

Skip Main Navigation

Menu

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Text Size

Select Language ▾

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Search Search

Secondary Navigation

MayorBiographyNewsOfficials

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Makes Announcement About NYPD Gun Violence Suppression Division

June 6, 2022

Video available at: <https://youtu.be/a9CnllQ6FPc>

Mayor Eric Adams Makes Public Safety-Related Announcemen



James Essig, Chief of Detectives, Police Department: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for coming. So we just showed you part of the reasons why shootings go down. So in the future, we hope with Gun Violence Suppression Division, with other resources that we have in this city, tackling this out of control gun violence that we've seen in previous years begins to decline, what you've seen in the last seven to eight weeks. We see a steady decline in shooting. So hopefully we start to get a handle on this. And with these cases goes a long, long way to bringing down the violence in this city. So, Chief Savino and his crew do an excellent job over here, as you see those gang takedowns. And I just want to emphasize the importance of this. This is not a huge, like they call them, roundups of gang members. These are specific targeted cases at people who are out there with a gun in their hand and think it's all right to shoot that gun in the city, sometimes hitting innocent people as we've seen tragically in the last few months.

Essig: So these are targeted enforcement on gang members, and we take those gang members off the streets, you see a dramatic reduction in the shooting. So we'll continue to hit that and I'll just pass that off to the mayor.

Mayor Eric Adams: Go ahead, chief.

Jason Savino, Commanding Officer, Gun Violence Suppression Division, Police Department: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And thank you also to Chief Essig. It's an absolute honor to take over your helm. You created Gun Violence Suppression Division, and you left us with a hell of a job and a hell of a team. So, first and foremost, we do have to thank our team very, very briefly. I have 200 investigators that believe in creating pristine cases, the absolute best cases that can be certainly corresponded, but they are the best of the best. And the way I like to say it is we are the best of the best, looking at the worst of the worst. Absolute great investigators. I'm surrounded by the team boss. I share your sentiment. When we include individuals in a takedown, these are by far the worst of the worst in the entire city, the trigger pullers, the alphas, the snakes' heads of the neighborhoods.

Savino: Everybody knows who these individuals are. When you walk into your neighborhood, these are the individuals that create just an uncomfortable quality of life. Not to mention, they have really the gall, if you will, to pull a trigger, regardless of who's around them, regardless of any unintended targets, something we've seen far too often, not only this year, but in prior years. We have to remember, bullets have no names. Bullets have no names. And we've seen that over and over again. So along with our team and the support from Detective Bureau, we're going to continue to look at every single street in this city and every gang in this city. So I do thank you for your time and much appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Adams: Thank you. And I am really proud of these guys and ladies that are here. They are at the heart of what I have been stating for some time. It's a small number of people who have made up their minds that they are going to inflict violence on our city. This is not a large number of people. It's a small number of people who are consistently inflicting violence. And so Chief Essig, for planting the seed of the Gun Violence Suppression unit. And now Jason as the commanding officer of this unit, continually going after the dangerous people, as they stated, the shooters. Now we've heard this before, "You're just rounding up innocent people and just lumping them into gangs." No. That is not what is happening. They are laser focused on the shooters. As they indicated the term, as you heard the alphas, who's driving the violence and what they're doing. And thanks to their work, we are seeing, you see the numbers, the charts are not lying.

Mayor Adams: This is saying the story that we have been talking about. If we zero in on those shooters and the individuals who are participating in the shootings, if we do the work to get it to the grand jury, to get that indictment, to make the arrest, then the other team must do their part. The courts have to prosecute. Judges have to make sure they stay in. Everyone has to do their part. If not, they go out and come back. And you know what's interesting? You do a profile, the picture that's emerging after the shooting, after the arrest, after being let go, you know what they do? They go do another shooting. People no longer believe that you can't do a

shooting in the city. You do a profile on all of these individuals here. You're going to see prior gun possession, prior shootings, just coming out. No one takes criminal justice seriously anymore.

