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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS NAMES SHEENA WRIGHT AS FIRST  
DEPUTY MAYOR, CAMILLE JOSEPH VARLACK AS CHIEF OF STAFF —  
STARTING JANUARY**

**Mayor Eric Adams:** Good morning. Such a significant day as we continue to move as a city and transition into moving into the second year of our administration. And today, I'm excited to announce that starting January, Sheena Wright, my deputy mayor for strategic initiatives, will be our next first deputy mayor of the City of New York. And my current senior advisor to the mayor, Camille Joseph Varlack, will be my chief of staff.

To the family and friends who are here, I wanted to tell them thank you for coming out today. But before we move forward, I just really want to acknowledge the two friends and rocks that have been with me throughout this important journey. Lorraine Grillo. I remember on bended knee, telling her, "Lorraine, I know you've had a long career and I know you're ready to do other things with your life, but right now, your city needs you. And can you come on board and give me the year to anchor this administration?" And Lorraine did just that. She came in with the level of expertise and a level of knowledge, and really provided the security that we needed as we transitioned into this new level. No matter who we were, when you want to do something you've never done before, you better have someone there that has done it before. And Lorraine brought that, she brought the experience that was needed in the first year of this administration, particularly the uniqueness of what we came into.

I know people don't realize it now because of what Lorraine and her team has done, but we came into a pandemic. It was a question mark link lingering over what was going to happen in the city. We came in with the uncertainties of our schools being open, and the noise from so many that were trying to give direction and instructions that we knew we had to push against. We came in with a crime surge and over-proliferation of guns. We came in dealing with all sorts of crises, from economic crises to how do we deal with Monkeypox? How do we deal with asylum seekers? All of these issues. We needed a first deputy mayor that would be able to assist us and navigate how we move forward. And she did just that. And I cannot thank her enough for her advice, her consultation, and her ability to navigate government. But also for her friendship, Lorraine is a friend. And those who know her know that she pulls no punches, she's going to tell you the way it is, and she's going to be very direct in the process. We needed her to guide the 8.8

million people with 35 million opinions. And she allowed us to keep moving forward to get the prosperity that this city is faced with. And I could not have achieved this without her.

And all of us know my relationship with my chief of staff, he's my brother. He is a person that, when no one believed it was possible, he knew it was. He was a Canarsie kid, played little league baseball and Canarsie little league football. He was told that he could not be an attorney because he was not good enough or smart enough. And on the other side of the city, there was this little, third grade, dyslexic child that played on a dirt lot for baseball and football. And together, we came together to say, just as people did not believe in us then, we would believe in each other now. And it was the combination of Frank Carone, my chief of staff, and Ingrid Martin that sat down together and stated we would make this pursuit. My heart breaks that I'm losing him, but I know he's one text away.

And I will continue to look towards both of them as we guide our city in the right direction. Some of the critical things that we were able to do around the Brookdale CUNY campus, what we did on moving forward with looking at how we're going to deal with the BQE crisis, what Lorraine has done around capital process reform, a task force, what both of them have done around their basic professional and portfolios that allowed us to move our city forward, and build the right team of professionals that are committed and dedicated to this city, from affordable housing to the amazing feat in Willets Point, a soccer and housing initiative that folks thought was impossible. Innovation Queens, people thought was impossible. All of these challenges, we had steady hands on the wheel, and these two amazing New Yorkers and public servants were able to help us navigate through them. They were the foundation to this administration, and I want to thank them personally. These are huge shoes to fill, but these two ladies in their red bottoms, they're going to bring their own pair.

They're going to bring their own uniqueness, their own flair to these jobs. They're going to draw on the experience of those who have carried out these roles in the past. Both of them have sat down with former first deputy mayors and former chiefs of staff, they have developed relationships with individuals who have walked this path before, and drawn on their experiences. I am really excited. Sheena and Camille are continuing the tradition of strong women in this administration, especially strong women of color. I look behind me and I see Deputy Mayor Joshi, Deputy Mayor Maria Torres-Springer, see Ingrid Martin, my chief advisor. I see the various women of color who are in leadership that historically have been denied, not because of their ability, but because of their ethnicity. They have been on the bench too long. They have been telling the City of New York, "Coach, put us in the game." And they finally have a coach that understands their skill set, they're in the game and they're ready to play their positions correctly and fairly.

