

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams, NYPD Hold Media Briefing

May 20, 2022

Video available at: https://youtu.be/WrIN-w4Y_JE

John Miller, Deputy Commissioner for Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, Police Department: Good afternoon. As you know, we have an announcement to make in a tragic homicide case and a development today. You'll hear from Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell, followed by Mayor Eric Adams, followed by Chief of Detectives James Essig, followed by Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark. Also here, we have Timothy McCormack, chief of Bronx Detectives, as well as Ralph Sozio, the United States Marshal for the Southern District of New York, who is part of the U.S. Marshal's NYPD Fugitive Apprehension Task Force. Commissioner?

Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell, Police Department: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here. Following the swift work of your NYPD detectives, we're here to announce an arrest in the absolutely senseless killing of Kyhara Tay earlier this week in the Bronx. Taken into custody before 2:00 this morning was 15 year old Matthew Godwin. He has been charged with her murder. You've seen the video. Mr. Godwin is the subject who pulled the trigger while riding on the back of the moped. Instead of hitting his intended target however, he ended the life of a totally innocent, completely uninvolved 11 year old girl. I won't say she was in the wrong place because why shouldn't an 11 year old child be able to stand outside in broad daylight?

Commissioner Sewell: The teenagers who took Kyhara's life, a sixth grader, who as her father said, didn't even have the chance to grow up, they shouldn't have been there. They have devastated a family, while at the same time ending their own lives as they know them. Let me say this to Kyhara's parents, Yahisha and Sokpini, the NYPD is far from finished. As I speak, your investigators are continuing to search for the criminal who was operating that moped. And I assure you, he too will be brought to justice. New Yorkers, the second suspect is 18 year old Omar Bojang, also from the Bronx. I believe we have his picture here. As always, I urge anyone who might have any information

about this horrendous crime or his whereabouts to please contact crime stoppers at 1-800-577-TIPS. We are talking about two teenagers who stole the life of an 11 year old child in our city. There is absolutely no justification for this tragedy and we will not stop until all of these violent criminals are off our streets and shootings and murders are no longer the top stories. Mayor Adams?

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you, commissioner and the detectives and law enforcement who were involved in bringing the individual to justice. And I also want to thank DA Clark, who has been a real partner in our pursuit to deal with the violence that we are experiencing in the Bronx. Look, listen to the numbers, 11, 15, 18. 11, 15, 18, over and over again. We're seeing 11, 15, 18, not only as the shooters, but the victims. Those numbers we hear over and over, the pattern that we are observing. They have engulfed violence in our city and we must put it to an end, and this is what we're dealing with over and over. Kids killing kids, illegal guns as easy to buy as candy and comic books. They are everywhere.

Mayor Adams: I've stated this before, and I will say it again. I have never witnessed the willingness to carry, the easy access, and the willingness to use it the way we are seeing it right now. Omar is still at large, and we need the public to help us find him. His friends, his family, whoever knows where he is. He should turn himself in to justice. And I want to thank the crime stoppers with a combined \$10,000 in a reward that was put out to assist in bringing the shooter and that helped us, but also the driver of the motorcycle or moped. There's no words that could express how we're feeling. It's beyond anger. It's beyond frustration. It's clear betrayal. We're doing everything we're supposed to do as a Police Department. The numbers are just horrendous. Removing 2,887 guns off our street – 2,887 guns off our streets since we've took office. Those numbers are just alarming to think about, but there's an endless flow.

Mayor Adams: Police officers are realizing that as soon as they take them off, new guns are being produced and placed on our streets. The heroic actions of our law enforcement agencies and combined effects is just keep fighting against the easy flow of guns in our city and in our country. Just this week, ATF did a report that showed gun buying in this country has tripled since 2000 and it spiked sharply in the last three years. Tripled. 11.3 million guns were produced in 2020 alone. It's unfathomable when you think about the number and volume of guns.

Mayor Adams: We're running out of baby formula in the city to keep children alive, but we are not running out of guns to take their lives. That is what our country has become. And this young man is no stranger. Omar is not a stranger to law enforcement. He himself is a victim of gun violence, shot twice, arrested for gun possession, and wanted for robbery. Same pattern over and over again. The same body of people doing the same actions, part of the same revolving cycle of justice system that we're seeing.

