

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 16, 2021, 10:00 AM

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Yesterday, we just had a beautiful moment in Brooklyn, celebrating one of the greatest New Yorkers of all time – and we miss her – Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a child of Brooklyn. And an amazing New York City story – grew up in Midwood, Brooklyn, went to our public schools, started even in her youth to demand justice and fairness for everyone, and particularly to fight for the rights of women. And she was one of the people who sustained us during the very difficult years we went through recently where our democracy was threatened. She was one of the beacons of hope. And we miss her, but we want to keep her memory alive and her example alive, so, yesterday, we renamed the municipal building in Brooklyn, the Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Municipal Building. And it was an exciting moment and a warm moment to gather with her family and remember her and ensure that her name would proudly be represented in her home borough. So, may she rest in peace and she continues to inspire us.

Let's talk about some other inspiring news. Last week, we had our best week yet for vaccinations in New York City, 370,000 vaccinations given last week. The number keeps rising. It's not where we want to be, and need to be, and can be, which is over half-a-million a week, but it's progress. And what we need – I think you're going to guess what I'm about to say – supply, supply, supply. We could be doing so much more if we had more supply and we're working closely with the Biden administration to get that done, and we appreciate every, every step – they have been increasing the supply steadily. We need as much as we can get our hands on. But the good news is, the numbers really are mounting. Today, we will surpass 3 million vaccinations in New York City from the beginning of this effort. The official number as of this morning, 2,976,162 – great, great progress. We'll pass 3 million today. We'll keep going. We are well on our way to our goal of 5 million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. That's got to happen, so long as we get the supply.

Now, we talk about recovery for all of us, we talk about the importance of bringing this city forward, not only bringing it back, but bring it back better, addressing the issues of the past and moving us into a better future. One of the crucial issues is continuing to work on the relationship between police and community, continuing to deepen our efforts to keep everyone safe, but do it in a manner that is fair and respectful. There are a lot of pieces to the reform plans that we've put out already, two major reports, dozens and dozens of new proposals, new recommendations, new policies that will be changed. One of the areas we want to focus on is about the many areas and really what we think about in our society that don't get the attention they deserve, that don't get the kind of conversation they deserve – today, I'm going to talk about domestic violence and I'm going to talk about the reality of sex work and how sex workers are treated in our legal system

and how that needs to change. These are two areas that don't have enough attention where real change needs to be made, specific proposals in our reports would make the changes we need.

So, for example, we need to change the approach to fight sex trafficking, to make sure there are aggressive, coordinated efforts to stop sex trafficking and punish those who do this horrible, evil crime. But we also have to support those who are the survivors. We have to support the sex workers. We have to do something different. The conception we have in our legal system is broken. We need to change it. And that means understanding that sex workers are often folks who are subjugated, who are victims of trafficking, who are people who think they have no other choice. We need to help them. We need to end the criminalization of sex workers and put all of the focus on enforcement against those who subjugate them. We're creating a task force on the health and safety needs of sex workers who are often very vulnerable in so many ways. So, we want to bring together all the agencies of the City government to determine how we can support and protect those who are put in this situation. But, most importantly, we're calling upon the State of New York to change the laws, to end criminal penalties for sex workers, to put the focus where it should be, on the traffickers and those who profit. So, this work we will be doing as part of this reform package, working with the State. And also, the NYPD will develop new approaches to focus on arresting and punishing the traffickers while not harming the sex workers themselves.

