

Good evening and welcome, Miami-Dade County, to beautiful Tropical Park.

Bienvenidos.

Byen Ve Nee.

I'm so glad to be here with all of you tonight and those joining virtually from across the County, as we look back at all we have accomplished together and look forward to all that is to come.

Thank you, Chairman Oliver Gilbert, for the gracious introduction and to Vice Chair Anthony Rodriguez for hosting us here in his home of District 10 and Director Nardi our MC. I'm proud to join you here in the west region of our incredible County. As you can see, this year we opted for an evening address, so as many of our residents as possible can join both in person and online.

It's no coincidence that we chose Tropical Park for my first-ever in-person State of the County address as your mayor. It's **the people's park**, a crown jewel of our community – and it's a symbol of so much that makes Miami-Dade strong and special, and shows County government at our best.

Tropical Park has been the heart of our community's response to the pandemic, operating testing and vaccination services for our residents that continue to this day.

It's a place that people from all walks of life cherish – from children playing sports, to older adults taking fitness classes, to families enjoying the lakes and open air – and it even provides a home for endangered species only found in Miami-Dade. It's a vital green space that belongs to all of you, our residents. And in partnership with our Vice Chair Rodriguez we're continuing to invest in beautiful Tropical Park and look for new ways to activate these public spaces.

I ran to be your mayor to make County government more transparent and effective for ALL residents. A government that earns your trust, makes our community safer, and helps residents and businesses to prosper by delivering on the world-class services you deserve.

These last two years, we've faced unforeseen challenges with relentless strength, leaning on what unites us rather than what divides us.

Last year, Miami-Dade emerged from the pandemic and entered a stage of unprecedented growth. We faced a national affordability crisis head on, launching lifesaving programs and creating a pipeline for tens of thousands of new housing units to ensure all residents, no matter your income level, can afford to live and thrive here.

As families faced escalating costs of living, we passed a **historic tax cut** – the first property tax cut in over a decade, and the lowest combined rate since 1982 – to put more money back in YOUR pockets.

While other major regions saw an increase in gun violence last year, Miami-Dade doubled down on successful programs that are preventing violence – and now we have one of the lowest rates of gun violence of any major metro area in the country.

We did all of this by coming together, across the public and private sectors, across cities and County departments, to make Miami-Dade the best place in the country to live, raise a family, and open a business.

**Two years ago, I promised you that we would win the future.** And we are winning. We delivered results. We emerged from a

global pandemic as one of the most recovered economies in the nation. At the end of last year, Miami-Dade County had an unemployment rate of 1.5%, lower than any other big urban area in the country, down from 3.3% just a year ago. **Miami-Dade is back to work in a big way!**

We must seize this moment to deliver an economy that works for EVERYONE, and where everyone has the FREEDOM to thrive.

Queremos una economía donde todos tengan la LIBERTAD para prosperar.

Yo ay-ko-no-MEE ko-tay TOOT moon LEEB, poo yo pwos-pay-ray.

**You DESERVE a government that is keeping you safe, protecting your pocketbook, and investing in our shared future so that your kids and grandkids can live in peace and prosperity.**

What does this future look like? It's one where **economic growth and innovation leave no one behind**. Where **public safety is a continuous priority**. Where everyone enjoys FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE no matter the zip code where you live. Where we **build for the future** – with housing you can afford, reliable public transit that gets you where you need to go, and climate-ready infrastructure that protects our environment for years to come.

**I address you today with not just hope, but real plans to make our vision for the future a reality – to build the Miami-Dade you deserve.**

Two years ago, our economic future was uncertain. Today, we have rocketed back from the pandemic with an economy that is growing and diversifying.

But I'm deeply aware that it doesn't feel like that for everyone. Too many families are struggling with increased costs of living. That's why I'm laser focused on **protecting your pocketbook.**

Mi prioridad es proteger sus bolsillos.

Last fall, the Board of County Commissioners approved my **historic tax cut** – reducing the millage rate for the first time in a decade – a nearly **\$25 million cut in property taxes.**

And we DOUBLED our investment in the Save our Seniors program – sending checks to over 25,000 seniors to help them pay their bills.

