

State attorney charges Osceola deputy who set motorcyclist ablaze with Taser



Jean Barretto Baerga, 26, suffered severe burn injuries after a Taser deployed by Osceola County deputies apparently set off a fire at a gas pump. (Courtesy of NeJame Law)



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The Osceola County deputy sheriff who has been under criminal investigation since last year after setting a man on fire at a Wawa gas station in Orange County will be charged, the Orange-Osceola State Attorney's Office announced Thursday.

Deputy David Crawford is facing a culpable negligence charge more than a year after he tackled Jean Barreto Baerga while he pumped gasoline on Feb. 27, 2022. Crawford then fired his stun gun as the gas it pooled beneath them.

Barreto Baerga, who was followed after fleeing from deputies responding to a report of a group of bikers riding recklessly, suffered burns on nearly three-quarters of his body but still survived.

The charge is [the same announced by Sheriff Marcos López last May](#), after a fire marshal report found Crawford's stun gun caused the blaze that injured the victim and himself.

A Sheriff's Office spokesperson said Crawford is still on administrative leave.

"We feel it's appropriate to let the criminal justice system determine if Deputy Crawford did a criminal act that could be proven beyond a reasonable doubt," said an unsigned agency statement.

One of Barreto Baerga's lawyers, Mark NeJame, praised the charging decision, saying he applauded the State Attorney's Office's "ongoing professionalism and diligence on this matter." The victim is still recovering from his injuries, which NeJame said has cost more than \$7 million in medical expenses and counting.

“He barely survived,” NeJame said. “His life will always be in jeopardy because of the massive amount of scar tissue and damage that happened to his body. ... He’s doing his best to get through his life with these cards that have been dealt to him.”

[Body camera video showed](#) Crawford tackling Barreto Baerga without announcing himself, and shouting at deputies to turn off the gas pump after another deputy, Christopher Koffinas, used his stun gun on the victim. Seconds later, as the victim was lying in a pool of gasoline, Crawford raised his Taser.

“You’re gonna get Tased again, dude,” he shouted before pulling the trigger, igniting the blaze. Koffinas received a 40-hour unpaid suspension for firing his stun gun first but is not facing charges.

The Sheriff’s Office has been under scrutiny for its practices since the fire, along with a deadly shooting at a Target store in Kissimmee, which killed 20-year-old shoplifting suspect Jayden Baez as he tried to flee unmarked deputy vehicles that tried boxing him

NeJame, who also represents Baez’s family, is expected to file a federal civil rights lawsuit against López and the Sheriff’s Office in the coming days.

Last year, in response to criticisms over the fire and the shooting, López said at a town hall that [he was not considering changing tactics in similar arrests](#).

During a press conference announcing the charging recommendation against Crawford last May, López said deputies believed Barretto Baerga fit a description of a man on a dirt bike who allegedly pointed a gun at a driver, though a weapon was never found.

López claimed he might have “tossed” the gun, but video shared with reporters of deputies following the victim to the Orange County Wawa did not show that.

NeJame blamed López’s protocols for the fire and called on the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the U.S. Department of Justice [to investigate the Sheriff’s Office](#), though neither agency took on the case.

He also expects to file another lawsuit against the agency on behalf of Barretto Baerga.

“If he was driving recklessly, charge him with reckless driving, but you don’t almost kill somebody and set them on fire,” NeJame said. “You cannot have law enforcement running amok. They’re supposed to be our protectors, not our ignitors.”

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