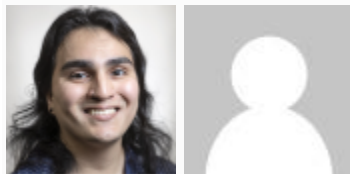


Osceola deputy who slammed teen at Liberty High School will not be charged, state attorney says



Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel State Attorney Monique Worrell speaks at a press conference on Tuesday, August 17, 2021. She announced her office will not file charges against Ethan Fournier, the Osceola deputy who was recorded slamming 16-year-old Taylor Bracey to the ground at Liberty High School in January.



By [Cristóbal Reyes](#) | creyes-rios@orlandosentinel.com | Orlando Sentinel and [Orlando Sentinel](#) UPDATED: August 17, 2021 at 11:06 p.m.

The Osceola County deputy who was recorded slamming a 16-year-old Liberty High School student onto concrete will not be charged in the incident, Orange-Osceola State Attorney Monique Worrell told reporters on Tuesday.

In a 20-minute press conference in front of the county courthouse, Worrell said the incident was provoked as two teens approached each other to fight. Worrell said Deputy Ethan Fournier's "controlled takedown" of the teen, performed after she freed her arm from his grasp, was part of his training and "did not violate any laws in the State of Florida."

"This decision is based solely on the law," Worrell said. "Although [Deputy] Fournier's actions were legal in accordance with Florida law, as a parent and a member of this community, when I watched this video, like many of you, I was angry and concerned for the safety and wellbeing of my children and all children."



State Attorney Monique Worrell speaks at a press conference on Tuesday, August 17, 2021. She announced her office will not file charges against Ethan Fournier, the Osceola deputy who was recorded slamming 16-year-old Taylor Bracey to the ground at Liberty High School in January.

The decision concludes the criminal investigation into an incident that made national headlines and led to the creation of a school district task force looking at Osceola's Fournier was placed on administrative leave after video of him slamming 16-year-old Taylor Bracey to the ground at Liberty High School went viral. Worrell said "there isn't better video" of the incident than the one that went viral, which she said highlights the need for body-worn cameras.

"Body camera in this situation would have been ideal because then everyone could've had an opportunity to see exactly what took place," she said. The Osceola County Sheriff's Office is the only law enforcement agency in the county that doesn't equip its on-campus officers with cameras.

Fournier was also the school's flag football coach, a role he no longer holds. He has been replaced as the school's resource deputy by Deputy Michael Campos, spokesperson Nirva Rodríguez said.

Sheriff Marcos López applauded the decision by Worrell's office, saying of Fournier that he's "very proud to have a deputy like him." Standing next to Fournier and other deputies at a press conference outside the Sheriff's Office, López added that Fournier could be allowed back as a campus deputy once an internal investigation is over.

“He’s a great cop, he’s an [Iraq War] veteran,” he said. “A lot of things are never going to look pretty on camera, but guess what? This worked out, and it’s a positive thing for law enforcement and our community.”

The incident made national headlines and caught the attention of famed civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who represented the teen’s family along with Orlando lawyer Natalie Jackson. The teen’s family said she [suffered from neurological issues after the slam](#), including memory loss and depression.

Taylor did not return to the school following the incident.

“Taylor is still feeling the repercussions from Fournier’s actions and likely will for the rest of her life,” said a joint statement by Crump, Jackson and attorneys Antonio Romanucci, Bhavani Raveendran. “This disgusting incident certainly sends a message to our young people of color — police officers should not be trusted and ‘protect and serve’ is nothing more than a meaningless slogan.”

Activists also rallied behind the Braceys, calling for on-campus officers to be removed from schools despite a Florida law mandating some form of armed security presence on public school campuses.

“We fought hard these last several months [on this case] and all that’s gone down the drain,” said Trey’vian Telfair, a vocal critic of Fournier and a recent Liberty graduate who [organized an off-campus rally in February](#) in solidarity with Taylor.

David Caicedo of the Florida Student Power Network also condemned the decision not to charge Fournier, calling it “tragic and horrifying that it’s legal, what he did.”

“It once again shows that the system is not made to protect our youth,” said Caicedo, co-executive director of the organization that supports removing cops from schools. “The issue is actually a police presence at the school and their training is not what prepares them to be around young people. Their training is for combat and high-pressure situations and very dangerous when used on children.”

The incident sparked debate [about the role and training of campus cops](#), prompting the creation of a task force headed by Osceola County school board member Julius Meléndez to look into current practices of the school resource officer program.

The task force’s efforts [prompted the creation of a new contract to govern SROs from the Sheriff’s Office and the Kissimmee and St. Cloud police departments](#).

Though many of the recommendations listed in the task force’s 44-page report didn’t make it into the final contract, the document requires school administrators to properly inform staff about when to involve law enforcement in on-campus incidents.

The contract also encourages officers to be more involved in the classroom, including lectures on “safety and security topics” like drug and sexual abuse as well as other topics “as requested by the Principal and approved by the SRO supervisor.”

Items like expanded use of juvenile civil citations and mandatory body cameras for SROs — which the St. Cloud Police Department already has, while Kissimmee looks to equip its officers this year — were approved separately in a nonbinding resolution.

Others, like a recommendation to involve school administrators in the assignment process, were included in the report but were rejected by law enforcement agencies.

López said earlier this year that he was reviewing training guidelines following the Liberty High School incident but never publicly announced any changes. On Tuesday, he said that his deputies undergo training beyond what Florida law requires.

Jackson, the Braceys' lawyer, said their legal team plans to file a lawsuit against the Sheriff's Office. López's response: "Go for it. ... We're going to fight it." "We're not going to give out any money to anybody unnecessarily," he said.

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