

## MIAMI POLICE CHIEF PROPOSES REMEDIAL MEASURES TO ADDRESS POLICE SHORTAGE



The Miami Police Department is depleting, as there are more officers retiring than the ones being recruited to take their place. Slowness in fresh recruitment, however, is not due to lack of financial resources or that they do not have enough applicants, but rather due to archaic hiring practices and administrative delays. Currently the police department is short by 84 officers. The new chief, Manuel Orosa, concerned that their numbers could increase, was trying to upgrade and modernize the department's hiring procedures. The Police Chief said, "If we were a public company, we would be fired. We would be deemed incompetent for not having hired new employees." Records reveal that over the last three years, the department, that has strength of 1,070 officers, employed just 16 new cops. It is anticipated that more than 250 workers will retire over the next 5 years, further aggravating the situation. Orosa's plan for speeding up the hiring process includes asking more employees to conduct background checks on job candidates. However, city commissioners are asking for urgent remedial measures to be initiated. Commissioner Marc Sarnoff said, "We're about to hit a crisis. We'll keep officers on patrol, but there will be fewer detectives, fewer officers on crime-solving teams. That's going to lead to serious problems down the road." The Miami Police Department, were under the scanner since 2010, when its officers, where found involved in series of fatal shootings. This led to loss of credibility and standing in the community and the then Chief Miguel Exposito, paid the price, by being ousted from his job. Orosa has spent quite a bit of his tenure, improving community relations, but in a recent commission meeting, Commissioner Marc Sarnoff, advised him to concentrate his efforts on the shortage of staff issue as well. "I watched this engulf one chief of police; I'm watching it engulf a second chief of police," the commissioner said. "Don't let this swallow you." The recruiting process in Miami is time-consuming and wearisome. Unlike other departments, that require only one test, here the candidate must pass two tests. Moreover, as per legal directions, Miami must advertise civil service tests three months before they are given. Following the tests, successful candidates, must take physical agility and psychological exams. Add to that the background checks and the whole process adds up to three or four months. Not many have the patience and aptitude to wait for so long and opt for jobs elsewhere. Only one in ten, make through the entire process. Rookie officers have to attend a six-month police academy. The chief proposes that the city civil service exam be abolished. Two more investigators should be added to screen the candidates and the creating of multiple hiring lists, in place of waiting for a new list to be created, until the on hand list is exhausted. The starting salary for Officers' is \$45,929. Orosa says, that money is not the problem. "The issues are with the delays," he said. The Chief stated that despite the shortage he is managing his human resources well and for the moment there is not too much cause for worry. "Right now, nothing is really suffering," he said. However, Armando Aguilar, president of the local chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police, contradicted the chief's claims, saying that the shortage is obvious. "Can you feel it on the street? No doubt," he said. "Calls for service are holding all the time." Aguilar envisages that, along with those who are due to retire, dozens more will join them, if officers are asked to make compromises to help balance the financially stressed city's billion-dollar budget. Andrew Scott, a Palm Beach County law enforcement consultant said, that more unfilled police vacancies were "a public safety issue of the first order." "Miami is a tough place," he said. "Once the bad guys start to realize that the police department is understaffed, it's going to be even tougher." Police dispatchers were also in short-supply. There are 8 vacancies to be filled. However, these cannot immediately be filled as, not only is the hiring process slow, they have to be trained for around 18 months. Shortage of dispatchers also led to dual problems. Existing ones were overworked and the overtime money that they were being paid was a drain on the exchequer. "We're burning people out," Miami Commissioner Frank Carollo said. Maria Haberfeld, who chairs the department of law, police science and criminal justice administration at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, said that Orosa's commitment was commendable, but said that pressing the accelerator in hiring, should not lead to hiring of the wrong people. "Given the history of the Miami Police Department, I would suggest they pay attention to standards and hire qualified people," she said.