



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 15, 2015
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO AND COMMISSIONER BRATTON HOLD MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: ...Commissioner Bratton and I, and the leadership of the PD – we had a few minutes to get updates internally regarding the threats that were made to school systems around the country. I want to update you to say that the NYPD has thoroughly assessed the threats that were made, including for our school system. And although the threat in that sense is specific, it is not credible. NYPD Intelligence Division has been in touch with the FBI throughout the morning, assessing the situation, and they've come to the conclusion that the threat that was made was not credible. I just spoke to Chancellor Fariña – our school system remains fully open, and we will of course continue to monitor the situation carefully, but based on the information we have, this was a very generic piece of writing sent to a number of different places simultaneously and also written in a fashion that suggests that it's not plausible. And we've come to the conclusion that we must continue to keep our school system open. In fact, it's important – very important not to overreact in situations like this. Let me now turn to Commissioner Bratton to now add to that information.

Commissioner Bratton: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. We reaffirmed that we do have an investigation underway, but it's an investigation into a hoax, which we strongly believe that the email that was received in New York City, which is similar – and almost exactly the same as we see in other locales, specifically Los Angeles. We do not see that as a credible terrorist threat, and we are investigating it as a hoax. We believe that the email originated overseas. The language in the email [inaudible] for example, Allah was not spelled with a capital A, and that would be incredible to think that any Jihadist would not spell Allah with a capital A, just as an example of this. Again, we received – a superintendent in our school system received a threat earlier this morning. It was relayed to New York City police officials and we began an immediate investigation into it, in cooperation with the Joint-Terror Task Force. We have been in contact with the Los Angeles Police Department. I'm [inaudible] with the school system [inaudible] appears, as of this time, that the school system out there [inaudible] no consultation with local law enforcement authorities. And our understanding is they may have shut down their schools for today. We see no need whatsoever to take that action here in New York City. And we do believe the outcome of the investigation [inaudible] a hoax [inaudible] investigated as such.

Mayor: Let me emphasize – we're going to take questions on this and other police matters only in this session. Go ahead.

Question: Can you into more detail on the email?

Commissioner Bratton: I will not – at this time that – the mayor and I just received a briefing from Commissioner Miller that was the cause of the delay in interacting with you. And they're in the process of still investigating. I have not had the opportunity to actually view the entire message that was sent at a briefing from Mr. Miller. [inaudible] briefing that, you know, this is in fact a hoax. We have to be careful. You hear me constantly – the mayor and I talk about being aware but not living in fear. These types of things tend to create fear. And as to what the motivation might be – midterm exams, somebody not wanting to go to school – but inasmuch as the origin of this appears that it may have been [inaudible]. I would not take it as the usual prank by a student not wanting to take an exam. Whatever the motivation, we cannot allow ourselves to raise levels of

fear – certainly raise levels of the winds. This is not a credible threat and not one that requires any action on our parts similar to what my understanding is in the school system in Los Angeles.

Question: Commissioner, was it the same email sent to many districts around the –

Commissioner Bratton: The preliminary brief the mayor and I just had that [inaudible] earlier briefing I had earlier this morning is that it appears to be the same email – the generic email that was sent to the number of major cities. Working with the FBI now, we’re trying to determine what other school systems – we’ve been in contact [inaudible] and that’s what entity the second largest school system in America. [inaudible] they shut it down today based on this [inaudible] not credible threat.

Question: What school received the threat? What borough was it in?

Commissioner Bratton: Won’t get into that at the moment – that’s part of our investigation to determine – one, was it a singular threat? [inaudible] specific individual, or did other school officials [inaudible] receive it? And also as to why had they gone to this particular school official? Those will be part of the investigation.

Question: Had the city considered closing schools at any point?

Mayor: No. The median assessment by the intelligence division, again, in constant [inaudible] with the FBI, was there was nothing credible about the threat. It was so generic, so outlandish, and posed to numerous to school systems simultaneously, that, that immediate – plus the additional information the commissioner just noted. There were wording choices and other indicators that suggested a hoax and not anything that we could associate with Jihadist activity. So, the assumption NYPD and the assumption the Department of Education were immediately exactly the same – that there would – in fact, there would be a huge disservice to our nation to close down our school system. So, there’s been absolute unity between NYPD, DOE, and the Mayor’s Office that this was not the kind of threat that we would act on, and, in fact, was a hoax.