Sheena, I've known for many years. She has been a steady hand, cool head, and has a passion for the work that is needed in these cities. And her record speaks for itself. She has most recently and notably, something that people thought was impossible, cleared up a backlog waitlist for vouchers, allowing the families of 36,000 children to apply for low cost, high quality childcare, which was a hallmark of this administration.

She led the joint task force to get nonprofits paid on time. It was unimaginable, when we inherited City Hall, we had 4.2 billion dollars for hundreds of organizations that were the gap fillers, to make sure that children and families received the services they deserve. She also oversaw the historic expansion of the summer youth employment program to reach 100,000 students, and co-led the city's gun violence prevention task force as we dealt with the over proliferation of guns that were carving highways of death through our city and our communities.

I knew her when she was the president and CEO of Abyssinian Development Corporation. And to her service as the first woman to be the CEO of United Way of New York City, and as a chair of my transition team. And I was really appreciative of her commitment and dedication as she took upon that awesome task to staff this city as we transition. She knows how to bring business, nonprofits and government together to simply get stuff done. And I saw it over and over again, as we brought together all of those entities, this is an administration where we do not build walls, we tear walls down. And our business and nonprofit communities can really appreciate that. She is steadfast, innovative, and creative.

Government has always had knowledgeable people. We did not have the creativity to solve the problems that we are facing. And she brings that commitment and creativity, and is committed to our city. And her personal story is a story that many people don't know, that I believe feeds her compassion. In many moments that we sat down and shared our lives, I've learned so much from her and appreciate her commitment and dedication, and her life of turning pain into purpose. And that purposeful moment has allowed her to be the first Black woman in this city to be the first deputy mayor. On the other end of the spectrum, I must have been on a call during the midst of COVID, and I heard this voice leading the initiatives as Dan and the chancellor were navigating how we were going to keep our schools open and navigating the uncertainty. And I heard this calm, strategic, general type voice moving with precision. I said, "Who is this woman, Eric Adams?"

Just clear, focused and disciplined. And I took note when I looked on the Zoom and saw the name, the name Camille, and started to listen over and over again as process and issues came about in the city. We transitioned from the pandemic to dealing with asylum seekers and migrants. Once again, I saw the leadership and the voice and the focus and the discipline.

Over and over again, I took notes as I watched her movement and her ability to just handle the crisis, to bring people together and bring the level of sureness that is needed in the disorder of government, as everyone moves in different direction and being able to herd us together and say we would be focused and disciplined. A real manager, understanding all the challenges. Slowly in the background, no need to be in the forefront. Coming in to continue the work that Frank Carone has done so successfully.

And I said to myself, "If I can only get her to become my chief of staff." Somehow I had to convince her to leave her practice and come into government and to deal with the press of the city. And so after numerous conversations, we were able to ask Camille to be part of this team and she agreed. The former deputy director of operations, chief risk officer and special counsel for the New York State, when she managed more than 60 agencies and authorities. She was a member of the New York City Task Force on COVID.

She's a founding partner and chief operating officer of her own law firm. The sacrifices we make because we believe to find our purpose in government. She chaired the New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics. But all of these accomplishments and what we give on one resume, trust me, they mean nothing. They mean nothing if you don't bring the passion to there.

If they are combined with the deep dedication to equity, justice and improving the lives of New Yorkers. Together, Camille and Sheena and our team have what it takes to serve the city that we will love and we believe in. As chief of staff and first deputy mayor, I want to be clear, I trust them, I trust them. I'm confident in their skills and commitments, and I look forward to shaping New York City's future and getting stuff done with them at my side. With that, I'm excited to introduce our next first deputy mayor, Sheena Wright.

**Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright, Strategic Initiatives:** Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. When you gathered all of your leaders on January 1st of this year, the first day of the Adams administration, you asked us one by one as we sat around the table to describe in one word how we felt. My word was grateful. I felt grateful to have the opportunity to be of service to the city that I love so much. And I felt grateful to be taking this journey with such extraordinary people. I felt grateful for your vision and your leadership.