So, that is one set of changes. But we also have a lot we need to do differently in the approach to domestic and gender-based violence. This has been an area where many, many parts of the City government have focused to try and help survivors in a variety of ways. And the NYPD has focused, including the regular visits to households where there's been domestic violence, to show follow-up and continuity and focus to stop it from ever happening again. These are good things, but we need to go farther. And so, we want to improve the support that we provide to survivors of domestic violence. We've got to put more resources into family violence prevention services to stop these horrible crimes to begin with. We've got to provide more counseling, more benefits to help survivors back on their feet. And we need to provide that support in many ways – in a way that decouples it from the criminal justice system. We want to give survivors access to the help they need. And, oftentimes, it's best to do that separately from any involvement that they may have seeking justice and support from the criminal justice system. Our Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence will lead the way and develop new approaches to train members of NYPD and City agency staff across the board in how to do this work a better way. We've been also partnering very closely with the City Council [inaudible]. There's tremendous concern in the City Council about reforming and changing the approach and reaching survivors in a better way and coming up with new strategies to prevent these crimes to begin with. I want you to hear from two council members who have been leading the way on these issues. First, the Chair of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity. I know that she cares deeply about these issues. She represents communities that have seen many struggles and she has been a fighter in those communities for change. My pleasure to introduce Council Member Darma Diaz.

Oh, wait. Not yet. Okay. Hold on. We have a little technical issue there. So, we will come right back on Council Member Diaz. But the second Council Member I want you to hear from has been outspoken, has worked very closely with this administration, has helped us realize a number of things that needed to be changed, and has challenged the NYPD and City agencies to do

better, and we have heard that challenge and acted on it. She's been a real voice of conscience. My pleasure to introduce, Council Member Helen Rosenthal.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Council Member Rosenthal, really appreciate your efforts. You've been constant and focused, and you've many times called me directly and said, hey, we need to do better here. And that has meant a lot and that has really helped. So, thank you so much. And everyone, this is going to be ongoing work, and a lot of work to do, but it's part of a huge set of reforms that are going to guide us into the future. And if you look at the two reports – and I urge everyone who's concerned to read them carefully – there's an immense amount of change embedded in those reports. It will guide us to specific actions constantly. I know Council Member Diaz wanted to speak to this, and I don't know if she's back. Yes, she is. All right, audio only will take audio only – sorry for the technical difficulty. But, again, I want to thank Council Member Diaz. I have seen the advocacy that she has provided in her district for people in need. It's a work of passion. She is connected to the grassroots. She fights for people in a very personal and real way. And I appreciate that. And, again, she serves as the Chair of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity. My pleasure and introduce by audio – via audio, Council Member Darma Diaz.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, Council Member. And Council Member, thank you. I admire you for everything you're doing. As you said, you are a survivor yourself and you've put all of your experiences, and taking them and put them into action, turn that pain into power, and really been out there fighting for other people and protecting other people. I want to really thank you for that. I thank you for your support of these changes that we plan to make.

All right, everyone, let's go over to the indicators for today. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Today's report – and this is a good one – 177 patients. So, again, it is too early to draw final conclusions, but we see in the last few days, and you can see it there on your screen, we're down below the threshold for the first time in a long time. That is very good news. Let's keep working together to keep it that way. It's everyone's business to stick to the guidance that's been working so we can keep pushing this number down. The confirmed positivity level, 63.54 percent. The hospitalization rate 3.64 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 2,236 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19 – today's report, on a seven-day rolling average, 6.40 percent.

Let me say a few words in Spanish. I'm going back to the topic of the reforms to the NYPD and police-community relations.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi, by Dr. Katz, by Commissioner Cecile Noel, of the Mayor's Office to End Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Discrimination, and by Ashe McGovern, the Executive Director of the New York City Unity Project, and, finally, by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today, it goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: I'm doing well, Juliet. How are you doing?

Question: I'm okay, thank you. The other day – or, you've been saying actually in the past couple of days that Governor Cuomo is holding up your effort to fight COVID, he's literally in the way. How is he holding up your effort and how is he in the way?

Mayor: First of all, Juliet, the same things we've talked about, we keep calling for, I keep calling for – the freedom to vaccinate. Let me give you an example, I think we should be vaccinating everyone who serves on a jury, all court workers, everyone who serves in a prosecutor's office, so we can restart our criminal justice system and make the city safer. I've been calling for that. We can't get support from the State on that. We're not getting our fair share of vaccine, even though we're vaccinating so many people from the suburbs, even from Connecticut, New Jersey. We should be getting more vaccine from the State. In so many ways, we're just not getting a response. That's why we need local control so we can move this effort forward. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: So, then, do you think there is a way then to work with the federal government directly if you want vaccine? Why does it – why does it all have to get funneled through the State if you don't think that's working for you?

