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Is downtown Miami safe enough? Here's how we can make sure | Opinion

By Ralph Rosado



For over 20 years, starting in the early 1990s, my mother-in-law owned a small jewelry store in downtown Miami. Every afternoon around 4:30 p.m., she would lock the front door, grab her purse and race to her car. She would call her husband or my wife as she left the store and stay on the phone until she was safely inside. Like many business owners of that era, she never took unnecessary chances.

That memory has stayed with me.

Today, I have the privilege of representing Miami's District 4 and serving as chairman of the Miami Downtown Development Authority, an almost 60-year-old agency tasked with expanding economic development and improving quality of life in downtown Miami.

Thanks in large part to the organization's advocacy and investments over decades, the area has grown to become one of America's great urban neighborhoods, now home to the nation's third-tallest skyline. But one expectation has never changed: People deserve to feel safe where they live, work, invest and recreate.

Since late 2025, we have led with greater transparency, stronger oversight, expanded resident representation and smarter budgeting. Those reforms laid the foundation. Now we begin downtown's next great reform: public safety.

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The Miami Police Department is responsible for policing our city. The DDA's role is to strengthen that effort by sponsoring and supporting additional initiatives and police hours. Those dollars produce results. Much like the four-pillar CASA Master Plan I developed for District 4, we have produced a four-point strategy for downtown safety.

Prevent crime

Working with Miami Police Chief Edwin Lopez, we analyzed where and when crime occurs, discerning the patterns that shape it. That information is now driving a preventative policing strategy that places bicycle officers, foot patrols, officers on horseback and a Downtown Police Drone where they will have the greatest impact. We will measure success by the number of officers residents actually see — not the number of patrol cars parked at intersections. Presence prevents crime.

Public safety network

This year's DDA budget prioritizes additional police services and an expanded Downtown Ambassador Program. Officers cannot be everywhere at once, and our ambassadors serve as force multipliers, providing extra eyes and ears. We have also launched a campaign to encourage even more businesses and property owners to connect their private security cameras to the Miami Police Department's Real-Time Crime Center camera network. The more cameras officers can access in real time, the faster they can solve or — even better — prevent crimes.

Community partnerships

Public safety is built on relationships. We are supporting free self-defense classes, community safety walks and downtown run clubs that create opportunities for officers to engage with residents before someone calls 911. We also remain committed to finding a permanent home for the Eastern Police Subdistrict, near Biscayne Boulevard. The officers protecting downtown deserve a headquarters in the community they serve, with command staff operating together instead of being scattered across the city.

Underlying problem

Enforcement alone is not enough. Many individuals cycling through our streets and jails struggle with untreated mental illness. That is why the DDA Board unanimously supported the opening of the Miami Center for Mental Health and Recovery (aka the Leifman Center) and secured a

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\$500,000 state appropriation to expand crisis stabilization beds. Treatment improves lives, reduces chronic homelessness and makes downtown safer.

Downtown Miami is entering a new chapter. We have new leadership at the DDA and a new police chief. In partnership with my colleagues — Commissioners Damian Pardo and Rolando Escalona and Chairwoman Christine King, each representing a portion of the DDA area, as well as with Commissioner Miguel Gabela, who oversees downtown's Bayfront Park — we have an opportunity to rethink how public safety is delivered in our urban core.

Previously, public safety was measured by inputs. Under this new leadership, it will be measured by outcomes.

I cannot change the downtown Miami my mother-in-law experienced. But together, we can build the downtown our children deserve.

Ralph Rosado serves as commissioner for Miami's District 4 and chairman of the Miami Downtown Development Authority.