# [*As Florida DOGE looms, Miami-Dade faces budget cuts and the mayor hits a crisis | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6GB7-4YS3-RS44-72VM-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 23, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** editorials

**Length:** 800 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** told the Herald Editorial Board in May that a "perfect storm" of financial headwinds were to blame for the county's $402 million ***budget*** shortfall. There's a lot of truth to that statement. Some of the challenges facing the county were outside local control, mainly the costs of complying with a 2018 state referendum that forced Miami-Dade to turn some of its departments, such as police, into independent offices run by new elected officials.

But, as we wrote in May, Levine Cava and the 13 county commissioners who must approve the ***budget*** every year rode high on rising property tax revenues and $1 billion of federal COVID funding that's now dried up. They should have had more foresight. Now Levine Cava is suggesting ***budget*** cuts for next year that she said will be "very painful," the Herald reported.

Miami-Dade's ***budget*** woes also might turn out to be politically painful, especially for the mayor, the first major test she's faced in two terms.

Since Donald Trump's return to the White House, the frenzy to cut programs has reached all levels of government. The newly-created Florida DOGE -- fashioned after the Trump administration department responsible for firing thousands of federal employees -- is auditing spending by Broward County, Gainesville and other communities. Gov. Ron DeSantis said it is "very possible" that Miami-Dade could be next, the Sun Sentinel reported.

The Florida DOGE is more about politics than fiscal responsibility. It is targeting programs that promote diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and that are aimed at responding to climate change, a central issue for Levine Cava. Perhaps foreseeing these political headwinds, she consolidated three top environmental roles into one. She also re-organized and reduced the department in charge of climate change response as part of her cost-cutting measures.

With more cuts to come, the pain will be felt by the most vulnerable people and organizations in Miami-Dade.

The mayor is proposing cuts across county departments, including $40 million in nonprofit funding, closing two senior centers that her administration says are "underperforming," with only about two dozen people using them, and closing three places where older residents can get free meals, which are also described as "underperforming" with few users. Her administration said Catholic Charities will continue to provide meals for seniors who used those sites. Grants for small businesses and arts organizations, which already lost state dollars last year, are also on the chopping block.

Of course, few causes can be spared when ***budget*** cuts become inevitable. and there should be few sacred cows. But where was that mindset when the mayor and commission in recent years approved $46 million in direct funding and free services for the soccer World Cup when it comes to Miami in 2026 -- $36 million of which will come due in the 2026 ***budget***, according to the Herald. Just two months ago, Levine Cava endorsed the latest $10 million subsidy installment for the Cup and acknowledged that may lead to service cuts.

Certainly, managing a ***budget*** the size of Miami-Dade is a difficult, thankless job. Since her election in 2020, Levine Cava, a former county commissioner and nonprofit founder, has faced few major crises. One of two Democrats elected countywide, she occupies a nonpartisan office and has managed to remain non controversial despite Miami-Dade's rightward shift. Her handling of the Surfside building collapse and her initiatives to help people affected by South Florida's housing crisis have earned her community goodwill.

She was easily reelected last year despite criticism about county spending from her main opponent, Manny Cid, a Republican and former mayor of Miami Lakes. In January, Levine Cava appointed Cid as the county's senior advisor for economic opportunity, a great display of her ability to reach across the aisle but one that cost taxpayers $200,000 per year for his salary. She's now proposing to eliminate the department where Cid works.

Fiscal management does not rest only with the mayor of Miami-Dade County, but with the county commission as well. But, politically, Levine Cava will be the one blamed or celebrated for how the county deals with this great challenge. The pressure has never been greater.

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this editorial incorrectly stated how Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** had reduced the number of environmental jobs in the county to reduce costs. She consolidated three county environmental positions into one. The editorial also has been clarified to say that Catholic Charities will continue to provide meal for seniors in the county.

letter V4.pngSend a letter to the editor to [*heralded@miamiherald.com*](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com)

Click here to send the letter.

**Load-Date:** July 24, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Miami-Dade mayor moves to block future $5 million payout to foundation under scrutiny*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6GB9-VCF3-RSH2-N1XY-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 23, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

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**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade's mayor said Wednesday she'll block a planned $250,000 yearly payment to a nonprofit that's been the subject of scrutiny in recent days over its ability to secure state and county funds without a philanthropic track record.

A Parks Department contract recently approved by county commissioners required a vendor to pay the A3 Foundation $250,000 a year. In a letter to the contractor, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** wrote that she won't be authorizing the planned annual payout required under the agreement.

Recent articles by the Miami Herald reported that A3 is a two-year-old charity headquartered in a West Miami townhouse and run by a top official in the city of Miami with no public record of charitable work.

A 20-year contract that Levine Cava had recommended to commissioners just last week required the charitable payouts from Loud and Live, a production company that will pay Miami-Dade to run ticketed events at Tropical Park's equestrian center, the former home to Santa's Enchanted Forest. The payouts Loud and Live was required to make would have totaled $5 million over the course of the 20-year contract.

The contract allowed the County Commission to select the charity, and Chair Anthony Rodriguez selected A3, a nonprofit that has already received nearly $1 million in county funds connected to the CountryFest rodeo that Rodriguez hosts each year at Tropical Park.

In her letter to Loud and Live, Levine Cava said she will not be signing an amended contract that would require the company to pay A3, as was called for in legislation that county commissioners passed by a wide margin on July 16. Levine Cava said her administration will consider other action before finalizing the Tropical Park agreement.

"At the time, we are determining next steps," Levine Cava wrote. "We will be in communication with you over the coming days."

Rodriguez represents the commission's District 10, which includes Tropical Park. He did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Levine Cava's letter.

The letter arrived as the Herald's stories were sparking growing questions about how A3 ended up on track to get millions through a Parks contract just a day after Levine Cava unveiled a 2026 ***budget*** proposal that cuts more than $40 million in nonprofit funding.

Levine Cava's current ***budget*** included a late addition of $125,000 for the A3 Foundation as commissioners prepared to give final approval of her 2025 spending plan last fall. Her ***budget*** office has also approved payouts to A3 in recent years at the request of a Rodriguez staffer.

County records show Rodriguez made A3 the clearinghouse for county funds dedicated for CountryFest, the signature event in Rodriguez's suburban district in the Westchester area.

In the last two years, A3 received nearly $1 million from Miami-Dade. This year it also secured $950,000 in the Florida ***budget***, with almost half of that coming from an allocation made by House Speaker Danny Perez.

Perez is a close friend of Rodriguez. He's also a friend of A3's director, Francisco Petrirena, whose full-time job is chief of staff to Miami City Manager Art Noriega.

Petrirena told the Herald last week he was earning $80,000 a year running A3 but hadn't been paid prior to 2025. An outside employment form the city released Wednesday also showed Petrirena volunteering his time for A3 in 2024. He listed zero compensation as director of the A3 Foundation last year.

He also listed $75,000 in consulting fees from a company he owns, Biltmore Strategies. Before becoming chief of staff to Noriega in May, Petrirena served as government relations director in Miami, a position that made him the city's in-house lobbyist for state matters.

Petrirena did not respond to requests for comment on Levine Cava's letter or one earlier in the day Wednesday on who his clients are at Biltmore Strategies.

**Load-Date:** July 23, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Foundation run out of a townhouse won millions from Tallahassee, Miami-Dade. Why?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6GB5-V953-RRPP-82T4-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 23, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 2193 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

From a West Miami townhouse, the A3 Foundation has spent its first two years in existence racking up nearly $2 million in government funding from Miami-Dade County and the state.

This year, the nonprofit led by a top official in the city of Miami's government came out of Florida's legislative session with a $950,000 allocation of state money -- nearly double what the charity had requested. Of that, $450,000 came from the "sprinkle list" fund of unassigned state ***budget*** dollars controlled by House Speaker Danny Perez, a Miami Republican who is friendly with the foundation's president, Francisco Petrirena.

Petrirena told the Miami Herald last week that he's earning $80,000 a year running the A3 Foundation while also working full-time as chief of staff to Miami City Manager Art Noriega. "Right now, it's only me," Petrirena said of his work for a foundation he formed in the fall of 2023 that has since secured millions of dollars in funding through the state and Miami-Dade County.

In 2024 and 2025, the charity collected nearly $1 million from Miami-Dade in connection with CountryFest, the rodeo and farming festival hosted each year at Tropical Park by County Commission Chairman Anthony Rodriguez, a close friend of Perez.

County emails made public this week illuminate how the A3 Foundation secured county dollars while largely staying out of the public eye, until it wound up the beneficiary of a Parks contract at last week's County Commission meeting. The emails show Rodriguez connected A3 with the signature county event in his district -- and the county funding that comes with it.

In a July 9, 2024, email to David Clodfelter, the county's ***budget*** director, for instance, a staffer in Rodriguez's office asked about getting a $421,000 check for the nonprofit. A3 had sent CountryFest invoices to Rodriguez's office, needing county dollars to pay event vendors.

"David per our conversation attached is the invoice that needs to be paid to A3 Foundation Inc for the 2024 CountryFest show," Aldo Gonzalez, Rodriguez's legislative director, wrote. "Can you please confirm this and make the payment as soon as possible please."

Rodriguez did not respond to a question on why Miami-Dade is using A3 to pay county dollars to CountryFest vendors.

Online records show A3 began collecting county payments in the spring of 2024, six months after Petrirena filed papers forming the nonprofit in September 2023. Nearly two years later, the foundation's mailing address in state records remains at the West Miami townhouse, where an accountant not listed on A3's organizing documents runs a home business. The Herald visited the townhouse last week and, after nobody answered the door, left a letter requesting copies of the foundation's latest tax returns -- documents that federal law says should be available for public inspection. The Herald has not received a response.

As of Tuesday, A3's website had no contact information and blank entries under the page titled "Our Programs."

That hasn't stopped it from getting a steady stream of dollars from Miami-Dade.

Funded with ***budget*** allocations by Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** and County Commission nonprofit grants, the charity has so far received about $980,000 from Miami-Dade, according to an online database of county payments.

County records show commissioners allocated about $270,000 to the A3 Foundation over the last two years, utilizing funds reserved for charities and nonprofit events. The awards are granted by County Commission votes, which are typically perfunctory at the end of a meeting. Rodriguez sponsored the largest donations to A3, worth $100,000.

Now, the foundation's local funding is causing friction at County Hall, days after Levine Cava unveiled a 2026 ***budget*** proposal with steep cuts in grants for charities across Miami-Dade.

Following a Herald story last week on last-minute legislation on a Parks Department contract that requires a vendor to make annual payments to A3, County Commissioner Eileen Higgins is asking Levine Cava to freeze the deal until the board can revisit its July 16 vote, which guarantees the foundation $250,000 a year.

The payments to A3 would come from Loud and Live, the production company that last week secured the county contract to operate Tropical Park's equestrian center, home to CountryFest and other ticketed events, in exchange for paying rent and a revenue share to Miami-Dade. The A3 payments are a requirement of the contract, which was presented to the board by Rodriguez in legislation that passed by a wide margin last week.

"After reviewing the media reporting and attempting to learn more, I have found limited publicly available information regarding the organization's track record, including the services delivered, people served, and documented outcomes," Higgins, a candidate for mayor in the city of Miami, wrote in an email to Levine Cava, a fellow Democrat, on Sunday. "The article has understandably prompted questions from constituents."

In a response to Higgins on Monday, Levine Cava wrote: "Thanks for sharing these concerns and we will review right away."

Payments from Miami-Dade and Florida

A3's website offers no information on charitable work performed by the foundation. The website offers a brief mission statement for the charity: "The A3 Foundation is a non-profit foundation dedicated to promoting sustainable agriculture, advocating for educational opportunities, and creating awareness of community priorities." Petrirena has not responded to inquiries since a brief phone interview last week.

The 20-year contract for Loud and Live is forecast to generate at least $24 million for Miami-Dade's Parks Department, with the Doral company also required to pay A3 monthly installments worth $5 million over the life of the deal. The contract stipulates that if the Parks Department pays to upgrade the 50-acre equestrian center, the A3 payment requirement increases from $250,000 to $300,000 per year.

The contract negotiated by Levine Cava's staff included the terms requiring the payments be made to an unnamed charity, but mention of A3 Foundation as the recipient did not come until Rodriguez added the legislation to the July 16 commission meeting agenda.

Higgins joined the majority in approving the item, which Rodriguez added to the agenda late enough that any commissioner could have requested a delay until the board's next meeting. While no commissioner asked for more time to review the contract, two voted against the agreement without comment: Juan Carlos Bermudez and Micky Steinberg. Neither responded to requests for comment from the Herald.

The vote came the day after Levine Cava unveiled a 2026 ***budget*** proposal that cuts more than $40 million in nonprofit grant funding, part of the mayor's plan to close a $402 million deficit in the county's tax-funded ***budget***.

In a statement, Rodriguez defended the required A3 payments in Loud and Live's contract as a good way for Miami-Dade to use private dollars to fund a charity that can help the community.

"The A3 Foundation is an ag-focused nonprofit organization that, while new, has served our community well," said Rodriguez, a first-term Republican whose suburban district includes Tropical Park. "If private entities are going to partner with our county for profit, it's important that those entities give back by way of supporting our local nonprofits. I am grateful for the work that A3 does and am proud to support them."

CAVA1.jpgMiami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** is proposing cuts to county charity grants in her 2026 ***budget***, which she said closed a $402 million deficit.

A3 Foundation has received tax dollars for Tropical Park's CountryFest

County records show A3 serves as the clearinghouse for Miami-Dade dollars used to fund CountryFest, a springtime event put on by Loud and Live. Once a county cattle show, Rodriguez rebranded the event as CountryFest after winning his District 10 seat in 2022 and turned it into a Tropical Park jamboree with live music, a VIP saloon with open bar and a food truck village. Visitors to the two-day event that started April 26 walked under a welcome sign with Rodriguez's name on it.

When Rodriguez's office requested the $421,000 check for A3 last summer, the funds came partly out of the Parks Department's $250,000 allocation for CountryFest, according to the correspondence released from the county's Clerk of the Court and Comptroller's Office.

The remaining money came from federal COVID stimulus aid that Miami-Dade was using to boost nonprofit funding, the correspondence said.

Attached to the email was a one-page invoice from A3 using the townhouse address, listing a $421,000 charge for vendor payments.

In March, another check request came from Rodriguez's office for $300,000, again with a one-page invoice from A3 weeks ahead of CountryFest starting. Also included in the backup materials for the check request is legislation Rodriguez had passed in 2024, waiving the county's bid requirements and purchasing rules for CountryFest.

"We ask that you please process this invoice as soon as possible as they need to start paying for things related to this event," Gonzalez, the Rodriguez aide, wrote to the county's ***budget*** office on March 25.

It's not known why Rodriguez wanted a foundation to collect county dollars for CountryFest instead of Miami-Dade paying Loud and Live directly.

As a nonprofit, A3 could accept tax-deductible sponsorship dollars for CountryFest. But A3's website makes no mention of CountryFest or its ability to put on an event that attracts more than 25,000 attendees a year.

Miami-Dade CountryFest.jpgEach year, Tropical Park brings a rodeo to western Miami-Dade County with CountryFest. The county is using a nonprofit to handle payments for the Parks Department event.

Also unclear is how the foundation got its name. "A3" does have a potential connection to CountryFest's main patron and official host. Rodriguez and his wife have three children, each with a name that starts with "A," according to the Rodriguez biography still available on a webpage for the Florida House, where he served between 2018 and 2022. Rodriguez did not respond to a Herald inquiry about whether the foundation's name is a nod to his family.

It's not known if Rodriguez has a friendship with Petrirena, but they share a friend in Perez. Rodriguez has described Perez as his best friend.

In an interview, Perez said he knows Petrirena and is friendly with him. The two worked together at Doctors HealthCare Plans, where Perez is general counsel and Petrirena was a manager before starting as the city of Miami's in-house lobbyist at the end of 2023, according to his LinkedIn profile.

In a Sept. 18, 2023, post on his private Instagram account, Petrirena shared a photo of himself standing with Perez on the Florida House floor the day that fellow Republicans formally voted to put Perez in line to be speaker the following year. Of his then-colleague and fellow Cuban American, Petrirena wrote: "3rd Cuban American in the history of Florida to serve as speaker. Proud of you bro, and to be part of this historic moment."

The post came seven days after Petrirena filed papers with Florida to form the A3 Foundation and weeks before he started his job with the city of Miami as director of government relations, overseeing the city's lobbying efforts in Tallahassee.

IMG\_1569.jpgIn this Sept. 18, 2023, Instagram post, Francisco Petrirena, right, poses with future Florida House Speaker Danny Perez. At the time, the two worked together at a healthcare company.

While working for Miami to boost state funding, Petrirena also was seeking state dollars for A3. Last year, he filed a request for $500,000 for A3 in the 2025 state ***budget*** but ended the session empty-handed. The A3 Foundation filed another $500,000 request this year, and lawmakers included the money in spending bills in the Florida House and Senate.

Then Perez added more when he released his list of funding awards from a pot of money that's traditionally been granted to House speakers. A3 was at the top of the alphabetical list, giving the foundation $450,000 more in state funds than it asked for. That landed A3 with a $950,000 allocation in the ***budget*** Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law last month.

In an interview, Perez said he picked A3 for the additional dollars from his so-called "sprinkle list" because of what he said is the foundation's plan to bring agricultural education to Miami-Dade residents with developmental disabilities.

"There are going to be multiple organizations on the 'sprinkle list' that are autism-centric," Perez said.

A3's status as a charity in Miami-Dade also made it a good choice for extra state dollars, he said: "I wanted to make sure we brought home money to the Miami area."

Perez said his personal connections with Petrirena played no role in the allocation.

"There are many elected officials who know many people that receive funds from the state," Perez said in an interview Monday. "He did not receive this because he is friends with the speaker. He received it because it is an organization that is going to immerse agricultural education within the disabled community."

**Load-Date:** July 23, 2025

**End of Document**

[*With charity cuts looming, Miami-Dade steers $250,000 a year to this new foundation*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G99-YM13-RSFV-J1SX-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

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**Section:** miami\_dade

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**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

In a year where Miami-Dade may slash tens of millions of dollars in nonprofit funding, one new charity with a sparse track record recently secured a $250,000 yearly revenue stream mandated by a county contract. The president of the charity receiving the payments is a top official in the city of Miami's government.

A last-minute item on Wednesday's County Commission agenda handed Loud and Live, a prominent production company, a 20-year contract allowing it to produce profit-making events and programs at Miami-Dade's Tropical Park, including running the equestrian center and putting on the annual holiday fest that replaced Santa's Enchanted Forest two years ago.

In addition to paying rent to Miami-Dade for exclusive use of some Tropical Park facilities, the Miami-Dade contract requires Loud and Live to pay $250,000 annually to the A3 Foundation.

That charity formed in 2023, when it reported having less than $25,000 in the bank, according to its 2023 federal tax return, which is available online.

As of Friday afternoon, A3 Foundation had a website with no contact information and inoperable links on pages under its projects section dedicated to "Promoting Sustainable Agriculture," "Education" and "Community Outreach." Tax and corporate records list its address as a townhouse in West Miami. The Miami Herald visited the townhouse on Friday to request the 2024 tax returns from the A3 Foundation. Nobody answered the door.

State records show the president of the A3 Foundation is Francisco Petrirena, who is also chief of staff to Art Noriega, Miami's city manager.

On Friday, Petrirena told the Herald he began earning compensation from the foundation this year and will be paid $80,000 annually. He said he's the charity's lone paid employee.

"Right now, it's only me," he said.

In the phone interview, Petrirena said the foundation helps put on one of Tropical Park's signature events: the annual agriculture show and rodeo known as CountryFest that promoters say attracts about 25,000 visitors a year. He said A3's mission is to promote agriculture education in South Florida.

"We work with CountryFest," Petrirena said. "We help organize the festival."

CountryFest is a county event hosted by the commissioner whose district includes Tropical Park, Commission Chair Anthony Rodriguez. Rodriguez sponsored the legislation awarding the Tropical Park contract to Loud and Live, a Miami-based production company that lists CountryFest as one of its events on social media.

In a statement, Rodriguez praised the charity.

"The A3 Foundation is an ag-focused nonprofit organization that, while new, has served our community well," he said. "The legislation approved by the County Commission supports an innovative way to fund Ag related community initiatives without the need to rely entirely on government funding ... I am grateful for the work that A3 does and am proud to support them."

The county-mandated payment to A3 may not be the only windfall for the foundation this year. Florida's recently enacted ***budget*** includes a $950,000 allocation to an organization of the same name. Online records show the A3 Foundation in March submitted a request for $500,000 to the Florida Senate to cover $100,000 in payroll expenses for an executive director and an assistant, as well as $385,000 for resources to "help educators and consumers learn more about agriculture" and provide scholarships related to farming.

The A3 Foundation has also has been receiving scattered funding from Miami-Dade as well. Rodriguez won commission approval to send $75,000 in county grant dollars to A3 earlier this year, on top of the $125,000 awarded A3 in the 2025 Miami-Dade ***budget*** recommended by Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** last fall and approved by commissioners. The $125,000 wasn't in Levine Cava's original ***budget*** proposal but added ahead of the final approval vote in September, which is typically when a mayor grants additional spending requests from commissioners.

Live and Loud won its Tropical Park contract through a bidding process run by the Levine Cava administration. Bidding documents included the requirement for a $250,000 yearly charitable contribution by the winning bidder but did not specify the charity. Instead, it said the County Commission would select the charity.

A spokesperson for Levine Cava, Natalia Jaramillo, said the administration didn't learn the identity of the chosen nonprofit until the legislative item appeared as a last-minute add to the agenda of Wednesday's County Commission meeting.

The administration did not respond to inquiries about how CountryFest is run at Tropical Park or what role A3 may play in that springtime event.

In 2024, the commission passed Rodriguez legislation exempting CountryFest from normal bidding requirements in the county's purchasing rules.

Petrirena confirmed his paid foundation work comes on top of his full-time job as a senior aide to Miami's top administrator. In a text message, Noriega said the city would provide paperwork related to approval of Petrirena's outside employment.

The $250,000 yearly payment to A3 came the day after Levine Cava proposed a 2026 ***budget*** with steep cuts to county grants for nonprofits. Along with eliminating roughly $40 million in nonprofit grants, the Levine Cava ***budget*** eliminates the jobs of county staffers charged with administering the grant programs.

"It's very painful," she said of the cuts required to close a $402 million deficit between projected tax revenues and 2026 expenses.

Miami Herald staff writer Ana Ceballos contributed to this report.

**Load-Date:** July 20, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Sheriff wants more dollars from Miami-Dade, says safety is at risk in mayor's budget*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G8X-1603-RWF6-H2PH-00000-00&context=1519360)

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July 17, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

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Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County's sheriff says the mayor's proposed 7% increase in tax funding for law enforcement won't be enough to keep the public safe.

Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz warned county commissioners on Wednesday that Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***'s proposed ***budget*** doesn't have enough money for law enforcement and urged them to approve the $93 million funding boost requested by the Sheriff's Office.

"Anything less is defunding the police," she said.

While Cordero-Stutz asked commissioners for more funding, she was silent on whether property-tax rates should go higher to pay more for public safety.

After she spoke, commissioners voted overwhelmingly to accept Levine Cava's recommendations to keep property-tax rates flat for now, ahead of a final decision in September. Commissioner Roberto Gonzalez, who is advocating for lower tax rates, was the lone no vote for the flat rates.

Levine Cava's ***budget*** is based on flat tax rates, but commissioners could have voted to mandate a reduction by setting a lower cap on rates. With a flat cap, commissioners can still vote to lower rates in September, but state rules make it harder for them to approve a higher rate.

This week, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** proposed increasing tax funding for the Sheriff's Office by about $55 million over current levels, but between $35 million and $40 million below what Cordero-Stutz requested, depending on which set of numbers is used. Cordero-Stutz said she needs about $93 million more from Miami-Dade next year to fill vacancies and hire for new civilian positions in what would be a 9% increase.

The bulk of the sheriff dollars come from property taxes as part of a $3.4 billion pool of money that funds core county services, including jails, parks and transit.

Levine Cava released a proposed 2026 ***budget*** on Tuesday that includes fee increases and cuts to parks, senior services and charity funding to close what she said was a $402 million deficit caused in part by the funding boost for the newly independent Sheriff's Office.

In an interview, Levine Cava noted that Cordero-Stutz was a senior administrator at the Miami-Dade Police Department, which became the Sheriff's Office at the start of 2025. Police budgets grew under Levine Cava, and the mayor pointed out the Sheriff's Office is getting more funding and dollars for positions at a time when other agencies are facing cuts.

"Everybody knows that public safety is priority No. 1," Levine Cava said. "We certainly wouldn't want to jeopardize public safety. We do think reasonable growth is what's incorporated in our proposal."

While Florida's Constitution required Miami-Dade to turn over its police department to an elected sheriff in 2025, the county government retains authority over the office's tax funding.

In September, Miami-Dade commissioners will vote on the final Sheriff's Office funding package when they consider Levine Cava's full $12.9 billion ***budget*** proposal for all county services and agencies, including Miami International Airport, Metrorail, and the water and trash systems.

The public complaints by the sheriff about the ***budget*** mark the first significant rift between Levine Cava, a Democrat in an officially nonpartisan position, and Cordero-Stutz, a county police veteran and Republican who in November won Miami-Dade's first sheriff election since the 1950s.

Once Cordero-Stutz took over the county police department, she began putting together a ***budget*** proposal with dollars to fill about 200 vacancies she inherited from Levine Cava and to create dozens of new civilian positions to manage new administrative duties. A projection from the Sheriff's Office shows about three dozen vacancies remaining under the Cordero-Stutz ***budget***, but 260 under the mayor's ***budget***.

The $93 million in additional funding Cordero-Stutz requested is part of a $1 billion ***budget*** plan Levine Cava proposed for the Sheriff's Office, which includes funding from grants and municipalities that pay for deputies to provide local police services.

As detailed in a summary provided by the Sheriff's Office, this is what the extra $93 million would pay for:

$63 million to cover raises and other staffing costs mostly required by police union contracts approved under Levine Cava before the sheriff's election Nearly $20 million to fill deputy vacancies, boost overtime and buy police equipment $4 million for 54 new civilian positions for administration and maintenance services previously provided by county government $7 million for added operational costs, including rebranding from the Miami-Dade Police Department to the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office

The Cordero-Stutz request for higher funding comes as commissioners are pushing Levine Cava to reverse some cuts in her ***budget*** proposal.

Commissioner Marleine Bastien, whose district in the northern Miami area includes some of the county's poorest neighborhoods, called the Levine Cava ***budget*** proposal a "community train wreck."

"It's a ***budget*** without a soul," she said.

**Load-Date:** July 17, 2025

**End of Document**

[*'Swim at your own risk': Mayor's cuts to Miami-Dade parks hit lifeguards, security*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G8P-20S3-RX8R-M26K-00000-00&context=1519360)

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July 16, 2025 Wednesday

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Miami Herald

**Body**

Roadside landscaping crews will get fewer hours, leaving roadside grass to grow taller. A pair of tax-funded senior centers will close. And some Miami-Dade parks will lose lifeguards and adopt a "Swim at Your Own Risk" approach in the new era of austerity Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** proposed Tuesday to close a $402 million ***budget*** gap.

Her $12.9 billion spending plan for 2026 ends five years of relatively flush spending in which federal COVID dollars flowed into the Miami area and real estate values boomed. With Washington and Tallahassee cutting back and home sales cooling off, Levine Cava is proposing a series of service reductions, layoffs and fee increases to balance the 2026 ***budget***.

"We've been through some good times together, and now we face some challenges," Levine Cava said in a morning press conference at County Hall in downtown Miami.

County commissioners will vote to approve the final ***budget*** in September, so the Levine Cava proposal is just a starting point for months of negotiating, lobbying and public pressure over how Miami-Dade should spend its tax dollars.

Commissioners will get their first crack at the plan on Wednesday, when they're scheduled to vote on caps for the property-tax rates that fund Levine Cava's 2026 ***budget*** proposal.

MIA\_03LEVINECAVABUDGETPRESSMayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** remarks on her choices as she unveiled her 2026 ***budget*** proposal, which includes spending cuts to close a projected deficit of more than $400 million on Tuesday, July 15, 2025.

Levine Cava, a Democrat, has proposed flat tax rates for the five property taxes that fund daily county spending, but some commissioners want them lowered.

Commissioner Roberto Gonzalez, a Republican, is advocating for lower rates and recently criticized Levine Cava as a liberal over-spender now facing reality. "It's easy to be compassionate when you're spending other people's money," he wrote in an op-ed the Miami Herald published Monday.

Last week, the Herald reported that Levine Cava planned on cutting spending to some of the initiatives she launched after winning the mayor's office in 2020. That included closing the Office of New Americans, which helps permanent visa holders become citizens, and removing more than $40 million in county grants to nonprofits -- funding that grew with the infusion of federal COVID dollars.

"It's very painful," Levine Cava said of the ***budget*** cuts she's proposing for 2026.

The ***budget*** proposal released Tuesday outlines other cuts and fee hikes that could go into effect when the 2026 fiscal year begins Oct. 1. They include:

Closing two senior centers: the Little River and South Dade adult daycare facilities. Both operate with a mix of county and federal dollars. The ***budget*** describes them as "underperforming," with only about two dozen people using them, and says the closures will save about $450,000 in county dollars. Letting grass grow taller at county parks and roadways. The Parks Department plans to save $3.5 million by cutting back lawn mowing by 25%. Another $1.6 million comes from defunding a tree-planting initiative. Shuttering a 10-person team dedicated to dealing with substance abuse issues. The Treatment Alternatives to Street Crimes costs about $1.5 million to run. The ***budget*** was tied to a federal grant. Ending lifeguard coverage at an unknown number of county parks, which would adopt a "Swim at Your Own Risk" policy. That would save about $770,000 a year. To save about $430,000, the Parks ***budget*** also gets rid of dedicated security guards at three park facilities: Arcola Lakes Senior Center, North Pointe Community Center and Oak Grove Park. Ending free parking at multiple county parks. ***Budget*** summaries that Levine Cava circulated to commissioners include $5 parking fees at A.D. Barnes Park and Tropical Park. The ***budget*** says the new $5 parking fees will raise about $3.6 million a year. Closing three places where older residents can get free meals. The "congregate meal sites" -- Florida City, Leonard Batz Center and Perrine -- are also described as underperforming in the ***budget***, which says closing them saves $272,000 in local funds. Miami-Dade would continue operating 13 other meal sites across the county.

While the full ***budget*** includes self-sustaining county agencies like Miami International Airport and the sewer system, the bulk of the ***budget*** friction happens around expenses tied to property taxes. That part of the ***budget*** started at roughly $3.6 billion earlier this year, with only about $3.2 billion in projected revenues to pay for it.

Levine Cava said the $402 million deficit came in part from Miami-Dade adjusting to a state-mandated change in local government.

This is the first county ***budget*** that includes a full year's worth of spending on newly independent offices for sheriff and tax collector -- positions that used to report to Levine Cava before Florida voters enacted a constitutional change requiring those agencies be spun off into their own governments.

While Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz now controls what used to be the Miami-Dade Police Department, the County Commission still approves county funding for the agency. The Levine Cava plan includes a 12% increase in spending for the Sheriff's Office, with a projected ***budget*** of $1 billion.

Meanwhile, Tax Collector Dariel Fernandez, who took office in January, has been taking over the state-run DMV offices that became a Miami-Dade responsibility with the change in local government. The change did not come with state dollars to issue driver's licenses, though. State law does give Fernandez the authority to retain 2% of the county's property-tax revenue each year -- a figure topping $120 million in 2026. While Fernandez does plan to retain the 2%, he said he expects to rebate a large portion of that to Miami-Dade by the end of the fiscal year.

MIA\_07LEVINECAVABUDGETPRESSCounty government employees and staff members listen as Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** unveiled her 2026 ***budget*** proposal, which includes spending cuts to close a projected deficit of more than $400 million, on Tuesday, July 15, 2025, in Miami.

Decisions by Levine Cava and the commissioners drove the deficit, too.

Commissioners approved $46 million in subsidies and free county services for the 2026 World Cup games, with $36 million coming due in the 2026 ***budget***. Levine Cava endorsed the latest $10 million subsidy installment in a May 6 memo, despite saying the cash giveaway might require the county to cut government services.

Slight cuts to property-tax rates that Levine Cava secured in the 2023 and 2024 budgets also will cost the 2026 ***budget*** about $48 million in lost revenue, according to Herald calculations.

And rather than hold back dollars for a rainy day, Levine Cava and commissioners funded a number of one-off programs and payments in recent years, including issuing $25 million in property-tax rebates for low-income seniors over the last two years and using more than $50 million in federal COVID dollars to minimize increases in county trash fees.

State tax cuts are costing Miami-Dade millions, too. The elimination of a statewide tax on commercial leases and changes in a Florida utility tax are expected to remove about $65 million from the county ***budget*** in 2026. Federal and state revenues are down about $78 million in the 2026 ***budget*** proposal.

While her administration sees the proposed cuts as the steepest since the lean years following the 2008 housing crash, the Levine Cava ***budget*** proposal increases spending by a modest 1.3% over current levels.

The county's workforce, including the Sheriff's Office, would grow 2% to 31,900 positions. The new positions largely come from the newly independent agencies, including about 500 additional jobs under the Office of the Tax Collector. Despite the overall number of positions growing, the Levine Cava ***budget*** proposal eliminates about 360 positions, including 142 currently filled by employees who will lose their jobs by Oct. 1, according to ***budget*** documents.

Levine Cava's ***budget*** also doesn't provide long-term fixes to the county's financial challenges. Deficits are projected to return in 2027 and approach $250 million within five years.

In an interview, Levine Cava said the county can't afford to reduce spending more without severe service disruptions.

"We don't have any ideas where else to cut," she said. "We'd have to cut bus routes. We'd have to cut parks entirely. It's pretty dire."

**Load-Date:** July 16, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Miami-Dade's budget crisis is a choice and now residents are paying for it | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G88-S523-RRMP-Y36P-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 14, 2025 Monday

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**Section:** op\_ed

**Length:** 551 words

**Byline:**  Roberto J. Gonzalez

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County faces a projected $402 million shortfall caused by an out-of-control government. Instead of fiscally disciplined and transparent budgeting, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***'s proposed $3.6 billion ***budget*** is a cautionary tale of progressive governance.