Mayor: Juliet, great question. In fact, mayors all over the country are raising this exact concern to the Biden administration. I'll give you a great example, I spoke with Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms of Atlanta, a huge important city. She has a governor who will not cooperate with her, who doesn't tell her what's going on with the vaccine effort, and it's extremely frustrating when she knows she could be reaching so many more people. And also, like here, Atlanta is not getting their fair share of vaccine. We've appealed, many of us, as mayors, to the Biden administration to change the rules, to provide vaccine directly and without strings attached to major cities, which have, you know, large health departments, public hospital systems, etcetera, so that we can cut out the middle person and get to work vaccinating more people and do it more quickly, more effectively. So, that's exactly what I'd like to see.

Moderator: The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. I wanted to ask you and your health professionals here on the line. You know, the city's positivity rate has been at around, you know, six to seven. I know you've talked about this, but the idea of pushing that down might be a challenge. I know that's concerning for people, you know, as more students return to class, you see classes, school shuttering because of cases. I've heard from people who were just very

concerned that we can't get below the six percent positivity rate. What can you say to reassure them about this rate? And what do you think can actually be done to get it down? You know, back last fall, we were all looking at three percent as a benchmark, and now we're double that. So, what do you think can be done?

Mayor: I'll start and I'll turn to some of my colleagues, Katie. I want to give you an example of the past 24 hours in our schools, almost 10,000 tests conducted across New York City public schools. 15 cases confirmed positive. So, 0.16 positivity rate. I mean, that's astoundingly low and it's just been very, very consistent. Schools are consistently safe because of the gold standard of health and safety measures we put together to keep them safe. But to the bigger point about the positivity level, I am hopeful that you'll start to see that number go down. We're almost at three million vaccinations. It's going to keep happening, we are going to keep building that vaccination effort. That's going to keep constraining the disease. We just have to stay ahead of these variants. But I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful you're going to see more progress and you're certainly seeing progress in terms of reduced hospitalizations and thank God, reduced deaths. Let me turn to Dr. Chokshi to just give a quick additional comment, then if either of our colleagues Dr. Varma or Dr. Katz wants to join in?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And yes, you're absolutely right in pointing out that the things that affect our percent positivity, but also our cases, hospitalizations and deaths, we have to think about you know, the tug of war that we're in with respect to those numbers. And there are so many things that we know work to drive them down. The core public health precautions that you've heard us talk about, getting tested, and of course, getting vaccinated as well. The new variants, particularly because they are more infectious, more transmissible, that is likely contributing to the fact that they're not coming down as quickly as we would like. But that's precisely why we have to recommit those things and drive them down further. I will point out when we look at hospitalizations and deaths, we're seeing more promising signals that those are starting to decline. But as you've heard me say before, now is not the time for us to let up on our efforts. We have to ensure that we drive everything down together in concert.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Varma or Dr. Katz, anything to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: I would just add sir, that I think the vaccination efforts we've done have been thus far, primarily focused on older people and on people with underlying illnesses. And so that's why you're seeing those dramatic reductions in hospitalizations and deaths that Dr. Chokshi has talked about. In order to see more reduction in infections, we need to get, as you are helping us to, to vaccinate all of the people in New York, the younger adults who are very active. They're doing their jobs, they're taking care of their families, which then raise a lot of opportunities with the virus, especially if there are variants, can transmit. So, I think getting everybody vaccinated will make a huge difference. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Varma, anything to add?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Just briefly on the issue of schools, I think, you know, as we've said, many times, we've had to learn as we're doing throughout this epidemic, and that's been a challenge for us. It's been a challenge for the community. And I think to emphasize, you know, what the Mayor has said, one of the things that we have learned is that even when the positivity rate is high in the community, we can create enough layers of defense for our schools, just like we do in hospitals to make sure that the transmission rate is low. And we've proven that we could do that even through very difficult months in December. And we do anticipate, especially as vaccines rollout and positivity [inaudible] decline that we can continue to keep our schools safe through those measures.

