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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW

Brian Lehrer: It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC. Good morning, again, everyone, and as usual at this time on Fridays, it's time for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment – my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Or you can tweet a question watch our Twitter feed go by, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor so we can easily spot it, and good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. How are you doing?

Lehrer: I'm doing okay, thank you, and let's get right to vaccine distribution, which we were talking about in a previous segment, and the opening of Citi Field as a supersite in Queens. It opened, from what I've seen, without a super supply, and people were frustrated that if they showed up, they couldn't sign up, they needed to go to their phones or their computers and hope there were slots. You were trying to remedy that. Has any of that changed as of this morning?

Mayor: Yeah, absolutely. First of all, what we've been saying throughout this crisis is the important thing is to go online or go to the phones to make those appointments. We really don't want people showing up, waiting in a line to make an appointment. That's not the effective way to do things. We want to keep people safe. We want to avoid lines. That's why the whole idea is to do everything by appointment. Folks who did show up that first day were engaged by navigators from Health + Hospitals to get them an appointment. As far as I heard, the vast majority were locked in for an upcoming appointment. But look, here's the deal with Citi Field. It starting small next week, it goes to 4,000 appointments per week, but we want to go to the 35,000 per week. We can do 5,000 people a day at Citi Field. If we get the supply from the federal government and the state, and right now we are not getting what we need. I think given that we're not getting our fair share where the City of New York is vaccinating people who live in New York City, but also from our allotment, a lot of people from outside of New York City are getting their vaccine. The State needs to increase the allotment to New York City to compensate for that reality, and really the best solution would be for the federal government to do a direct allocation to New York City. Just reduce the red tape and the confusion and give us the most we can get each week. Because right now we are at the point where we could be doing 400,000 – 500,000 vaccinations per week, if we just had the supply.

Lehrer: If you're opening more sites and super sites and bringing more people into eligibility, without appreciably a faster pace of doses arriving yet, is that just going to make things more frustrating and at the same time harder for the 65-plus New Yorkers, and teachers, and others who already qualify, but couldn't find slots in many cases?

Mayor: Look, I think it's the more egalitarian approach to say for folks who are truly in need, folks with preexisting conditions, folks who are 65 years old and older, and obviously our frontline essential workers to give maximum opportunity. We know there's still a lot of people, Brian, who has had the opportunity and chose not to get vaccinated. That's still a very real trend. But for those who are eligible and want it, I think giving an equality of opportunity is the right thing to do, but we need supply, and so right now – I mean the truth is we are, each week, getting somewhat more supply and we're going to see a huge bump when Johnson and Johnson vaccines arrive, which are also single dose. So, that's been increased efficiency and that's really a matter of weeks now, and I've been talking to the Biden team and there's no question, each week effectively, will get better. I think March will be a lot better than February. So, we know we – and we are banking, I think, very substantively on an increase in supply, but there's still things that could be done right now to simplify the process. Direct allotment from the federal government would simplify the process, reducing a lot of the red tape that we've experienced and lack of flexibility from the federal government or State, the ability to use second doses now, knowing that more supply is coming, a greater supply each week is coming. So, I think it's right to invite people in, but I think the federal government and State government can do more to speed this process up for us.

Lehrer: Before we go to the phones, all this opening of things, restaurants today, then on February 23rd, per the Governor, outdoor stadiums, indoor arenas like Barclays Center and Madison Square Garden at limited capacity. Bad timing with the variants expected to run rampant in America over the next few months?

Mayor: Very important question, Brian, I mean that, you know, in the deepest sense, open question. We need to keep our eyes focused on the data and the science. I talk to my health care team every day about what they're seeing, not only in New York City, but what they're seeing around the country around the world. We're deeply concerned about these variants. They're the X-factor right now. So, the jury is still out and we have to be able to make quick decisions. If we see a problem. Today, we can make those decisions work there, the state's decisions, but we'll implement them and make sure it's being done safely. But you know, each week we got to watch to see if we need to vary the approach.