Many have sent heartwarming handwritten notes of gratitude which I cherish.

We know that Miami-Dade is at the epicenter of a national affordability crisis – which is why we are ALSO at the forefront of housing solutions.

In April, I launched the **Building Blocks plan** to strengthen protections and increase the supply of workforce and affordable housing. We are **working directly with private builders to** accelerate new development over the next three years.

**We passed a budget that includes more than half a billion dollars** in solutions to expand housing that people can afford – with nearly 32,000 housing units in the pipeline – and relief for those who are struggling.

The ERAP (Emergency Rental Assistance Program) **has helped 22,000 families stay in their homes.** The program has been so successful that we expanded eligibility and we continue securing new funds from the federal government!

This has made a huge difference in the lives of families who find themselves needing help for the first time - like Carmen, a mother in the Dadeland area who recently became eligible for ERAP.

She shares an apartment with her son, a full-time college student. She juggled several jobs during the pandemic but struggled as 3 jobs became 1. Her family had never needed rental assistance before, but Carmen's rent was rising, and they were running out of options. With the expansion of the ERAP program, she was able to get help. For Carmen and her son, a lifeline. We are so glad that Carmen could be with us today.

Last year, we worked with our Board of County Commissioners and community advocates, to adopt our first ever Tenant's Bill of Rights.

We adopted legislation requiring 60-day written notice to tenants ahead of any major rent increases.

And we launched the brand new Office of Housing Advocacy, to help residents navigate their housing needs.

I am enormously proud of the progress we've made together. In 2023, we are rolling out even more programs to support all those facing skyrocketing housing costs – from middle class families to very low-income households.

I look forward to working alongside Commissioner Marleine Bastien, my community partner for over 40 years, to keep finding solutions as the new housing committee chair.

We're also taking immediate steps to protect homeowners from association fraud that is directly threatening your pocketbook.

Later this month, we will be launching our new condo and HOA online dashboard – created through the leadership of Commissioner Rene Garcia – to expand transparency for condo

and homeowners. Our Police Real Estate Fraud Squad continues to actively investigate these crimes alongside our partners in the State Attorney's Office.

As we act at the local level, we are urging our state leaders to push forward reforms to protect homeowners and help us crack down on fraud.

We're cutting housing costs and improving jobs... we're building an economy that works **for all**: a thriving, inclusive economy that meets today's challenges, and an innovation-driven, fast-paced economy that is ready for the future.

Our airport and seaport are bouncing back better than ever. Just two years after air travel shrank to historic lows, Miami International Airport had its busiest year ever with over 50 million passengers! PortMiami welcomed over 4 million cruise passengers and starts this year with FIVE new ships and easy to plug in shore power to reduce pollution.

The world is discovering what we've always known – that Miami-Dade is the greatest place to live in our nation. Fortune 500 companies are moving here and bringing with them new opportunities for our workforce. And we want all our residents to have a slice of the pie.

That's why I launched Miami-Dade's Future Ready Plan – to **build the economy of the future today**. It has 3 pillars: empowering our local workforce, supporting our small businesses, and unleashing the power of innovation.

This collaborative approach is a **Win Win Win**: businesses get a dynamic workforce; you, the residents, get more jobs in the fastest growing fields; and our community prospers.

Because innovation can happen anywhere... including in our County government. We need an active, agile government that partners with the private sector.

**That's why today I am thrilled to announce the Miami-Dade Innovation Authority.**

The Innovation Authority is a nonprofit established with seed funding of \$3 million each from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Citadel founder and CEO Ken Griffin, and Miami-Dade County. The Authority will provide grants to companies working to solve pressing challenges in climate, health, housing, transit, and more. Companies will be invited to pilot new technologies with the County – fast-tracking ideas to key problems our community faces.

Chairman Gilbert and I will be bringing the Innovation Authority legislation before the Board of County Commissioners in March, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Commission to bring this program to life.