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

Question: Thanks. And I wanted to ask you, and Dr. Katz, you know, Mayor de Blasio, you've been very critical of Governor Cuomo's decisions around nursing homes last spring at the peak of COVID. But the City had placed a hospital at Coler on Roosevelt Island, which part of the building is a nursing home and the rest was a closed hospital. There were residents of the hospital who said that there was no quarantine between COVID patients and people who lived in the nursing home. And that, you know, people died in that nursing home. And it's actually still been difficult getting a firm number of who died at that nursing home. So, I'm curious if you think that that was the right call, knowing we needed hospital space last year, but putting it in the same building that housed a nursing home, since you've been so critical of Governor Cuomo? That's sort of, you know, something according to some people who live there, bad things happened to that nursing home because of the hospital that was placed there inside. So, if you just wanted to speak to that a little bit?

Mayor: Yeah. I want to speak to that. Thank you for the question, Katie. First of all, again, this goes back to the whole reality from the moment the Governor put forward his emergency plan and took away local control, we were all dealing with decisions he made, whether they were right or wrong. And we all didn't have – localities, including New York City didn't have the freedom to do things the way we would have done them. But beyond that, I would say the experience of Coler was very, very different than what you saw at other nursing homes. And Dr. Katz can speak to it. We've talked about it. There was a tremendous effort made to protect people and because it is a City facility, we were able to do things differently than how the State regulated nursing homes handled things. Dr. Katz, you want to speak to that?

President Katz: Yeah. I want to speak very clearly about how different our strategy was at Coler. Instead of returning patients who were sick to a nursing home, we used a completely separate building, right? Remember that Coler was built as a public hospital. It was a huge hospital. And the part that we use as a nursing care facility is a very small proportion of that total building. And rather than return sick patients to Coler, where they could infect other patients, we did construction on a completely separate part, with a separate entrance, separate staff, separate elevators. And we made sure that we were able, therefore to protect our patients. And the number of serious illnesses and deaths at Coler was much, much smaller and due to our having created a separate facility on that same site. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Katz. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Emma from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor. My first question is about summer school. There's been growing calls to open it up to families, to make up for the educational losses of the last year. Are you considering making it optional for all families?

Mayor: This is something we're looking at right now. Emma. As you heard our Chancellor, Meisha Ross Porter talked about wanting to reach every child who needs help this summer. I think it's fair to say some families are going to very much want it and some families will not. We also have to think about our educators who have been working non-stop under very, very tough conditions, you know, going back to March, 2020. But I think the direction is right. We want to reach as many kids as needed. We're working on that plan right now. We'll have more to say on that in the next few weeks. And obviously the stimulus money now gives us some options for new ways to help kids and families. Go ahead, Emma.

Question: This next question might sound a little bit self-interested but I do think it's an important policy question. So, D.C. announced yesterday that they're allowing journalists to become eligible for vaccines this month. Many of us are gathering news in-person. So, I'm curious, you know, the CDC recommended in Phase 1C, a bunch of different industries – housing construction, information technology, energy, law, media. So, do you think that those categories – that it should be opened up to those categories? I know it's a State decision.

Mayor: Yeah. Clearly members of the media are out there in communities and are vulnerable. Of course, they should be vaccinated. And this is another example of why fight for the freedom to vaccinate. I don't understand how the State has made its decisions. I don't know why we still have so many categories of folks who have been left out. I've talked in recent days about Sanitation workers. I just talked about folks who work in our court system and jurors who serve on juries. I mean, there's no rhyme or reason here. Certainly, members of the media should be vaccinated. I think President Biden has it right, May 1st is a great time to open up to all adults. But in the meantime, as these pinpoint decisions are being made, I think they should keep up with reality more. And we should obviously include some of the groups of folks who we rely on the most and are most vulnerable.