There is a better way. It starts with focusing on core needs, exercising disciplined executive leadership and demanding truth in governance.

First, budgets must reflect the people's priorities by funding basic needs. The rate of growth must be sustainable and not outpace revenues.

Since taking office, Levine Cava has grown the government at an unprecedented rate. Instead of saving for a rainy day, they went on a spending spree. New offices sprang up to promote diversity, sustainability and other social programs. It's easy to be compassionate when you're spending other people's money.

Next, government investments should prioritize public safety and improve our community. Under this administration, needs were ignored and investments haven't kept pace with our growth. We don't have solutions to the trash problem or aging roads and 24-hour gridlock, but we got a heat office to tell us it's hot and electric buses that don't work.

The mayor now proposes to eliminate offices that she created and take away funds from nonprofits she threw money at. This begs the question: Did we really need these things in the first place?

The administration's ***budget*** also cuts all departments equally -- a lazy practice that fails to prioritize core needs. Consider that while traffic gets worse, cuts to roads and transit are among the largest.

They ask for more fee increases, including a higher gas tax that will hurt hard-working families and seniors. This administration loves to increase fees. It's only when the county commission stops them that they magically find a way to get things done with less.

Conversely, we have an example of executive leadership in Florida where Gov. Ron DeSantis uses line-item vetoes to eliminate waste and protect taxpayers. Florida invests in core needs that continue to attract new residents and businesses. The governor exercises fiscal discipline and is even talking about eliminating property taxes.

Miami-Dade's proposed ***budget*** doesn't even try. It avoids the hard work of creating savings through efficiencies and cutting waste. Where is the promised independent third-party audit to identify inefficiencies, create savings and restore credibility to the process?

As someone elected to give voice to the people, I am sick and tired of the annual ***budget*** shell game where the mayor withholds information and plays hide-the-ball with commissioners.

This is why I am working on legislation to force zero-based and line-item budgeting to give us a true picture of where taxpayer money is going. This transfers power from bureaucrats to the people -- no more hiding money in vague categories or general accounts.

I urge you to show up to the ***budget*** hearings and demand that the mayor explain her ***budget***, because you deserve to know how your hard-earned money is being spent.

Roberto J. Gonzalez is a Miami-Dade County commissioner, representing District 11, which includes the greater West Kendall area. He serves as chairman of the safety and health committee.

roberto-j-gonzalez.jpgMiami-Dade Commisioner Roberto Gonzalez

**Load-Date:** July 14, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Mayor's budget cuts include Miami-Dade's 'New Americans' office for immigrants*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G7V-5823-RSTF-309H-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 12, 2025 Saturday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 811 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

When she was a Miami-Dade commissioner, ***Daniella Levine Cava*** passed legislation that created a county office to help permanent visa holders in the Miami area become U.S. citizens. Now in her second term as mayor, Levine Cava has proposed eliminating the county's Office of New Americans, according to ***budget*** documents.

This year, Miami-Dade faces a $402 million deficit in the $3.6 billion ***budget*** for police, jails, parks and other core services that rely on property taxes for the bulk of their funding.

To close that gap, Levine Cava is preparing a package of spending cuts, layoffs and fee increases in the 2026 ***budget*** proposal she's expected to unveil Tuesday, according to planning documents the Miami Herald obtained through a public-records request.

Documents show Levine Cava planning to defund some of her signature initiatives since taking office in 2020, when the one-time social worker became the county's first Democratic mayor in 16 years under the campaign slogan "A Mayor Who Cares."

The Office of New Americans loses funding under a broader downsizing of the county's social-services arm. Community Action and Human Services is merging with Juvenile Services, which helps rehabilitate youthful offenders. The ***budget*** documents show the two departments are set to lose a combined 62 positions once they meld into the new Community Services Department, out of the roughly 770 positions in the agencies' current budgets.

While the New Americans initiative got its start before she became mayor, Levine Cava made it a separate agency within Community Action. Her 2022 ***budget*** funded four positions in the office, and that's the staff in the 2025 ***budget***, too. The office's website says its mission is to help legal immigrants with permanent visas complete their path to citizenship, and county records show that staff are expected to process roughly 2,400 requests for assistance this year. The help includes legal assistance and referrals to immigration lawyers, including support for immigrants holding legal visas but who aren't on the path to citizenship.

The ***budget*** documents obtained by the Herald do not show how much money Miami-Dade would save by closing the New Americans office or if Levine Cava has a plan to merge some of the functions into existing county operations. It also shows only a glimpse into the overall plan for the county ***budget***, which is around $13 billion and includes spending plans for Miami International Airport and the water and trash systems.

A Levine Cava spokesperson declined to clarify information in the documents the Herald obtained through the Board of County Commissioners, which has been attending ***budget*** briefings with the mayor and leaving with summaries of her proposals.

In a statement this week, Levine Cava said she's not happy about the cuts she's getting ready to propose ahead of final ***budget*** votes by the commission in September.

"We have made difficult choices," she said. "We've looked across departments to maximize the value of every taxpayer dollar. ... Next week we will propose a ***budget*** that continues to deliver on the core services that residents need and deserve."

Among the cuts in the ***budget*** planning documents the mayor's staff circulated this week:

Eliminating the Office of Innovation and Economic Development, a 17-person office dedicated to growing businesses in Miami-Dade. It's home to the county film office and a Levine Cava initiative aimed at green jobs. Cutting 37 Parks jobs that are currently staffed. The agency has a staff of roughly 2,300 people. Closing the Office of Neighborhood Safety, a Levine Cava initiative aimed at addressing gun violence with community outreach and other approaches aimed at reducing crime. Halting funding for small business "Mom and Pop" grants, which cost about $1 million a year.

Eliminating a county office for immigrants comes as Levine Cava faces criticism from the left for her response to Gov. Ron DeSantis seizing a county airport in the Everglades for construction of a detention camp for federal immigration offenders.

Environmental groups are suing Miami-Dade for not trying to use zoning rules to shutter the temporary facility known as "Alligator Alcatraz." An immigrant-rights group has been buying billboard space demanding that Levine Cava file suit against DeSantis, who used emergency powers he granted himself in 2023 to mitigate what he maintains is an ongoing crisis related to illegal immigration.

On Friday, Levine Cava convened a closed-door meeting with immigrant advocates to try and quell criticism of her. That includes a muted response to officers dragging a woman out of a County Commission meeting before she could speak against a cooperation agreement that Levine Cava authorized between Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Miami-Dade jails. Levine Cava maintains that Florida law required her to sign the agreement.

**Load-Date:** July 12, 2025

**End of Document**

[*To fix budget, Miami-Dade mayor floats higher gas tax, cuts to charities and parks*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G7M-VNY3-S9ND-R269-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 11, 2025 Friday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1310 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

With Miami-Dade County's government facing a ***budget*** deficit of more than $400 million in 2026, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** is considering historic spending cuts, as well as increases in transit fares, tolls and a sales tax on gasoline, according to multiple sources briefed on recent versions of the spending blueprint.

In private briefings, Levine Cava and top aides are outlining what's likely the most austere ***budget*** proposal in county government since the bruising years following the 2008 housing crash. The proposal includes an unknown number of layoffs and substantial spending cuts, including about $25 million from the Parks department and slashing about $40 million from county nonprofit grants, according to the sources briefed on the plan.

Property-tax rates remain flat in the ***budget*** proposal, which Levine Cava must present to the public by July 15 under county rules.

Representatives for the administration declined to respond to the Miami Herald's request for clarity or more information about the leaked information on the ***budget*** proposal. But the mayor's office released a statement from Levine Cava that emphasized the financial challenges facing Miami-Dade, including cuts in state and federal funding and higher local expenses from having to fund newly independent county agencies, including the Sheriff's Office.

"In the face of these headwinds, we have made difficult choices to balance our ***budget*** while minimizing impacts to our residents and employees as much as possible," she said.

Sources said the ***budget*** cuts Levine Cava proposed in recent briefings include:

Severe cuts to the roughly $55 million pool of county tax revenue that Miami-Dade uses to subsidize nonprofit groups. Lavern Spicer runs the Curley's House food bank near Liberty City, which received more than $200,000 in county payments last year, according to online records. She said she's aware of potential funding cuts from the county to charities like Curley's House but that it's too early to predict the consequences. "I'm just waiting to hear," she said. Increasing a countywide sales tax on gasoline to five cents per gallon from three cents per gallon to raise money for transportation and transit. A sharp cut in the county's parks system, which is budgeted to cost about $290 million to run this year. Levine Cava is reportedly contemplating $25 million in savings from the Parks ***budget***, but the details aren't known. Raising fares for county buses and Metrorail trains from $2.25 to $2.75 a ride. Tolls on two county bridges, the Rickenbacker and Venetian causeways, would increase by a dollar, to $3.25. Eliminating the free MetroConnect transit shuttles, an Uber-like service that provides short rides within 13 zones across Miami-Dade where transit options are considered sparse. The proposal already has County Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez warning of elderly residents in his district being stranded because MetroConnect was launched to compensate for bus routes that were eliminated in recent years. "I'm certainly looking at opportunities to maintain the service in some way, shape or form," he said, adding that might include charging riders fares.Merging multiple departments. The county's social-services arm, Community Action and Human Services, would merge with Juvenile Services into the Community Services Department. Cultural Affairs would merge into the Library Department, which is funded by its own dedicated property tax. Raiding reserves set aside for future projects in the county's SMART Plan transit blueprint. Those projects include a Metrorail extension north to Hard Rock Stadium and a new Metromover line between downtown Miami and South Beach. The $82 million reported in the transit fund last year is an eyedropper's worth of funding compared to the more than $1 billion that either SMART project would cost, but the reserves are a key part of the county's plan to pursue federal and state matching grants for transit expansion.

While Levine Cava proposes the county ***budget***, it takes a majority vote among the 13 county commissioners to enact it. Mayors regularly change their initial ***budget*** proposals to craft a spending plan that has enough support from the commission to pass in September.

"The question is, how do you restructure this government so it can be leaner? It needs to be leaner for the next two or three years," Commissioner Raquel Regalado said in an interview.

While Levine Cava and commissioners have for months warned of coming cuts, the scattered details emerging from the briefings are the first look at potential consequences from the growing gap between forecasted tax revenues and the cost of maintaining existing county services and staff.

Part of the current revenue strain comes from new challenges, including state cuts in transit taxes and ***budget*** demands from the elected heads of two newly independent offices: sheriff and tax collector.

It also comes from ***budget*** decisions Levine Cava and commissioners made in the last five years, including property-tax rate cuts and spending boosts that were approved when federal COVID aid was flowing and real estate values were surging.

Countywide spending, funded mostly by property taxes, increased 8% this year to $3.2 billion. The county workforce grew by just 1% to about 31,000 positions in the 2025 ***budget*** year, which ends Sept. 30.

While Miami-Dade's ***budget*** hit $12.8 billion overall this year, most of the current strain stems from the $3.2 billion pool of expenses that rely on property taxes, sales taxes and other revenues in county general funds that pay for police, jails, parks and transit.

At a town hall in May on the coming ***budget*** decisions, Levine Cava said projected expenses in the general funds exceed revenue by nearly $390 million. Add in the full ***budget*** requests from Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz and Tax Collector Dariel Fernandez and the gap crossed the $470 million mark.

***Budget*** projections took another hit in recent weeks when Florida's 2026 ***budget*** ended a tax on commercial leases that provided Miami-Dade with roughly $27 million a year for transit, roads and sidewalks. County administrators say they've already seen some federal dollar cutbacks under President Donald Trump, and they're expecting aid from Washington to drop in the coming years.

It's not known how much Levine Cava will recommend giving to Cordero-Stutz, who has requested $936 million.

A ***budget*** summary provided by a Cordero-Stutz spokesperson shows the request is $93 million over the equivalent ***budget*** for law enforcement this year, which included the final two months of existence for the county police department before it became an independent sheriff's office in January under a state-mandated change.

The summary says the extra dollars would go to pay increases for officers that are mandated by union contracts negotiated by Levine Cava's administration and filling vacant positions for officers and the agency's civilian staff.

State rules also allow Fernandez as tax collector to retain 2% of the county's property-tax revenue to fund his newly independent office, which inherited Florida's driver's-license offices but no state funds to run them.

County commissioners will approve the final ***budget*** in September, following a pair of public meetings that can stretch into the morning hours when a spending plan sparks controversy.

On Wednesday, commissioners are scheduled to vote on Levine Cava's proposal to keep tax rates flat -- legislation that would still allow for lower rates during the final ***budget*** adoption in the fall.

In a memo to commissioners recommending the flat tax rates, Levine Cava argued against efforts to lower the rates this year in the face of the austerity ***budget*** she'll send them next week.

Lowering the rates "would ensure that more drastic service adjustments will be required in order to close the funding gap," she wrote.

**Load-Date:** July 11, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Developers agreed to terms of Miami mega mall deal. Now they want to change it | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G5X-DKT3-RS6D-K29C-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 3, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** editorials

**Length:** 719 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

For the unsuspecting taxpayer, the different messages coming from Miami-Dade County's elected officials couldn't sound more dissonant: You have the mayor calling for ***budget*** cuts and warning about times of financial austerity. Then you have a commissioner proposing to allow property tax dollars to be used to help develop a mega mall.

The developers of American Dream Miami, planned near Hialeah, understood the county's approval of the project in 2018 also came with a subsidy ban on the planned retail theme park. Now that the project is at least five years behind schedule -- and Miami-Dade County has sued over the delays -- there's a proposal to water down that ban. Developer Triple Five is also in court with a Miami Lakes developer over control of land located at Florida's Turnpike and Interstate 75.

Asking for the county's help sounds like a Hail Mary to push through a project that's looking less feasible by the minute.

Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez's proposal would allow the county to divert property taxes to cover about $60 million in local road construction and other infrastructure costs that otherwise would be the developers' responsibility, the Herald reported. Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** supported the item as a way to expedite the construction of roadways in the area even if the mega mall doesn't get built.

The proposal was placed on the County Commission's Tuesday agenda at the last minute but a vote was deferred to mid July. Some commissioners balked at the argument put forward by Bermudez linking the approval of his subsidy-cap legislation to another vote that was also on the agenda to accept $5 million from the developer to settle the county's lawsuit. The latter was also postponed.

Commission Chair Anthony Rodriguez said it was a "bad look" that "you guys are saying you'll only come to this agreement if we get this," the Herald reported.

Commissioner Oliver Gilbert said he opposes letting Triple Five tap into property taxes to offset its development costs, saying, "I don't see how that's a good deal for the people." It is not.

Bermudez called his legislation "an opportunity to right a wrong," the Herald reported. That's because some of South Florida's largest malls successfully lobbied the commission to impose the subsidy ban on American Dream when it was approved. Miguel Díaz de la Portilla, a Triple Five lobbyist and former county commissioner, equated that to "interference from some mall owners who don't want competition." Díaz de la Portilla said the company could attract $350 million in road construction dollars to Northwest Miami-Dade if it can tap into county money first.

We don't disagree entirely with Bermudez and Díaz de la Portilla.

There's no doubt that the subsidy ban was a political move, at least in part, to stifle competition. Alas, in 2018, Triple Five agreed to cover the $60 million roadway costs or persuade state or local governments to fund them. It's hard not to read this latest move as a desperate attempt to change the terms of the deal, especially given Triple Five's legal and financial issues elsewhere.

An American Dream mall opened on state-owned land in New Jersey in 2019 with help from more than $1 billion in state and local aid, according to NorthJersey.com. Surrounding municipalities have sued, accusing the developer of owing a combined $13 million in negotiated payments to them since the mall's opening.

Triple Five has denied any wrongdoing, arguing that the mall didn't have to start making the payments because it hasn't reached 100% occupancy and so was not completely open. In March, a local judge rejected that argument, ruling in favor of one of the municipalities, NorthJersey.com reported.

Miami-Dade County is under increased financial pressure from the drying up of pandemic federal funding and the costs associated with spinning off county departments such as police into independent offices. Levine Cava's administration says the county faces the worst ***budget*** shortfall since the 2008 Great Recession.

With so many needs and an unpredictable next few ***budget*** years, is this the time to ask the county to allow a developer to access property tax dollars for a private project? The answer should be no.

letter V4.pngSend a letter to the editor to [*heralded@miamiherald.com*](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com)

Click here to send the letter.

**Load-Date:** July 3, 2025

**End of Document**

[*American Dream Miami mega-mall will pay Miami-Dade $5M. But wants subsidy help, too*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G5P-FCP3-RT25-T2R3-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

July 2, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 973 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

The stalled American Dream Miami mega-mall project may ask for property taxes to revive its fortunes.

At a meeting Tuesday, some county commissioners balked at a proposal to lift a subsidy cap that was imposed on the retail theme park when a different commission approved the project in 2018. A vote to lift the subsidy ban was pushed to the board's next meeting on July 16.

While lifting the ban wouldn't authorize the spending of any tax dollars on the $4 billion private project that's at least five years behind schedule, it would allow developer Triple Five to ask for county help funding about $60 million in nearby road construction and infrastructure costs.

That could be a big boost for Triple Five, which hoped to reproduce its success with Minnesota's Mall of America in South Florida but is now mired in legal fights and delays. The American Dream project is so far behind schedule that it's facing a $5 million lawsuit from Miami-Dade over development delays.

In 2018, Triple Five agreed to either cover the $60 million roadway costs or persuade state or local governments to fund the roadway improvements that are needed to connect the property with the nearby Florida's Turnpike, Interstate 75 and neighborhood roads on the vacant development site near Hialeah.

Existing malls had pushed subsidy ban in Miami-Dade

Some of South Florida's largest malls successfully lobbied county commissioners at the time to impose a subsidy ban on the project when the county originally approved the development. Triple Five called the ban unprecedented and unfair and says the restriction is making it harder to get Florida to build needed roads in the area.

"To me, we have an opportunity to right a wrong," Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez, the sponsor of the measure to lift the subsidy cap, said at Tuesday's meeting. "It was a decision based on politics, not on what was best for Miami-Dade County."

Miami-Dade mostly relies on state dollars and permitting fees for road construction, while property taxes fund police, jails, transit and parks. On Tuesday, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** said she supported the Bermudez item as a way to accelerate construction of roadway improvements if the state won't pay for them -- even if the mall never gets built. Bermudez said he had worked with the mayor's administration to refine the language of his legislation.

"I was personally persuaded that this really didn't have to do so much with the project as it has to do with the needs of the residents of the area," Levine Cava told commissioners. "We do not know what the developer plans to do with this property at this time. It could come back as housing or something else."

Miguel Díaz de la Portilla, a Triple Five lobbyist and former county commissioner, said Triple Five could lure about $350 million in state highway construction dollars to the Northwest Miami-Dade area if it could first tap county funds for some road construction. He called the subsidy ban an unprecedented restriction that came out of "interference from some mall owners who don't want competition."

Property taxes could help cover development costs for the American Dream Miami project

At Tuesday's meeting, Triple Five was hoping there would be a vote overturning the subsidy ban at the same time the commission endorsed Miami-Dade accepting $5 million from the developer to settle the county's lawsuit over the project's delays. The county sued Triple Five in April for missing its 2025 opening deadline and for failing to secure the required county approvals and permits by 2020, as was required under the 2018 development agreement reached with Miami-Dade.

Levine Cava recommended that the commission approve a $5 million settlement of the suit, to be paid over four years with interest. The first $1 million would be due within 30 days, and all settlement money would go to offset the $53 million current shortfall in the county's transit ***budget***.

But the items lifting the subsidy cap and settling the lawsuit were added late to Tuesday's agenda, without the required public notice of four business days before the scheduled votes. The lateness allowed any commissioner to demand that the votes be delayed until the next meeting, and Commissioner René Garcia did so for the legislation lifting the subsidy cap.

That prompted Bermudez, who sponsored both items, to say he didn't think the settlement would hold up without the subsidy-cap legislation passing as well. The suggestion of a link rankled Commission Chair Anthony Rodriguez.

"I think it's a bad look," he said. "That you guys are saying you'll only come to this agreement if we get this."

Commissioner Kionne McGhee ended the debate by invoking the "four-day rule" to push the settlement vote to the July 16 meeting as well.

Triple Five had agreed to the $5 million penalty in 2015 as part of an agreement with Miami-Dade to purchase 83 acres of government land for the development site without having to go through the normal bidding process for the property.

While settling the Miami-Dade suit would cost Triple Five $5 million, the potential to gain access to property-tax dollars to fund development costs could be worth far more for the developer. The Bermudez item would allow Triple Five to request a special taxing district around the project to divert an unknown portion of property taxes from the American Dream property to pay for transportation costs. Creating that district would require another vote of the commission.

A 2015 economic study Triple Five filed with Miami-Dade in the early stages of the approval process predicted American Dream would pay more than $13 million a year in property taxes.

Commissioner Oliver Gilbert said he would oppose letting Triple Five use property taxes to subsidize its own development costs. "I don't see how that's a good deal for the people," he said.

**Load-Date:** July 2, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Inmate names to remain public under ICE agreement with Miami-Dade jails, admin says*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6G10-F5T3-RX9B-605M-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

June 9, 2025 Monday

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**Section:** immigration

**Length:** 1058 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

A proposed update to Miami-Dade County's detention agreement with ICE won't cause any changes with how family members can find relatives in local jails or give the federal immigration agency extra authority within the county's Corrections system, a top deputy to Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** pledged Monday.

James Reyes, chief of public safety under Levine Cava, said the updated agreement does not give Immigration and Customs Enforcement additional powers in Miami-Dade jails, where the county already has a state-mandated cooperation agreement with ICE to hold inmates for two extra working days if they're booked on local charges while also being sought for deportation.

The agreement, proposed by Levine Cava, is scheduled for a final vote before the County Commission on June 26. Levine Cava's administration maintains that the agreement submitted for a County Commission vote is required by Florida law, which mandates that jails sign cooperation agreements with ICE.

Immigration advocates have expressed concerns that the proposed update to that agreement would give ICE the ability to remove some inmates' names from the Miami-Dade online portal, where anyone can search for someone to see if they're being held. Reyes said all inmate names will remain in that public database, even those being held for ICE.

"Nothing is going to change," said Reyes, who was the county's Corrections director before Levine Cava promoted him to his current position, overseeing the jails and the Fire Rescue Department. "If somebody is in our custody -- we have a public-facing site that's searchable where you can see who is in our custody. That's going to stay the same. As long as they are in our custody, they will appear in that searchable database."

MIA\_SN2\_5211Miami-Dade County Commission Chairman Anthony Rodriguez, second from left, cancels a County Commission committee hearing to discuss a proposed agreement between ICE and the administration of Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** due to a lack of quorum on Monday, June 9, 2025. The matter of the hearing was regarding reimbursement for extended detention in county jails of inmates booked on local charges but also sought for deportation.

Immigration advocacy groups had hoped to block approval of the agreement at a Monday morning committee meeting by the County Commission. That meeting of the Policy Council was canceled when not enough commissioners showed up to meet the quorum requirements. While commissioners didn't show, multiple local residents did attend to object to the ICE deal that is recommended by Levine Cava but requires a commission vote.

"It's immoral," said Silvia Muñoz, a Miami volunteer for the Cuban American Women Supporting Democracy advocacy group. "It's a human-rights issue."

MIA\_SN2\_5901Silvia Muñoz, a volunteer with the Cuban American Women Supporting Democracy group, signals while talking on the phone as the leaves the commission chambers after the cancellation of a County Commission committee hearing to discuss a proposed agreement between ICE and the administration of Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** on Monday, June 9, 2025.

Miami-Dade already had a fierce fight over turning over county inmates to ICE when they're sought for deportation. That was in 2017 during the initial weeks of the first Trump administration, when Miami-Dade under then-Mayor Carlos Gimenez agreed to honor detention requests from federal immigration agents.

The county had been declining to delay releasing inmates at ICE's request before Trump took office unless the federal government agreed to cover the extra jail costs. When Trump promised a crackdown on "sanctuary" jurisdictions, Gimenez, now a Republican member of Congress, agreed to drop the reimbursement requirement, and commissioners voted to endorse the new policy later that year.

Levine Cava is a Democrat who voted against the Gimenez ICE policy when she was a county commissioner in 2017. She hasn't sought to change it since becoming mayor in 2020. Reyes, a former Democratic candidate for county sheriff, said the proposed update to the existing ICE agreement would let Miami-Dade collect $50 from Washington for every inmate it holds for ICE.

"The only thing that changes for us is currently we don't get reimbursed," he said.

It costs about $523 million a year to run Miami-Dade's jails, where the average daily population is 4,700 inmates, according to ***budget*** documents. That translates to a daily cost of about $305 per inmate.

Advocacy groups pointed to language in the proposed "Basic Ordering Agreement" with ICE that governs public records in the county's Corrections Department. The agreement states that information generated under the arrangement becomes "under the control of ICE" and can only be released by federal authorities. Reyes said he couldn't offer an example of what kind of public record would be covered by the agreement but said it could be federal documents -- like a detainer request itself.

MIA\_SN2\_5476Mariana Lopez, a resident of Miami-Dade County, holds a sign outside the commission chambers after the cancellation of a County Commission committee hearing on Monday, June 9, 2025. The matter of the hearing was regarding reimbursement for extended detention in county jails of inmates booked on local charges but also sought for deportation.

Advocacy groups say the language could be read as giving Miami-Dade the green light to remove inmates' names from local search portals once the people are being held for ICE, making it impossible for their custody status to be known to civilians.

Local jails release inmates to ICE when the person has a federal "detainer" request attached to their name in federal law enforcement records. Those detainer requests ask a jail to hold someone for up to two business days past when they would otherwise be free to go on whatever local charges brought them into the jail system.

Juan Osorio, who is part of the Tallahassee-based Rising Voices Collective advisory group, was also in the audience for Monday's canceled committee hearing. He said the public-records language is problematic.

"It would basically make it impossible -- or very difficult -- for the public to get that information," he said. Osorio said he wants to hear from the mayor's administration on its interpretation of the language. "They need to clarify that for the next meeting," he said.

**Load-Date:** June 10, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Trump cuts hit flood control and food aid in Miami-Dade. Will Medicaid be next?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FXK-F5S3-RRR2-N1FT-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

May 29, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 871 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks and Alex Harris

Miami Herald

**Body**

Cuts to federal spending yanked $10 million for flood-prevention projects in Miami, slashed USDA produce deliveries to a leading food bank and killed $17 million in grant money that Miami-Dade County hoped to secure for expanding Internet access to low-income households.

But those cutbacks aren't what have county administrators worried. It's the even deeper cuts proposed by the Trump administration that they say would bring severe consequences to healthcare, housing and social services throughout Miami-Dade.

The county's Democratic mayor, ***Daniella Levine Cava***, laid out potential impacts in a recent memo to county commissioners.

With more than $700 billion in Medicaid spending reductions in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the Republican-backed spending and policy bill that narrowly passed the U.S. House on May 22, Levine Cava's memo warns of local pain if Washington cuts back on the stream of federal healthcare dollars to the Miami area.

"Last year, in Miami-Dade, Medicaid provided services to 40,300 children (30% of the County's children) and 120,700 seniors and people with disabilities," Levine Cava wrote in the May 19 memo. "Any reduction in Medicaid funding would significantly impact access to care and economic security."

U.S. Rep. Carlos Gimenez, a Republican and Levine Cava's predecessor as county mayor, defended the proposed Medicaid changes that he voted for in the House, including work requirements for some recipients and stricter eligibility scrutiny to prevent "double-dipping" by Medicaid recipients wrongly enrolled in more than one state program. "The benefits to eligible residents have not been reduced," he said.

Federal funding accounts for about 6% of the county's $12.7 billion ***budget*** -- amounting to more than $750 million annually from Washington. Among the funding concerns cited in the memo:

A $65 million shortfall in funding for the federal Section 8 rental voucher program that Miami-Dade administers using dollars from Washington. The memo said more than 5,400 households could lose their housing assistance without more federal money in 2025. The potential loss of Head Start childcare dollars through a planned restructuring at the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Miami-Dade runs Head Start childcare centers funded by roughly $90 million a year from Washington. The latest grant expires Oct. 1, and Levine Cava said there's no option yet to apply for a renewal in the federal grant-making system. Cutbacks in federally funded food shipments that make their way to soup kitchens, church pantries and food banks throughout Miami-Dade.

Farm Share, a main supplier of free food in the county, said the U.S. Department of Agriculture recently cut in half the number of semi-trucks packed with cans, produce, and dry goods like rice and beans that find their way to local charities and nonprofits. Farm Share's federal shipments hit about 15 million pounds between February and May last year, compared to 7 million pounds this year, said Stephen Shelley, president of the Homestead-based charity.

"It's concerning," he said. Even so, Shelley said he's optimistic the cutbacks will be temporary as the second Trump administration retools the program and manages fallout from the shortages. "This is a cycle that is not uncommon. We're watching, and we're hopeful."

While the memo focuses mostly on potential funding impacts, some examples represent federal money that's already lost. That includes a $16.5 million grant from the Department of Commerce that the county hoped to receive to expand Internet access countywide.

One of the biggest hits to Miami-Dade's existing federal funding is a grant designed to help the county lessen current-day flooding, as well as help prepare for sea-level rise.

Two of the floodiest spots in Miami-Dade County -- the mouth of Little River and the Biscayne Canal -- were set to receive multimillion-dollar makeovers designed to protect neighborhoods against high waters and heavy rains. But last month, the Trump administration ended FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructures and Communities (BRIC) grant program, which launched during Trump's first term.

READ MORE: Millions in South Florida flood-control projects on hold after Trump FEMA cuts

Planning for the flood protection projects is on schedule to finish up this month. But there's no longer federal money to raise the height of canal walls and purchase bigger pumps to keep rainwater flowing to Biscayne Bay instead of into nearby streets.

"The cancellation of the BRIC program poses a major setback to Miami-Dade County's ability to implement long-term resilience strategies," Levine Cava wrote. She said the two canceled grants were worth $9.2 million, with another $23 million in pending grant applications also taken off the table.

Even so, she said Miami-Dade will be pursuing other federal dollars for the projects -- even if they have more strings attached. Levine Cava is already warning of a nearly $400 million shortfall for the county's 2026 ***budget*** from increased local spending and slowing growth in property-tax revenues. That can make it harder to snag federal grants because county "departments continue to face challenges identifying required match funding."

**Load-Date:** May 29, 2025

**End of Document**

[*The worst budget crisis since 2008 and Miami-Dade couldn't see this coming? | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FX2-TJ33-S30J-R0GP-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

May 27, 2025 Tuesday

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**Section:** editorials

**Length:** 703 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County is facing the worst ***budget*** shortfall since the 2008 Great Recession -- nearly $400 million out of the county's $3.6 billion general fund ***budget*** that pays for core services such as public safety and parks.

And who's to blame?

The county is dealing with what Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** described as a "perfect storm." There's the cost of converting three county departments -- elections, sheriff and tax collector -- into independent agencies run by newly-elected constitutional officers. (The county couldn't have stopped this change, forced by a 2018 statewide referendum.)

There's less money expected from the state and the Trump administration, no more COVID federal dollars and inflation has made the cost of running government more expensive.

With the mayor now talking about ***budget*** cuts and austerity measures such as department mergers and hiring freezes, we wonder: Where was this fiscal conservatism when Miami-Dade was flush with cash, including $1 billion in federal pandemic funding and rising property tax revenues? The responsibility to plan for the end of the financial bonanza was on the mayor and the 13 county commissioners who approved two property tax cuts that cost $42 million in revenue from this year's ***budget***, the Herald reported.

"We've already begun to economize," Levine Cava told the Herald Editorial Board. "We are focused on greater efficiency, finding savings for residents, improving operations, cutting red tape... Already this year, we've asked every department to identify savings in their budgets, both for this year and in next year's projected ***budget***."

Why, then, why is Miami-Dade treating the $46 million it has committed in direct funding and services to the host committee of the 2026 FIFA World Cup as though it's untouchable? If programs that directly impact services for our citizens could be on the chopping block, so should money for the soccer tournament, even if Miami-Dade officials made a financial commitment as one of the Cup's 16 host cities.

Moving forward, the burden of frugality will fall not only on the mayor and commission but also on the new constitutional officers. Levine Cava said that the ***budget*** proposals submitted by some for approval by the county "are significantly outpacing the growth rate that we project and that we think is reasonable."

Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz, for example, is asking the county $110 million more than last year's Miami-Dade Police Department ***budget***, according to ***budget*** documents from her office. That increase is partly driven by merit salary increases Levine Cava's administration negotiated in 2023, overtime increases "due to less deputies" and money to hire 54 additional civilian positions -- the first significant increase in that workforce "in decades," according to a Sheriff's Office document.

Tax Collector Dariel Fernandez hasn't yet submitted his ***budget***, but his office is in the process of taking over the county's beleaguered driver-license offices from the state, and he's promised to hire more staff and reduce wait times. Fernandez also plans to exercise his office's authority to keep 2% of property-tax money from the county -- totaling $107 million -- to fund the new services. He said he will refund a significant portion of that money at the end of 2026 but he hasn't said how much.

To be sure, spending money to reduce the outrageous wait times at DMV offices or hire more people to improve public safety may offer clear public benefits. Likewise, some of the programs Levine Cava created to help people during the pandemic and struggling in Miami-Dade's housing crisis were necessary.

The same can be said about public transit expenses, responsible for a big chunk of Miami-Dade's ***budget*** woes. The rapid-transit bus system in South Miami-Dade, a much-needed project expected to open this summer, has an annual operating cost of about $12 million, the Herald reported.

After years of being buoyed by pandemic funding and the hot real estate market, Miami-Dade may be finally learning the lesson that we can't pay for it all -- tax cuts, social programs, the World Cup -- all at the same time.

letter V4.pngSend a letter to the editor to [*heralded@miamiherald.com*](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com)

Click here to send the letter.

**Load-Date:** May 27, 2025

**End of Document**

[*'Difficult decisions are ahead': Miami-Dade faces worst budget crunch since '08 crash*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FTH-5HR3-RRSP-J29D-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

May 15, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 997 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

After years of flush spending and tax-rate cuts, Miami-Dade County is now facing the steepest ***budget*** crunch since the 2008 financial crisis.

