

Osceola Sheriff under state review for posting corpse photo

The photo appeared to depict Kissimmee teen Madeline Soto



(Willie J. Allen Jr./Orlando Sentinel) Osceola County Sheriff Marcos Lopez talks during a press conference in Kissimmee, Fla., on Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024. (Willie J. Allen Jr./Orlando Sentinel)



By [Amanda Rabines](#) | Orlando Sentinel
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The Osceola County Sheriff's Office is under state review for posting a photo of a corpse on the sheriff's Instagram page last weekend.

The photo, which appeared in a slideshow of images from an event for seniors, appeared to be the dead body of Madeline Soto, the 13-year-old girl who reportedly went missing last week, although the sheriff's office declined to confirm that. Her body was found on Friday after an extensive search from multiple agencies.

"Today the Sheriff's Office contacted the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to offer our cooperation and transparency into the inadvertent release of an investigative photograph," the Sheriff's Office said in an unsigned news release Tuesday evening. "We understand the community's concerns and we welcome an independent review of what transpired."

It's unclear whether the Osceola County Sheriff's Office could face any criminal charges.

A representative with the FDLE did not immediately respond to an email asking what a review could warrant.

Florida law generally forbids the release of photos or video of "the killing of a minor" without the permission of the surviving family—photos of dead bodies included. Perpetrators could face a third-degree felony charge.

Though it was promptly deleted, screenshots of the dead body ended up circling social media.

A second photo taken by agency Executive Director Nirva Rodríguez and posted on her personal Facebook page also received scrutiny from the public. In the post, she is seen taking a selfie in front of Stephan Sterns, the prime suspect in Madeline's disappearance.



On Monday, Osceola County Sheriff Marcos López issued an apology for the post.

“We deeply apologize for any confusion or disturbance this may have caused. As with any investigation, the information obtained is confidential and any mistaken disclosures will be immediately rectified,” read a statement sent to the Sentinel by an unsigned Sheriff’s Office spokesperson. The agency has not yet clarified whether the photo was of Soto.

The Kissimmee Police Department, which is investigating Soto’s death and disappearance, declined to comment on the photo posted by López.

This is a developing story.

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