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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Good evening. Welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, May 4th, 2020. I'm Errol Louis. We begin the week with some reasons for cautious optimism as our city continues its fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Here are some of the highlights – hospitalizations in our city are dropping, as well as the number of people who have tested positive, which made de Blasio says is a sign we're moving in the right direction. Governor Cuomo has laid out several criteria required for different regions of the state to begin easing restrictions and concerns are growing over how police are enforcing social distancing rules after a video this weekend showed an officer violently attempting to make an arrest. Joining me now to talk about those topics and much more from the Blue Room in City Hall, we have Mayor Bill de Blasio. Good evening, Mr. Mayor. Good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. How are you doing?

Louis: Okay, just fine. Let me ask you, what are your experts, the health experts in particular, telling you about where things stand now? What are you hearing from my hospitals about whether or not they're continuing to be overburdened and running 12-hour shifts and so forth?

Mayor: Well, there's definitely improvement, Errol, and that's really, really encouraging, and it's because of what New Yorkers have done. This is ultimately because so many people, the vast majority of New Yorkers made the decision to follow the guidance, do the right thing, have stayed home the vast majority of time, you know, practiced social distancing, more and more people wearing those face coverings. It's really having an impact, but there's more to do. The hospitals – look, when it comes to our public hospitals, those ICUs are still much more full than we want them to be. We still, of course, see a very substantial number of new cases identified each day. We're still losing a very substantial number of people each day. So, we're not out of the woods yet, but there has been a clear, clear trend line in our favor, clear progress, and people are really earning it, they're really doing the hard work to get us there. The next phase I feel very good about now where we use the testing and tracing to continue to squeeze this disease, continue to beat it back. That apparatus is being built rapidly. I think it's going to really help us improve our situation even more. But I think – I don't get the sense people are overconfident. I know people are antsy. They're a little stir crazy, we all are. But I also think New Yorkers have learned to really respect the unfortunate power of this disease. So, folks understand, we're going to be very careful and smart about how we take the next steps. And our daily indicators are going to tell us a lot. They're trending in the right direction, but not all the way there yet.

Louis: Are your strategists – are you and your strategists thinking of a number in mind. I mean, at some point, we're going to reach a point hopefully where the numbers are substantially lower than they are today, but also not at zero, right? At what point do we decide where we've got the situation under enough control that we can move forward?

Mayor: So, it's couple of things. First of all, the daily indicators – we've said for weeks now we need to see those move in unison downward – those three indicators together downward for 10 days to two weeks. So, we had very good indicators today, but in the days before we've had somewhat uneven patterns, not the clear consistency we're looking for. So, we want to stretch together, you know, at least another 10 days to start to see more ability to consider opening up more. The other thing, of course, is a number of cases, when you think about what it takes to test and trace, the tracing of each case is its own effort to find everyone that a person has been in close contact with and then follow up, get them tested. Anyone who's positive, anyone who's symptomatic goes to either isolation in their own home or to a hotel to quarantine. That's a big effort. So, that effort is being built up right now. But to be able to make it work, you have to have a manageable number of new cases each day. So, right now, where you see days where we're still in the thousands of new cases, you're not going to be able to trace those and act on those quickly enough before the next days, you know, 1,000 or 2,000 new cases. But if we keep bringing that down into the hundreds and then even lower, that's when our testing and tracing apparatus can actually catch up with the number of new cases, manage each one, and drive the number down even more. Yeah, you're right, there's a point where you don't have zero, but you can literally test and trace in the case of every new case that comes forward, you can do the whole pattern. When you get to that point, you actually have then achieved something we could call low-level transmission.

Louis: For you, personally, Mr. Mayor, just like the rest of us, I'm sure, you've had to clear out a lot of things out of your schedule that you may be had hoped to do – different events, travel, vacation, seeing relatives and so forth. For me, frankly, I'm thinking that the remainder of 2020 is basically gone. I was tentatively thinking about trying to figure out some Christmas travel, but even that is looking very iffy right now. How about for you?

