



18 March 2020

Subject: **ACLU Miami statement | Miami Beach Police Department actions - Spring Break 2020**

The ACLU of Florida Greater Miami Chapter is gravely concerned at the perceived disparity in treatment of individuals visiting Miami Beach by the Miami Beach Police Department. This year during Spring Break, which was largely attended by African Americans, Miami Beach police used an approach and tactics that were not used during Art Basel or the Super Bowl, when crowds were not predominantly African American.

This approach and tactics reflected a lack of discipline, an absence of training, and poor planning, all which ultimately threaten public safety. As witnessed on videos posted on social media and reported by major news outlets such as the Miami Herald, the Miami New Times, and other sources, Miami Beach police officers engaged in what can only be described as excessive force -- indeed, violence -- to restrain and detain African American visitors who do not appear to have been involved in any criminal activity. Large numbers of police officers can be seen on video taking an overly aggressive stance, firing automatic PepperBall weapons to disperse and intimidate groups of people who do not seem to have been breaking any law.

The ACLU of Florida Greater Miami Chapter joined the NAACP in a press conference last Friday, March 13, 2020, to call attention to the alarming police actions on Miami Beach but, unfortunately, in the following days there appears to have been an escalation of police abuse, some captured on video. The recorded scenes seem more akin to what is expected in a police state -- not in a free society, governed by the principles embodied in our U.S. Constitution, where people should be treated with dignity and respect, and their basic rights should be protected, regardless of the color of their skin.

We understand that the necessary emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic creates particularly difficult and challenging circumstances in Miami Beach due to the large number of visitors for Spring Break, and the concomitant threat to the health and well-being of first responders. But the need to comply with emergency orders -- such as limiting large gatherings, imposing a curfew, and closing parts of the beach on Ocean Drive and Lummus Park at 4:30 p.m. -- does not justify violating basic rights and civil liberties through excessive policing that could lead to unnecessary confrontation, escalation, and risk people's public safety.

In recent years, many policing tactics and strategies implemented with great success during Urban Beach Weekend / Memorial Day called for a less aggressive police stance, with police deployed in smaller groups, absent riot gear and automatic weapons, and using passive crowd control measures such as re-routing of vehicular traffic and barricades to close off spaces as needed for crowd control. But these measures seemed to have been abandoned and replaced with aggressive policing, and little or no apparent planning. Even more alarming, the behavior of many police officers, as recorded on video, seems to show lack of self-control and discipline or adherence to basic police training, including racial-sensitivity training. This type of behavior is ineffective and wrong, it's dangerous, and it could have tragic consequences.

The ACLU of Florida Greater Miami Chapter urges the Miami Beach Police Department to take immediate steps to discipline those officers who are found to have engaged in over-aggressive behavior, and to modify its policing tactics and strategies and increase its training, including racial-sensitivity and implicit bias training, so as to implement measures for crowd control in accordance with our fundamental principles of liberty and equality.

Sincerely,

Nicole Sinder | President - ACLU of Florida Greater Miami Chapter | miamiaculupresident@gmail.com

ACLU of Florida Greater Miami Chapter

4343 W. Flagler Street - Suite 400 - Miami, Florida 33134 | **559 287 1984** | miami.aclufl.org | acluflmiami@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/groups/GreaterMiamiChapteroftheACLU | [@ACLUofGreaterMiami](https://twitter.com/ACLUofGreaterMiami) | [@ACLUFLMiami](https://twitter.com/ACLUFLMiami)