



Vol. 36, No. 2

“Committed to Excellence” April-June 2020



# Focusing on Officer Wellness, MDPD Expands Psychological Services Bureau

By Brian Ballou



Major Melissa Barosela, Commander of MDPD's Psychological Services Bureau, has overseen expansion of the Department's counseling services for sworn and non-sworn employees.

Located five minutes from the Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) Headquarters Complex in Doral, the newly-expanded Psychological Services Bureau's (PSB) decor is soft, modern, and inviting. The layout of the privately-leased office offers confidentiality, with multiple exits so that visitors can come and go without running into other people.

This is the place where police officers and civilian personnel unravel their thoughts and memories to professional clinicians. Visits have jumped by 60 percent since 2017 and the staff has increased from four licensed mental health professionals to seven. The Bureau is looking for as many as 30 officers from throughout the Department, as well as dispatchers and complaint officers, to serve as peer advocates who will receive training on how to spot warning signs among their peers that could be linked to psychological distress. So far, eight peer advocates have been identified, and the program will continue to grow this year.

The message from the command staff has been clear in recent years and is being amplified by Director Alfredo “Freddy” Ramirez III, that seeking help should never be seen as a sign of weakness. Director Ramirez’ advocacy for employee wellness is having positive results, said Major Melissa Barosela.

“The Director’s message is being heard, and I think it explains the more recent increase in numbers we’ve seen,” Major Barosela said. “We’ve come a long way in terms of shedding the stigma. Police officers are starting

to recognize that it’s OK to reach out.”

The clinicians at PSB offer individual counseling for a variety of mental health concerns to include anxiety, depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, relationship difficulties, substance abuse, and stress management. They also offer couples’ counseling, as well as group counseling in the areas of substance abuse and bereavement. They also plan to establish a third support group in the near future dedicated to officers who are military veterans.

“All of our clinicians have different areas of expertise so depending on the presenting issue we can typically match the client with the best therapist to treat them,” Major Barosela said.

For the last few years, the Bureau has more frequently been notified by district supervisors of incidents that can potentially leave responding officers with psychological trauma. In an effort to decrease the likelihood of the development of psychological distress, the Bureau has taken a more proactive approach in reaching out to those officers who may be potentially impacted by those incidents. The peer advocates will be instrumental in providing an additional layer of support to those officers, if needed.

An officer who has been with the Department for more than 25 years said that in a moment of despair in 2018, he decided to call the Bureau. He was seen by a clinician within a week. The officer, whose name is being withheld out of privacy concerns, had been troubled with anxiety since childhood, and it was affecting his personal life. “At work, I put on a facade, just hid it all,” he said.

The officer was hesitant initially to be open and honest with his clinician. “That’s how paranoid I was of the system. . . I was worried about the stigma of it,” said the officer.

But he found out that confidentially is everything at the

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## Focusing on Officer Wellness. . .

*Continued from page 1*

Bureau. He has been getting counseling there for about 18 months. “They take every precaution imaginable, they stagger meetings so that you can come and go without running into anyone,” he said. “I can’t speak enough of how confidentiality is fiercely protected. Your anonymity is protected and your career is not going to be negatively impacted.”

Major Barosela said that suicides among police officers nationally in 2019 struck a chord. Last year, there were 228 police suicides, according to statistics by Blue HELP (Honor, Educate, Lead, Prevent), a non-profit

law enforcement advocacy agency. The number of suicides annually is typically higher than the number of officers killed in the line of duty. Last year, 146 officers were killed in the line of duty, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page, a non-profit agency that tracks that statistic.

Major Barosela said that suicide prevention is, and will always be, the number one goal of the PSB.

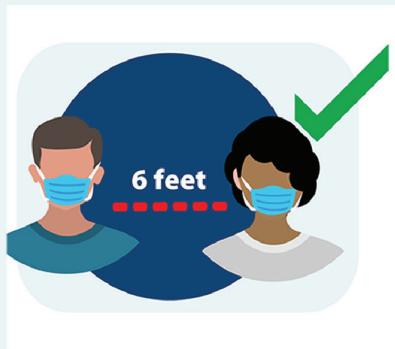
“We have to take care of those who take care of the community,” Major Barosela said.

