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MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Miami-Dade mayor: Number of police layoffs going down Like 805



Mayor Carlos Gimenez unveils the county budget County Hall Tuesday on July 8. EMILY MICHOT / MIAMI HERALD STAFF Buy Photo

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Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez announced a significantly improved budget picture Thursday night, slicing in half his plan for cutting police-officer jobs, canceling a proposed closure of an 18-hole golf course and unveiling a new employee healthcare plan — if approved by labor unions — that would allow him to avoid more reductions.

The latest budget now calls for eliminating 110 police-officer positions, well below the 228 cuts Gimenez initially proposed. His administration also will no longer pursue closing one of two public golf courses at the Country Club of Miami. Part of the savings would come from Gimenez canceling a planned \$1.5 million increase in hotel-tax funding for the new Pérez Art Museum Miami, and more coming from holding back reserve and contingency payments next year.

“My administration has spent most of this summer trying to save as many jobs as possible,” Gimenez told a town-hall audience in Aventura’s City Hall. “We have made significant strides.”

His budget announcement follows a revelation this week that Gimenez would no longer request an increase in fares charged for disabled-rider shuttles.

His budget director, Jennifer Moon, said Gimenez would propose a new healthcare plan for county employees requiring new premium payments of

about \$75 every two weeks for many workers. If approved by unions during ongoing contract negotiations, the new plan would let Miami-Dade avoid all police-officer layoffs, she said. While workers not insuring dependents would pay the new \$75 premiums for certain levels of coverage, workers with family coverage would likely see premium reductions, Moon said.

Combined, this week’s announcements reflect an effort by Gimenez to reduce fallout from the well-publicized pain of the \$6.2 billion budget he unveiled early last month. The spending plan relied on commissioners agreeing to keep most property-tax rates flat, which they did in a July 15 vote. Commissioners still must approve the actual budget, and several said they wanted to find money to avoid

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planned police layoffs and other reductions.

With flat tax rates, Gimenez told county unions they must extend current concessions and agree to less-generous health-care plans in order to avoid more than 500 layoffs countywide. About 270 of the layoffs in the previous proposal would come from police, with 228 slated for sworn-officer positions and the rest from civilian positions. Gimenez said his latest budget does not avoid any civilian cuts, but that more job reductions countywide could be avoided solely through health-care savings. With health-care savings, Gimenez said he also would undo this year’s cuts in the county’s lawn-mowing schedule for parks and roadways.

Terry Murphy, a consultant for county unions, attended Thursday’s meeting and said he greeted Gimenez’s latest budget presentation with some doubt.

“I think these are all P.R. numbers at the moment,” he said. “I’m a little skeptical.”

Cuts remain. Miami-Dade’s charity-grant program is slated for a 10 percent reduction, transit fares are still planned to increase, and multiple agencies are preparing for layoffs and other cost-saving measures, including reduced hours at Zoo Miami and increased fees for a variety of county services. While commissioners approved a higher rate for the tax that funds the county library system, the extra money will mostly replace budget dollars currently provided by reserves.

Moon said the extra revenue behind Thursday’s announcement stemmed from the PAMM cut, healthcare-plan changes for non-union county workers, and reducing a series of reserve and contingency payments tied to the police budget and funds used in part to cushion shortfalls from property taxes. Because reductions tied to property-value appeals aren’t as bad as expected, Moon said those payments can be lower.

As Gimenez prepared to announce a less-harsh budget Thursday, he faced some of the consequences of his announced cuts. On Thursday, parks administrators gathered dozens of hourly maintenance workers to brief them on planned job eliminations and how they could re-apply for new positions being added to the department.

Hours later, Gimenez stepped in to halt a grander [briefing](#) by the police department for about 400 employees identified as at-risk of layoffs by department administrators. The mayor sent a letter to the police department director saying that the planned layoffs briefing next Tuesday morning at a banquet hall inside a college football stadium was “premature at best and unnecessary at worst” in part because his administration hopes to bring down the number of job losses required.

“[T]here is no official list of layoffs and my administration is actively working to avoid the worst case scenario,” Gimenez wrote to Police Director J.D. Patterson.

Patterson attended Thursday’s town hall, and said afterwards: “I’m pleased by what I heard here this evening.”

Miami Herald staff writer Patricia Mazzei contributed to this report.

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