




MEMORANDUM  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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**DATE:** July 6, 2005

**TO:** Honorable Chairman Joe A. Martinez & Members  
Board of County Commissioners



**FROM:** Carlos Alvarez, Mayor  
Miami-Dade County

**SUBJECT:** Response to County Manager's Fiscal Year 2005-2006 Proposed Budget

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Pursuant to Section 4.03 of the Miami-Dade County Charter, I am pleased to present my response to the County Manager's Fiscal Year 2005-2006 (FY05-06) Proposed Resource Allocation Plan (Budget).

I commend the Manager and his staff for their efforts in proposing a fiscally responsible budget that preserves core services, provides targeted enhancements, addresses long-term needs, and strengthens reserves. I further applaud the Board of County Commissioners (Board) for their impressive level of involvement throughout the development of this year's budget, to include in-depth discussion at budget workshops and line-item review of department budgets.

I am pleased that the Manager has proposed a budget that incorporates a reduction in the total property tax millage rate, continuing a downward trend for the eighth consecutive year. The Proposed Budget recommends a 0.068 mills decrease in the countywide millage rate, which would benefit all County residents regardless of the municipality they reside in. Due to tremendous growth in the property tax roll (currently estimated at 18.7%) and the fourth straight year of double-digit growth, we should take this opportunity to minimize the burden on our taxpayers to the extent possible, without materially affecting County services. At the same time, the Budget appropriately plans for the likelihood that this property roll growth will slow down, by strengthening reserves and making strategic investments that will benefit the County in the future.

In my March Budget Message, I outlined specific challenges and policy priorities for Miami-Dade County, and I am pleased that a number of them are addressed in the Proposed Budget, including the following:

- **Financial Stability** – The Budget adds to the Countywide Emergency Contingency Reserve and creates contingency reserves for the Unincorporated Municipal Service Area (UMSA) (\$1 million), Fire Rescue District (\$7.2 million) and Elections (\$500,000).

- Public Safety – Funding for four Police Officer Training Academy classes and four Correctional Officer Training Academy classes. Funding for critical capital needs in the Corrections and Rehabilitation Department.
- Employees – Funding for professional development training (\$540,000) and an employee gym in the Stephen P. Clark Center building (\$500,000).
- Community-based Organizations – Funding for Discretionary Reserves (\$4.2 million) to address neighborhood and community needs.

Detailed below are my remaining concerns, which I trust will be addressed during your consideration of the final budget in September.

### **Senior Advocate**

Our elderly continues to be an often neglected segment of our population. While the Budget provides funding for senior citizen programs, including the Golden Passport Program, Meals to the Elderly, and the Hurricane Shelter program, we need to go beyond this and ensure that all eligible senior citizens take advantage of these and other services. It is unfortunate that many of these residents are not even aware of their rights or the various programs and resources available to them.

I firmly believe that there should be a point of contact in our government for referrals, advocacy, and outreach for seniors. To that end, I am reiterating my recommendation for the creation of a Senior Advocate position. This competitively-selected person would be responsible for identifying and defending services for elder residents and their families (such as transportation, meal programs, housing, and referral services), as well as reaching out to elderly-related non-profit associations and community-based organizations to increase coordination of outreach and services. Similar to the recently created Children's Advocate position, I also envision tasking this person with the development of a strategic plan for senior services in partnership with other public and private agencies. In addition, I expect that he/she will be recommending and promoting legislative initiatives that will benefit seniors (such as property exemptions and tax breaks). This position would also serve to identify where service and funding gaps exist and how they might be addressed.

### **Long-Term Vacant Positions**

I recognize the need for "truth in budgeting" and more realistic estimates for departmental budgets, particularly personnel costs, in order to minimize mid-year and year-end adjustments. Pursuant to your direction (Reso. No. R-96-05), the removal of long-term vacant positions (LTVP) – positions which have been vacant for over 12 months – from the County's table of organization (TO) is attractive in terms of presentation because there is a clear linkage between the proposed funding and the number of employees. Unfortunately, this is mainly a perception issue, as funding is generally not attached to these positions. The Proposed Budget's elimination of 362 long-term vacant positions countywide provides

a more accurate depiction of what positions are needed to provide the current level of service, but limited tangible "savings", if any, will be achieved as a result. Furthermore, based on my experience as a Department Director, it is generally difficult for departments to obtain approval for new positions, even when adequate justification and potential funding sources are provided.