*If you find yourself experiencing mental or emotional distress, please do not hesitate to reach out to the PSB for confidential assistance. If you have any questions or for services, please call 305-591-1106. ☎*

## CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) SAFETY TIPS

CONSEJOS DE SEGURIDAD POR EL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

TI KONSÈY SEKIRITE SOU CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



**Practice social distancing**

Mantenga la distancia social

Pratike distans sosyal



**Wear a face covering**

Use una máscara facial

Mete yon Kouvèti vizaj



**Wash your hands often. When soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer**

Lavese las manos frecuentemente. Si no tiene agua y jabón, use desinfectante de manos.

Lave men w souvan. Lè savon ak dlo pa disponib, sèvi ak dezenfektan pou men.

[miamidade.gov/coronavirus](http://miamidade.gov/coronavirus)



# MDPD Priority Response Team Busy Since October 2018 Creation

By Brian Ballou

Even before a lone gunman unleashed deadly violence inside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in February 2018, there were discussions within the MDPD about increasing the level of protection in schools within the Department's coverage area.

Those discussions led to the creation of the Priority Response Team (PRT) in October 2018. The PRT fills the space between patrol officers and the Special Response Team (SRT), the Department's highly-trained full-time tactical unit.

Because threats can happen anywhere, not just schools, the PRT trains in a variety of scenarios and settings, from transportation hubs, to office buildings, to open spaces, and even on the water.

The unit has been "extremely busy" since it was created, responding to every shooting, suicidal call, and calls of a violent nature, said Lieutenant Joel Bello, commander of the unit.

Aside from the SRT, no other unit in the County puts in as many training hours, Lieutenant Bello said. The officers who joined last summer had approximately 200 hours of training through mid-April. Every officer also receives comprehensive emergency medical training so that they are capable of rendering advanced aid on-scene before paramedics arrive.

The training is based on the MDPD's Mass Casualty Attack Plan, a training guide on how to respond to active shooters. Every MDPD officer in the Department goes through at least 16 hours of training under this guide, but the PRT members receive more.

"What we are teaching members of the PRT in terms of response is the same that we teach our other officers throughout the County, so that we are all talking the same language when we are responding and we are all operating out of the same playbook," Lieutenant Bello said.

The PRT members receive additional training on individual skills such as firearms and defensive tactics, and maneuvering and communicating in dangerous scenes. They are also trained in scenarios aimed at honing their decision-making abilities in critical incidents. The officers who lead the training have vast experience as members of



Members of the MDPD's Priority Response Team go through active shooter training in an office setting. (Photo courtesy of MDPD Priority Response Team)

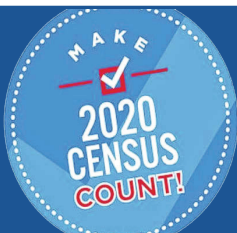
the SRT, many of whom have served for over a decade in that specialized unit.

"We focus on how you use your skills and the skills of those around you to solve a critical incident," Lieutenant Bello said.

Circumstances can change rapidly, as was the case with the Parkland shooting, so adaptation is crucial. "What we do is give them the confidence, skills and thinking ability to problem solve under stress," Lieutenant Bello said. There are 81 PRT officers, 9 squads of 9 people, (1 sergeant and 8 officers in each squad). The squads have "Alpha" and "Bravo" components, two teams of four officers, and also "elements" or four teams of two officers in each squad.

PRT members listen to their radios for incidents that fit their response, and because they are trained to also function as smaller components, their response times reflect their rapid mobility. Sometimes they arrive within two to three minutes after uniformed officers, sometimes they arrive at the same time, and sometimes they are the first to arrive.

"Every time we have needed something to give these officers what they need to get the job done, Director Freddy Ramirez has given us that. We have never put together such a large-scale team from scratch."



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# Miami-Dade Police Officer Serves Comfort Food to Hundreds of Families at Ronald McDonald House Healthy Retirement

By Brian Ballou



MDPD Officer Elliott Scholes

Once a month for the past decade, MDPD Officer Elliott Scholes has brought homemade dinners to the guests at the Ronald McDonald House in Miami.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has suspended many activities including the dinners, Officer Scholes is planning to pick up where he left off as soon as he gets the OK by management at the charity.

He's served meals to hundreds of families at the facility. The non-profit house provides free accommodations for the families of children suffering from serious health issues. The children receive medical treatment at nearby hospitals, on an inpatient or outpatient basis. Many of the families come from other states and other countries.