And now 11 months later, I didn't think I could be more grateful than I was on that first day, but I am so much more. I want to thank you, Lorraine, for your leadership. I have had the good fortune to know Lorraine for over 20 years. While I was at Abyssinian Development Corporation, I worked with you to build the first new high school in Harlem in 50 years. Lorraine has always personified leadership and service and a tenacity to get things done, and she has always been a beacon for women leaders. She's brought so many of us along and I'm grateful for you.

I deeply appreciate her example and her council as she served as first deputy mayor. And I look forward to continuing to call on you for advice, support, and friendship. Frank, while I have not known you for 20 years, it sure feels like it. From the moment I met you, it felt like family. You have such a special, welcoming spirit coupled with the tenacity of a marine.

**Mayor Adams:** That's right.

**Deputy Mayor Wright:** Don't mess with Frank. That has enabled you to accomplish so much in your career and as chief of staff to the mayor of the City of New York. I've learned so much from you and very much look forward to continuing to have the benefit of your council and friendship. I would say that you two will be missed, but I won't. I know you'll be right there when we need you, and that you both will continue to be of service to this great city.

And also, we know where you live. You can't escape us. Lorraine and Frank have set such a strong foundation for this administration. As Camille and I step into these roles, we will bring our full selves to the task. I appreciate the mayor saying, when he was asked about Lorraine, the question was, "Who will you get to fill her shoes?" And no one can fill Lorraine's shoes and no one can fill Frank's shoes. And I was so grateful when the mayor said, "Whomever I choose will have to bring their own shoes."

So my shoes have traveled from the South Bronx, where I was raised by incredibly resourceful and strong women. I was raised in a house with my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. That's a lot of women in one house. They made me who I am today and poured into me. I watched as they worked hard and made a way, not just for themselves and their families, but for their communities.

My great-grandmother, Cormenia, an immigrant from Jamaica who came to New York. She was a domestic who worked hard and with dignity to provide for her family here and abroad. My grandmother, Millicent, provided social services with care and love to low income women and their children for over 30 years, working for the State Department for Women, Infants and Children. And my mother, she couldn't be here today. She's got pneumonia and that would only keep her away.

She's sick, she's contagious. But she has been and continues to be for me a north star. A revolutionary and distinguished fighter for social justice and health equity. I also want to express my profound appreciation for the men who raised me as well. The men don't get enough credit sometimes. My father, a steadfast supporter of everything that I do. And my grandfather, who made his way during the great migration from South Carolina to New York City in search of justice and opportunity, who always made sure that I knew my worth.

Growing up in South Bronx, going to boarding school, college, practicing corporate law for a decade, leading nonprofits for 20 years, my shoes have traveled to lots of different places. They've been in boardrooms of some of the biggest companies, as well as on the ground in community building housing, schools, providing education, early childhood. Supporting families who are unhoused, building commercial development and supporting small businesses.

In addition to the professional path I've traveled, I bring my personal experience as well. My experience of being a mother, a person of faith, someone who knows what it means to have family members struggling with severe mental illness and who knows personally about many of the other challenges facing many New Yorkers. And with all of that, I am a person who fundamentally believes, even in the face of those challenges, that with the full contribution of all of us, government, nonprofit, corporate, and philanthropy, only then can we realize the full potential of what this great city can be.

I brought my full self to City Hall on January 1st and I am grateful for what we have accomplished. I believe having never actually worked in government, but having worked very much with government for over 20 years has been an asset. I believe I've brought a fresh perspective. I have asked why a lot and why not even more. With these two questions all of us have accomplished so much in these past 11 months. As the mayor said, the childcare blueprint, the nonprofit backlog, the summarizing all of the things and so much more. And I've always been focused on getting stuff done. And in this year I was so grateful to be a part of an administration that has achieved so many things in such a short period of time. So many things.

