

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 6, 2020, 7:00 PM

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Bobby Cuza: Good evening and welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, July 6th 2020. I'm Bobby Cuza. The holiday weekend saw a significant increase in shootings with 64 people reported injured in 44 shootings across the city. That comes after the month of June saw a 130 percent jump in shootings when compared to last year. NYPD leadership is blaming a number of factors, including bail reform efforts to reduce the jail population. Meanwhile, those in the police reform movement have said the spike should not slow the significant efforts to change the criminal justice system here in New York. Joining me to talk about this and much more from the Blue Room inside City Hall is Mayor de Blasio. Welcome back to the show Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Bobby. How you doing?

Cuza: I'm doing all right. So I heard you speak at length at your briefing this morning about some of the myriad factors responsible for this increase in shootings. We talked about young people who are sort of idle because of the COVID lockdown and because of a lack of jobs. You also talked about the court system not functioning, which I want to get back to in just a couple of minutes. But it seems police officials have sort of a different take on this. I want to play soundbite for you from the Police Commissioner Dermot Shea on NY1's morning show, Mornings on One today.

***Police Commissioner Dermot Shea:** We're in a perfect storm of sorts with COVID, with the Rikers population, but, you know -- look at the Rikers population of the last year. Ask a sane person, it's about half. And where is that other half right now? We've transplanted general population to the streets of New York City. And it's extremely frustrating.*

Cuza: Mr. Mayor, I wanted to sort of zero in on the Rikers issue. There were hundreds, if not thousands of people in jail at Rikers who were released because of COVID concerns. I wonder, in retrospect, whether you think that might've gone too far?

Mayor: No, Bobby, I think it was the right thing to do in the middle of a health crisis and a humanitarian crisis. We would have had a lot of people who would have died in Rikers, had we not done that because COVID-19 at that point was, you know, really, really surging in our jail system. But listen to what Commissioner Shea said, because he points to that perfect storm. And he points to what is happening overall because of the coronavirus, including the health challenges, logistical challenges to doing that. But we've got to get the system up and running so that when the police [inaudible] down on gun violence – this is something I've spoken about before on NY1. We've got to recognize that, you know, right now we're seeing a surge in gun violence and anyone who's a perpetrator of that violence, there has to be a consequence for.

Cuza: Mayor, something that we heard a few times today from police officials was a provision in this chokehold bill that was passed by the City Council, which bans not only chokeholds, but any sort of maneuver that restricts air flow to the diaphragm. Police say that is really going to restrict them. I wonder where you come down on that particular provision in the law? Is that something that you continue to support and that you support period?

Mayor: Yeah. Look, Bobby, the law, there was a change in the draft of the law at the last moment. And the NYPD has raised real concerns about it. But nonetheless, this is a law that is rooted in such deep concern in this city, that we have to move forward with it. But at the same time, we've got to listen to the concerns the NYPD is raising. So as we implement this law, there'll be new training for the NYPD. We've got to watch very carefully as to what happens as a result. And we all know we do not ever want to see anyone lose their life while they're in the middle of being arrested by a police officer. And we also have to make sure the police can do their job effectively. So this law will move forward, but we should keep a close eye on what happens in practice and make sure that we make the right adjustments as we go along.

Cuza: Terrence Monahan who participated in your briefing this morning, he said that out there on the street, there's a level of animosity towards the police and that people who are being arrested are fighting back with the police. I wonder if you have a sense that people who are committing crimes are sort of emboldened by the sort of anti-police sentiment that's out there that has grown out of this protest movement?

Mayor: Well, Bobby, the folks who commit crimes have been emboldened for a long, long time. They commit the crimes, even though they're illegal. I don't think that's new. I think there's a pain out there and a frustration. It comes out of, you know, a long, long history of issues that have to be addressed in a forthright way. Mistakes in policing, problems in policing that have to be addressed. And obviously structural racism that's existed within policing in New York City and beyond. We got to go out all of that. At the same time, there's a real yearning in communities, I've heard from community residents all over the city. They want to work with police. They want to see police officers there to protect them, but they want it to be fair. They want it to be respectful. And so I think for everyday New Yorkers, a lot of pain and frustration is coming up, but it is not stopping people from wanting to move forward. I think a lot of police officers are frustrated because they deserve respect for such an important profession. And at the same time they're feeling an atmosphere that in many ways is difficult for them. And I can feel for them too. Most New Yorkers want to move forward. They want effective policing. They want police to be there when they need them, but they want it to be fair. They want it to be respectful. That's how we're going to find the common ground to move forward. But the criminals have been with us for a long time. And you know, in the end, of course they are a very, very few, but they do a lot of damage to communities all over this city.

Cuza: All right, Mr. Mayor, it's time for a break. We will have much more with Mayor de Blasio straight ahead. Stay with us.

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Cuza: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I am once again joined by Mayor de Blasio, joining us from the Blue Room at City Hall. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about the Amy Cooper case. This is the woman who was caught on video that sort of went viral. She was walking her dog, a Black

man asked her to leash her dog. She ended up calling the police and telling them that she was being threatened by an African American man. The Manhattan DA today announced that she was being prosecuted, charged with falsely reporting an incident in the third degree, and is being arraigned in a couple of months, I believe. I wonder if you think that is deserved.

Mayor: Yeah, Bobby, I don't know if you can hear me. I lost sound there for a moment, but, Bobby, it's absolutely the right thing. I mean, that video was so painful. That was just overt racism and unacceptable. And it was clearly – I mean, in her mind, she was trying to suggest that the very reality of someone being an African American man was somehow criminal and illegal. And she has gotten what she deserved – that was false reporting of a crime and that should be prosecuted. And I think the District Attorney did the right thing.