Mayor Adams: And this time, his actions took the life of young Kyhara. It's a brutal cycle of neglect, of violence, and victimhood, a revolving door that place our children in harm's way. Our children are dying and gun violence is the key cause of it. It's the number one killer of our children. Every year, 18,000 children and teens are shot, killed, or wounded and approximately 3 million are exposed to gun violence. This is not on TV. This is not on video games. This is in their neighborhoods, in their schools, on the street corners. This is the legacy that we are leaving our children. And still, we are being held hostage by a gun industry that's putting profit over public safety and our kids are paying the price with their lives. DA Clark said it best, "We're losing the generation one bullet at a time."

Mayor Adams: We love our freedom as we all state, but you can't be free if you can't go to school, if you can't go to church. If you can't sit in a restaurant, your babies can't go to the park. When I went to the hospital that night and spoke with the parents, they stated, "We don't allow our child to go out. We let her go out this one time and she never came home." It's unimaginable when you think about it. Our children are having their entire childhoods taken from them. Can't go to the park, can't go to the store, can't attend events. They have to sit home because they don't feel safe enough to go out. We're betraying these youths. We're failing them. We're taking everything from them. We're leaving them nothing, not even their lives. Well, I'm going to stand. I'm going to stand for them. And I'm asking New York to join us as we stand for these children. It's time to end this senseless gun violence. We're going to continue to do our job, but we have to get these dangerous people off the street and keep them off the street.

James Essig, Chief of Detectives, Police Department: Good afternoon, everybody. Jimmy Essig, Chief of Detectives. To my right is Chief Timmy McCormack, the investigative chief and patrol detective, Bureau Bronx. To his right is Lieutenant Sean O'Toole, Bronx homicide detective, to his right is the Lieutenant Chris Popovic, the 41 Precinct detective squad supervisor.

Essig: So on Monday, May 16th, at approximately 4:50 PM, a 13-year-old male was being chased by two males on a scooter at Fox Street and East 165th Street in the Longwood section of the Bronx. The male attempted to gain entry to 1015 Fox Street, which is an assisted living facility. He was unable to gain entry and began to run southbound towards Westchester Avenue. At which time, one of the males on the scooter, who was in the rear passenger, discharged a firearm at him in this despicable daylight shooting.

Essig: This reckless and irresponsible behavior resulted in an unattended, innocent 11 year-old being struck in the stomach by the stray bullet, causing her demise. Detectives from the 41 Precinct, Bronx Homicide, Gun Violence and the Intelligence Bureau collected and poured through numerous videos which were obtained, and they were able to identify the individuals.

Essig: At 1:30 AM this morning members of the regional task force responded to a Hotel 95 located at 1275 Pugsley Avenue in the Bronx. There, they apprehended, without incident, the male who we believe is the shooter. He was with his mother at the time. That person is a Matthew Godwin, male, 15 years old, with a date of birth of 3/13/2007.

Essig: He is arrested and charged with murder in the second degree, manslaughter in the first degree, and a criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree. He has no prior arrests, but his previous contacts with police include, in October of 2019, as a 12 year-old, he's a victim of a harassment where someone smacks him in the face and states, "Are you a member of the 800 YGz", which is a notorious violent gang where rivals are the SevSide and the Third Side. Last summer there a series of violent acts perpetrated by these gangs, which resulted in the murders of a 13 year old, a 16 year old and a 19 year old. Godwin also was a victim of a shooting January 6th, 2022 in front of 900 Bronx Park East. There were no arrests in that case.

Essig: We are still actively looking for, and seeking the public's help, in apprehending the driver of that scooter. That wanted person is Omar Bojang, male, 18 years old of 2115 Honeywell Avenue, Apartment 4D. He is a Moneywell gang member, which is a subset of those 800 YGz. His previous arrests include one gun arrest in June of 2020, which went to the youth court. He also has an arrest warrant for a Bronx robbery pattern, where there were three incidents where he and another display a gun, robbing

individuals. All occurred in the housing and Webster Avenue in the Bronx, and all his victims were lured there using social media.