That makes me even more excited to take on this new role. It is an awesome responsibility to lead my sister deputy mayors, chief housing, tech, and efficiency officers, to work with an

incredible leadership team to ensure that we are realizing the mayor's vision and that we are driving to and accomplishing meaningful and measurable change for New Yorkers, ensuring that we are a results oriented and data driven administration. And I'm grateful to have the guidance and support of the many people that have sat in the seat, the formidable women, Patti Harris and Lorraine Grillo, as well as the men, Tony, Dean, Stanley, Joe, and any of the others who will take my call.

And I'm grateful to have the support of my incredibly loving and supportive family and friends, my village. Thank you. I am grateful for these unbelievable sister women, these sister DMs and chiefs and other leaders and men that work very hard every day in service to New Yorkers. And I am grateful to be in partnership with Camille Joseph Varlack. I've had the profound pleasure to meet her during the transition and she's been working since before day one for this administration.

To be able to work alongside her during the transition and all of these 11 months. She is an incredible force, incredibly accomplished, bringing decades of experience and a full commitment to operational excellence and someone who has been a great public servant and cares deeply about this city and a friend. Last but not least, I am grateful for this mayor. For such a time as this, for your vision. He's laid it out very clearly what his aspiration for this city is and he has charged us to fulfill it. His tenacity, no one, and I mean no one works harder than this mayor. His fearlessness, he faces some of the thorniest, most challenging problems head on.

I'm grateful for his confidence, the confidence in me to chair the transition to serve as deputy mayor of strategic initiatives and to this appointment today. I want to say to you, I've got my shoes on. They are tied tight and I'm ready to run this next leg of the race with you and with all of us. Thank you. Thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** And now our chief of staff, Chief of Staff Camille Joseph Varlack.

**Camille Joseph Varlack, Special Advisor to the Mayor:** Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. I am incredibly humbled to have the opportunity to continue to serve. I have always believed that the call to public service is one that is certainly not easy, but is almost always the most rewarding. In order to fully appreciate why this is so meaningful to me, I'd like to share a little bit about my own personal history. My life began in Trinidad and Tobago as the granddaughter of a Baptist minister and a midwife who were also called to serve. My mother immigrated to the United States and brought me as a child. Like so many others, she worked around the clock to give my sister and me a better life. I was a latchkey kid before I knew what that phrase even meant. Growing up I always knew that I wanted to be a lawyer. I spent my time watching old Matlock TV shows and I was like, "I've got to be in the courtroom."

I always wanted to go into public service. It was important to me that I work in the city that I lived in and I had that opportunity, and I always wanted to move to New York City, which to me was the epitome of opportunity and the absolute center of the world. Now I've lived through in my time here, 9/11 and COVID in New York. And what stands out to me with both of those unbelievably difficult challenges is how in those moments you see the best of who we are. Our strength, our resiliency, our determination to rise in the face of crushing odds. This moment is

another opportunity to be our best selves, to live the American dream and bring it within everyone's reach. The American dream starts in New York. It is New York. And this opportunity to help enable New York to continue to be a place where people like my mother can achieve our dreams is an opportunity that you say yes to.

Mayor Adams also embodies the American dream. His journey and his ability to connect with New Yorkers is unbelievable, I think. Sir, I was on the call with you the other day and you were in a store looking for... And you were just talking to and connecting with New Yorkers in a way that is absolutely unbelievable. He believes like I do, that New York City is a place where all dreams can come true. I believe deeply and personally in Mayor Adams' vision for ensuring that this remains true for all. Quite frankly, I would not be here if I did not.

I am thrilled to work with the team that he has built, the incredible deputy mayors, Chief Advisor Lewis-Martin, and all of the leaders who work so hard to deliver for New Yorkers every day. It is not difficult to set up an administration. And when you look behind me, when you look around, you see an incredible team. And that is very much a testament to what you have done, Frank. And I am so very grateful to be a part of that team. I am incredibly happy to have worked with First Deputy Mayor Grillo. We've been in the COVID bunker since before the administration started, and she is a true public servant, which is something that means a lot to me. First Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright, incoming. I remember a few months ago we sat down and you were like, "Your job's not done yet and you're not going anywhere."

