



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, DYCD COMMISSIONER CHONG AND HRA
COMMISSIONER BANKS ANNOUNCE ENHANCED SERVICES TO ADDRESS YOUTH
HOMELESSNESS**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much, Creighton. Thank you to all of the young people who gathered with us and all my colleagues – you’ll be hearing from them in a moment.

Creighton, I want to thank you for what you do, for what everyone here at Covenant House does – and you can hear the passion in Creighton’s voice. You can hear how much this means to him to get it right for our young people – in many cases, young people rejected by their own families, who didn’t deserve that, who now find the help, find the support, find the love and the embrace they deserve at places like Covenant House.

Creighton, I want to thank you because you had another path in your life before – Creighton was very successful corporate lawyer, but he felt a calling to do this work. So he left a very lucrative career and came here to help young people in need, and that is something that I really admire and a lot of young people have benefitted from it.

Let’s give Creighton a round of applause.

[Applause]

And to all the young people here with us, I want to thank you and I want to express my admiration, because it’s not easy – it’s not easy to deal with these challenges. And it’s not easy when you feel the sting of rejection, when you don’t know where to turn, to still keep fighting, keep trying to find your way. Sometimes it’s not easy to accept help, but part of how people grow, part of how they overcome their challenges is to know to accept a helping hand. All of these young people had to find a way to safety, had to find a way to start on a better path – and they came here and to other organizations and they embraced the chance despite the challenges they had faced.

Now, I should tell you, right before I came here, I spent some time with my son Dante and he asked what I was going to – and I explained to him that we were going to make an announcement about trying to help young people – helping homeless young people, helping runaway young people – and as I was explaining it to him, I realized I had to explain to him why this problem even exist to being with, and every young person has their own story, but I said in too many cases it is because of intolerance, it is because their own families rejected them. Maybe it’s because a young person was gay, maybe it was because of their lifestyle or the choices they had made – the fact that any family could turn against their own is something I find humanly unacceptable, because we believe in this city in embracing everyone. So, as a father explaining to my own son, I could not find the words, actually, to fully explain how any father could reject their son or daughter just because of who they were, but that’s what happens. That’s what happens.

And when our young people end up, literally, thrown out of the home they have known, a lot of them face a lot of danger. It's not a simple reality. There are a lot of dangers on the streets of this city. Some of these young people could fall prey and have fallen prey to those dangers.

So, the work of places like Covenant House is not just about turning around lives, it's also about saving lives because some of these young folks could end up in lives of crime, could end up being taken advantage of, could end up involved in sex trafficking – there's so many dangers out there and our job is to catch these young people, to support them, to get them to a better path before those dangers can grab hold – and it should not have to be.

I want to be very plain about this, it should not have to be. This should not have to be. There should be no young person ever forced into this situation, but until the day where we fix that root problem, it's our job to be there for them.

The success of people – the success of places, I should say, like Covenant House, has been that they open their doors, they welcome, they embrace, they believe in each of these young people – and as a city, that's something we have to be clear about. We have to believe in our young people.

We have to, not only say to them, they are our future, we have to treat them like they're our future, which means actually being there for them, actually investing in them, lifting them up.

And, again, my kids are the very same age as a lot of the young people here and my children certainly can tell you the challenges they've had and their friends have had. We should not pretend for a moment this isn't something every family sees in one form or another. It's tough growing up in this society. It's tough growing up in this city. The difference is, in the vast majority of families, families work it through together. When that doesn't happen, we have to be there for our young people.

So, I'm proud to announce today our plan to reach more homeless and runaway youth. Our youth people ages 16 to 20 – we want to reach more of them. We want to make sure there is no waitlist for any young person who needs a safe place to sleep – that there is a shelter just for them – a place that they will feel safe and supported – and give them a chance to rebuild lives that have just begun and get on the right track.

We are going to add additional tools to support our homeless and runaway young people as part of our bigger effort to combat homelessness. We're putting more tools and more resources on the table than ever before in the history of this city.

And a lot of people here, and I want to thank them – the folks who run wonderful organizations like this, who provide for our young people; the members of my administration who do this work every day; our elected officials. We are a common front, we are in common cause to address these problems that for so many years went unaddressed.

Let me tell you three things that we're working on.

First, we're deploying counselors to adult shelters to reach homeless and runaway youth at shelters that are for adults and let them know that there's an option to go to a youth-oriented shelter like this one. Understandably, some young people do not feel comfortable in adult shelters, and when they didn't have an alternative in terms of a youth shelter, they had to choose an adult shelter they may not have felt was right or the streets, which were obviously dangerous and not right for them either. It was a horrible choice and a dangerous choice. Places like Covenant House provided the right option, but more and more young people had to be accommodated – and by the way, at a place like this, it's not just those three meals a day, it's not just the warm bed and the safety, it's also the efforts to help the young people get where they need to go to get a GED, to get training for a job, or medical treatment – the things that will really set them on the right path.