Mayor Adams: These bad guys no longer take them seriously. They believe our criminal justice system is a laughing stock of our entire country. We have to get serious about this because innocent people are dying. But he also, Chief, made another important point of what we are going to do and what we're doing. You take the snakes, you take the alphas. Now you have a large number of people who are there. It's only a matter of time before another alpha steps up. But we announced last week with A.T. Mitchell and the crisis management teams, we're now going to go into those communities and find those who have headless leaders and have more leaders to give them the on-ramp so that they don't continue to participate in the violence that we're seeing. Because if we don't do that, if we don't do the other part of making sure we give them an on-ramp to leave violence, then all we're going to do is continue to run after the new alphas that are popping up.

Mayor Adams: This is the strategic analysis that we are doing to go after crime. And in spite of the critics [inaudible], that people criticize us all the time, in spite of that, shootings are going down. Shootings are going down without violating the constitutional safeguards that we have in place. We're decreasing shootings, we're taking bad guys off the streets, and we're going to create a safe city in the process. And so I'm proud of the men and women who are part of this unit that are going after those small number of people that are driving crimes in this city. This unit, that's three main strategies of the Gun Violence Suppression Division: gun trafficking, real problem gun investigation, enhanced prosecution. When you put them together you're going to create a safer city. We know that. The only thing we didn't factor in, I'm going to say this as many times as possible until it resonates, the only thing we did not factor in; that we're going to keep letting bad guys out. None of us factor this in.

Mayor Adams: It was unimaginable to us that we would do these cases after a year, take them down. And by the time we get back to patrol, we're seeing them back on the streets. You guys gotta start writing about this. Just can't continue. It can't continue. And in spite of that, in spite of the naysayers, in spite of the attacks, in spite of the tweets, in spite of letting them out, these guys are still doing the job every day, going out there investigating, taking these bad guys off the street. And we cannot thank them enough for what they're doing. Precision policing works. It works. Precision policing, not a wide net taking up anyone who happens to be affiliated with these guys. No. This team they're going after the shooters, the trigger pullers, the drivers of violence and we just need help. It's not a hard thing to ask for. We need help.

Mayor Adams: They're placing themselves in harm's way. We need help to stop dangerous people from coming on our streets. We're going to continue to do so. We will do our job. Now we need everyone else to do their job. We're open to any questions you may have from the chiefs, that's here.

Question: One, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: These men we see here, are they in custody? Are they convicted? Are they just suspects? And also looking at every single one of these pictures, is the city you're leading failing young men of color?

Savino: I'll answer the first portion of your question. As far as these individuals are concerned, like we stated earlier, we're talking about individuals that are true trigger pullers. Quite often, more than once. The vast majority are stolen. We did have cooperation with the DAs in regards to these individuals. But like Mr. Mayor said, leading up to these takedowns, a lot of these individuals had three, four, sometimes five gun arrests. So once we incorporate them into the takedowns, they usually stay in. But for the most part, they have that record behind them and it leads to really an empowerment of sorts. I call it criminality without consequence. So that's something we just... When we have our takedowns, with the cooperation of the DAs, generally speaking, people stay in. But leading up to it, I think that's where there's a lot of room for improvement.

[Crosstalk]

Mayor Adams: No, no. Let me finish. No, because that's such an important question. Yes. Yes. We're failing men of color. We're failing communities that have been denied with inequalities for years. I bet you, if you do a profile of these men that are here, you will find many of them are dyslexic, mental health issues, homelessness, fell out of school. I bet you, 90 percent of them don't have a high school diploma or equivalency diploma. I bet you. And why aren't we catching them before they become shooters? Because by the time this arrest is made, we've already failed. It's already done. It's a wrap, and there's a pipeline waiting to fill it. So yes, we have failed. And that is what we're fighting against, to stop that failure. But we have to do intervention and prevention. The police officer's job is not to find out what is a psychological profile, if the person has other issues at home, that's our job as a city. Their job is to take dangerous people off the street. My job and the job of my agencies is to prevent people from being dangerous. And that is the partnership we created.