Lehrer: One follow up on this, and I'm curious how much you grapple with, you know, how much to open, how much to close, even beyond the details of what we just discussed? Like, I know you're a baseball fan. I don't know if you're a tennis fan, but I was watching Serena Williams' determined comeback at the Australian Open last night, very gritty performance when she didn't have her best stuff, but there was a subplot. They announced during the match that starting today, they will stop allowing fans into the stadium, and there will be a general lockdown in Melbourne area with a real five-day stay at home order beyond what we've ever done, as I understand it in this country. Why? Because there was a small outbreak of the British variant. As the AP reports there today, the outbreak has only at most 13 people, and they're pretty much locking down Melbourne, Australia for the next five days. What do you think when you see something like that?

Mayor: I think every place is different. Every place has had a very different experience. I also think, you know, they're a very big island and they have a different interconnection to the rest of the world, and more sensitivity perhaps to what the numbers should be. But look, let's talk about this specific reality of the variant with a note – on a sports note, anyone who wants to praise Tom

Brady for agelessness, better praise Serena Williams for agelessness too. I mean, she's just unbelievable.

Lehrer: Her opponent last night was half her age.

Mayor: Yeah, I mean, come on. This is a, I think it's such an extraordinary display, not just grit, but determination and refusing to lose, refusing to age. So, God bless her.

Lehrer: And welcome folks to Sports Talk 93.9, but go ahead.

Mayor: That's right. I – that's our next show, Brian. That's, we'll start that next year. But look, I, as a fan, I'm very much a baseball fan, I'm a basketball fan. I mean, I think there's a way to bring people back safely. But again, you have to watch constantly for things that might change. So, the folks in Australia, I respect that they make different decisions based on the data and the science, and if they see a threat, they make an alteration. We're watching these variants really closely, and, you know, I talked to my health team about it, Brian. There's a couple of things we know, and a lot we don't know. We know they're more contagious. We fear in some cases, they could be more deadly, but that, that is not proven yet. We believe the vaccines are effective against them broadly, but still need more information. There's a big question here. So, I think it's fine to say let's take some incremental steps because we do need to continue our recovery. I'm going to talk about all year is a recovery for all of us, an equitable recovery for New York City. We're going to be moving vaccination intensely. I want five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. I want to see our economy come back. But if at any point the data and the science suggests we have to take a different tack for a period of time, we've got to be willing to acknowledge that and act. It really means listening to the health care leadership.

Lehrer: Logan, in Brooklyn. You're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Logan.

Question: Hi, thank you so much for taking my call, Brian. Mr. Mayor, whenever you're asked on the show about holding the NYPD accountable, you reference the discipline matrix, and you say that due process is important. But the matrix only lists penalties for police misconduct that get to the stage of a formal administrative discipline charge, which is rare. And then it gives ultimate authority to the Police Commissioner to enforce those penalties, if the case ever gets to an administrative trial. So, it's really up to the NYPD, and to you, to decide whether or not officers will be fired for brutality, killings, and gender-based violence. And just on January 29th, during this segment, you refused to commit to scheduling a disciplinary trial for NYPD Officer Wayne Isaacs, who killed Delrawn Small in 2016. You said that the trial's moving forward, but there's still no date, even though Delrawn Small was killed by Isaacs almost five years ago. So, how do we know that the NYPD won't keep delaying? Will you commit to setting a date for Wayne Isaacs' disciplinary trial and will you support the demands that Isaacs be fired and not be allowed to retire with benefits?