I am so extraordinarily happy to be able to partner with you and to work with you in this work. Moving a city, the city, the one that matters, the capital of the world, is not easy. One does not arrive in this place, in this moment where we are, alone. I had truly hoped that my mother would be able to be here today. But true to form, she's devoted to her work as a nurse and could not travel at this time. She's dedicated to caring for others. She puts education first and raised me to understand that order, structure and discipline are non-negotiable. And to say that she is the center of my world is an understatement.

To my sister Kaylan, thank you for your constant unwavering love and support. But I have also been blessed, and many of you who may be immigrants will know this. Most of my family still is in Trinidad, with a family of my choosing, some of whom are here today. Arshiya, Umar, Linda, Jenny, Karima. Thank you for your unwavering love, support, and guidance. To my best friend Karima, who has been riding with me since college and deals with all of my craziness. Thank you to her. To my mother-in-law Leila and my father-in-law, Keith who is here and is one of the best men that I know. Thank you for welcoming me into your family, for your guidance and for being the best cheerleaders as I have pursued my dreams. To my husband, I know that I am not easy.

You know me better than I know myself. Since meeting you on July 25th, 1994, we have grown up together and you have supported every corner of the state I have found my way to and every crisis that I run towards. And you have loved me through it all. You are an incredible human being and I love you very much. When I relocated to Albany to serve on the COVID task force, my son said to me, when I told him I likely would not be able to come home for several months, "Mommy, when you look back at the history of this time, won't you want to be able to say that

you were there and that you helped?" My daughter, who has joined us today said, "Make sure they give you everything you deserve to get the job done."

They are the brains and heart of our family's operation. Thank you for your support and for everything that you do. I love you. Mr. Mayor, I am honored to have been considered and selected to serve New York City as your chief of staff. Thank you for the opportunity and let's get to work.

**Mayor Adams:** We're going to open to some, on-topics. Last night we had a real dangerous person that was just on a homicidal path and we started communicating with the chief of the department, chief of patrol, and the PC, because we knew we had to catch this person. And I reached out and told Camille this was unfolding and we were navigating to bring this person to justice. And she says, "Am I wrong for wanting to hop in the car right now and go over there?"

But that's the style of this on the ground leadership that we have created. This is not an ivory tower administration. We want to be close to the action so we could be close to the solution, and we need that.

And many nights after a terrible incident, I would pop up and Frank would be there, 1, 2, 3 in the morning, putting a call to Lorraine and finding out what we had to navigate from the fire and the beginning of our administration to some horrific incident. This is the type of administration we have prided ourselves in becoming. There on the ground, in the fox hole with New Yorkers. Not sending them into battle and asking, "How was the war?" But leading them into battle to fight the war. That's the leadership you are going to see in this administration. And now with these two generals, they're going to be on the front line in leading us in this battle. We're open to some questions. And just remind them we're doing on-topic, because this is a celebratory day.

**Question:** The outgoing chief of staff and first deputy mayor. I mean, what's the message you've given to those taking over for your role? I know you've sort of overlapped in some degree, but I don't know if there is one solid message you each gave?

**First Deputy Mayor Lorraine Grillo:** Thank you, Katie. I think that my message is that we each come with a different set of skills and that we do our best with those set of skills. But in this case, I think our new first deputy mayor has all the skills necessary to do this job and do a great job. So I have no concerns and no advice. She will be terrific.

**Frank Carone, Chief of Staff to the Mayor:** Okay. Thank you, Katie. It was very simple, just be yourself. You could only be the person you are, be authentic, be yourself, give it your all, don't be afraid of mistakes, dust it off, and keep moving.

**Mayor Adams:** Well said. Frank was never in government and he was himself to navigate, and make us one of the top contenders in the DNC of what Frank, his natural ability, as you stated, of just calming the waters. He was himself. All I had to do was say, "Frank, you be you because I am going to be me." And that was a perfect match.



**Question:** Also, a question for the outgoing chief of staff and first deputy mayor. Is there anything that you would feel like you have to get done before you leave office? Anything left on the table?

**First Deputy Mayor Grillo:** It's a really good question. I could probably think of 3,000 things that I would like to do, but over the last couple of weeks we've had some real successes. One of them, as the mayor talked about, is the campus of Brookdale, which is something I fought for a lot of years and to have that announced and to have so many other things come to fruition was such a great thing for me. So, I will walk away and I will leave the other 3,000 things too.