So, we're going to have our counselors at our adult shelters making sure that any young person who prefers and needs a youth shelter has that option.

Second, we're adding 300 – 300 safe, secure, dedicated beds for homeless and runaway youth over the next three years – a major addition to our effort to help young people in this city.

[Applause]

As a lot of people in this room know, in the last two city budgets, we added extensive new resources for shelter for homeless and runaway youth. We're going to build on that right now. This will be part of the budget announcement coming up in the next couple of weeks.

This will bring our total to 750 beds in this city for homeless and runaway youth. We've never had that kind of capacity before. And even though I have said here 300 new beds in over the next three years, I want to make a pledge right now that we will keep adding beds as quickly as – not only as quickly as possible, but as much as needed. If we need more, we will add more. If we need them more quickly, we will produce them more quickly, because we don't want any young person waiting. Those days have to end in this city. Every one of our young people needs a safe and secure place that they can sleep at night away from the dangers of our streets.

[Applause]

With this announcement, in the space from the time I took office to the build-out of this plan, we will have tripled the number of beds for homeless and runaway youth. Now, right now, as you heard, we're almost at capacity with the beds we have, but we want that to be a thing of the past. We want people – young people to get what they need just as quickly as they need it, because we think that's how we show our commitment to them.

Third, there's an important reform that we want to achieve, and we want to work with the state of New York on this – something that will make a big difference for our kids. Under the current state rules, young people are allowed 60 days to stay in a shelter setting. And that often is just less time than they need to get into a better position to take the next step to either transitional housing or another positive step in their lives that will get them stable. So, we're going to work with the state on a much-needed reform, giving our young people a full three months – 90 days – that they can stay in a setting like this to help them stabilize. That additional month is going to make world of difference for young people who are turning their lives around, and we look forward to getting that done.

Now, this is a big piece of a bigger challenge, and there's been a lot of discussion in this city over the last weeks, and it's an important discussion, it's a good discussion. What does it mean when people are homeless? Why are people homeless? Why do young people run away? We need to look at these issues more squarely than we ever have in the past.

Homelessness has been a problem for decades and we haven't gone far enough to achieve the solutions – we just haven't. We haven't looked at it in the way we need to, and we haven't looked at the fact that for many people in this city, homelessness is a phenomenon they never thought would happen to them. I was last night in the Bellevue shelter, talking to a lot of people. And I want to emphasize this point – a lot of people who are working right now – right now, they're working, they're bringing home a paycheck, but it's not enough given the cost of living in this city, given the cost of housing in this city. I talked to veterans who have served our country, but our country hasn't served them, and who need housing, which we're committed to getting them. I talked to people who worked as recently as a month or two ago and would give anything for that next job – they're ready to work, they're able to work – but they don't know how to get a job that will pay them enough just to make ends meet.

Homelessness today is different than homelessness even just a decade ago. We went through the greatest economic crises since the Great Depression. We've seen the cost of living skyrocket in a way that I don't think any of us could have imagined. We've certainly seen the cost of housing reach levels in all five boroughs that no one could have even imagined ten or 15 years ago. It's a new reality. We need new tools. We need new approaches. We need to be clear about what it's going to take to address the scourge of homelessness. So, we, as I've said, have put together a set of tools, a set of approaches that's never been tried before, and I think it's going to make a huge difference.

91,000 people we've reached over the last two years with prevention programs to help them from becoming homeless, to stop them from becoming homeless. The best way to address homelessness is to stop it before it even begins – keeping people in their apartments, giving them the helping hand, or the legal services to avoid eviction. 22,000 people who ended up in shelter, we got out of shelter and to housing – 22,000 people, because the tools we're using now are finally working. The things we used to have in the past that worked that were taken away have been replaced by new and better tools, and they're working.

We've heard the advocates, the providers, who have said for years – the elected officials who have said if we're actually going to address homelessness, we need supportive housing. We've committed to 15,000 apartments, the most the city has even committed to, and some of those are coming online right this year. And that's going to make a huge difference, particularly in getting folks off the streets who have been on the streets for too long.

We started the HOME-STAT program – the biggest, most comprehensive outreach effort of any city in the history of this country – not just to constantly crisscross the city, engaging homeless folks who are living on the streets, but literally to know each and every one of them by name, and to know their personal story, to know what led them to the streets, and to know what will lead them back off the streets. And we're going to spare no resource – anything it takes to find the solution for each person to get them off our streets. That's what HOME-STAT is about.