Moderator: The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. There is a protest planned today outside City Hall led by yoga instructors, fitness instructors, others who teach indoor fitness classes, who are wondering at this phase of the game, why they haven't been able to resume that type of instruction? So, I'm wondering if you could respond to that and maybe your medical team could answer data-based on why that activity is still considered risky when all the folks in the class would be masked?

Mayor: Yeah, thank you, Andrew. I care about the people who do that work and I appreciate the work and it's about keeping us all healthy and fit. But it also comes with particular vulnerabilities, particular problems. That's not true of many, many other things that people do.

And I've had this conversation with the health team and they remain very consistent saying not yet. So, I'll let you hear from them in this case. Dr. Chokshi followed by Dr. Varma.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And yes, you know, our goal overall with any activity when we're trying to determine COVID-19 risk is particularly to look at those where people are indoors, perhaps unable to wear a mask consistently or have the mask, you know, get wet. And also in groups. You know, those are the settings where we have seen COVID-19 spread. And those are the factors that facilitate that spread. So, that's what goes into our decision-making about specific activities.

Mayor: And Dr. Varma, you could give us, as you often do, perspective national and international on why there is a body of evidence that these kinds of settings are the areas to be most concerned about, especially while we're still facing the challenge of variants.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah. What we've seen unfortunately, is if you look at outbreaks that have been reported around the world, there's one very notable one in South Korea. There's another one in Japan. And there are more recently, have been reports from the United States about outbreaks in group fitness centers. Like any type of setting, there are certainly ways to try to make things safer. But we also know that there are certain activities as Dr. Chokshi has mentioned, that make it really difficult to make it completely safe. And a lot of that has to do with people in close proximity breathing heavily and the likelihood that masks may fail because they get wet or because they come off of people. And so we're really factoring in the experience from around the world and around the country, as well as what we know about sort of the inherent risk of certain activities.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Thank you, Connecticut, on April 5th is planning to change its vaccine eligibility to everyone 16 and older. Is it reasonable to expect that New York should match that if not on the exact date, but somewhere around then? Or based on our current supply, is that simply unreasonable to expect?

Mayor: I think President Biden has it, right. I think May 1st is a better time to do that. Because given the relative lack of supply, Andrew staying focused on those who are most vulnerable, our seniors and folks with preexisting conditions and essential workers, I think it makes sense to stay that way for the remainder of March and April. And then on May 1st to open up to everyone.

Moderator: The next is Michael Gartland from the Daily News.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Michael, how you been?

Question: All right.

Mayor: That sounds really inspiring, Michael.

Question: Yeah. You know, I'm trying, I'm trying. The first question, I want to go back to the police reform packages you put out. In the first one, it featured an apology from Commissioner Shea that I think he had made previously to the Harlem Chamber of Commerce. And, you know, it got me to thinking, do you think it would be helpful for you in your role as mayor – I'm not speaking personally, to apologize to the city for, you know, some of the past actions of the police department as far as race is concerned? And if you do think that's useful, would you be willing to do that today?