Question: Mr. Mayor, looking at these cases, they're a year or two, three years old. What would you attribute the last seven to eight weeks decrease on? Why are we seeing success as of late?

Mayor Adams: The unit that everyone criticized me for is called Neighborhood Safety Team. Everyone said, "No, not do it. Don't do it, Eric." But you know me, being a former cop, I'm used to people yelling at me, screaming at me, spitting at me, saying what I shouldn't do. I'm focused. I knew we were doing the right thing. We have an excellent compliment to what they're doing. Our Neighborhood Safety Team. We took 3,000 guns off the street. You know how many guns that is? 3,000 guns off the street. Our Neighborhood Safety Teams are doing it. So when you combine our Neighborhood Safety Teams, when you combine the everyday patrol that officers are doing, and when you combine the fact that they are saying, when I speak to the officers on the street, they say, "We have a mayor that understands the job, supporting us doing our job and is not going to leave us out there for doing the job."

Mayor Adams: So it's a combined effort of the men and women who are police officers. They want to go after bad guys. That's why you take this job. And that's what we're doing. And we are going to continue to do so to take dangerous people off our streets.

Question: If I could follow up real quick, 3,000 guns at this point in the year is about on track where we were last year without Neighborhood Safety Teams. So what case can you make to say they are making a difference right now?

Mayor Adams: Well, number one, shootings are going down. We are dealing with, in 2020, it was a different city. COVID, 2019 lockdown. We're dealing with a different city. And so in combination to taking the guns off the streets and the combination to arrest or increase for dangerous felonies are increased, when you look at the combined efforts, we have made historical changes in how we're doing public safety in the city.

Question: I had a couple of questions I wanted to ask. First was how many of these gang takedowns have we done so far this year? And the second was about this Supreme Court ruling that might overturn or might change the rules on the Second Amendment and cause people to carry more weapons. What conversations have you folks had, the mayor's office, the NYPD, any other law enforcement agencies in the area? What have you done to get ready for that possibility?

Mayor Adams: Yes. And Chief will talk about the number of cases. I spoke with our counsel today, Brendan McGuire, and we are going to communicate with cities across America. We're going to look at the ruling because the ruling could be on several different levels. We're going to look at the ruling and see what powers we have and what are we going to need from our federal lawmakers to put laws in place that could prevent the Supreme Court ruling from impacting our cities. And so we want to build up a task force across the country: Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, New York, San Francisco, all of these places that are dealing with violence. And we want to put our legal minds together, come up with some real legislation on the federal level, our state level, and our city levels to get prepared for this.

Mayor Adams: People hear of this right to carry. You should focus on it. If this right to carry, this keeps me up at night. If this right to carry goes through the Supreme Court and becomes the law of the land, can you imagine being on the 4 train with someone having a 9mm exposed? Everyone on the train is carrying? This is not the wild, wild west. And this law is frightening to think that we are even thinking about that and what they did in Atlanta and what they doing. This fixation with guns is really, even in the midst of Florida, in the midst of Texas, in the midst of all of these shootings, we're still even considering this. Those laws prevent these types of shootings from taking place. So it's a real concern and we need to talk about it more.

Question: How would that change policing in this country and this city and would that undo all of these initiatives that you have been putting into place you [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: And we don't know the limitation. I don't know if they're going to go as far as to say, "Even if you have a prior felony conviction for a gun arrest, you could still carry." We don't know if they're going to go as far as to say, "There could be no background checks. There could be no limitation." We restrict carry permits here. It's very difficult to get a carry permit. One could get, with the right credentials, can get a target permit. But if you're saying that it is illegal, unlawful for us to restrict carry permits and any other permits, this is going to be a real mess to police. And we don't know how far they're going to go.