That's what our commitment to our veterans is about. And I had the honor last night of talking to a lot of veterans who have come upon hard times, but that does not in any way shape or form negate what they did for this country. And I told each and every one to their face, we will get you the housing, we will make sure you have a home, because you deserve that.

It's why we're doing Safe Havens – because we want to show – and we want to thank all the houses of worship, and particularly the archdiocese in New York, that have done so much to help us build out the Safe Haven effort – to show people who feel a shelter may not be right for them that there's a smaller, more intimate, more supportive setting they can get to where they will be cared for. And we know also we'll be able to convince them to start on the path to mental health services and substance abuse services – the things they need.

Dr. Herminia Palacio, our new deputy mayor, said it so powerfully when we announced her a few days ago. She talked about a patient she treated in San Francisco who had tuberculosis, but who also was a heroine addict. And her job as a doctor was to deal with the tuberculosis, but she was not satisfied with that, she needed to help this man get clean and sober. And so, she relentlessly worked on it. She relentlessly engaged him. She convinced him to get the treatment he needed. And because of that persistence, he got clean and sober, and he's living a good life now. We have to do that for each person who needs it. It doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen easily. People have to be engaged, and they have to see our persistence, and we will keep coming back and coming back until we find the solution for each person.

So, we do not accept this status quo. I want to be abundantly clear – the status quo of homelessness, it's been with us for decades, that doesn't make it acceptable. We will change the status quo. The greatest city in the country cannot accept this reality.

[Applause]

But I want to finish on this point. I want you to hear from some of my colleagues. This is a problem that's very big in scale, but it is solved one person at a time, one family at a time. So, my colleagues here who have put so much of their heart and so much of their effort into solving the problem – they know there's no magic wand. They know it is person by person – reaching each person, figuring out what will turn their life around, and then we reach the next person, and the next person, and the next person. That is how we turn the tide, and that's what we're committed to doing.

Quickly in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to bring up Steve Banks, who I would say – and I think it's a fair statement, probably – there's no one in New York City who knows more over the – about the homelessness crisis over the last three decades. And I don't think there's anyone in New York City who's done more to help the homeless over the last three decades. And Steven Banks – the 90-day review that he's undertaking with the Department of Homeless Services and the Human Resources Administration is already leading to real changes. And I want to thank him for his extraordinary efforts – our HRA commissioner, Steven Banks.

[...]

Mayor: Okay, we're going to take questions on this announcement and, obviously, related topics. We're going to stick to this topic today – not doing off-topic questions, just this. Okay, on this announcement – yes?

Question: I just needed some clarification on the numbers here, Mr. Mayor. You're saying currently there are 392 runaway homeless [inaudible]. Is that right? That's the current number?

Mayor: Let me get Bill and Steve to come up and address the specific numbers.

Commissioner Bill Chong, Department of Youth and Community Development: So, currently, we have funded 453. So, we will be – 392 is what's been certified by the state to be operational. The remainder – the 61 or so – will be online either at the end of this month, or at the end of February.

Question: [inaudible] online right now?

Commissioner Chong: 392.

Question: So, you have 392 beds right now?

Commissioner Chong: Right, and 61 more on the way to get us to the 453.

Question: And then the 300 additional ones that you're talking – that's on top of this?

Commissioner Chong: Yeah, correct.

Question: That's where you get to the number –

Commissioner Chong: 753.

Question: Gotcha. Okay. And what –

Mayor: Just – I’m sorry, just for clarification – just to give a sense of when we came into office how many beds existed.

Commissioner Chong: We had 200 less, basically. So, instead of 453, we had 253. So, we’ve almost doubled in a little over two years. And by the end of this three-year rollout, it will have been tripled, the number that we came into office with.

Question: And then what role does Covenant House play in the 300 additional beds? Are those all going to be here?

Commissioner Chong: No. We traditionally do solicitation – a request for proposal for funding, and community groups – Covenant House being one of them, but many nonprofit organizations – bid for this, and then we have facilities literally around the city – I think pretty much every borough.

Mayor: Okay. Other questions? Anybody? On this topic – Marcia?

Question: Mr. Mayor, as Steve Levin said, this is the third major announcement you’ve done this week. I wonder if this, in a sense, serves notice on the governor that, despite his criticism, the city is on it, the city is dealing with the homeless problem. And I also – I’m curious how you feel about all the announcements he’s made this week, in terms of whether they’re helping the city with all of his economic development, and, as you look to the State of the State, what he’s going to do on –