A top deputy to Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** on Wednesday laid out a looming financial squeeze for Florida's largest local government. The administration is predicting a nearly $400 million shortfall next year for the county's $3.6 billion general fund ***budget*** that pays for the core services of police, jails, transit and parks and relies on property taxes for the bulk of its revenue.

"We have some very difficult decisions to make," Carladenise Edwards, the county's chief administrative officer under Levine Cava, told the County Commission's Appropriations Committee at an afternoon meeting. "If we don't pivot, and we go straight into the storm, it could be devastating."

The administration blames a mix of circumstances and overspending for the $387 million forecasted ***budget*** gap, including added expenses tied to a change in the Florida Constitution spinning off three county departments into independent agencies: Elections, Sheriff and Tax Collector. Also in the mix: state mandated sales-tax holidays, a $35 million subsidy for the 2026 World Cup games and cost overruns in the county's transit department.

Edwards offered no potential fixes for the projected $387 million revenue gap at Wednesday's meeting. But she did say that Levine Cava, who will unveil the 2026 ***budget*** in July, will not propose an increase in tax rates to fix the ***budget*** gap.

With more than a month to go before the ***budget*** gets released, the administration still has ample time to rework the current numbers and bring down the projected deficit. Asked if layoffs were a possibility in the 2026 ***budget***, a Levine Cava spokesperson said in a statement that the administration is waiting for the final property-tax estimates that come out in June but that "we do know that difficult decisions are ahead."

Miami-Dade also is expecting less money from Washington under President Donald Trump and likely fewer state dollars as Gov. Ron DeSantis and the state legislature push for tax reductions in the 2026 Florida ***budget***.

"I know this is going to be a difficult year," County Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez said at Thursday's meeting of Miami-Dade's Government Efficiency and Transparency Committee. "There's probably less money coming from Washington and Tallahassee."

At the Appropriations committee meeting, David Clodfelter, the county's ***budget*** director, said the last time Miami-Dade faced this kind of shortfall was in the years surrounding the financial crisis in 2008 that saw banks close and a recession begin.

Property values surged after Levine Cava took office in 2020 in the middle of the COVID pandemic, creating more tax revenue at a time when the county also received more than $1 billion in federal pandemic relief. The county was flush enough in Levine Cava's first term that she was able to secure two 1% cuts in the countywide property-tax rate for property owners. But spending increased during that time period, too.

Labor contracts negotiated during Levine Cava's first term included pay raises for unions that added about $150 million to the ***budget*** this year. The two tax-rate cuts, approved by county commissioners in 2022 and 2023, removed about $42 million in revenue from this year's ***budget***, according to a Miami Herald calculation.

Levine Cava has already taken some austerity measures, including imposing a hiring freeze earlier this year and eliminating some vacant positions -- including the $175,000-a-year position of chief heat officer she'd created to devise county responses to extreme heat, like promoting the availability of air-conditioned public buildings for people to get out of the sun.

Edwards presented a chart with the administration's breakdown of the $387 million deficit for the 2026 ***budget*** year, which begins Oct. 1. Causes include:

Transit busting its ***budget***: The administration predicts a $53 million gap between transit expenses and the revenue available to pay for Metrorail, Metromover and the bus system. A new rapid-transit bus system in South Miami-Dade is expected to open this summer with a yearly operating cost of about $12 million. Earlier this month, the Levine Cava administration won commission approval for an additional $27 million for the Department of Transportation and Public Works ***budget*** to shorten Metrorail waits and to fund expenses for the Better Bus route redesign that was launched in late 2023.

Unsustainable spending: Edwards said about $90 million of the shortfall comes from spending decisions. That includes $23 million in recurring spending on nonprofit grants and other funding giveaways by Miami-Dade. About $65 million was linked to spending increases that Levine Cava recommended and commissioners approved: $30 million in extra funding for the Sheriff's Office this year and $35 million in subsidies for the 2026 World Cup games.

DMV fixes and more: There's a sharp increase in the ***budget*** for the county's Tax Collector's Office, which is in the process of taking over Florida's overwhelmed DMV offices across Miami-Dade. State rules made the Tax Collector's Office an independent agency this year, with the requirement that it take over driver's-license functions that for decades have been a state responsibility and a state expense. Dariel Fernandez, Miami-Dade newly elected tax collector, is using his office's authority to retain an estimated $107 million in property taxes from the county's ***budget*** next year to fund the new services. Fernandez has also said he expected to refund a portion of that money at the end of 2026 but has not said how much.

Levine Cava is holding three town halls on the ***budget*** this month:

Friday, May 16, at 6 p.m., at the Main Library, 101 W. Flagler St., MiamiSaturday, May 17, 12:30 p.m., at the North Dade Regional Library, 2455 NW 183rd St., Miami GardensMonday, May 19, 6 p.m., at the South Dade Regional Library, 10750 SW 211th St., Cutler Bay

**Load-Date:** May 15, 2025

**End of Document**

[*A Miami hospital leader just got a $242,000 raise. How does the salary compare?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FKG-NF83-RRHS-P445-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

April 17, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** health\_care

**Length:** 1758 words

**Byline:**  Michelle Marchante

Miami Herald

**Body**

The chief of Miami-Dade County's public hospital system just got a big raise.

Carlos Migoya makes more than mayors, city managers, police chiefs and school superintendents. But he's not the highest paid health executive in the nation, or even in South Florida.

What does Migoya's paycheck look like?

After a $242,054 boost in salary, a nearly 21% raise, Migoya is pulling in about $1.4 million a year at the nonprofit Jackson Health, one of the largest public hospital systems in the nation.

The 74-year-old CEO, who has been with Jackson 15 years, has big plans for the health system. But he's also thinking about retirement.

"I never thought I'd be here this long," he said during a Zoom interview with the Miami Herald, noting that the Jackson CEO position has now been his second longest job. "Ever since I got here, my number one job was always to find the right replacement for me."

Although Migoya hasn't decided on when he will retire, he has a possible successor in mind: David Zambrana, Jackson Health System's president and chief operating officer, who has worked alongside him for years.

Zambrana, a registered nurse and doctor of nursing practice, began his health career at Jackson Memorial working in cardiac surgery intensive care, trauma and pediatric intensive care. He came back to Jackson in 2016, when he left his job as chief executive at the neighboring University of Miami Hospital for the same job at Jackson Memorial Hospital. He is now Jackson's chief operating officer.

Screenshot 2025-04-10 183213\_fitted (1).pngDavid Zambrana, Jackson's president and chief operating officer

Migoya won't be the one to decide Jackson's next CEO. That task will fall to the seven-member Public Health Trust, the board that just gave Migoya a pay raise. But Zambrana "would have not only my support but my complete recommendation that he would be the first to eventually take over" Jackson, the CEO said.

"You want to make sure you leave at the right time and I don't know what that is right now. A lot of challenges are ahead," Migoya said. "We will make that decision at the right time and I don't know when that is."

Comparing hospital salaries of the bosses

Migoya's raise is part of a new two-year contract with the governing body that oversees Miami-Dade's public hospital system. Its meant to make his salary more competitive with other CEOs that run not-for-profit health organizations similar in size and complexity to Jackson. Migoya's salary, like all Jackson employees, is accounted for in the hospital system's operating ***budget***, which comes from patient revenue, taxes and philanthropy.

So how does Migoya's salary compare to other hospital executives?

Under the new contract, Migoya's total compensation package would be the sixth highest of 21 public health systems with revenues greater than $1 billion, Michelle Kligman, Jackson's executive vice president and chief human resources officer, told the board in February.

With his raise, Migoya's base pay is similar to other South Florida hospital CEOs. But his total compensation -- salary combined with benefits that will bring him to at least $1.74 million in 2025 -- is less than other hospital leaders.

That's not unusual. Nonprofit hospitals and private for-profit hospital systems typically pay their top executives more than taxpayer-funded public hospital systems like Jackson. News reports and tax documents give an idea how much money they make.

CEO Compensation DataWrapper

Migoya's total compensation is more than that of Shane Strum, who oversees Broward's two public hospital systems and is the only other public hospital CEO in South Florida. Both make less than other South Florida executives who run not-for-profit health systems, including Baptist Health South Florida, Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, Cleveland Clinic Florida and the University of Miami Health System.

The highest paid South Florida hospital CEO in total compensation is Albert "Bo" Boulenger, the president and CEO of Baptist Health South Florida, the largest not-for-profit hospital system in the region and the future teaching hospital of Florida International University.

Boulenger, who became Baptist Health's CEO in October 2022, received a total compensation of about $3.05 million during the 2022 fiscal year, which ran from June 2022 through September 2023, according to the most recently filed tax documents with the IRS. He was promoted to the CEO job after Baptist Health's longtime leader Brian Keeley retired. Keeley, who had been CEO since 1986 and then became a trustee member, received a total compensation of about $4.88 million during the same time period.

Joseph Echevarria, president and CEO of the University of Miami and the University of Miami Health System, received a total compensation of about $1.84 million during the 2022 fiscal year, which ran from June 2022 to May 2023, according to most recent IRS tax documents. Echevarria's UHealth CEO role was expanded during this time to include the university. He became UM's interim president, and later permanent president, last year. Dr. Dipen Parekh, professor at UM's Miller School of Medicine and UHealth's chief operating officer, who oversees UHealth's day-to-day operations, reported a higher total compensation of about $3.44 million.

Gino Santorio, the president and CEO of Mount Sinai, received about $1.93 million in total compensation in 2023, according to ProPublica's Nonprofit Explorer, which collects tax documents filed with the IRS.

Dr. Conor Delaney, executive vice president and president of the Cleveland Clinic Florida market, oversees the health system's operations across the state, including Cleveland Clinic Weston and four other hospitals. He received about $1.76 million in total compensation in 2023, recent IRS tax filings show.

Strum is president and CEO of Broward Health and also serves as the interim CEO of Memorial Healthcare System, two of the largest public hospital systems in the country. Strum makes about $1.3 million annually for his job at Broward Health and declined a salary for Memorial, according to news reports. The Herald could not confirm the salary and benefits breakdown of his compensation and has filed a public record request for his contract.

Salary information was not publicly available for the South Florida executives of for-profit health systems HCA Florida Healthcare, which owns several hospitals across the region, and Healthcare Systems of America, which took over Palmetto General Hospital in Hialeah, North Shore Medical Center in North Miami-Dade, Coral Gables Hospital, Hialeah Hospital and Florida Medical Center in Lauderdale Lakes from struggling Steward Health Care System last year.

Carlos Migoya's role at Jackson Health

Migoya oversees Miami-Dade County's healthcare safety net, which provides care to everyone, even if they can't pay and don't have insurance. Jackson has seven hospitals, two nursing homes, a renowned transplant center, and several urgent cares, doctors' offices and clinics across Miami-Dade.

Besides being one of the largest public health systems in the nation, with more than 14,800 full-time employees, Jackson also serves as a teaching hospital through a partnership with the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. The taxpayer-funded public hospital was ground zero of Miami-Dade's COVID-19 pandemic. As the hospital CEO, Migoya also serves on the executive committee of the Jackson Health Foundation, the fundraising arm of Jackson.

While he may be thinking of some R&R, for now Migoya is focusing on working with the team he has built through the years to "drive Jackson to the levels of competition that we need to be at to be able to be a thriving and sustainable system for Miami-Dade County."

MIA\_Pfizer\_Vaccine\_Jackson\_ (19)Jackson Health CEO Carlos Migoya, left, and Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** attend a press conference outside of Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, Florida, on Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2020. The conference was held after Jackson Memorial Hospital administered doses of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to its healthcare workers.

Migoya, a retired banker with decades of experience in the banking industry, including serving as regional president of Wachovia in North Carolina and the CEO for the Atlantic region, was hired in 2011 to help steady the financially wobbly Jackson.

He also had a bit of public service experience, although at a much lower salary. Before coming to Jackson, Migoya worked for $1 a year as Miami city manager in 2010 "when bloated union contracts threatened to drown the municipal ledgers in red ink," as the Miami Herald reported at the time.

In his first year as Jackson CEO, the hospital system produced a surplus of more than $8 million, its first since 2006. Jackson has since earned an annual surplus every year, including last year when it faced one of its toughest financial hurdles in over a decade.

A breakdown of Migoya's Jackson Health compensation

In his evaluation, board members commended Migoya for his leadership and vision of growth. In the anonymous evaluations, which the Miami Herald obtained through a public record request, one board member described the CEO as "one of the premier relationship builders in Miami-Dade County." Another said he was "an extraordinary CEO who has dedicated the last decade of his mind and heart to Jackson."

Migoya's pay bump is based on the salary recommendations made by the consulting firm Gallagher, which conducted a hospital CEO compensation analysis for Jackson in November.

Under the new contract:

Migoya will now make a base salary of $1.4 million. In February 2026, he'll get a 3% raise, bringing it up to $1.44 million. The new contract runs through June 17, 2027.

He'll also receive $340,897 worth of annual benefits.

The CEO may also be eligible for an annual performance bonus based on how well Jackson does financially each fiscal year.

Migoya's total compensation, salary plus benefits, for 2025 will be at least $1.74 million and at least $1.78 million in 2026, not counting bonuses.

Migoya said that his desire to continue leading the health system comes from loyalty to his team and what Jackson "means to this community."

He's excited for Jackson's future plans that include building one of the largest ERs in the nation and the construction of affordable workforce housing for employees, and expansion of outpatient services.

"There's a lot of people that are not only alive," he said, "but have quality of life because of the work that's done at Jackson."

**Load-Date:** April 17, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Developer gets land by MIA in cut-rate deal for housing. 'Giveaway' says ex-Springs mayor*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FKB-1083-RS6H-D3K9-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

April 16, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** real\_estate\_news

**Length:** 1137 words

**Byline:**  Theo Karantsalis

Miami Herald

**Body**

The County Commission recently voted unanimously to sell a nearly 4-acre parcel of vacant land north of Miami International Airport at a cut-rate price to a developer to build workforce housing, a deal the former Miami Springs mayor calls a "giveaway."

On April 1, the commissioners voted to sell the property, about a block west of LeJeune Road and Northwest 36th Street within Miami Springs' city limits, to Habitat Creators Inc., a Miami developer, for a "nominal sum." The county did not immediately respond to the Herald's query about the sales price.

The project calls for 20-plus townhouses that will go for about $450,000 each, according to Habitat Creators. The property's sale is contingent on Habitat complying with income limits for buyers set by the county and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Habitat Creators has not submitted renderings, saying they are in the design phase.

Three apartment towers first proposed

Initially, Habitat Creators wanted to build three 10-story towers with 1,426 rental units. But the city of Miami Springs balked over the size, leading to the developer's decision to scale back to the 20-plus townhouses. Homeowners would pay taxes to the city of Miami Springs.

Still, the former Miami Springs mayor has reservations about the latest plans.

"This is not a sale of airport property; it is a giveaway to a private developer," Maria Mitchell told the Herald in a recent interview.

Mitchell had hoped to build a new City Hall and/or Police Station/Public Safety Complex on the property, but that never materialized.

Mitchell also was miffed about not being included in the discussions to sell the property, considering it fell within the city's borders.

"The City of Miami Springs was surprised to find that late on the evening before the April 1 Board of County Commissioners meeting, an item was placed on the agenda to give away county-owned property located in Miami Springs and valued upwards of $17 million to a private developer," Mitchell said in a statement to the Herald. "The City had requested to be included in any discussions regarding county properties located within the city. Therefore, the lack of any notice or discussion with the city was both disrespectful and irresponsible.

"Further, it is surprising that the Commissioners approved giving away a highly valuable multimillion-dollar property considering how the County has repeatedly stated that it is facing a dire financial situation, and is in need of revenues. We look forward to being included in future discussions with the County and the proposed developer."

Former County Commissioner Kevin Cabrera placed the item on the county's agenda for the April 1 meeting. The meeting was his last before resigning to become the U.S. ambassador to Panama in the Trump administration. The U.S. Senate confirmed his appointment earlier this month.

READ MORE: Miami-Dade commissioner confirmed as Panama ambassador. Who will take his seat?

County: Land generates no revenue

The county said it's selling the land, which it deemed "surplus," because it's not generating any revenue.

"The property has been left vacant for over 25 years, generating no tax revenue for the County and serving no public use," the county's resolution said. The parcel, owned by the Miami-Dade Aviation Department, will be sold to Habitat Creators, Inc. "for a nominal amount for the development of the property with affordable townhomes," the resolution noted.

Miami-Dade County is facing financial challenges as Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** prepares her 2026 ***budget***. With federal COVID relief funds gone and with real estate values no longer posting the big gains from recent years, the county is facing a $48 million revenue shortfall. The mayor has requested budgets with potential 10% cuts from department heads and imposed a hiring freeze.

The president of Miami-based Habitat Creators is Gordon Bello, a lawyer who had been an aide to former Miami-Dade Commission Chairwoman Audrey Edmondson. Bello did not return a message seeking comment from the Herald.

Developer: Housing for county employees

James Doddo, an attorney for Habitat Creators, issued a statement to the Herald on Friday: "This project is all about expanding access to homeownership for the people who make Miami-Dade work, our essential workforce that's been increasingly priced out of the communities they serve."

Florida's Live Local Act, signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis in 2023, enabled the land sale. The law offers tax breaks to developers who build affordable housing for individuals earning up to 120% of the area's median income. According to a county chart, that would equal about $136,000 for a family of four.

Priority will be given to airport employees and Water and Sewer Department workers, but all qualified buyers within the income limits would be eligible, the developer said.

Miami Springs is not the only entity peeved at the pending sale.

Land swap with Water & Sewer

In return for selling its land, Miami-Dade Aviation would receive a 352,8000-square-foot parcel of land owned by Miami-Dade Water & Sewer near Miami Springs High School, in the heart of the city's tony "Bird Section" enclave. That parcel is bordered by Hammond Drive, Dove Avenue, Quail Avenue and Lenape Drive.

lot.jpgIn return for selling its land, Miami-Dade Aviation would receive a 352,8000-square-foot parcel of land owned by Miami-Dade Water & Sewer near Miami Springs High School, in the heart of the city's 'Bird Section' enclave, shown above.

"I don't like any [land] swap that involves WASD," District 7 Commissioner Raquel Regalado said at the April 1 meeting, referring to the county's Water & Sewer Department. "I'm concerned whenever we get anything at the last minute. This property is very complex and I am concerned about the valuation."

The Water & Sewer Department tract has a market value of $2,525,516, which is approximately $1.2 million higher than the airport-owned parcel, according to the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser's website.

The utility operates two wells on the property, which may need to be relocated, according to the county's resolution.

Regalado had suggested finding another property to swap, but in the end she voted with the other commissioners in approving the deal.

None of the Miami Springs officials were at the April 1 County Commission meeting, which was Election Day in the city.

Miami Springs voters elected Walter Fajet as mayor and elected Joseph Dion and Fabian Perez-Crespo to the Group II and Group IV council seats. Jorge Santin and Orlando Lamas ran unopposed, winning the Group I and Group II seats.

The public is invited to weigh in on the proposed land deal before the new council at 7 p.m. Monday April 28 at the City Council meeting, 201 Westward Drive.

Miami Herald Staff Writer Douglas Hanks contributed to this report.

**Load-Date:** April 16, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Partial demolition approval clears way for plan to revive the Coconut Grove Playhouse*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FMC-6JF3-RW89-K4G2-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

April 15, 2025 Tuesday

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**Section:** coconut\_grove

**Length:** 1501 words

**Byline:**  Andres Viglucci

Miami Herald

**Body**

A contentious, long-stalled plan to resurrect the iconic Coconut Grove Playhouse took a major step towards realization Monday when Miami city building officials issued a permit for partial demolition of the historic 1927 theater, which has been closed for nearly 20 years.

The permit gives Miami-Dade County the green light after years of legal and political battles to begin work on its plan, which calls for tearing down the large auditorium at the theater's rear while preserving the Mediterranean-style three-story front building on Main Highway that gives the playhouse its distinctive architectural presence.

The 1,100-seat auditorium, which the county says is obsolete and too big to be financially sustainable, would be replaced by a modern, 300-seat stand-alone playhouse separated by a public plaza from the restored, wing-shaped front building.

A group of preservationists and playhouse fans who want the entire theater renovated and reopened fought the county plan and the demolition with a series of unsuccessful lawsuits, initially with the support of Miami Mayor Francis Suarez. The Suarez administration dropped its own fight to block the county plan in 2022 after several losses in court, but some preservationists carried on the legal fray.

A stinging appellate court decision last year, however, effectively exhausted their legal options and cleared the way for the demolition permit to be approved. On social media over the weekend, as they anticipated approval of the permit, some of those opponents vowed to again to challenge the permit.

But Miami-Dade Commissioner Raquel Regalado, who has been the county's public point person for the plan, said courts have been clear that the preservationists have no further legal recourse. Once issued, a demolition permit approved by the city building department can't be legally appealed, she said.

"They have run out of stuff," Regalado, whose district includes the Grove, said of the preservationists.

Brian May, chair of the Miami-Dade's Cultural Affairs Council, the board that oversees county cultural programs and facilities, called the approval of the demolition permit "a turning point" in its long effort to reopen the playhouse, widely considered an important cultural and architectural landmark.

2021.06.08 CGP Project Community Presentation v4-15.jpgAn architectural rendering from a modified plan prepared under the guidance of Miami-Dade Commissioner Raquel Regalado shows shows the restored front building of the Coconut Grove Playhouse at left with a new, woodsier, greener and shadier plaza and exterior for the freestanding modern theater at right.

"The preservation community has a perspective on this which is respected," May said in an interview. "But the community at large is longing for the day this playhouse will be restored and modernized and opened. They've been waiting almost 20 years, and that's far too long."

In a news release, the county said the issuance of the permit puts work on track for the new theater to open in 2027. The release also includes statements of support for the start of work from Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** and Miami Commissioner Damian Pardo, whose district includes Coconut Grove.

"Today's permit marks decisive action forward on a contentious community issue marred by polarized debate. While it may not be the desired outcome for some, after almost 20 years of stagnation, we are excited to witness new beginnings," Pardo said.

The release said a contractor for the demolition, John Bell Construction, has been hired, but May and Regalado said the razing of the auditorium won't begin immediately.

First, they said, the county has to clean out the remaining contents of the playhouse, which includes debris as well as furnishings, papers and other materials left behind when it was abruptly shut down in 2006 amid mounting debts, though valuable items like costumes were previously put in safe storage. Some interior architectural elements that will be incorporated into the new theater, such as original columns and portions of the stage and proscenium, are also being removed.

Asbestos must also be removed, and the front building shored up before demolition of the auditorium can be carried out, they said. May said he doesn't expect demolition to begin for several months.

The playhouse had a long and storied run before closing. The nonprofit volunteer board that ran it was unable to pay cascading debts or maintain the building as it struggled to fill seats.

Designed by the famed architectural firm of Kiehnel and Elliott and originally built as a movie house, the playhouse hosted many legendary stars in stage productions after its conversion to live theater in 1956. Its first theatrical production was the U.S. debut of the classic absurdist play "Waiting for Godot," during which much of the audience famously left well before the end.

The county took control of the state-owned playhouse under a complex 2014 deal that allowed Florida International University to lease the property for a nominal sum and have use of the planned new theater for student programs. The new playhouse would be managed and programmed by GableStage, an award-winning small company that now operates at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables and would be renamed GroveStage.

Citing the old playhouse operation's financial failure, the difficulty in attracting large audiences to live theater in Miami, the inadequacy of the barn-like auditorium for modern dramatic productions, and limited available public funding, county officials developed a plan they said balances historic and architectural preservation with fiscal and artistic prudence.

Image21A 2017 rendering showing how the Coconut Grove Playhouse's historic front building could look on Main Highway after restoration. A proposed parking garage is visible behind a street tree to the right of the historic building.

The county's architectural and theatrical consultants concluded that the playhouse's front building -- which at various points housed the playhouse lobby, restaurants, offices and, on the third floor, apartments for visiting artists -- should be renovated as a stand-alone structure. Miami-based Arquitectonica, meanwhile, designed a separate new state-of-the-art theater that consultants said would be financially and artistically feasible to manage.

The plan includes several other significant elements, including a new parking garage on the property's existing parking lot that would also house dining spots or shops on the ground floor. It would be built and managed by the city's semi-autonomous parking authority, and revenue from the operation would help cover the cost of renovating and maintaining the playhouse's historic front building, which could also be converted to commercial use, as well as to subsidize the new theater's theatrical productions.

Regalado said she has also insisted on addition of a pocket park at the rear of the property to make it welcoming to residents of west Coconut Grove, the historically Black neighborhood whose residents were once barred from attending shows at the playhouse. Other design tweaks include more wood on the facade of the new theater so that it blends better with the woodsy ambience of the Grove, and more trees and landscaping, May said.

PLAYH0518BLGGCTJA dispute over the fate of the Coconut Grove Playhouse boiled down to whether to save the auditorium at the rear of the theater. Courts have ruled the city can't require Miami-Dade County, which wants to demolish the rear under a plan to rebuild the playhouse, to save the interior.

The county plan quickly ran into concerted opposition from playhouse fans and some cultural figures who called its intimate new auditorium small and unambitious and demanded instead an alternative plan calling for a full restoration capable of handling big Broadway-style shows. Their calls for a larger auditorium didn't go anywhere after promised private fundraising failed to materialize.

The final design for the site still requires approval of the city's historic preservation board, where shifting membership over the years meant that votes on elements of the county plan have been inconsistent -- favorable sometimes and at other times not. Once design approval is in place, the county must also secure building permits from the city. That means it could be as long as a year before construction work on the new theater starts, May said.

The years' worth of delays also means that the new theater's original ***budget*** of $23 million, a combination of bond proceeds and grants, would fall far short of today's cost, county officials concede. New estimates are being drawn up, but the county has been allocating additional funds over the years in anticipation of a significant rise in construction cost and there should be no shortfall once construction is ready go to, May said.

The city parking authority has told the county that it will be ready to build the long-planned garage as theater construction starts, May and Regalado said.

**Load-Date:** April 21, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Miami City Commissioner Manolo Reyes dies at 80*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FJ7-GNH3-S129-V37R-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

April 11, 2025 Friday

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**Section:** obituaries

**Length:** 1455 words

**Byline:**  Tess Riski

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami City Commissioner Manolo Reyes, who dedicated his life to public service, has died at age 80.

"It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Miami City Commissioner for District 4 Manolo Reyes," his family said in a statement Friday.

Earlier this week, Reyes was hospitalized due to a decline in health. He has faced health issues in recent years, including battling cancer.

"Manolo cherished his family, especially his three grandsons," his family said. "He loved his many, many friends all across our great communities. He yearned for a free and democratic Cuba. And he was a proud and enthusiastic Florida Gator."

Reyes' family said that serving as the District 4 commissioner "was Manolo's great, lifelong dream fulfilled. He energetically served his City with passion, honor and integrity every day."

"When asked recently how he wished to be remembered, Manolo humbly said: 'As a man who fulfilled his solemn duties, to his family and to his community; as a man whose word was his bond, and upon whose handshake could be relied, and who never had a corrupt thought in his entire life,'" his family said.

Manolo Reyes.jpgMiami City Commissioner Manolo Reyes

Reyes had a nontraditional path to elected office, winning his first election in 2017 at the age of 73 after six unsuccessful attempts dating back to 1985.

Reyes was born in 1944 in Cuba in a town called Victoria de las Tunas, now known as Las Tunas. His father, Ernesto "Payes" Reyes, was mayor of the town from 1952 until 1959, when Fidel Castro seized power. That year, Reyes -- then a teenager -- came with his family to the U.S. seeking refuge from the Castro regime.

In 1977, Reyes went on to graduate from the University of Florida, where he studied economics. After that, he landed a job at the city of Miami as a ***budget*** analyst.

An economist by trade, Reyes served as the principal economic analyst for the Overtown Park West Redevelopment Project and later was a principal ***budget*** analyst for Miami-Dade County Public Schools. He also taught at Westland Hialeah Senior High School.

IMG\_5882.jpgMiami Commissioner Manolo Reyes was sworn in for a second term on Nov. 15, 2019.

In an interview with the Miami Herald in May, Reyes said public office was something he considered to be a "vocation."

"If you get into government, you get power to serve, and many people forget about this," Reyes said. "You don't obtain power to serve yourself. The people give you power to serve them."

The commissioner began facing health problems not long after his first election in 2017. He went into remission in 2019 following an earlier battle with cancer. Then in September 2023, amid his reelection campaign, Reyes was diagnosed with leukemia.

But by February 2024, Reyes announced that his cancer was in remission. In May, he celebrated his 80th birthday at City Hall, telling the crowd: "It's like I was born again."

With three wins under his belt, Reyes appeared poised for his next chapter in Miami politics. He announced in May that he planned to run for mayor of Miami in 2025, "God willing."

But the commissioner's health began to decline in subsequent months, causing Reyes to miss City Commission meetings. He was about halfway through his term at the time of his death.

Despite his health issues, Reyes' family said the commissioner "did not let his illness define him; instead, he became even more committed to accomplishing the goals he had established for himself and his City staff, beginning with his election in 2017. Manolo's ear always was attuned to 'the little guy,' the least among us, and he met with and counseled constituents up until only a few days before his recent hospitalization."

MIA\_Bay\_of\_Pigs\_MJO\_4.JPGDistrict 4 Commissioner Manolo Reyes, far right, cuts a ribbon during a commemoration event at the Bay of Pigs Memorial Park on Wednesday, April 12, 2023, in Miami. Reyes unveiled a new monument to honor the Cubans who participated in the Bay of Pigs Invasion and showed improvements made to the park.

Miami officials react

Mayor Francis Suarez said Friday that Reyes was a "fierce advocate for his district" who "exemplified the true meaning of perseverance."

Suarez ran against and defeated Reyes in the 2009 election for District 4. Suarez recalled that Reyes kept the race focused on the issues, rather than stooping to smear tactics.

"We remained friends after that," Suarez said. "There wasn't a situation where, 'Oh, he was my opponent, so he was therefore my enemy.'"

"I think that that's rare in today's day and age," Suarez added.Regalado04 reyes#1 Lnew rk.JPGManolo Reyes, then a City Commission candidate, greets Tomas Regalado, candidate for mayor, at the Versailles restaurant in Little Havana in November 2009.

Commissioner Miguel Angel Gabela said it was a "sad day for the city of Miami to lose somebody like that."

"I think he was a brave individual," Gabela said. "I just admire the tenacity that he showed."

"And I sparred with him backwards and forwards on occasion," Gabela added, referring to arguments on the dais during City Commission meetings.

However, Gabela said that at the end of meetings where the commissioners were "civil" toward each other, Reyes would come up to him and say, "That was a good meeting."

Commissioner Joe Carollo said Reyes was someone who "did not give up."

"He ran numerous times before he got elected," Carollo said. "He never lost that spirit of knowing that he could win, and many others would've just thrown in the towel. But he did not. The persevering spirit that he had, it's very unique."MIA\_ELECTIONPACKAGE\_SUAREZ-Local0477JAI.JPGMiami Mayor Francis Suarez, left, kids with Commissioner Manolo Reyes, second from the left, during a press conference where he announced a spending plan for $137 million in federal pandemic relief on Sept. 14, 2021. Also in the photo are Commissioner Joe Carollo, second from right, and Commissioner Jeffrey Watson, on the far right.

Like Carollo, City Commissioner Christine King served alongside Reyes for years.

"Miami has lost a devoted public servant, and I have lost a dear friend," King said. "There are no words which can express how deeply I will miss him. My heart aches along with his family, friends, and constituents who loved him dearly. May he rest in peace."

Commissioner Damian Pardo described Reyes as "a friend, a colleague, but most importantly, an exceptional role model."

"I will never forget his kindness and warmth, his welcoming hug to the dais during my first days as commissioner, and his welcoming smile," Pardo said. "I will remember him for his intellect, passion, humility, strength, love of community, family, and service. May we all aspire to follow the principles, values, and actions that made Commissioner Manolo Reyes such an outstanding elected public official."

MIA\_key1199GENTEDEZONACONCERT071421.JPGCity of Miami Commissioner Manolo Reyes joins activists during a rally on Calle Ocho near Versailles Restaurant in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood on Wednesday, July 14, 2021. The rally was held in solidarity with the protests happening in Cuba.

Miami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** said Friday that the flags at County Hall in downtown Miami would be flown at half-mast in honor of Reyes.

At a press conference called on Friday on a separate topic, Levine Cava offered high praise for Reyes in both English and Spanish.

"We know he was struggling," she said. "He was a dear friend, a wonderful human being, someone who was loved and admired by everyone. For me, personally, it's a deep loss."

Afterward, Levine Cava said Reyes had given her a nickname: "He called me 'Danielita,'" she said.

Reyes also served as chairman of the Downtown Development Authority. Christina Crespi, the organization's executive director, said in a statement that Reyes "worked tirelessly to create a welcoming and thriving downtown."

"His positivity, warmth, and dedication made him not only a remarkable leader but also a cherished friend to so many in our community," Crespi said.

In a statement, Reyes' family said: "Manolo is survived by his wife of 56 years, Chacha Reyes; daughter Meily and husband Antonio Rios; son Manny and wife Adriana Pereira-Reyes; grandsons, Maximo, Matthew and Daniel; sisters Mayda Rodriguez and Merle Reyes; his adored nieces and their husbands and extended family; many beloved friends and his exceptional City staff that were his District 4 family."

"He was preceded in death by his sister Maika Reyes, his mother Eduviges Ortiz, and his hero, role model and political inspiration, his father Ernesto 'Payes' Reyes."

MIA\_29MIAMIRESCUEPLAN.JPGCommissioner Manolo Reyes, attends a Miami City Commission meeting on Monday, Sept. 13, 2021.

Miami Herald staff writer Douglas Hanks contributed to this report.

**Load-Date:** April 12, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Where do your property taxes go in Miami-Dade? Take a look at our deep dive*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FJ8-5483-S6G9-31JG-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

April 11, 2025 Friday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 2178 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

When Jared Lago reports for a 24-hour shift in one of Miami-Dade's newest fire stations, property taxes pay almost all of his wages.

Lago, 25 and the three other members of the Dolphin Station 68 crew start work at 7 a.m. and don't go home until the next morning. Hired in February as part of a department expansion in a station that opened last year, one of Lago's first rescue calls was a health emergency at the nearby Dolphin Mall. An older woman at a restaurant had trouble breathing, prompting help from the Dolphin Station across the street in Sweetwater instead of one of two suburban stations 5 miles away that would have handled the call before.