Officer Scholes got involved ten years ago, when the mother of an MDPD Police Explorer who was volunteering at the house learned that a child staying there wanted to see a police car. The woman told Officer Scholes about the child's wish and Officer Scholes showed up days later with three police cruisers. During a tour of the facility, he asked an employee what was on the menu for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. The employee said that nothing was planned, and that is when Officer Scholes decided to cook his first dinner for the house. He has returned once a month bringing more food and more volunteers.

"The families come here looking for the best medical treatment for their child and we want to make sure they're focused on that, so to have Elliott come here during those times, well he's a true champion for the families and they love him," said Ms. Soraya Moya, Executive Director of Ronald McDonald Charities of South Florida.

"His meals are truly special, from the heart, and he motivates others to do the same," she said. Officer Scholes occasionally brings in gift baskets filled with toiletries

and other essential needs and gift cards. "They get very creative, him and his wife and his whole group of friends are amazing," Ms. Moya said.

Officer Scholes usually arrives at the house with between 15 and 20 volunteers. Other people pitch in making meals or donating money to buy supplies.

"This is a collective effort, I have help from so many people and I'm grateful for their contributions because it's all about putting a smile on the faces of those children and their families as they are going through tough times," Officer Scholes said. He doesn't have any special culinary training and gets a lot of help from his wife and from other MDPD officers, and officers from the Florida International University Police Department as well as deputies from the Broward Sheriff's Office.

Local restaurants offer food as well. The Baby Bakery in northwest Miami-Dade County has pitched in numerous times. The owner there, Mr. Jose Rodriguez, once cooked 16 chickens and provided side dishes and rolls.

The volunteers serve as many as 40 people. The dinners are usually held mid-month, running from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., and there is typically a theme, such as "Superhero Night" when the servers wear t-shirts with their favorite superhero logos, or Cuban Night, when they wear guayaberas and hats. And once a year, they organize a big breakfast and an ice cream social.

Officer Scholes says he can relate to the families staying at the house because a member of his family has been through a serious health issue.

Officer Scholes described one of his favorite memories from a recent dinner, where balloons twisted in the shape of animals and other objects filled the third floor dining room. The mother of a sick child was sitting in a chair, a balloon shaped like a hat resting on her head. She was smiling, beaming with happiness as she watched her child play.

"That is what it's all about," Officer Scholes said. "These families are grappling with so much, so to be able to help them forget for just a few moments, that is my reward."

Officer Scholes was born in the Dominican Republic and his family emigrated to the U.S. when he was three years old. He grew up in New York City, and attended high school in Coral Gables. He enrolled in the MDPD police academy in 1994 and was assigned to the Intracoastal District after graduation. In 1996, he was transferred

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## Miami-Dade Police Officer Serves Comfort Food...

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to the Northwest District, where he has served as patrol officer, his current position.

Officer Scholes has formed friendships with dozens of families who have stayed at the house. He knows that some of the children are there to receive treatment

for life-threatening illnesses, and that their outlook for recovery is grim. Sometimes he learns that a child died. "I've cried more than a few times, but if you ask me why I do this month after month, I say why not?"

## MDPD Victim Advocate Receives Statewide "Outstanding Victim Advocate Award" from Office of Attorney General Ashley Moody

*By Brian Ballou*

The suspect had beaten his girlfriend numerous times during their long relationship. Last year, after yet another violent outburst, he set her car on fire and then sped off in his own vehicle.

He returned to her house and started throwing glass bottles at the firefighters and MDPD police officers on-scene, and then he sped off again and disappeared.

"It was just a matter of time before he was going to kill her," said MDPD Victim Advocate Alexander Puga, who convinced the victim to file a restraining order. Mr. Puga, assigned to the Department's Economic Crime Bureau (ECB), kept in touch with the victim in the weeks that followed. After two months, the victim learned from a friend that her ex-boyfriend had been admitted to a local hospital after sustaining a broken arm in a traffic accident. The victim immediately called Mr. Puga with her ex-boyfriend's whereabouts and MDPD police officers arrested the suspect at the hospital.

"But for the relentless efforts of Mr. Puga, a dangerous criminal would still be free to terrorize the victim," said MDPD Detective Alfonso Najera, who works in ECB.

That case was one of several that earned Mr. Puga a 2019 Distinguished Victim Service Award, bestowed by Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody. There were six total awards given out in two categories, three for victim advocates and three for law enforcement officials. Mr. Puga and the other recipients were scheduled to receive the award on April 22, 2020, in Tallahassee, Florida, but the ceremony was cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The ceremony is customarily held during the annual National Crime Victims' Rights Week in April. Mr. Puga did receive the award in the mail.