Mayor: Again, Brian, thank you for the question. And I just want to say to the first part of the question, we announced the discipline matrix, and again, I understand folks are going to advocate for different positions, but I also hope when there's a fundamental change, it's acknowledged. This is something the Civilian Complaint Review Board fought for – a discipline matrix that very strictly says what the penalties will be in each case, and these are the cases that matter the most. You said some things aren't covered. I would ask the public to go online to nyc.gov and look at the discipline matrix. It covers a huge range of offenses. There are very clear

penalties – certainly, as you said, gender-based offenses, 100 percent are there, hate speeches. There are a whole host of offenses and we hope we never have officers doing any of those. But it is quite comprehensive. And what I've said, the CCRB has said, the Police Commissioner has said, we are going to honor the matrix, period. So, the notion that State law says the Commissioner has ultimate authority, that's true. That's what State law says. What we've said and why there's the MOU, a memorandum of understanding between the CCRB and the NYPD is we will honor the matrix as written. To the individual case that you're talking about, it will be scheduled. I will make sure we get a date for that and announce that date. I know people care a lot about it. But it is due process – I am not going to prejudge due process. There's been due process already in this case that has yielded outcomes. This is a different due process. When we see the result of due process, that's when the penalties will be determined.

Lehrer: On the Police Commissioner having final disciplinary authority, City Council Speaker Corey Johnson was here this week talking about the new package of bills and resolutions that City Council unveiled. And one of the things is removing the Police Commissioner's final disciplinary authority over even substantiated cases per the Civilian Complaint Review Board. Another one was that future police commissioners should need confirmation by City Council. Do you support either of those things? If either of those make it in a bill to your desk, will you sign them?

Mayor: So, let me just answer it by saying we are beginning a two-month process with the City Council. There's going to be public hearings. There's been a lot of input already, but there's going to be even more. I'm not going to go point by point. We're going to come up with a plan with the Council that will be voted on by the end of March. And as I have a dialogue with the Council and with community members, we'll decide how to handle each of these items. But I do want to say to the first question – this is real important. The current State law is clear, and we have to be mindful about litigation risks here. We just created this disciplinary matrix. It's revolutionizing police discipline. Ask the Civilian Complaint Review Board, they will tell you this fundamentally changes police discipline. It empowers the Civilian Complaint Review Board. I've announced a series of additional changes, what I'm calling the David Dinkins Plan – a series of steps that we're taking now to empower further and strengthen the hand of the Civilian Complaint Review Board. But that's key is State law right now, if we were to say, “hey, we're going to simply take the commissioner out of the process entirely,” I think that creates a State law problem and litigation risk. I think it creates the danger that these things will revert back to collective bargaining with the police unions, who clearly would try and water down these reforms. So, there are real issues here that have to be looked at. The best way to handle this is the discipline matrix, and because there's a legal MOU, a legal memorandum of understanding between the CCRB and the police department, that says the police department will abide by this matrix, and I've said it, and the Commissioner said it, I think that is the smartest way to change the discipline process.

Lehrer: Question from Twitter. Listener Jenny asks “I'm a teacher who can't get a vaccine appointment. I'm being called back into the building, which would be fine, but I feel unprotected. Mayor and Carranza,” the Chancellor, “said we would have priority. Not feeling prioritized.” What can you tell that teacher?

Mayor: Well, we'd love to get Jenny's information and help make sure she knows where she can get one of those prioritized appointments, especially during the school vacation week. We'll have thousands of appointments available for teachers and school staff. But I also want to remind

everyone our schools are amongst the safest places in the entire city. I look at the data daily on positivity levels for COVID in our schools. It's extraordinarily low. We're testing every school every week, whether someone is vaccinated or not, they're going to be safe in our schools. And obviously, you know, tens of thousands of teachers and staff have been teaching the whole way through since September, in a very safe environment. Much safer, bluntly, than many other places in New York City. So, I can assure Jenny, that first of all, we'll help her in every way to get prioritized testing opportunities, but second, she'll be going into an atmosphere that's literally the gold standard of health and safety in the city.

Lehrer: And Jenny, if you're still listening, we're going to direct message you from Twitter, via Twitter, and get your contact information, if you want to share it privately with us. And we will pass it along to the Mayor's Office as the Mayor invited us to do. Another one from Twitter. Listener asks, "are there any jobs for nonmedical folks at the mass vaccination sites? Out of work hospitality workers with computer, event, and people's skills want to know and how to apply. Hard to figure out." Are there such jobs at the mass vaccination sites?