"She was having a panic attack," Lago said. "We gave her an IV and calmed her down."

READ MORE: What happens if property taxes go away in Florida?

The rookie firefighter is part of the roughly 3,000 people who work for the county's Fire Rescue Department, where property tax pays 85% of the agency's $752 million ***budget***.

MIA\_PROPERTYTAXESAS399Jared Lago, a new crew member, folds up the fire hose after a training exercise during a shift on Thursday, April 3, 2025, at Dolphin Station 68 in Sweetwater, Florida. Public safety expenses like the fire department are a top recipient of property taxes in Miami-Dade.

That puts the department near the top of the list for receiving Miami-Dade property taxes, a revenue source now under attack in Tallahassee by Gov. Ron DeSantis and others.

"Everybody in Florida is essentially renting their properties from the state," said Rep. Ryan Chamberlin, a Republican from Belleview in Central Florida who is pushing for the elimination of property taxes statewide. "There is a better way to tax people and raise the same amount of money."

It's not just Republicans in Florida's capitol. Last month, a bipartisan group of Miami-Dade commissioners took a vote urging state lawmakers to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot to bar local governments from imposing property taxes on primary homes. Those "homesteaded" residences make up about 43% of Miami-Dade's residential tax base.

Amid calls for eliminating property taxes altogether or slashing the number of homeowners paying them, an analysis of ***budget*** figures in Miami-Dade shows schools and public safety agencies have the most to lose.

hanks prop tax chart

Combined, those two ***budget*** categories eat up about 70 cents of every dollar of the $7 billion in property taxes that Miami-Dade's countywide governments are forecast to spend this year, according to the Miami Herald's analysis.

The high share for safety and schools highlights the challenge in slashing property-tax revenue without slamming the county's budgets for jail guards, police officers, firefighters, paramedics, teachers and the maintenance crews that keep schools functioning.

"If we didn't have property taxes, we'd have no money whatsoever to repair anything at the schools. A/C units die here in Miami very frequently," said Martha Diaz, chief ***budget*** officer for the Miami-Dade school system, where about half of the ***budget*** comes from property taxes. Losing property-tax revenue "would definitely cripple the system."

MIA\_PROPERTYTAXESAS318Lt. Veronica Cordoba, left, supervises Jared Lago, a new crew member, in a forward lay training exercise during a shift on Thursday, April 3, 2025, at Dolphin Station 68 in Sweetwater, Florida. The forward lay allows the crew to connect directly to a fire hydrant in order to keep water flowing so they can fight fires.

For this story, the Herald went through budgets tied to a dozen Miami-Dade property taxes -- different buckets of revenue dedicated to things like countywide government operations, the school system, public libraries and more.

Combined, those taxes are expected to generate about $7 billion this year. The Herald's analysis does not include the $2 billion in city property taxes collected by Miami, Hialeah and the 32 other municipalities that have their own budgets and revenue sources.

To illustrate where that money goes, we used ***budget*** documents to calculate what portion of each government agency's ***budget*** is funded by property taxes. Finally, we broke out the components of those budgets and ranked them by how much they rely on property taxes.

The analysis found:

Education expenses easily top the list. The Herald analysis found that roughly 50 cents of every dollar collected in county property taxes goes to the school system. Miami-Dade public schools are set to receive roughly $3.5 billion in property taxes this year to educate more than 300,000 students. About $2 billion of that money goes to the instructional ***budget***, things like teacher pay and textbooks. That puts instructional expenses at the top of the Herald's list of property-tax expenses.Public-safety expenses eat up a large chunk. About 21 cents of the county's budgeted tax dollars go to Miami-Dade's three countywide public safety agencies: Fire Rescue, Corrections and the Sheriff's Office. Together, they're set to spend about $1.5 billion in property taxes this year. (Property owners in cities with their own fire departments don't pay the county's fire tax. The Sheriff's Office receives money from a tax charged to all property owners and one charged only on property outside of city limits. To see a property's tax breakdown, visit the Property Appraiser Office's "Tax Visualizer" website.)Health and social services aren't especially high on the list. Combined, social services and health costs account for about 9 cents of every property-tax dollar in the Herald's analysis. The county's Jackson Health hospital system receives about $300 million from property taxes, making the public hospital the largest expense in this category. A close second is the Children's Trust, a grant-making agency funded by a special property tax that Miami-Dade voters approved in 2002. That tax is forecast to generate about $225 million this year. Miami-Dade's county government also expects to spend about $110 million in property taxes on charity grants, elder care, case workers for juvenile offenders and other social services.

MIA\_PROPERTYTAXESAS070From left to right: Bibich Zabaleta, Lieutenant Veronica Cordoba, Chris Carlson, and Jared Lago, the fire engine crew for Station 68, pose during a shift on Thursday, April 3, 2025, at Dolphin Station 68 in Doral, Fla. Property taxes go towards public safety expenses like the fire department.

For Karina Pavone, a cofounder of the Amigos for Kids nonprofit in Miami, a $300,000 annual grant from the Children's Trust lets her organization fund social workers who help low-income parents facing eviction.

"We call them success coaches," she said. She said about 90 families are enrolled, with social workers helping them secure benefits that can help them pay rent or tackle issues like substance abuse.

"We only take the toughest cases," Pavone said. While private donations help, Pavone said Amigos relies on the stable funding stream that the Children's Trust provides with the help of property-tax dollars. "I'm going to be very honest with you: Private philanthropy is hard," she said. "The uncertainty is really hard on nonprofits."

The push to cut back on local governments' property-tax budgets has Miami-Dade's Democratic mayor, ***Daniella Levine Cava***, warning of financial pain. Last month she released a memo with cost estimates on various property-tax legislation circulating in Tallahassee, including creating a $100,000 exemption for all real estate (a change she said would reduce Miami-Dade's property-tax revenue by 22%) and a study to eliminate all property taxes (which would wipe out all of the $3 billion in property taxes that goes into Miami-Dade's $12.7 billion ***budget***).

"Property taxes are the backbone of our local government," Levine Cava, a Democrat reelected to a second term last year, said in an interview. "They fund the public services that everyone relies on."

MIA\_106DeSANTISCondo09NEWPPFlorida Gov. Ron DeSantis is pushing for state homeowners to pay less in taxes. What would that mean for Miami-Dade County's local governments?

While DeSantis has proposed that Florida homeowners receive a state-funded rebate for property taxes, expected to average $1,000 this year, he's also part of the push to change Florida's constitution to reduce the amount of taxes on homeowners.

"This is just the opening salvo. We want to have a constitutional amendment on property taxes," DeSantis said in a March 31 speech in Orlando to the Florida Association of Realtors.

He didn't provide details on what he wants but suggested property taxes could plunge or vanish for homeowners in exchange for more taxes on real estate owned by vacationers and investors.

"This can actually be done," DeSantis said.

He's already pushing local governments to agree to audits from a state efficiency task force he's established that's named after DOGE, the Elon Musk-led group that has been slashing jobs and offices in the federal government under President Donald Trump. Those audits, DeSantis told the Realtors group, will show local governments "they have the ability to both shrink their own budgets but also shift tax burdens to our tourists and our non-Floridians."

Payroll is a major expense for local governments -- costing about $4 billion this year in Miami-Dade's $12.7 billion ***budget*** -- so any significant drops in property-tax revenue would likely bring layoffs or salary cuts. Politically influential unions negotiate the contracts that govern how much most government employees get paid in Miami-Dade.

At Station 68, the white board by the common room has a reminder of a raise to come: "3% COLA on 4/17."

The cost-of-living adjustment was part of the union contract approved by Miami-Dade County commissioners last year and negotiated by the mayor's administration. Adding roughly $29 million a year to the $752 million Fire Rescue ***budget***, the deal gave firefighters like Lago annual 3% pay boosts in 2024, 2025 and 2026.

MIA\_PROPERTYTAXESAS375Firefighter Chris Carlson, center, rolls up a hose with the help of Lt. Veronica Cordoba, back left, and Jared Lago, back right, during a shift training exercise on Thursday, April 3, 2025, at Dolphin Station 68 in Sweetwater, Florida.

Other unions got the same pay increases under deals that added another $125 million a year to the county's ***budget***, according to county memos. Under Levine Cava's ***budget***, the average county worker earns about $96,000, compared to about $63,000 for the average worker in South Florida. For the Station 68 crew, the average pay is about $100,000, according to a county compensation database.

Lago said he first applied for his job three years ago and kept reapplying while working as a private-sector ambulance driver and completing firefighter school. "I was just blessed," he said.

Because of rising property values and new construction, Fire Rescue saw its property-tax revenue increase 11% this year, allowing it to make about 170 new hires, including Lago.

But relying on real estate taxes isn't always a recipe for steady hiring at Fire Rescue. Firefighter Bibich Zabaleta joined the department in 2013 when Miami-Dade was still recovering from a plunge in property taxes during the real estate crash that began in 2009. The 45-year-old said that back then, he wasn't sure his rookie slot on the payroll was secure. "I remember they told us we just got hired, but we might get fired," he said.

Veronica Cordoba, 31, joined the department in 2018 and now serves as a lieutenant. She grew up in a family of New York police officers but said she opted for rescue work after she witnessed a friend die in a four-wheeling accident while in her early 20s. "I wanted to follow in her legacy," Cordoba said.

MIA\_PROPERTYTAXESAS496Firefighters Jared Lago, left, and Bibich Zabaleta, right, help put away a fire hose at Dolphin Station 68 in Sweetwater, Florida, on Thursday, April 3, 2025. Also photographed: Lt. Veronica Cordoba in the background and firefighter Chris Carlson in the top of the truck.

She's part of the four-person crew that heads out on the station's lone fire truck. Crashes on the nearby Florida Turnpike keep the squad busy, as do health emergencies from tourists in nearby hotels. Engine 68 recently got a call to a rock quarry to save a man who became trapped in machinery during an overnight shift.

While the new station has a fire truck, there's no ambulance. The Station 68 crew needs to request an ambulance from another station if somebody they're treating needs to go to the hospital. They're expecting Fire Rescue to provide an ambulance for the station once funding frees up for the extra equipment.

"It would be nice," said Chris Carlson, 35, a county firefighter hired in 2018. "This is a very busy station."

MIA\_PROPERTYTAXESAS169Lt. Veronica Cordoba, who leads the crew, left, talks with Chris Carlson, driver operator, before they run a training exercise with their fire engine crew during a shift on Thursday, April 3, 2025, at Dolphin Station 68 in Sweetwater, Florida. Property taxes go toward public safety expenses like the fire department.

**Load-Date:** April 11, 2025

**End of Document**

[*'Rent is too damn high.' Interfaith group demands action from Miami-Dade leaders*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FHT-J9M3-RV60-13P9-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

April 9, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1578 words

**Byline:**  Lauren Costantino

Miami Herald

**Body**

One of Miami-Dade's most politically engaged interfaith groups held their annual assembly to press elected leaders to make housing more affordable and reducing evictions in Miami-Dade County.

After hearing testimonies from renters facing impossible housing predicaments, high rent prices and risks of becoming homeless, Miami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** agreed to commit $3 million to an eviction diversion program during the Monday night gathering.

The soon-to-be interim director of public housing and community development, Nathan Kogon, also committed to hold meetings with public housing tenants during redevelopment planning.

The housing proposals were drawn up by People Acting for Community Together, or PACT, a nonprofit interfaith group made up of some 40 churches, synagogues and mosques in Miami-Dade that advocates for solutions to some of the county's most pressing social issues. Over 800 congregants -- many of whom also happen to be voters -- showed up to Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church in Cutler Bay to watch elected officials answer questions about their commitment to plans addressing the group's number one issue this year: staggering rent prices that have forced locals out of Miami-Dade County.

"PACT congregations held listening sessions across the county, and the top concern that we heard over and over again was high cost of rent and gentrification," said Khalilah Abdullah of Masjid al Ansar, a mosque in Liberty City.

MIA\_INTERFAITHHOUSINGPACTAS (5)Khalilah Abdullah of Masjid Al Ansar talks about the issue of housing and gentrification during the PACT Nehemiah Action Assembly, where elected officials are invited to make commitments to the community.

The commitment from the mayor came after members of PACT laid out some facts about renting and evictions in Miami-Dade County. Last year alone, 19,000 evictions were filed, and there are probably more that went undocumented, according to PACT members.

"The group most disproportionately impacted by evictions are Black mothers ... mothers and children with no options of where to go," said Philip Cardella of Coral Gables Congregational United Church of Christ.

Renters in Miami-Dade are the second most "cost-burdened" (a Department of Housing and Urban Development term for people who spend at least 30 percent of their monthly income on housing) in the country, surpassing notoriously expensive cities like New York City and Los Angeles, according to reporting from the Miami Herald.

READ MORE: Miamians are the most rent-burdened people in America -- and they're stressed about it

Cardella then asked the crowd to raise their hand if they or someone they know has struggled with housing. A large majority of the crowd's hands shot up.

Huge shortage of affordable housing

PACT members noted that there's a shortage of 90,000 affordable housing units in Dade, according to their research. PACT conducted meetings with 12 housing experts and organizations including Miami Workers Center, Miami Homes for All and Legal Services of Greater Miami to seek out solutions. They came to the conclusion that the Eviction Diversion Program -- a pilot program funded by the county in 2023 -- was essential to curbing evictions.

Brian Douglas of the Miami Workers Center, who was first homeless when he came to Miami from New York, found himself facing an unexpected eviction notice last year.

Douglas -- who was 65 years old at the time -- was on the waiting list for affordable senior housing when his landlord informed him that the building he lived in was sold and to be condemned. Tenants were told they had to move immediately and were threatened with eviction.

"The residents were given no notice whatsoever," Douglas said. "The very thought of being out on the street last year with a heat index of over 100 degrees was a very stressful situation."

Douglas said that the combination of stress and his underlying health conditions, high blood pressure and diabetes, landed him in the hospital. The vast majority of the residents were minority, elderly or disabled and many, like himself, were never behind on the rent. Some became ill and one person passed away due to the stress, Douglas said.

MIA\_INTERFAITHHOUSINGPACTAS (6)Brian Douglas, of Miami Workers Center, gives his personal testimony of housing troubles during the PACT Nehemiah Action Assembly on Monday, April 7, 2025, at Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church in Cutler Bay, Fla.

One day, Douglas got an out-of-the-blue visit from someone from the Miami Workers Center, a nonprofit that works to expand tenants rights and protections across the county. The organizer offered him free legal counsel provided by Legal Services of Greater Miami and information about the Eviction Diversion Program. With help from the nonprofits, Douglas was able to land multiple extensions on his lease until he found a new place to live. He called the program "essential and lifesaving."

The pilot program was funded by the county commission in 2023, and was designed to assist at-risk tenants and their families through free legal assistance and eviction diversion programs. The program conducted door-to-door canvassing to households and people -- like Douglas -- who were struggling to navigate an eviction process. It also allowed the nonprofits involved to share data on how evictions impact housing stability, and identify ways to improve plans and processes for the future.

"We need the eviction diversion program to be sustained, to be expanded and made permanent for the protection of tenants, especially those of us who are members of vulnerable populations," Douglas said.

MIA\_INTERFAITHHOUSINGPACTAS (3)Rachel Prestipino, from Catalyst Miami, center, greets an attendee after the PACT Nehemiah Action Assembly on Monday, April 7, 2025, at Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church in Cutler Bay, Fla. Affordable housing was the focus at this year's PACT assembly.

Levine Cava acknowledged the group's concerns. "We know the rent is too damn high. We have stabilized the renting prices but they are still too damn high."

After Levine Cava agreed to the request, the congregation gave PACT's signature response in unison, "Let justice roll!" The mayor was then given just two minutes to outline the challenges.

"We are entering a very difficult ***budget*** season," she said. "We need your voice at county hall. I do not pass a ***budget***, the county commission passes a ***budget***. They need to hear from you."

Levine Cava later told the Miami Herald that the county government has a "freeze" on hiring and is working to improve "efficiencies" and "accountability" but that at the end of the day, is still going to have to make "significant cuts" in the next fiscal ***budget***. She said the evictions program is still a priority, regardless.

"For me personally it is a priority, but it has to be voted on by the commission," Levine Cava said.

READ MORE: 'Let Justice Roll!' How a group of many faiths takes on Miami's big social problems

MIA\_INTERFAITHHOUSINGPACTASMark Beckford, right, a member of Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church, greets parishioners from Coral Gables Congregational UCC before the PACT Nehemiah Action Assembly on Monday, April 7, 2025, at Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church in Cutler Bay, Fla.

PACT members also advocated for the use of Community Benefits Agreements, which are legal agreements between community groups, government, and developers that seek to ensure that residents have a say in how development impacts their communities.

Rev. Ana Jackson of Sellers Memorial United Methodist Church explained how important residents' input is in her community in West Little River.

"My adult children live with me because of the high cost of rent, and the area around my church has been actively changing for years," she said. "Through Community Benefit Agreements, we can negotiate benefits for our communities that we know we need, like affordable housing."

The absences of two county commissioners who were invited, Commissioner Vice Chair Kionne McGhee and Commissioner Oliver Gilbert, was noted by group leaders.

"We are extremely disappointed that County Commission Vice Chair McGhee decided to not show up this evening," said Quanda Dupree of St. Peters Missionary Baptist Church. "He is missing not only the opportunity to listen to his constituents but to also be accountable to the community."

McGhee's office did not respond to a request from The Herald for comment. In an email to the Herald, Commissioner Gilbert said while he hoped to attend that his office never confirmed his attendance.

"I appreciate the very valuable work that People Acting for Community Together, PACT, has done in our community for years," Commissioner Gilbert said in an email. "While I have attended the Nehemiah Action Assembly in the past, I was not able to attend last night's assembly in Cutler Bay."

MIA\_INTERFAITHHOUSINGPACTAS (4)Bianca Montenegro, of Christ Congregational UCC, gives attendees the chance to write down the contact information for Commissioner Oliver Gilbert, who had committed to being at the meeting but ultimately did not show up, during the PACT Nehemiah Action Assembly on Monday, April 7, 2025, at Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church in Cutler Bay, Fla.

This story was produced with financial support from Trish and Dan Bell and from donors comprising the South Florida Jewish and Muslim Communities, in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners. The Miami Herald maintains full editorial control of this work.

**Load-Date:** April 9, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Not a good look: Miami-Dade warns of budget cuts while asking for more World Cup dollars | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FF1-Y1C3-S67K-42X2-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

March 27, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** editorials

**Length:** 759 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

No doubt, hosting the world's most important sporting event is an opportunity for Miami-Dade County, but, at some point, taxpayers must ask: In times of expected financial headwinds, how much should they spend to foot the bill for the seven 2026 FIFA World Cup soccer matches that are planned at Hard Rock Stadium?

It's a relevant question for county taxpayers right now. The County Commission is one vote away from approving $10.5 million in new World Cup funding.

That's on top of the $36 million the Commission approved last May -- $10.5 million in cash and the rest in donated government services such as police and paramedics -- despite criticism that there few details about how organizers would spend the money. Also adding to the taxpayer tab: a $15 million bonus in 2022 that the county awarded the Miami Dolphins, the owners of the Hard Rock, as part of a deal to offset stadium renovation costs, the Herald reported.

Although Miami-Dade is facing a financial shortfall that has prompted county administration to look for 10% in ***budget*** cuts, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** is asking commissioners to approve the extra $10.5 million in World Cup funding, the Herald reported. In a 9-3 vote last week, the commission gave preliminary approval to the funding request sponsored by Commissioner Oliver Gilbert; a final vote hasn't been scheduled.

Asking for more money now is a bad look.

In a memorandum to commissioners, Levine Cava did not explain exactly how the new money would be spent. In a statement to the Herald Editorial Board, her office said, "The World Cup Host Committee handles the expenses, and the County will encourage strong fiscal stewardship" and public safety efforts.

Levine Cava, in her memo, recognized the additional funding could mean a reduction to county services. Gilbert painted a different picture in a statement this month, writing that the money wouldn't come from service reductions but from "efficiency efforts," the Herald reported.

County officials shouldn't be so enamored by the idea of hosting the World Cup that they lose sight of the ***budget*** constraints they are facing -- and of Miami-Dade's fraught history when it comes to taxpayer-funded sports ventures. Taxpayers still have PTSD over the price tag to build the Marlins stadium in Little Havana, which promised an economic development boom that hasn't materialized, and the promised public park next to the Miami Heat arena in downtown that's never been built.

To be sure, when Miami-Dade pursued the opportunity to host important World Cup games, there was an expectation that local governments would subsidize some of the cost.

"In 2018 the County submitted a bid to host the World Cup and since it was awarded, the County does have a responsibility to ensure we have a smooth, safe and successful World Cup," a statement from the mayor's office read. "The economic impact [of] hosting this over a month period will be tremendous for our small businesses and residents that access job opportunities."

In a hearing before the County Commission last year, Lisa Lutoff-Perlo, then head of the FIFA World Cup 2026 Miami Host Committee, said the economic impact of the games would surpass $1.5 billion, the Herald reported. The committee expected to raise $100 million from private sources.

At that meeting, commissioners approved the $36 million funding package, which was smaller than the $46 million originally proposed. Backlash had come from powerful local leaders, including the mayor herself and now-Florida House Speaker Daniel Perez, R-Miami. Perez said at the time no money "should be used toward FIFA when we have so many needs in our county."

The Herald Editorial Board asked Perez about his position on the latest $10.5 million proposal. He responded via text message on Tuesday: "My position hasn't changed."

Last year's financial package was trimmed, leaving open the possibility that organizers could ask for the rest of the money as the games got closer. But today, Miami-Dade is preparing for fiscal austerity measures not seen since the aftermath of the housing crisis in 2008.

The years of county budgets flush with revenue from rising property values and federal COVID-19 pandemic dollars are over. Levine Cava's administration projects a $48 million gap between expected tax revenues and countywide spending next year, the Herald reported.

If the prestige of hosting the 2026 FIFA World Cup is a bonus to Miami-Dade County, so is fiscal responsibility.

letter V4.pngSend a letter to the editor to [*heralded@miamiherald.com*](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com)

Click here to send the letter.

**Load-Date:** March 27, 2025

**End of Document**

[*NOAA faces cuts and Miami-Dade streamlined its resiliency office. Will it cost us later? | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FC9-H5Y3-RS68-J514-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

March 19, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** editorials

**Length:** 672 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

Florida is less than three months away from hurricane season, but this year, Floridians could have more to worry about than usual -- not because of the forecast, but because of job cuts to critical weather services. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Weather Service -- agencies Floridians rely upon for hurricane watches and storm warnings, among other forecasts -- have been hit by DOGE layoffs.

Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) are expected to cut an estimated 20% of NOAA's workforce, including some of the country's top meteorologists. These cuts are an attempt to cut spending and reduce the size of the federal government.

While the impacts of the cuts probably won't be immediately felt, they could affect Floridians, as well as others across the nation, who must be able to rely on weather information to make serious decisions about when to stay and when to get out of harm's way when severe weather is coming.

That information has become especially important as storms have become wetter and stronger. Scientists say climate change is making storms more intense -- and yet Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation last year that will delete most mentions of climate change from state statutes. It's obvious that tackling the climate crisis is no longer a top priority in Washington or Tallahassee.

The cuts to NOAA come on the heels of news that Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***, who has championed climate initiatives, is consolidating three positions -- chief Biscayne Bay officer, chief heat officer and chief resilience officer -- into one role and reducing the department that handles climate change by about two-thirds.

In a memo released last week, Levine Cava stated that her focus on government efficiency was in line with her "WISE 305" strategy to cut red tape and trim the size of her administration. She said in the memo that the county "is taking a fresh approach to our resilience efforts in order to break down siloes across county portfolios and accelerate progress on critical solutions..."

However, it is hard to ignore the consolidation.

Levine Cava was criticized in last year's election -- including by this Editorial Board -- for growing the size of county government staff during her first term. While government efficiency is needed and the county faces a tougher ***budget*** year with the end of federal COVID dollars and a possibly cooling real estate market, will consolidating climate employees impact Miami-Dade's future in a place where heat, rain, sea rise and hurricanes all play a major role?

Loren Parra, who now has the consolidated climate position, told the Miami Herald Editorial Board the "core priorities of the administration" remain the same: "Our responsibility to the protection of people and property, to prosperity, to our natural environment, which we know is so important, both for our community but also our economy, haven't changed at all."

Levine Cava's deputy chief of staff, Rachel Johnson, added that the restructuring will allow experts to better serve the community by being embedded directly within various county departments instead of being under three different chiefs.

As one of the last remaining Democrats elected countywide, Levine Cava is clearly reading the political landscape and adjusting her office so she can continue to tackle one of her top priorities, climate change, at a time when the science of climate change is under siege.

But as climate change is being put on the back burner nationally, Miami-Dade must continue to lead on this issue.

Government efficiency is a great thing. Who doesn't want their government to be efficient? But these cost-cutting measures, both national and local, cannot be done indiscriminately. If there's government fat to cut, fine. Just don't harm our ability to handle hurricanes in the short term and the effects of climate change in the long term.

letter V4.pngSend a letter to the editor to [*heralded@miamiherald.com*](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com)

Click here to send the letter.

**Load-Date:** March 25, 2025

**End of Document**

[*'We need to scale back': After a flush 1st term, Miami-Dade mayor warns of lean times*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FC1-JWK3-RRV3-D420-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

March 17, 2025 Monday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 950 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

In her first term, Miami-Dade's mayor used federal COVID dollars and extra revenue from a real estate boom to fund tax breaks and spending increases.

Now preparing the debut ***budget*** of her second term, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** is warning of leaner times ahead as revenue growth cools and the higher spending from recent years threatens a fiscal squeeze.

"I fully recognize the hard work and difficult decisions ahead," she wrote in a March 7 memo to department heads announcing austerity measures and asking for potential spending cuts. "We must be proactive as we wisely manage our resources to avoid even harder decisions in the future."

Levine Cava won't release her 2026 ***budget*** proposal until the summer, but the latest forecast from her administration shows a $48 million gap between expected tax revenues and countywide spending next year.

In the March 7 memo, she imposed a hiring freeze and paused raises for some county managers. Levine Cava also asked department heads to submit budgets with 10% cuts -- reductions that would be the sharpest pullback in county spending since the aftermath of the 2008 housing crash.

For now, the spending cuts are just a ***budget*** exercise as Levine Cava and her deputies decide what kind of a spending plan to send to county commissioners in July. All signs point to the 2026 ***budget*** being the most challenging one yet for the Democrat and former social worker who ran on the slogan "A mayor who cares" and took office promising a more responsive county government.

With $1 billion in federal aid flowing through the county ***budget*** since 2020, Levine Cava had extra money to boost spending and services. Real estate values soared through the pandemic too, with the value of the county's property tax base up 40% since 2021, compared to growth of 19% over the prior four years.

In the March 7 memo, she noted there has been extra spending tied to Miami-Dade's new form of government after last fall's state-mandated elections for sheriff, tax collector and elections supervisor -- positions that previously reported to the mayor.

Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz (R) wants an extra $50 million over what commissioners approved in Levine Cava's 2025 ***budget*** for the Sheriff's Office, and Tax Collector Dariel Fernandez (R) is retaining a portion of the county's property-tax revenue to fund improved DMV services. That could cost Miami-Dade's countywide ***budget*** about $10 million next year, based on the most recent estimate from Fernandez's office.

But spending also grew steadily in Levine Cava's first term, including through union contracts expected to add more than $100 million in payroll costs next year, according to administration memos summarizing the three-year labor deals approved in 2023 and 2024.

Commissioners last fall approved Levine Cava's $12.7 billion ***budget*** for 2025, an 8% increase from the prior year. The overall ***budget*** covers big sources of government spending that are funded by fees paid by users, like Miami International Airport and the Water and Sewer and Solid Waste departments.

Property taxes are the main source of revenue for the $2.5 billion general fund within the ***budget*** that covers core countywide functions, including police and jails. That's up 46% over the last four years, compared to a 25% increase in the prior four years under Levine Cava's Republican predecessor, Carlos Gimenez, who is now a member of Congress.

Along with higher spending, Levine Cava's prior budgets dialed back the amount of revenue growth available for future budgets.

Flush with revenue in 2022 and 2023, Levine Cava won support from commissioners for two 1% reductions to the countywide property tax rate.

While property-tax revenue continued growing from higher real estate values, the rate cuts make the ***budget*** process more challenging. If the countywide tax rate was at its 2021 level of $466 per $100,000 of taxable value, Miami-Dade would have another $41 million to spend this year. The current rate is $457 per $100,000 in taxable value.

Federal dollars in recent years helped Miami-Dade increase spending while lowering tax rates.

COVID aid began flowing when Levine Cava was still a county commissioner in 2020. Some emergency aid programs supported specific county functions, like air travel at Miami International Airport and the transit system in Transportation and Public Works.

Other pandemic dollars landed in county coffers with few limitations on how they were spent. That included roughly $528 million from the American Rescue Plan stimulus legislation approved when Joe Biden was president.

The latest county summary of how that federal money was spent since 2021 shows some of the funds went to one-time expenses related to infrastructure projects, including extending the county's sewer system to homes and businesses using septic tanks ($10 million), the purchase of housing complexes for Miami-Dade's homeless agency ($6 million) and upgrading traffic lights ($5 million).

COVID dollars also funded county services and grants that needed to be replaced by Miami-Dade dollars to continue. That included $57 million to prevent higher trash bills by subsidizing the county's Solid Waste ***budget***, $9 million for programs aimed at reducing gun violence, $5 million for workforce training and $1 million for a countywide savings account program for families saving for college.

"It's a weird thing to say we were prosperous during COVID, but we were," Carladenise Edwards, Levine Cava's chief administrative officer, told commissioners during a meeting last week of the county's Appropriations Committee. "Now we are in a period of austerity. We don't have the resources we had to do the things we were doing. So we need to scale back."

**Load-Date:** March 19, 2025

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[*Miami-Dade mayor recruits new transportation director from DeSantis administration*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FB8-YYP3-RT34-30M3-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

March 14, 2025 Friday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 356 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

The head of state transportation projects in the Miami area will take over Miami-Dade's transit system under an appointment announced Friday by the county's mayor, ***Daniella Levine Cava***.

Stacy Miller, who holds the title of district secretary in the Florida Department of Transportation, will take over as transportation and public works director in Miami-Dade.

She replaces Eulois Cleckley, the former Denver public works chief Levine Cava hired shortly after winning office in 2020. Cleckley left his $298,000-a-year county post last year to lead the fundraising operation of the Underline, a privately run bike and pedestrian trail under the county's Metrorail system.

Miller, an engineer, took over the Miami-Dade and Monroe County operations at the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) in 2021 under Gov. Ron DeSantis. The job gave her the title of District Six secretary and made her the point person for state funding for road, bridge and transit projects across the region.

With Miami-Dade projecting a ***budget*** crunch next year, those dollars are even more important as Miller comes in to oversee the county's roads, bridges, traffic lights and transit system in a job that will pay $302,000 a year, according to an offer letter released Friday by the mayor's office.

Miller takes over as Levine Cava's administration is predicting a revenue shortfall in next year's county ***budget*** even as the county prepares to open a rapid-transit bus line in South Miami-Dade and pursues federal funds to open a commuter rail between Miami and Aventura. Both projects -- the South Dade rapid-transit bus line and the Coastal Link rail line -- are part of the county's SMART Plan blueprint, an initiative that counts on state funding to become reality.

Javier Betancourt, director of the office overseeing the county's half-percent sales tax for transportation, praised Miller for her extensive state contacts and strong local relationships.

"I was delighted to hear about the appointment," said Betancourt, director of the Citizens Independent Transportation Trust. "She's familiar with our community, and she's committed to the SMART Plan."

**Load-Date:** March 14, 2025

**End of Document**

[*World Cup wants $10M more from Miami-Dade County. That could mean cuts to services*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6FB5-P5D3-RX5X-B0F8-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

March 13, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 884 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

A ***budget*** crunch may not stop Miami-Dade County from doubling its spending on World Cup preparations this year, even if it means trimming government services.

Days after asking county departments to submit suggestions for 10% spending cuts, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** is recommending Miami-Dade spend an extra $10.5 million this year for the 2026 soccer championship. The extra World Cup money may come from reductions to county services, Levine Cava said in a memo released this week.

County commissioners last year approved a $10.5 million subsidy for World Cup in 2025 as organizers prepare for the 2026 games. In the memo recommending that commissioners approve the World Cup spending boost to a total of $21 million this year, Levine Cava said the extra $10.5 million she's requesting would come from a fund to cover expenses tied to employees leaving their jobs. Replenishing that fund to cover the World Cup dollars will likely require generating extra money elsewhere in the ***budget***, Levine Cava wrote.

"To achieve these savings, several considerations regarding the current level of services provided by departments funded by the General Fund and how they provide those services are being reviewed," Levine Cava wrote. "As a result, service adjustments may be inevitable."

The memo, part of the mayor's broader request for mid-year ***budget*** changes, does not offer details on what service reductions could be on the table. Levine Cava's office did not respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Commissioner Oliver Gilbert is sponsoring the legislation that would authorize the $10.5 million subsidy boost for World Cup and the other ***budget*** changes in the Levine Cava request. In a statement, Gilbert said the $10.5 million for World Cup wouldn't come from service reductions but from "efficiency efforts" that will generate new dollars. "This is ultimately an investment in our community," he said.

Rodney Barreto, co-chair of the local World Cup organizing committee, said the economic boost from hosting seven World Cup games during the summer, which should bring in extra hotel and sales tax revenue, is bound to cover the county's extra outlays. "It's hard to believe this $10.5 million item would negatively impact county services," he said. "It's an investment in World Cup."

The World Cup request comes on the heels of Levine Cava amplifying her warning that cutbacks to county government spending may be needed next year.

After a first term defined by an increase in property tax money from a booming real estate market and a surge in federal COVID funds, Levine Cava said she's expecting leaner times ahead and is looking at cutting spending, freezing hiring and pausing raises for county managers. Last week, she asked department heads to submit proposals for 10% cuts in their budgets but didn't say whether those reductions would be enacted.

"I fully recognize the hard work and difficult decisions that lie ahead," Levine Cava wrote in the March 7 memo to commissioners, which did not touch on World Cup expenditures. "We must be proactive as we wisely manage our resources in order to avoid even harder decisions in the future."

