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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. As we discussed at the top of the hour, the city will be deploying 250 additional police officers in the subway system following a series of violent crimes on the trains. The announcement comes as overnight subway service returns after more than a year of being shut down. Mayor de Blasio joins me now from the Blue Room inside City Hall to talk about that and much more. Welcome, very good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good to see you, Errol. How are you doing tonight?

Louis: Just fine, thanks. And I've got a lot of questions for you, I know my viewers do too. Let's start with the ending of the mask mandate. We heard from the Governor, we've heard from the president, does the end of the mask mandate apply to New York City?

Mayor: Yeah, it's the right thing to do at this point. I mean, look, we've got 7.5 million vaccinations from the beginning. This is the big story here. The vaccination effort has been extraordinarily successful. We're pushing back COVID more every day, whereas seven-month low for COVID positivity in this city. This is exactly the right time to open up the rules some, but look, the CDC is clear, if you're fully vaccinated, you get a lot more freedom. And there's still places, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, there are still places where you want to keep the mask on. I think they're pretty balanced rules, but the message comes through loud and clear, you still need to get vaccinated. You know, if you want that personal freedom, you need to get vaccinated, if you want to help us end COVID once and for all, you got to get vaccinated. That's why we're doing much more of this grassroots outreach, the mobile vaccination vans and buses. You saw Dante out there today with the bus up in the Bronx at Fordham University, we're going to be doing all a lot of that, and the incentives, Shake Shack, and others to get the message out and get people vaccinated.

Louis: I get it, you can get glazed donuts and French fries and all kinds of bad stuff in order here – as an incentive.

Mayor: We're working on one health problem at a time, Errol.

Louis: Not a problem, but what I mean is this going to apply to the buildings that you control? Is it going to apply to City Hall? Is it going to apply to other government buildings?

Mayor: Look, right now, we're going to be careful in the first weeks of having our city office workers back. You know, we're going to have a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated people together by definition. So, we're going to be cautious about that and certainly interacting with the

public where you're going to have vaccinated and unvaccinated people together. We're going to have the masks on in those situations. So, go slow approach indoors in the city offices, but the CDC was clear, if you are fully vaccinated and you're around fully vaccinated people, different discussion, outdoors, different discussion. I think they showed, you know, there's different levels if you will. It's still all says to people, if you want more freedom, if you want life to be easier, just go get vaccinated

Louis: Yeah, no, for sure. But the new guidance essentially ends masking as a requirement. It puts it on what you could even describe as an honor system, you know, and you're asked – and then we're then asking private firms to enforce it. But I also look at the stats that I see that about 30 percent of people in Brooklyn and the Bronx have been vaccinated, and we know that there are still issues with hesitancy. Aren't we practically guaranteeing at a minimum misunderstanding and at worst, you know, future outbreaks?

Mayor: No, that's certainly not what I feel, and that's not what I'm hearing from our health team. We think this is calibrated to the reality of 7.5 million vaccinations in New York City and climbing, and the fact that the numbers, the data is speaking to us. The decline in COVID is pronounced and is directly related to that massive amount of vaccination. I think we are in a phase now, a positive phase, making vaccination accessible, fun, easy, local, giving the incentives, more and more people we're going to reach that way. I think people have fought through this in New York City. I've said New York City has been heroic. People in New York City have been heroic, fighting through this crisis. Wearing a mask when it was not easy to keep that mask on all the time, but people did it. And then, Errol, I think you're going to see, you know, millions of New Yorkers who will still wear the mask a fair amount of the time because people have grown used to it, and there's going to be times when they feel more comfortable having it on.

Louis: I mean there's a particular group I'd like you to speak to, that there are parents with kids that are under 12, they're too young to be vaccinated, they have to wear a mask when they're going to school and they're at soccer practice and so forth. But then they're also going to be encountering all along the way, people who are not wearing masks, it starts to get really confusing. What would you tell those parents?

Mayor: Well, I think you made a crucial point. So much of the time kids are going to be in settings where masks will continue to be used. That's the CDC rule, it's quite clear, and in the end of the day is going to come when there'll be vaccination available for younger children as well. It's all the way down to 12-years-old right now in this city, and people are coming out, you know, and getting those vaccinations. It will go to younger children over time as well. I think the bottom line is we've got to show people that there's a real fruit to their labor, if you will. You know, folks worked so hard for well over a year and it is the right time to start loosening up some of these rules, but there's still plenty of smart restrictions in place. We'll constantly watch the data. If we have to make adjustments, we will. But look, these COVID numbers are striking, and it just continues to go down in a very sharp pattern, and the foundation, we talked so many times about what would be that critical-mass point where COVID would just run out of room, 7.5 million vaccinations, plus a lot of people obviously have the antibody beyond that,

increasingly I think COVID prospects in New York City are limited just by these fundamental facts.

Louis: That is certainly good news. There's a lifting of the curfew tonight for outdoor dining restaurants in New York City, and I just, as a point of clarification, does this apply to all restaurants or just those who had outdoor dining before the pandemic? Because there were some who never had outdoor dining, but then as a matter of survival, they figured it out and either put up a shed or put it – went out on the sidewalk and so forth, is the curfew being lifted for everybody tonight?

