



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 19, 2022, 10:30 a.m.

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS ANNOUNCES THE FULL ROLLOUT OF THE
BIG APPLE CONNECT PROGRAM**

Mayor Eric Adams: Good morning, morning, morning. Good to be here this morning. We're just really excited about this initiative and I want to thank my Chief Technology Officer, Matt, who really had this vision. He was very clear with it and wanted to make sure that we were able to make it happen. And having Councilwoman Won here is crucial because this is not a local initiative, but it's a citywide initiative and connectivity is important. And so today, it's a great day for NYCHA. I keep saying over and over again, if you do an analysis of our administration in the last nine months, you'll see how often we have been on NYCHA grounds and how we have been pushing forward those things that are important for NYCHA, the Land Trust, and so many other issues. This is where we are going to spend a great deal of attention.

A 21st century city, like New York, deserves a 21st century infrastructure. And the reality is that that infrastructure has often passed NYCHA residents. Internet isn't a luxury, it's a necessity just like electricity and gas. We saw during COVID absence of internet service, our young people were not able to do their remote learning. We saw our elders were unable to do telemedicine. We saw just basic updates were not available, and it was just simply wrong. Just as we need those other utilities, we need internet services, and we are focused on that. And for far too long, NYCHA residents have been disconnected while the rest of the city has been connected.

Thank you. You're 100% right. You know that? You know what? I'm going to start wearing my durag again. And so the goal here is today, we want to bridge the digital divide with the landmark rollout of the Big Apple Connect program. We're making free high speed internet and basic cable TV available to 300,000 New Yorkers in more than 200 public housing developments by the end of 2023. Currently available in eight pilot sites across the five boroughs, including here in this NYCHA housing that we're located in now, Big Apple Connect is being expanded today to more than 100 NYCHA developments. A clear pathway to connectivity. This is the largest municipal sponsored broadband program for public housing residents. The largest. We're delivering broadband across the five boroughs and getting more New Yorkers online than ever before.

And here at Langston Hughes Houses, the architect of the poem life for me has not been crystal stairs. Right here, we are offering connectivity to 502 households. This will help residents get greater access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities online. It will help them stay connected and allow them to be connected to their loved ones as they live in a safe, clean

environment. Our goal is to expand and to grow the connectivity throughout this city. It'll allow the digital literacy skills that we keep talking about for far too long and they have been overlooked. Something as simple as providing free accessible wifi can change the life of a New Yorker, and Big Apple Connect is connecting New York City to the future.

This is such an important program. It's something that we knew was crucial, we wanted to get done right away. As we continue to expand information throughout the city, we knew we had to expand the connectivity so people can receive that information. It's a good day for NYCHA. It's a good day for our city as we continue to connect everyday residents. Want to turn it over to our Chief Technology Officer. Matt, take it from here.

Matt Fraser, Chief Technology Officer, Office of Technology & Innovation: All right, sir. Hard act to follow. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, for the support. And not just to the mayor, but to Council Member Won, to the Chief Housing Officer Jess Katz, and of course, none of this is possible without the community. So our association president for Hughes Houses, Mr. Ciprian, and also for Inspector Gill and the folks at the NYPD for providing that bridge between the community and the department.

So what we're talking about here today, it's not just about free wifi. It's about economic development, it's about public health, it's about safety, and it's about having a fair shot like every other person that has money does. And in public housing, far too long, it's been second fiddle to others just because it didn't have access to the resources. So like the mayor said when he got in and while he ran for office, this administration is about getting stuff done. So we're not here to talk about things that we will get done eventually. We're talking about things that we're actually getting done now.

So as the mayor stated, we're in over eight developments, and not just any eight developments. One of the developments that we started with Big Apple Connect was Queensbridge Houses, the largest development across the nation. And today, we're announcing the rollout to over 100 housing developments. And by the end of 2023, we expect to be in all housing developments. So what does this actually mean? If you look at administration to administration and you look over the past several, there's been lots of commitments to public housing in terms of what would come, what connectivity would look like, and all of those were focused on multi-year strategies. Coming off the heels of COVID, seeing what impact it had to the community and not just any community, what it had to this community. Those that live in public housing, it was unfair.