Mr. Puga joined the Department in March 2017 as an MDPD Victim Advocate. Prior to that, he worked in



*MDPD Mortgage Fraud Detective Ivette Franco Perez (left) standing with MDPD Victim Advocate Alexander Puga, both assigned to the Department's Economic Crimes Bureau. (Photo courtesy of Alexander Puga)*

the mental health field for almost 20 years. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in mental health, both degrees from St. Thomas University.

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## “Outstanding Victim Advocate Award”

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Mr. Puga was planning to pursue a career in federal law enforcement, but just before he received his undergraduate degree in 1997, he found out that he had cancer, which prevented him from being able to pass the physical tests required to become an agent. After going through treatment and beating the cancer, he worked with his father for several years, and then went back to school to get his master’s degree and then he embarked on his career in mental health.

When he joined the MDPD his first assignment was in the Homicide Bureau. After a year, he transferred

to the ECB, where he typically handles cases of fraud, including telephone scams.

It was while he was with the Homicide Bureau, that he learned the patterns of domestic violence and how it can escalate to murder. Mr. Puga said that was on his mind when he sat down with the woman who had been repeatedly beaten by her boyfriend.

“I’m a person who likes to help people, I was like that before I had my cancer, but when I survived, I decided that I had to pay it forward,” he said.

## Milton Family Foundation Donates \$25,000, of Which \$15,000 Earmarked for Masks

*By Brian Ballou*



*Director Alfredo “Freddy” Ramirez III recently accepted a donation of 5,000 masks and a check for the Police Officer Assistance Trust on behalf of the Ana and Cecil Milton Family Foundation (Photo by Brian Ballou).*

Mrs. Ana and Mr. Cecil Milton’s charitable relationship with MDPD began in the late 90’s when they raised money for the Police Officer Assistance Trust (POAT) through 5K fundraising events in Miami. The couple is continuing their philanthropy with a donation of 5,000 masks for law enforcement personnel and a monetary donation to POAT.

“I just think the POAT does an incredible job, a very important job, to help the families of fallen officers, to give their kids scholarships and continue to support families during their most devastating times,” Mr. Cecil Milton said, standing in front of MDPD Headquarters Complex on June 9, 2020, with six cardboard boxes full of masks and a cardboard replica of a check representing the cash donation in the name of the Ana and Cecil Milton Family Foundation.

The masks are washable cloth, emblazoned with the American flag and the MDPD badge. Mr. Milton sought a design that conveyed pride and identified with MDPD.

“Some people have the classic hospital masks, some people have the Miami Heat masks, lots of different kinds of masks, and I thought it was important that the police department have a mask that is light and easy to breathe in, but also one that showed uniformity and the pride that we have in our flag, and the badge that all the officers wear with so much honor.”

The MDPD has received donations of masks in recent weeks from other organizations, but with thousands of its officers patrolling Miami-Dade County around-the-clock, those protective masks are in high demand.

“We are really grateful,” said Director Ramirez. “This is really indicative of what a special community we have here, with law enforcement and the public community working together to protect each other, really is in these trying times a symbol of that bond. There is nothing more important to me than to protect my officers and community and it’s very special to see the community step forward and look into their wellness and make sure they’re safe.”

Mr. Milton is the CEO of United Property Management, which oversees more than 15,000 residential apartments in the region. The family foundation has extended its philanthropy through the years to numerous organizations, including the Zoological Society of Miami, the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Jackson Health System.

# On June 8, 2020, in light of recent protests around the U.S., the MDPD issued a statement regarding various issues and policies that have come to the forefront.



**For Immediate Release:**  
June 08, 2020

**Media Contact:**  
Det. Argemis Colome  
[AC@Mdpd.com](mailto:AC@Mdpd.com)  
305-471-1900

The Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD) hears and values the voices in our community that have called for police reforms and accountability. As such, we want to update our community on where we stand on various issues and policies that have come to the forefront of this important conversation.

- **Ban Chokeholds & Strangleholds:**

The MDPD does not teach or utilize strangleholds or chokeholds. Each officer is instructed on the usage of the Applied Carotid Triangle Restraint which is a non-lethal application. Every officers' proficiency in this maneuver is tested and documented bi-annually during the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Recertification training.

- **Require De-Escalation:**

The MDPD already has policy and training on de-escalation, for both Crisis and Conflict situations. Our officers are trained to only use the reasonable amount of force necessary to complete an arrest.