Mayor: You know, I want to be careful if there's any nuance I don't know about, my understanding is it's across the board, but you know, I'll have folks follow up and tell you there's any other subtlety to it. But really, you know, what we've seen is folks, you know, I'm so proud of outdoor dining. It sustained, you know, over 100,000 jobs, it kept businesses going. This was something we did in the midst of crisis, but it turned out to be something that was tremendously positive, gave people hope, and now has actually opened up a new reality which is why we're making Open Streets and Open Restaurants permanent policies for this city. But now, again, this is a good time to be taking a step forward because people really heeded the call when they needed to. I think the thing here also, Errol, we've really asked ourselves a question. I've talked to the health care team about this a lot. Of the remaining New Yorkers who have not yet been vaccinated, what do we see going on? And I think the first category, the biggest category of folks, is folks who are willing, but they need it to be convenient. They need it to be the right time, right place, which is why the walk-ins have helped us a lot, and some need some valid encouragement or answers from doctors or pediatricians. So, a lot of our effort now is to get those trusted health care providers to engage proactively with their patients. That's where most folks are who need to be vaccinated. The group that is ideologically opposed to vaccination is much smaller. So, I think we'll be able to keep building this number up more and more, making the city safer and safer. And I – this is why I'm convinced this summer is going to be extraordinarily vibrant in the city, and you already see tourism coming back in a meaningful way, and it's still this early on, it's still May, and we already start to see now tourism coming back. That's very, a very hopeful sign.

Louis: Definitely a good sign. We've got more to talk about, standby Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break here. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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We are back Inside City Hall, and once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, when we spoke last week, you characterized the MTA's requests for more officers underground as a political stunt. I'm wondering if you have changed your mind and if so, did the recent spate of attacks have anything to do with it?

Mayor: Errol, there's still way too much politics, and the bottom line is what I said today is look, we, we do have more officers now as a whole city, as a whole NYPD – 850 more officers graduated just over a week ago, and we've got another 600 coming next month. So, we have some officers we can put into play. I think it's smart to put additional resources in the subway for a period of time, and this will be the largest NYPD force in the subways in 25 years. So clearly,

it's a really substantial investment in the safety of the people in New York City in our subways. But meanwhile, I'm asking MTA to pull their weight. They were supposed to hire officers a year and a half ago. They didn't do it. They still have vacancies. They should be shifting officers onto the subway system. It's where the vast majority of their riders in the whole MTA system are. Help us out, help us out, you know, pull your own weight, and if we all do work together, I'm certain we can create an environment that will encourage millions of folks to come back. Ridership's been going up steadily. That's the good news. Let's keep working together to encourage that, and let's also show faith that when we put our minds together, we can get something done. The recovery – this is what I keep realizing – the recovery will support public safety. Public safety will support the recovery. The more people on the subway, public safety experts are saying it, the more people go on the subway, just everyday New Yorkers coming back to the subway, the safer it gets, but we also have to give them every positive assurance when they come back to the subway, they're going to have a good experience.

Louis: Well, these new officers that you described, are they going to stay throughout the recovery? I think that's what the MTA is looking for – a commitment that they stay until the recovery really is taking place?

Mayor: Look, when we make a commitment of our officers, it's to achieve an outcome and I'm hopeful and believe that outcome will be achieved quickly. We'll keep them there as long as we need to. I believe that – you know, when I said July 1st full reopening and I meant full reopening I think even between today in the middle of May and the beginning of July, you're going to see the city come alive in a host of new ways. You're going to see an extraordinary amount of activity this summer. I think people are going to come back to the subways. Folks who haven't visited the city a long time, going to start coming here. Think it's going to be a very rapidly evolving environment, but we're ready to do whatever it takes, of course, to keep people safe.

Louis: Okay. I wanted to ask you about the tragic death of Romy Vilsaint, the 12-year-old Brooklyn boy whose family says that he was bullied, and I'm wondering if you have any update in particular about whether or not the adults involved met their duty to report bullying?

Mayor: I want to know more about it, Errol. It's a really sad, sad situation. What I've heard so far is this is a child who struggled with some very, very real pre-existing conditions, which makes me very sad to begin with, and then this sad demise, I know the family's gone through hell. I want to know exactly what happened, and if all the adults involved did what they're supposed to. So, I know it's being looked at right now and, and we'll have something soon to say when we get more detailed.

Louis: Oka, change topic. Last week at our televised debate, nearly all of the candidates said that they plan to either slow down or dial back your plan to close Rikers, ostensibly, I guess because people, predictably are complaining about the different houses of detention that would have to be built or rebuilt out in the boroughs. I wanted to get your reaction to that?