Levine Cava helped lead the county's pursuit of World Cup matches ahead of the global soccer tournament run by FIFA coming to North America in the summer of 2026. The Miami Dolphins' Hard Rock Stadium secured the right to be one of 11 venues in the United States for the games, including a quarterfinal and third-place match.

The local organizing committee last year requested a $46 million subsidy from county government for the games -- $21 million in cash and $25 million in donated county services. Most of the donated services was for overtime pay for police and paramedics, expenses that pro sports teams like the Miami Dolphins pay out of pocket for regular games.

The subsidy proposal faced blowback when made public in May through legislation also sponsored by Commissioner Gilbert. Florida House Speaker Danny Perez, a Miami Republican, came out against the proposal, saying county taxpayers shouldn't be subsidizing "the elites of FIFA." Levine Cava herself issued a statement then expressing "concerns" about Gilbert's legislation, noting the cost to Miami-Dade would be "significant."

Facing resistance, Gilbert revised his proposal to only provide a portion of what organizers wanted. On May 21, commissioners approved a nearly $36 million funding package for the 2026 games -- with a $10.5 million cash subsidy and $25 million in donated services.

That left organizers $10.5 million short of their original request. The change wasn't meant to be final, with organizers free to come back ahead of the 2026 games to request that final $10.5 million. "We might need more," Anthony Rodriguez, the commission's chair, said before the vote.

The new Levine Cava ***budget*** proposal would provide the missing $10.5 million, completing the organizers' original request.

Barreto, whose lobbying firm represents the Dolphins, said the latest funding proposal follows through on the expectation that organizers would return to the county to ask for more money. He said Miami-Dade should expect to get far more back from World Cup's arrival than what the ***budget*** will spend on it.

"The hotel tax revenue produced will be more than enough to justify the item," he said.

**Load-Date:** March 14, 2025

**End of Document**

[*DMV offices have long waits -- and Miami-Dade taxpayers just got a $171M bill for a fix*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F76-85T3-RTKD-V2C0-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

February 27, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1620 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

With people camping overnight to beat the lines for appointments in Florida's overwhelmed driver's-license offices in Miami-Dade, the county's new tax collector is promising to spend big to cut down on wait times.

One problem: His plan to add more staffing and efficiency measures could cost local governments as much as $171 million in property taxes this year.

After the last election, Miami-Dade now falls under a state rule that requires elected county tax collectors to issue driver's licenses. For decades, that's been the responsibility of Florida and its nine state-run offices across Miami-Dade where people can renew their licenses, get new ones, take driving tests and access other services.

The mandate doesn't come with state funding, so Tax Collector Dariel Fernandez plans to exercise his office's authority to keep 2% of property-tax money from the county and from Miami-Dade's 34 cities, an amount estimated at $171 million this year. The county government's ***budget*** will see the biggest effect, with Fernandez's office planning to retain $118 million from the county this fall.

Fernandez, a Republican who ran a software company before winning the office in November, has not directly addressed the funding cuts to local governments but said he expects to return a large chunk of the 2% back to those jurisdictions once he gets a handle on how much it will cost to fix the current mess facing people seeking driver's licenses in Miami-Dade. But he said there's no question that effort will be expensive and require some investment of local tax dollars.

"We are delivering solutions, not excuses," Fernandez said at an event Monday morning opening three new driver's-license windows at the Tax Collector's Office in downtown Miami.

They're the first of their kind for a county office, and the debut of what Fernandez said will be a year-long shift as Florida prepares to turn over its nine Miami-Dade DMV locations to the tax collector. (While the Department of Motor Vehicles name was retired nearly 20 years ago in a reorganization, the offices are still known as "DMV" locations.)

Fernandez said that by the end of 2025, he expects his agency to take over all of Florida's state-run driver's-license offices in Miami-Dade. Fernandez also plans to expand beyond that, with the Tax Collector going from an agency with a single location in downtown Miami to offices across Miami-Dade, ideally bringing driver's-license services to areas that didn't previously offer them.

Fernandez's office says Florida has spent about $40 million a year running its nine Miami-Dade DMV offices, with only $9 million of that covered by the fees that are charged to residents for licenses and other services available there. In addition to taking on that expense, Fernandez said he wants to spend more on staffing and technology to speed up wait times.

Miami resident Roopesh Reddy, 40, said he and his wife had been to most of the state DMV offices in Miami-Dade in hopes of getting an appointment for her learner's permit, without success. Reddy said that included an overnight visit to the state-run Miami Gardens office, where they hoped to get to the front of the line, only to be shocked by a crowd already in place.

"My wife and I went there at 3 a.m.," he said. Not only did they already find plenty of people ahead of them already waiting, but some appeared to be there to monetize the situation.

"People were selling their spaces for $150," said Reddy, a software engineer.

Reddy and his wife were among the first people to try out the Tax Collector's Office's driver's-license windows, which launched service Monday morning at 200 NW Second Ave. He said it took about two hours before they could see a clerk and then learned they had to return the next day to sort out a paperwork issue. The office gave them an early-afternoon appointment for Tuesday.

"Not too bad," he said of the wait. "At least I got to sit inside a building."

Nicolas Gesnel, another 40-year-old Miami resident, was there, too. He also described a failed overnight arrival at the Miami Gardens driver's-license office but an easy time getting his license renewed in downtown Miami on Monday morning. "It took 30 minutes," he said.

About half of the driver's-license appointments in Miami-Dade each year are from immigrants who are in the United States legally but who do not yet have a green card allowing permanent residency, according to the Tax Collector's Office. Those appointments often take longer because they involve more complicated rules, such as setting a license's expiration date to the final day a person is allowed to remain in the country legally. Should that date get extended, the person has to return to the office to get a modified license.

While license waits have long been a headache in South Florida, chaotic scenes of long lines outside South Florida DMV offices have gotten more attention in recent weeks.

Daiana Rocha, a spokesperson for Fernandez, acknowledged that DMV lines are too long but said they have been that way for a while and that Tax Collector staff do not see evidence that people needing driver's licenses today face more problems than they would have a year ago.

"We do not have data to support the idea that lines are longer," she said. "The lines have always been crowded, and it's always been a struggle to keep up with demand."

Either way, Fernandez's office is pointing to the long DMV lines as evidence that Miami-Dade will need to spend much more than Florida has been spending to provide services.

"We have a crisis here," said Andrew Lopez, director of motorist services for the Tax Collector's Office.

Fernandez says he's planning to ramp up hiring to boost the number of clerks available to help customers, expand office hours and add locations across Miami-Dade to give residents more options. His deputy says the situation is too fluid to put a firm estimate on what the improvements will cost to implement -- and then maintain.

"It would be unfair to commit to a dollar amount," said Gerardo Gomez, Miami-Dade's deputy tax collector.

Who pays for shorter wait times at the DMV in Miami-Dade?

Fernandez's planned tax diversion has local governments pushing back and urging him not to spend heavily on driver's-license offices at the expense of city budgets that fund police, parks and transportation.

In a statement, Alberto Parjus, city manager of Coral Gables, called the planned $2.6 million cost to Coral Gables a "financial burden" in an already challenging year for local governments facing a slowing real estate market.

"The City of Coral Gables recognizes that the newly established Miami-Dade Tax Collector's Office will require an investment in infrastructure and operations," he said. "However, the proposed 2% fee on municipal tax collections would have a substantial financial impact on our community. ... This additional financial burden comes at a time when municipalities are already navigating economic challenges."

The tension comes from a new system of government imposed on Miami-Dade by a constitutional amendment passed in 2018 that required the county by 2025 to create three new elected offices to run agencies that were previously under the control of Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***. That meant turning over the Miami-Dade Police Department to a new sheriff, the Elections Department to a new elections supervisor and the Tax Collector's Office to a new tax collector.

Only the Tax Collector switch involved a major new cost for Miami-Dade, since Florida law requires counties with elected tax collectors to also take care of issuing driver's licenses. Whatever the final amount that will be allocated for driver's-license services, it's clear the Tax Collector ***budget*** under Fernandez will be far more than what Miami-Dade spent on his office in prior years. Under Levine Cava, the Tax Collector's office spent just $33 million.

Broward is the only other Florida county also making the transition from state-run DMVs to county-run driver's-license offices this year. That's left Abbey Ajayi, who won the office in November, figuring out how to take over the existing locations she expects the state will stop running by 2026.

"Right now, we have no funding," said Ajayi, Democrat who was manager of the agency before the 2024 election. "Which is why we have not taken over those offices yet."

She said her office plans to collect the 2% commission from local governments as well, with an estimated total of about $91 million. Unlike Fernandez, though, Ajayi said her office considers cities mostly exempt, based on an interpretation of state law. Municipalities in Miami-Dade are considering making a similar argument to shield themselves from the 2% collection, according to a source familiar with the discussions.

While property taxes withheld from the Miami-Dade County government will account for the bulk of the $171 million Fernandez's office plans to take, about $34 million of that total will come from city governments. That includes $13 million from Miami, $6 million from Miami Beach and $1 million from Miami Gardens.

Jason Greene, Miami Beach's finance director, said at a Feb. 21 committee meeting that the city is expecting the Tax Collector plan to increase the city's challenge of balancing its ***budget*** in 2026.

"That's really going to make things difficult," he said.

While Fernandez won't say how much his office plans to spend from the $171 million, he promised it won't be close to that number.

"It's insane to think that," Fernandez said when asked if he needed the full $171 million. "We are here to spend the money on what we need to spend. ... It's just what we need -- and that's it."

Miami Herald staff writer Aaron Leibowitz contributed to this report.

**Load-Date:** February 27, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Is Medicaid at risk in Florida? How proposed federal cuts could affect your healthcare*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F76-85T3-RTKD-V2C1-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

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**Section:** health\_care

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**Byline:**  Michelle Marchante

Miami Herald

**Body**

A coalition of Florida health advocates is sounding the alarm over a federal ***budget*** proposal that could make unprecedented cuts to Medicaid.

A ***budget*** blueprint approved by the House this week is expected to cut billions in federal Medicaid spending as part of a plan to help renew and fund new and existing tax cuts. Republicans in Congress say there won't be direct cuts to the millions of low-income adults and children in the U.S. covered by Medicaid, and that they're planning to target waste, fraud and abuse, according to the Associated Press.

President Donald Trump on Wednesday also doubled down on his previous statements that Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security aren't at risk.

"We're not gonna touch it," Trump said. "Now we are gonna look for fraud ... like people who shouldn't be on it."

But concerns are continuing to mount among some lawmakers and health advocates. Based on the proposed ***budget***, health advocates say there are few options to avoid Medicaid cuts. They say slashing federal Medicaid funding would force Florida and other states to raise taxes or consider other alternatives, including scaling back how many people can be enrolled in the health insurance program that provides coverage to 80 million low-income adults and children in the U.S.

"Federal cuts to Medicaid will do nothing, let's be clear, will do nothing to lower healthcare costs or improve quality and access to care for our residents," Alison Yager, executive director of Florida Health Justice Project, a nonprofit that advocates for health equity, said during a news conference this week. "Miami's residents are already struggling to take care of our children and our elders and those with chronic conditions, and we cannot afford to lose this lifeline."

Medicaid is a joint state and federal health insurance program that provides coverage to millions of kids, pregnant women, seniors and people with disabilities in Florida, including in Miami-Dade and Broward, home of the highest enrollments in the state.

Earlier this month, a group of House Republicans who are part of the Congressional Hispanic Conference and represent Hispanic-heavy districts in the country wrote a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson expressing their concern over potential cuts to Medicaid and other social programs that their constituents rely on.

On Wednesday, Miami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** sent a letter to Florida's elected members of Congress urging them to oppose the "drastic and potentially disastrous" proposed cuts that could impact Medicaid and other programs that more than 720,000 Miami-Dade residents depend on, and instead "advocate for modernized, fiscally responsible reforms that maintain access to care while improving efficiency and reducing waste."

Levine Cava letter on Medicaid cuts

What is Medicaid and who does it cover?

Medicaid is a medical lifeline for millions of people in the U.S., including 4.2 million Floridians. It provides coverage to one in five people in the U.S. and accounts for nearly $1 out of every $5 spent on healthcare, according to KFF, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that provides information and research on health issues and policies.

The Medicaid program is considered to be the largest payer of mental health services in the country, the largest funder for nursing homes and long-term care in the U.S., and the largest payer for substance abuse treatment, including opioid use disorder, according to health experts. It has also played a significant role in treatment and care during pandemics, including COVID, HIV and AIDS.

"The families I provide care for can get regular checkups, treatment for chronic illnesses, and prescription drugs because of vital insurance programs like Medicaid and the insurance they buy themselves on the Marketplace every year with the help of tax credits," said Dr. Olveen Carrasquillo, a health policy expert at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. The programs "help my patients receive preventative care, which helps them stay out of the hospital for preventable causes. Stripping away health coverage will increase the likelihood of harmful health outcomes."

In Miami-Dade County, more than 40% of kids and more than half of Miami-Dade seniors are insured by Medicaid, according to Leo Cuello, a research professor and Medicaid policy expert at Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families. More than 50,000 people with disabilities under 65 in Miami-Dade also rely on Medicaid coverage, according to Yager. Medicaid brings billions in revenue to Florida hospitals, covers more than 40% of Florida births and pays for 58% of nursing home residents in Florida.

"For them, Medicaid isn't just healthcare --it's the difference between getting a check-up and letting an illness go untreated, between affording medication and risking serious complications," said Abraham Frometa, community health manager at Catalyst Miami, a local nonprofit that works to address health and other inequities in the community.

Medicaid has helped South Floridians like Beyssa Buil have access to more affordable health care. Buil is living with multiple sclerosis, a chronic neurological disease that affects the body's central nervous system.

The chaplain said she is occasionally hospitalized because of her condition and needs weekly and monthly infusions, as well as occupational and physical therapy. When she had Medicaid, the health insurance helped cut the cost of her monthly treatment to $3,856. Her medical debt has quickly ballooned without it.

What's going on with the proposed federal Medicaid cuts?

While the House's ***budget*** blueprint doesn't mention Medicaid, it instructs the House's Energy and Commerce Committee, which oversees Medicaid and other programs, to figure out how to cut spending by at least $880 billion over the next decade, according to the New York Times. The cuts are part of a plan to make $4.5 trillion in tax cuts a reality and slash $2 trillion in spending.

Here are some key things to know:

The House's Energy and Commerce Committee has the broadest jurisdiction of any committee in Congress and "has responsibility for matters including telecommunications, consumer protection, food and drug safety, public health and research, environmental quality, energy policy, and interstate and foreign commerce among others." Its health bucket includes Medicaid, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, which Miami-Dade and Florida heavily relies on. Miami-Dade consistently leads the nation in Obamacare enrollments.

MORE: These Miami cities love Trump -- and lead the U.S. in Obamacare enrollment. Here's why

Senate Republicans, who approved their own ***budget*** plan earlier this month, have indicated that they won't accept the House's plan as is and want to make changes, Politico reports.

The House and the Senate will now need to negotiate until they can agree on a finalized ***budget*** plan. Once a ***budget*** blueprint is finalized, a group of committees will be ordered to draft legislation on how to implement the proposed tax cuts and spending reductions. These policies will then have to be voted on by Congress, and if passed by lawmakers, will head to the president for approval.

Based on the current ***budget*** proposal, the New York Times reports, there are few options to avoid Medicaid cuts, including considering cuts to Medicare and cutting everything else the committee oversees.

What are the Medicaid cuts?

Republicans have floated imposing work requirements or changing the way the federal government provides Medicaid money to states, according to the AP. Currently, the federal government covers 57% of Florida's Medicaid costs, which fluctuates depending on need.

On Wednesday, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson told CNN that lawmakers have ruled out two of the biggest potential cuts to the program, one of which would have impacted the most Floridians.

Johnson said Congress would not put "per-capita caps" on Medicaid, which would give states a fixed amount of federal funding per Medicaid recipient, regardless of how much care costs. The Florida Policy Institute, a nonprofit nonpartisan public policy research center, said this proposal would have resulted in about $900 billion in cuts and would have been "the largest impact on Floridians among all of the floated proposed cuts to Medicaid."

This cap, Cuello said, would have hurt Florida and other states that have rapidly rising healthcare costs the most because it would not keep up with the cost of care for Miami-Dade and Florida's aging senior population.

Cuello compares the situation to eating with someone at a restaurant, and when the check arrives, the person walks out and leaves you with the bill. The person saved money, but you didn't.

It's "a terrible deal for Florida," he said.

Johnson also ruled out changing match rates, which could have led to states needing to pay more of the Medicaid costs.

"We're talking about finding efficiencies in every program, but not cutting benefits for people who rightly deserve them," Johnson said, noting that lawmakers want "to cut the fraud, waste and abuse out of Medicare."

Johnson may have eased some of the concerns of lawmakers and health advocates. But there's still a lot of questions, skepticism and confusion over Medicaid's future.

"Where are they going to get these cuts from?" That's what Holly Bullard, the chief strategy and development officer at Florida Policy Institute, and other policy experts and health advocates want to know. Based on Congress' own numbers, Bullard and Cuello told the Miami Herald on Thursday that there's no way to slash $880 billion without "dramatically cutting Medicaid," which in turn will affect those who rely on the health insurance for coverage.

"The issues being raised here in Florida are the concerns that are playing out across the entire country because there is a major threat to health coverage in front of us, and there are a lot more concerns and questions that we have than we do answers," Cuello said.

"To be clear, no one has said how they could make a cut this large and protect beneficiaries," Cuello said. "$880 billion is such a large number that there's no way to avoid devastating cuts. ... There are no proposals that have been released that actually are targeting cutting waste. The proposals all slash the Medicaid funding that states use to provide Medicaid services."

On Thursday, Cuello reiterated his concerns.

"The numbers don't add up and the state is still at extreme risk and I don't think anyone should assume the state is not at risk until they tell us exactly what are the policies that they are going to do to cut $880 billion out of the program," Cuello said.

How would Medicaid cuts affect your care in Miami and Florida?

Since 1965, the federal government has shared the costs of Medicaid with the states, and Medicaid is the largest source of federal funding to Florida. Lawmakers still need to finalize a ***budget*** before they can actually create a game plan to target spending.

This means it's still too soon to know what the actual cuts will be or how soon people in Miami-Dade could feel the impact.

Here's what Cuello and Bullard do know:

If Medicaid cuts happen, Florida will quickly realize that a "huge ***budget*** hole is coming" and will likely have to consider three options:

Reduce how many Floridians can be enrolled in Medicaid.

Reduce the types of services the health insurance will cover.

Slash provider rates, which means fewer doctors, if any, will want to provide care to people enrolled in Medicaid.

Experts say Florida could also choose to redirect money away from other programs to fund Medicaid services, but that could be difficult. The state, without the possible Medicaid cuts, already has a projected deficit of $2.8 billion for fiscal year 2026-2027, according to Bullard.

"Florida doesn't have the money to cover this ... In Florida, historically, we've not gone into our coffers to make up a difference," said Bullard, who is also concerned Congress' push to slash spend will likely lead to them not renewing Obamacare tax credits that are set to expire at the end of 2025.

KFF, the health policy nonprofit, estimates Florida would see a 7% increase in state Medicaid spending over a 10-year period if the federal cuts happen and the state wants to maintain its current Medicaid spending and eligibility. If Florida's response to federal cuts is to reduce Medicaid spending and eligibility, KFF estimates the state would see a 12% decrease in Medicaid enrollment in 2034.

"For the people we serve, Medicaid is more than just a safety net -- it's a critical tool for health, financial stability, and community well-being," said Frometa of Catalyst Miami. "Losing Medicaid would be devastating. It would lead to more preventable illnesses, greater financial strain -- including job and housing loss -- and more people forced to go without the care they need."

Cuello, Yager and other health advocates also agree Medicaid cuts will lead to worsening health in Floridians.

"These massive cuts would make our healthcare problems worse by sharply increasing costs, medical debt and financial insecurity for families, and people's healthcare needs aren't going to change. States will just have far less money to cover them, " Yager said. "If the cuts go through, they'll shift costs from the federal government to the state, and ultimately, the state will shift costs to the people who can least afford them at a time when healthcare costs are already skyrocketing. We will all pay the price for these Medicaid costs, not just individuals covered by Medicaid."

**Load-Date:** February 28, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Miami-Dade's Zoom era may be ending. Mayor orders county workers back to their desks*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F5T-RPG3-RWC2-04FW-00000-00&context=1519360)

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February 21, 2025 Friday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 276 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County's government employees will see an end to remote work this spring, according to a memo released Friday by Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***.

Levine Cava set an April 15 deadline for ending the five years of remote work that started when most office buildings shut down at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The return-to-work directive from Levine Cava, a Democrat, follows a similar order in January from the county's newly elected Republican sheriff, Rosie Cordero-Stutz, who took over the county police department from the mayor at the start of 2025. President Donald Trump also ordered federal workers back to the office after he returned to the White House last month.

Miami-Dade County return to office

The county government employs about 31,000 people, making it the second largest workforce in Miami-Dade behind the school system.

More than 10% of the county's workforce is working remotely at least part of the time, according to the mayor's office. A spokesperson said Friday that 3,931 employees are on either remote or hybrid schedules.

In her memo, Levine Cava described ending remote work as a boon for productivity as Miami-Dade prepares for a challenging ***budget*** season. With a real estate market cooling and Miami-Dade no longer able to plug spending holes with federal COVID dollars, Levine Cava and others are warning of revenue challenges for the 2026 ***budget***.

"While the hybrid and remote work arrangements served us well over the past five years, enhancing collaboration and teamwork through in-person interactions is essential to improving efficiencies and empowering employees to perform at their best," Levine Cava wrote.

**Load-Date:** February 21, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Miami-Dade's resilience department gets a rebrand and staff cuts in efficiency push*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F5P-FT93-RRX6-M3XH-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

February 20, 2025 Thursday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 657 words

**Byline:**  Alex Harris

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade is slashing and re-organizing the county department in charge of climate change, a move that combines three top environmental roles into one and reduces the department by two-thirds.

A memo released Thursday afternoon details the change, which Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** is calling a bid for government efficiency in line with her "WISE 305" strategy to cut red tape and trim the size of her administration. She also says it will help all parts of the county address climate change issues individually, as well as together.

"My administration is taking a fresh approach to our resilience efforts in order to break down siloes across County portfolios and accelerate progress on critical solutions to build a future-ready Miami-Dade, protecting our community and economy now and in the long term," the memo reads.

The changes come as Levine Cava is warning of a challenging ***budget*** for 2026, as Miami-Dade faces a cooling real estate market and the end of federal COVID dollars that buoyed spending since she took office in 2020. In her State of the County speech last month, Levine Cava announced a push to streamline county government to save money.

The biggest change is eliminating two top environmental roles, a Chief Resilience Officer and a Chief Heat Officer. Both come with six-figure salaries, according to the latest county data; more than $236,000 for the former and $180,000 for the latter.

Jane Gilbert, the nation's first chief heat officer, plans to retire this summer, the mayor's office said. Last month, Levine Cava announced her pick for the county's newest Chief Resilience Officer -- Curtis Osceola, the former chief of staff for the Miccosukee Tribe.

Days after the announcement, Osceola was arrested on domestic violence charges against his girlfriend. He says he was wrongfully detained and arrested and expects the charges to be dropped.

After his arrest, the county backpedaled on hiring Osceola. Now, the role will be filled by Loren Parra, the county's Chief Bay Officer and a former communications staffer for the mayor.

Parra will serve as Chief Resilience Officer while continuing her work on Biscayne Bay and absorbing the duties of Chief Heat Officer.

The Office of Resilience is getting a rebrand, as well as a haircut. It's now known as the Office of Environmental Risk and Resilience, and the headcount is dropping from 27 staffers to 10, said Rachel Johnson, Levine Cava's deputy chief of staff.

Only one staffer is losing their job, Johnson said. The rest are getting scattered to work on resilience projects in other parts of the county, including the airport, solid waste, housing and economic development.

"This is really to expand the impact of the resilience team," Johnson said. "We really want to make sure that we're creating a structure that continues to advance these critical projects into the future."

The move to re-organize and rebrand the county's top agency for adapting to climate change comes in a political climate where both the state and federal government are minimizing climate action -- if not blocking it altogether. But Johnson said climate change remains one of the mayor's key priorities.

"The mayor's commitment is to resilience and investing in a future-ready community. Our commitment is as strong as ever," she said.

Commissioner Raquel Regalado, who represents District 7, said she sees the move as a proper response to a smaller ***budget***, with a stronger focus on resilience projects versus communicating the science and impacts of climate change on the region.

"The pendulum has swung and these things were created with the best of intentions. The majority of this work has been public relations. I'm really interested in what benefit they are providing the country and the residents of Miami-Dade County," she said.

"As the residents of Miami-Dade County tighten their belts, government must do the same."

Miami Herald Staff Writer Douglas Hanks contributed to this article.

**Load-Date:** February 20, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Hialeah will have its first female mayor when Mayor Bovo steps down. Who is she?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F2D-6TN3-RS2H-S520-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

February 5, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** hialeah

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**Byline:**  Veronica Egui Brito

Miami Herald

**Body**

Hialeah Mayor Esteban "Steve" Bovo's plans to step down and take a job with a lobbying firm in Washington D.C. will trigger a significant political transition in the city, the second-largest in Miami-Dade County. Jacqueline Garcia-Roves, the current city council president, is poised to step in as interim mayor, making her the first female mayor in Hialeah's nearly 100-year history.

Garcia-Roves, who was first elected in 2019, is a relatively low-profile figure on the council.

Bovo's office has not responded to the Miami Herald's requests for comment, but several sources familiar with the first-term mayor's private conversations say he has decided to accept an offer from The Southern Group lobbying firm. The offer includes a compensation package surpassing his current mayoral salary of $150,000, along with a $40,000 expense account for work-related costs.

According to the Hialeah charter, when the mayor's office becomes permanently vacant, it is to be filled by the council president, who serves for the remainder of the former mayor's term until the next scheduled municipal election. Garcia-Roves will hold the position until November, when the mayor's seat will be up for election.

Garcia-Roves, 42, was endorsed by former Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez in 2019, ran on his slate and defeated Milly Herrera, a prominent advocate for Hialeah Park. She is known for her quiet presence at meetings and has rarely spoken out against items up for a vote. One of the most significant moments in her political career came in 2022, when she led a public campaign to raise awareness about mental health following a personal loss in her family due to suicide.

In 2024, Garcia-Roves gained attention when Hialeah opposed Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***'s proposal to hold a referendum for a $2.5 billion debt plan. As council vice president at the time, Garcia-Roves made an unusual statement on behalf of Bovo's administration, announcing the introduction of a resolution opposing any county bond referendum.

IMG\_7151.JPGCouncilwoman Jacqueline Garcia-Roves joined Hialeah Mayor Esteban Bovo at a press conference in September 2023 announcing the first phase of the municipality's reforestation project.

Garcia-Roves was reelected unopposed to the city council in 2023. When Bovo steps down in March, she will assume the responsibility of leading Hialeah, with a population of 221,000 residents and an annual ***budget*** of $485 million. Hialeah is the second-largest city in the county after Miami and the sixth-largest in Florida.

concejales.JPGHialeah Council members Jacqueline Garcia-Roves, Jesus Tundidor, and Monica Perez have represented the new generation of leadership in the city since 2019.

Garcia-Roves is a key member of a powerful trio on the seven-member city council, along with Monica Perez and Jesus Tundidor. The three frequently stand united in their outspoken opposition to controversial issues, such as when they collectively opposed the expansion of a charter school in a public park.

Hialeah has a strong-mayor form of government, giving the mayor a substantial executive power.

It remains uncertain whether Garcia-Roves will seek election as mayor, leaving the door open for several political figures to vie for the role.

Other local politicians are believed to be interested in running for mayor.

Rene Garcia, Miami-Dade county commissioner for District 13, which includes Hialeah and Miami Lakes, has yet to confirm his intentions. He told the Herald, "Until I hear from Steve Bovo directly on what he is or isn't doing, there's no point in me discussing what I may or may not be doing."

Jesus Tundidor, a current member of the Hialeah City Council who was first elected in 2019 and reelected in 2023 without opposition, has also weighed in. Having previously served as council president, Tundidor said, "Hialeah has always been in good hands with Mayor Bovo and Senator Garcia. I'll follow their lead."

Luis Rodriguez, current Hialeah City Council vice president, elected in 2019, is expected to seek reelection in November. "We definitely need to wait until the mayor makes any decision or announcement," he said. "Then I will see how I can help my city in the long term."

Bryan Calvo, a former Hialeah City Council member elected in 2021, who resigned in 2024 to run for Miami-Dade tax collector but lost in the Republican primary, said, "I'm keeping my options open."

Miami Herald staff writer Douglas Hanks contributed to this story.

**Load-Date:** February 6, 2025

**End of Document**

[*With budget worries growing, Miami-Dade mayor promises a more efficient government*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F19-2723-S36F-648K-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 31, 2025 Friday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 915 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

As ***budget*** challenges grow, Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** on Thursday night launched a new efficiency effort to promote cost cutting and streamlining in a county government that spends nearly $13 billion a year.

"My administration has doubled down on a promise to invest your tax dollars wisely," the two-term mayor said during her fifth State of the County address since the Democrat won the nonpartisan office in 2020. "Every policy championed, every program established, every real estate deal pursued and every contract proposal should get the highest return."

MIA\_20250130AD0825STATEOFTHMiami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** delivers the annual State of the County Address at Miami Senior High School in Miami, Florida on Thursday, January 30, 2025.

Speaking before an audience at the Miami Senior High auditorium in Little Havana, Levine Cava said the new "WISE 305" effort would have the county investing in automation to save dollars, encouraging employees to flag outdated or cumbersome rules and procedures, and looking for ways to consolidate existing government agencies -- like her recent proposed merger of the county's Internal Services and Human Resources departments.

"WISE 305 is my promise that we're working even harder so that our best days are ahead and that we maximize every dollar," Levine Cava said during the evening speech, parts of it delivered in Spanish and in Creole.

Because of changes in state law, she took the auditorium stage as a weaker mayor than she did a year ago for her State of the County address at the county's Zoo Miami.

MIA\_20250130AD1157STATEOFTHMiami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** delivers the annual State of the County address at Miami Senior High School in Miami on Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025.

In 2024, the zoo parking lot was peppered with county police cars under her command as the only mayor in Florida who also held the powers of sheriff. That ended Jan. 7 when Miami-Dade's first sheriff since the 1960s, Rosie Cordero-Stutz, took office under a statewide constitutional change requiring elected sheriffs in every county. The constitutional amendment also stripped Levine Cava of her previous power as head of elections for Miami-Dade and the chief financial steward of the county -- authority now held by an independent elections supervisor, tax collector and comptroller.

A year ago, Levine Cava was cruising for an easy reelection against poorly funded Republican challengers, with talk of her running for governor in 2026 as a Democrat with bipartisan appeal from a county that's voted blue in every presidential election since the 1990s.

MIA\_20250130AD0990STATEOFTHMiami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** departs the stage after delivering the annual State of the County address at Miami Senior High School in Miami on Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025.

On Thursday, she instead addressed the audience as the Democratic mayor of a county that President Donald Trump won by 11 points, and one where a slate of Republican countywide elected officials swept their races, including Sheriff Cordero-Stutz.

Facing a new right-leaning political landscape in county government, Levine Cava told the crowd that Miami-Dade won't be defined by party divisions.

"When all around the world we see division and hyper partisanship, here we have shown that we can build bridges and we can reach consensus," said Levine Cava, who worked as a child-welfare lawyer and nonprofit leader before winning a County Commission seat in 2014. "I believe you can take care of business and drive real results, while still leading with compassion, kindness and collaboration."

In a memo last week to commissioners, Levine Cava described "a time of mounting pressure on our County's overall ***budget***," which she linked partly to the higher expenses tied to the newly independent county offices. Earlier this month, Cordero-Stutz asked commissioners for an additional $50 million over what was approved in the $12.7 billion countywide ***budget*** the board approved in September.

Levine Cava's early years in office were flush with federal COVID dollars, and now growth is slowing in property values. The combination has Levine Cava and others warning of a tougher ***budget*** ahead as the mayor prepares to unveil her 2026 spending proposal in July.

Levine Cava didn't solely focus on cost cutting in her speech, pledging to continue efforts to boost affordable housing, expand transit and invest in protecting the environment. But the WISE 305 program was what her media office highlighted in the first press release promoting the speech.

While mostly reading from prepared remarks, Levine Cava departed from the script early on when a granddaughter in the front row began crying about four minutes into the mayor's speech.

MIA\_20250130AD0296STATEOFTHBertha Morales dances as Jon Sax performs for early arrivals for the annual State of the County address by Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** in Miami, Florida on Thursday, January 30, 2025.

"I think she wants to come up here with me," the mayor said to laughter as her son headed for the exit with the infant.

Levine Cava told the audience her State of the County address fell on what would have been the 91st birthday of her mother, Lois Levine, who died in December.

"She was the one who taught me compassion, peacemaking and reverence," she said. "I'm especially reminded of her in all the work we do to find compromise and common ground and rise above -- not despite our differences -- but because of our connectedness."

**Load-Date:** January 31, 2025

**End of Document**

[*In Trump county, Miami-Dade mayor felt the pressure and flipped incinerator stance | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F0X-DHB3-RSF1-P4S8-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 29, 2025 Wednesday

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**Section:** editorials

**Length:** 846 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

In trying to solve the nearly two-year-long saga of where to send Miami-Dade County's trash, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** found herself in the unusual position of facing pressure from the environmental groups that have normally supported her and from President Donald Trump's family and allies, who now control much of the county's politics.

In the end, the pressure seems to have worked, with the mayor reversing a stance she's held since 2023.

Levine Cava announced over the weekend she was backing off from her administration's recommendation to rebuild a waste-to-energy incinerator in Doral, just three miles from where Trump owns a golf course. She's now recommending the county continue to ship trash to landfills as far away as Central Florida, even though just two months ago, she criticized that option. Her flip-flop frustrated even her own allies on the county commission during a Tuesday meeting.

Levine Cava prides herself on listening to all sides of an issue. But the mayor, a Democrat elected to a nonpartisan position, is anything but politically naive. The dominance of Trump after he carried Miami-Dade in the presidential election last year -- plus the opposition the incinerator got from officials in Doral and Miramar, whose cities would be close to the sites she previously proposed -- made this a losing issue for her.

