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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION PROMOTION AND RECRUIT GRADUATION
CEREMONY**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone.

Audience: Good morning.

Mayor: Well, this is a wonderful day. This is a wonderful day for a group of people who are going to do something great for this city. And I want to congratulate all of you for the step you are taking, for becoming members of New York's Boldest.

And I know you've got a lot of proud, proud family members here today. Family members, you deserve praise as well, for having helped each and every one of these individuals to this point. So, let's do a round of applause for everyone.

[Applause]

You know, it's a great day for the new members of this department. It's a great day for those who are being promoted today – both civilian and uniform members in this department, being promoted. A lot is happening today.

And Bishop Brown framed it perfectly. This is a moment when people are making a noble choice, a powerful choice, a choice that is going to have a huge impact on thousands and thousands of people going forward. You're embarking upon work of extraordinary importance, because it has to do with, literally, the lives of human beings, their trajectory of their futures, and therefore, of their family members as well – the lives that you will touch and shape and change, the force of so many families, and of course, of our city as well.

And we're calling upon you, to not only do that work with honor and distinction and commitment, but to recognize that you are part of a great change, a great reform, a new way of doing things, that we believe fundamentally will lead to a very different future for everyone involved. And I'll speak about that, but I wanted to say up front, I thought Bishop Brown said it powerfully. I want to thank him for his words.

As human beings, we're always engaged in the process of change. The question is how conscious of it are we, how much do we do with it, how much do we make it our own – how much do we take something that wasn't good enough, and demand more, and say that we won't accept anything less than what we believe is truly right.

You're joining this department at a powerful moment, a moment when the eyes of the city are on this agency. A lot of investment is happening in this agency. A lot of energy is going into lifting it up, and making it stronger, and righting some of the wrongs of the past. It's exciting to have the new blood, the new energy, the new ideas you'll bring. Remember, each and every one of you is starting out. You're going to contribute to the new reality, but you're also the future leaders of this agency. What you're already doing and experiencing, what you're going to bring to bear, will shape the future. And many of you will choose to make this a life's work. And with each year, you will get smarter, you will get more insightful and wiser about what can be done to keep making it better all the time. That is part of what we are as New Yorkers, and what we're so proud of as New Yorkers is we don't fear change, we don't fear innovation – New Yorkers thrive in an atmosphere of innovation, of progress. It's why we are the greatest city in the world. And that is what's happening here, in this department, and you will help to shape that.

Now, it's my honor to be with you, because I understand how important your work is, and it's fair to say that people who do this work often don't get enough credit. But I have the honor of being the elected leader of all 8.4 million New Yorkers. I want you to hear directly from me how much I appreciate the decision that you've made – how much I appreciate all of the people of this agency, because this is crucially important work.

And it's not for the timid. It's not easy. No one ever said it was easy. When we talk about New York's Boldest, to me, that is a direct acknowledgement of the fact that this is difficult work. We're dealing with people whose lives have gone astray, and trying to get them right. That's difficult. It takes bold people. It takes inventive people. It takes people with a vision – a belief that they can do something better, make something better of a tough situation. And I honor you for making that choice. It is a noble choice.

Now, you have great leaders. You have great leaders who have the trust of all of us at City Hall, and in whom we are investing, in the leaders of this agency who have called upon City Hall to invest further, and we are answering that call. And I want to thank Commissioner Ponte – four decades of experience, and a national reputation as a change agent, a reformer. But he started one day – Commissioner Ponte, what year was that that you sat in the same kind of chair as they are? One day in 1969 – sorry I gave away your age – one day in 1969, Commissioner Ponte was sitting in a place like this, taking the same oath you're about to take. And he devoted his life to this work, to great effect, and in a way that, again, affected thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people. So I want to thank him for his leadership.

I want to thank the leadership team of this agency – a lot of great people here. I want to particularly thank our first deputy commissioner, Mr. Dzurenda, and our deputy commissioner for human resources, Ms. Simon. And I want to congratulate one of the people being formally promoted today to a crucial role in this department. I want to congratulate Chief of Department

Martin Murphy, for taking on this extraordinarily important role for this agency. It's a great leadership team, and a team that will move this agency forward.

I also want to thank our colleagues in labor, who we work with to better the work of this agency

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Sidney Schwartzbaum, the president of Deputy Wardens' Assistants, Deputy Wardens, and Norman Seabrook, the president of COBA. Thank you both for being a part of this great day.

Today is another step in a new era of the Department of Correction. It's a time to commit ourselves to doing something better, doing something smarter – to talk about the ways the lives of inmates, and officers, and civilian employees [inaudible] safer, something that will lead to more progress and more success in the work. For too long, the environment here just wasn't right. It wasn't fair to anyone. There wasn't the kind of respect in the work for each and every individual involved, because the approach wasn't right, the resources weren't right. And we set out to change that in a very visible manner. People often had to deal with an environment – again, everyone who did this work, and all the people in these [inaudible] to deal with an environment that was dehumanizing. We want to create an environment that is filled with possibility, that is filled with progress. And that's why we're going to be implementing a comprehensive plan, and that's why we chose Commissioner Ponte, because he had the walked the walk, and he is known all over the country. He has shown that things could change, productively and effectively.