You had kids that went home with devices into pre-war buildings, and the moment they stepped in the door, those devices didn't work. We gave them access to hotspots. And again, the only way they could use those things is if they got by a window so that stuff could work. And as we look forward and we know that we're pushing past and now remote schools are reality, we want to make sure that those that have access to the least historically have a fair shot to participate in all the things that everyone else does like education. So by the end of 2023, over 300,000 people will have access, not just to free broadband, but also social and media connections through basic TV. And this is by far the largest municipal broadband program that's ever been launched. And it's not just one that's been launched, it's one that's focused on delivering results quick.

So when we talk about getting stuff done, look back a year from now and as the mayor has committed, you'll see that this administration is like no other. So already today, we are

empowering thousands of households across NYCHA and our eight developments, and we expect by the end of the year to be in over 100, and by the end of the next calendar year to cover the rest. And it's just the beginning. Digital equity is not just about connectivity, it's also about device access. The only other program that rivals what we're doing with Big Apple Connect is what exists on the federal level with the federal ACP. And we're going to continue to push the boundaries to ensure that those that historically have had access to the least in the city will get their fair opportunity. But it's not just about hearing about how we feel about it or what government's doing because a lot of administrations talk and it's easy to say that we're doing great things. Let's hear from the people that are consuming the services. And I'd like to introduce the Tenant Association President Mr. Ciprian.

(Ciprian Noel speaks.)

Mayor Adams: Two in college. That says a lot. And down in Texas. I'm going to share with you later what I want your daughter to say to Abbott once we finish, now the governor. But we want to really bring on a partner out in Queens. One city, maybe five boroughs, but we have one destiny and one concern, and Councilwoman Won knows how important this issue is. And Councilwoman, please come and say a few words.

(Council Member Julie Won speaks.)

Mayor Adams: Thank you. I just want to, whenever we talk about our housing... I just want the Chief Housing Officer Jessica Katz to come up and say a few words. Jessica, you work so hard on these issues.

Jessica Katz, Chief Housing Officer: Thank you so much. Thank you Mr. Mayor and thank you to everyone for coming here today. As the mayor said, CTO Fraser said, NYCHA is the centerpiece. It is the single largest and greatest affordable housing resource that we have here in New York City and for decades, we've been letting it crumble. So bit by bit, we've been working very hard to get stuff done for NYCHA and try to rebuild the trust with the NYCHA residents and rebuild physically the buildings themselves, as well as the connectivity between NYCHA residents and the rest of New York City. Because NYCHA is such a special resource here in New York and we have such a huge number of New Yorkers who live in NYCHA housing. And we've really been allowing NYCHA residents to get left behind in so many different ways.

Today's a really important step forward towards that. The Public Housing Trust is a really important step forward. Brick by brick, \$0 internet bill by \$0 internet bill, we'll be moving that forward. I also really just want to thank the new interim CEO of NYCHA Lisa Bova-Hiatt who is here today for leading us into the next phase of NYCHA. Thank you.

Mayor Adams: Okay. And all of our partners, the cable providers, for really coming to the table with a mindset of how do we work together and get this done. We want to thank them as well. Why don't we open to a few on topic and then we'll do some off topics.

Question: Thank you. Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask if you have any ballpark dollar figures about how much this project is going to cost? And then second, which providers are actually involved. Is it just Optimum or are there other providers as well?

Fraser: Thank you for the question. In terms of provider participation, currently we have participation from Charter Communications and Altice and I'd like to thank them both for coming to the table and helping us make this a reality. We're currently in conversations with Verizon to get them in, but currently it's locked to Charter Communications and Altice. In terms of the cost. The cost per unit is \$30 per month and the overall total cost will be dependent on the deployment footprint.

Question: And just as a follow up on that, the previous administration, when it was working on internet expansion had kind of a philosophy of relying more on MWE, smaller providers, and trying to involve them in the process? This seems to be a little bit of a step away from that and relying more on the bigger providers. Can you touch a little bit on what prompted that decision and how you weighed it?

Fraser: Sure thing. In government, oftentimes we try to find the best, perfect, most ideal solution. And then along the lines, you forget that there are people that are actually hurting. So, when you look at the previous approaches that focused on multi-year delivery, talking about getting something tangible into someone's hands in two years, four years, five years. What's the cost of inaction? How many people do we actually get left behind? So this administration, when we talk about getting stuff done, it's not getting stuff done that's the perfect thing, it's getting stuff done so that we can help the people that need the help right now. So it's like dealing with a trauma patient. You have to stop the bleeding. And this stops the bleeding. And while we work on something that could be more sustainable long-term, we have to cover the problems that we have today.