The question now is whether her change of mind will lead to the best outcome for a county that produces on average twice as much waste per capita as the rest of the nation. Or if this is really just a case of out of sight, out of mind if the county ends up simply hauling its waste somewhere else.

Landfills release methane, a greenhouse gas, but some environmental groups say, when done right, they are more sustainable than incinerators. However, research by Levine Cava's administration until now pointed to a waste-to-energy facility as the best option. What's truly better for the environment is now muddled after her reversal.

In Nov. 22 memo, Levine Cava argued Doral, where the county's previous incinerator was located for 40 years until a fire in 2023, was the best location for a new one. She touted the environmental benefits of waste-to-energy plants, writing they produce clean energy, have lower greenhouse gas emissions than landfills and "state-of-the-art pollution control systems."

"Visits by Commissioners and myself to [waste-to-energy] facilities in Japan, Europe, and the U.S. show that with the right technology and regulations, these facilities can be successfully integrated into communities," she wrote.

On Nov. 25, however, she told Trump's son Eric in a phone call that she would ask for a delay on an expected vote by the county commission on her proposal so she could consider other options, the Herald reported. It became clear at that point she was losing political support for her plans.

Now, Levine Cava's administration says the best course of action is to use trucks and trains to haul garbage to private landfills or to new ones the county could build in Central Florida. That directly contradicts what she wrote in November: "As the County's landfills reach capacity, transporting waste over long distances is neither sustainable nor cost-effective."

Levine Cava's office told the Herald Editorial Board via email that she changed her mind because of the anticipated costs related to an incinerator and the delays the expected legal challenges would create. A new landfill would cost $556 million to build, versus the $1.5 billion the county planned to spend on the new incinerator, but annual operating costs of the landfill would be higher, the Herald reported.

"Through all our fact-finding and due diligence, we are confident that modern waste-to-energy is safe for people and the planet. However, the costs of building and maintaining a new WTE facility have proven to be extremely high," she wrote in a statement. "It is critical that we not create an undue burden to our ratepayers, especially at a time when too many families are struggling with rising costs and we are facing mounting pressure on our county ***budget***."

Her new position was applauded by environmental groups such as the Sierra Club. The organization has argued that the county should adopt a "zero waste" approach by ramping up recycling and composting and reducing single-plastic use for cleaner landfills.

Miami-Dade County has increased recycling enforcement and education and required vendors at county-owned facilities to switch from plastic products to more sustainable options. The commission is also discussing expanding composting and recycling more items, such as mattresses. But with state laws that preempt regulations local governments can impose, Miami-Dade is limited in what it can do.Now it's up to county commissioners to decide which of the mayor's recommendations they will vote on. Levine Cava's evolving stance makes wading through the science of waste management much for difficult for them and the public.

letter V4.pngSend a letter to the editor to [*heralded@miamiherald.com*](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com)

Click here to send the letter.

**Load-Date:** January 31, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Confusion in Miami over federal grant freeze as White House works to clarify details*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F0T-4RT3-RS4Y-F00Y-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 28, 2025 Tuesday

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**Section:** politics\_government

**Length:** 1278 words

**Byline:**  Michael Wilner, Douglas Hanks, Max Klaver and Michael Butler

Miami Herald

**Dateline:** WASHINGTON

**Body**

White House officials attempted to clarify the scope of sweeping action by President Donald Trump to freeze federal grant funding on Tuesday after the Office of Management and ***Budget*** directed federal agencies to temporarily pause the disbursement of nearly all grants by the end of the day.

The directive -- blocked temporarily Tuesday afternoon by a federal judge -- prompted panic in communities across the country, including Miami-Dade, where local government officials, non-profit leaders and grant writers scrambled to discern whether their programs would be hit. Organizations ranging from schools and child care service providers to cancer research programs and opioid addiction centers questioned whether a primary source of their funding would suddenly disappear.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers alike said their phones were ringing off the hook with concerned constituents asking for clarity over the new policy. But in her first briefing with reporters, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt offered little detail on the types of programs that would be spared.

"It is a temporary pause, and the Office of Management and ***Budget*** is reviewing the federal funding that has been going out the door," Leavitt said. "We will continue to provide that list as it comes to fruition, but OMB right now is focused on analyzing the federal government's spending, which is exactly what the American people elected President Trump to do."

The original OMB memo said that federal agencies "must temporarily pause all activities related to obligation or disbursement of all federal financial assistance." But fallout from the original directive prompted a second memo from the office, stating the freeze would "not apply across the board" and would spare programs "that provide direct benefits to individuals."

Still, confusion persisted throughout the day on Tuesday as to which programs would be considered as providing "direct" benefits. Health care community centers, Pell Grants, rural development projects, rental assistance for low-income families, school meals, job training, and space, ocean and energy research are just a handful of examples of the types of programs and organizations where federal funding provides benefits and employment to Americans.

In the briefing, Leavitt could not say whether the freeze would impact Medicaid services, which benefited roughly 72 million Americans last year. Medicaid portals were down across the country after the briefing, prompting Leavitt to tweet that the White House was "aware" of the outage.

"We have confirmed no payments have been affected -- they are still being processed and sent," she said. "We expect the portal will be back online shortly."

A social media account run by the White House later said that pell grants, rental assistance, Medicaid and cancer research funding would remain protected.

By the end of the day, several states had grouped together to file a lawsuit against the administration to halt the funding freeze, including California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Delaware. The judge handling the case issued a "brief administrative stay" on the measure. Further deliberation is expected on Monday morning, according to multiple reports.

CONFUSION IN MIAMI

Government officials, non-profit leaders and more began to scramble Monday night when news of Trump's directive on federal grants first emerged, given how widely federal money flows into local coffers.

Elaina Norlin, a coordinator for the Association for Southeastern Research Libraries, told the Miami Herald that she had been on the phone nonstop since the announcement. Her organization receives grants to support federally funded universities like Florida International University.

"We have general grants and have been talking throughout the day to see if we could withdraw our money before it freezes, but the agency we're working with got the memo before us," she said. "[They] were blindsided by the messaging."

The legal team at Norlin's organization said that they believe they will win their battle. The time it will take to do that, however, is unknown.

"There's an enormous amount of uncertainty," said Loreen Chant, CEO and president of the Health Foundation of South Florida, a local nonprofit. "The freeze will affect every aspect of our community, healthcare, childcare and beyond."

Miami-Dade County government's 2025 ***budget*** counts on more than $680 million in federal funds - roughly 5 percent of the $12.7 billion the county plans to spend through September.

That includes $92 million to fund the county's Head Start early education program, $50 million for long-term housing for people experiencing homelessness, more than $100 million for the transit system and about $180 million for public housing.

Leavitt said in her briefing that Head Start funding would remain in place -- one of only a handful of programs mentioned by the new press secretary in her answers to the press.

Miami-Dade reported $1 billion in cash in its last financial statement, giving the county the resources to cover temporary shortfalls in expected federal dollars and then replenish the local money once Washington aid resumes.

Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** said Tuesday it's too early to predict the consequences of Trump's freeze on federal funds but said county staff and lobbyists would be trying to free up the most vital dollars as quickly as possible.

"We're just trying to sort it out," she said. "We're going to try and make the case for the funds that are crucial to the county."

In remarks to reporters Tuesday afternoon, Levine Cava said her administration was racing to file paperwork related to pending funding amounts in order to beat the 5 p.m. deadline set by the federal Office of Management and ***Budget***.

"We're very concerned about this announcement," she said. Levine Cava, a Democrat, said the county's federal funding is so broad, it's hard to zero in on one area of concern. She cited Section 8 housing vouchers for people with low incomes. "How are people going to have rent payments made?" she asked.

The Chapman Partnership, one of Miami-Dade's largest emergency homeless shelters, received nearly $1 million in federal grants last year. Much of that money went to placing shelter residents in permanent housing -- helping them secure apartments by paying first and last month's rents, as well as security deposits.

"Any potential delay or loss of funding impedes our ability to provide housing, support services and job opportunities for our clients," Chapman Partnership CEO Scott Hansel said in an email to the Herald. Grant reductions stand to impact its ability to transition homeless residents into permanent housing, he said.

Ron Book, chairman of the Homeless Trust, Miami-Dade's homeless services agency, said that federal grants are the organization's largest source of revenue and make up nearly half of the Trust's $100 million annual ***budget***.

"We don't yet know what the effect will be," Book said.

Book is nonetheless confident that the Trust will be able to maintain its normal operations, for now at least. "We're not pausing anything, we're not stopping anything," he said, adding that the Trust's $16 million in reserves will be able to keep all of its federally funded programs online for at least 90 days. Those initiatives include long-term, extremely low-income housing, emergency shelters and initiatives to end youth homelessness.

This story was produced with financial support from supporters including The Green Family Foundation Trust and Ken O'Keefe, in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners. The Miami Herald maintains full editorial control of this work.

**Load-Date:** January 29, 2025

**End of Document**

[*In a new memo, Miami-Dade mayor abandons incinerator plan attacked by Trump's son*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F07-7XK3-S60C-P0JW-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 26, 2025 Sunday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 998 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Two months after her plan to build a new garbage incinerator came under attack by President Donald Trump's son, Miami-Dade's mayor is dropping her longtime fight for a new trash-burning facility and instead wants the county to explore building a new landfill somewhere else in Florida.

In a weekend memo, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** explained why she says hauling trash out of the county makes more sense than replacing the Doral incinerator that was burning almost half of the garbage collected by county trucks before the facility burned down in early 2023 at its longtime site in Doral.

While a new incinerator would be a workable solution, Levine Cava wrote in her Saturday memo that "the costs of building and maintaining a new facility are extremely high, and any site selected would likely generate legal or other challenges that would significantly extend the project timeline. This decision also comes at a time of mounting pressure on our County's overall ***budget***."

Miami-Dade has already spent millions on waste-management consultants to help navigate those obstacles, which have been part of the incinerator calculation from the start. Environmental groups have urged Levine Cava to abandon the incinerator plan in favor of waste reduction, but the mayor had previously said other options endangered the county trash system's ability to keep up with planned growth.

There appeared to be the votes on the Miami-Dade commission to build a modern replacement of the incinerator on the same location in Doral, until Eric Trump, who runs the president's hospitality business, came out against the plan days after his father won the 2024 election. The incinerator site sits about 3 miles from the Trump National Doral, a golf resort owned by the president.

In a brief interview with the Miami Herald on Jan. 15, Eric Trump predicted the Doral incinerator push was all but dead.

"We will fight it," he said after winning zoning approval of a resort expansion before the Doral City Council. "I'm not even sure we will have to. ... I think a lot of the support to rebuild it, frankly, has been lost."

Levine Cava last recommended rebuilding the incinerator in Doral on Nov. 22, writing that she "firmly believes" the location was the best for Miami-Dade.

She backed off that recommendation at the same time that Eric Trump got involved, telling him in a phone call on Nov. 25 that she would ask for a delay on a planned commission vote on that recommendation in order to consider other alternatives -- including landfill options that some environmental groups were urging her to pursue.

Her latest memo outlines a new recommended path forward: using trucks and trains to haul garbage out of the county, then burying it in landfills. That includes the existing network of private landfills Miami-Dade pays to use and the possibility of a new one the county hopes to build somewhere in Central Florida.

3\_IMG\_6306.jpgAt a County Commission meeting in March 2023, Doral residents raise their hands to oppose Miami-Dade County rebuilding an incinerator in their city.

In her memo, Levine Cava said county staff expect a new landfill could be operating within 10 years and would require about 150 acres and cost roughly $556 million to build. That's far less than the $1.5 billion the county planned to spend on the new incinerator. But operating costs are higher.

01.25.25 Second Update on Directive No. 241676.pdf

The Levine Cava memo states that operating costs for the landfill will run about $163 million a year, compared to the $15 million yearly operating cost for a modern Doral incinerator identified in a 2023 county consultant's report.

The memo outlines three options for the commission to explore as the board prepares for a special meeting on the incinerator issue on Jan. 28. The options she offered: continue using trucks and trains to ship county trash to landfills outside Miami-Dade; build a new county landfill in Central Florida; and build a new incinerator somewhere in Miami-Dade.

Her memo leads off with a recommendation that only involves hauling trash to landfills: "I am recommending that we continue to longhaul waste via truck and rail using our contracted capacity, while we continue exploring options to build a landfill outside of Miami-Dade County."

Ken Russell, a former city of Miami commissioner who now is a lobbyist for the local Sierra Club, said the environmental advocacy group "is very excited about the mayor's recommendation." He recently returned from a visit to Austin, Texas, where a landfill uses advance technology to reduce odors and environmental impact.

"We would really like to help the county recognize there is a new version of landfilling that is different from what we've seen in the past," Russell said.

Miami-Dade Commissioner Raquel Regalado said Saturday that she thought the incinerator plan had gotten too expensive based on current financials. She pointed out the county has been shipping most of its trash on trucks and trains to landfills across Florida since the incinerator fire two years ago. The option of Miami-Dade owning its own out-of-county landfill will help with costs.

"Right now, it makes financial sense," she said. "This is a solution for now."

MIA\_TRUMPDEVELOPMENTAPPROVAEric Trump speaks before a Doral City Council meeting regarding the final vote on Trump's development project on Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2025, in Doral, Florida.

This is Levine Cava's third recommendation on what to do after the February 2023 incinerator fire, which shuttered a facility that had been operating since the 1980s. In August 2023, she recommended building a replacement in an abandoned county airfield near the Broward County line, which drew a promise to sue from nearby Miramar.

Juan Carlos Bermudez, the Miami-Dade commissioner who represents Doral, has been fighting the effort to rebuild the incinerator there. On Saturday, he offered cautious praise of the mayor's memo.

"I am reviewing it," he said. "In general, I think it is positive."

**Load-Date:** January 27, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Does Miami-Dade have enough officers? New sheriff says no, wants more funding*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6F02-HR13-RRTP-B237-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 25, 2025 Saturday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 511 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County's new sheriff wants another $50 million in tax funds to beef up police staffing and hiring, as well as to cover ongoing expenses related to the local investigation of the 2021 collapse of condominium towers in Surfside.

The request from Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz went out to Miami-Dade commissioners in a memo Friday. While Cordero-Stutz took over the former county police department earlier this month and assumed control of its $875 million ***budget***, commissioners and Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** have authority over approving additional tax dollars for the newly independent agency.

In November, Cordero-Stutz, a Republican, won Miami-Dade's first sheriff election in six decades after a change in Florida's Constitution required the county to create an independent sheriff's office by the start of 2025. During the campaign, Cordero-Stutz, then a senior commander at the county police department, criticized the police ***budget*** proposed by Levine Cava, a Democrat, for not having enough money for overtime and for hiring new officers.

In her memo, Cordero-Stutz said the Levine Cava ***budget*** that commissioners approved in September counts on savings from the Sheriff's Office not filling nearly 190 vacant officer slots on a payroll with roughly 3,200 "sworn" law enforcement positions. Including civilian positions, the Sheriff's Office is budgeted to have roughly 4,500 jobs, according to county ***budget*** documents.

That attrition strategy "effectively eliminated the Sheriff Office's ability to fill any sworn positions" this year, Cordero-Stutz, using the term for jobs filled by law enforcement officers instead of civilian employees.

In a statement Saturday, Levine Cava noted that police funding has gone up each year since her election in 2020.

"We are in the process of reviewing the proposal presented by the Sheriff, and will continue to ensure our officers have the resources they need to do their jobs while also being good fiscal stewards of taxpayer dollars to protect our entire community and economy," she said.

Levine Cava's ***budget*** included $32 million to fund extra expenses requested by the sheriff's office as well as from three other agencies led by newly elected officers: elections supervisor, tax collector, and clerk and comptroller.

With her funding request, Cordero-Stutz said she wants the 6% increase in the current Sheriff's Office ***budget*** to:

Pay for two extra recruitment classes at the county's police academy, with funding for 90 trainees.Increase overtime pay from a budgeted $29 million to $48 million.Add another $2 million to pay the engineering firm Miami-Dade hired to investigate the collapse of the Champlain Towers South condo complex, which killed 98 people. The memo says the firm, Lerch Bates, "has fallen behind schedule" due to the "complexity and tedious nature of the work" and needs more time analyzing thousands of documents recently brought into the investigation. The probe by the county homicide squad is ongoing while a federal investigation into the cause of the building collapse is underway, too.

**Load-Date:** January 25, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Marlins unveil plans for Miami Live! at loanDepot park. Aims for dining/entertainment hub*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DWP-6BH3-RYKC-50HF-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 14, 2025 Tuesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 901 words

**Byline:**  Milena Malaver

Miami Herald

**Body**

The Miami Marlins are banking on boosting the team's sagging popularity and making loanDepot park a year-round destination for indoor-outdoor dining and entertainment in a newly designed West Plaza called Miami Live!, the franchise announced Tuesday.

The Marlins have partnered with the Cordish Companies, a Baltimore-based real-estate development company that has led similar projects at several Major League Baseball stadiums, including Texas Live! at the Texas Rangers ballpark in Arlington, Texas, and KC Live! in Kansas City. David Cordish, Cordish CEO and chairman, has a home on Fisher Island.

"They [Cordish Companies] really do a great job of tailoring their offerings to the local community and building great partners and creating something that is a thriving destination for the community all year long," said Caroline O'Connor, president of the Marlins' business operations.

The development is projected to create more than 200 jobs in the construction and hospitality sectors, said O'Connor. Opening day will be early 2026.

The project is a private investment that will be funded by the Marlins Bureau of Ownership groups, O'Connor said. Bruce Sherman is the Marlins principal owner.

Though the exact ***budget*** for the project is still in the works, O'Connor said, Texas Live! was built on a $250 million ***budget***, according to its website.

"This privately financed project embodies Miami-Dade's innovative spirit, and at zero cost to taxpayers, will provide an even greater experience for residents and visitors alike," Miami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** said in a press release.

Miami Live!\_Plaza View (1).jpgMiami Live!, an entertainment and dining space at loanDepot Park is set to open to by early 2026. the Marlins announced Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025.

Controversy over public financing of stadium

The financing behind constructing the Marlins stadium has been controversial since the ballpark opened in 2012. The stadium's construction costs--estimated at $634 million--were financed through public funds, with 80% provided by the city of Miami and the county.

Miami-Dade County covered about $359 million and the city of Miami took on $119 million, using taxpayer dollars instead of Jeffrey Loria, then the team owner, paying for the stadium through private financing. Loria sold the team in 2017 for $1.2 billion, or about $1 billion more than he paid for it.

READ MORE: How could Jeffrey Loria claim no profits on his $1.2 billion sale of the Miami Marlins?

Proponents of the new stadium said its construction would revitalize the Little Havana neighborhood around it and stimulate local economic growth. That didn't happen.

Stadium proponents also said the Marlins, whose first season was in 1993, would field a more competitive team with the projected increased revenues from their new home.

That, too, hasn't happened. Since 2012, when the new stadium opened, the Marlins have had only two winning seasons in the 13 seasons since, according to Major League Baseball. For the 2024 season, the Marlins' $97 million payroll ranked 27th out of 30 MLB teams.

As a result of the team's poor performance, the Marlins have been in the cellar in ticket sales. The team ranked 29th out of 30 teams in Major League Baseball game attendance for the past four years, according to ESPN. They ranked 30th in 2018 and 2019.

Envision year-round hub

The Marlins are hoping to rebuild the fan base -- and get the community heading to loanDepot park as a dining and entertainment destination.

David Cordish envisions Miami Live! as more than just a game-day destination, emphasizing its success hinges on being a year-round hub.

Miami Live! will be free for the public to go in and out as they please, Cordish said.

"Anybody is welcome, and that's a very important point," Cordish said. "If you just want to come in and stand around and soak up the atmosphere and look at the big screen, fine."

Cordish also wants to see Miami Live! as a gathering spot for the community to watch away games, as they plan to have large LED screens.

"This project represents our commitment to our community, as we develop our ballpark's campus to feature dining, entertainment, and gathering options for everyone to enjoy," said Sherman, the team's chairman and principal owner. Miami Live! will be a vibrant hub to gather and create lasting memories for all who visit."

Miami Live!\_Stage View.PNGRendering of the planned stage at Miami Live! in loanDepot Park set to open in early 2026.

Other ballparks with Live!

This project is the latest Cordish Companies project under their Live! patent.

The "Live!" brand is a prominent aspect of The Cordish Companies' portfolio, encompassing entertainment districts, casinos and hotels. Notable projects include Texas Live!, Xfinity Live!, Kansas City Live! and Bally Sports Live!

David Cordish believes Miami Live! will follow the success of their past projects. Live! Branded properties have over 55 million visitors annually, according to the company's website.

For Cordish, the key to success is the company's involvement in every single step of the project. Cordish Companies serve as the real-estate developers, architects, engineers, contractors and tenants, said Cordish.

"I think one of the big reasons why this works so well is [because] we're one-stop shopping, just like the walls that have been here forever. We're going to be here forever, and it allows you to do things the best."

**Load-Date:** January 14, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Where do the tax dollars go in Miami-Dade? Newly powerful clerk promises easy answers*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DW1-MMV3-RRVN-43R8-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 11, 2025 Saturday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 740 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Juan Fernandez-Barquin has been Miami-Dade's county clerk since the summer of 2023 but never with the watchdog powers he inherited this week.

On Tuesday, the former Republican lawmaker assumed control of a newly empowered Clerk's Office. Thanks to a change in the Florida Constitution, this week the Clerk's Office took over the auditing and accounting staffs that previously were under the control of Miami-Dade's Democratic mayor, ***Daniella Levine Cava***.

READ MORE: DeSantis names Republican ally to succeed Miami-Dade's longtime Democratic clerk

At his ceremonial swearing-in on Friday, Fernandez-Barquin promised to use his office's expanded powers to give residents a clearer look at how the county government spends tax money.

MIA\_CLERKOFCOURTSWEARINGIN1 (2)Juan Fernandez-Barquin before he is sworn in as clerk of court and comptroller of Miami-Dade County at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center in Miami on Jan. 10, 2025.

"We will ensure greater transparency," Fernandez-Barquin, a 41-year-old lawyer, told the crowd gathered for the ceremony in the chambers of the County Commission, where the clerk's staff is responsible for paperwork and record-keeping.

The 1,100-person clerk staff also runs the court offices where residents access the legal system to pay parking tickets, file for divorce, record deeds and report for jury duty.

Fernandez-Barquin said his staff will be rolling out an online dashboard devoted to the county's nearly $12 billion ***budget***. He said the site would be "offering near real-time insights into how taxpayer dollars are utilized."

Fernandez-Barquin became clerk in June 2023, appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis to the position left vacant by the death of Harvey Ruvin, who won his first election to the post in 1992. Ruvin's widow, Risa, was given a front-row seat at Fernandez-Barquin's ceremony, and the newly elected clerk praised his Democratic predecessor in the partisan office.

"When I stepped into this office, I stood in the shadow of the legendary Harvey Ruvin, who served this community for over 30 years," Fernandez-Barquin said.

MIA\_CLERKOFCOURTSWEARINGIN1(2)Congressman Carlos Gimenez presents Clerk Juan Fernandez-Barquin with a congressional record after Fernandez-Barquin was sworn in as clerk of court and comptroller of Miami-Dade County at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center in Miami on Jan. 10, 2025.

Before his appointment, Fernandez-Barquin was serving his third term in the Florida Legislature, representing a House district in Kendall. He went on to win a full four-year term as county clerk in November.

The clerk's expanded powers come from a 2018 amendment to the Florida Constitution that required Miami-Dade to have the same slate of elected officers as the other counties in the state by 2025.

Changes included electing a sheriff, elections supervisor and tax collector -- posts that previously were under Levine Cava's authority as mayor. The terms for those offices, all held by Republicans who won their November elections, also began Tuesday.

MIA\_CLERKOFCOURTSWEARINGIN1 (6)Juan Fernandez-Barquin smiles as he is sworn in as clerk of court and comptroller of Miami-Dade County at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center in Miami on Jan. 10, 2025.

The statewide change in local governmental power also required the clerk to also have the power of county comptroller -- the post that brings with it Fernandez-Barquin's new auditing and financial-management authority.

In his swearing-in speech and in an interview after, Fernandez-Barquin said he also plans to:

Use artificial-intelligence technology to speed up processing of civil filings so that they'll show up quicker on the clerk's website. Hire a vendor to jumpstart the office's lagging efforts to post images of criminal filings online. Make it easier for people without credit cards or bank accounts to pay fines and filing fees. Work with Miami-Dade's school system to create a curriculum for high school students interested in starting a career in the clerk's office after graduation. Create an interactive portal that would allow residents to learn more about the ***budget*** that the mayor proposes each year and that is approved by the County Commission.

"I would like something that's very robust -- and something that is easy," he said. "If the residents want to look at the ***budget*** of Miami-Dade County, they won't have to look through three volumes that are about an inch-and-a-half thick. Something that's searchable."

**Load-Date:** January 11, 2025

**End of Document**

[*On Day 1, Miami-Dade County's new sheriff promises to target public corruption*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DV9-RVX3-RRYY-C2YG-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 7, 2025 Tuesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1036 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County's new sheriff on Tuesday vowed to root out public corruption as she takes command of the largest police force in the Southeast.

"The cornerstone of public safety is public trust," Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz said in her swearing-in speech eight weeks after winning the county's first sheriff election since the 1960s. "Public trust requires zero tolerance for public corruption."

The speech at Miami Dade College's North Campus marked a historic change in county government as Cordero-Stutz and three other newly elected office holders assumed authority over agencies that previously reported to Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***. The mayor, a Democrat, watched from her assigned seat in the sixth row of the college hall as Cordero-Stutz, a Republican, laid out her agenda for law enforcement in Miami-Dade.

READ MORE: Republican Cordero-Stutz wins Miami-Dade sheriff's race, first female at top post

On public corruption, she cited government officials as well as homeowner associations and those responsible for fraud against the elderly. Cordero-Stutz also pointed to the Jan. 1 attack in New Orleans as a warning for Miami-Dade and its tradition of playing host to large events.

MIA\_20250107AD2359ROSIECORDMiami-Dade County Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz gives a thumbs up to the crowd in attendance for the Sheriff's Pass in Review ceremony at Miami-Dade College School of Justice in Miami on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025.

"Miami-Dade will continue to be an idyllic venue for world-class events, and terrorists and [the] deranged will continue to search for ways to strike the defenseless when they least expect it," she said. "Not only must we be alert and intensify our efforts, we must maintain a permanent vigilance with persistent innovation."

Cordero-Stutz, a 55-year-old veteran administrator at the now-defunct Miami-Dade Police Department, defeated Levine Cava's public safety chief, James Reyes, in the November election. It was part of a Republican sweep of countywide offices fueled by President-elect Donald Trump's 11-point win in Miami-Dade.

A change in Florida's Constitution that voters approved in 2018 required Miami-Dade to join other counties in electing a sheriff and other positions previously reporting to Levine Cava, who began Tuesday with far less authority than she has held since first winning her office in 2020.

MIA\_20250107AD2083ROSIECORDMiami-Dade County Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz, the first woman elected to that position, speaks during the swearing-in ceremony at Miami-Dade College School of Justice in Miami on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025.

Along with losing command of the 4,500-person police department, the mayor yielded control of the Elections Department to Elections Supervisor Alina Garcia and the county's tax-collections staff to Tax Collector Dariel Fernandez. State rules also required her to turn over the county's financial and auditing staff to Court Clerk Juan Fernandez-Barquin, whose position has been elected for decades but now has broader powers.

In an interview, Levine Cava said she was "proud" of her time as the county's de facto sheriff for the last four years. And she praised Cordero-Stutz's 12-minute speech.

"The speech was uplifting," she said. "And decisive."

The hundreds of county law enforcement personnel in attendance for the Cordero-Stutz swearing-in captured the transition underway: While her husband, Kurt Stutz, pinned on her the traditional star badge used by sheriff offices, rank-and-file officers continue to wear the shield badges used by police departments.

Florida law gives Miami-Dade three years to make the full transition to a sheriff's office, with plans for phasing in the new badges and squad-car designs as replacements are needed. While considered police officers when they had been working for the Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD), they now are sheriff deputies under the MDSO (the abbreviation the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office debuted Tuesday with a new star-themed logo).

When she put her hand on the Bible held by her 15-year-old son, Evan, Cordero-Stutz was in the uniform she's worn for years as assistant MDPD director, most recently overseeing investigative services. Cordero-Stutz, who was born in the Dominican Republic and grew up in New York before moving to South Florida, has spent her law enforcement career with the Miami-Dade Police Department.

MIA\_20250107AD0873ROSIECORDDuring a swearing-in ceremony, Miami-Dade County Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz takes the oath of office with her left hand on a Bible at Miami-Dade College School of Justice in Miami on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025. Her son Evan holds the Bible.

In a round of interviews in English and Spanish after the speech, Cordero-Stutz said she planned to ask county commissioners to approve changes to the $876 million Sheriff's Office ***budget*** proposal from Levine Cava that the board passed in September. During the campaign, Cordero-Stutz objected to cuts in the overtime dollars from the 2024 police ***budget*** and urged commissioners to beef up funds for new police academy classes. She also reiterated that, while she won Trump's endorsement in the Republican primary, she considers immigration enforcement a federal duty that doesn't involve county deputies.

Florida law doesn't require sheriffs to live in the counties they represent, and Cordero-Stutz is a Broward resident. While she said during the campaign she would move to Miami-Dade if elected, she told the Miami Herald she has no immediate plans to purchase a home in the Miami area as she devotes her time to the new job.

"Right now, we kind of slowed down," she said of house hunting. "We'll be looking at it again."

MIA\_20250107AD2431ROSIECORDMiami-Dade County Sheriff Rosie Cordero-Stutz stands at attention for the Sheriff's Pass in Review ceremony at Miami-Dade College School of Justice in Miami on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2025.

On her public corruption pledge, Cordero-Stutz said she's hoping to beef up the number of investigators who can look into fraud -- particularly when it comes to homeowner associations and government wrongdoing. She said corruption was a topic that resonated with voters.

"That was the No. 1 question," she said. "They've been wanting it to be addressed for so long."

**Load-Date:** January 8, 2025

**End of Document**

[*After Democrats lost Miami-Dade, how will Mayor Levine Cava lead a red county?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DV5-RP23-S3SX-D106-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 7, 2025 Tuesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1299 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

When Miami-Dade County's leading Democrat wanted to make news with her first marquee hire of 2025, she picked a Republican sure to make a splash.

For a newly created position of small-business adviser, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** picked Manny Cid, a suburban restaurant owner who also was her leading GOP challenger in the 2024 county mayor election that was decided in August.

READ MORE: Running to lead Miami-Dade, this suburban mayor promises slashing spending won't hurt

In giving the former Miami Lakes mayor the $203,000 position of "senior advisor for economic opportunity," Levine Cava has a living example of the bipartisanship she's been trying to highlight since November brought historic losses for her party in Miami-Dade.

"I think she's trying to do the right thing. And she sees the writing on the wall," said Anthony Rodriguez, the Republican chair of the Miami-Dade County Commission. "This county is going more and more red every day. And she is one of the last standing Democrats in a high position."

While some Democratic leaders of large metropolitan governments are publicly vowing to fight President-elect Donald Trump, Levine Cava has been highlighting cooperation with Republicans.

Two weeks after the Democratic drubbing on Election Day, the newly reelected mayor made sure the president-elect was mentioned in her Nov. 20 installation ceremony.

"We will work with President Trump to draw down additional funding to truly implement our SMART program," Levine Cava said in a reference to the county's plan for transit expansion, which relies on federal funding.

While Democrats still barely outnumbered Republicans in the county's latest voter report, the GOP is on the rise in Miami-Dade. Republicans in November climbed to second place in the county voter rolls, displacing unaffiliateds as the No. 2 voter category. Democrats have watched their Miami-Dade numbers shrink for years and now are on track to lose the No. 1 slot to the GOP sometime later this year.

Results of partisan elections have been worse for Democrats. Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis won Miami-Dade by 11 points in his 2022 reelection campaign, and Trump took the county by the same margin. That was a dramatic comeback for the GOP, with Hillary Clinton beating Trump by 30 points eight years ago in Miami-Dade.

Trump's Miami-Dade win also sank the Democratic candidates who were backed by Levine Cava and her political team for newly created countywide offices. The result: On Tuesday, Levine Cava loses authority over the Miami-Dade Police Department to Republican Sheriff-elect Rosie Cordero-Stutz and turns over the Elections Department to Republican Alina Garcia and the Tax Collector's Office to Republican Dariel Fernandez.

On Monday, Levine Cava waved off the characterization of Cid's hire as an example of newfound bipartisanship. Instead, she called Cid the right choice to be an advocate for small businesses.

"This is a person who is dedicated to public service. Who has good ideas that complement mine," she said. "Together we can have a big impact."

"I'm very grateful that I'm in a nonpartisan seat," Levine Cava continued. "I think that has really made a difference. It allows me to more readily cross the aisle, which I've always done."

Because county offices are officially nonpartisan, Levine Cava's comfortable reelection win in August wasn't a true test of party performance on a Miami-Dade ballot. She beat Cid by 35 points after he criticized her as being too liberal for Miami-Dade and for creating a county government that's too top heavy.

"Any office that she started is going to be looked at for elimination," Cid said in an August interview on his plans as county mayor. "Anything that was added in the last three years, it 100% is on the chopping block."

Cid's new county job is in the economic development office run by Levine Cava appointee Francesca de Quesada Covey. On Monday, he said the seeds of his hire began the day after his loss in the Aug. 20 election, when Levine Cava texted him to say she appreciated some of his ideas and suggested they talk about them in the future.

Cid spent the fall seeking government employment as he wrapped up his final year as Miami Lakes mayor and said he was a finalist for the Biscayne Park village manager position and tried for the top post in Key West, too. He decided to take up Levine Cava's offer to meet, and that resulted in an interview with de Quesada Covey, who made the formal job offer.

"I'm working on a strategic plan for small businesses," he said. "We're hitting the ground running. I'm really excited."

If the Trump mention at her installation ceremony hinted at Levine Cava's lack of interest in friction with the incoming Republican administration, a dustup with team Trump over her plan for a new county incinerator cemented that impression.