Mayor: On the two economic development announcements – although, I don’t have all the details on either one yet – the Javits Center and Penn Station – I welcome them both. I think they’re both steps in the right direction for sure. We are very, very happy with the overall success we’ve had with tourism. Last count we had was 56 million tourists – all-time record – came to New York City. I guess that was for 2014. We’re waiting for the 2015 numbers. It absolutely is necessary to keep expanding our conference capacity. So, I think the governor’s right to do that. And again, I don’t know all the details of the proposal, but the broad idea is absolutely right. Penn Station is about – right now, about double the capacity it’s supposed to be handling in terms of passengers. And I want to remind everyone, we’re in a city, right now – largest population we’ve ever had. This is the kind of stuff that actually get talked about a lot and should. We have the largest population we have ever had in the history of New York City – almost 8.5 million people. We will be at 9 million people in the next couple of decades without question. We have the most jobs ever in the history of New York City – 4.2 million jobs. We are going to expand that greatly. All of that requires more ability of people to get around – and for people who come out of the city who come work here to get here. Penn Station right now – absolutely maxed out – needs more capacity. So, I think the governor’s right to focus on that, and I’m very hopeful about that plan. To your previous question – look, we have said very clearly that we’re going to take the homelessness crisis on – just, head on, every day. Yes, it is a crisis that’s been here for a long time, but that doesn’t make it acceptable and I don’t accept the status quo. So, we announced the big pieces like the supportive housing effort, the HOME-STAT effort, and, now, a number of specific additions – the Shelter Repair Squad enhancements – what we’re doing here with the homeless and runaway youth. We’re going to keep coming up with every tool that we can to fight the problem. Now, we need help from the state of New York, there’s no two ways about it, and supportive housing would be a great way to begin, because a lot of times people legitimately say, show me the money – show me the commitment. And that’s why we said, we’re not only going to show you the money, we’re going to show you more than you’ve ever seen before with 15,000 apartments of supportive housing. We’re anteing up. We need help from the state as well.

Question: Mr. Mayor, if I could just follow up – there are some people who think that best way to deal with homelessness is not to let people become homeless in the first place. So, is it possible that you would be asking the state to come up with money to keep people in their homes – not the Advantage program, which has fallen apart – but, I mean, other ways to provide either subsidies, or loans, or income so that people don’t become homeless in the first place?

Mayor: Yes. So, this is something that I believe in fundamentally, and I've worked on for a long time. We've reached 91,000 people with those kind of preventative efforts that really make a difference. Yes, sometimes – let me just give people the easy math – say you have a family that is in an apartment, and they're short on the rent – \$500 a month, or \$1,000 a month – if we can get them in time and get them a subsidy, and they can stay in their apartment, it's the right thing to do, it's the humane thing to do. Yes, it's an investment, but it's a worthy investment. Now, conversely, that family – if we don't get them in time, we don't have something for them – they end up in shelter – that's going to cost the taxpayers \$40,000 a year, or more – much more than we would have done in the subsidy. But the human cost is much greater – a family dislocated, children who have to suffer through homelessness, get to school far away in many cases. So, for years, this mistake has been made. And the decision to cut the Advantage program clearly factored into it, because it was working. It was one of the efforts to provide subsidies that actually was making a huge difference. And if you look at the numbers – I showed them to you guys at the last budget briefing last year, I believe – the day the Advantage program was cut, there was about 37,000 people in shelter. By the end of the previous administration, two-and-a-half years later, there was over 50,000 people in shelter. The overall economic reality factored into that of course, the cost of housing of course, but the city actually had a tool that was working. The state had a tool that was working. And, together, they decided to do away with it. I think that was a mistake. So, we have painstakingly recreated – we haven't called it Advantage – we've added new features – but what we basically did was took a lot of the same ideas and created a whole new reality – LINC – and other efforts, to achieve the same things. They're finally working – 22,000 people out of shelter and into housing, and the number of people in shelter now stabilizing because these programs are working, and we're able to reach more and more people. So, yes, that's absolutely something the state should invest in. By the way, the federal government – I usually say the federal government is absent. On this one, I have to say, the federal government, because of President Obama's leadership on the veterans issues – we have – every time I've turned to the federal government and said we need more housing vouchers for veterans, they've said yes. So, the federal government's been stepping up. We need that across the board – all three levels of government – if we're going to break the back of this problem. Yes?

Question: The city's homelessness [inaudible] is approximately 60,000. What are your –

Mayor: Well, right now, I want to be careful about that. I'm going to be very, very careful every step along the way. We're 58,000 –

Unknown: In DHS.

Mayor: – in DHS, and we can give you the exact figure, 58,000-plus. 3,000 to 4,000 people on the street by the last HOPE Count, which is the federally-authorized national count – same in every city. We're now going to have much more regular updating of the street homeless numbers because of HOME-STAT, because we're going to literally every day be able to do a census and do regular reporting on that. So, I just want to be careful about getting the numbers exactly right – go ahead.

Question: Approximately, give or take 60,000 – what are your internal goals for homelessness reduction?

