

Osceola sheriff, deputies facing lawsuit over deadly Target shooting



Attorney Mark NeJame speaks with Alejandro Baez, the father of Jayden Baez, during a press conference, on Tuesday, May 16, 2023. NeJame will announced the filing of a lawsuit against the Osceola County Sheriff's Office for the shooting that killed 19-year-old Jayden Baez outside a Target store in Kissimmee last April. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/ Orlando Sentinel)



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Lawyers for the man killed last year by Osceola County deputy sheriffs as he tried to leave the scene of an alleged shoplifting is preparing a lawsuit against the Sheriff's Office, citing "excessive, unreasonable and unnecessary force."

The pending federal lawsuit, which names Sheriff Marcos López, comes a year since [20-year-old Jayden Baez was gunned down by deputies](#) Scott Koffinas and Ramy Yacoub, who for the first time since the incident have been publicly named.

Attorneys Mark NeJame and Albert Yonfa also claimed the Orange-Osceola State Attorney's Office is investigating the Sheriff's Office for its handling of the shooting. NeJame and Yonfa previously criticized OCSO as trying to engage in a cover-up, including falsifying reports.

The legal complaint will be filed in the coming days, NeJame said.

"State Attorney Monique Worrell and her team have quietly been acting on this," NeJame told reporters. "We have learned through our sources and investigation that her office has issued subpoenas to various deputies of the department."

Keisha Mulfort, spokesperson for the State Attorney's Office, didn't confirm or deny the attorneys' claims but said details of its investigation into the shooting are "not currently available for public consumption."

"We will be sure to provide a full report once that investigation has concluded," she said.



Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel

Osceola County Sheriff Marcos R. Lopez says the public should wait for all the details to be revealed about the death of Jayden Baez, a suspected shoplifter killed by deputies. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel)

In April 2022, deputies in unmarked vehicles participating in a nearby training exercise converged on the car driven by Baez after reports of shoplifting involving about \$46 worth of pizza and trading cards. Deputies opened fire as Baez tried to flee, killing Baez and injuring two passengers. Charges against the two passengers for the alleged shoplifting were later dropped.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement, tasked with investigating the shooting, submitted its report to the State Attorney's Office months later, but Worrell has yet to issue a decision regarding any charges. Past attempts to obtain FDLE's investigative file and Baez's autopsy report have been denied.

But Baez's family's lawyers have accused the Sheriff's Office of covering up the events leading to and following the shooting, pointing to reports filed on the same day at the same time more than a week after it happened. [Experts have criticized the deputies' tactics in the shooting](#), calling it a "tactical nightmare" to use force in response to shoplifting.

Despite the length of the investigation, Alejandro Baez, Jayden Baez's father, supports Worrell's investigation. Sitting alongside NeJame and Yonfa, Baez said the year since his son was killed has been painful.

"Any parent would want the truth if they lost a child, like I did," he said. "I will never know what it is to be called 'abuelo.' The truth has to come out."



Alejandro Baez shows a tattoo of his son Jayden Baez's face during a press conference, on Tuesday, May 16, 2023. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/ Orlando Sentinel)

He remembered “Champ,” his nickname for Jayden, with a laugh, calling him a “pretty boy” who spent a lot of time looking at himself in the mirror. Baez also recalled his son’s love for music and basketball as well as the fishing trips the two would take together.

“He was my best friend, and I was his best friend,” Baez said. “It was a relationship that a father and son should have.”

López has deflected criticism of his deputies in the incident and said in a townhall meeting last year that [he wasn't planning on changing procedures in the wake of the](#)

shooting and a fire caused by a deputy at a Wawa gas station in Orlando while chasing a suspect that February.

“We are here to do a job. Unfortunately, sometimes outcomes aren’t as pretty as people want to see it. However we’re going to continue to do our job unless someone deems it not right or unconstitutional,” López said at the time. “We’re not going to change any of our protocols or any of our tactics.”

A Sheriff’s Office spokesperson didn’t answer questions about the lawsuit nor did it confirm whether the State Attorney’s Office’s issued subpoenas in a probe into whether documents were falsified.

But a statement sent Tuesday afternoon said members of the agency are “waiting for the State Attorney’s Office to decide if the two deputies were justified in firing their weapons at a local Target.”

“The Sheriff’s Office is looking forward to the completion of State Attorney’s review so all parties can gain some closure regarding this incident,” the statement added.



Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel

State Attorney Monique H. Worrell holds a press conference, on Thursday, March 9, 2023. Worrell has faced criticism from local law enforcement leaders, who she says are working with Gov. Ron DeSantis in support of her suspension from office. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/ Orlando Sentinel)

The pending lawsuit also comes as Gov. Ron DeSantis continues to gather information on Worrell's office, in what she has repeatedly said is an attempt to remove her from office with the help of local law enforcement heads.

Lopez, who denied being part of that effort, previously accused her of [unnecessarily dropping](#) drug trafficking cases, [which Worrell has refuted](#).

NeJame said his office had been delaying filing the lawsuit as Worrell's investigation continued, but felt it best to speak up amid the governor's scrutiny.

“We believe we need to take action now,” NeJame said. “She has the support and appreciation of all the victims’ families as she is seeking to uncover the truth and proceeding on what appears to be glaring issues of integrity and truthfulness. If Ms. Worrell is removed from office, it will compromise and hinder the investigation.”

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