

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Pocket Agenda Item
March 11, 2025
Police and Fire Headquarters
2151 Salzedo Street, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Alberto Parjus
City Clerk, Billy Urquia
Police Chief, Ed Hudak

Public Speaker(s)

Pocket Agenda Item [10:41 a.m.]

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager, before we move on to Public Comment, I just like to have our Chief and yourself address certain issues that we've received emails for in the last 24 hours.

City Manager Parjus: Sure, Mr. Mayor.

Police Chief Hudak: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners. As some of you have been notified, the Police Department, myself particularly, signed agreement number 287, it is a Task Force Operation Memorandum of Understanding or Memorandum of Agreement with ICE, Immigration, Customs Enforcement. This is what we do on a regular basis. For the record, it was – I did confer with the City Attorney, as I do on all of these mutual understanding agreements that we do. It is the responsibility of the Police Department and myself to continue to work with other entities throughout, not only our state, but also our local government and our federal partners. So, this was not something that is an agenda item. The only time we have brought these agreements to you all is if it has come from this body. The Mayor's initiative on dealing with human trafficking and

City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025

prostitution was something that came from the Mayor's Office that we worked and came back to this body. There are some local governments that require in their Charter that their Commission has to approve these. We do bring these from time to time if there is a fiscal impact to the city. So, if there is an MOU that I want to enter into, there is that ability, give us the ability to put it on your agenda to discuss it if you have issues. This was a purely operational issue. I understand the concerns of a country. I understand the concerns of a state and I am sworn, as every law enforcement officer is. I take an oath to the Constitution, the Constitution to the United States, the Constitution of Florida and to the ordinances. This is an operational agreement. I do not, nor does the police department have any say in who goes or who does not go, if an immigration status is brought to our attention. However, the reason why we are here today first is, as you know, I am the Legislative Chair for the Florida Police Chiefs Association. Last week, I had a meeting with all of the other Police Chiefs, our association about where this was coming from, what the ramifications are, if any, and what I was going to do as the Chief, but also what the Florida Chiefs of Police recommend. And going through this document, the agreement, and also working with Florida State Chapter 908, which governs all of us, yourselves included on the Federal Immigration Enforcement Statutes coming from the State of Florida. This was an operational agreement that I signed with. Let me be clear, we are not ICE agents. We are not DEA agents. We are not border patrol agents. We are not HSI agents. However, we have agreements with all of those entities, and we have a select few employees that work on those task force. We are not a jail facility. As you know, if you haven't known, 67 County Sheriffs have all signed on. The largest impact, if you will, is going to be the jailing, the housing of individuals. If you look specifically in 908, which I have to abide by the State Statute, before the agreement is, it protects and we were very happy about this when I say, we, the Florida Police Chiefs, it protects witnesses and victims of violent crimes. That was a big part for the Police Chiefs throughout the state that we are not going to be checking people's immigration status, because they are victims, and there are protections in that. This agreement does nothing more than give us training and the ability for reimbursable funds from the federal government through the state. It is a work in progress. As you all know, the Governor and the Legislature listen to both sides, us included, us being the Police Chiefs, about what this agreement means. It gives us the training that we have. It does not under 908 commit us to any more resources that we can actually abide by or live with. In section 908, and specifically why I'm comfortable with this and why I signed it, under 908.104, a law enforcement agency shall use best efforts to support the enforcement of federal immigration law, best efforts. That does not mean that we are going to be going door-to-door. That does not mean we are going to be going into schools and to my knowledge, we are going to continue to uphold the Constitutional oaths that we took as law enforcement. If a federal agency comes and asks for assistance, we are going to render assistance, if it's within our ability to do so, because that's the oath that we took. There are specific enforcement efforts under 908 that adhere to both myself and all of you as sitting Commissioners, that if we do not do certain things, if we do not do our best effort, there are certain things an enforcement that the Governor, the State of Florida's Attorney General can wager against

*City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025*

us as individuals, but also at the department as-a-whole or the city as-a-whole, including a consent decree that can come down from a port of appropriate jurisdiction. I understand everyone's concern about what this is going to turn your police department into. Do we have to sign this legally? – no. Should we sign this, and do I need to sign this operationally? – yes, its why I did. I signed it on the 5th, it was accepted by ICE in their portal on the 7th, which was Friday, and we are here today. We had every intention of talking to the Manager and I discussed it, obviously the City Attorney and I discussed it beforehand. This does not commit any more resources. If we do have resources, the only way we can get reimbursement through the state is to be a member of the task force. So again, as the Chief, if there are sources that we can go after or get reimbursed from, we have to be a part of it. We are part of Stone Garden; we had been for years. Our Marine Patrol has been out there for years. When staffing didn't permit us, because we were short, we pulled back from that agreement without losing any resources from the federal government. It's an operational necessity that allows us to do that. You all are aware, as the country is, that we've had smugglers hitting our shores, giving us the ability to enhance our investigative techniques by having one or two or three or more people trained by this MOU, which is what comes of it, is something that, as your Chief, we need to have. We have detectives at airports. We have detectives that are out there right now working on federal areas of investigation that benefit us as a police department. You've heard me say this, our criminal element doesn't necessarily live in Coral Gables, so we have to have those resources, we have to gather that intelligence. We are looking at this in the same way. The fact that it protects anybody who is here legally or illegally, and they are a victim of a crime or reporting a crime, I'm very comfortable with that. More importantly, if it gives my detectives, your officers the ability to make sure that somebody who preys victim on any of us in this city and that person is here legally, illegally, we definitely make sure that we notify the appropriate people. This is the codification of not doing things from the hip but making sure that we will notify and work with our federal partners. We have historically worked with our federal partners, and this is just an operational agreement. It does not mean that we are going to be knocking on doors, checking on people, checking on yardmen. If they commit a crime, anything like that, we will do the crime investigation, and that will be asked. There are seven estimated, 700,000 civil detainer warrants that the federal government has put into our information systems. We have to have this agreement, and we have to have that training to address those, not every officer will be able to. Similarly, not every officer is a breath-test operator. We have certain officers, and if we think somebody is intoxicated, we bring in an expert. This agreement allows me to select certain officers that would become experts in the process of identifying people that are not supposed to be here. That's all it does. It is not something that has the police department we are going to start traffic-slopping people, looking at people, profiling people, and for the statements out there that we are going to start profiling, I will hold up my department, your department, up to any other department in this country that I have the faith in my officers that we do not profile people, we never have. We haven't had those complaints, and this agreement is not going to change that. The way we respect our citizens, our visitors, and also the subjects that we deal with is something that I'm extremely

