

# MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



Dear Residents,

This is the last budget I will submit as Miami-Dade County Mayor. Under my administration, you have saved well over \$2 billion in property taxes, with the average taxpayer saving nearly \$2,000 since I became Mayor. We re-organized Miami-Dade County government, reducing overhead and focusing our resources on direct services: the services you, our residents, told us you wanted. Priority services – public

safety, social services, transportation, parks and culture – have received enhanced funding. We invested in our reserves and developed a program to upgrade and maintain our infrastructure now and in the future. We refinanced our debt and saved more than \$1.87 billion across our entire capital improvement plan. Recurring expenditures are covered by recurring revenues.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be understated. Beginning in March, as cases began to spread to Miami-Dade County, we reacted quickly, first isolating our senior citizens and most vulnerable populations, and eventually closing all but essential services, requiring facial coverings and social distancing, limiting capacity in commercial establishments and strongly recommending people stay at home as much as possible. As had occurred elsewhere around the world, our local economy ground to a near halt. Tourist tax and sales tax collections plummeted. Transit service was scaled back as ridership decreased and fares were suspended so that riders could board through rear doors to protect our drivers. Cruises were suspended and passenger air travel dropped by 90 percent. Activities and business that were typically conducted by the County waned.

We did not stop providing our critical services. First responders remained in the field, fulfilling an even more important role protecting the health and welfare of our community by enforcing Emergency Orders and responding to calls for service. Corrections Officers, Transit operators and Elections employees continued to do their jobs, but in much more perilous conditions. Solid Waste, Water and Sewer, Animal Services and Juvenile Services employees all continued to provide service vital to our community. Throughout the organization, we have completely changed how we do business, with a large number of County employees performing their duties from home or altering workspaces to allow for social distancing and other protections. Personal protective equipment (PPE) was procured for employees, and technology investments were made to permit virtual workspaces. Employees who may have been susceptible to COVID-19 were allowed to stay home, and hundreds of employees were reassigned to tasks necessary to respond to the pandemic, serving in call centers, accepting applications for unemployment and other assistance, and distributing needed food and supplies. A cadre of employees became dedicated to planning pandemic response, data gathering and coordination of services. I have never been prouder to lead our County employees as I have through the past few months.

It is because of our continual efforts as a resilient government that we have been able to sustain our services. Even before the pandemic, we began preparing for this eventuality and other shocks and stresses that could impact our community. We already had the relationships, the plans, the resources ready to be able to respond to the emergencies. Our employees have learned to think differently: to identify the reasons for and the immediate impact of a shock and to anticipate the ongoing consequent stresses so that we can prepare for those as well. Our quick response without question saved lives. Our ongoing efforts have also kept our community safer and healthier – physically and economically – than if we had not been as prepared.

All of this has impacted our budget in ways we could never have imagined nor predicted. Along with other extraordinary occurrences in our community, our country and our world, the pandemic of 2020 will be remembered as an event that changed the way we think about the delivery of service and the predictability of revenues. Even after receiving several months of actual revenue receipts affected by the pandemic, we do not know for sure how to project coming months' receipts. Many people are working remotely and while we have allowed for business reopening, it comes with certain capacity restrictions and some businesses remain closed. All of this has changed the delivery of County services: commutes and transit use have changed, emergency call volumes and jail populations have gone down, even water and sewer and solid waste collection services have changed because people are in their homes, instead of at work. Whether these changes become the "new normal" is yet to be determined, but future planning for County services will be able to use what we have learned through this experience.

In developing this year's budget, we set three main goals: (1) avoid layoffs; (2) maintain critical services; and (3) support the community's economic recovery. This budget keeps service levels at status quo - funding targeted service increases that result from the completion or acquisition of new facilities, enhance public safety, are supported by dedicated funding or were already approved in the current year, prior to the pandemic. Saving jobs, ensuring the continuity of services and investing in our community through partnerships with stakeholders focused on business development and job training will lead us to our "new normal," more resilient than ever.

Working with the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Beacon Council and the community Chambers of Commerce, we will continue to do all we can to shore up our economy. Investments in job creation, small business sustainability and training will be so important in the coming months. In addition, making sure that our community is still a place where people want to live, work and play is vital to our future.

As I said before, I am so proud to have led our County employees through this crisis and I am appreciative of the support of the Board of County Commissioners, municipal leaders, and officials at the State and Federal levels. By continuing to work together cooperatively, we can ensure the needs of our community are met. Ordinary people have done extraordinary things to serve the community in which they live, always putting others before themselves. It is not the resources, the capital projects, the equipment or the initiatives funded in this budget that make our County resilient, it is the people of this County that, through their service and selflessness, make Miami-Dade County the place we are all proud to call home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carlos A. Gimenez', with a stylized, flowing script.

Carlos A. Gimenez