In my Budget Message, I stated that every department should be able to justify every position on their TO or the position should be eliminated. Positions that are not anticipated to be filled in the near future, for a variety of reasons, do not need to remain on the TO; however, there are some departments where the ability to hire as funding permits is essential. Nowhere is this more so than in our public safety departments. In the Corrections and Rehabilitation, Fire Rescue, and Police Departments alone, a total of 155 civilian positions were eliminated in the Proposed Budget. While all sworn positions were funded, these civilian positions provide the necessary support that enable front-line employees to perform their duties in the most effective manner. In many cases, forced attrition has historically been the norm. For example, in the Police Department's Communications Bureau and Records Bureau, existing employees have been required to work mandatory overtime for years. Performance standards are being met, but at the cost of a demanding work environment that can adversely affect employee morale. These conditions ultimately compromise service quality, as well as hinder the ability to retain qualified personnel.

I am opposed to the total elimination of long-term vacant positions in the public safety area and urge the County Manager to work with staff to (1) identify positions of a critical nature that should remain on the departmental TO for future operational needs and (2) identify funding for those positions with an immediate need. A careful examination of the use of overtime could yield potential savings for the hiring of additional employees. This would be consistent with the Board's LTVP policy to "not...remove department directors' flexibility to hire employees to meet priority service needs." Reviews of LTVP should be conducted on a case-by-case basis, as was done in other departments (such as the Building Department and Public Works Department) where positions were allowed to remain on their TO due to issues related to recruitment.

### **Enhanced Enforcement Initiatives (EEI)**

The health and well-being of our residents and our economy are inextricably tied to safe neighborhoods. For South Florida to continue being a desirable place to live, work, and play, public safety must remain a number one priority. Crime is currently at an all-time low, and violent and non-violent crime has been reduced by 41% and 40%, respectively, since 1996. These achievements can be attributed, in part, to dedicated funding for Enhanced Enforcement Initiatives (EEI): pro-active and aggressive programs to combat crime, such as the Tactical Narcotics Team, Robbery Intervention Detail, truancy enforcement, and warrants sweeps.

Funding for EEI is included in the Proposed Budget at the same level as in the current year (\$13.34 million). Given increases in personnel and overhead costs, it will be difficult to

achieve further reductions in crime rates, or even maintain current levels, without additional resources. I am especially concerned that, in the first five months of 2005, reported robberies are up 3.07%, residential burglaries are up 4%, and aggravated assaults are up 2.57%. In addition, clearance rates are significantly below previous years and below national averages. As such, I am requesting that the County Manager provide additional funding for EEI and, in particular, Robbery Intervention Detail and Warrants Sweeps. The prevention of even one high profile incident could have a profound impact on the state of our tourism industry.

### **Affordable Housing**

The affordable housing shortage in Miami-Dade County has persisted for years, despite efforts by public and private agencies to alleviate the problem. Today, it has reached a crisis level that is not only a concern for lower-income households, but also for moderate-income families. With homes in Miami-Dade now priced at more than six times the median household income – the second highest disparity in Florida – the necessity for a comprehensive approach to address this matter can no longer be delayed. The prosperity of our residents relies strongly on their ability to establish permanent roots in the community and accumulate home equity.

Through our Housing Agency, Housing Finance Authority, and others, the County has been successful in the implementation of many quality affordable housing initiatives, such as conversion of public housing developments into homeownership, low-interest construction loans for affordable housing, in-fill housing development, and the Section 8 Homeownership Program which enables clients to purchase a home using their Section 8 voucher. The Building Better Communities Bond Program also allocates \$170 million for affordable housing (new construction and renovation) and loans, including \$30 million to be distributed over the next two years. Nonetheless, there are dozens of innovative alternatives that have yet to be fully pursued, e.g. inclusionary zoning (giving incentives to developers to dedicate all or a portion of new units to affordable or workforce housing) or an infill trust fund (to waive liens, impact fees, and other start-up costs related to developing in-fill properties). The affordable housing crisis cannot be resolved in one budget year but we can increase measures to directly assist potential homeowners in such forms as: subsidized loans, down payment assistance programs, educational seminars, and credit counseling.