With pilot programs and an openness to creative solutions, we are flipping the way government does business by inviting businesses to test and pilot WITH us. This approach will fast-forward local innovation and give entrepreneurs a path to scale. We'll make it faster and easier to innovate in the County and further position Miami-Dade as a world-class destination for high-growth companies.

Thank you to the Knight Foundation and Ken Griffin for this major investment in innovative problem-solving right here in Miami-Dade!

To ensure all residents have good-paying jobs, we need to equip young people for success in some of Miami-Dade's highest-growth industries – like tech, hospitality, and construction.

We are working with the Beacon Council, our chambers, big and small businesses, CareerSource and our colleges & universities to train the talent pool.

**In the coming year – in addition to internships in tech and summer jobs – we will be creating apprenticeships in construction on County projects for high school students,** in collaboration with Miami-Dade County Public Schools and our partners in labor.

Broadband access has never been more critical to bridging the digital divide. High-speed internet should be as commonplace as water and electricity. **Today I'm excited to announce a Broadband and Digital Equity Action Plan,** with our partners at the Miami Foundation and Miami Connected, that lays out a strategy to connect every neighborhood with fast, affordable Internet. We also made this a requirement in all new County-funded housing.

Across all our programs, I'm making sure that the County spends your money in line with our values. We are expanding purpose-driven procurement – so more County dollars go back to small and local business and to companies committed to protecting our environment and our workers.

My team is also **cutting red tape** to build **a business-friendly ecosystem.**

That's why we've rolled out programming that supports small businesses at every stage – from start up to scale up.

We are leading the way nationally with our *STRIVE305* program – equipping entrepreneurs and small business owners with access to capital, training, and more.

Like Natacha Metayer – Miami-Dade native, jeweler, and full-time business owner! Her business, JNCY Jewelers, just expanded from a home office to our Downtown jewelry district.

While working full time, Natacha began pursuing her dream of becoming a jeweler with her cofounder and brother Jonas, **who is with us here tonight**. JNCY received one-on-one coaching, learned new skills and accelerated networking through Strive305.

Now, Natacha has even bigger dreams of becoming an appraiser and shining a light on more young women jewelers. And in 2023, the company projects DOUBLE revenue growth. I am proud to be wearing a pair of their beautiful earrings tonight. Please join me in a round of applause for JNCY!

**Strive 305 has served more than 5,000 small businesses.** In December, it went virtual. And we're working to empower dreamers of all abilities. Thanks to the leadership of Commissioner Raquel Regalado, we launched the EmployAbility internship program to help more people with disabilities build successful careers here in our County.

There has never been a better time to be an entrepreneur in Miami-Dade. And I will continue to do everything possible to help our small businesses **build the future**.

I've been talking a lot about creating prosperity... but we can't have shared PROSPERITY unless we have PEACE.

To truly thrive, all residents **deserve to live in neighborhoods where they feel safe and at peace**.

That's why we acted swiftly to stem the national trend of rising gun violence, launching **public safety** programs that tackle the root causes of violence. We're making Miami-Dade the **strongest and the safest** County in the country.

Este será el condado más seguro del país.

Collaboration with our police is essential to achieving this vision. We can never repay the sacrifices that our Miami-Dade Police Department makes each day, but we must always remember. Tragically, this year was the first in over a decade that one of our officers was shot and killed in the line of duty. Detective Cesar Echaverry, or Echy, lost his life in August while serving on the Robbery Intervention Detail, one of our critical frontline posts. We continue to wrap our arms around his family and loved ones as together we celebrate his legacy. I'm grateful to Commissioner Roberto Gonzalez for sponsoring legislation to name a street in his honor.

It's fitting that tonight, we are gathered in front of the Police Memorial, lit up in blue behind me, established in 1980 to honor fallen officers from every law enforcement agency across Miami-Dade. Please join me in a moment of silence as we remember Echy.

We continue to invest in Operation Community Shield – taking more than 2,500 guns off our streets. We've increased protection in the communities most affected by gun violence. We've invested in new police capabilities. These efforts show real results – a nearly 42% decline in shootings in Unincorporated Miami-Dade during the 30 weeks following the program's roll-out.