Mayor Adams: And so, I mean, we can't impact the decisions of the Supreme Court, but we are hoping that if a loud enough voice is heard, which I don't think is loud enough. I think people are really missing this opportunity to say to the Supreme Court, "This is not what the people of the country want." I think we're being too silent on an issue that could drastically impact public safety in this country.

Question: He was asking about the gangs.

Essig: Yeah, on average, we have about 150 long term investigations within the Detective Bureau each year of which, they run the gamut. Gun trafficking cases, sex trafficking cases, grand larceny cases. There's about 35 to 50 active investigations, gang investigations, that we look at. Some come to fruition. Some don't. This year there's been 16 taken down throughout the city. Some like this are quite big. Some are two, three, four people involving two quick shootings. We are looking to take that shooter off the street as quick as possible.

[...]

Question: Thank you. Mr. Mayor, you've spoken a lot today about judges not keeping people incarcerated, suspects coming back out onto the streets. I know you asked Albany legislatures this session to set a dangerous standard in the bail law. That obviously didn't come to pass. Can you speak a little bit, what do you think that will mean for public safety and the city and what plan B is now that that standard has not been set to the bail law?

Mayor Adams: Well, plan B is what plan A was. We're going to do our job. I am not in control of judges. I'm not in control of the state lawmakers. I'm not in control of the City Council. My job is to present the case based on what I'm hearing from my law enforcement communities and present it to them and hope that they will see the expertise and make laws based on the case we present. We made some victories in Albany around public safety. We would have liked to receive more, like the dangerousness standard. That's so important. You have one of these guys that come in front of you or someone is arrested nine times. I think the judge should make the determination, this person presents an imminent threat to the city. I'm hoping that they reexamine that in their next legislative cycle, because we have to close some of those loopholes that are dealing with public safety, as the governor presented her 10 bills that I think are important including microstamping.

Mayor Adams: Sometimes I just feel, with some lawmakers, that they're just not dealing in the reality. Idealism can't displace realism. And when I had some of these conversations, I've had lawmakers say to me that young people are carrying guns because they feel unsafe. And so it should be understandable that they're carrying guns. No, no, it's not understandable. And so if that's the philosophy up there, I heard a lawmaker say that if you want to deal with the Rikers issue, just let everybody out. I mean, where's the reality here? That is not what New Yorkers want. And so we're hoping that they listen to what we have been saying to make our city the safe city that we deserve.

Question: One quick follow up. It's on kind of a related topic. We're hearing that your sister, when she arrived in town yesterday, witnessed some sort of...

Mayor Adams: No. Here's what happened yesterday. Here's what happened yesterday. A family member was at the ferry and we were going to pick her up. I was enroute to pick her up. And while she was waiting, three men walked in with hoodies on, and yesterday was very hot, and they had hoodies on, and she overheard one of them state something to the tune of, "Don't shoot until you get inside." She called me. I said, "Immediately call 911," and I got on the phone and called 911 to make sure they got the call. When we got to the ferry, my security team and I went to the boats and said, "Don't let the boats move out." Police responded and did a canvas of the area. And now they're going to continue the investigation.

Mayor Adams: But I want to thank my family members because they listened. See something, say something, do something. Nothing would have been worse if someone would have gotten on that boat and something would've happened to innocent people. And that's what we encourage New Yorkers to do. And I feel great to know that at Thanksgiving, when I've drilled it in the heads of my family members, they did that.

Moderator: Just before we go to off-topic, I know you wanted to say something to the investigators from here. And the case detective all of these cases are lined up at the table. And I know you had a message for them that you mention.

Mayor Adams: We just want to say thank you. Superheroes don't have S on their chest. They have shields on their waist or on their uniforms. These are everyday heroes. People talk about the superheroes. These are real heroes that save lives. They will save lives because of taking down these dangerous people. And just on behalf of the people of the city of New York, we thank you. Thank you for your job. And I'm not going to send you in harm's way and leave you out there. I'm going to send you to keep our city safe and I will be with you as we accomplish that task. We're going to turn around this city and I'm confident of that because of the men and women who are doing this job. Thank you very much.