*City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025*

proud of. This agreement is not going to change that. I'm available for your questions. I know there's a lot of people that want to speak on that, but again, this is an ongoing moving issue. I head to Tallahassee in my role as the Florida Legislative Chair on Monday and we are going to continue to work, because just the Florida organization what the Governor and Legislature has passed is still coming together. There is a council that we are going to meet with, there are several members of that council of my fellow Chiefs, and we will continue to move on, but this does not mean and has no intention of when I signed it, it's an operational necessity. It is not something that means we are going to start going door-to-door. Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Manager, anything else to add?

City Manager Parjus: Will this effort and cooperation affect in any way your ability to provide police services to the city?

Chief Hudak: No. Even though we are in the recruiting process of our vacancies, again, because it is the best of our abilities to assist, it will not impact our staffing levels at all. If there is, and this is kind of the reimbursable side of it, if there is overtime that needs to be spent and we have people to do it, we would obviously have to have this agreement in place which we kind of have to have to get any kind of reimbursements, so it is not put onto our taxpayers, specifically I'm concerned about that. But no sir, it will not affect our staffing, because there is not a requirement that I have to commit so many resources or so many resources.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. So, what you're saying is that only a few officers will need this training, this is not the whole police force thing.

Chief Hudak: Its not my intention, nor do I think its feasible to train every officer that comes in here, that we are going to handle this as we have other task force. We will have, whether it be detectives, officers on the street, the Crime Suppression Team, people that are familiar with those investigations, that's what we're going to do. I am not turning the police department into an ICE sublet, if you will.

Commissioner Castro: And I think its important to reiterate what you just said that we will not be profiling victims, we will not be profiling people and that we are going to protect victims, correct.

Chief Hudak: Correct. We are protecting victims and witnesses of crimes. Listen, as the Chief, I'm concerned that I want everybody, whether they are here legally or illegally, to call 911 and let us know if they see something, say something. It's the reason why we were able to save the lives of the Chinese people that were smuggled here, at least they got here safely. It's an ongoing issue that I think this side of the country is starting to face. That's the motive, that is our mantra, if you will, from the police department, that we will continue the safety of lives. Whether they are here

legally or illegally that's up to the federal government, but we will assist in this agreement, that's it.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you Chief, I appreciate it. Thank you for the clarity. Madam Vice Mayor, you have anything else you'd like to add?

Vice Mayor Anderson: The only comment I have is that every time that I've seen our officers interact with individuals, whether they live here or they don't live here, they've always treated everybody with respect and dignity and that's with the officers just not realizing that I'm observing them. It's just a wonderful place to live because our police department stands far above the other departments that sometimes are in the news that aren't to the caliber of the officers that we have here. So, thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. And I just wanted to add.

Chief Hudak: Mr. Mayor, I know I kind of glazed over this and I need to be very clear for you all is under 908, when it gets into the governmental entities, again, nothing forces us to do this. However, the sanctuary policy which means a law police practice procedure or custom adopted are allowed by state entity or government entity which prohibits or impedes a law enforcement agency from complying with USC 1373 or prohibits or impedes a law enforcement agency from communicating or cooperating with federal immigration agency so as to limit such law enforcement agency or prohibits the agency. Complying with the immigration detainer, complying with a request from federal immigration agency, providing federal immigration agency access to inmate for review, providing federal immigration agency with inmate incarceration status. Again, that's jails, that's not on us, providing the state entity for immigration status of an inmate detainee and state entity means, any state or any office, board, bureau, commission, department, branch, division of institution thereof. So again, I signed this, and you need to know my intent was that I believe that we have to sign this because we want the ability to work with our federal partners and our concern is, what happens if we don't. I know we're talking about what if situations. I can tell you what if situations are about in enforcement. I don't know what those what ifs situations are politically, and again, your police department is in the middle. We took an oath to uphold the Constitution and the laws. These are the laws of the state and this is the Constitution, that's why we're here. So, I'm sorry Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I just wanted to commend you and our incredible police department for all the hard work they do. Again, I know we are in the middle of a situation that's stuck between the federal government and the state government and again, it's a tightrope that we walk here. We are a great community. As you can see, the City of Coral Gables has faced multiple issues with the Chinese immigrants, that's just a testament and other immigrants that have come here, and if you look at

*City Commission Meeting
March 11, 2025*

the police officers in the back, they've always conducted themselves with pride and with dignity, understanding that not only do they represent the City of Coral Gables, but they are representing themselves, and a majority of them are minorities and they understand that this is a great country built on immigration and we have to be respectful and thoughtful and careful. And I also understand your comments in regard to our partnership with the federal government, funding issues. So, like I said before, we are walking a fine line, and I want to thank you and that's why I asked the Manager and yourself, after a conversation yesterday that maybe we should address it front and center here in the public as we always have. Thank you, sir.

Chief Hudak: Appreciate it.