- **Require Warning Before Shooting:**

The MDPD has policy and training in regards to the use of force. The policy states that officers may encounter situations requiring the use of force, both non-lethal and lethal. During these situations, the use of force is necessary to control situations, effect arrests and protect public safety. Control may be achieved through advice, warning, persuasion, or by physical force. The decision to resort to force and the degree of force to be used must be based on the totality of the circumstances confronting the officer at the time, judged from the perspective of what actions would be taken by a reasonable officer on the scene faced with similar facts, or what reasonably appears to be fact, to the officer at the time the action is taken. An officer may use that force which he reasonably believes is necessary to prevent serious physical harm, either to the officer or to others.

- **Exhaust All Alternatives Before Shooting:**

The MDPD recognizes the value of human life and is committed to respecting the dignity of every individual. Accordingly, the sanctity of human life is central to the Department's mission, policies, training and tactics. The use of deadly force is the most serious action in which a police officer

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may engage. The authority to carry and use firearms in the course of public service is an enormous responsibility. Respect for human life requires that, in all cases, deadly force be used only as a last resort. Above all, the safety of the public and officers must be the overriding concern whenever the use of deadly force is considered.

- **Duty to Intervene:**

The MDPD has policy on an officer's duty to intervene. This policy is specific to seeing another officer using force that is clearly beyond that which objectively reasonable. In addition, each trainee that goes through the Basic Law Enforcement Program receives training and the Department's expectation of intervention if and when excessive force is being used. This instruction includes scenario based training and application where the trainee is subjected to situations where they witness an excessive use of force and/or conduct unbecoming an officer. They are mandated to take action and stop these acts from taking place.

- **Ban Shooting at Moving Vehicles:**

The MDPD has a policy on shooting at moving vehicles. The policy states that police officers are prohibited from discharging their firearms at a moving vehicle unless a person in the vehicle is imminently threatening the officer or another person with deadly force by a means other than the vehicle itself. The only exception is an apparent act of terrorism where the vehicle is being used as a weapon.

- **Require Use of Force Continuum:**

A use of force continuum is a standard that provides law enforcement officers and civilians with guidelines as to how much force may be used against a resisting subject in a given situation. However, the continuum models are not based in law and in fact may be in conflict to what would be considered "objectively reasonable" by the legal standards of today. There is no possible way that any continuum model can provide for an entire set of circumstances in each very unique situation. As a result, The Miami-Dade Police Department has developed a policy by taking the standards set by State and Federal law and further restricting them to insure an officer only uses the force deemed reasonable to complete an arrest.

- **Require Comprehensive Reporting:**

The MDPD has policy on the reporting of use of force incidents. The policy states that the incident will be documented each time an officer acts in an official capacity on or off duty, regardless of whether an arrest is made. The reports are reviewed by the officer's chain of command and subject to Internal Affairs Investigation if force is deemed unnecessary.

- **Additional Information:**

The MDPD sets the standard for many departments around the world. Our policies and training have been incredibly successful, and it is displayed by the very low percentage of instances that an officer has to use force to resolve a situation. The MDPD handled 642,151 calls for service in 2019, and our officers only used force 288 times. (.04%)

We take a great deal of pride in recognizing that our Department reflects and serves one of the most diverse communities in the United States, and makes every effort to serve all persons in a dignified and courteous manner, and exhibit understanding of ethnic and cultural diversity, both in our professional and personal endeavors.

While we have come a long way through the years, we realize that there is more work to be done and we are committed to working in partnership with our community to be the model law enforcement organization in the nation by being responsive and blending strategic planning with community concerns.

###

MIAMI-DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT



# On June 11, 2020, Director Alfredo Ramirez III announced that he would no longer authorize the use of the Applied Carotid Triangle Restraint as a non-lethal use of force.



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
June 11, 2020

**MEDIA CONTACT:**  
Det. Alvaro Zabaleta  
305-471-1900

## ATTENTION ASSIGNMENT EDITORS

### MDPD to no Longer Authorize Applied Carotid Triangle Restraint

*“Upon being appointed Director of the Miami-Dade Police Department at the beginning of this year, I began a review process that initiated changes which I believe will help our Department live up to our vision of being the model law enforcement organization in the Nation. Among those changes was a Departmental re-organization that emphasizes compliance with professional standards and Officer wellness as well as a streamlined approach to emergency operations. Nonetheless, as a progressive agency, we must remain in a constant state of review and open to emerging best practices and community feedback. As such, I have decided to no longer authorize the utilization of the Applied Carotid Triangle Restraint (ACTR). This decision was based on a multitude of factors to include officer and public safety, feedback from policing professionals, members of our community, local leaders and officials, and recommendations from the Police Executive Research Forum.”*