Mayor Adams: And just the MWBE part, which is very important. We are going to focus on how do we bring them, those companies, those smaller companies, part of this process as we expand out. This is not the end of expansion of high speed broadband. We are laser focused on improving the access to small and minority women-owned businesses as we expand. But as Matt indicated, it was crucial to get these families their high speed broadband, and this was the fastest way to do that.

Mayor Adams: Okay. We're going to excuse y'all from the off topic onslaught. You don't want to be a part of this. All right.

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

Mayor Adams: How are you?

Question: First question. It seems an asylum seeker died in a shelter. Can you give us more information about that? Also, I hear that some other cities in the state might be looking to take on some of the asylum seekers to take some pressure off the city. Can you tell us about that possible plan and what's going on there?

Mayor Adams: It's really unfortunate. This just really highlights how this issue is real. We can't go into details by law on the mother who lost her life. It's really troubling. And our goal is to just tell those who are going through this traumatic experience that if you need mental health assistance, we are providing that, and we're going to continue to do so. You saw at the intake center that we had, that we had a litany of services. We're going to continue to. It's really sad to

hear that someone took their life in this capacity, but by law, we're not allowed to go into the details of it.

Question: Morning, mayor, how are you?

Mayor Adams: How are you? Good.

Question: Good, thanks. So in terms of potentially sheltering some of the asylum seekers on cruise ships, where is the city in terms of exploring that process and how do you respond to some advocates for the homeless who have concerns?

Mayor Adams: (Inaudible.)

Question: Advocate for the homeless had said that (inaudible.)

Mayor Adams: Well, we're not going to leave any stone unturned. 11,600 asylum seekers and migrants are here in the city. 8,500 are in our system. We opened up 23 emergency shelters. We're not going to leave any stone unturned. And once we finalize our plans, we're going to announce it. There's not going to be any surprises. Once we finalize how we're going to continue to live up to our legal and moral obligation, we're going to announce it. So until then, we're just letting people know what we're thinking of and how we're going to find creative ways to solve this man-made humanitarian crisis that was created.

Question: Mr. Mayor, yesterday you said that you were considering legal action against the government of Texas. Is that directed at Governor Abbott? And what about the mayor of El Paso? Are you also considering suing him potentially? And why is it that you're able to work better with him over Abbott with the migrant crisis?

Mayor Adams: Okay. Two quick questions. Number one, we're saying we're looking at all our legal options. I didn't pinpoint any particular place. We're looking at all our legal options around this entire event. As our counsel said last week, we are looking at the right to shelter aspects of it. We are strongly in support of right to shelter, but there's aspects of it that we want to look at. And so we're looking at our legal options on all of what we are seeing, how to address this. And once we identify what legal actions we're going to take, we're going to announce that.

Now working with the mayor of El Paso — and I want to be clear. I thought I said it yesterday and I'll say it again. We are not telling anyone that New York can accommodate every migrant in the city. We're not encouraging people to send eight, nine buses a day. That is not what we're doing. We're saying that as a sanctuary and a city with right to shelter, we're going to fulfill our obligation. That's what we're doing. And when we reached out to Governor Abbott and stated, "Can we coordinate? Can we identify who's traveling here so that we don't have to guess this?" They refused to do so. When we reached out to the mayor of El Paso, he was willing to sit down and share what his concerns are and what our concerns are and figure out a humane way to coordinate. And we are clear, we cannot handle all of your migrants, mayor of El Paso. But we were able to communicate with them. We were not able to do that with Governor Abbott's team. We spoke with them, they stated they were going to inform us, and he did not.

Question: Is that because there's a political element there too? Because Abbot's a Republican, perhaps you work better with Democrats like Leeser in El Paso?

Question: Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask about the budget cuts that were recently announced, the new PEG for the agency. Just wondering if you could explain why that is necessary now. What is the impetus for it? I know you've referred to the stock market being unstable, but that's been the case for a while. So what specifically right now has prompted this?

Mayor Adams: That's an interesting question. Every expert said that we are getting ready to enter a financial typhoon. Every expert, not just my budget director, Jacques. Everyone. We have a potential \$10 billion budget deficit in the out years. Just think about that. \$10 billion. And so if I don't make the smart decisions now, am I going to wait until we're at the cliff, or do I prevent the cliff? And I stated, this is not a surprise. When I ran for office, I stated that we were going to do a PEG to balance the budget. We did that. And I stated I was going to use taxpayers' dollars more efficiently. I have been very clear on this over and over again. So this is not a surprise. We have to be financially sound for the future and I'm going to do that without layoffs and without reduction in services. We're going to find efficient ways to operate this city. And I've said that over and over again.