Mayor: So, again, when we have that to announce, we certainly will. But the point is this – we're doing the 90-day review of the operations of the Department of Homeless Services, and how it interrelates with the Human Resources Administration. We've put all these tools on the table. We now have to go out there and apply them, and, from that experience, decide what we think can actually be achieved. And then we can tell you we've never shied away from numerical goals – 200,000 units of affordable housing, 68,000 kids in pre-k, and many other examples. But on this one, when we set a goal, it's going to be one that we are convinced we can achieve, and that's going to be based on seeing these tools that have never been used in this way before, actually getting some experience with them so we can be accurate in our projections.

Question: And just to quickly follow up on the 90-day review – what role has Gilbert Taylor played in that?

Mayor: He has been a part of it. Obviously, we want his input and advice. Gil Taylor played a major role in getting those 22,000 people out of shelter. And now, Herminia Palacio will play an important role in it as well.

Question: Can you give a sense of what the population of the homeless who are falling into this 16-to-21 age bracket, and are runaway youth are? What is the number of people that we're talking about [inaudible]?

Commissioner Steven Banks, Human Resources Administration: Currently, in our DHS shelters, we've got approximately 66 young people – 18, 19, or 20. We want to make sure that they have options to move into a youth-oriented shelter instead. And then, of course, there's the relationship to our stepped-up efforts on the street, so we want to be careful – we want to be as effective as we can in bringing people in, and having the resources when people do come in. So, the plan of rolling out these additional beds is a combination of addressing young people that are already in our DHS shelters, and also projecting what we can do to try to bring more people in off the streets.

Question: But do you have a sense within the people living on the street of how many fit into this category?

Commissioner Banks: I mean, that's one of the reasons why HOME-STAT is so important. So much of these things have been speculation over the years. Just because it's speculation doesn't mean it's not a real problem, but the HOME-STAT initiative is going to give us – when it's fully rolled out – a much more granular understanding, and allows us to do exactly what the mayor wants us to do, which is to go case by case. This is a systemic change, but, ultimately, it's really focused on trying to make it sure that on a case by case basis young people get what they need.

Question: And Senator Hoylman said something that was really disturbing about young people coming to shelters, and then being at capacity, and being turned away, and then being coerced or finding [inaudible] who would talk to them about prostituting themselves. Do you find that that's the case [inaudible] capacity and people can't get in?

Commissioner Banks: When I – in my prior life, when I represented individual clients, I certainly encountered these kinds of things over the years. I think that's why it's so important today that we're moving forward with an initiative to reach out to young people in the DHS shelters to be sure they know that these other options are available for youth shelters, and we're providing youth shelters, and we're reaching out on the streets to reach people, and I think the combination of those three things will address the kind of disturbing situations that the senator described.

Mayor: Let me pick up from this – look, I just want everyone to be real about this – this is a real serious problem and it has been for many years, and it's something we have to examine carefully. Why was it let be for so many years, right? Why were these young people ignored for so many years? I don't want any of us let off the hook for the things we have to do. But I'm very proud of the fact – and I appreciated the recounting of the history – we came in the door and started adding homeless and runaway youth beds, and we are going to add them until the point that there is a bed for every child who needs it, when they need it, period – that's my point. The commitment to 300 is to keep ramping up as quickly as possible to the point that there is no waitlist anymore. But, the fact is – and we've got to look under the hood of this whole situation, because this is really a scandal if you think about it. How did this happen for decades, all of this? How was this tolerated? Just go point by point – how was all this tolerated? Last night, at Bellevue, looking at announcements on the wall, Steve and I were trying to discern from the wording of the announcements whether they were from the Giuliani administration or the Dinkins administration. We saw a big series of big posters that said the Advantage program is no longer available to you. Clearly, those posters were put up in 2011. Why has nothing been changed since 2011? This is something that needs to be looked at. Why did this city tolerate this? We don't tolerate it. So, I am taking the gloves off on this issue. We are going at this with everything we've got. And everyone who's been a part of city life, and everyone who's been a part of government and public service – all

of us have to bear responsibility not just for this year, but for decades before. But, in this time, we will turn the tide, because we're throwing everything we got at it, and we're absolutely focused. I think, honestly, a mayor should be held accountable – I feel there's a blunt, very, very clear parallel to the reality on Rikers Island, to the reality with our public housing developments, to the reality in our schools – why was any of this tolerated? We're not tolerating it.

Question: Why was it tolerated?

