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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 18, 2015

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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE JOHN GAMBLING SHOW

Host: The mayor of the city of New York, Bill de Blasio – Mr. Mayor, it’s an honor. Thanks for squeezing us in for a few minutes.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: It’s my pleasure. Very happy holidays, very merry Christmas to you.

Host: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor, likewise to you and your family. You are making international headlines with your speech on homelessness yesterday. Before we get into the specifics of what you’re proposing with HOME-STAT, you know, anecdotally, it does seem that we have seen an uptick in the number of homeless people on the street. Just here downtown, it seems like there are more of them than there were a couple years ago. Is that just my perception or has that been borne out by the data?

Mayor: The data is not what it should be, I think is the best answer to begin with. There was a count last winter that did not show a big increase – in fact, it showed a small decrease. But the reports from people all over the city indicate that something is going on that is being deeply felt by people. And we have to address it with everything we’ve got. And so we have the new HOME-STAT effort. It will be the most comprehensive street outreach effort directed at the homeless ever deployed in a major American city. It will give us literally a daily count. We will have the ability – because city officials will go out, block by block – focused all over the city, but with a particular focus on Manhattan between Canal and 145th, which is where the biggest concentration of homeless – street homeless – are. We’re going to count every day. We’re going to send outreach workers to all the homeless folks who are on the street, giving them the opportunity to come off the street, get the mental health services they need, the substance-abuse services they need. We’re going to do that every single day. When anyone is violating a law, the NYPD will be called in immediately, because we do not accept quality-of-life violations. And it’ll be a very consistent effort. And not only will it be different on a scale level, it will be different on a quality level, because, bluntly, you know, we’re talking somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 people on the street right now. They got there somehow. Something went wrong in their life and they ended up on the street. We have not done a good enough job for decades of figuring out what gets them back off the street, even though we have success stories – we’ve seen examples of people who got their life together if they got the right help. We’re now going to have a case manager for each and every one of them. If there’s, let’s say, 3,000 to 4,000

individuals, that means we need to crack the code for each one of them. What will help get them back on their feet? And now, more than ever, we're going to provide the housing they need, so if we can get them in the right direction, we actually have a place for them to go and they'll no longer have to be on the street.

Host: And now, CompStat, which revolutionized policing really all over the country, and Commissioner Bratton, the current police commissioner, was one of the innovators in implementing that here in New York City – do you view this as sort of a similar game-changer for homelessness that can be used as a model for other cities?

Mayor: Yes, absolutely. And look, I say that – this is the outset. We have a lot to prove with this new effort. I don't want to – I don't want to say for a moment that we can claim any kind of credit until we show it works, but you're absolutely right. If we – not only do we have CompStat as a great example of what works to this minute in New York City – you know, Bill Bratton is our commissioner, deeply involved in this work of addressing the homelessness issue – in fact, the NYPD is going to create a new specifically-trained homelessness outreach unit – about 100 officers, who will get extra training on how to deal with folks with mental health issues in particular. So Bill Bratton is going to be a key partner in this. So the fact that CompStat has been all it's been and the author of CompStat is the leader of our police department and the police are playing a key role in this effort, I have great faith that HOME-STAT will be a game-changer, because we've never tried. We've never tried to say here's each individual person. Here's their situation. Here's their pathway to a better life – let's apply that relentlessly. It will take time. It will take time. It will certainly take time to keep building out the housing we need to get people to, but I think this is the method that's ultimately going to work.

Host: You know, Commissioner Bratton – and if you're just tuning in, we're talking with the mayor of the city of New York, Bill de Blasio – very honored to have him on the program for a few minutes – Commissioner Bratton said yesterday that your administration would make an effort to get new laws passed that the courts wouldn't have a problem with. How much of this HOME-STAT approach and this homelessness approach in general is dependent upon new legislation? And how much can be done under existing law?

Mayor: We can do it all under existing law, but we will certainly look at other legislative options as well, and we're working with the NYPD on that. But this approach – let me just give you a quick moment of historical perspective. We've got now 3,000 to 4,000 people on the street. We've got 58,000 people in shelter. Now, when I took office, that number was lower. It's been growing, which deeply concerns me, because it has all to do with the cost of housing continuing to go up in this city and people not being able to make ends meet economically. The homeless today in shelter are more and more families, not single men. They're more and more people who are absolutely functional, go to work – you know, literally go from shelter to their jobs, their kids go to their schools. It's very different than it used to be. When Rudy Giuliani took office, there were about 20,000, 22,000 people in shelter. So something profound has happened over the last few decades. And the economic reality of this city – the way this city became more and more expensive – underlies all of it. So we've got two very different problems. We've got the problem of folks who are in shelter – that is overwhelmingly an economic problem that we have to solve. We've got the problem of people on the streets – full-time, 24 hours – that 3,000 or 4,000 folks –

that is largely a mental health and substance abuse problem. Two different approaches, but what HOME-STAT is going to allow us to do is in a way we've never tried before to actually crack the code of what will get the street homeless off the street permanently.