Mayor: Well, I may be a little more optimistic than you, Errol. I think – look, I think anyone who says that for the rest of 2020, we don't know what it's going to look like yet, that's absolutely smart. Don't bet the farm yet. Don't put a lot of money into something if you're not sure what it's going to look like. I believe right now we're on a good track for the thing I'm focused on the most, which is getting us up and running and as much normal as we can be by the beginning of September when school begins, I want to see school come back strong. I want to see us do the work over the next few months to get to that point. It's also a natural time when people are coming back from the summer, sort of have everything get into higher gear. Now, I think, in the meantime, we'll be able to start reducing restrictions and opening up certain types of businesses in certain ways. But when I think about sort of what a fuller restart looks like, more normalcy, I still think it's going to take, you know, several months. September to me is a pretty good bet. So, I'm a little more hopeful that by the time you get to end this summer, beginning of the fall, there's a chance for more normalcy. But, you're right if you say it's too early to tell for sure, because the thing I warned about a lot over the weekend, you could see a boomerang. You

could see a resurgence of the disease if we're not very careful, that could set us back a substantial amount of time. That's what I have to always guard against.

Louis: A quick fact question – you've talked about a stockpile being built up of protective equipment and so forth. I was wondering one, will that include ventilators; and, two, where physically and geographically where will the stockpile be?

Mayor: So, yes, it will absolutely include ventilators, both the ventilators that we are now building here in New York City – those bridge ventilators – and the more advanced ones, the full-service ventilators. We want a substantial supply of both to be available in New York City. In some cases, right in the hospitals, in reserve there; in other cases, in the warehouses of our key City agencies here in the city. But, yeah, we want to make sure we have the ventilators, we have the PPEs, that 90-day supply, going forward, and, even better, Errol, the ability to build our own in the future if the national and international market isn't working for us, or the federal government isn't working for us, more and more the ability to build our own right here.

Louis: And when you say build our own, do you mean the city doing it itself? Are you saying you've got, sort of, contracts with private suppliers here in the city?

Mayor: It's been a partnership between the City government and a number of city-based businesses. And that's what has led to – we literally had no production of face shields, of surgical gowns – literally none in New York City – lord knows none of ventilators or test kits, which is what's being now put together and built. All four of those items on January 1st this year, zero being produced in New York City, now all being produced in New York City. Private companies, universities, partnering with the City of New York through our Economic Development Corporation – that model is a great model for the future and we're going to make sure that is ready and available at all times.

Louis: Okay. Stand by, Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break here. We'll be right back with much more from Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall and my Monday's with The Mayor conversation with Bill de Blasio. And Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about a story in Politico about line of duty deaths. This is getting quite a bit of conversation these days that there are essential workers, some of them uniformed workers, who reported to work during the pandemic as they were obligated to do and who subsequently died. It's not clear, and there's a somewhat adversarial process, where their families now are trying to get line of duty benefits. I say this advisedly because after 9/11, there were fights that went on for well over a decade over whether or not people whose health and life were impaired by working at in the middle of that emergency, whether or not their families would be properly compensated. What is the status of that question?

Mayor: Well, Errol, it's so important that you make that parallel because Lord knows we do not want a situation has happened after 9/11, where those families had to struggle for clarity and for some sense of what kind of help they would get. We don't want to see that happen here. The

immediate difference here is that we're right in the middle of a discussion that literally be resolved in a matter of weeks in terms of the federal government providing support and a lot of that discussion revolves around the really heroic efforts of essential workers. What should be done to help the essential workers who right now are at the frontline making such a difference in terms of things like a bonus for them but also how do we help the families who have lost a loved one who was an essential worker. The federal government is in a position to do something very, very substantial and we're going to have that answer real soon. That's obviously where we're looking for the first answer here, but we in the city, we're going to work with those families. We want to make sure, you know, they are going to be okay going forward and certainly no scenario like it played out after 9/11. This is all going to be resolved, you know, very quickly. I think that's the reality.

Louis: Well, I mean at least part of it was that it was considered a federal question as opposed to the city simply granting line of duty benefits that in some cases were not only contemplated but written into the union contracts that people worked under, right? I mean, you have some ability to move on this with or without an answer from Washington?

Mayor: Errol, the reality right now is again, my first focus is these families, they've gone through so much, we want to make sure they're going to be, okay, I'm also looking at the fact that the city right now is a reeling in so many ways. The pain that so many people are going through, the uncertainty and the fact that right now we're in a very desperate situation in terms of our finances. Look, that all could be resolved in so many ways through what happens in Washington this month with the stimulus bill. All of these pieces interrelate. But the federal government is in a position to address this issue of families, not only here, but everywhere that have suffered. That is the way to address this against a backdrop where the city of course has lost billions and billions of dollars through no fault of our own. So, I want to see the federal government address this. I think we can find a way to act on that in a way that makes sure these families are taken care of. That's the way forward.