Mayor: Look, I think for a long, long time in our society, the needs of poor people have been ignored. I think a lot of people's problems were swept under the rug. And I think in the crass political world, these were people who quote-unquote "didn't vote," and therefore they didn't matter to some people. And I think that's sick, but I think that's real. So, as I said, if we had 37,000 people in shelter in the middle of 2011, and it grew to over 50,000 in two-and-a-half years, where was the outrage? Where was the outrage? Where were the protests? Where were the front-page exposés? So, please, bring them to us, because we're ready for them. We're owning this issue 110 percent. I'd like to know why it wasn't handled that way in the past, but I don't have time for idle speculation. We are owning it and we're going at it with everything we've got.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: I hear a voice – yes?

Question: Behind the cameras – back in May, you announced that you would begin assigning letter grades to homeless shelters, much in the way restaurants get them, showing their conditions within the shelters, and you said to expect them by the end of that month. They're still not up yet. I guess only a fraction – maybe something like 23 out of 700 shelters have those letter grades. I want to know what happened to them, why they were put on the wayside? Is that something you're still intending to do –

Mayor: Yes.

Question: – and is it a sign that maybe the conditions in the shelters weren't being taken as seriously just even last year as they are now?

Mayor: Well, first of all, it's unacceptable to me that those scorecards were not prepared. We made a commitment to do it. And in 2016, the people who are part of my administration will feel the lash, because if we make a commitment, we're keeping it. Anyone who doesn't keep it is going to have a problem with me. And I will happily change people's roles if I have to do that, but the bottom line is we said that we needed a scorecard, and there will be scorecards. They will now obviously be wrapped into the 45-day inspection effort. We're going through every single shelter top-to-bottom to assess the situation, as you heard the other day; we're adding to the shelter repair squad. We're intensifying the response time – the 24 hours for any complaint, including from shelter residents. And there will be a hotline that didn't exist in the past. We're bringing in the Coalition for the Homeless to monitor independently. But those scorecards will happen – they will happen by next month because that's when the inspections will be over. If they don't happen, a lot of people are going to be in trouble. And I think we cannot be fearful of accountability. Now, go through those buildings, like I did with Bellevue last night, and ask when was the last time they had a paint job, and when was the last time any city, state, or federal agency invested in them? And, again, I'm going to be really clear and blunt in 2016 – we have to be responsible for everything that's happened in the last two years, and everyone else who was there before should be responsible for everything that happened on their watches, and we should all take responsibility together. But the – there's no question a lot of these facilities did not get the investment they deserved for years and years. In our time, we have to fix it, and the scorecards are one of the ways we will hold ourselves accountable. Yes?

Question: Mr. Mayor, do you think there's a bit of risk in taking on a problem this large and this – that has been “intractable,” quote-unquote, for so many years? I mean, do you feel like you're kind of walking a very fine line here?

Mayor: I think I've put that behind me. First of all, it's morally necessary. It's my job. It's what we came here to do. Second of all, there's no difference here between this problem and the one at Rikers. What's happening at Rikers Island is unacceptable, and it's been unacceptable for years, and I don't know how that got tolerated for years and years. Again, I do think with the case of Rikers Island, there has been – and I'm not trying to make this about just any one group of us – there's the media, there's city government, state government, federal government – there's a lot of players in all of this. The media's done some great work on Rikers Island in the last couple of years, but I think there were five or 10 years before that where the story got missed, and I think the same for all of us in public life. I didn't – and I told people very bluntly when I came into office, it was like peeling back the onion, finding out how bad Rikers Island was. I had no idea it was that bad. But I have to own it, and I'm not scared to own it. We have to – you know, we always say about our first responders they walk towards danger. We in public life have to walk towards danger too. So, we're owning Rikers Island. We're owning the housing authority, whose finances are in absolute and total mess – and that's also decades in the making. We're owning the Department of Education, which we're very proud of the changes we're making, but we're not even close to satisfied because too many of our kids are not getting the education they deserve and we have to fix that. This is the same exact reality. This was unacceptable years ago. Somehow as a society we didn't come to that conclusion. We didn't have the will. If it had been an issue where the people demanded change and the anyone who didn't provide change would be voted out of office, maybe changes would have happened earlier. If it had been front-page news every day, maybe changes would have happened earlier. If all of us had figured out what needed to be done and it forced the hand of all the rest of the people in government, maybe it would have happened earlier. But here we are today, and, so, on all of these fronts – you know, bring the pain. You know? It's like – just, let's go, let's take them on. We are blessed to have a lot of great colleagues in elective life who want to solve these problems. We're blessed for this period of time to have some resources. That won't last forever, but we have them now – we're going to use them. But I'm perfectly comfortable being held accountable for all of it.

Question: Mr. Mayor, would you be helping the homeless man who gave you his resume –

Mayor: Say again?