Essig: He's also known to us with two previous shootings. In April of 2020 in front of 921 East 180th Street, he and another male were shot in the leg. That other male was a 27 year-old Blood gang member. In November 2020 in front of 2260 Critoner Avenue, he was shot in the leg during an exchange of gunfire between Bojang and rival gang members, Third Side. That's an open case right now in family court. This is still a very, very active case.

Essig: I'd like to thank the U.S. Marshals for their help in apprehending today, Ralph Sozio. Darcel Clark and her staff were great, and again, the detectives who did great work in this case. This is still a very active case and we're investigating, but we're asking for anyone with information for this shooting, or for the whereabouts of Mr. Bojang to call crime stoppers at 1-800-577-TIPS. With that, I'd like to turn it over to the Bronx District Attorney's office.

[...]

Question: Hi, is there any word on who the intended target was? I heard that [inaudible].

Essig: We know who the intended target was. It was the 13 year-old who was being chased over there.

Question: Yeah, initially we were told the suspect, a 15 year old, his name wouldn't be released because of his age. Can you explain what the change was, what was that growing information?

Essig: He's being charged in a criminal court right now.

Question: So what was the determination to change that?

Essig: He's being charged as an adult in criminal court right now.

Question: Before me stands three people, one person formerly in law enforcement, two south view houses, South Jamaica Queens, Jamaica Queens. When you guys were growing up, people were moving out of the city because of this same kind of violence. How do you... My cousin is dealing with it, right? His mother is dealing with it. How do you tell families they should stay in the Bronx in South Jamaica given kids are getting shot and killed.

Mayor Adams: It's a real concern, and we all need to be part of the solution. And as the DA stated, one of the best things that mother can do right now for her son is to bring him in, turn him in. And we are saying to all of those good families that are in our city, which is the overwhelmingly number of people in this city, that we are going to do our job as a Police Department. We need to get to those who are getting in the way of preventing this flow of guns in our city. It's time for the federal government to have a real look at this.

Mayor Adams: We just gave you the numbers. Three times the rate of guns are being produced and sold in our city. It is imperative that we all get involved in preventing these levels of violence that we are witnessing. Particularly they're happening with young people. So there's a lot of concern, but we're not going to surrender to violence. I say this over and over again. We are going to turn this city around, and we're going to make sure these children are not being exposed to this level of violence.

Question: Thanks. I have one very granular question and then one sort of bigger question. Do you know what this was about, first of all, in terms of the shooting, about why they were chasing the person home?

Essig: That's still part of the investigation. You heard the history, the history of the gangs up there, but as far as motivation, there's no justifiable cost to shoot out there, in broad daylight pull a gun and shoot. But that's part of the investigation with the [inaudible].

Question: And then just for the commissioner. Commissioner-

Mayor Adams: There's one thing I want to point to before the commissioner responds to that. This is what we are finding fascinating. The shooters are about nothing. All of these cases, when you start digging into it, it's about an argument. It's about a dispute. It's about being disrespected on social media. It's about you walked on the block that's

not your territory. There's nothing. When you look at these shootings, it's not rooted into anything. It's really just rooted into – some of this is mental health issues, but it's not as something that's real crisis that's caused someone to be shot.

[...]

Mayor Adams: I'm sorry. He was asking a question.

Question: You're throwing a lot at this problem. There's teams with the ghost guns and all of this wrecking of real stuff, right? You have children who think it's okay to pull the trigger without any care of where it goes. What do you do about that? What can you – talk about that?

Commissioner Sewell: Well, I think it goes to what we all keep saying. We need neighborhoods and communities and families to step up. You have to turn these people in. We have a number of resources. The city has a number of resources for these youth, for these children to take another path, take that opportunity. But if you don't take that opportunity, we will never stop doing everything we can to stop you.

Question: When [inaudible] was arrested, do we know why he was at his hotel with his mother? Did they live there, or were they just temporarily staying there?

