

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 10, 2022, 9:00 AM

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS APPEARS LIVE ON CNN'S "SMERCONISH"

Michael Smerconish: Good morning. I'm Michael Smerconish in Philadelphia. America has a longstanding homeless problem. At least that's what we call it. I think it's much more complicated than a matter of shelter. On last week's program, I gave credit to New York City Mayor Eric Adams for taking it on. Others are not so supportive of his efforts. The mayor himself will join me in just a moment.

Adams has tasked first responders with enforcing a state law that was enacted in 2021 allowing them to involuntarily commit people experiencing a mental health crisis. The mayor called it a myth that the law only covered a "overt act" that the person may be suicidal, violent, or a danger to others. He said it also pertains to those whose illness "prevents them from meeting their own basic human needs to the extent that they are a danger to themselves." I said last week that the same standard actually exists in theory all over the country. What sets Mayor Adams apart is his willingness to act on it. Mayor Adams says we have a moral obligation to try and help, and yet his move immediately caused controversy.

In an opinion piece for The New York Times, Anthony Almojera, a lieutenant paramedic with New York's Fire Department Bureau of Emergency Medical Services wrote these words: "In nearly 20 years as a medical responder, I've never witnessed a mental health crisis like the one New York is currently experiencing. During the last week of November, 911 dispatchers received on average 425 calls a day for emotionally disturbed persons. But dispatching medical responders to wrangle mentally disturbed people living on the street and ferry them to overcrowded psychiatric facilities is not the answer." He lists overworked responders, swamped hospitals, and the breach of trust that it will cause among the homeless population.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams joins me now. Mayor, thank you so much for being here. As I said, you're getting lots of attention. It's mixed. When I looked at the directive, it occurred to me that your standard, are they at risk to themselves or others? It's the same as any other city. It's just that you're acting on the authority you have. Is that a fair encapsulation?

Mayor Eric Adams: Yes, it is, and it's a very clear one. We should be clear. If we are saying, "Let's leave the status quo," those who are saying that, that's basically stating leaving people on the streets who cannot take care of their basic needs and they are dangers to themselves or others. That's inhumane. I am not going to do that. I'm going to make sure we give people the care they

need and the care they deserve. And in many cases, they don't know they need that care because of their mental health illness.

Smerconish: Mayor, we know what it means to be a danger, to pose a danger to others. We can see that. Threatening conduct, violent action. But it's much more of a gray area to try and determine when an individual is at risk to themselves. How do we define that?

Mayor Adams: Well, there's clear training. We're using several ways of making a determination. First, based on the partnership we're having with mental health professionals. People continuously state the police are going to round up everyone with a mental health illness. That is just not true, and people are reading into our statement. What we are doing, we're going to train our mental health professionals, our outreach workers, and our law enforcement officers to look and make a determination and then reach out to clinical professionals, either remote viewing or some form of telecommunication, telemedicine, to also assist in that determination on the street. Now, after that, it is made that this person cannot take care of their basic needs, they then go to the hospital where a determination is made by a psychiatrist or psychologist. A professional will determine the next steps to be taken.

Smerconish: You know that a lawsuit was filed this week and folks say, critics say that you've lowered the bar and that now someone simply with a mental disability runs the risk of being locked up. To those folks, you would say what?

Mayor Adams: It's really unfortunate that we're trying to use our political motivation to get in the way of motivating people to take care of those individuals who need their basic needs. Everyone knows that my comments were clear. We are not taking everyone that has a mental illness into custody. We're not arresting people. All of this hysteria that's being raised, it's totally in conflict with New Yorkers. New Yorkers overwhelmingly understand that we cannot leave our fellow citizens on the street that cannot take their basic needs. I did not get to this point overnight. For the first two months, January and February, I went out, I sat in tents, I sat in encampments, I talked to people. You know what I saw? I saw people living with human waste, talking to themselves, drugs, paraphernalia, imagining things, hearing voices in their heads. After the end of February, I stated, "This is not the city we're going to live in where we're walking by our fellow New Yorkers that we know they cannot make those determinations of seeking help."

Smerconish: For the reasons that you just articulated, I said last week right here that maybe homeless or homelessness is not the right descriptor. Because, yes, shelter's a factor, they need to be housed. But so much of this is driven by mental illness and addiction. What should we call it?

Mayor Adams: That's a great question and I'll leave that up to the experts that's better than me. I sat down with our mental health professionals, other individuals, and sat in a room and they assisted me after my observations and the first subway safety plan, we continue observation. What we discovered, it was a lack of clarity. Our first responders did not know exactly what they could do if they came in contact with someone that clearly was imagining things. We cannot wait until they do something harmful to themselves or harmful to others, and we gave that clarity to our first responders. You know what I've learned? Change is hard. At any time you want to make a change, especially in New York with 8.8 million people, 30 million different opinions. But we know this is the right humane thing to do and we're going to move forward. And hopefully other

cities and states will see that we can't leave our fellow Americans on the street when they're in these conditions.

Smerconish: You know that you're going to be judged for how well you care for these folks, those that you do remove from the street. You ready for that?

Mayor Adams: Yes, I am. I did not become the mayor to climb a hill. I became the mayor to climb a mountain. Far too often, we're afraid to take action and we want to punt to another administration so we want to pretend as though the problem's not there. I want these problems. I noticed them for years as a police officer, I saw how we abandoned people, and I made that commitment. We're not. We're going to take these tough choices. We're going to go towards the problem. I ran towards gunshot as a cop. I'm going to run towards the problems we're facing in the city that is leading to the dysfunction of our city and how we can do better by the people of the city.

Smerconish: Well, it's heartbreaking and I wish you God's speed. I have an unrelated question before I let you go. The guy with the bat.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Smerconish: What the hell? \$7,500 and he's back out? That's heartbreaking and it's wrong. Correct?

Mayor Adams: It really is. Not only that, the individuals who plotted to shoot a synagogue, they're back out. The individual who shot three people, killed two, had a long record, he finally got caught. Every time we do our job as law enforcement and city administrators, we're seeing this revolving door catch, release, repeat system that's really playing out all across the country. I say this over and over again. When are we going to pass laws that are going to protect the innocent people of this city and this country? We have to stop passing laws that protect the guilty.

Smerconish: Agree with that, too. Mayor Adams, thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

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