Mayor: Well, that was a whole lot of politics going on. That's what I felt. Look, you got to take a stand on this one. If you oppose the community-based jails, then you're willing to run the risk that Rikers will stay open a lot longer. Rikers is not a place that should be open. We need to

close it down at the first available moment, the plan that I acted on the City Council acted on first time in 85 years that actual action was taken to get off Rikers once, and for all. We have all the pieces in place now to achieve this plan, it'll take some political courage, but it's the right thing to do. We need to get off of Rikers. You cannot reform the correction system. If you stay in a place that was built for all the wrong reasons, all the wrong approaches. A prison island for God's sakes, as opposed to modern, smart, sane rehabilitation-oriented facilities. So, people should not be pandering on this one. None of the candidates should be pandering. The bottom line is if you want to get off Rikers, you have to be in favor of the community-based jails and the places they are now, we went through years of work to find locations that would work and get buy in and get the support of the City Council. Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water here. We have a plan. They should support the plan.

Louis: Okay, Dianne Morales, one of the candidates, apparently paid a bribe to a crooked DEP inspector long, long time ago. I was really curious – just Brooklyn homeowner to Brooklyn homeowner – you must have seen over the years that homeowners are constantly being asked to buy something off the truck or pay in cash, you know, and they won't charge you sales tax, all kinds of rotten little deals that people in the private sector offer homeowners all the time. Has that happened – that has happened to you, I assume?

Mayor: Nothing like it was being described in this case. I don't know all the details in this case, but what I've heard. No, I've never anything like that, and if someone was asking overtly for a bribe, that's pretty straightforward.

Louis: Well, yeah, I mean, it's unusual I'll give you that. I mean, it was unusual to have somebody in a uniform, you know, I mean, somebody who's part of the government you know, play into that. I'm just talking about the whole private side of it. Like the homeowner, I call it the homeowner hustle. The whole system is drenched in corruption. I mean, every vendor that you deal with, plumbers, carpenters, you know, electricians, everybody's got like some kind of a Brooklyn deal for you, and it's a rotten kind of a system. I mean, I think that's really what this corrupt inspector was relying on the fact that people are offered these kinds of deals all the time, or some kind of a deal all the time.

Mayor: Yeah. I mean, look, I don't know if I fully follow all the examples you're giving. But I would say this in the end look, every homeowner deals with the cost of being a homeowner and it's not fun and easy, and some of the challenges that come from government, you know, different regulations and fines and all that, but everyone's still got to be smart about it, and either, you know, get ahead of it and do things the right way. Or if you have a problem, then sometimes you have to pay a penalty. It's a cumbersome system, unquestionably. I'm sure there's some people trying to scam on it, but in the end, you know, I think the right and wrong is often quite clear. Yeah.

Louis: Speaking of right and wrong, Governor Cuomo, it turns out, got a little over \$5 million for his book about leadership. There are questions about, I mean, I don't think anybody's saying it was – well, there's an investigation as to whether or not it was unlawful. Was it improper?

Mayor: Well, I can tell you what I think it was. I think it was state sponsored literature. You know, this guy clearly depended upon public employees to do a lot of the work and that's not acceptable. I mean, that's not even close. Right. You know, you don't need a lot of ethics training to figure out that's not acceptable. So obviously the Attorney General and the legislature will now be looking at that on top of the nursing home scandal, the sexual assaults and harassment you know, the giving out vaccine as a political favor. I mean, it just goes on and on. It's unbelievable. Yeah.

Louis: Before I let you go the clock has started on the proposed rezoning of the Gowanus area. This is in your old council district. It would bring 8,502 apartments into the area over the next couple of decades, about 3,000 designated as affordable. The buildings could end up being quite high. The superfund cleanup, however, it has only just begun, and we know that there's a lot of toxic stuff down there. The subsequent monitoring is going to be done by individual developers and landlords. You have any concerns about the health risks? Is this a place where, you know, if you were looking for a place to live, you would consider?

Mayor: Oh, sure. I obviously represented the community for years in the City Council. A lot of work has been done to clean things up. It's a very, very different Gowanus Canal that surrounding area, it's really different than when I first went into the City Council in 2002. Of course, it's a place that people can live and believe in. Look at 3,000 more units of affordable housing, as you said, thousands of working-class jobs are going to be protected and built out as a result of this rezoning. I think it's a really balanced plan and we're looking forward to moving on it.

Louis: I mean, the remediation in particular is not nearly as thorough as we as outsiders would think. You hear superfund site, and you think, oh, the federal government is going to get all of the bad stuff out of the ground. That's not really what this is, right. I mean, they're, they're going to make the area safe, but they're not going to necessarily remove every last bit of pollution.

Mayor: Well, again, the way you just defined, it has been my understanding for years, they're going to make the area safe. You know, all over industrial America, there was all sorts of stuff that had to be addressed. So long as it is addressed, that's what matters. Unfortunately, in some parts of the country, you have sites that never were. I think there's a pretty conscientious effort that's going on. The EPA has been deeply involved for years now. So, I think it's the right time to now pull all the pieces together, get housing, particularly affordable housing. You know, I love my community in Brooklyn. I want to see affordable housing there. You and I have known each other a long time. I'm someone who believes it had to continue to be a community for everyone, and that meant building affordable housing and not letting it become a community, you know, gentrified out of its historic existence as a multiethnic, multi-income place. So, I really believe in having this affordable housing come in. I think it's the right time.

Louis: Okay. We'll leave it there for now, and we will see you again next week. Thanks for stopping by tonight.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

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