

Osceola sheriff announces policy, personnel shakeups following decision not to indict deputies in Jayden Baez killing

Plans mark sheriff's first
acknowledgment that change is
needed since controversial 2022
incident



Osceola County Sheriff Marcos Lopez talks during a Wednesday, Jan. 3 press conference about the grand jury decision 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, (Willie J. Allen Jr./Orlando Sentinel)



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Osceola County Sheriff Marcos López on Wednesday said he will make changes in policy and personnel in his department following [a grand jury decision not to charge two deputies over the controversial killing of Jayden Baez](#) in a Target parking lot.

One policy change would be to limit the use of “boxing” — officers stationing their vehicles around a suspect’s vehicle to block its movement — only to incidents involving felony crimes. Deputies boxed Baez’s car and then shot him as he tried to drive away from the April 2022 encounter along with two companions who were said to have stolen \$46 in pizza and Pokémon cards from the Target, which would be a misdemeanor.

Another change, related to the use of force on moving vehicles, has not been finalized.

López’ comments, his first acknowledgment since the shooting that changes are needed in his department, came in the wake of a Tuesday announcement that the grand jury plans to recommend changes to policies and practices in the sheriff’s office even though it did not believe deputies violated the law in their handling of the Target incident.

López continued to defend his deputies' actions Wednesday, insisting they fired their weapons because Baez chose to "use his vehicle as a deadly weapon" and "their lives were in danger." But he said, "There's a lot of policies that are outdated, a lot of policies that could use improvement."

"An officer who uses deadly force appropriately should never — I repeat, never — be treated as a criminal," he said. "It's unfortunate that the two deputies who fired their weapons in this case had to wait 20 months to be told that they're rightfully and legally performing their jobs as a deputy sheriff."

AdChoices 

López also said he will expand the use of body cameras, which [were not carried by the deputies at the scene](#). The only known video of the shooting that killed Baez is from the Target store's surveillance camera overlooking the parking lot.

As for personnel changes, López offered no specifics but said those are being made, "to make sure we're getting a good mix of experience and make sure everybody involved is making good decisions when we're working with critical incidents." He declined to answer a question from the Orlando Sentinel about whether that included former Maj. Wiley Black, who, the Sentinel has learned, was removed from the agency's Criminal Investigations Division after heading it at the time of the Target shooting.

A member of López's staff said the office would respond to the question in an email but it had not done so by publication time.

López's comments come a day after a grand jury recommended no charges against deputies Scott Koffinas and Ramy Yacoub, [who were identified in a federal lawsuit](#) as firing the shots that killed Baez and have since returned to duty.

The lawsuit, filed by lawyers representing Baez's family and survivors, accuses the sheriff's office of excessive force, and says López has fostered a "an agency-wide culture of escalating minor criminal offenses into violent and deadly scenes."

In the past, the sheriff [rebuffed calls to revise his agency's tactics](#) in the wake of Baez's death and the unrelated arrest of Deputy David Crawford, who was charged with culpable negligence after a chase into Orange County resulted in [a man being set on fire after Crawford lit a pool of gasoline with his stun gun](#).

But on Wednesday, López told reporters he welcomes any recommendations from the grand jury, convened for the first time as part of a policy by Orange-Osceola State Attorney Andrew Bain to [investigate uses of force by law enforcement](#).

Bain, who held a press conference late Tuesday to announce the grand jury's decision not to indict, said members of the grand jury will prepare their full report on the Target incident "in the coming months."

"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," Bain said.

That was welcome news for Mark NeJame, whose firm filed the lawsuit against the Sheriff's Office. He told reporters Tuesday he didn't expect an indictment against the deputies but hopes the grand jury's report "end[s] up highlighting some of the various deficiencies."

On Wednesday, NeJame questioned the timing of López's announced changes, saying, "I'll believe it when I see it."

"Good leadership would have dictated that these changes should have occurred before young people were murdered and maimed," NeJame said.

NeJame and his team have long voiced their concerns about the agency's handling of the shooting that killed Baez and injured two of his companions.

A corruption investigation into the Osceola Sheriff's Department began under Orange-Osceola State Attorney Monique Worrell before she was suspended by Gov. Ron DeSantis and replaced by Bain, who in September officially confirmed it was ongoing. The U.S. Department of Justice also opened a probe into the allegations, the status of which is unknown.

López told reporters his office has "provided the Department of Justice everything they need in order to make sure that this comes to a closure soon."

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