On Nov. 22, Levine Cava recommended that commissioners approve building a $1.5 billion incinerator in Doral, where a trash-burning facility had operated since the 1980s before a fire two years ago shut down that operation.

Doral happens to be where Trump owns a golf resort, and opponents of Levine Cava's plan reached out to the president-elect's camp for help in blocking the mayor's recommendation ahead of a planned Dec. 3 commission vote.

The Trump Organization's local lobbyist, Felix Lasarte, reached out to Levine Cava for a call with Eric Trump, the son of the president who runs the family's development and hospitality business. Levine Cava agreed and told the younger Trump she was planning to call for a delay on the incinerator decision, a reversal she blamed on newly found interest from environmental groups in pursuing landfill alternatives.

The Cid hire became public days before Levine Cava will be attending the installation ceremony for Cordero-Stutz, a Trump-backed Republican who takes over from the mayor as the top law enforcement officer in Miami-Dade.

Levine Cava's staff arranged to have the news of Cid's hire revealed in a Miami Herald editorial over the weekend. Commissioners weren't given advanced notice of the high-profile hire.

"The failure to communicate with the Board of County Commissioners is an ongoing issue," Commissioner Raquel Regalado, a Republican, said Monday. Regalado also questioned the need to bring on Cid at a six-figure salary when Miami-Dade is bracing for ***budget*** strain this year as the real estate market cools and leftover federal COVID dollars dwindle.

"We are in a place and time where we need to be streamlining county government," she said.

The hire means a compensation bump for the 41-year-old Cid, a married father of four. A financial disclosure he filed for the 2024 campaign showed that in the prior year, he reported about $87,000 in income. Of that, $28,000 came from his part-time job as Miami Lakes mayor, compensation that ended when he left office in November after serving the maximum two terms.

In his campaign for county mayor, Cid, the owner of the Mayor's Cafe diner, said he wanted to streamline the county bureaucracy to make it easier for small businesses to secure permits and other county approvals needed to open and expand.

He told the Editorial Board he plans to help Levine Cava with that effort: "I'll be a voice for the common folks."

His hire coincides with Rodriguez, a former Florida lawmaker, naming government spending as a top target as he takes over as board chair. On Monday, Rodriguez announced his slate of committee chairs, including Commissioner Juan Carlos Bermudez, a fellow Republican, heading up a new panel on government efficiency.

In his interview Monday, Rodriguez emphasized he has a good relationship with Levine Cava and praised the mayor for making efficiency efforts part of Cid's duties.

"Saving money for taxpayers is not a partisan issue," Rodriguez said.

**Load-Date:** January 7, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Reaching across the aisle, Miami-Dade mayor hires her former opponent and fierce critic | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DTR-V8G3-SB3F-43RS-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

January 5, 2025 Sunday

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**Section:** editorials

**Length:** 717 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** got a good grilling from her main opponent in last year's election when they sat down for an interview with the Herald Editorial Board in July.

She fended off criticism after criticism from then-Miami Lakes Mayor Manny Cid about the size of her ***budget*** and a "war on the middle class" that's making living in South Florida too expensive. At the end of the contentious interview, Levine Cava said Cid had good ideas and invited him to offer more input on how to improve county government.

Levine Cava won reelection with nearly 58% of the vote, defeating six opponents in August.

Now -- in a move that's far too rare in these partisan times -- she's reaching across the aisle. The mayor has announced she's hired Cid to join her staff.

Starting Monday, he'll be senior advisor for economic opportunity, a new position in the Miami-Dade Office of Innovation and Economic Development. Cid's role will be promoting economic growth, helping and growing small businesses and looking for ways to cut bureaucracy to make doing business in the county cheaper and more efficient.

Cid, 41, served 12 years on the Miami Lakes Town Council and became the city's youngest mayor. He is the owner of the Mayor's Cafe, a diner in Miami Lakes, a former legislative aide in Tallahassee and has a master's degree in ethical leadership from St. Thomas University.

His criticism of Levine Cava's administration during the campaign was pointed and, at times, justified when it came to the growth of county staff during her term -- he said in July the mayor "hired a huge staff around her to insulate herself." His joining her team with a $200,000 annual salary will, ironically, add to that payroll. Cid noted to the Editorial Board that the Office of Innovation and Economic Development is among the smallest departments in county hall.

Regardless, as a small business owner, Cid is well positioned to find efficiencies. Cid said he wants to look for ways to streamline the permits entrepreneurs must obtain from different county departments before opening their doors -- one mistake or delay in obtaining a permit can be a huge blow to a small operation.

He also wants to help businesses with the difficult task of securing capital and look for incentives to transform renters into homeowners. He added that a lot of the red tape he wants to eliminate can be identified by talking to rank-and-file employees whose knowledge is often overlooked.

"I'll be a voice for the common folks that I talked about at that table," Cid said, referring to his July interview with the Editorial Board.

The position of county mayor is nonpartisan but Levine Cava is a Democrat. Cid is a Republican. In a time of hyper partisanship, their partnership shows that good ideas can transcend party affiliation. This is also a politically savvy move by Levine Cava as one of the last Democrats elected countywide, given that Donald Trump carried Miami-Dade and Republicans swept county offices last year.

"[Cid] also brings connections, you know, not per se partisan connections, he brings business connections. So he's going to help us communicate to the business community and make them more aware of programs that we have and opportunities that we have to support them," Levine Cava told the Editorial Board.

"We have a goal of reaching 75% of our small businesses in the next two years."

Cid told the Editorial Board he doesn't plan to run for mayor again in 2028 and that his focus for now is to work in government administration.

Without an elected position, Cid won't have the authority to pass policy to help the middle-class. But he will be a voice in the mayor's ear -- hopefully, one that will disagree with her when necessary.

We hope, too, that Levine Cava, a former social worker and nonprofit founder who has prioritized programs to help those in need, allows a business-first, conservative point of view to balance her progressive political instincts.

That ideological balance, forgotten in these times of political tribalism, is usually behind good government. The unusual alliance between the mayor and her former political opponent is a promising step. Miami-Dade will be expecting results.

letter V4.pngSend a letter to the editor to [*heralded@miamiherald.com*](mailto:heralded@miamiherald.com)

Click here to send the letter.

**Load-Date:** January 8, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Who earns the most overtime pay in Miami-Dade government? Search our county data*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DMV-G2T1-JC3J-X08D-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

December 13, 2024 Friday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1238 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Lenard Davis works as a maintenance supervisor in Miami-Dade County's transit system, but more than $200,000 in overtime pay has helped him earn more than anyone else in his department -- including the county's transit director.

Thanks to overtime, Davis landed on the list of 50 employees who earned the most in county government last year. Miami-Dade paid Davis $313,000 last year, more than Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** ($201,000) and multiple department heads, including the county's police director and transit director ($278,000), inspector general ($273,000) and fire chief ($260,000).

READ MORE: How much does the average Miami-Dade worker make? Search our database on government pay

The majority of Davis' compensation came from what the Department of Transportation and Public Works, home to the county's transit system, said was an average of 58 overtime hours a week at $69 an hour as he supervises repair crews at Metrorail and Metromover stations. That's on top of his regular shifts at $46 an hour in the standard 40-hour workweek.

2023 overtime chart

No employee in the county's 31,000-person workforce earned more from overtime last year than Davis did, a situation a county spokesperson said reflects severe staffing shortages in the transit system's maintenance staff.

"Ongoing labor shortages have necessitated the use of supervisors to fulfill essential maintenance tasks -- to ensure needed upgrades and repairs can be made as swiftly as possible," Juan Mendieta, a spokesperson for Transportation and Public Works, said in a statement. He called Davis "a key employee with specialized knowledge and expertise" in a transit system facing staffing issues and chronic maintenance issues from aging infrastructure.

Davis is an extreme example of Miami-Dade's overtime expenses, which cost taxpayers about $330 million last year.

Like other employers, Miami-Dade typically pays employees 150% of their hourly wage when working overtime. That means for each hour of overtime, Miami-Dade pays an extra 50 cents in wages for every dollar the employee would have earned working a regular shift.

With ***budget*** pressures in Miami-Dade government growing as the real estate market cools and a new slate of elected office holders jostles for county funding, overtime costs are getting more attention.

Running in the county's first sheriff election in 60 years, Republican candidate Rosanna "Rosie" Cordero-Stutz urged Miami-Dade commissioners in September to reject the mayor's ***budget*** proposal reducing the police force's overtime ***budget*** by a third -- from $44.5 million this year to $30 million in 2025. The commission declined, passing Levine Cava's $12.7 billion ***budget*** mostly intact.

Cordero-Stutz, who was elected sheriff on Nov. 5, said she's concerned police operations will suffer with fewer overtime dollars to spend once she takes office Jan. 7.

The 2025 sheriff ***budget*** drafted by Levine Cava's staff and approved by the County Commission in September also has less money for training new officers than in past years. With funds budgeted for two new academy classes in 2025 -- down from five classes in 2023 -- Cordero-Stutz sees a reduced pipeline of officer cadets ready to fill shifts left open by retirements. That dynamic will mean more scheduling demands for remaining officers -- at a time when the ***budget*** has fewer dollars available for extended shifts.

"Without those classes, we don't have the new officers to back fill," she said. "That means after eight or 10 months, we'll have a decrease in the number of officers available. That's going to increase our overtime."

Levine Cava brushed off the dispute as more about financial planning represented by the ***budget*** than the reality of police commanders being unable to deploy officers with overtime pay as needed. While the 2024 overtime ***budget*** was $45 million in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, the county said actual overtime costs were closer to $86 million.

With the sheriff's office not coming into existence until Jan. 7, Levine Cava retains authority over the police department until then. And she said there is no crackdown on overtime expenditures.

"Overtime is always something we monitor closely," she said. "I have issued no directives to not approve overtime. Nothing has changed."

Payroll is a top expense in Miami-Dade government, accounting for 35 cents of every dollar in Levine Cava's $12.7 billion ***budget*** this year.

And with a slowing real estate market, additional expenses tied to a new courthouse and other projects, and dried-up federal dollars causing growing ***budget*** anxiety in Miami-Dade government for next year, overtime is bound to get more attention as a problematic expense as Levine Cava prepares to submit her next ***budget*** proposal in the summer. Levine Cava's 2025 countywide ***budget*** predicts future annual deficits between $52 million and $154 million starting in 2026.

"What we are going to be talking about next June and July is cutting services or raising taxes," Commissioner Eileen Higgins said at the Dec. 3 commission meeting. "It's worrisome to me."

Across county government, overtime accounted for 14 cents of every dollar paid to employees last year -- $330 million out of a $2.4 billion payroll expense.

Of all the county agencies, Miami-Dade's jail system relies the most on overtime. It paid about 23 cents in overtime for every dollar of pay. Like transit, jail administrators blame staffing shortages for the heavy reliance on premium overtime pay.

Juan Diasgranados, a spokesperson for the Corrections Department, said the jail system has about 90% of its positions filled, and vacancies are down from 116 positions last year in a workforce of about 3,000 to 77. Last year, Corrections spent about $63 million on overtime.

"Many correctional agencies around the nation are faced with staffing and hiring challenges," Diasgranados said, adding that Miami-Dade Corrections "is committed to enhancing our recruitment and retention efforts."

The Department of Transportation and Public Works ended 2023 in a close second place for overtime expenditures, spending $62 million, representing about 23% of its payroll cost.

Davis, the maintenance supervisor, accounted for a teeny portion of that outlay with his $204,000 in overtime pay. The Herald requested a chance to talk to Davis through Transportation and Public Works, but an interview was not offered.

Pay stub summaries and other documents provided by the department show Davis usually worked double shifts, frequently at night when Miami-Dade pays extra. Records from January to October show Davis worked 231 days. Of those, the records showed Davis working at least 16 hours for 199 days.

Mendieta, the agency spokesperson, said Transportation and Public Works is working on reducing overtime expenses by cross-training employees to be able to fill in when staffing is thin and closer monitoring for individuals with excessive overtime hours on their pay stubs. He said Davis was flagged for excessive overtime but that he's also one of the supervisors willing to take on overtime for maintenance projects when others won't.

Mendieta said overtime remains a vital part of keeping the transit system running.

"Despite active recruitment efforts and a training class currently in progress," he said in a statement, "the limited number of trainees has meant that existing staff has had to routinely work overtime to meet stringent safety and maintenance needs."

**Load-Date:** December 13, 2024

**End of Document**

[*Miami-Dade's new commission chair: 'Every cent must be scrutinized. It's your money, not ours.'*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DMM-H2X1-DYJM-M0SM-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

December 12, 2024 Thursday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 413 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

As he formally took office as Miami-Dade County's new commission chair on Wednesday night, Anthony Rodriguez warned he wants a fresh look at how the board oversees nearly $13 billion in government spending a year.

"I want to reinvent how we look at government spending," Rodriguez, 37, said during his installation address at the Frost science museum. "We should insist that every dollar being spent is getting the results the taxpayers expect. ... Every cent must be scrutinized. It's your money, not ours."

A Republican former member of the Florida House, Rodriguez assumes the chair post after being unanimously elected by an officially nonpartisan board where Democrats hold seven of the 13 seats. The first-term commissioner takes the powerful seat -- which gives him control of the board's agenda and meetings -- at a promising political juncture for the married father of three.

He's now the leading county Republican in a county that swung dramatically right in the November presidential election, with President-elect Donald Trump going from winning six commission districts in 2020 to 10 last month. Rodriguez's close friend, state Rep. Danny Perez, a Miami-area Republican, is now speaker of the Florida House.

"Anthony Rodriguez will rise to the occasion," Perez said before swearing-in "my brother," Rodriguez. "There is nobody better suited to lead this community."

Screenshot 2024-12-11 173305.pngAnthony Rodriguez, left, takes the oath as Miami-Dade County Commission chair on Dec. 11, 2024, at the Phillip and Patricia Frost Science Museum. Florida House Speaker Daniel Perez administers the oath.

With the county's Democratic mayor, ***Daniella Levine Cava***, starting her final four-year term, the swearing-in of Rodriguez also brings new attention to his political future. He and Perez are both mentioned as potential county mayoral candidates in 2028.

Rodriguez's election as chair was considered all but done for most of 2024, a year where he raised more than $1 million for his political committee, A Bolder Florida.

He takes over leadership of the commission at a time of growing worry about the county's finances after years of surging real estate values and an influx of federal COVID aid. Levine Cava presents her ***budget*** proposal in July, and Rodriguez will preside over the meetings where commissioners will set the tax rates and approve spending levels.

"We should insist that every dollar being spent is getting the results the taxpayers expect," Rodriguez said.

**Load-Date:** December 12, 2024

**End of Document**

[*What to know about Trump's latest AG pick, Pam Bondi + Florida GOP leaders lean into populism + Trump's plan to deport millions may not be so easy*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DH1-0SY1-DYJM-M4FN-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

November 25, 2024 Monday

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**Section:** politics\_policy\_in\_sunshine\_state

**Length:** 1524 words

**Byline:**  Alexandra Glorioso

Newsletters |

**Body**

It's Monday, Nov. 25 and President-elect Donald Trump continues to tap Florida politicians for his administration. After former U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz dropped his bid for attorney general amid significant pushback in the Senate, Trump turned to former Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi. Bondi, 59, is a Temple Terrace native and has been a familiar face to Floridians and Tampa Bay residents for decades. She's been a reliable supporter of Trump.

During her eight years in office, Bondi challenged the Affordable Care Act and the Environmental Protection Agency's limits on air pollutants. She opposed same-sex marriage and semiautomatic-weapon bans enacted in other states after the Sandy Hook shooting. She was also a frequent commentator on Fox News.

Here's what else to know about Bondi.

Note to readers: This newsletter will not publish on Dec. 2, as we take a break to enjoy the holiday. Happy early Thanksgiving.

WHAT WE ARE WATCHING

Gaetz says he will not be returning to Congress after dropping attorney general bid: Gaetz resigned from his seat in Congress and stated his "intent" not to return after her was nominated by President-elect Donald Trump to lead the Justice Department. His decision last week to withdraw his name from consideration raised questions about what he would do next -- and whether he would be sworn into the next Congress after all. Speaking with Charlie Kirk, a conservative political activist, Gaetz said he is "still going to be in the fight," just not in Congress.

Florida's top health official recommends against putting fluoride in drinking water: Florida's Surgeon General on Friday recommended against putting fluoride in public drinking water, guidance that comes amid speculation he is being eyed for a position in President Donald Trump's administration. Trump has already appointed his top health official, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has been an outspoken opponent of adding fluoride to drinking water.

DeSantis says he will likely decide Marco Rubio's successor by early January: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis says he is likely to make a decision on who will fill Marco Rubio's U.S. Senate seat by early January, saying his office has already begun vetting several possible candidates and will continue to do so over the coming weeks. President-elect Donald Trump named Rubio as his pick for U.S. secretary of state last week, meaning the Miami native is likely to resign before Trump takes power on Jan. 20.

Miami-Dade mayor changes incinerator plan and now wants to build it in Doral: Two months after recommending Miami-Dade County move its trash incinerator out of Doral, Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** is reversing course and urging commissioners to keep it there. The mayor's Friday memo is the latest setback in Doral's effort to rid itself of Miami-Dade's trash-burning operation, which was halted by a fire at the county incinerator in early 2023. With the county preparing to spend $1.5 billion on a modern replacement, Doral wants Miami-Dade to find another location. But some county commissioners have already said the current location makes the most economic sense and want Doral to cover the costs of more expensive alternatives.

WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT

He said Florida's insurance market is 'on the brink' of collapse. Then came the subpoena: Florida regulators issued subpoenas to a Palm Beach Gardens-based ratings agency last month to force it to justify its "dire predictions" for the state's insurance market. Weiss Ratings founder Martin Weiss wrote in October that homeowners insurers are "on the brink of a collapse" and that homeowners are at a "high risk" of not being paid for their claims related to hurricanes Helene and Milton. The Office of Insurance Regulation demanded that Weiss and his company turn over any emails, text messages and other records that back up those statements by Nov. 30.

MIA\_DANIELPEREZUMEVENT0332JAI.JPGCoral Gables, Florida, September 28, 2023 - Daniel Perez, Florida Speaker Designate speaks to attendees during Florida's Future Conference at the University of Miami Shalala Student Center 1330 Miller Drive. Incoming Florida House Speaker Daniel Perez hosted the Florida's Future conference at the University of Miami to discuss pressing problems and challenges facing Miami-Dade County.

New Florida legislative leaders surprise with tough talk on insurance, affordability: The new Republican leaders of the Florida Legislature surprised colleagues on both sides of the aisle on Nov. 19 with tough talk against insurance companies and a new focus on the state's affordability crisis. On the first day of the new legislative term, House Speaker Danny Perez, R-Miami, criticized private equity companies buying up homes in Florida. Senate President Ben Albritton, R-Wauchula, warned insurance companies about paying claims on time. "I want to make sure that impacted Floridians and insurance companies hear me loudly and clearly -- we are watching," Albritton said, to a standing ovation. "I'm not going to sit idly by if legitimate claims get denied while rates continue to rise. Period."

No delay on looming deadline for condo repair fees, Florida GOP leaders decide: Florida condo owners won't get any relief from potentially crushing association fees for future building repairs before the end of the year, Republican legislative leaders said this week. By Dec. 31, many Florida condominium associations must complete a reserve study to ***budget*** for those future repairs as part of condo reforms lawmakers passed to prevent another Surfside tragedy. With that looming deadline, the governor said in recent months that he wanted lawmakers to address it before the end of the year to keep constituents from being "forced out" of their condominium who are facing steep repair costs. It now appears that's not going to happen.

Black Democrats express disappointment with the party's South Florida outreach: As a member of the Miami-Dade Democratic Executive Committee, Miami Gardens resident SarDeborah Wright knew months before Election Day that she would be voting for Kamala Harris for president. But Wright, 67, had also grown frustrated with the way the national party ran its operations in Florida this election cycle, saying she believes it wasted time trying to persuade Hispanic Republicans to vote for Democrats rather than focusing on mobilizing Black supporters like her. "They're not going to switch parties," Wright told the Miami Herald. "They keep putting a lot of money into going into areas of known Hispanic Republicans. They need to be putting more of their money into their base."

Trump wants to use the military to deport millions. Experts say it's not that easy: Trump confirmed this week that he plans to declare a national emergency and use the U.S. military to carry out the mass deportation of over 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. That may prove easier said than done. Legal experts have told the Miami Herald that Trump's proposal could run afoul of federal law and would face immediate challenges in federal courts and encounter logistical hurdles.

POLITICAL PROSECUTIONS

Ex-GOP state Sen. Artiles sentenced to 60 days in scheme to throw election against Democrat: Frank Artiles, a former Marine and Republican state senator convicted last month of orchestrating a ghost candidate scheme that likely stole an election from a Democrat, was sentenced Nov. 18 to 60 days in jail, five years of probation and 500 hours of community service. But it will be a while -- if ever -- before Artiles, 51, spends time behind bars or begins mentoring military veterans as part of his community work. That's because after Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judge Miguel de la O read the sentence, he also agreed to stay the order until after the defense appeals the verdict with the higher court.

Daughter of ex-Broward mayor pleads guilty to pandemic fraud; other daughter served time: Another daughter of former Broward County Mayor Dale Holness has pleaded guilty to a fraud charge stemming from a COVID-19 pandemic benefits program. But as part of her federal plea deal, Richelle Holness will be spared from another charge accusing her of stealing from her father's county commission campaign in 2020.

How prosecutors' bribery case against a former Miami city commissioner fell apart: For months, prosecutors with the Broward State Attorney's Office appeared to be moving full speed ahead before a planned December trial against former Miami City Commissioner Alex Díaz de la Portilla and lobbyist Bill Riley Jr. on corruption charges. But prosecutors suddenly slammed on the brakes after defense attorneys on Nov. 18 moved to dismiss the case, claiming they lacked critical evidence to prove the alleged bribery scheme.

Thank you for reading! The Politics and Policy in the Sunshine State newsletter was curated this week by Miami Herald reporter Alexandra Glorioso. We appreciate our readers, and if you have any ideas or suggestions, please drop me a note at [*aglorioso@miamiherald.com*](mailto:aglorioso@miamiherald.com) or message me @aglorios.

Please subscribe! Do you know someone who would like to get this free newsletter? Send this to a friend to receive it weekly.

**Load-Date:** November 25, 2024

**End of Document**

[*Miami-Dade's Democratic mayor saw all her candidates lose to Republicans. What's next?*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DCK-FW91-JC3J-X2PY-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

November 9, 2024 Saturday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1174 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** walked right into her new political reality on election night, when the county's leading Democrat was stopped in her tracks while trying to join the stage for a victory speech with the county's newly elected Republican sheriff.

Multiple people who were there recounted seeing the mayor being stopped by security as she tried to join a mostly Republican crowd of supporters behind the winning sheriff candidate Levine Cava had tried to defeat, Rosanna "Rosie" Cordero-Stutz.

At first, the mayor thought security just didn't recognize her, one attendee told the Miami Herald. But she was quickly assured otherwise. "They said: 'We know who you are.'"

READ MORE: How did the Donald Trump red wave hit Miami-Dade's blue cities? Check out our chart

President-elect Donald Trump delivered Republicans a landslide victory in Miami-Dade, foiling Levine Cava's plan to place Democratic allies in key posts in a government where she's now in a partisan minority.

MIA\_03FINALEARLYVOTETURNOUTMayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** on the campaign trail for fellow Democrats during a visit to the polls at the Joseph Caleb Center during a "Souls to the Polls" event on the last day of early voting on Sunday, Nov. 3, 2024 in Miami.

Not only is the new sheriff a Republican, but so is the new elections supervisor, Alina Garcia, and the new tax collector, Dariel Fernandez. Each of them defeated Democrats backed by Levine Cava.

On Jan. 7, they'll take over county departments currently run by Levine Cava herself, leaving the position of mayor with diminished powers thanks to a change in Florida's Constitution requiring the offices to become independent.

That change, approved in a statewide referendum in 2018, also requires Miami-Dade to transfer its financial oversight -- including its 45-person auditing agency -- to the court clerk. That position was won Tuesday by Republican Juan Fernandez-Barquin over another candidate Levine Cava campaigned for, Democrat Annette Taddeo.

"I took the results to be a rejection of the mayor's slate and the mayor's vision," said Fernandez-Barquin, who was appointed to the open clerk post by Gov. Ron DeSantis in 2023. "It was the people expressing their want and need for checks and balances in county government."

IMG\_9406.jpgJuan Fernandez-Barquin, Miami-Dade County's clerk of the court, is a Republican and was elected to a full four-year term on Nov. 5, 2024.

He said he's planning to dive into accountability measures, including the potential for a dashboard tracking contract spending by the administration and other watchdog features. "I want more transparency on where the funds are going," he said.

In an interview Wednesday, Levine Cava pointed out that, unlike sheriff and the other countywide positions created by the 2018 constitutional amendment, the office of mayor remains officially nonpartisan. She won reelection in the Aug. 20 county elections against a mostly Republican field of challengers and emphasized she's ready to work with the people elected by residents on Nov. 5.

"Obviously, the voters spoke. My plan is to work across the aisle, as I always do," she said.

Asked about the incident by the stage at the Cordero-Stutz party, Levine Cava responded: "It's all good."

Cordreo-Stutz, an assistant county police director until Jan. 7, also minimized the incident, noting the mayor did make it up to the stage to greet her.

"I actually said hello to her on stage," Cordero-Stutz said, adding that she would expect security to not let anyone join the stage once a speech had begun at the party at the EB Hotel near Miami International Airport.

A county police veteran endorsed by Trump in the Republican primary, Cordero-Stutz pulled off a 12-point victory despite being out-spent by Democrat James Reyes, a candidate Levine Cava had elevated with a senior county post and the backing of her fundraising operation.

Once the county's corrections director, he was named head of public safety -- overseeing police and fire, along with jails -- just weeks before he filed for the Democratic primary as the instant favorite with Levine Cava's backing.

Like Taddeo and the other candidates Levine Cava backed, Reyes used the mayor's campaign manager, Democratic political consultant Christian Ulvert.

sheriff (2).pngMiami-Dade County sheriff candidates James Reyes, a Democrat, and Rosie Stutz-Cordero, a Republican.

During the campaign, Cordero-Stutz criticized Levine Cava's 2025 ***budget*** for reducing police overtime and scaling back money spent on training new officers.

Levine Cava said there are extra dollars reserved to accommodate spending requests by the new sheriff, which will still rely on money approved by the County Commission for a nearly $900 million ***budget***.

On Thursday, Cordero-Stutz suggested a confrontation is coming related to how Miami-Dade wants to fund police once the new sheriff takes over.

"I do have concerns with the ***budget*** as the way it is written. But they did state there is a pot of money they set aside," she said. "I believe at a minimum we are going to need to have conversations about how that money is allocated. I am hoping we can have that conversation sooner rather than later."

Trump's decisive win after losing the county in 2016 and 2020 means a changed political landscape for the 13-member County Commission, too. After the 2020 election, each of the seven Democrats on the commission represented a district that voted for President Joe Biden. Now, only three do: Oliver Gilbert, Marleine Bastien and Keon Hardemon, according to a Miami Herald analysis of precinct data.

Trump flipped the Biden districts represented by the other Democrats: Micky Steinberg, Eileen Higgins, Danielle Cohen Higgins and Kionne McGhee. Democrats have a one-seat advantage over Republicans on the commission, although the seats are officially nonpartisan.

On Friday, McGhee said he didn't expect to see the presidential results change priorities for commissioners or alter how the board operates.

"The dynamics and priorities there have been established over time and aren't likely to shift due to a single election cycle," he said in a text message. "I respect the diverse perspectives and voices within our community."

Even so, the shift has some Republicans picturing a more contentious phase of county government, where a Democratic mayor faces a newly empowered slate of GOP office holders taking power in a county that's now decidedly red.

Hialeah Mayor Esteban "Steve" Bovo -- a former county commissioner and a Republican who lost to Levine Cava in the 2020 election for mayor when Biden carried Miami-Dade by six points -- said he sees Tuesday's results as motivation for Republican commissioners to assert themselves more against Levine Cava.

"To my friends on the county commission, this is a clear message by residents," he said. "Not just from Republicans but from independents who also voted for Trump and who want more accountability."

"I think they need to use that wind behind their sails," he said of commissioners. " And I think they will."

**Load-Date:** February 26, 2025

**End of Document**

[*Republican Cordero-Stutz wins Miami-Dade sheriff's race, first female at top post*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6DBX-7KM1-JC3J-X3P7-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

November 5, 2024 Tuesday

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**Section:** miami\_dade

**Length:** 1260 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks and Charles Rabin

Miami Herald

**Body**

A Republican veteran of the Miami-Dade Police Department won the county's first sheriff election since the 1960s on Tuesday, with Rosanna "Rosie" Cordero-Stutz set to assume the law enforcement powers currently held by Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***.

Cordero-Stutz, 54, becomes Miami-Dade's first female sheriff, a position that county voters eliminated in 1964 after a string of corruption scandals. Cordero-Stutz is also the first Hispanic female sheriff in Florida history, according to her campaign.

At her victory party at the EB hotel near Miami International Airport, Cordero-Stutz took to the stage around 8:45 p.m. to thunderous applause and chants of "Rosie, Rosie. Rosie." Besides her were U.S. GOP House reps. Mario Díaz-Balart and Carlos Gimenez, a former Miami-Dade mayor, and Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle. Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** also was there.

After being introduced by former Miami-Dade Police Director Juan Perez, Cordero-Stutz promised to be the sheriff for all people in Miami-Dade.

"The sheriff must truly be independent of all political control to protect the community," she told the crowd.

MIA\_CORDERO-STUTZ\_SHERIFFAS (3)Rosie Cordero-Stutz, center, celebrates with her husband, Kurt Cordero, left, and Miami-Dade Commissioner Rene Garcia after winning the race for Miami-Dade sheriff. The GOP candidate, Cordero-Stutz gave her victory speech Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2024, at the EB Hotel in Miami.

She also paid tribute to the Miami-Dade Police Department, where she has worked her entire career.

"My Miami-Dade Police Department, thank you for trusting me during this difficult year. I didn't know I'd be a politician, but apparently I did alright," she said.

And she made a promise to the more than 3,500 worn officers she will now direct: "I see you. I hear you. I have your back."

In a statement released by his campaign shortly after 8 p.m., Reyes said he planned to continue as head of public safety in Miami-Dade. "I want to send my sincere congratulations to our Sheriff-Elect, wishing her the best of luck in this crucial role," Reyes said. "I look forward to working with her in pursuit of our shared commitment to keeping Miami-Dade County safe."

MIA\_03REYES\_SHERIFF.JPGOn a small screen, local Channel 6 broadcasts the result of the Miami-Dade Sheriff as television journalists pack their gear after James Reyes canceled his concession speech during the local Democratic Party election watch party at Bay 13 Brewery in Coral Gables, Florida, on Tuesday, November 5, 2024.

Endorsed by Trump

Cordero-Stutz won the Republican primary for sheriff in August after securing the endorsement of former President Donald Trump. Her victory Tuesday overlapped with Trump's own win of Miami-Dade, which ended 28 years of Democratic presidential victories in the county.

At the Reyes party at the Bay 13 brewery in Coral Gables, Reyes campaign director Christian Ulvert addressed a dejected crowd.

"Obviously, this is a tough evening for us," he said, as he stood beside David Richardson, another Ulvert client and the losing Democratic candidate for tax collector. "It's not what we hoped for."

MIA\_01RICHARDSON\_CONCESSIONDavid Richardson, right, gives his concession speech after losing his bid for Miami-Dade tax collector during the local Democratic Party election watch party at Bay 13 Brewery in Coral Gables, Florida on Tuesday, November 5, 2024.

Currently an assistant director for Miami-Dade police overseeing investigations and other bureaus, Cordero-Stutz, 54, ran a campaign focused on her experience at the law enforcement agency. Reyes, on the other hand, spent most of his career in Broward County, where he ran the jail system and became a top administrator in the sheriff's office there.

Levine Cava, the only county mayor in Florida to hold the powers of law enforcement, recruited Reyes, 47, to run Miami-Dade's jail system in late 2022. She appointed him to oversee the police department as public safety chief just weeks before he filed to run in the Democratic primary for sheriff in January.

Big change in county's largest police department

A change in the Florida Constitution in 2018 set up a sweeping change in the county's law enforcement system, with Miami-Dade required to elect an independent sheriff in 2024. What was then Dade County abolished the sheriff's office in 1966 after a string of corruption scandals, with the powers ultimately resting with the elected mayor.

Levine Cava oversees the Miami-Dade Police Department, which will become the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office under Cordero-Stutz on Jan. 7.

The change doesn't affect city police departments, which remain independent. Instead, the entire county police department will become a sheriff's office that will fall under the control of Cordero-Stutz, with a ***budget*** and funding still approved by the County Commission.

With the next sheriff set to take over the county's nearly $900 million law enforcement ***budget*** -- with the possibility of assuming control of the county jails, too -- the partisan contest between Cordero-Stutz and Reyes was the marquee local fight for Democrats and Republicans on the Miami-Dade ballot.

Both candidates are Broward residents, taking advantage of a provision in Florida law that does not require sheriff hopefuls to live in the county where they run for office. Cordero-Stutz and Reyes both said they planned to move to Miami-Dade if they won the election.

Miami-Dade police veteran

Cordero-Stutz is married and a mother of a teenage son. Her husband, Kurt Stutz, is a retired Miami-Dade officer, and they also have a retired MDPD bomb-sniffing dog, Max. She was born in the Dominican Republic and grew up in New York before moving to South Florida. She has spent her law enforcement career with the Miami-Dade Police Department.

She joined the county police department 28 years ago as a patrol officer and rose through the ranks to be a senior administrator. She took a leave of absence to run for the fall campaign. Her current position as assistant director for investigative services put her in charge of the 4,500-person agency's homicide and robbery bureaus, as well as other units dedicated to solving crimes.

Levine Cava backed Reyes and boost fundraising for his political committee, Miami-Dade Safe and Secure. Levine Cava's Republican predecessor as mayor, Gimenez, backed Cordero-Stutz. His son, C.J. Gimenez, and daughter-in-law, Tania Cruz-Gimenez, ran Cordero Stutz's campaign. Cruz-Gimenez served as Cordero-Stutz's campaign manager.