**Carone:** There's always something going on here. And it's first and foremost tangling the crises and handling the everyday services. But really there are always big ticket items. The mayor mentioned it during his remarks with the BQE, we're still really focused on that. DNC, some changes in Fifth Avenue, but these are things that are in motion and the team is going to quarterback at January 1st on. I'm the type of person that likes to go right to the finish line and work backwards.

**Question:** I had two questions. One for you, and one for the new chief of staff. Are the portfolios or the organizational chart changing at all with these two appointments or are they getting the same portfolios that their predecessors had?

**Mayor Adams:** Basically, the same. What we're looking at, it may be some tweaks in some areas, but it's basically the same portfolio. And they're going to sit down and talk about if they believe there should be some new changes, and I'm going to seek their advice based on their observation. But basically, as it stands now, it's the same portfolio that they are going to inherit.

**Question:** Thank you. Let me take my second question to the new chief of staff. First of all, congratulations on your appointment, and I was just wondering if you do inherit the same portfolio that Frank Carone had, do you have any thoughts about the intergovernmental affairs division heading into the Albany session? There've been some stories over the past year about some infighting and some sort of murky lines of authority in that area. So if you're overseeing it, I was just wondering if you've had an opportunity yet to kind of think about it.

**Varlack:** Our inner gov operation is led by Tiffany Raspberry, who is an incredible public servant and who works around the clock. I think as a matter of fact, she's not here because she's working as well, and I've been on the calls with her late at night, et cetera. And so there are always opportunities for things to be tweaked and shaped. But the fact of the matter is, I think what matters is that we have an incredible team who is devoted to doing that and excited for all of the opportunities for us to make things stronger. And I'm hoping that my operational experience and background will benefit all of the divisions, all of the units across the city, not just inner gov. Thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** Hold on for one moment. Hold on because I want to answer this important question. What I have learned from all of my studies, readings of prior administrations leaders, one of my best books, is of game change. Good teams don't explode. They implode, because

good teams cannot lose to their enemies, they lose to each other. And if good teams allow the noise that's out there to define who they are, they're going to start believing that noise.

Tiffany has done an amazing job. I'm still baffled that when people look at our Albany victories, they state that we didn't have victories. We got the land trust passed, NYCHA. Other administrations attempted to do it, they were unsuccessful. We had the childcare passed, no one else was able to do it. We had the increase in income tax credit. No one else was able to do it. We were able to move the needle on discovery. Others failed at doing it.

When you look at the Ws, we got in Albany based on this team, it was this team that got the project done in the Bronx, the Bruckner project. It was this team that navigated the politics of Innovation Queens, that IG team, even their cheering, that IG team has been an amazing team. So yes, we bring a lot of passion into this game, but when people say in fighting, no, healthy, good debate is part of reaching a consensus. I don't want people to come and say, "Eric, we agree with everything." I want a healthy debate. But once we make a decision and we break the huddle, we go to the line of scrimmage, we execute one play.

And that is the trademark of this administration. And so we have one IGA, and as our chief of staff stated, it is headed by Tiffany Raspberry. She's going to continue to do the job until she decides to transition. But right now, that's intergovernmental affairs, and I thank her for commitment and dedication to the city.

**Question:** For the new first mayor and chief of staff, priorities on day one for both of you going forward?

**Deputy Mayor Wright:** I think the priorities are evident dealing with the current crises and challenges that we're facing, whether it's asylum seekers, housing, but also continuing to chart the path forward to realize the mayor's vision for this administration.

We are prioritizing, obviously, public safety and all that that means, particularly the upstream causes of public safety as well as economic opportunity, health. There are many priorities, but they really fall in some core buckets and that we are charged to drive forward.

**Varlack:** Just echoing and underscoring what first Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright has indicated, my goal, my focus is to deliver for New Yorkers. That is the focus of this entire administration. And so we are going to be working to make sure that the foundation is rock-solid so that we can deliver on all of the mayor's priorities, many of which were already laid out in addition to all the crises that come in, because I do love a crisis. Thank you.

**Mayor Adams:** Thank you.

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