Essig: No, they don't live there. They live over at 900 Bronx Park. They got that room the night before, May 19th.

Question: So were they hiding? They were hiding there?

Miller: We could surmise that. Yes.

Question: Maybe, Chief [inaudible] speak to the problems with scooters. Is this something? Is this now becoming, I want to say, a preferred method of gang suspects trying to enact it? How big of a problem is this for you, and how are you all addressing it as you have to tweak and adjust to deal with them?

Timothy McCormack, Chief of Bronx Detectives, Police Department: Scooters are a big problem in our city and also in the Bronx. And I know working with my counterpart on patrol, Borrow Bronx, he's working very, very hard to enforce the laws as it relates to scooters. The method of transportation, cars and scooters, with violence it goes hand in hand, and they're doing their part as a proactive measure to stop the violence by stopping the cars. Whatever violations they can find, we'll take them and seize them.

Commissioner Sewell: Can I just add something to that? Just so you're aware, we have a number of enforcement efforts that we are putting in place before the summer months come because we know this is a problem between the ATVs and the scooters. So we're doing a significant amount of traffic enforcement, and we're seizing those vehicles when we can.

Question: Yeah, for Chief Essig. Chief, was the gun found? Has the 13 year old explained his beef at all? Can you talk a little bit about what happened at the hotel? We had heard that he had resisted, but that wasn't what we heard earlier.

Essig: The gun has not been recovered as of yet. We're still looking for the gun as part of our ongoing investigation. The second part was at the hotel-

Question: As far as if you... He was a 13 year old. Has he explained at all what these tensions are?

Essig: The 13 year old did come in with his parent and he spoke with us, but we still haven't determined the cause of the shooting.

Question: And then lastly at the hotel, was there resistance early on? We had heard that there was some resistance. He might have put up a fight, maybe tried to run away.

[...]

Question: The mom was there as well?

[...]

Question: Were they close to leaving town, or were they just hiding out?

[...]

Question: Chief, can you just describe, going back to work that the detectives did to ID the 15 year old and finding this [inaudible] at the hotel, was this a crime stoppers tip, or did you guys track him there? And why isn't the mother being charged if you believe that they were running away from law enforcement?

Essig: Well, as far as the mother being charged, that's still part of her investigation. We know she was there. We know they don't live there. We know they rented that room the night before. The first part of that question? I'm sorry.

Question: First part was how did detectives get the idea of the 15 year old at first?

[Crosstalk]

McCormack: As I stated on Monday, this was going to be a slow and tedious process where both my homicide and four wind detective squad investigators amongst other investigators, we tracked the perpetrator for approximately just over two miles where we were able to get very good facial images of him. And we were able to use police sources to identify him.

Question: And did you guys get to the hotel because of a crime stoppers tip, or how did you guys track him?

Essig: No, they tracked not through a crime stoppers tip. The U.S. Marshals with the NYPD personnel were able to track them to the hotel.

Question: Can you elaborate on how they were tracked?

Essig: Not at this time. I'm not going to go into it.

Question: I heard you say you did not recover the gun. Do you know where the young shooter obtained the gun, specific to that case? And then generally when guns are

recovered, whether used in a crime were just recovered illegal possession, do you then seek where they get this gun, roll up, and try to find who's selling or panning-

Essig: Yeah. Yeah. We don't have the gun as of yet, so we won't trace it. All our guns that have serial numbers, they are traced, and then they are followed back up, seeing a place of origin, who sold it, time to crime. And then between our Joint Firearms Task Force or our Firearms Task Force, they will develop a case and see if we can roll up who's trafficking those guns into New York.

Question: The DA Clark mentioned on the number of shootings involving kids in Bronx in the past year. What specifically is the NYPD doing in the Bronx to suppress gun violence ahead of the summer?

Commissioner Sewell: We rolled out our Summer 40 plan. There's a number of Bronx precincts that are part of that Summer 40 plan. We have enhanced deployment in those areas. We have a dedicated inspector in the borough who is responsible for suppressing gun violence and being able to determine where we need to pivot our resources if something is not effective. We have supervisors that are in charge of those precincts as well and those details to ensure that we are doing everything we can and getting the information and intelligence we need to be effective.