Question: Will you be helping the homeless man who gave you his resume last –

Mayor: Yes. Yes, I'm going to –

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: I know a couple of folks in the construction world who I think would be happy to help a young man who just wants a job. He has a lot of experience. He was incredibly earnest. I mean, it was actually very moving. He kind of came around a corner in a hallway and he came up to me with his resume in hand. By the way, that resume – maybe he did it himself, but I suspect some people in these wonderful nonprofits helped him to create – it was a great resume. He said, I just want a job. I just want a chance. I just want one chance to prove myself. It was totally heartfelt. We're going to get him that chance.

Question: Me?

Mayor: Yeah.

Question: What happens after 60 days – 90 days – or when someone turns 21, and, then, what's the relationship with DYCD and the rental assistance program?

Commissioner Chong: So, the 60 to 90 days – young people have different pathways. Of the 453 beds, about half are crisis shelter, which are the ones that are short-term residential programs. The other half are what we call long-term traditions to independent living. So, in some cases, a young person who ages out after the 60 days [inaudible] hasn't been reunified with their family, which is one of the goals of the runaway and homeless youth programs – to reunite them with their families. If that's not an option, they transition to an independent living program where they can stay from 18 months to 24 months, or until they age out at 21. So, their options – we try to connect young people with other permanent living arrangements, we reunited them with their families. So, there are different options. Sometimes young people in this – particularly in this age group, 18 to 21 – they couch-surf – they stay with friends. So, we – and then at the end of the day, if there's no other option, and they've aged out, then the Department of Homeless Services can serve any young person 18 to 21. You want to talk about 21 and after?

Mayor: 21 and after is what we do for everyone.

Commissioner Banks: I just want to add, of course, we're taking this initiative because we want to make sure that we can get young people into the youth services shelters, and we're still going to work very diligently at HRA, DHS, and DYCD to avoid people moving from system to another. If that is something that turns out to be the case, we're going to work very hard to come up with solutions for that as well. Of course, when people are coming to DHS, and they're over 20, that is a part of our focus on reforms there as well.

Mayor: Yes?

Question: Excuse me, Mr. Mayor, a lot of initiatives you've announced have included adding funding to the budget, adding resources, and you mentioned, obviously, there is finite resources. So, just wondering what the administration is doing to figure out –

[Music plays in background]

Mayor: Who's got the music?

Unknown: [inaudible] is rocking out.

Mayor: Security, take that man away.

[Laughter]

Question: Just wondering, what –

Mayor: Take him away too.

[Laughter]

Unknown: [inaudible]

Mayor: That's right, that's right.

Question: Just wondering what you're doing to make sure not just where more resources are needed, but that current resources are being spent [inaudible]?

Mayor: Yes. So, there's a – I appreciate the question. First of all, what's the great phrase? It's not the money, it's the money? There is no way to solve this problem without resources. Anyone who tells you otherwise is not

telling you the whole truth. This is about thousands upon thousands of people who need help and aren't getting it, and who have been left behind by our society. And in the case of our veterans, this one's not even close – why are we even having this discussion, right? As I said, they served our nation – their nation's not serving them. I give President Obama credit, and it's a consistent point with what we talked about earlier about the fact that we all have to bear responsibility. The president of the United States, for the first time, said we are going to house all our homeless veterans. No president said that before, including those who had served in the military. There's a lot we have to uncover here. There's a lot to look at. I mentioned the movie Spotlight to some of you, which has certainly got my juices flowing. We need to look at this history. Why were homeless veterans not served for decades? How is that acceptable in our society? So, let's face it, it's about money. I don't want to miss the [inaudible] of your question, which is about you have to use the money properly – there's no question. I don't think we've done that well enough in the past either, and we still need to do better ourselves. But let's start with reality – if there weren't beds for kids, it's because there wasn't money to pay for them, right? If there wasn't money for a rental subsidy to keep someone in their apartment – they lost their apartment – it's not about could we have done something magical to keep them there. We needed cash on the barrelhead to pay the rent. If someone's about to be evicted wrongly, they needed a lawyer. If no one paid for the lawyer, they weren't going to have a lawyer. So, this is very much about resources. Supportive housing can only be built and staffed with money. So, let's be clear about that. And I really think it's time – again, I want a lot fewer games in 2016. We are not going to make these changes without resources, and everyone is accountable, everyone is responsible. Now, once we take those resources – our own, or any other resources – we have to use them right. So, when I hear the scorecards weren't done – that's unacceptable to me. That means someone didn't do their job, right? Period. Last night, at Bellevue, I saw people who had done their job because I saw veterans who were on their way to their permanent housing, but I also saw others who had not been served right. And I know Steve feels as I do – we're going to create one standard where people get service, and they get it when they need it – that's why HOME-STAT's so important. HOME-STAT's going to give us a very universal standard to work with. We're going to be telling you constantly what we're seeing in the numbers we see. And we're going to hold ourselves accountable for figuring out what each person's path off the streets is. So, I am very aggressive with my team about – we are going to use the money well, because I want the result. I have to see the results. But in the past, we had the worst of both worlds – the resources weren't provided, and they weren't used well. We're going to fix both pieces of that equation.