Question: Mr. Mayor?

Mayor Adams: Yes, sir.

Question: [Inaudible] Supreme Court decision. Is there a contingency plan the city has for any immediate decision to combat this before lawmakers can join on board or not?

Mayor Adams: That's what we need Brendan to do. I need my counsel to communicate with our court counsel, communicate and coordinate with the attorneys across the country. And there's a multi-layer plan. The federal government could put in place laws. The states can do what they have to do, but really it depends on, as I learned this morning, it depends on what the ruling is and how expansive the ruling is going to be. If the Supreme Court still allows the local municipality to make the decisions based on that ruling, that would make it a little easier for us. But if it's just an open-ended that it's unconstitutional to deny someone to carry a weapon, that's some scary stuff.

Question: Mr. Mayor, first, I just wanted to clarify on your family member. Can you say which ferry terminal this was?

Mayor Adams: Yeah, the 39th Street and 12th Avenue.

Question: And no arrest to this point?

Mayor Adams: You could reach out to the commissioner and they give you an outcome of the investigation.

Question: Okay. And separately on the class size bill that was passed in Albany. Senator Liu, the teachers' union, maintains that there is extra funding that is coming to help the city accomplish the goals of that bill. Do you disagree with that assessment? Do you see some financial hurdles that you're going to have to go through to accomplish this?

Mayor Adams: Yes. The CFE, it was improperly reported by some that the Campaign for Fiscal Equity covered class size. That is not true. It did not cover class size. When you read the bill, you see nowhere in the bill does it state class size. The funding that's coming in is not to deal with class size. We're talking about \$20 billion in capital, \$500 million in dealing with the staffing and everything else. When you look at it, the money has to come from somewhere.

Mayor Adams: And so our conversation was, "Tell us what we should cut. Should we cut pre-K? Should we cut dyslexia screening? Should we cut the mental health professionals? Tell us what we should cut." And I would've hoped they would've put in the bill and stated that here are the areas you should cut, because if we're going to do something that's going to have a major impact on the funding of the DOE, then we should take the responsibility of saying to New Yorkers, "We no longer want pre-K. We no longer want dyslexia screening." You can't just say, "We're giving you this unfunded mandate." There is no money. They say the money that's coming in, they need to show us where it is.

Mayor Adams: And when you look at this money, we're hitting a cliff. This money is not here. As the governor stated, this money's not here next year, in the next budgets to come up. We don't have that money. And so we are hoping that they look at those schools that are in greater need to do class sizes in that need, now. The union contract called for 32 students per class. That's the union contract. We had 21.5. We lost 150,000 families. We've dropped down to 21.5. Because we're dropping so low, it's going to mess with our federal dollars that are coming in. And we're in a fiscal crisis. We are doing a good job, but let's not kid ourselves. The city is in a real financial crisis that we have to be prepared for so that we don't hurt. So I don't know where they believe the money is coming from because we don't see that at all.

Question: Mayor, as you know, there have been a lot of dire predictions made about a violent summer in New York.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Question: Looking at that chart, what should people make of it? Should they breathe a sigh of relief or would that be premature?

Mayor Adams: My answer to that is, we're going to do our job, [inaudible]. There are still dangerous people out there. And we're hoping that some of the investigations that are in place are going to stem the tide of what we witness as just the violence that we are experiencing. And so, my assurance to New Yorkers is that we're going to remain vigilant. We're doing several things. I was on the phone for an hour and a half with the commissioner yesterday, are all out. We're going to have uniformed personnel going to patrol. Everyone is going to be on board. We have a few other initiatives that we're doing to get that uniformed officer on patrol. What we're going to do in the subway system. The commissioner is going to be announcing to, in addition to what we have done already. And so I want New Yorkers to be assured that the history of violent summers, we are going to fortify our law enforcement officers to be proactive and prevent some of that violence from taking place.

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