Host: What happens if one of these caseworkers comes across someone – maybe they're addicted to drugs or alcohol, maybe they're mentally ill – but maybe they just simply want – have a distrust of the shelter system and have a firm desire to remain on the streets – what can they do in that instance?

Mayor: It's an excellent question. Look, there are – and you know, the researchers certainly have affirmed – there are some people who are perfectly functional, perfectly sane, and just want to live a life disconnected from, you know, what you and I would call a normal life. If they don't bother anyone, if they don't violate any law, there's no law against sitting on a park bench in this city. But that's a pretty small percentage of the people, I think. I think what we see overwhelmingly is folks who unfortunately have a real problem, who don't want to be on the streets, never intended to be on the streets, and their lives fell apart. And we have to figure out how to resolve that in a more lasting way. Now, one tool that we have – and I want to thank Cardinal Dolan for this, because he's been a crucial partner – the archdiocese and the city have been working very closely on the Safe Haven effort. And what that is is instead of a big shelter, it is a very small – a very small more intimate setting, for example, in a house of worship – five beds, ten beds – where homeless folks who've been on the street for a while are encouraged to come in – in effect, no obligation – come in, it's a safe environment, it's a respectful environment. When they come in, what we find is a lot of times we can convince them to get the substance-abuse treatment they need or the mental health support they need – where they find that, you know, maybe getting a hot meal and a shower is better than living on the street. And – but – and I understand some people have not been willing to go into big shelters, but these smaller safe havens – and particularly because the presence – you know, being in a house of worship often gives homeless folks more comfort that they're actually going to be taken care of – we think that's going to make a big difference. 500 more beds in the safe havens will be available by June, and that's another thing we didn't have before – a sufficient number that we'll finally have now.

Host: Final question on homelessness and then I want to quick pick your brain very quickly on universal pre-k. Where I live in Staten Island, something I've heard – a concern that I've heard from a lot of [inaudible] people on the street and even some policy-makers and [inaudible] – is that homeless people will be found in Manhattan and then relocated to residential neighborhoods in places like Staten Island with temporary housing. Is that a legitimate cause for concern [inaudible]?

Mayor: I don't think that's the – I don't think that's accurate. The – the fact is we are looking to do several different things. The safe havens I mentioned will be in houses of worship in all five boroughs. And most of the time, folks are going to – homeless folks will go to a safe haven near them. There aren't a lot of street homeless in Staten Island. Obviously, the overwhelming majority are in Manhattan, as I said – Canal Street to 145th Street, where we're going to focus our daily outreach efforts. That's where most folks are. In terms of permanent housing, supportive housing, we have 15,000 apartments of supportive housing for folks who have been

street homeless that will be built literally in all five boroughs, all sorts of different neighborhoods – and that mirrors what we’re doing with our affordable housing efforts overall. So I don’t think that’s right. You know, what we try and do in the short term, sometimes we have to find a temporary placement for a family, and that’s going to be wherever we can find it in the five boroughs. But the long-term goal is to increasingly build the affordable housing and subsidize the affordable housing and the supportive housing that will really change the equation.

Host: Mr. Mayor, we have only have less than a minute left. I just want to ask you on universal pre-k – I know this was a big initiative of your administration – do we have any idea at this point how many folks have signed up for universal pre-k?

Mayor: We do and I’m very proud of it – 68,500 kids as we speak in full-day free pre-k.

Host: Wow.

Mayor: To give you quick perspective, two years ago, it was only 20,000. And we have more kids in full-day pre-k today in New York City than there are kids in the entire school system of Boston –

Host: Wow.

Mayor: – just to give you some perspective what a big initiative [inaudible].

Host: That – that is extraordinary. Mr. Mayor, thank you for doing this. I hope we can do it again. Merry Christmas.

Mayor: Very merry Christmas.

Host: Thank you. Mayor of the city of New York, Bill de Blasio.

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