Question: You said that actually –

Commissioner Bratton: It’s doing it [inaudible] or a threat, may be a Homeland fan – they started watching Homeland episodes [inaudible]. So, who knows? As we go forward with the investigation, reaffirming that the mayor, and I, and the officials [inaudible] the head of the FBI, who was here with us early this morning [inaudible]. This is not a credible threat. It’s not something to be concerned with. What we would be concerned with is overreacting to it. We stay aware. We stay in control. [inaudible] overreacting to what will probably be a series [inaudible]

Question: You were saying that – you didn’t want to say if it was a specific school, but the mayor alluded to this whole district – so, you’re talking about specifically to an NYC public school email address or account?

Mayor: Again, we’ll go into more detail as the investigation continues. But what was obvious is whoever did this sent this to numerous school district around the country.

Question: Unrelated question pertaining a homicide investigation in the –

Mayor: Why don’t we just see if there’s anything else on this and then you’ll be next. Anything else on this topic?

Question: Yeah. Just – I wonder whether – Mr. Commissioner, Mr. Mayor – whether you can speak to problems caused by these hoaxes. Do you get many of them that you have to investigate? Or is this highly unusual?

Commissioner Bratton: Well, I think this one is the most recent of – many things that we have to look at that you never hear about and we make a determination that there’s no validity to it. This one here – the multiplicity

of it, involving several cities, certainly several police agencies. The Joint-Terrorism Task Force [inaudible] school districts. This one is different only in the context of the multiplicity of entities that were, in this case, emailed. But the department, as you know, is constantly reviewing different threats, etcetera, most of which never [inaudible] newsworthy [inaudible] because they're just not credible.

Question: With the idea of not wanting to address threats if they're not newsworthy – does the decision in Los Angeles to shut down their school system sort of force you guys to sort of address the issue here in New York City. Does what they do out there have an impact –

Commissioner Bratton: I have a lot of intimacy with Los Angeles [inaudible]. The Los Angeles unified school district is a separate entity from the county system, which is very strong in Los Angeles, and the city. It is a separate, independent entity. The school chancellor doesn't report to the mayor, he doesn't report to the county supervisors. So, he has the [inaudible] in this instance, it's apparently [inaudible], somebody very well known in this city. He made an independent decision based on preliminary information that we're hearing to shut down his school system. And, as of now, we don't know that he wasn't [inaudible] with any police agencies in Los Angeles. So, it's a different set of circumstances. Here, the schools are controlled by the mayor. It's a very different chain of command in Los Angeles than it is here in New York.

Mayor: Let me speak to the bigger point. The – we believe fundamentally that we must continue to go about our lives in the face of the actual threats of terror around the world. But that's even more true when you think about when it comes to the pure hoaxes that we deal with. And they are not always with a Jihadist message, obviously. There's all sorts of hoaxes, all sorts of threats that come in and [inaudible]. As leaders, it is our job to protect public order, and to keep things moving forward in this city, and to certainly not aide and abet those who want to sell panic. So, an everyday hoax is something that has to be weighed smartly. But I have tremendous faith in Commissioner Bratton, and Deputy Commissioner Miller, and all of the NYPD leadership that they assess these types of realities all the time, and they are very specific in their analysis – obviously careful and cautious – but they also are smart about realizing that many hoaxes come along and they could not be dignified. That relates to but is very different of course from when we have terror threats that are made to try and unnerve us. When we see psychological warfare in effect from terrorist organizations – and we've spoken to that. We spoke about that after the drill – the active shooter drill a couple of weeks back. We've spoken about many occasions – we're not going to give in to the efforts by terrorists to change our lifestyle, change our values, change our democracy. Keeping order, going about our business is very, very important. So, any time we believe a threat actually signifies a real danger, of course we'll alert New Yorkers, we'll take all the proper measures. But it's very important to realize there are people who want us to fundamentally change our lifestyle and our values, and we will never give into that.

Question: Is there a message directly speaking – generally – but to a pair of may have a six-, seven-, eight-year-old in school, you know? Can you speak directly to them just so that people do feel safe –

Mayor: Yes. I'm a parent. Let me speak to my – let me speak to my fellow parents, as a parent. Our schools are safe, children should be in school today. I just spoke to Chancellor Fariña, who has 50 years – half-a-century as an educator in our schools, who is adamant that the situation is safe. As you heard, the information we received suggests no credible threat to our children. We will be vigilant to look for any signs that might suggest otherwise. And there is an NYPD investigation going on as we speak. But we are absolutely convinced – the chancellor, the commissioner and I are absolutely convinced [inaudible] business as usual.

Question: Would you have addressed this issue publicly had the schools in LA not shut down?

Mayor: I don't think we should get into the hypotheticals. I think the fact is that this is something we're clear is not a credible threat.

Question: Commissioner Bratton, do you think Los Angeles overreacted by closing their schools?

