

MIAMI HERALD EDITORIAL

# Why aren't curfew holdouts on Miami Beach sick and tired of being held hostage by spring break?



ALIE SKOWRONSKI [ASKOWRONSKI@MIAMIHERALD.COM](mailto:ASKOWRONSKI@MIAMIHERALD.COM)

A man sits on a ground handcuffed Sunday night after witnesses say he had a knife. The detention came after a pair of deadly shootings over the weekend rocked this year's spring break on Miami Beach.

Here we go again.

Miami Beach is entering the third and jam-packed weekend of spring break with few additional tools to prevent the unchecked rowdiness and violence that have marred the annual, increasingly unwelcome event stretching across South Beach.

This quandary follows last weekend when two people were killed, one a college student from Georgia. The murders, one captured in a security video, have made headlines worldwide. And this is Miami Music Week, which features Ultra Music Festival in Miami's Bayfront Park and other events throughout South Florida, including Miami Beach.

In preparation, a divided Miami Beach City Commission, disappointingly, voted 4-3 on Monday not to re-impose a midnight curfew as City Manager Alina Hudak wisely had done last weekend following the fatal shootings.

This vote was a dereliction of the commissioners' duty to keep everyone as safe as possible within city limits.

We agree with Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber, police Chief Richard Clements and Hudak that it's time to shut down the partying, or at least stifle it as much as possible. They recommended the city enter the weekend with a midnight-to-6 a.m. curfew.

Commissioners bent a bit, voting 6-1 to support the ban on alcohol sales for off-premises consumption in South Beach after 6 p.m. That includes package liquor stores and any other stores that sell alcohol. But that vote is being challenged by a liquor-store owner, who says he and other merchants like him are being singled out. He has a point.

In addition, Ocean Drive will be open to traffic, which will impede gatherings along the stretch. And the city has announced two drunk-driving checkpoints throughout the city. Fine, however, these should not turn into a blanket stop-and-frisk tactic.

We hope the commission's decision to forgo a curfew doesn't come back to bite with more deadly violence.

The commissioners who sided with nightclubs, Kristen Rosen Gonzalez, Ricky Arriola, David Richardson and Laura Dominguez, should hope everything goes well this weekend.

Their rationale: It's not expected to be so busy as predicted. They contend that it's a knee-jerk reaction to respond with a business-crippling curfew; party-goers this weekend should not be punished for the deeds of partygoers last weekend; the murders appeared to be the result of personal beefs — as if we should find comfort in that — not random shootings.

But in a shoulder-to-shoulder crowd, people were lucky there were no more fatalities.

But the real reason to maintain the status quo was, why should businesses on South Beach — mainly bars and nightclubs — be financially impacted when they have been waiting all year for this boon? They took a hit last year under a midnight curfew, also prompted by violence.

Vice Mayor Steve Meiner and Commissioner Alex Fernandez, along with the mayor, voted for the curfew, which successfully curtailed street partying over the weekend.

Fernandez is tired of the same old "We can't control spring break" refrain.

"Upon consulting with our city manager and city attorney, I strongly feel the city must announce that, for next year, Miami Beach will shut the door on spring break by announcing — from now — a curfew

for the historically violent third weekend of March,” Fernandez told the Editorial Board.

He also wants to bring metal detectors and a fenced-in perimeter into the equation for spring break 2024. He says he has the backing of club and bar owners.

Fernandez says he will place a resolution on the agenda directing city administration to find such a private partner to stage a ticketed, fenced-in event with security, a la Ultra.

Fernandez has a solid idea here. We commend Gelber, Hudak, Meiner and Fernandez for trying their best in an impossible situation.

But for next year, there must be radical changes made to the spring break and they should be announced well ahead of time before people make their hotel reservations.

Spring break 2024 on Miami Beach should usher in a new day, as many have said. Enough is enough.