Mayor: Yeah, I do think it's useful, but I want to do that in a more solemn way, in a more appropriate way. We're going to be doing a lot of work through our upcoming charter revision commission. And I've said this is really going to be a commission that focuses on racial justice. And I think it's not just about the NYPD. It's about a lot of other elements of life in the city and what City government has done or has not done over the years. And I think this is something that has to be approached very thoughtfully. But I do think it's necessary. I think Commissioner Shea, if you look at Commissioner Shea's speech to the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, it's very moving. And the letter that accompanies this second report is powerful. To see the police commissioner in New York City say the NYPD has a history that must be answered for, and must be acknowledged of structural racism. And that too much of that exists today and still must be overcome, for the head of the largest police force in America to say that and write that and acknowledge that formally, is a very big moment. And then to accompany it with a series of actions that will make the change. But we have a much bigger conversation to have. So, having a commission on racial justice is going to be a big part of that. And I'll be speaking to that a lot more as we move that along. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: Okay. The second question, and I apologize in advance if it takes a while for me to get to my point, and I don't normally bring in kind of my personal experience to ask questions, but I was at the 168th Street train station, subway station, this weekend, and I was walking off the platform. You know, there were probably a third to a fourth of the people on the platform without masks. I walked up to the second tier, there are three police officers talking on the second tier. I walked out of the turnstile. Someone asked me for some change. I said, no. They spit in my face. I walked back to the police and I told them what happened. And, you know, they looked and they didn't find the guy. And I said, you know, I'm going to get going. And, you know, I bring up not because 'woe is me' right. I bring it up because if this is something that's happening, kind of on, you know, a day just taking the train, I'd imagine it's happening for other people. So, what I'm leading up to is I wanted to ask you, if you could explain – you know, you'd said yesterday that everything the city's doing is to protect New Yorkers. What is the city doing to protect New Yorkers, you know, in the subway system as far as, you know, making sure people are wearing masks? I mean, this isn't the first time I've noticed people without masks, you know, when taking the train. And two, preventing situations where, you know, you have people getting spit at, walking out of the train station.

Mayor: Well, first of all, Michael, I'm sorry you experienced that because no one should. And I know it must be very unsettling and it can be dangerous, obviously, if someone does that to another person. I would say when it comes to masks, we've had a lot of success going out and just giving away free masks and having people out there. And we'll redouble that. Subway

ridership is going up. We saw last Thursday, the highest point since the beginning of the pandemic for subway ridership. If that means we need to redouble our efforts on mask distribution, we'll do that. But I can say, in reports I've gotten and also my own experience, that I do think the vast majority of people in subways are wearing masks, but it's good to keep reinforcing it and keep giving out free masks.

As to the individual who did that to you. That was horrible and that was wrong. And I'm sorry, the cops, in that case, weren't able to find them. But the fact that you went out there and there were police officers there is an indication of exactly what we are doing, to answer your concern. We're making sure there's a lot more presence. It's now over 500, closer to 600 more officers in the subway system. And we're going to keep making those adjustments, keep making whatever investment we need to, to make sure that we can keep people safe in the subways. So, that's my answer to you. I think that we've proven time again, this is what precision policing is all about. If you see a specific problem, apply the resources to it and change it. And we will do that again in the subways. Absolutely.

Moderator: The next is Erin from Politico.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. I have a question about some of the police reform items that you talked about at the top. As for the decriminalization of sex work, I know that the State would have to do that, but, you know, with respect to marijuana, for instance, you just had the NYPD say, you know, not going to make arrests anymore on this crime. So, will you do that in this case? Just stop arresting people for it.

Mayor: Yeah. The number of arrests has gone down markedly and should keep going down, Erin, absolutely. As we know, sometimes we get a report that someone was arrested for a particular crime. It turns out they were arrested for other things or an outstanding warrant. So, I always want to caution, there may be more than one factor, but if you're talking about sex work alone, of course, I don't want to see arrests for that anymore. I want us to move to a different approach and I want the State law changed. So, you can already see that the NYPD is changing their approach. They've reduced arrests a lot, intend to see them reduce them even more. Go ahead, Erin.

Question: Okay, thanks. And then, I mean, a similar kind of question, but on vaccines – with all the complaints you have about the eligibility from the Governor, you know, have you ever considered just kind of taking matters into your own hands on some of this local control stuff and just saying, you know what, we're going to vaccinate the people we think need to be vaccinated and, you know, come for us if you need to.

Mayor: Look, Erin, we've talked about this before in press conferences. Because remember that point where I was fighting for the freedom to vaccinate for seniors, for police officers, firefighters, EMT, and paramedics, educators, it was getting ridiculous. It went on for days and days. And we certainly did consider the option of just going ahead and doing it. Look, we try to respect the different branches of government, the different levels of government. Sometimes it's really hard to do when you see ridiculous and arbitrary actions. And I've seen them from Governor Cuomo, and I saw them constantly from President Trump. So, we're trying to work

within the structures we're given. I think now we have an opportunity for potential change because as I said, mayors around the country are demanding direct allocation with no strings attached with the freedom to vaccinate at the local level. And we'll work with the Biden administration on that. So, that to me would be the best way to solve this problem.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Kristin from the Staten Island Advance.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you today?