Cuza: Mr. Mayor, I've heard you talk a couple of times about trying to work with the State and with the Port Authority Police, in particular, to try to get information on travelers who are coming in from some of these problem states where the coronavirus has spiked. I'm wondering how that's going to work if we're trying to track down what I presume would be thousands, tens of thousands of people who are coming in from, I think there's something like sixteen states on the list, on the Governor's list of states where you should quarantine if you travel from there. That seems like some undertaking. Is that something the City is prepared to do? Would you have to hire more contact tracers in order to track all those people down?

Mayor: You know, Bobby, we can do it. I mean, right now we've got thousands of contact tracers who have the capacity to reach a lot of people. We can keep hiring because there's nothing more important than stopping the spread of this disease. Everything we're talking about, all the crime issues we were talking about, everything we're talking about is contingent upon stopping the spread of the disease. So, we have the contact tracers. That's not a problem. What we need from the State is a list of everyone that comes in. And look, I don't think that should necessarily be voluntary. If someone comes off a plane from Florida and we have a law that says, or a rule that says you have to quarantine, I don't know why someone shouldn't be required to give their name and contact information, have it be confirmed with an ID, and then the State can pass that onto our Test and Trace team and we'll go find them and make sure they're quarantined and get them the support they deserve and they need. I think we need to go at this really aggressively. And if someone's coming into this state, into this city, it's not too much to ask of them that they let us know how to contact them.

Cuza: Mayor, I want to ask you about – going back to police reform and specifically moving school safety agents out from the Police Department and over to the Department of Education. There was some budget documents that were released late last week that showed that item in the budget. Something like \$326 million for school safety agents will remain part of the NYPD budget for this coming fiscal year. That came as news to City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, who said that he had a commitment that that was going to be taken out of the NYPD budget in this fiscal year. You know, there's a lot of talk about moving a billion dollars out of the NYPD budget. It seems like in this case, if that's not coming out of the budget this year, then that billion at the very least is coming in an out-year, right, and not in the year that we're entering now?

Mayor: Yeah. Look, Bobby, I think the important point is what I said from the beginning is, we are going to take money out of the NYPD put it into youth programming, social services. That's exactly what happened. And the fact is the transition of something as large as school safety was

not going to happen overnight. I said very publicly well before the budget was voted, this would be a two-year process. It has to be that way to be safe, to make sure it can be done safely. This is first and foremost, it's called school safety for a reason. The first job is to keep kids safe. And in the end, on top of everything that was done in the expense budget, you know, I made the decision to move another half-billion dollars in capital funding from NYPD projects to instead create community centers, youth recreation centers, broadband access for young people who live in public housing. What matters here was that there was a thorough commitment to move resources out of the NYPD, put them into community needs, in the communities hardest hit by the coronavirus, and do it in a way that would not undermine our need to keep people safe all over New York City in the middle of a tough moment in our history. And we struck that balance. So, everything is exactly as what we committed to. And I think we did it the right way.

Cuza: You guys obviously have a lot on your plate when it comes to planning for the upcoming school year. It's only a couple months away, but if you're a school safety agent, is anything changing for this coming school year? Is there anything – is there any difference between now and September?

Mayor: Yeah, there'll be a lot more training for school safety agents, training that will be provided by the Department of Education, a focus on some of the approaches that we've taken over these last years that really have worked restorative justice, social and emotional learning, getting away from a punitive approach, things like suspension, which were really horribly overused in the past and often used in a way that was de facto racist. And that's something we've cut back greatly. We want school safety to more and more focus on developing real relationships with young people, nurturing relationships, supportive relationships. A lot of school safety officers do that already, but we want to make it a systematic part of the training and more and more role from the education side, leading the efforts of school safety.

Cuza: Mr. Mayor, with regard to schools, I know you've been asked about this a lot and there's no finalized plan yet, but I wonder what the message is for parents out there given the fact that there's going to be some need for social distancing in schools in the fall. In the vast majority of cases, it seems that parents should be planning for the likelihood that there's going to be some type of blended learning in the fall, right? That their kids won't be in school five days a week for full days as has always been the norm.

Mayor: Yeah, look, we're in a great unknown here, Bobby, but here's some things I can tell you. First of all, the Department of Education went out and surveyed parents. They got an extraordinary response – 400,000 parents replied. Overwhelmingly, three-quarters said they wanted their kids back in school. The second thing I can tell you is our plan is to have school open in September. It will, of course, have to be a balance. We have some kids who are going to stay at home. We're going to have to support them with remote learning. Other kids will be in the school buildings, but we have to practice social distancing. So, we're going to have a lot less space. So, it will be some kind of blended system. We're going to talk a lot more about that this week, the Chancellor and I. But what my goal is, is to have kids back in school in September, it would be the maximum number of days in the school building each week possible and really restart the process aggressively. We've got a lot to catch up on as we go into the school year, it has to be aggressive. We have to set that goal and do everything we can to stick with it.

But safety is going to be – the health situation, that's going to be the number one concern in all of this, Bobby. We continue to make progress fighting back this disease, we're going to be able to go farther in reopening schools. If we have a problem on the health care front, if we don't think we can do it safely, that's going to alter our plans. But for now it's full steam ahead because we have to get ready. We have a little over two months, we got a lot to get ready in that time.

Cuza: You've got your work cut out for you, certainly. Mr. Mayor, thank you so much for being with us as always. We'll see you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Bobby.

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