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TRANSCRIPT: NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on 1010 WINS with Susan Richard to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared on 1010 WINS with Susan Richard to discuss the MTA's ongoing response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Susan Richard: There has been a lot of talk today from both the Mayor and Governor about the homeless in city subways, and we are joined live on the line now by Sarah Feinberg, the Interim President of the New York City Transit Authority. Thank you so much for being with us.

Sarah Feinberg: Thanks for having me. How are you?

Richard: I'm great. So, not such a great situation in the subways though. You wrote an opinion piece for the New York Post in which you said that City Hall must not let the subways turn into a homeless shelter. And today Governor Cuomo called the situation disgusting and disrespectful to essential workers. Would you go that far as what the Governor said?

Feinberg: Oh, absolutely, he's absolutely right. Look, this is a population that desperately needs housing services, that desperately needs mental health care and counseling services. And, you know, look, we're a transportation agency, we run a subway system and a bus system. We are not a social services agency. And so, you know, if we've got folks in the system who desperately need help, they're not able to get what they need from us, and I'm pleased that the Mayor has stepped up and has started addressing the problem. Frankly, we've been asking for this help for months and months. And so last night, in my opinion, having the NYPD out in full force and having his outreach workers out in full forces was a huge help, and we need to see it continue.

Richard: Well the Mayor wants certain stations closed overnight for deep cleaning and for homeless outreach. What do you think of that?

Feinberg: Well, we'll certainly look at it. Look, we'll look at anything that could possibly address the problem. But this is something we've looked at before and in our experience, look we've been at this for a year now, in our experience shutting down, or closing a subway station isn't what solves the problem, because then on top of everything else, you know, you have an issue with getting essential workers who need the system. And that's a problem. So I'm open to anything that'll address this problem, but the main thing I need is for, you know what I saw last night with all those NYPD out and all those outreach workers, I need them in all of our end of line stations. We need those folks out not just in one station like they were last night. I need them in every station by the end of the week. That will be the biggest difference that we can possibly make here.

Richard: Well the Governor just moments ago live on 1010 WINS said he has instructed the MTA to, quote, do whatever it takes, and give him a plan in two days. So he's asking the transit folks for a plan. So what do you think of that?

Feinberg: No, I think he's exactly right. Look, here's my plan. I want the Mayor to send the NYPD and his outreach workers into every single end of line station by the end of the week. I want what they did in one station last night, for them to do in every station, every end of line station by the end of the week. And look, if the NYPD and the city can't do it, I got it. You know, people are overwhelmed, we're in the middle of a global pandemic. We will go hire more MTA Police to get this done if we have to, but I believe that the city can do it and if the city can't do it, or won't do it, we'll hire MTA Police to do it.

Richard: So here's an idea, and you know, what do I know, but I'm just sort of thinking out of the box here. Is there a way to prevent the homeless from seeking shelter in the subway to begin with? I mean, if somebody has a MetroCard, you obviously can't stop them from entering the system. But if they don't, and they're homeless, perhaps that point of entry might be a good place to intervene and get somebody help.

Feinberg: Look, we are a system that does not discriminate, right? So we evict people and eject people from our system all the time for violating our rules and regulations. So I don't care if you're homeless or not homeless. I don't care if you have a beautiful home in which you live or you don't, if you are violating our rules and regulations, if you're sleeping, if you're drinking, if you're smoking, if you're laying down, if you're storing all of your belongings, any of those things are against our rules and regulations and so we're going to ask you to leave regardless.

Richard: What is your message for somebody who's an essential worker who is commuting, who say the cars are too crowded A)with other commuters, or B)with homeless people, or say they feel unsafe in a subway car at this point.

Feinberg: Look, in terms of crowding with other riders, we are asking people, you know, move to a part of the platform that's less crowded, move to a train car that's less crowded. I know it's not always easy, but we are really seeing those issues of crowding to be pretty sporadic. If you're having trouble boarding a car because there are multiple people laid out, you have every right to be angry, I'm angry. I'm incredibly frustrated, and our workforce is incredibly frustrated. You know, the men and women who work at New York City Transit, who show up every day to move the essential workers to work to

fight this crisis on the frontlines deserve better than this. And that's exactly why we need the NYPD to do more. We need the city to do more. We need them in all of those end line stations by the end of the week.

Richard: And so just very briefly, one more question, what are the plans that might be in the works in general for keeping the subway safe when we might start reopening in the city?

Feinberg: Look, we have a lot of plans in place for reopening. I mean, we're looking at security, we're looking at social distancing, we're looking at service, we're looking at our own workforce and making sure that we've got adequate crews to service the ridership as it picks up. But the most important thing in my mind is safety and security because if you can't get that right, you can't get anything right. And so, you know, just in the last several weeks, we've hired dozens and dozens of private security guards because frankly, we need more eyes and ears in the system. You know, like everyone else we've had lots of MTA Police out sick and on quarantine, NYPD officers are out on quarantine, and so we've hired private security contractors to come in and help so safety and security is at the forefront of what we're thinking about right now.

Richard: Alright. Sarah Feinberg, Interim President of New York City Transit, thank you so much for your time.

Feinberg: Yup, good to be with you.