Mayor: Good, Kristin, how you been?

Question: I'm good. Thanks. So, I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the homebound vaccination efforts. You had tweeted out a link yesterday telling people who were homebound that they could make an appointment. However, it's still the same interest form that's already been up. So, are people able to make an appointment for a specific day and a specific time, or is the City still only using the interest form and just collecting names? And what's the timeline between somebody filling out that form and actually getting a day and a time for them to be vaccinated?

Mayor: Thank you for the question, Kristin. Obviously, we need people to know when the help is coming to them, we're going to their home so it's a different reality. We need to have it organized and scheduled. In terms of how it works, I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Katz to speak to the specifics. But the idea here is to have people sign up, get clear from the response when they will get the help, and to turn that around quickly, because our goal is to reach everyone homebound, who has not been reached already by other providers and who is willing to be vaccinated, we want to reach everyone by the end of April. So, it's very important to get quick turnaround time and make sure we follow through. Dr. Chokshi then Dr. Katz, anything you want to add about the mechanics of how this works.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. Thank you. And thank you for this very important question about homebound seniors. The way that it works is that once a person or a family submits the information on the form that is taken in and we go through a process essentially reaching back out to that person or caregiver asking some additional questions about the person's status, you know, ensuring that they are homebound and then working through the process of scheduling. We do that based on both the capacity that we have to deliver these in-home vaccinations, which as the Mayor described yesterday is ramping up quickly as well as the supply of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Thus far, I do know that hundreds of those calls have been made and will continue in the coming days to reach out to everyone who has submitted their information through the form to get them lined up on the timeframe that the Mayor has set out.

Mayor: Dr. Katz, you want to add? Dr. Katz? All right. We don't hear him. Okay, go ahead, Kristin.

Question: Yeah. And also, just on the homebound front, you know, a lot of different City agencies have a different definition of what homebound means. In some instances, it's a person

doesn't have the ability to leave the house at all. In other instances, homebound might mean they can't leave the house without difficulty or without certain transportation needs. So, I was hoping you could explain in this particular instance what exactly the City's definition of homebound is.

Mayor: I will start, Kristin, as a layman and then Dr. Chokshi can give you a little more expert answer, but look, our first concern is for folks who literally cannot leave the house, have no other possible option. That's job one, is to reach them. There are folks who leave with some difficulty. In some cases, we're reaching them in naturally occurring retirement communities, right there in the lobbies of their buildings. That's one of the things we're working on now where we can get a lot more people vaccinated that way than going apartment by apartment. Some people, again, have some difficulty, but can get to a vaccination center. So, we're going to reach those who need it, but particularly focused on those who literally don't have any other choice. That's the first priority. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. You covered the high points. I'll just elaborate briefly to say that the people who are the focus of in-home vaccination for the early parts of our efforts are indeed people who are completely homebound meaning that they cannot leave the home even with a very significant amount of assistance and transportation. So, that is our initial focus and for others who may, you know, have considerable and taxing effort to be able to leave the home we are arranging other options, particularly transportation. We've already done thousands of rides bringing people from their homes to vaccination centers and working with all of the different providers, whether it's visiting doctors and nurses or home health aides, to ensure that people have the support that they need, if they are – you know, if they have limited mobility, but are able to walk around the corner to a pharmacy or a few more blocks to a vaccination site. So, our goal is to cover that full spectrum of needs for people who find it difficult to leave the home.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today, it goes to Gersh from Streetsblog.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: I am well, Gersh. Spring is almost here. We'll all be back on the softball fields.