Commissioner Bratton: Based on the information I'm working with, if that's the same information they had, I think yes. It's what they want – whether it's a prankster or a terrorist – that they want to instill fear, they want to disrupt the normal routine. And LA is a huge school system – 600 square-mile school system. And to disrupt the daily schedules of half-a-million school children, their parents, daycare, buses, based on an anonymous email with no consultation, if, in fact, consolation did not occur with law enforcement authorities – I think it was a significant overreaction, yes.

Mayor: Anything else on this topic? On any of the policing topics? Take it away, Steve.

Question: Yes, I wanted to ask about the homicide investigation in the 7-3. An elderly woman who died last month – it was discovered by a funeral home director a month later that she in fact was murdered. Just wondering how is it possible that the ME signed off on her death certificate. If you can give –

Chief of Department James O'Neill, NYPD: To answer the question quickly, the ME did not sign off. I'll explain it as I go forward. Presently, the 7-3 Precinct [inaudible] as well as [inaudible] are investigating the homicide of [inaudible] who lives at 383 Powell Street, within the confines of the 7-3. That's part of the Woodson Houses. On the [inaudible] there was a call that she was not responding to her friends and family. We went into the apartment – EMS, as well as patrol units who found the body of [inaudible] underneath the table. At that time, the brief investigation found that she was suffering from hypertension and diabetes [...] custody until arrangements could be made, at which time the family doctor is notified. They did find a funeral director, at which time the funeral director picked up the death certificate and had the doctor – family doctor – sign it. The family doctor, as far as we can tell in our determination right now, never viewed the body. The body stayed for about a month in the morgue, at which time the body was then removed by the funeral director to the funeral home, where that funeral director discovered a stab wound in her neck and also some bruising in her face. The body was then immediately removed to the OCME's office, where Dr. [inaudible] determined it was death by homicide – stab wound to the neck, bruising around the face, and three broken ribs, which were not easily determined by initial viewing. That's where we are right now. The OCME – and we're working with them, we have a lot of work to do on the case – one of the questions came up that her credit card was used. We found that not to have happened – she used the credit card just prior to her demise. So that's where we are in the investigation right now.

Question: Any leads? Or anyone who you're in particular – who you're questioning at this point?

Chief O'Neill: We do, but we will not say anything at this time, because we need some confidentiality in the case.

Question: Thank you.

Unknown: [inaudible]

Question: Commissioner, you said that the NYPD has fewer tools now than you did in the 1990s to deal with the homeless issue on the streets of New York City. Could you explain that for us, please?

Commissioner Bratton: [inaudible]. As police we work with ordinances, rules, regulations, and the laws. There have been some changes in the laws since the 90s, both in the transit system, which I had a lot of intimacy with in the 90s, as well as in the streets. And several of them are specifically the reaffirmation of the Supreme Court that begging is protected under the First Amendment. So when you see somebody sitting on a sidewalk with a sign, begging, that is protected as free speech. There is nothing – nothing – we as a law enforcement agency can do to deal with that individual begging. Secondly, there have been, and Larry Byrne, [inaudible] –

Unknown: Come right here, Commissioner.

Commissioner Bratton: – that he has been researching and briefing us on this to give us guidance on what we can do. The issue of people that you’ll see occupying a public sidewalk – stretched out, sitting on the blocks with a sign – the courts – it has been determined in New York State, [inaudible] New York City, that we used to use a tool – obstructing free foot passage – the idea that if somebody was on a public sidewalk and blocking free foot passage, we could move them – if they were lying on a grate or lying on the sidewalk. That determination is that if you and I can walk around them, then they are not obstructing our foot passage, they’ve got to leave them alone – that – it [inaudible] the imagination, but I, at all times, am going to have to work within the law, unless we can change the law.