Question: On finding the next NYCHA CEO, is that going to be a national search? Are you going to look internally in the agency? Can you give us an idea of what that process will look like?

Mayor Adams: Yes. It's going to be a national search. We're going to find the best person to provide leadership to some of the best people I know and that's my NYCHA residents. And so they need to have that quality leadership and we are going to do a national search to find that person to do so.

Question: Does the city plan on sending any hurricane relief to Puerto Rico and helping people in Puerto Rico right now?

Mayor Adams: Yes. We're going to coordinate with the governor and we're going to coordinate... I met the mayor of San Juan a few months ago. I have a call out to him and we want to be clear on how we could help because people on the ground can tell you better what they need instead of us just dictating what they need. But our hearts go out to the families and residents of Puerto Rico. And we want to be there for our brothers and sisters as much as possible.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Adams: How are you?

Question: Good. I wanted to...

Mayor Adams: They were rude about seeing you on the train the other day, late at night.

Question: I don't think I saw that one, but... I want to go back to the death of the woman. Do you think that this is a failure on the part of people in the shelter system to recognize someone who is

in crisis? Will you be at releasing more details about where and the time and how that this happened?

Mayor Adams: It just always amazes me that whenever a tragedy happens, we start with the word "the failure" of the hard-working people who have housed over 11,000 people. No, this wasn't a failure. No. No.

A woman was, I believe, was traumatized by this whole experience. And this is not a failure of those men and women. Those city employees who have stayed up late at night, been at the bus station, feeding, navigating. No, it's not a failure. City employees are not failures. They're hard working civil servants. And we shouldn't start the question off with, "Is this a failure?"

Is this a failure? No. No. The trauma... The failure was the governors that sent people on a multi-day bus ride without proper food, without medical care, without the basic necessities, telling them they had to be treated in this inhumane way. That's the failure.

And we didn't fail in this city. This city is helping people. And again, my heart goes out to that family and we are going to continue to provide mental health care for those who are in need.

Question: Mr. Mayor?

Mayor Adams: Yes, Sir.

Question: I wanted to go back to the idea of cruise ships. The Times reported that your chief of staff spent time on a cruise ship in France for research purposes. I wanted to see what he was trying to figure out there. And was that taxpayer funded?

Mayor Adams: You see what I got to go through? I answered the cruise ship question already. I'm not going back and forth on that. When there's something to announce more about a cruise ship idea, or any other idea, I'm going to announce it. I'm finished with that. Next question.

Question: Can I call up on a separate topic?

Mayor Adams: Okay.

Question: On policing. We saw some new figures that show police stops are greatly increasing. I know you've said that there is a role for that in your policing strategy, but the numbers show that again, people of color being disproportionately stopped and relatively few guns are being taken off the street as a result of these stops. Is this still... Why is this still an effective police strategy in your mind?

Mayor Adams: Well, during the campaign, people asked me about the proper use of doing inquiries if someone is believed to commit a crime, the proper use of doing that. Because remember the improper use... Remember, I was the leading voice fighting against the abuse of improper police stops. Testifying in federal court. The judge mentioned me in her ruling on why she ruled against the Police Department. So I'm clear on that.

So when you have tools, you use the tools properly. We have a record number of gun arrests in this city. Let's be clear. When I walk in this housing area, the people here are stating "Eric, we want to be safe." And I'm saying we can have safety without abuse. That's what we're doing. The NYCHA tenant president acknowledged the work of the inspector. I don't think people are listening to everyday New Yorkers that are saying, "We are building a relationship between police and community."

Now some people in this city only want to focus on protecting the rights of people who commit crimes. I want to protect the rights of people who are the victims of crime. We are not abusing any tool in policing as long as I'm the mayor of the City of New York.

Question: But people of color are being disproportionately targeted.

Mayor Adams: People of color are being disproportionately shot and killed and injured. Disproportionately. I don't know if you're reading the papers on who's being shot, who's being killed, what babies are being shot. Disproportionately Black and brown. That's what we need to look at.

Question: I wanted to circle back to Liz's question. If it's not a failure by the city... You brought up the governor of Texas, the governor of Florida. Do you hold them accountable for this stuff? Do you think it's the governor of Texas' fault that this woman is now dead?

Mayor Adams: No, I think the governor of Texas and others are at fault for creating this man-made humanitarian crisis. That's what I think they're at fault for.

###