

# Miami-Dade can help small businesses reopen their doors, survive — and thrive | Opinion

[BY EILEEN HIGGINS](#)

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You know that *peluquería* in Little Havana where mom has her hair done and socializes with friends? Or that flower shop in Cutler Bay that carries the perfect roses your significant other adores? Or the Haitian bakery in North Miami where just-out-of-the-oven sweetness wafts into the street to lure you in? Or the dry cleaner in Sweetwater where your shirts are pressed exactly how you like them, and where the seamstress always remembers your name?

These, and so many more, are the small businesses that make Miami, that shape and enhance our lives in big ways. They give our county character and personality, history and a whole lot of flavor. Their existence, and our relationship to them, grounds us here and helps us feel like we belong. They make us a community.

These small businesses are also our true economic engine. And right now, they need our help.

Florida International University's recent Small Business. Big Impact report counted more than 66,000 microbusinesses — those with 10 employees or less — across Miami-Dade, representing 81 percent of all private businesses in the county. The COVID-19 pandemic has put an incredible, and disproportionate, strain on these businesses. Many don't have the resources or technical and financial support they need to emerge from the shutdown on their own. Indeed, they faced challenges even before coronavirus, often unable to access the kind of capital and lending opportunities that larger businesses can more easily attract.

Next week, the county has a chance to step up and do something to help many of them.

On Tuesday, the Miami-Dade County Commission will vote on a resolution that would create the RISE Miami-Dade Fund (Re-Investing in our Small Business Economy). For weeks now, I've been working with county administration and the Dade County Federal

Credit Union to develop a plan to help these small businesses access the funds they need to reopen and operate in a new and different world, setting themselves up for success well into the future.

As part of the legislation, we're proposing that the county seed the Fund with an initial \$25 million, which would come out of the coronavirus relief funds we received from the federal CARES Act stimulus bill. But we're also committed to seeking out an additional \$25 million from the private and philanthropic sectors, which could help us turn this into a \$50 million fund.

Our proposal structures the RISE Miami-Dade Fund so that as businesses pay back loans, with the money recycled and available to be loaned to other businesses. We would rely on local community lenders who specialize in helping small businesses, including women- and minority-owned companies, to issue the loans, but also to provide coaching, technical assistance and advice — all the support entrepreneurs need so they can flourish.

If we're successful, the program will live on long into the future. I envision it becoming a permanent part of the small-business infrastructure in Miami-Dade, giving more and more small-business owners the opportunity to make their entrepreneurial dreams come true — and to experience the freedom and independence that owning one's own business provides.

As moments of difficulty often do, this crisis has brought to the surface the entrenched challenges our community faces, especially those that have persisted since before COVID-19. Our small-business ecosystem has long needed more resources and a far more inclusive and enabling environment. It's in our own best interest to support these small businesses. Their survival — indeed, their ability to thrive — will help us protect jobs. It will help us protect our tax base, which is precisely what fuels our municipal budgets and allows the county to provide crucial services, from fire rescue to parks and green spaces, street cleaning to public transport.

The truth? This fund is long overdue.

I urge my fellow commissioners to approve the creation of the RISE Miami-Dade Fund on Tuesday. And I urge everyone who calls this county home to support our local shops, salons, restaurants, vendors and companies.

Because Miami just isn't Miami without them.

*Eileen Higgins represents District 5 on the Miami-Dade County Commission. She chairs for the Community Disparities Subcommittee and is the vice chair of the Housing, Social Services, and Economic Development Committee.*