Mayor Adams: Hold on, I want to respond to that for one moment, which is important. What the commissioner just stated, what we have done traditionally, we've dropped the weight of this on the Police Department, only. We're not doing that. They're rolling out their summer plan, but every agency that's involved with young people also must produce a plan to compliment what the Police Department is doing.

Mayor Adams: The Department of Education, summer youth employment, DYCD. We are not saying to the NYPD, that this is your crisis only. By the time someone carries a gun, discharges a gun, we already failed as a city. And so what we are doing that's different is we're asking the police to be on the front line as they normally are. But I'm going to all of my agencies and say, "How are you part of complimenting the Bronx plan?" That's the goal here and that is what's different than what has been done previously. Everyone must be on board because we have to prevent as well as apprehend those crimes that are taking place in the city.

[Crosstalk]

[...]

Question: Off-topic. Are you okay? Did you get hit with a can?

Mayor Adams: No, actually we were at the conference. They saw that I was there, they know that I'm into health so they threw down a protein bar for me to be able to drink. I didn't get a chance to thank them. I had to get up to the Bronx, but I appreciate the commitment to my nutritional values.

Question: Mr. Mayor, are you concerned with your personal physical safety and since your inauguration, have you ever carried a firearm with you as mayor?

Mayor Adams: I'll ask the latter first. No, I have not carried a firearm. As I stated before, if I feel the need to do so since I'm able to do so, I will. I don't feel the need to do so. I'm very fortunate that my brother is playing an active role in protecting me. And so I am pleased with the security that I have and I feel confident.

Question: Cool.

Mayor Adams: Okay. Thank you.

Question: Speed cameras, a quick comment. Albany reported they have a deal, 24 hours. Speed cameras, they'll get you if you're 10 miles over. What's your thoughts on that?

Mayor Adams: Real win. You know, we started out the year in January. People felt as though we were not going to make any inroads in Albany, but I knew differently that we were behind the scene talking with people. We didn't feel that we needed to have a public discussion, but behind the scenes, people were aligned with our mission. Sometimes the loudest is not the majority. This is a huge win. We know speeding is a contributor to many of the fatalities and injuries. And we also know that at night, many of the speeders are taking place and so this is a big win for us. And we're really excited about getting that done. Thanks, Senator Gounardes who played the crucial role in carrying the bill in the Senate.

Question: Mr. Mayor, just one more question.

Mayor Adams: Yes, sir?

Question: Can we get back to the guns for a second?

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: Gun violence.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: You have obviously many hats to wear, right? [Inaudible] taking care of the people's problems and everyone's living and housing needs to be safe. You're also trying to sell the city to business, trying to bring people back. These seem to diverge over the issue of crime. How do you tow that line? How do you on the one hand say you've never seen anything like this, which is astonishing what's been going on, while at the same time telling Midtown office workers that it's safe to come back to work?

Mayor Adams: Because look, we have to be honest about what we're facing, because if we're not honest about what we're facing, then everyone is not going to be onboard. So I am calling on the business communities. When I sit down with them, I say, "I need you to do paid internship programs. I need you to be part of the summer youth employment. I need the mentoring programs." When I speak to my faith-based leaders, I tell them, "I need you to come out with me in the streets and be the eyes and ears." So if I'm not honest with New Yorkers of what we're up against, then I'm sending a false impression. I have to be honest. This is an FDR moment. You explain exactly what we're dealing with. And then you show the plans we are going to implement to address what we are dealing with.

Mayor Adams: We're dealing with the gun crises and we're not alone. I was with the Atlanta mayor, we had dinner. He was here in New York and he told me that the governor just passed a piece of legislation that you no longer have to do any checks to buy a gun. Now people are going to be just carrying their guns openly. Chicago just implemented a curfew for young people. Detroit, St. Louis, this is engulfing big cities across America. And I'm saying to New Yorkers, this is what we're dealing with, here are our plans and I need all New Yorkers to be part of that plan so that we can make our city the safe city that we know it could become.

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