Question: I do have it on good authority that spring is indeed coming apparently by Sunday. But anyway, I want to talk to you about why spring is important, because as you know, you've announced last year that your Open Streets program would be permanent. You know, and since then the DOT has conducted multiple community workshops in some of the neighborhoods that would be most affected by this. And I don't know if you've watched any of those workshops, but a lot of them boil down to basically gripe sessions from car owners who are generally wealthier than their non-car owning neighbors. And the agency, the DOT has declared that 34th Avenue, for example, in Jackson Heights is your gold standard. Yet the agency has not presented a plan for ensuring what that permanent Open Streets is going to look like. So, that sort of suggests that mayoral leadership is needed. So, tell us what your vision is for a permanent Open Street. Is that

like a car-free plaza? Is that like only a summertime thing? What do you want from your gold standard Open Street?

Mayor: Well, I like your use of gold standard there, because I think, Gersh, we've all done something really extraordinary in the last year in this city. And I thank you. And I thank lots of advocates who saw the opportunity and we took some work to figure out how to do it right, but we really got to a good place with Open Streets. I think there'll be different approaches for different places. Some might be more temporary, some more permanent, some bigger, some smaller, but I think the idea is that Open Streets are going to be a big part of the future of New York City. In some cases, absolutely, we'll have a permanent pedestrian plaza. In other cases, it might be different times of the week. So, what I like is the idea of tailoring it to each neighborhood. I hear you loud and clear, and I respect those who own cars. I'm not surprised that there are complaints, but this is for the greater good. This is for the greater good. This is about creating communities that work for everyone and encourage people to be outside and benefit folks who can't afford a car. So, we're going to keep expanding, but it will really be done neighborhood by neighborhood, depending on the specific needs of each neighborhood. Go ahead, Gersh.

Question: Okay. Interesting. And, you know, as a follow-up, Mr. Mayor, you're already saying that you like when reporters make you aware of circumstances that you might not be aware of. So, I got one for you. We've actually learned that there are multiple community groups, now these are not business improvement districts, these are just community groups, that are actually raising money on GoFundMe and other charity platforms to help raise money to operate their Open Street, which is kind of a bizarre circumstance because Open Streets are, by definition, public space, you know, carved out by you and your administration and Department of Transportation for the benefit of the communities like you just said a minute ago. So, it's weird to me because if a community is raising money to help set up its Open Street, that raises the possibility that communities with substantial means like the Upper West Side of Manhattan, for example, might be able to raise money to keep their Open Street going, whereas another community that might not have the means to do so, wouldn't be able to do that. So, that's kind of a weird thing. You ran as a mayor to fight the tale of two cities. So, where do you stand on what I just told you?

Mayor: I think we have to recognize that until a week ago, we were dealing with a situation of tremendous financial scarcity and limits. And in that context community groups stepping forward and doing whatever they could to support the efforts made sense. I think now we have a chance to reevaluate because of the stimulus funding and see if there's some ways we can provide more support. I can't say yet exactly what that will be, because as you can imagine, Gersh, the moment we have these new resources we have immense need and demand that we have to address and all the previous deficits we're trying to make up. But I think it's a fair question. I really do. I want to make sure that Open Streets reach every kind of community and that the financial realities of community groups don't hold them back from being able to participate. So, we obviously have to look at solutions there, whether it's public funding or foundation funding or whatever it may be to ensure that Open Streets is something for everyone and for every kind of community. So, it's a fair concern, thank you for raising it. And we're going to follow up on that and get you an update.

And with that, everyone, I'll segue right into the idea I talk about all the time, a recovery for all of us. Well, a recovery for all of us means every community having the opportunity. It also means every community having justice. The specific ideas I talked about earlier as part of our police reform proposals would have a profound effect reaching some of the folks who have experienced the most injustice and it will change the way we police. It will change the relationship between police and community. It proves that we can change the culture of policing, read these reports and look at how much change is being engineered right now, right now, and how much more can happen if we get support from the State Legislature going forward. But the bottom line is between the seven years of reforms that have been made and the dozens and dozens of new reforms in this package, you're going to see absolutely better policing, more respectful policing, closer relationship between police and community. And that is crucial to a recovery for all of us. And that's what we will achieve. Thank you, everyone.

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