Our groundbreaking Peace and Prosperity Plan, led by Commissioner Keon Hardemon, now in its third year, is a long-term investment in prevention, intervention and re-entry – **creating opportunities particularly for at-risk young people.**

And we're seeing results: Year 1 of the Plan was associated with fewer shootings in unincorporated Miami-Dade and gun-related homicides countywide.

In our Peace and Prosperity's flagship program, **Fit2Lead**, students are hired for meaningful summer and afterschool jobs, and when they need it, they receive case management services too. The best part? They get paid good wages while doing it.

Like Mario, a 16-year-old who entered Juvenile Services on a battery charge. From there, the county connected him to support services. Through Fit2Lead, Mario got a job!!! at the North Central Library. After just a few months, his behavior and grades have improved, and he's had NO more trouble with the law.

I'm proud to have with us here tonight a group of our amazing Fit2Lead interns, who like Mario, are taking control of their lives. Interns, please stand! Please join me in a round of applause for our Fit2Lead leaders!

**Safe in the 305 community grants** – another Peace & Prosperity program – are designed by and for residents. In the last year, these grants were used to remove graffiti in Brownsville, revitalize a community garden in Goulds, hold cleanups in Little Havana and Little River, and promote emotional wellness in Opa-Locka, to name a few.

Thank you, Commissioner Kionne McGhee, for your critical support. You are a long-time leader in violence prevention throughout South Dade and across our community...

And our work has gained national attention. Miami-Dade is one of just 16 regions across the U.S. participating in the White House Community Violence Intervention Collaborative – sharing our local success and learning from others.

We have so many outstanding programs and want to ensure ALL our residents can use them. That's why our Community ID program is so important – allowing people to identify themselves and access our beautiful public libraries, transit passes for

seniors, and so much more. Thanks to Miami-Dade Public Libraries and Branches, our nonprofit partner, over 1,200 residents have been served since October!

A safe community also means one free from hate and intolerance. With the troubling increase in hate crimes including antisemitism nationwide, Miami-Dade continues to stand strong in the face of injustice, loudly declaring that our county is a safe place for EVERYONE.

I'm proud to be your first Jewish Mayor and your first woman mayor – and together, I know we can stem this rise in hate.

By reducing crime and bringing our community to the table, we're saying YES to a stronger, safer Miami-Dade.

As we build for the future, we must build a County that is connected, climate resilient and FUTURE READY.

From Aventura to Homestead, from Doral to South Beach, **good public transit meets people where they are.** We are fast-forwarding our work to build key transit corridors that will better connect us and take more cars off the road.

Special thank you to our transit champion Commissioner Eileen Higgins who is helping drive us toward a more mobile future.

This year we reimagined plans to build Baylink from Miami to Miami Beach. And working together with County Commission Chairman Oliver Gilbert, we are accelerating our timeline to build the Metrorail North Corridor all the way to County line road, with neighborhood stops along the way, making good on a 30-year promise.

Construction on new transit stations on the South Corridor is well under way. The South Dade TransitWay will connect the south end of our MetroRail system using a fleet of fully electric, train-like

buses specially designed for fast boarding and quiet, pollution-free mobility.

In the west end, we opened the Tamiami park and ride, launching our second express bus route to link residential areas to downtown with a dedicated bus lane, saving time and stress.

We are investing in what fuels the future – converting our County fleet to electric and building electric charging stations countywide.

To protect our cyclists and pedestrians, we have an aggressive plan – vision zero – to improve bike safety... and as someone who often bikes to work, I am especially mindful of all the ways we must improve to end deaths and serious accidents Countywide.

At the end of 2022, we had **over 5,000 units of new County-funded** affordable housing near transit corridors built or planned.

We are saying YES to **freedom of movement and connection to opportunity.**

In Miami-Dade, we know that our waters, parks, and landmarks fuel our economy.

