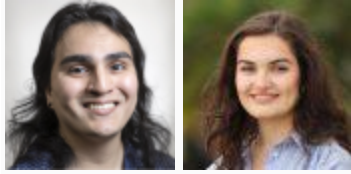


# Osceola deputies won't be charged in 2022 killing of Jayden Baez at a Target store

Grand jury decides against indicting officers who fired at car fleeing an apparent shoplifting



Orange-Osceola County State Attorney Andrew Bain announced on Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024, that a grand jury has declined to indict Osceola County deputy sheriffs for fatally shooting Jayden Baez in a Target parking lot as he drove getaway for two associates who shoplifted \$46 worth of Pokemon cards. (Natalia Jaramillo/Orlando Sentinel)



By [Cristóbal Reyes](mailto:creyes-rios@orlandosentinel.com) | creyes-rios@orlandosentinel.com |  
Orlando Sentinel and [Natalia Jaramillo](mailto:najaramillo@orlandosentinel.com) | najaramillo@orlandosentinel.com | Orlando  
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A grand jury has decided not to indict two Osceola County deputy sheriffs in the death of Jayden Baez, the 20-year-old gunned down in a Target parking lot as deputies tried to stop an alleged shoplifting, State Attorney Andrew Bain announced Tuesday.

“This is a tragic situation that has affected many families, individuals, law enforcement members and our community,” said Bain, who announced a new policy in September for grand juries to review officer-involved shootings. “As with any case in the criminal justice system, the facts must be proven in a courtroom and beyond a reasonable doubt. We hope our community and everyone involved feels confident the grand jury reached a reasonable and impartial decision.”

The decision comes nearly two years after a deadly encounter in April 2022 that drew widespread attention for the way a seemingly minor crime led to bloodshed.

The incident unfolded as Baez’s companions returned to his car with about \$46 in stolen pizza and Pokémon cards. The deputies who converged in the parking lot in unmarked vehicles had been practicing “dynamic vehicle takedowns” nearby as part of a training exercise, [according to a federal lawsuit filed by Baez’s family against the Osceola County Sheriff’s Office](#). They fired when Baez attempted to drive away.

Osceola County Sheriff Marcos López refused to identify the officers, citing a state law intended to protect the privacy of victims, but the lawsuit identified deputies Scott Koffinas and Ramy Yacoub as firing the fatal bullets.

Baez was killed while two companions, Michael Gómez and Joseph Lowe, were injured by gunfire, with Lowe losing a finger after being shot in both hands as they were raised. A fourth passenger, who was a minor at the time of the shooting, survived unscathed.

Though the grand jury decided not to charge Koffinas and Yacoub for their roles in the shooting, the saga is far from over, said Mark NeJame, whose Orlando-based law firm is representing Baez's family along with the survivors. Bain said in his announcement that the jury may have more to say about the policies and procedures deputies followed during the confrontation.

"We are ecstatic to hear that this grand jury by this presentment has said it ain't over yet," NeJame said. "We hope that they end up highlighting some of the various deficiencies."

NeJame said neither he nor the family ever expected the deputies to be charged. "It's almost impossible to get an indictment against law enforcement."

The final grand jury report is expected to be released "in the next few months," Bain said.

“The biggest thing that was also part of the policy that we put in place was that the grand jury got to weigh in on the incident that happened,” Bain said. Next, he said, “They’ll be able to present their findings and investigations to you all on ways that they believe that law enforcement can help preserve lives and what we can do as a community to prevent the loss of life from incidents like this.”

López has consistently backed the actions of his deputies, saying they were “justified in all their actions.”

[But use-of-force experts interviewed by the Orlando Sentinel](#) in the wake of the shooting were appalled by deputies’ actions, questioning whether it was appropriate to perform vehicle takedowns in response to a petty theft, a misdemeanor.

The only video of the incident was taken by a Target surveillance camera overlooking the parking lot. Deputies at the scene were not equipped with body or in-car dashboard cameras.

NeJame has long accused the Sheriff’s Office of mishandling the shoplifting incident and its aftermath, and the family’s lawsuit accuses López of fostering “an agency-wide culture of escalating minor criminal offenses into violent and deadly scenes.”

NeJame also accused López of enabling a cover-up, pointing to the deputies’ reports on the incident all being filed on the same day at the same time more than a week after the shooting. The attorney sent letters to state and federal officials calling

for an investigation, and WFTV-Channel 9 later reported the U.S. Department of Justice opened a probe into the matter.

The investigation into the Target shooting was initially led by State Attorney Monique Worrell after the Florida Department of Law Enforcement concluded its review but was later taken over by Bain after she was suspended by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

In May, NeJame [publicly announced Worrell was investigating allegations of corruption](#) at the Sheriff's Office related to the shooting, something Worrell's office declined to confirm at the time. Worrell [revealed the existence of the investigation](#) to the Daily Beast following her ouster.

At the September press conference announcing the convening of the grand jury, Bain said the "public corruption case" was ongoing, though he added that evidence of those allegations would not be considered by the grand jury.

The status of that probe is unclear.

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