MONICA CEPERO, County Administrator
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: Wednesday, August 26, 2026

TO: Broward County Board of County Commissioners (Board)

FROM: Monica Cepero, County Administrator

RE: **Board Conversations on Public Safety Funding, Transparency, and Accountability**

The annual budget process always challenges the Board with balancing Broward County's many needs. Additionally, the Broward Sheriff's Office's (BSO) appeal of the Adopted FY26 Budget uniquely highlighted the necessity for a systematic review of the Board's approach to funding and operating the public safety services upon which the community relies.

For ease of reference, apart from its statutory requirements, BSO provides public safety in five (5) areas through County agreements or County statutory authority.

1. E-911 Call-Taking and Dispatch (Contract - Term Sheet)
2. Broward County Fire Rescue Department (Interlocal Agreement)
3. Law Enforcement and Fire Rescue at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (Contract)
4. Law Enforcement and Fire Rescue at Port Everglades (Contract)
5. Department of Detention/Jails (FS 951.061)

The sections that follow provide a status update on three of the major topics under review: BSO Appeal of the FY26 Budget, Contracted Law Enforcement, and the Fire Rescue Interlocal Agreement (ILA).

BSO FY26 Budget Appeal

Following the Board's adoption of the FY26 budget, BSO appealed its budget to the Administration Commission. BSO's appeal was roughly $73 million, primarily related to Year 1 of salary increases suggested by the BSO Pay Study of 2024, across multiple disciplines. More recent documents from BSO suggest the total impact being $100 million if implemented in one year. This figure includes benefits but does not include the impact on overtime costs.

BSO appealed its entire budget, including functions that are not appealable under state statute, such as fire rescue and E-911 call-taking/dispatch. It also included services provided by contract, such as law enforcement and fire rescue at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport (FLL) and Port Everglades (PEV), which are similarly not appealable.

By doing so, BSO attempted to shift budgetary authority for County agencies and County functions away from the Board of County Commissioners and to the Administration Commission, which is made up of the Governor and the Cabinet. The appeal currently remains in the 'discovery phase'. To our knowledge, no requests for information have been received by either BSO or the County; and, to date, no date has been set for a budget hearing by the staff of the Administration Commission.

Law Enforcement at FLL and PEV

Unlike E-911 dispatch and Broward County Fire Rescue, both of which are functions previously operated by the County but currently overseen by BSO, the County has never staffed or overseen a law enforcement agency. For this reason, it was decided that professional advice would be sought to understand the feasibility of forming a law enforcement agency to secure FLL. On December 11, 2025, the County executed a contract with the Jensen Hughes public safety consulting firm.

The study was funded by Airport fees and revenues, not by property tax dollars.

The final feasibility study for FLL law enforcement was presented to the Board at the May 12th, 2026 Board Workshop. The study concluded that yes, the Board could feasibly form a law enforcement agency to secure FLL. Doing so would require various start-up costs and a ramp down of BSO personnel during the ramp up of County law enforcement officers. If the Board were interested in continuing to research the possibility, the next phase would involve contracting a consulting firm for a Comprehensive Workload Analysis and Staffing Study. This would provide far more detailed cost figures, project schedules, and personnel counts.

On April 22, 2026, the County Executed an amendment to the FLL contract with Jensen Hughes. The amendment added Port funding and scope to complete a similar feasibility study for the creation of a law enforcement agency to secure Port Everglades.

Similarly, the study was funded by Port fees and revenues, not by property tax dollars.

The final feasibility study for PEV law enforcement was distributed to the Board on Friday, August 21, 2026. It similarly concludes that a law enforcement agency is feasible, but that further work is necessary to refine costs, personnel, and project schedules. Staff will be providing individual briefings to commissioners on the feasibility study for PEV law enforcement during the month of September.

Broward County Fire Rescue Department (BCFR)

Broward County's own fire rescue department is operated by BSO under an ILA executed in 2003. The agency has over 900 personnel and a total budget of over $259 million. It provides regional services ($47M), such as Air Rescue, to the entire county. It also provides seven municipalities with local fire rescue services under contract ($212M). BCFR also provides highly technical fire rescue services under contract at the airport and seaport.

No similarly sized county in the state contracts with its sheriff to operate its fire rescue agency. Holmes County (pop 20,042) and Walton County (pop 90,547) are the other two.

Given the ongoing feasibility studies of forming law enforcement agencies to secure the airport and seaport, the Board approved a consent item on April 14, 2026, to investigate the process of returning operational control of BCFR back to the County. At the August 20, 2026, regular meeting, the Board discussed the process. At the end of the discussion, the Board directed staff to bring an item to the September 22, 2026, Commission meeting for Board consideration.

This motion, if approved, would direct County Administration to provide BSO with written notice that the County will not renew the ILA for the next five years. Such notice would end the ILA on September 30, 2028, and trigger a two-year transition period.

At the request of various commissioners, the following bullets note the high level benefits and challenges of moving forward with transitioning operational control of BCFR back to the County.

BENEFITS

- BCFR is already Broward County's agency
- Provides transparent understanding of costs
- Ensures that Board level appropriations (investments) for BCFR remain with BCFR
- Ensures operational alignment of fire rescue activities with the County's Office of Emergency Management (OEM)
- Ensures that the BCFR budget cannot be appealed by BSO
- Costs are already budgeted
- Personnel, equipment, and facilities already exist
- Ensures that audit authority over BCFR is restored to the County Auditor

CHALLENGES

- Significant human resources effort necessary to on board over 900 personnel
- County would need to assume direct labor negotiations with IAFF 4321
- County would need to transition and assume contracts with municipalities

In the context of the larger public safety conversation triggered by the BSO appeal of the FY26 Adopted Budget to the Administration Commission, the Board's strategic conversation on the best model for operating the BCFR is both appropriate and timely.

Summary

The ongoing strategic review of the Board's public safety investments will ensure that it makes well-informed, fiscally responsible, transparent, and accountable decisions. At the Board's direction, County Administration is keeping BSO, municipalities, and all external stakeholders informed. Given the scale and scope of public safety responsibility, a thorough review of Broward County's public safety model is warranted and responsible.

Cc: Kevin B. Kelleher, Deputy County Administrator
Michael W. Ruiz, Assistant County Administrator
Andrew J. Meyers, County Attorney
Annika Ashton, Deputy County Attorney
Robert Melton, County Auditor