this city and participate in it. And so I'm excited about this,

not only for the lawyers, but for the other firms. We're asking every corporation to allow their younger employees in general to cycle through government work.

Question: Mayor, Brendan, I'm wondering if... Are there specific areas that you're concerned about where you're seeing like a backlog or there are really strong issues that are happening because the city doesn't have enough lawyers? And secondly, I'm wondering if there's any thought of doing this program to sort of help people? For example, there are people who need lawyers to challenge their (inaudible) rent issues and other things. There have been complaints about that. I'm wondering if there's any effort to maybe expand this program out that way to help people as well.

Mayor Adams: Well, we don't wait until the problem is beyond control before we respond. We are seeing an issue. And during our morning briefings, we acknowledge the issue. We put an entire team together to do an analysis around work and what post-work environment looks like. And so instead of waiting until something's out of control, we got ahead of it. And we stated that let's come up with creative ways, let's think differently about solving the new problems that we are facing. And so city services are continued. People are still doing their jobs. They're working longer and harder. We're doing more with less. So, we're not waiting until something gets beyond our span of control. That is why we're getting ahead of it by being creative and we're going to go out and continue to do the recruitment. Brendan, you wanted to answer that other part?

McGuire: I would just say that it's all really connected and that the idea here is, because of the shortage, there's a need in a lot of areas. But I think the goal over this year is to see how well are these fellows working in these particular agencies? How can we leverage them the most, give them the richest experience possible, while also looking toward the following year, as you said, to potentially expand it in areas of particularly acute need?

Mayor Adams: Folks, thank you. I need some (inaudible) off-topics. Okay.

Question: Good morning.

Mayor Adams: How are you?

Question: Sorry about that.

Mayor Adams: That's all good.

Question: Following up from the previous employer's question, why were these specific agencies chosen in particular, and why not others? And also with the lawyers getting their pay from their firms, will their wages be transparent like other city government employees?

Mayor Adams: Well, number one — and my lawyer would talk about the wages — but the ask not, you receive not. These agencies say, "Hey, we love it. Let's do it." They stated that the resources we bring to an agency, we want the agency to embrace those resources. And all of these agencies here, we told them this is the program we're going to do. Are you interested in it? And they said, "Heck yes, this is a great idea. It's a great win-win." And that is why they're here.

And other agencies may turn on and see how well you guys and ladies reported this, and they may reach out and say, "Hey, we would like to be in this program as well." Brendan?

McGuire: And just on the wages piece, and more broadly on potential conflicts between these firms, the work these firms do and the city, we have received guidance on this program from the Conflict of Interest Board and so all of that has been addressed. They will, as you said, receive their compensation from the law firms in the ordinary course. But in all other respects, they will be full-time city employees who will perform in the same way as if they were full-time city employees getting paid by the city.

Mayor Adams: Okay. Thank you all. So, a few off-topics.

Question: (Inaudible.)

(Laughter.)

Question: I don't know how true that is. Good morning.

Mayor Adams: How you doing?

Question: Good. Governor's race. On multiple occasions, Congressman Zeldin has intimated that he's still close with you, that you still converse, that he'd get along very well with you as governor. Given that there is a good bit of overlap between his positions on criminal justice and your positions on criminal justice, how accurate are those intimations?

Mayor Adams: Everyone knows that I endorsed, support, campaign for, rally for Kathy Hochul. She has been an amazing partner and I am fighting like hell to get guns out of schools. And I am not aligned with anyone that believes we should be giving guns to teachers and others. I fought like hell and advocated for the crime bill to be passed. Lee did not sign onto that. And so we served together in the Senate. We've always had a cordial relationship, but we have some real philosophical disagreements that Kathy's aligned with me and I think she's a great partner. And I'm looking forward to her going back to Albany. We have some real challenges in front of us.

Question: On criminal justice and bail reform specifically, I know that wasn't a topic really of the summit a couple of weeks ago, but are you still in favor of something like a dangerousness standard or putting some juveniles in adult criminal court?

Mayor Adams: I've always made it clear what we must do around the criminal justice reforms. I've been very clear on that. I have not in any way moved away from those issues. But I know, as I stated at the forum, that there are far too many issues we all agree on, and that is what we need to deal with. When you look at even some of the issues that are playing out on Rikers, far too many of those inmates are there too long. It's not sustainable to have a criminal justice system operate this way.

Question: Good morning...

Mayor Adams: How are you?

Question: Mayor, can you please tell me what you know about Commissioner Ulrich's legal exposure and when you learned of it?

Mayor Adams: When you guys started calling around with tips. We had no idea. We got notified like you did. I think reporters were calling the team. That's when I became aware of it yesterday.

Question: And no one's talked with you about what he was being investigated for?

Mayor Adams: No, I think that the... From my understanding, the Manhattan DA is doing a review on some things. And when the outcome comes... Every person in government should always, no matter what form of government, should always participate with any review that one of our bodies look into.

Question: In what circumstances would you dismiss him from your administration?

Mayor Adams: We're going to take it as the days go.