Cordero-Stutz had the backing of Perez, the police director under Gimenez. Reyes had the backing of Freddy Ramirez, also a police director under Gimenez who was promoted to chief safety officer under Levine Cava. Ramirez used that position to launch his own bid for sheriff in the Democratic primary, but his campaign ended after a suicide attempt last year.

READ MORE: Freddy Ramirez ends campaign for Miami-Dade sheriff weeks after suicide attempt

Cordero-Stutz trailed in the fundraising front, raising $1.4 million for her campaign and political committee, Citizens for a Safer Community. That's compared to the $2.1 million raised by Reyes.

But the Republican side led in turnout, with about 36% of the ballots cast by GOP voters and 33% by Democrats. The results suggest independent voters, who cast about 29% of the vote, broke heavily with Republicans in Miami-Dade.

The results marked a sea change for Miami-Dade, a county where Democrats still hold a narrow lead in registration and outperformed Republicans by 10 points in the 2020 fall election.

**Load-Date:** November 6, 2024

**End of Document**

[*In Miami-Dade, Christian Ulvert helps candidates win elections and developers win deals*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6D9X-69X1-DYJM-M3DK-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

November 1, 2024 Friday

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**Section:** politics\_government

**Length:** 3902 words

**Byline:**  Douglas Hanks

Miami Herald

**Body**

When developer Paul Lambert needed help winning county land for the Miami Wilds waterpark under Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***, he hired a consultant who knows her well: Levine Cava's campaign director, Christian Ulvert.

"We knew that we needed some help messaging," Lambert said in an interview about Ulvert's previously unreported work for Miami Wilds, the controversial project once planned for county land outside Zoo Miami. "Just the same way he does for elected officials. It was to give us advice on how to message it."

Ulvert, 42, became locally prominent in politico circles for his work running campaigns for Democratic candidates across Miami-Dade County. Though not a registered lobbyist, he also works as a communications consultant for private-sector clients, advising developers and others seeking favorable decisions from Levine Cava and favorable votes from the 13-member County Commission, where Ulvert has three campaign clients: Commissioners Danielle Cohen Higgins, Eileen Higgins and Micky Steinberg.

His ties to county office holders could expand even further after the Nov. 5 election, since his company, Edge Communications, is managing the campaigns for the Democratic nominees for sheriff, tax collector, elections supervisor and clerk.

The two sides of Ulvert's business give him an enviable advantage as a paid consultant. On the one side, he's the top political operative for the county's newly reelected mayor and her slate of candidates seeking to run Miami-Dade agencies. On the other side, he's sought out by companies eager to win deals from Levine Cava and others holding power in Miami-Dade government.

Ulvert's consulting work doesn't violate county lobbying rules, according to the Miami-Dade Ethics Commission. But it does expand his role and influence in local government with each candidate he helps get into office.

While Levine Cava ultimately killed the Miami Wilds project, Ulvert's previously unknown work assisting Lambert sheds light on the duality of his role as a paid advisor to both politicians and private-sector executives as they stand on two sides of a given deal.

Lambert told the Miami Herald he wasn't paying Ulvert to pitch the project to Levine Cava or other elected officials. Instead, he said Ulvert was hired to offer advice on the best way for Lambert and partners to make their case to the administration, County Commission and the public.

Lambert recalled how Ulvert put it: "'I can help you figure out how to message this correctly for the mayor, but also for the commission. But I'm not a lobbyist. You'll still need to have ... other people working on the lobbying side.' That's what he told us," Lambert said. "'That's what I do. I know messaging.'"

IMG\_6537.jpgChristian Ulvert, owner of the Edge Communications political consulting firm, readies the lectern for a press conference by his top client, Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***, who is in the background. The event was at the Coral Gables Library early-voting site on Oct. 21, 2024, and Levine Cava was joined by multiple Ulvert clients seeking countywide office on Nov. 5.

Ulvert said Levine Cava was aware he was helping Miami Wilds with what he described as a grassroots communications plan focused on the best way to build support for the waterpark in areas around the zoo.

In his interview, Lambert also emphasized that Ulvert's work focused on a broader campaign to build public support for a project that was largely backed by the county's elected officials until it ran into trouble last year.

"Even though certainly the mayor was part of the audience and the commission was part of the audience, the public was the main audience," Lambert said of Ulvert's work for the Miami Wilds effort. "Because at that time, the mayor and the commission didn't have a problem with Miami Wilds."

Ulvert told the Herald that he has no role in lobbying any elected officials, including Levine Cava. Instead, he described his work for Miami Wilds and other companies pursuing county deals as focused on communications and not politics.

"I always make clear: If you are looking for someone to advocate for your cause with a lawmaker or an elected official, you need to go hire a lobbyist, or sometimes a zoning attorney," Ulvert said. "I am neither of those things."

Ulvert client list

Ulvert may be the ultimate insider in Levine Cava's orbit, both on and off the campaign trail, but he says his conversations with the mayor never tread into issues that private-sector clients are pursuing with the administration.

In an interview, Levine Cava said she's never had a conflict with Ulvert running her political operation while working for private-sector clients, too.

"His private-sector consultation, as I understand it, is primarily around strategic communications," she said. "If there's an issue, then we don't talk about it."

MIA\_03CHRISTIANULVERTPROFILE.JPGChristian Ulvert at his desk at Edge Communications on Monday, May 6, 2024, in Miami.

The ultimate insider

While lobbyists regularly use political contributions to keep on friendly terms with elected officials, no private-sector player has the kind of extensive relationship Ulvert enjoys with Levine Cava.

Since she took office in November 2020, Levine Cava's Our Democracy political committee and her 2024 mayoral campaign have paid more than $3 million to Ulvert's Edge Communications and its related entities, according to campaign-finance reports. Because those dollars cover payroll for campaign staffers, television and radio advertising, printing costs for materials, polling and other expenses, it is not known how much of the money represents actual profit for Edge.

Ulvert ran her first political campaign 10 years ago, when Levine Cava, then a nonprofit executive, won an upset in 2014 by unseating the most conservative county commissioner on the board, Lynda Bell.

At the time, Ulvert was head of the SAVE Dade gay-rights advocacy group and, along with his husband Carlos Andrade, was suing Florida to overturn the state's ban on same-sex marriages. He had clashed with Bell after she blocked adding transgender protections to the county's human-rights ordinance. When Bell declined his request for a meeting on the issue, Ulvert said he told her: "You'll never forget me." (In an email, Bell said she did not recall the conversation. "I have a pretty decent memory," she said. "I doubt that conversation took place.")

Ulvert helped Levine Cava win an easy reelection to her District 8 commission seat in 2018 before the two engineered a 2020 mayoral run that, for the first time, tapped Democratic Party resources and organizers to win Levine Cava the county's top job in a race that is technically nonpartisan.

When Levine Cava took over the mayoral suite of offices on the 29th floor of the Stephen P. Clark Center, she continued to turn to Ulvert for advice, while paying him $6,000 a month for political consulting work. In 2021, the Miami Herald reported on text messages showing that Levine Cava ran a transit memo by Ulvert -- "Waiting on your last look," the mayor wrote -- before releasing it to the County Commission and also got advice from Ulvert when she was landing the ill-fated FTX sponsorship deal for the county's Miami Heat arena.

dlc ulvert text 1.jpgText messages between Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** (left) and her political consultant Christian Ulvert, right, on Jan. 12, 2021, about a transit memo the mayor was preparing for Commissioner Kionne McGhee.

In 2022, one of Ulvert's publicly known private-sector clients, the government of Qatar, paid for Levine Cava and other county officials to make a visit to the Middle Eastern nation. Ulvert and one of Qatar's local lobbyists, Jacqui Carmona, were on the trip, too.

In January, Levine Cava left some commissioners annoyed when they learned through her State of the County address that she would ask them to put a $2.5 billion bond package on the November ballot. While the mayor kept her plan under wraps inside county government, Ulvert knew about it months earlier and had already polled the issue with likely voters. In April, Levine Cava said she was shelving the bond plan until 2026.

Along with serving as Levine Cava's top political consultant, Ulvert has a hand in shaping the mayor's official messaging out of County Hall.

He's in frequent contact with Levine Cava's chief of staff, Johanna Cervone, a former communications director for Florida's Democratic Party, where Ulvert was once political director. Text messages released by the mayor's office earlier in the year show Cervone regularly contacting Ulvert for advice on Levine Cava's messaging and public image.

"Thoughts on posting a pic with Danny Perez from meeting today?" Cervone texted Ulvert on the afternoon of Jan. 2 after Levine Cava met with Danny Perez, a Republican state lawmaker in line to be Florida's House speaker later this year. "Thanking him for his commitment to Miami-Dade?"

The texts, acquired through a public records request, do not show a response from Ulvert. The following morning, Levine Cava's social media feed had a photo of her meeting with Perez and others at Miami International Airport, with the message: "We are grateful for the productive meeting with Speaker-Designate of the House, @Daniel\_PerezFL."

Christian Ulvert's clients, known and unknown

Ulvert's work helping the private sector try to profit off the public sector is partially detailed on the website of Edge Communications, which lists past and current clients.

Along with the Democratic politicians who have hired him -- Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle, Florida Rep. Ashley Gantt, and current and former state senators Jason Pizzo, Jose Javier Rodriguez and Annette Taddeo -- there are companies, unions and nonprofits. Those include Miami's Magic City Casino, the Laborers' International Union of North America (best known as LiUNA) and the Everglades Foundation. Ulvert said Edge last represented the Everglades Foundation about eight years ago.

Other clients aren't listed but have been publicly disclosed or written about. A Miami Beach developer hired Ulvert in 2016 for public relations help during a fight in that city over a project when his client, Philip Levine, was mayor. That year, Ulvert also made a rare appearance in County Hall when Uber hired him to help with media strategy during its successful fight to legalize ride-hailing apps in Miami-Dade.

uber presserPolitical consultant Christian Ulvert, left, and Uber Miami chief Kasra Moshkani address reporters in Miami-Dade's County Hall in 2016.

Ulvert's known clientele also includes developers seeking county deals. Developer Michael Swerdlow has paid him for consulting services, both Swerdlow and Ulvert confirmed. In the last year, Swerdlow secured a no-bid deal on Miami-Dade land for a new Costco near Homestead, and the developer is also pursuing county parcels for a residential and commercial complex in the Liberty City area.

David Martin, another developer with county projects, has hired Ulvert to run referendum campaigns for municipal deals requiring voter approval -- including Martin's failed bid to redevelop the Miami Beach Marina in 2020. This year, Edge is getting paid to promote the residential and commercial project Martin and partners want to build on land owned by Miami on Watson Island, between downtown and South Beach.

But an untold number of other Ulvert clients have managed to stay under the radar. Miami Wilds, for one, isn't listed on the Edge website and had not previously been reported.

The county's ethics rules don't require a campaign consultant like Ulvert to register as a lobbyist if he's just giving companies advice on how to persuade the elected officials he works for, Jose Arrojo, then the director of the Miami-Dade Ethics Commission, said in May shortly before leaving the agency for a different job. While lobbyists must disclose the names of clients who are paying them to speak to government officials, consultants can keep their client list confidential.

The rules also allow someone who is advising county bidders to regularly communicate with elected officials, provided that person isn't making his or her client's case.

"They're not lobbying, they're just advising firms on the best way to make their case," Arrojo said. "If this person has access to an elected official and is speaking to this elected official on a daily basis because they're friends or because they're a paid political consultant, this person should not be advocating on behalf of a third party. That would constitute lobbying."

MIA\_01CHRISTIANULVERTPROFILE.JPGChristian Ulvert, a political consultant in Miami, ran Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***'s four winning campaigns: two for County Commission and two for mayor.

Presenting something palatable

When Levine Cava took office in late 2020, she inherited a county engineering deal with a private group in talks to build and operate a monorail system linking Miami to Miami Beach. The new mayor's administration tried to negotiate a final contract as projected construction costs soared past $1 billion and wealthy South Beach condo dwellers rallied to derail the effort.

In 2021, the monorail group hired Edge Communications as the project awaited a final deal from the Levine Cava administration.

Christopher Hodgkins, a Miami executive who was part of the monorail team, said Ulvert never joined team lobbyists for meetings with elected officials but instead offered polling data and advice on how the project could be presented as something palatable to Miami Beach, as well as to the Levine Cava administration and to county commissioners.

"He was never at a meeting we had with the mayor. He never claimed he was talking directly to the mayor," Hodgkins said. "He would talk about what the political ramifications were. What people were thinking? What was the Beach's perspective? What would Commissioner Higgins, what would the mayor think, of this and that?"

While Ulvert was working on the monorail team, one of his political clients was the leading foe of the project. Dan Gelber, Miami Beach's mayor at the time, said he considers Ulvert as something of a son after giving him his start in politics with a paid position fresh out of Florida State University as communications director for Florida House Democrats when Gelber was minority leader in the late 2000s. That led to Ulvert running Gelber's multiple campaigns for office, including a failed bid for Florida attorney general and two successful runs for Miami Beach mayor.

"Some consultants will do the blocking and tackling of a campaign. And some consultants will give you a visionary path without the detail work. Christian does both," Gelber said. "That's why he's been very successful."

MIA\_20230708AD1240FloridaDeMiami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber speaks as Miami-Dade County Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** joins him on stage during the gala at the Florida Democratic Party's annual Leadership Blue Weekend at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach, Florida, on Saturday, July 8, 2023.

Gelber said he was aware of Ulvert's work for the team pursuing the county monorail project, a transit route that would link Miami Beach to private land on the Miami waterfront where Genting, a Malaysian casino operator, wanted to build a resort. Gelber, who has helped lead the fight against casino expansions in Miami-Dade, said he didn't have an issue with Ulvert quietly being on the opposite side of the monorail debate.

"He's entitled to represent anyone he wants to," said Gelber, who last year joined Levine Cava to preside over a waterfront vow renewal ceremony for Ulvert and Andrade. "It's not really an issue."

For more than a year into her first term, Levine Cava's administration continued negotiating toward a monorail deal. Even after the development ***budget*** spiked to more than $1 billion, her administration defended the plan and successfully argued against a transit oversight board endorsing a Metromover extension to South Beach as a more practical alternative.

"This corridor has been studied since 1988," Eulois Cleckley, Levine Cava's transportation director, told the Citizens Independent Transit Trust board at the Oct. 28, 2021, meeting, urging members to stick with the monorail plan. "This quite frankly is the best opportunity to deliver this connection."

But her position flipped a year later, when Levine Cava announced the monorail project wasn't feasible and endorsed the same Metromover extension that her administration fought against months earlier.

"We are officially shifting gears," Levine Cava said at a press conference. "And we'll start working to expand the Metromover system. It will be an easy, familiar, one-seat ride from Government Center all the way to South Beach."

Ulvert described his work for the monorail team as focused on grassroots strategies related to building support on Miami Beach. He said he didn't advise Levine Cava on monorail issues and said she has ample help on policy decisions from her mayoral office staff, while he focuses on her political life outside of County Hall.

"She has a very well-seasoned team," he said. "They know what they're doing."

Having a mayor's political team overlap with the county's lobbying corps isn't unusual. When Carlos Gimenez was mayor between 2011 and 2020, his campaign manager was registered lobbyist Jesse Manzano-Plaza. The volunteer finance chair for Gimenez's campaigns was Ralph Garcia-Toledo, a registered lobbyist and county contractor who helped win Miami-Dade contracts under Gimenez.

As registered lobbyists, Garcia-Toledo and Manzano-Plaza were authorized to pitch their clients' plans directly to the mayor, something Ulvert cannot do. But, unlike for Ulvert, county rules required Garcia-Toledo and Manzano-Plaza to add their names to a county registry listing lobbyists and their clients.

garcia-toledo and manzano-plaza.jpgThree leaders of Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez's 2016 reelection campaign share a light moment in the County Commission chambers on Feb. 21, 2019. From left to right are Ralph Garcia-Toledo, who was Gimenez's volunteer finance chairman; Brian Goldmeier, the hired fundraiser for the 2016 race; and Jesse Manzano-Plaza, the campaign manager. Garcia-Toledo and Manzano-Plaza were part of a proposal by Genting to build and operate a county monorail system.

Garcia-Toledo and Manzano-Plaza were at the center of the monorail bid when Gimenez was mayor and remained on the team as Levine Cava took office and Ulvert was hired. Later, Ulvert was on the same team as Garcia-Toledo and Manzano-Plaza for another high-profile effort to win a county contract under Levine Cava.

In 2022, Lambert, the Miami Wilds developer, was helping lead a different team pursuing a development deal to build a $241 million hotel at the county-owned Miami International Airport.

Operating under the name Parmco Airport Hospitality, the Lambert team was ranked second by a county review board that summer, with the high score going to a hotel venture formed by Fontainebleau owner Jeff Soffer and Stephen Ross, the New York developer who owns the Miami Dolphins.

While Parmco got the lower score, the recommendation wasn't binding on Levine Cava. She got to decide who to recommend to county commissioners for the hotel contract.

Though not known publicly at the time, Ulvert was advising Lambert and others on the Parmco team in their bid for the hotel deal.

"He was pretty clear: 'I can help you figure out how to message this correctly. For the mayor but also the commission,'" Lambert said. "'But I'm not a lobbyist. You need to have support and other people that are working on the lobbying side.' That's what he told us."

As the underdogs after the second-place ranking, the Parmco team hoped to get a leg up from the county with its backing by labor unions. Parmco had already signed preliminary "peace" agreements with two unions: IBEW, representing electricians, and LiUNA, representing construction laborers. Those agreements commit an employer like Parmco to not oppose organizing efforts to recruit workers to become dues-paying union members.

The two unions wrote Levine Cava on Nov. 28, 2022, urging her to throw out the selection panel's scoring and start fresh with a new bidding process that would put more weight on labor-friendly elements, including agreements for higher wages and local-hiring pledges. One of the unions, LiUNA - had Ulvert as a consultant at the time, paying him about $7,500 that month, according to the union's federal regulatory filings.

Less than a month later, Levine Cava largely did what the unions asked. On Dec. 21, 2022, she released a memo saying she would reject the ranked bids and issue a new request for proposals (RFP) for the airport hotel that put an emphasis on those labor-friendly elements.

"A project of the scale and scope of the airport hotel presents a major opportunity for Miami-Dade County to set a new procurement standard based on our values and priorities," she wrote in a memo to commissioners. "A new process designed under our more rigorous procurement standards will help us reach a stronger financial outcome and create the greatest value possible for taxpayers."

While the mayor's surprise memo gave Parmco a second chance at the top score in a new bidding contest, the change wasn't well received by Lambert and other team members, according to multiple sources involved. By starting fresh, Levine Cava eliminated the chance of using her discretion to overrule the selection board and unilaterally recommend Parmco as the preferred hotel developer to the County Commission, which has the final power to award contracts.

The following day, Ulvert was on a conference call with Lambert, lead partner Darryl Parmenter, Garcia-Toledo, Manzano-Plaza and others. Multiple participants described a tense exchange between Garcia-Toledo and Ulvert over Levine Cava's intentions.

One participant, who didn't want to be identified discussing the private meeting, said Ulvert replied: "The mayor is looking at this closely. She'll do what is right."

Nevertheless, that meeting marked the end of Ulvert's role on the airport hotel team, according to multiple people familiar with the Parmco team.

IMG\_5512.jpgMiami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** poses with her campaign consultant, Christian Ulvert, during a get-out-the-vote event ahead on Aug. 15, 2024. Five days later, Levine Cava won a second term in the county's Aug. 20 elections.

Levine Cava later decided to stick with the original bidding process and in April 2023 recommended the Ross and Soffer team as the airport hotel's developer. County commissioners awarded that team the contract 12 weeks later.

In describing his role on the Parmco team in an interview with the Herald, Ulvert said it was limited to lining up the union support that the developers thought would be helpful in their pursuit of the county deal.

"That's the lens I had," Ulvert said. "It's no secret I do a lot of work with labor."

In her own interview, Levine Cava cited LiUNA as an Ulvert client that happens to overlap with her policy agenda. "I'm a LiUNA fan," she said. "I'm just a fan of the way that LiUNA does its work."

She cited her rejection of Lambert's push for the Zoo Miami waterpark as an example of how hiring Ulvert doesn't mean favorable treatment from her administration.

"You saw what happened with Miami Wilds," she said.

**Load-Date:** November 2, 2024

**End of Document**

[*Hialeah council votes to invest millions to revamp neglected water and sewer systems*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6D83-T7B1-DYJM-M2HG-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

October 23, 2024 Wednesday

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**Section:** hialeah

**Length:** 670 words

**Byline:**  Verónica Egui Brito

Miami Herald

**Body**

The City of Hialeah, which has not made significant improvements to its water and sewer system in the past 20 years, voted unanimously on Tuesday to set aside $14.8 million for upgrades, from building new pump stations, replacing water pipes, cleaning and restoring manhole covers and repairing the sewer system.

The lack of maintenance has created significant challenges for the city over the years. Pumping stations are currently operating beyond the 10-hour daily limit set by Miami-Dade County, which has made it more difficult for businesses and developers to get permits to build new projects or improve existing ones.

Kevin Linskey, the director of public works, who oversees Hialeah's water and sewer department, said that many pumping stations covering as much as one third of the water and sewer system have been operating beyond the normal limit of 5,000 gallons per mile of piping. In some instances, these pump stations are flowing at up to five times their intended capacity.

The improvements the city approved Tuesday aim to ensure long-term reliability of the system and save on costs for residents. Linskey's detailed explanation to the city council of the water and sewer issues marked the first time a public works director has publicly addressed the need for maintenance and repair of the system. Linskey became public works director in March 2023, after Armando Vidal, who had the job for 25 years, retired.

At the council meeting on Sept. 10 prior to the approval of the new ***budget***, Linskey told the council that the problems with the water and sewer system have "significantly slowed down development."

The city has approved a $162 million ***budget*** for public works for the new fiscal year, representing a substantial 25% increase from last year. Of this funding, $31.7 million will come from the American Rescue Plan, a federal initiative to aid economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The city also plans to spend $40.4 millon over the next five years for repairs and improvement to the water and sewer system.

Hialeah residents pay the fourth-highest water and sewer rates in Miami-Dade County, and the rates are expected to continue rising.

Residents pay a rate of $11.50 every two months for water usage and $12.50 rate every two months for sewage.

Leakage in the system is one of the factors keeping costs high.

This year, residents will see another increase in water and sewer fees. Miami-Dade County, which provides 50 percent of Hialeah's water, has raised water fees by 13.6%. A county sewage fee reduction of 3.3 percent will mean Hialeah residents will see an overall hike of 10% for water and sewage.

To help residents with the rising costs, the city has suspended the franchise fee, which it charges to all water and sewer accounts. The fee, initially set at 10% in 2014 under Mayor Carlos Hernández, has been gradually reduced since 2019 and currently stands at 4%.

The city's aging water and sewer system is overloaded, particularly in east Hialeah, with frequently leaking pipes that date back to the 1960s. Groundwater infiltration into the system increases the volume that must be processed at treatment plants, leading to higher costs for residents in the area.

The county has sent the city an ultimatum to pay an outstanding debt of $18 million for water and sewer services. Overdue payments for the services are over 90 days delinquent, Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** said in a letter to Hialeah Mayor Esteban "Steve" Bovo on July 22.

The letter emphasized that all county residents share the financial responsibility for water and sewer services, and that Hialeah's failure to settle its debts "means that the county's water and sewer customers are unfairly burdened with the financial obligation for services rendered in Hialeah."

Hialeah has requested two extensions for payment. The mayor, who disputes the amount the county claims the city owes, has said he will not authorize payment of the $18 million until the city resolves past disagreements over the services.

**Load-Date:** October 23, 2024

**End of Document**

[*'Misleading' ads create friction in the weeks leading to Miami-Dade sheriff's contest*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6D71-YB81-DYJM-M0W8-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

October 18, 2024 Friday

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**Section:** voters\_guide

**Length:** 1357 words

**Byline:**  Charles Rabin

Miami Herald

**Body**

With just over two weeks to go before Miami-Dade County residents choose a sheriff for the first time in six decades, the race for one of the most important elected posts in the state has turned ugly, with accusations of dirty politicking coming from both camps.

The tension is centered on a pair of ads running on local television stations in the final weeks of the contest. Democratic candidate James Reyes' campaign aired a spot this week saying his Republican opponent, Rosie Cordero-Stutz, was sentenced to a week in jail for missing a deposition over a decade ago. Another ad run by Reyes blames her for a series of job cuts and attrition in the Miami-Dade Police Department.

Cordero-Stutz was never jailed in the 2013 civil case involving a timeshare in North Carolina. A judge did order her "sentenced" to seven days in jail for failing to show up for depositions. But the same order said she could "purge herself of contempt" if she appeared for the deposition in the next 30 days. And there were no job cuts at Miami-Dade Police in 2014. And if there had been, Cordero-Stutz, a lieutenant at the time, had no power over hiring or firing.

"It's absolutely dirty politics," Cordero-Stutz told the Miami Herald last week. "I always said this race shouldn't be partisan. It should be of the utmost integrity."

Cordero-Stutz countered with an ad criticizing Reyes, the county's chief of public safety, for the riot-like scene that broke out inside and outside Hard Rock Stadium during the Copa America final in July when thousands of fans showed up without tickets. She also blasted Reyes for accepting the endorsement of Florida Rising, a social justice and economic reform group that supported large ***budget*** cuts for police during the Black Lives Matter marches of 2020.

"I brought up the idea to open the gates and take responsibility," said Reyes, who ran the command center during the soccer final. "It was a rough day. A lot of lessons were learned. But I also believe we saved lives that day."

The two emerged from crowded partisan fields in August after a pair of weighty endorsements.

Reyes easily defeated the Democratic field with the backing of incumbent Miami-Dade Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava***. The mayor hired Reyes away from the Broward Sheriff's Office in 2022 to oversee the county's troubled department of corrections, which remains under a federal consent decree. A year later he was appointed to oversee public safety -- which includes police, fire and corrections -- after Police Director Alfredo "Freddy" Ramirez's attempted suicide.

Cordero-Stutz, a Miami-Dade Police lifer who has served in top posts in several divisions in her 28 years and worked her way up from street cop to assistant director -- won a much tougher primary. An endorsement from U.S. presidential candidate Donald J. Trump helped her squeeze past former Miami Commissioner and Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Joe Sanchez and a host of other candidates.

Since their August primary victories, the sniping between the two candidates for a post that had been made by appointment since the 1960s has only intensified. It's the reaction political observers feared but predicted when a statewide vote forced partisanship on a critical law-enforcement position long considered devoid of politics.

"This sheriff's race is not about Rosie Cordero-Stutz and James Reyes. It's about the R and D next to their names," said Fernand Amandi, who manages a Miami public marketing and research firm. "This is the consequence of making this constitutional office partisan."

The election for Miami-Dade's first sheriff in 60 years is Nov. 5. Early voting begins Oct. 21 and runs through Nov. 3. Mail-in ballots are already available.

Statewide vote changed Miami-Dade policing

When the votes are counted on Nov. 5, Miami-Dade will have an elected sheriff for the first time since a corruption scandal forced a change long before Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon. Until a statewide vote amended Florida's Constitution in 2018, Miami-Dade had been the only county in Florida's 67 with an appointed police director.

The election for sheriff in Miami-Dade was done away with in 1966 after Sheriff T.A. Buchanan was indicted for perjury and failure to disclose campaign contributions. The goal was to eliminate the politics that inevitably got in the way of electing a sheriff. For the most part, it seemed to work. Broward County, however, offers a window into the possible pitfalls of a partisan contest.

Broward Sheriff Gregory Tony has been in a political scuffle over his credentials since he was appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis almost six years ago, when Scott Israel was forced out as sheriff in response to the Parkland school massacre. Before that, Broward Sheriff Nick Navarro took a hard political stance that gained national attention in the early 1990s when his war with rap star Luther Campbell over musical lyrics went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Whoever wins the election will inherit one of the largest policing agencies in the U.S., with more than 3,200 sworn officers, more than 5,000 total employees and a $1 billion ***budget***. It remains unclear if Miami-Dade's new sheriff will also direct the department of corrections and its 3,000 employees and $500 million ***budget***.

Though state law mandates that Miami-Dade commissioners make that determination, they have yet to have a final vote on the measure. The sheriff of most other law enforcement agencies in Florida oversees corrections. Once commissioners take a final vote, it will be up to the sheriff to create a ***budget*** for the office, then pass it along to commissioners who would vote on it.

A new wrinkle for the new sheriff: If he or she doesn't agree with the commission's final decision, it can be appealed to the governor, who would have the final say.

MAIN CHARACTERS AND THEIR THOUGHTS

As the election nears, the priorities of both Reyes and Cordero-Stutz have come into focus. Both would create oversight boards partially comprised of civilians, which were eliminated last legislative session. Reyes' board would vote on disciplinary measures, which would be passed along to the sheriff, who would have the final say, for enforcement. Cordero-Stutz said her board would focus more on community concerns instead of individual complaints against officers.

Both say the inability to fire rogue cops because of built-in protections like qualified immunity and some provisions in the state's Law Enforcement Bill of Rights need to be reassessed, though neither candidate offered a direct plan. Both also said they would reinstall the agency's Public Corruption Unit, which was dismantled years ago.

Cordero-Stutz said her first priority will be transitioning to a sheriff's office. There's no plan in place yet, she says, on basic necessities like how to move forward with county-owned buildings that house police, or how the cost for maintenance, support services or information technology would be covered.

She said after that she'll worry about whether the new office should oversee corrections. She believes the issue should be negotiated between the sheriff and county commissioners and the mayor. Reyes, who spent 22 years at BSO and ran the administrative side of corrections, fire and police, said he hopes corrections falls to the new sheriff.

And both say they will look into community concerns about the discrepancy between the percentage of Blacks and whites who are stopped by police and charged with crimes -- particularly in the wake of the confrontation between Miami Dolphins receiver Tyreek Hill and Miami-Dade Police just outside Hard Rock Stadium in September. Cordero-Stutz took a more cautious approach, saying she'd like to study statistics first.

"We're not perfect. I understand that and will work with the community," she said. "The first step is for an officer to be held accountable. And the sheriff is a good place to start."

Reyes had a similar response.

"Every concern in our community has to be my concern as a sheriff," he said. "It starts on how we're recruiting and who we're recruiting. And I plan to integrate more implicit-bias training for our officers."

**Load-Date:** October 21, 2024

**End of Document**

[*Herald endorsement: Our choice for Miami-Dade County Sheriff | Opinion*](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6D3M-DFY1-DYJM-M148-00000-00&context=1519360)

The Miami Herald

October 2, 2024 Wednesday

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**Section:** election\_recommendations

**Length:** 738 words

**Byline:**  the Miami Herald Editorial Board

Miami Herald

**Body**

Miami-Dade County will have a sheriff for the first time since 1966. In this partisan race, voters have two strong choices who bring different skills to a job that for almost 60 years belonged to an administrator chosen by the Miami-Dade mayor.

Republican Rosanna "Rosie" Cordero-Stutz, 55, is a 28-year veteran of the Miami-Dade Police Department, where she currently is an assistant director. She also was given the responsibility to oversee the Sheriff Internal Transition Team, handling the logistics of the department's exit from the county government.

Democrat James Reyes, 47, is Miami-Dade's public safety chief, overseeing the county's police department, the fire department and the jail system with about 10,560 employees and an operating ***budget*** for fiscal year 2023-24 of more than $2 billion. He was first appointed by Mayor ***Daniella Levine Cava*** two years ago to run the county's aging jail, which after years of overcrowding has been substantially cleared from federal oversight under his watch.

Both candidates have credentials but Reyes is the Herald Editorial Board's choice because of his higher rank overseeing policing in Miami-Dade and, previously, as executive director at the Broward Sheriff's Office, one of the largest in the nation. Reyes also vowed to take a more transformative approach to the job by cutting redundancies and administrative positions to put more cops on the streets.

Reyes has the support of Levine Cava and various elected Democratic officials and county commissioners, as well as the South Florida Police Benevolent Association (PBA), representing 7,500 officers in the region.

Cordero-Stutz says her experience working as an officer, then moving up the ranks to homicide detective and eventually assistant director, distinguishes her from her opponent who started his career as a Broward jail deputy. She has been endorsed by former President Donald Trump and U.S. Rep. Carlos Gimenez, the previous county mayor, among many others

.MIA\_1DAV\_SHERIFF\_RACECandidate for Miami-Dade Sheriff James Reyes speaks with the Miami Herald's Editorial Board at the Herald newsroom on Tuesday, September 10, 2024, in Miami, Fla.

Reyes and Cordero-Stutz want to focus on funding a public corruption unit. And they want to bring more crisis counselors and other resources to tackle mental health situations that arise during arrests and have sometimes led to police shootings of victims, as well as helping police officers deal with mental health issues that arise from the pressures of their job.

Reyes wants to have a civilian oversight panel to issue recommendations on police misconduct cases. Cordero-Stutz wants a community board to serve as a liaison to the sheriff's office, which feels more like a feel-good gimmick than a board with any true influence.

Reyes promises more transparency. He followed through on that when he decided that MDPD should release officers' body camera footage before an investigation was complete of the Sept. 8 rough takedown of Dolphins' wide receiver Tyreek Hill by police during a traffic stop.

Each candidate has some weaknesses.

The county's unpreparedness in preventing the Copa America Final fiasco this summer, with fans without tickets crashing the security gates to get into the stadium, still hangs heavy on Reyes. He has vowed that sheriff's deputies will be prepared for the 2026 FIFA World Cup matches in Miami, and we hold him to that.

For her part, Cordero-Stutz is grappling with being a law enforcement officer who has the backing of a former president who has been convicted on 34 New York state charges involving payoffs to a porn star and remains embroiled in various criminal trials, one in particular involving the Jan. 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol by thousands of Trump supporters.

Approximately 140 police officers were assaulted at the Capitol. Cordero-Stutz said her "moral compass is to uphold the law" but added that without knowing the intent of those who participated, "I cannot say that people who broke in were all criminals," adding she knew of some folks who who were at the protest-turned-riot. That namby-pamby response is not what we would expect from a leader who professes to uphold law and order.

With his substantial leadership experience and an outsider's perspective, Reyes is poised to be a change agent while keeping county neighborhoods safe.

For Miami-Dade County sheriff, the Herald Editorial Board endorses JAMES REYES.

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