Mayor: Yeah, let me – let me add to that point that the – that means it’s a different legal environment than 20 years ago, let’s say. It doesn’t mean there aren’t lots of new strategies to be utilized. So, first of all, anybody who violates the law – a homeless person or anyone else – who harasses, who threatens people, who physically assaults someone, who urinates publicly – you name the typical either acts of violence or quality-of-life violations the NYPD deals with every day in every corner of the city from every kind of New Yorker – anybody who is homeless or on the street even if they’re not homeless, who violates the law, the NYPD will follow up very, very vigorously. And, in fact, it’s important – today’s a good day to note this – the NYPD has done such a great job of driving down serious and violent crime that more and more time is being freed up for our officers to address quality-of-life violations. So all those examples that I gave are now subject to a lot more attention by the NYPD. Also, as you heard earlier, 2000 more officers will be available within the next year, in terms of patrol strength – again, adding to our ability to address quality-of-life violations very quickly and aggressively. The neighborhood policing initiative will do the same. So I think New Yorkers should understand that, yes, the legal environment is different, but the overall crime environment is different, too. The NYPD of today has much more time, energy, focus, strategic capacity to go after these quality-of-life violations, and will. I think that’s a crucial part of the equation. We also have, on the Department of Homeless Services side, a new approach that we think will bear fruit in – in the next months, which is the Safe Haven program. So because we have people on the streets who don’t have a place they believe they can go safely – if they have felt for, you know, wrongly or rightly, they have felt they could not go to a traditional shelter – more and more, we’re adding these safe-haven beds that are in smaller facilities, often sponsored by a house of worship, that have proven very successful in being an environment where people come in off the streets, take advantage of mental health services, substance abuse services, start to get a different path – that’s something we did not have enough of in the past in New York City. We are now adding 500 new beds – they’re coming online as we speak. We think that’s going to make a real difference. The final point I want to make – Commissioner Bratton has spoken very powerfully to this – we need to understand we’re dealing with different kinds of realities on our streets. There are some people who, tragically – there’s about 4,000 of them in this city – between 3,000 and 4,000 – who are, if you will, quote-unquote “permanently homeless people” – literally 24/7 on the streets. Those tend to be single individuals. Those tend to be people with substance abuse and mental health problems, usually men. Those folks are particularly going to be affected by the greater availability of substance abuse, mental health services, safe havens. There is another group of people who panhandle, as the commissioner said, and sometimes do commit offenses, but are not homeless in that sense of being permanently on the street – some of them live in shelters, some of them live in their own homes – but go out on the street and panhandle. The law treats everyone the same. And the commissioner said it right – yes, as Americans, we’re guaranteed certain rights, but the second you cross the line and break the law – I don’t care if you’re homeless or you have a permanent address – if you break the law, the NYPD will enforce.

Deputy Commissioner Stephen Davis, Public Information, NYPD: Thank you. Two more for police matters – two more.

Question: On police matters – I’ll try to get two in at one time – maybe we can [inaudible].

Mayor: At least you’re honest about it.

Question: One, there’s a report out that still – registered sex offenders still living in NYCHA. This comes on the heel of the report last week that people with criminal backgrounds or who commit crimes are still in

NYCHA. Are you concerned about this? What's being done? And where would they live if you do put them out? And the second one is a pedestrian safety initiative that the NYPD is working on.

Mayor: Let me the start on the first one, pass to the commissioner. Look, we – we are adamant that we are going to create a much tighter working alliance between the Housing Authority and the police department. We said in the testimony before the City Council that, clearly, over the years, that relationship was not strong enough. The flow of information was not good enough. And we didn't have the kind of clear, sharp protocols to ensure that if someone was a threat to their fellow residents that that was addressed very aggressively and quickly. Now, I think there's been, just in the last two months, tremendous progress between the Housing Authority and the police department. And when we have an identified case that is one where someone should be removed from the premises or served with a warrant or any other kind of follow-up action, we're now in a position to have the two agencies act as one in achieving that enforcement.

Do you want to take the second part?

Deputy Commissioner Davis: Let the chief speak about this? Tom Chan?

Commissioner Bratton: Chief Secreto, who heads up our Housing Bureau Police to speak to the specificity of your question – sex offenders, there are different categories – one, two, three. And the chief will explain the significance of that as it relates to who can live and who cannot live in NYCHA properties. Chief? Chief Secreto, who heads up the Housing Bureau, as you know –

Chief James Secreto, Housing Bureau, NYPD: Level one's can live in housing. Levels two and three are prohibited from living in housing facilities – NYCHA facilities. We get notified from the sex registry unit daily. We monitor the database, bringing out the offenders that come into housing. We give that information to the domestic violence officers in the PSAs and they go out and do visits to – to see if these people are, in fact, living in housing. It's possible that they give an address when they're getting out – they need to give an address – that they used a housing address, not necessarily that they're staying there. I think one of your questions was, well, is this a problem? It can be a problem and, like the mayor, I'm a father and I'm also a grandfather. It would concern me if I'm living next door to a sex offender – certainly the level two's and three's that shouldn't be there and are the more serious of the sex offenders. We're going to use our sex offender monitoring unit to follow up and prioritize to see if this is, in fact, true. As of right now, we do a notification to NYCHA and they take it from there with their investigative unit. We're going to follow that up with our sex offender monitoring unit to prioritize and make sure that, in fact, these people aren't living in housing.

Mayor: What was your second question?