The Miami-Dade Housing Agency would benefit from a funding allocation to create an "equity sharing mortgage program" in which the County would subsidize the purchase (in excess of the initial \$100,000 financed by the purchaser) to make the loan affordable and allow the County to share in the appreciation of the property. I am further requesting that, before the September budget hearings, the County Manager submit a report detailing the programs and initiatives that will be undertaken in the upcoming year and to what extent these meet current needs. The report should also include a preliminary multi-year plan for increasing the availability of affordable housing and community access to information and services.

### **Building Better Communities Bond Program**

I recently had the privilege of participating in the launch of the Building Better Communities General Obligation Bond (GOB) Program at Virginia Key Beach Park, one of many worthy sites across Miami-Dade County long overdue for restoration and improvement. The fact that voters overwhelmingly approved this \$2.9 billion bond program last November is a testament to the confidence they have in our government to invest in this community for our future generations.

As we embark on one of the largest GOB programs in our County's history, I expect that the County Manager and staff will work closely with our GOB Citizens' Advisory Committee to keep the public informed as to the Program's progress and ensure that there is transparency and accountability every step of the way. Citizen involvement is essential to make certain that the bond money is spent efficiently and as promised. With vigilant monitoring of the Program, I am certain many projects can be expedited and/or completed at a lower cost, so that funds can be leveraged for additional projects. For example, I am pleased that the new Mental Health Facility, included in the first bond sale, is expected to come in under budget because an existing building has been identified for renovation, instead of requiring a new construction. I want to acknowledge the Board and Judge Steve Leifman for your diligent efforts in championing the rights of the mentally ill. Pursuant to my Budget Message, the County Manager should provide adequate funding for the staff required to implement GOB-related projects, so that given timelines and the expectations of the public are met.

### **Transportation**

Improving our transportation system is crucial to public safety and the economic vitality of our County. The People's Transportation Plan (PTP) will alleviate our traffic conditions to a great extent over the next three decades. The first Metro Rail extension line is anticipated to open in 2010, connecting Miami International Airport to downtown Miami via the existing Metro Rail line. Two other rail extensions are expected to open by 2014, and the Revised PTP Amendment to be considered by the Board on July 7, 2005, if approved, will provide \$2.8 billion for our future transportation needs.

While major outcomes of the PTP will not be experienced for years, we can take measures now to promote tangible, incremental improvements that our residents can benefit from in the near term, such as: improving roadway signage, installing traffic-calming devices, and synchronizing traffic signals. The Automated Traffic Management System (ATMS), a promising plan for improving arterial traffic flow as much as 3% to 5%, will be before the Board for approval on the same July 7, 2005 agenda. The ATMS will replace our existing twenty-nine year old traffic control system and allow for the centralized synchronization of the County's 2,600 traffic signals. It will also have the capacity to handle all new signals installed during the next several decades. Once the countywide ATMS synchronization is completed, it will enable Public Works staff to increase the safety and capacity of the existing roadway network and reduce side-street delays caused by improperly-timed traffic signals. I am requesting that the County Manager provide the resources necessary to

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expedite this initiative for implementation in 2006. I further challenge the County Manager to continue studying and consider pursuing innovative approaches to traffic relief that have been successful in other cities, such as the incorporation of reversible lanes in congested corridors.

### **Mosquito Control**

I share the Board's concern that the Public Work's Mosquito Control Division continues to be under funded. Besides the inconvenience to residents and tourists alike, the possible transmittal of mosquito-bourne diseases makes this a life safety issue. I am requesting that the County Manager determine a sufficient funding level for the Division that would enable it to adequately control mosquitoes and insects countywide and year-round.

### **Closing**

On July 7, 2005, you will make an important decision in setting what will effectively be the maximum millage rates for FY05-06. Because the UMSA rate is the fifth lowest in the County, serious consideration should be given to the County Manager's proposed UMSA purchase package, which would be used to fund a number of enhanced services in the unincorporated area.

I admire each of you for the commitment you have demonstrated to this community by remaining actively involved in the budget process and, through your legislative authority, I am confident the Board will adopt a budget that represents the best allocation of this county's resources.

c: Honorable Harvey Ruvin, Clerk of Courts  
Honorable Joseph P. Farina, Chief Judge, Eleventh Judicial Circuit  
Honorable Bennet H. Brummer, Public Defender  
Honorable Katherine Fernandez-Rundle, State Attorney  
George Burgess, County Manager  
Robert Ginsburg, County Attorney  
Marvin O'Quinn, President/CEO, Public Health Trust  
Charles Anderson, Commission Auditor  
Kay Sullivan, Director, Clerk of the Board