Unknown: Last question.

Question: Mayor, two questions –

Mayor: I don't know why you're rewarding him for his obstreperous behavior.

[Laughter]

I find that unacceptable. Security, take her away, please.

[Laughter]

Go ahead.

Question: Just two questions – one, your approach to homelessness has been to try and stop it before it starts. Is there any effort to do that with these young people, especially when a lot of them are dealing with issues of being gay, transgender, discriminated against – against their families. And secondly, you've talked about what you need from the state and federal government. Have you or your administration have been in touch with the governor, and laid out specifics for what you would need to solve the problem?

Mayor: Sure. Several – let me do the second part, and I'll begin to address the first part, and Steve and Bill might want to add. For two years, the city of New York has made very clear to the state of New York what we

needed. Look at our budget requests and legislative agenda for 2014 and 2015, and look at all of the back and forth both publicly and documented in those two years, clarifying our needs and our disappointment at some of the cuts to homeless services that occurred. It's all well documented. It's all public domain. So, it's quite clear we have asked repeatedly for help. Obviously, we've asked for help in terms of supportive housing. And I am hopeful – let me clear, you know, hope springs eternal – I am hopeful that cuts will be restored, that fundings for programs that work, like anti-eviction legal services, and rental subsidies will be provided, that supportive housing, our initiative, will be matched. I'm very hopeful because it's the obvious it's the right thing to do. Again, I use – I have a good-news story to tell you. You know, the president of the United States said we have to get homeless veterans to housing. I had numerous conversations with Valarie Jarrett, and with Secretary Julien Castro, and they could not have been more helpful – time and again, helping us every step of the way, providing more veteran vouchers, whatever we needed to get the job done. So, it does exist – it's not a unicorn – it does exist that sometimes the city of New York says we're ready to fix a problem, but we need help, and another part of our government responds. And I'd like to see that good tradition continued in terms of what we do with the state, going forward. So, yes, the needs are abundantly clear. The requests have been made many times over, and we're ready to get to work. On the question of how we prevent – so, preventative efforts – some of you may want to go back and look at the years 2002, '03, '04, '05 – some people in this room will remember those years – where I had a running dispute with the previous administration over the need for preventative services. Many a hearing we held at the General Welfare Committee on the need for preventative efforts – anti-eviction legal services, rental subsidies. For three or four years, I was told I had to have my head examined. In the fourth year, preventative services suddenly became the policy of the preceding administration, and I'm glad it did. I'm glad it did. And then, in 2011, both the state of New York and the city of New York canceled the Advantage program, the one thing that actually worked. So, there's a lot to learn, my friends. But the point is, preventative efforts work. They always have worked. They're not perfect, but they work. Now, in terms of young people – and I appreciate the way Corey talked about it – if we're going to help young people, we have to change the entire discussion in our society. And I think in this city we do a lot to send a message of inclusion. We've done it through the laws we've passed. We've done it through leaders, who represent every community, and who we're proud of, and who we hold up as examples. We do a lot to try and educate people about tolerance and understanding, but we cannot reach into the household dynamics of every family, obviously. So, sadly, too many times we're going to have to catch the situation when the problem occurs, and do our best to then, at least, get the young person to safety. You guys want to add?

Commissioner Chong: One of the things that we've done – maybe without a lot of fanfare – is that we've really worked aggressively in all the programs we fund – our after school programs and employment programs to create welcoming environments for young people who are gay, or have not come out, because we want to create that support system so that, whether it's in a community setting, whether it's a job program, that young people can be engaged and come out about their gender – their sexual orientation. On the runaway homeless youth side, one of the things – one of the goals of the runaway homeless state law is to work toward family reunification. So, a lot of the times, the programs offer mediation, counseling to see whether there can be a reuniting of the family with either the immediate family member or with another family member who can provide a safe and supportive environment for that long person. So, it's a multi-faceted approach. It's not easy, but I think we have to change the culture that young people who are coming out are facing.

Mayor: Amen. And I would urge all of you – I don't want to speak for young people here, but if afterward if they want to talk to some of the media about their story – your choice. But a lot of young people have really done, I think, incredibly admirable work at overcoming that rejection that they felt for their own families, and getting on a positive track in their own lives.

Okay, last call – that was last? Okay, you always have a constructive question – go ahead.

[Laughter]

Question: Well, it's not directly related – just wondering if you're planning to play the Powerball lottery?

[Laughter]

Mayor: I would only play it if the proceeds could go to the city of New York.

[Applause]

Thank you, everyone.

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