Question: Thank you. Mr. Mayor, follow up on Emily's question. Have you spoken to the commissioner since news broke that he's under criminal investigation? Has he told you what happened?

Mayor Adams: No. My chief counsel has communicated with him. And I don't know if you guys look at my schedule, but from sunup to sundown, I'm all over the place and I haven't had a chance.

Question: His ongoing service in city government, is it appropriate for him to stay in charge of the Buildings Department while under criminal investigation? I assume being on a criminal investigation comes with having a lot on your plate, having to address that in various ways. Wouldn't that compromise the integrity of the Buildings Department to have someone in charge of the department that's under criminal probe?

Mayor Adams: We have a great team over at DOB. And the DOB, Department of Buildings is going to continue to do the great work that they're doing.

Bernadette.

Question: How are you?

Mayor Adams: What's going on?

Question: Going back to the bail question, Governor Hochul has said that she's not going to be touching bail changes right now. And you've said that she's a great partner, you're aligned with her. But do you think if bail's important, something that you ran as a part of your campaign, do you think those changes are important especially in light of what's going on with increased fear on the subways, et cetera?

And of course Commissioner Sewell earlier this morning said she thought that those changes to bail and adding a dangerousness standard were important and wants that to happen. So again, are you pressing Governor Hochul to make these changes on bail reform? And if not, why?

Mayor Adams: Again, I say this over and over again, everyone wants to talk about only bail reform. Our system is broken and it takes a level of discipline to look at every aspect of that broken system. Many rivers feed the sea of violence and the incompetency of our criminal justice system. And I am aligned with Governor Hochul on far too many of those issues and I lean into those issues that we are aligned on and I'm going to continue to articulate the issues that I think are important.

Question: Do you think she's done enough on bail reform?

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry?

Question: Do you think she did enough on bail reform?

Mayor Adams: Listen, I believe we can always do better in every area of our criminal justice system until we get the perfection that we're looking for.

Question: I just wanted to return to Commissioner Ulrich for a minute.

Mayor Adams: Yep.

Question: Did the Department of Investigation, when they do their standard background check, reveal that he had this debt or any other red flags to City Hall?

Mayor Adams: Brendan, you want to answer that question?

McGuire: Sure. So Sally, he went through the same DOI background process that every other eligible member of the administration should go through. We don't comment on the results of that. But needless to say, this administration takes very seriously what turns up in those DOI background checks. And we have, in the past, taken action when necessary based on what those investigations find.

Question: If there was a red flag raised, you would have acted?

McGuire: I think fair to assume that this has been done in the normal course and I don't want to get out ahead of DOI, it's their investigation that they've conducted. So I'll just stop there. But he followed the process that all other senior leaders in the administration followed.

Question: Mayor, I'm wondering if we think that Eric should still be in charge at the Buildings Department. Is he still in charge at the Buildings Department (crosstalk) those decisions? And then secondly, I'm wondering, you've been a great believer of giving people second chances and opportunities. You've talked about your own background. I'm wondering if you think that applies in this case with (inaudible)?

Mayor Adams: I think that... First of all, to peel back to your questions, number one, Eric is still the commissioner there. Number two, I really think that this is really so early for us to be saying should we, shouldn't we, should we, shouldn't we, should we? The DA's office is going to do their review and that review will determine how to move forward.

Question: I was wondering, it sounds like the DA didn't give you heads up before the commissioner was brought in. Do you think you should've gotten one?

Mayor Adams: No, no, no. The DA's job is to ensure the integrity of any review that they do and they're separate from City Hall. I do not expect anyone to give anyone a heads up on what they're doing. They do what they do. We do what we do and I respect that firewall. That's an excellent firewall and people must have trust in any review and body. So they did what they were supposed to do.

You're going to Bernadette twice? What's up with that?

Question: Hi. So you said earlier that you've taken care of COVID, but looking at recent data, only less than half of New Yorkers have gotten the bivalent booster. What are your thoughts about that and do you think that counts as being taken care of?

Mayor Adams: Well, if I said me, it's we. And we consist of the Health Department, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, citizens that got their booster shots, people who wore their masks. What we witnessed was the coordination of city agencies and New Yorkers coming together managing a crisis. I was here in the peak of the crisis. I know what it was like to see our city shut down, our streets empty. And anytime you manage a crisis to move it from the crisis level to the level of stabilizing, there's still going to be those that didn't do fully what's needed. People need to get boosted, people need to take the vaccine and we need to continue to follow those safe practices that we've done. And I wash my hands more than I've ever done. And so these practices are now incorporated. But what I do know is that COVID was on the front pages of all of our papers when I took office.

You couldn't open the paper without the conversation of COVID. I know what this team has done and what we continue to do as we manage these crises and allow people to realize the success of that. And I hear often I'm the pilot. Anyone that's wishing for the pilot to fail, they better realize they're on this plane. We are all in this together right now. I'm the pilot and we should be all praying for safe landing as we're in this plane together and not cross our fingers for something to happen. Pray for me cause I got to land this.

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