We named, out loud, a set of goals that were different, a set of ideas that will take hard work, but will move us forward. He said we have to end punitive segregation for adolescents [inaudible] move to end punitive segregation for 18- to 21-year-olds by the end of this year. We are doing that because it's the right thing to do. But there's a lot of other things we have to do in light of that to ensure we keep progress at this agency, and ensure the safety of all of you – everyone who does this hard work. You are creating a nation – a model for the nation. You're literally creating a new model. The eyes of the nation are on this agency. We're going to do things differently, but we're going to make the investments to ensure the safety of all involved.

One example, our new enhanced supervision housing, opening in a few weeks – special housing for the most dangerous inmates. And the truth that you all know already from your intensive preparation, you learn in the work a very small percent of the inmate population drives a majority of the violence. So, we're going to deal with that group in a different way, and at the same time, undertake a host of reforms that will reduce the level of violence overall, that will improve our ability to address one of the biggest challenges this agency faces – the challenge of mental health, mental illness, that afflicts so many of the people that you are here to rehabilitate.

We understand all these pieces connect. You can't look at the question of violence without looking at the question of mental health. And we know that you deserve that issue to be treated, first and foremost, for what it is. And that's why we're investing separately in the issue of mental health.

Now, in the coming months I look forward to visiting Rikers Island again to see this enhanced supervision housing, and the other forms in effect, and to show the people of New York City that

progress is being made. Because, again, for too long, things weren't looked at squarely, and the work of so many good people was not appreciated and celebrated. And instead of saying, let's acknowledge a problem and act on it, the issue was shoved to the side. Now, the attention of the city is here, and we believe that is productive, and that is right, and that will keep driving progress and investment.

I know you're going to serve with courage. I know you're going to serve with professionalism. I know you're going to serve with integrity. You have made a bold choice and you know the standards are high. And I have faith because you've made this choice that your commitment is deep. I also have faith in what we're doing to ensure that the people chosen for this job are chosen through an even more rigorous and selective process, an even more demanding approach, that clearly sees out those who can do best at this challenge. Well, we've invested in that as well – \$3.6 million to expand our recruitment unit and our Applicant Investigation Unit to make sure that everyone that comes in here and puts on that uniform is the very, very best.

I just want to offer you a story – one of you today, Chrismelly Bautista – while at the Correction Academy, he was also earning a college degree at John Jay, a double major – Criminal Justice and Criminology – simultaneously doing both – long days, as you know, of physical training and the classes; all that you just went through; sleepless nights studying. It's a tough thing to do simultaneously. And on the final day of finals – the day of the final exams – exposed to chemical agents as part of the training at the academy, so taking college exams with red and swollen eyes – that's an example. One of you – and I'm sure in so many other extraordinary stories of commitment and focus – but for Chrismelly, incredible grit and drive to succeed, and desire to be a correction officer because of all that that means, because of all the good that can be done.

All of you have a story. All of you have an example that drove you – what sustained you. And you're going to take that same spirit every day when you do the work you do. 17 of you I want to thank in particular, because you already served your nation in the armed services, and now you're coming back to do even more service. And that is an extraordinary level of commitment and we thank you for that. Many of you – let's thank – let's clap for all the veterans. We appreciate them.

[Applause]

For many of you, you are following in the footsteps of loved ones and great examples of role models in your lives – parents, uncles, aunts, siblings. And that gives you a special sense of how important this work is. And you know that the training is more rigorous than ever. The focus is on building practical skills to get you ready to do this work. I know the Queens House of Detention – you got training in real-life situations, that we saw on the video. You're learning how to deal with crises. You're learning how to deal with the challenges of mental health. And more and more of that training is going to be offered for the whole DOC team, for all the employees to learn how to address these underlying challenges in mental health. We're going to have a focus throughout – as you've learned – how to deescalate, how to reduce violence, how to work productively to solve incredibly complicated situations, how to keep our jails safe and – in the process, change the lives of thousands for the better.

There is a reason this agency is called Department of Correction – a very powerful concept, correcting lives of individuals who went astray. Again – tough, challenging, complicated work. Now, think of it one by one, think of every life that you help to turn around and what that means – what that means for so many people. So, we’re going to continue to improve on the training and preparation – all that you need, and that the generations that come after you will need, to be the very best.

I want to end with one story before I offer you the oath of office – one story that really should remind you what a privilege it is to wear that uniform, and how many people would love to have that opportunity, and how many people work hard to have that opportunity. I know you used the story of one amongst you, Michael Early. Michael was a member of FDNY – firefighter Battalion 32 – and he had to leave the FDNY, for a very noble reason, because his family needed him – he had to care for his ailing mother. He put family first and I commend him for that. But he still had a deep yearning for public service. And his mother – may she rest in peace – she had a dream for him. He had a dream for himself – going to college, getting a BA in Criminal Justice and continuing to serve in this field. At 45 years old he is becoming a correction officer, and that is noble choice. And a lot of people asked him why. Well, Michael’s resolve never wavered. He had a simple answer. I think it’s an answer that every one of you could say in your own way – Michael said, “I know I am here for a purpose.” It’s true of all of you – you’re here for a purpose. You have answered the call to service. You’ve made a noble choice.

On behalf of all 8.4 million New Yorkers, I thank you for that choice and I commend you for the path you’ve embarked upon. And now, it is my honor to issue the oath of office. Please stand and raise your right hand.

[Mayor de Blasio delivers oath of office]

Congratulations. Welcome to New York’s Boldest.

[Applause]

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