Just weeks ago, we lost an environmental champion who had a profound impact on protecting these natural resources. For decades, Harvey Ruvlin served as not just our Clerk, but an outstanding public servant who cared deeply about our County. Harvey, your legacy lives on in our beautiful environment and in our hearts.

He held deeply a value that I too share - Investing in our environment isn't just practical. It is vital to our future.

Alongside Commissioner Danielle Cohen Higgins, I'm fighting for smart planning that protects the Everglades and Biscayne Bay and our precious agricultural lands.

**We are making historic investments using new state and federal funds** to reverse decades of pollution, prevent flooding, convert septic to a clean sewer system and more.

Thank you, Commissioner Micky Steinberg, a true environmental champion, who is already prioritizing our aging stormwater system and other key reforms.

Our globally renowned Sea Level Rise and Climate Action Strategies are blueprints for the green economy – pushing us forward to our goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and 50% by 2030. We're aggressively deploying solar energy including at three County buildings and plan to “go solar” at more than 28 facilities. And we are doubling down on zero waste efforts, working alongside Commissioner JC Bermudez to find new ways to reduce waste and emissions.

We updated our building requirements to account for sea level rise.

We are responding to extreme heat – including, for the first time ever, installing high efficiency air conditioners in public housing units that lacked AC. This will protect our most vulnerable, particularly older adults, from the impacts of extreme heat. Thank you to Commissioner Kevin Cabrera for joining me for that announcement – from day one on the job you showed that you will stand up for our seniors and public housing residents.

And I am working with public and private partners to achieve our ambitious goal of 30% tree cover by 2030.

Through all this progress – housing people can afford, transit that moves at the speed you do, and an environment that's preserved for your children and grandchildren – we are creating a Miami-Dade that delivers on our core promises: **a community that we can all be proud to call home, today and tomorrow.**

As we look back and look ahead, there is still work to do – but Miami-Dade, we have proven that we're ready – and we can tackle whatever challenges tomorrow brings when we stand together.

A spirit of collaboration is our secret weapon that will fast forward our growth.

We have 13 Commissioners, each bringing their diverse experience and talent to the dais, working to take on our biggest challenges.

We have 34 wonderful cities. We continue to work alongside them to improve quality of life for all.

We have an incredible County family, a workforce nearly 30,000 strong, who remind me every day what great public service looks like. From our frontline teams – bus drivers, law enforcement officers, firefighters, librarians, social workers, engineers and more – to our Department Directors and my valued leadership team at County Hall, you all play an integral role in keeping Miami-Dade moving, and I am forever grateful that you heeded the call to service.

I also want to thank all our local, state and federal elected leaders, our business leaders, community advocates, nonprofit, academic, and faith institutions for your partnership.

And thank YOU – our residents – for putting your trust in me.

It's the honor of my life to be your Mayor. When I first ran for County Commission, it was with a simple goal to improve quality of life for my constituents and increase trust in your government. I often reflect with awe and appreciation on the great trust you have placed in me. Please know that I live every day with a sense of deep responsibility to honor that trust. I've worked my whole

career to advocate for children, families and our workforce, to help them overcome challenges and thrive – and that purpose continues to drive me today.

Since day one, I have valued your feedback and that will never change. Even when it's not easy – your voice matters to me.

And you have my pledge that under my leadership, County government will put YOU first. We will be open, accessible, and continue delivering on YOUR needs and priorities.

Together, we will make our vision the reality – **a safer County... a more prosperous County... a FUTURE READY County.**

A County where our neighborhoods are safer and connected, our environment is more beautiful and resilient, **and all people are free to build their dreams.**

Queremos un condado donde todas las personas sean libres de construir sus sueños.

Yon KON-tay, ko-TAY TOOT moon leeb, poo yo bah-TEE REHV yo.

We deserve a Miami-Dade that works for all of us. Whether this County is your new home or you have been growing roots here for generations; whether you live north, south, east, or west.

This is our Miami-Dade County, and I promise to continue working my hardest every day to make it better for you – for all of us.

So, it's with a heart filled with gratitude that I stand here before you to report on the State of the County – and the State of the County is STRONG.

May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless Miami-Dade County.