Louis: I want to change topics, we all saw over the weekend and I believe you commented on social media about Francisco Garcia, the officer who was involved in an arrest that was caught on video. The Legal Aid Society says that this officer has been involved in seven cases since 2015 that have cost taxpayers nearly \$200,000. Corey Johnson, the Speaker of the Council says he should be removed from the force. I know you're not necessarily going to weigh in on that particular question, but I'm curious, is there ever a time at which the cost of real or alleged misconduct, in this case a couple of hundred thousand dollars, does that ever come into sort of consideration as far as police policy, the urgency with which these issues have to be dealt with, and even the financial consequences for the police department?

Mayor: Errol, in the six years-plus I've been doing this job, I haven't seen it thought about in terms of financial liability. I've seen it thought about by the NYPD in terms of making sure that all our officers do the right thing and live up to their oath and look, it's a huge police force, 36,000 officers, the vast, vast majority of whom do a great job and really honor the training they've been given, including increasingly the de-escalation training. And you see the proof is there in just day to day life in New York City, things are different than they were seven or eight years ago and the officers have really responded to the training and the neighborhood policing

strategy and approach. It's a very different reality in our communities. But if an individual officer isn't doing the right thing, well then there's clearly disciplinary structures and evaluative structures to determine if that officer should keep doing that job or not. So, I think that's the real issue. Can they serve the city and the people, the city the right way? That's what matters much more than any financial consideration.

Louis: Well, I mean yeah, I only raised it because you know, we are in a tough budget situation and we know that, you know, summer youth employment and other kinds of things are really under a lot of fiscal stress and I look at how, you know, this one person, this one city employee in the space of about two minutes could cost us hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars. And you know, there's a bunch of teachers that won't get hired. There's a bunch of programs that won't happen. It seems to me something that's at some point it's got to get looked at.

Mayor: Well, I understand your question and I think it's fair to say, look, anything that's causing the taxpayers to have to shell out money they shouldn't be shelling out is a real concern. But again, to me, that is secondary to the central question, which is should somebody be a police officer if they're doing their job right? That's what matters. That's what we're focused on. If there's a problem and we can address it, we need to address it. Some people in every profession don't belong in that profession and we find out that pretty quickly. So that's what has to be determined in each case. That's the bottom line, I agree with you. There's another real important issue that's financial, but I think the better we do at the first part of the equation, the less exposure that will be in terms of the financial side.

Louis: Last question as far as the closing of the subways at night that's going to go into effect and the outreach teams that are supposed to work with people who are homeless in order to to get them help, is there something different about those outreach teams compared to what's been done for the last seven years? Because it seems like this is the same strategy that we've talked about all the time, except now we're going to close the stations and try one more time to do the same old thing?

Mayor: No Errol, respectfully, I think that's a real misread of what this is and when you say the last seven years, I'm a little troubled to hear you say that, honestly. I know you care a lot about what's happening in the city, but I don't know how you missed the fact that for the last three years, the HOME-STAT Initiative has brought in over 2,000 people off the streets and kept them off the streets, which has never happened before in the history of the city. The fact that we announced the Journey Home strategy in December, which is literally meant to end a long-term permanent homelessness once and for all because we have a strategy. That's what we found with HOME-STAT, three years of experimenting to get it right, prove to work this massive investment in lots and lots of outreach, constantly stay on each individual homeless person to make sure that we figure out what's going to get them to come in, labor-intensive costly for sure, but worth it because it's helping us to literally change people's lives forever.

We're applying that same strategy, but here's the disruptive piece that I think so important, and I know Steve Banks our, you know, Social Services Commissioner, Dermot Shea, our Police Commissioner, they feel the same way that the history for decades was someone just rode back and forth on a train line all night long if they were homeless and nothing really changed that.

And that was not helpful, in fact, it was encouraging life on the streets and the subways rather than saying to people there's got to be a better way. By disrupting that, four hours a night where that can't happen anymore our homeless outreach teams will be there, NYPD outreach teams will be there to make sure that there's the maximum chance of getting people to come in and stay in. So I think it actually triggers a whole different reality.

Louis: Okay, I guess we will see. I mean the two deaths that were featured in the news just recently, those didn't happen during those overnight hours, right?

Mayor: I don't know the exact hours. What I know is it's a further example that someone living their life on the train is not safe, that people need a place to live and we will provide medical care and all sorts of support, and we need to convince those who are street homeless that there's a better way. And unfortunately, deaths were horrible and tragic, and they are the very clearest example that it's not safe for people to live on the streets and we have to find every day a way to convince one more, and then one more, and one more to come in and accept long-term shelter and affordable housing.

Louis: Well, okay, we're going to leave it there for now. I will talk with you again next week. Thanks so much for spending some time with us, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you.

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