Mayor: There has been an effort and we can get the details to you, and certainly the listener, please pass along their information, we'll connect them to it. There's an effort to hire thousands of vaccinators, and folks can do that work, because there's different roles. Some of it is directly giving the vaccine and some is the work around the process where folks with hospitality background could be really well suited to it. So yes, just like we hired thousands of people into the Test and Trace Corps, we are hiring thousands of people for the vaccination effort. We'd love to see if your listener would be a good fit.

Lehrer: Chris, in Richwood you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Chris.

Question: Hi, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor. Thanks so much for taking my call. I have recently moved because of loud neighbors. And I ended up in an apartment that has even louder neighbors and paper-thin walls. It's an apartment that was renovated quite recently, all the walls were taken down and rebuilt as many buildings in my neighborhood. And I can hear everything that's happening at my neighbor's apartment. And they are pretty loud. They also just like me, they work from home. They're photographers so they work at all times a day and night. And I have a home office. And at this point I can't use the home office because I can't work there. They can hear my conversations. I can hear theirs. I can't sleep because they work at night. And I've been trying everything to solve this problem. I've contacted all agencies, tenants' rights agencies, tenant lawyers, the DOB, pretty much everyone that I could and nobody can help me.

Lehrer: Let me get you a response. And Mr. Mayor, some things never changed in New York, even in pandemic and insurrectionist times. Violations, potentially of the noise code by neighbors. Can we help Chris?

Mayor: Yeah. Chris, I'm very sorry you're going through that. And especially because on top of the pandemic and a lot more people working from home, you know, it just adds to the stresses that everyone's already been through. And you've obviously been through, so I'm sorry you're going through that. Our tenant protection office can certainly try to help. I mean, sometimes we'd be able to mediate situations like this and figure out solutions with folks. And if, of course, there's any violation of law, we would act on that too. So, if you give your information to

WNYC, our tenant protection office will follow up with you and hopefully we can find some way to improve your situation.

Lehrer: Do you know what the general city guidelines are or law? I mean, you can't stop somebody from living in the apartment next door, but when does it become a violation?

Mayor: I cannot pretend to tell you the exact chapter and verse. I think, you know, some of this is common sense. If a neighbor is really being disrespectful of someone's rights you know, we know, again, there's the opportunity sometimes to mediate, sometimes if you're dealing with a good and thoughtful landlord, they step in and try and help address the situation too. But there are situations where there are noise code violations, where something's egregious enough, you know, it might enter into some kind of violation. So yeah, I think the bottom line is let's see if we can mediate in this case. And if someone's having this problem, you know, again, our tenant protection folks will always try to see if we can find a solution.

Lehrer: Felicia, in Ozone Park, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Felicia.

Question: Hi. Good morning. My name is Felicia [Inaudible]. I'm a daughter of a taxi driver. My father has been a taxi driver for 32 years. He's done all the right things. He's paid his mortgage, his taxi fees – excuse me. He's an aging immigrant and he will never be able to retire because of the City's negligence. We now have 83 days left before the United States Bankruptcy Court takes our home because we have to file for bankruptcy because we were unable to pay our medallion. 950 medallion owners have filed for bankruptcy. This is not the first time this has happened. And this is not the last time. You said we needed federal relief and federal relief is possible with the stimulus bill which needs to include a plan to pass Congressman Meeks's bill, House Bill 5617, for tax exemption on medallion debt forgiveness. Senator Schumer has pledged his leadership to involve the medallion – to be involved in the medallion debt crisis to fix it. And this has already been approved by Attorney General James and our Comptroller Scott Stringer, for passing the Taxi Workers Alliance plan. So really my question is, will you commit to using stimulus relief like you said? We need federal relief to provide debt relief for taxi drivers and commit to the plan built by New York Taxi Workers Alliance. Because I have 83 days before I'm unhoused with my family, and this will happen to many more families. So, we need an answer from you, Mr. Mayor. We need you to find the courage and the moral will to step forward and provide relief today.