Question: About the pedestrian safety initiative in the NYPD. I mean, this comes after another person killed by a city bus. I know there's some initiative [inaudible] Chief Chan about the initiative that you're starting and continuing.

Chief Thomas Chan, Transportation Bureau, NYPD: Just working on last year's – the overall fatalities last year was reduced by 15.2 percent. And our largest category – [inaudible] for pedestrians – that was down 26 percent. This year, at this time, we're down 11 percent in total fatalities, and down 4.7 percent in pedestrian fatalities –

Mayor: Compared to last year.

Chief Chan: – compared to last year. Now, what will happen is that we're working closely with the Department of Aging. We identified over 200 senior citizen centers throughout the city, in all precincts throughout the city. And what will happen is that our officers will be targeting those locations for pedestrian safety, failure to yield to pedestrians, and other hazardous violations that affect the pedestrians. That also includes moving violations. Also, our TEB will be doing parking enforcement, targeting double-parkers, people who park in bus stops and hydrants – things of that nature that make it more difficult for our seniors to cross the street. Now, this initiative

started on Monday – yesterday – and this holiday pedestrian safety initiative will run until Sunday on the 20th of this month. So again, we’re working with our partners. We’ve identified a group of population that – seniors, 4 percent of the population, but nevertheless, 38 percent of our fatalities – so we’ll be concentrating on that effort.

Mayor: Let me add just one thing quickly. Look, the numbers, which, again, represent human beings, represent families, we have to understand that these numbers are profoundly meaningful. What the NYPD has done, together with the Department of Transportation and Taxi and Limousine Commission, is nothing short of extraordinary – last year, the lowest number of traffic fatalities since 1910 – over a century ago. The numbers this year are even better – we’re going to set new records this year for reducing those fatalities. Part of why this has happened is the NYPD believes in this profoundly. Commissioner Bratton, even in the days before I named him commissioner, had given a speech – you remember – expressing his passionate belief that police had to focus more on traffic fatalities. Chief Chan has done an absolutely extraordinary job over these last two years. So the story that should be told here is that the NYPD has been on the vanguard of creating a whole new approach to safety in this city. And they have embraced the mission of dealing with folks who – you know, drivers who don’t yield to pedestrians for example. Let’s face it – not yielding to pedestrians was tolerated in this city for decades. Under Chief Chan, under Commissioner Bratton, the NYPD of today does not tolerate that, and follows up aggressively. And the number of tickets that have been given out for failure to yield is the highest we’ve seen – and that means it’s going to change the behavior of drivers and protect more and more people. We’re not only right away protecting lives, we’re changing behavior for the long run. So, NYPD deserves tremendous credit on this.

Deputy Commissioner Davis: Last one, please.

Question: What preparations, if any, are you taking for a potential verdict in the Freddie Gray case – Freddie Gray cases? If there’s unrest or protests or anything like that.

Commissioner Bratton: We’ll stay aware of that, but I would not anticipate any impact in New York of significance. Might there be demonstrations? Certainly. But we would be prepared to deal with demonstrations of any scale. But I don’t really see what’s going on in Baltimore having significant impact up here in the sense of large-scale demonstrations. We’ve been dealing with continuing demonstrations throughout the year here that have been controlled to the extent you don’t even report on them anymore, because of the fact they are controlled and the people conducting the demonstrations are getting their voices heard. On the police end of it, we’ve had very few disorderly instances, because we monitor those demonstrations. So I don’t anticipate an issue with that.

Question: Do you have an update on the arsonist in Forest Hills?

Mayor: This is the last one.

Deputy Commissioner Davis: Okay, last one. Last one.

Question: I’m sorry.

Unknown: [inaudible], update on the Forest Hills arson?

Chief O’Neill: Currently we’re investigating two arson patterns within Forest Hills – the 112 Precinct. We believe right now they are more dissimilar than similar. Similar in geography, because they’re not that far away from each other in the same precinct – however, on different ends of the precinct. The one that we have, which occurred in the houses – in the renovation homes – were seven cases from October 20 to December 2. The second case was on one night last week, where he – where an individual started three garbage fires near Austin Boulevard, near the precinct. We have video from each one of those individuals. They look dissimilar at this point. We have a very strong person of interest right now on the second fire, and we’ll go forward that way.

Again, we'll – right now, we don't think they're connected, but we'll see as we go forward with the second investigation, which is more – we have more reason [inaudible].

Deputy Commissioner Davis: Thanks, all.

Question: Do you think they had similar motivations at all or –

Chief O'Neill: No. The motivations are different, because one was a garbage fire and one was [inaudible].

Deputy Commissioner Davis: Thank you, all.

###