CARLOS A. GIMENEZ
MAYOR
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

September 18, 2014

Fellow residents...

Madam Chairwoman, commissioners...

We started this process in July, and although it's been a long road, I think it's safe to say that now, we see the light at the end of the tunnel!

I truly believe Miami-Dade County has turned the corner.

I mentioned during the last budget hearing and I wish to reiterate tonight how this budget process has truly been an exercise of "democracy in action."

It has been an open and transparent process, government in the sunshine, and I want to thank all who participated whether in our eight town hall meetings, or here in person at County Hall.

People care deeply about the future of our community, and it shows in the level of detail and passion they bring to these meetings.

And now it's time for all of us to come together, and set our budget for the next fiscal year.

One of the most important and difficult duties we have as public officials is deciding how to spend public money.

And while we certainly have discussions, and I welcome them, in the end we are all working toward the same goal:

to make Miami-Dade County the best possible community for all those we represent.

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Let me start by saying that the budget you have before you is first and foremost balanced and puts Miami-Dade on a sustainable path. It places us in a solid long-term financial position.

I'll touch upon some items we've been able to address.

Boot Camp:

Boot Camp has been restored using one-time revenue.

Although this restoration is good for the next fiscal year, my administration has listened to the concerns from the County Commission and will work on ways to maintain this program in coming years.

Libraries:

All libraries will remain open the same number of hours. Some libraries with heavy use will go from five to six days of service. And our five regional libraries will open on Sundays.

Animal Services:

we continue to work to increase our save rates toward becoming a no-kill SHELTER.

Since 2012, Animal Services has aggressively implemented programs that enabled it to save the highest amount of shelter pets in the history of the department.

The save rate for dogs increased from 61 percent in 2010 to 77 percent in 2013. The save rate for cats increased from 18 percent in 2010 to 66 percent in 2013.

And year-to-date, our Animal Services' save rate is 84 percent for dogs and 72 for cats.

I also supported the change to Trap Neuter and Release as the preferred policy for saving feral cats.

And just a few weeks ago, we broke ground on the new shelter, a project that was only partially funded before I became Mayor.

Fire boats:

we're working with the cities of miami, miami beach, coral gables, and the village of key biscayne on an unprecedented interagency agreement that will get more resources to enforce our boating laws, protect our waterfront, and be better prepared to respond to emergencies.

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Transit Fares:

fares will not go up this year.

Let me thank the Citizens' Independent Transportation Trust - CITT - for approving the waiver of the transit Maintenance of Effort – M.O.E.

and for ALLOWING THE usE OF People's Transportation Plan – P.T.P. - surtax revenues to forestall a fare increase for one year.

Health Care Plan:

We have additional good news on our health care Select Plan – Miami Children's Hospital is now part of the Select Plan, joining U Health and Av Med.

I want to thank Miami Children's and Av Med for working with us so that employees that choose the Select Plan have the best possible healthcare choices.

Meals for Senior Citizens:

I have always prioritized the wellbeing of our seniors, and this includes preserving senior meals.

This is why I will use savings from my own office budget and identify other savings that will help us preserve meals for our senior citizens, including those from CBOs like farm share and others.

Public Safety:

With regard to public safety, keeping our families and neighborhoods safe has always been a priority of mine.

No officer will lose his or her job.

The budget also allows for 500 body cameras…

and I want to point out that The White House has come out in favor of this technology – as well as our local chapter of the NAACP South Florida.

Again, I will emphasize that we've done all this, while remaining balanced and sustainable.

And let me clear the air on this once and for all so I can correct any misconceptions that may exist out there:

While we've been able to significantly restore primarily public safety positions…

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The changes to this budget that have occurred in the last month represent less than one half of one percent of the total operating budget

Even though the latest adjustments have been possible through one-time revenue sources, the proposed budget reduced recurring expense by more than $150 million, absorbing more than $45 million of one-time revenues previously used to support operations,

We have accomplished all this while also keeping overall tax rates low and striving to make Miami-Dade County more efficient.

There are certain concerns regarding the use of tourist taxes, and this point was brought up by a couple of you during the past hearings.

I wish to remind the Board that the County has been using tourist taxes to fund operations that previously had been funded in the general fund for almost 10 years.

All the museums, all the cultural facilities, all the zoo activities at one time or another were funded with general fund.

For the last two years, we used more than $40 million just to support the parks department.

This year's budget (same as with prior budgets) includes about $21 million of allocations that really could be supported by the general fund...

That's 200 police officers, or all the CBO allocations, or the budget for the BOARD.

To say that any shift is something new is simply not the case.

Also, our budget is balanced regardless whether our negotiations with the other five employee units are successful...

And it is balanced regardless whether the three employee units that have entered into tentative agreements with us but have yet to ratify them do so.

Additionally, let me point out that balancing our budget for the long-term means that we don't expect to face these difficult financial challenges again next year.

However, this does not mean Miami-Dade County will stop seeking efficiencies and better ways to provide services for our residents.

We've done a lot, and we can still do more.

But as long as we have a 5.5% increase in the tax roll (which is a very conservative estimate), we are ok.

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In fact, this year the growth was almost at 7%.

For our labor partners, Cost of Living Adjustments, COLAs, are tied to anything above 5.5%.

If the County as a whole does well, we all benefit.

Already five of our labor partners have either tentatively agreed or voted to ratify these innovative labor contracts with my administration.

And for those who have not, we continue to reach out to the remaining 5 labor units in an attempt to begin or continue negotiations.

As we continue negotiations and the various unions ratify the agreements, the position counts will show differences.

Should all of the units for which we have already reached tentative agreements ratify, as GSAF's units have already done...

and the contracts are approved by the Board, 121 positions and a broad range of services may be restored.

I will be requesting a special meeting with the Board prior to October 1st to discuss the ratified agreements.

This is not absolutely necessary, but I want to do it.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to all the County employees who have worked many long hours in putting this proposed budget together.

They took what started as a "worst case" scenario and turned it into the "best possible" scenario...

and this is due to their professionalism and dedication to public service.

Commissioners, I don't need to remind you that we are here as the stewards of the people's money...

and working together, we have placed Miami-Dade County on the road toward fiscal sustainability.

I truly believe Miami-Dade County's best days are ahead of us.

This process has been collaborative, and has been done "in the sunshine."

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Unlike the federal government, where much of the budget process is done with little public input...

here in Miami-Dade County, as the government closest to you -- the people – we strive to have the most transparent process possible.

Our residents deserve this, and we have done so.

Thank you, and I look forward to tonight's discussion.

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