Mayor: Felicia, I want to say first, I'm hearing deeply what you and your family are going through. It sounds horrifying, and I don't want to see anyone go through that. I really don't. It's no lack of will. There have been plans put forward over time that were far beyond what the City could do. And that's why I said, if we're really going to have relief, this was not, I disagree with one point. The mistake here, the most profound mistake was the loose lending rules. Those were federal rules, those were State rules. That was their oversight. It was not the City of New York. I just need to say that. But it doesn't change the human reality. The human reality is unacceptable. And we've tried to take a number of steps to help taxi drivers, but we haven't had the resources to do it right. The stimulus would give us that. Absolutely, we get stimulus dollars, we're going to be able to do something to help taxi drivers. The specific plan – I need to give you an answer, whether we think that plan is the right approach or a different one. But we will do that quickly. And I am hopeful, more hopeful than I've been in a long time about stimulus dollars getting here. Because we're really seeing finally, some action in the Congress. In your particular case, Felicia,

please give your information to WNYC because I would like both our tenant protection team and Taxi and Limousine to see if there's anything we can do to intervene to forestall what's happening to you and your family. Because there's other tools available that we can bring to bear to help. So please let us see if we can do something right now to help you. But yes, look, I am very hopeful that we're going to get the kind of stimulus that will allow us to do a specific plan to help taxi drivers. I want to, I believe in it, but I need the resources to do it.

Lehrer: And there's no way – and Felicia, hang on and we will take your contact off the air. So maybe you can help this one person, but you know we get calls all the time for you from taxi drivers, in this case, a taxi driver's daughter. Is there no way to put a higher priority? I don't know what you would cut. I admit that, but on the funds that the City has for these stories of desperation, through no fault of their own, so many drivers are losing their life savings?

Mayor: I appreciate your whole frame there, Brian. Because again, I want to help them. I've talked to a lot of taxi drivers and have heard about what their families have been through. It is horrifying. Taking the resources we have, which are profoundly limited. We've lost \$10.5 billion in City revenue in this crisis, we have greater needs than ever to provide health and safety and food to people who are hungry. The demands of the City are extraordinarily intense and we have no guarantee yet on the stimulus. That's why it's been really hard to say we're going to be a position to bail out individuals. I want to find a way to help. The different plans out there, most of the plans I saw previously were hundreds of millions of dollars, even into the billions. We just can't do that. I know there's a newer plan that suggests it could be done for a lot less. I want to get an answer on that. See if we can get that done. But the most important thing is if we have stimulus money, then we're finally in a position to help these drivers.

Lehrer: We may, Mr. Mayor, have our youngest Ask the Mayor caller ever teed up next. It looks like we have sixth grader, Liz, in Crown Heights calling in. Liz, you're on WNYC, hello?

Question: Hello.

Lehrer: Hey there. You're on the air with the Mayor.

Question: Hi.

Mayor: How are you doing, Liz?

Lehrer: Go ahead and ask your question.

Question: I'm good. So, my question is when are you going to get Wi-Fi for kids that don't have access to Wi-Fi?

Mayor: It's a great question. I want to make sure you give your information to WNYC. If you're one of those kids, we can do that right away. We have been constantly bringing in more and more devices, iPads, and other devices. We're now getting up to the point of about 400,000 we've distributed. If any family needs service or different service than they have now so that the kids can, you know, participate in digital learning, we're getting them the service. We're doing all this for free for families who need it. So, if your family needs it, Liz, we want to get it to you right away.

Lehrer: Liz, I gather from my screener that you're advocating for others. Do you want to describe to the Mayor and to everybody, the situation that you're aware of?

Question: So, there's actually like, there's not like a ton of kids in my grade, but there are a few kids in my grade who haven't been able to attend like, the Zoom meetings. I mean the Google Meet meetings because they just don't have Wi-Fi. Like their parents can't pay for Wi-Fi or it's just, they're not in a place where they have Wi-Fi. So yeah, but I came up with a couple of things that – like I came up with the list of things that we could maybe do to get Wi-Fi for other kids. And some of my suggestions are put routers in school buses because since a lot of kids aren't going to school and even though schools are starting to open back up, there are still going to be tons of buses that, school buses that aren't going to be used so we could put routers in school buses. And put them in neighborhoods that don't usually have access to Wi-Fi. Another suggestion is we could set up Wi-Fi spots where maybe in like buildings that aren't being used, we could set up like, just space for kids to come in and use Wi-Fi, social distance, if their home doesn't have access to Wi-Fi.

