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Miami-Dade commissioners upset over jail inmates released in their districts

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Peter Andrew Bosch / Miami Herald Staff

Miami-Dade Commissioner Audrey Edmonson is seen during a July 2013 meeting. Edmonson is unhappy that inmates are getting released in her district.

The thing about criminals is, no politician wants them in their district.

So when the Miami-Dade County corrections department changed the way it releases people booked at one of its jails, elected officials noticed.

Last week, the department began allowing released inmates who had rides of their own to leave jail directly from the Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center in West Miami-Dade. The remaining inmates are bused to the civic center in Miami, which houses the main jail and criminal courthouse and offers round-the-clock access to public transportation.

That irked Commissioner Audrey Edmonson, who represents the civic center district and only just found out that's where inmates get released — even though that's been county practice since 1961.

“We already have a high crime rate,” she told Corrections Director Tim Ryan.
“What you're doing is increasing it.”

Ryan noted the new policy letting inmates get picked up at TGK has actually reduced the number of people bused to Edmonson's district in the past week to about 125 a

day from about 200 a day over the past two and a half years.

That's how long it had been since any inmates had been booked at TGK while the jail's intake facility was renovated to comply with a federal mandate from the U.S. Department of Justice. During the renovation, all inmates had been booked and released at the main jail in the civic center.

"We give them a bus pass," Ryan said. "The buses do not run 24/7 in front of TGK. They stop a little bit before 10 p.m."

Then maybe the jail shouldn't release anyone after 10 p.m., Edmonson suggested.

Ryan said he would like to halt releases between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. But judges and the public defender have told him that would run afoul of a person's constitutional protections.

"I have an obligation to get them out in four hours if they're to be released," he said.

Commissioners who represent the neighborhoods around TGK don't want released inmates there, either.

"We have been facing constant break-ins into Miami Springs, Virginia Gardens," Chairwoman Rebeca Sosa said. "They let them go in the middle of the night. They walk."

"Somebody is going to get killed" in the neighborhoods around TGK, added an angry Commissioner Jose "Pepe" Diaz, who represents the district around the jail. He accused Edmonson of "ambushing" him by bringing up the jail discussion without previously placing it on the meeting agenda.

That led Edmonson to accuse Diaz of not being a gentleman.

Without a resolution to their concerns and an acknowledgment that people who have been booked and released must be let out somewhere, commissioners agreed to revisit the issue soon.

As for Diaz and Edmonson, they settled their disagreement with a hug.