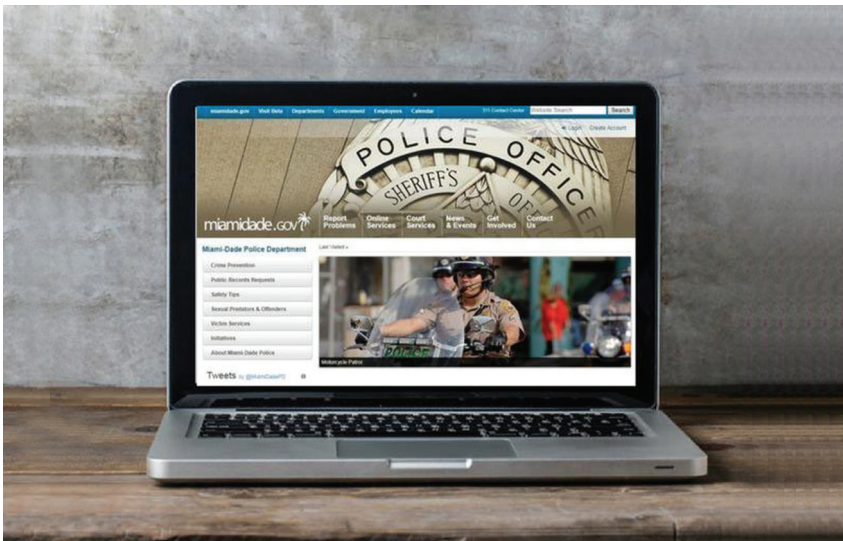
Alfredo Ramirez III, Director  
Miami-Dade Police Department

The MDPD’s Miami-Dade Public Safety Training Institute will now work on amending its training protocols and departmental policies as they relate to the application of the ACTR.

###

### MIAMI DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT

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# Recent Retirements

MDPD recently said farewell to 36 employees (30 sworn personnel and 6 civilians) who retired after periods of service ranging from 18 to 38 years. Director Alfredo “Freddy” Ramirez III, the Department’s Command Staff, and the entire MDPD family wish our colleagues many, many years of happy retirement.

<b>Sworn</b>	
Lieutenant Dillian E. Robin .....	30
Lieutenant John T. Ryan .....	30
Sergeant Jorge A. Cameron .....	27
Sergeant Richard F. Hernandez .....	30
Sergeant Mark R. Houstoun .....	26
Sergeant Nathan A. Jackson .....	33
Sergeant Cira M. Leslie .....	20
Sergeant Clarence E. Stephens Jr. ....	26
Sergeant Pete A. Taylor .....	30
Officer Douglas Almaguer .....	33
Officer Pamela J. Austin Jones .....	32
Officer William J. Bostick .....	30
Officer Joaquin M. Fundora .....	27
Officer Heather A. Grimes .....	31
Officer Mark A. Havlin .....	23
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Officer Israel Hernandez .....	23



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# Retirements *Continued from page 10*

Officer Francois R. Jean .....	26
Officer Terri L. McLaughlin .....	30
Officer Jonathan W. Morris .....	27
Officer William F. Nadramia .....	30
Officer Edward K. Orinstein .....	30
Officer Antonio F. Prado .....	31
Officer Mario Rachid .....	30
Officer Ronald L. Rodriguez Jr. ....	29
Officer Jose A. Rodriguez .....	30
Officer Alberto M. Sanchez .....	31
Officer Mary Ann Stahl .....	18
Officer Andre B. Vaughn .....	32

## Civilians

Senior Police Bureau Commander Loretta Gabe-Charles .....	35
Manager MDPD Crime Lab Thomas G. Fadul .....	35
Police Records Specialist 1 Marcie J. Gooding .....	30
School Crossing Guard Arthur A. Prieto .....	22
Police Computerized Report Specialist Pearlle K. Sukhoo .....	30
Administrative Officer 3 Heather O. Thomas .....	35
Court Support Specialist 1 Desiree T. Wright .....	38



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*Miami-Dade County provides equal access and equal opportunity in employment and services and does not discriminate on the basis of disability. "It is the policy of Miami-Dade to comply with all of the requirements of The Americans with Disabilities Act."*