Lehrer: Future mayor Liz, in Crown Heights.

Mayor: Yeah Liz, that's very good. Hey Liz, which school do you go to?

Question: I go to Brooklyn Green School.

Mayor: Brooklyn Green School, where's that?

Question: District 16.

Mayor: District 16, excellent. These are great ideas, Liz. I know folks have been thinking about different ways to get Wi-Fi service all over. But Liz, really, it would help us a lot if you could make sure the kids in your school and their families just get the information to WNYC or they can call 3-1-1. We not only will give the devices, we'll make sure the services are there so that families can get connected. And again, the cost is taken care of by the City, the service, the devices, we cover those costs. So, any kid who hasn't yet been connected, we'll find a way, one way or another. But I really love your suggestions. I really appreciate your looking out for the other kids in your school.

Lehrer: Liz, thank you so much. Before we run out of time and we almost are running out of time, but I want to get your reaction to two scandals if we have time. One is definitely a scandal. The other might be. The definite one involving a former homeless shelter boss and these new questions involving Governor Cuomo. For people who haven't heard, the shelter boss Victor Rivera story yet, the New York Times revealed and wrote that ten women, including employees of Mr. Rivera's organization and those who lived in its homeless shelters accused him of sexual assault or harassment. Several women tried to report Mr. Rivera's behavior to various State and City agencies, but he maintained his position. Two women were paid by his organization to ensure their silence, the Times reported. And even among the sexual abuse claims, Mr. Rivera's nonprofit, the Bronx Parent Housing Network, received millions in City funding says the Times. So, who made those funding decisions? And with what knowledge, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Mr. Rivera has been fired, that is really important to know. This was an important investigation. It has led to changes immediately. Any allegations of sexual harassment cannot be sent back to an organization. It has to be handled by an independent audit or independent oversight agency like our Department of Investigation. We've changed that approach based on this investigation. So, this literally will not happen again. It's unacceptable. The provider provides important homeless services, separate from the individual who did something obviously quite awful and now is paying the price for it.

Lehrer: Did the chain of information breakdown, or was the standard of suspicion needed to stop funding, set at too high a bar? Or how did this happen?

Mayor: No, I want to add real quick, we don't think stopping funding to an organization that actually provides good homeless services in a world where there's not enough organizations that do that, I don't want to see that organization cut off from doing the work of helping homeless people. I want to see an executive who did the wrong thing, punished and new leadership brought in. And that's exactly what's happening now. But there's a different standard. Now, any allegation like that will immediately be brought to Department of Investigation and there will have to be an outside investigation to determine immediate actions.

Lehrer: And briefly the Cuomo nursing home story, first reported by the New York Post. Here is a Politico description of it that the Post reported that Cuomo aide, Melissa de Rosa, told Democratic State Legislators in a meeting on Wednesday that the administration quote, froze when asked to release data about the number of nursing home residents who had died of COVID-19. A March directive from Cuomo calling on nursing homes to admit patients who tested positive for the coronavirus has been blamed for contributing to high death rates. So, what's your judgment of anything that Governor Cuomo did as this story is developing?

Mayor: It's a really disturbing report. It's very troubling. We've got to know more. We now need a full accounting of what happened. Think about seniors, who their lives were in the balance and their families, you know, just desperate to get them the help they needed. We need to know exactly what happened here. We need to make sure nothing like this ever happens again.

Lehrer: Thanks as always Mr. Mayor. Hope you and Chirlane have a happy Valentine's Day and I'll talk to you next week.

Mayor: We will. And thank you and happy Valentine's Day to all the listeners of WNYC.

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