

Fired employee: Osceola sheriff leered at nude photo rather than disciplining deputy who shared it

The accusation is the latest in the litany of controversy swirling around Sheriff Marcos Lopez



Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel Osceola County Sheriff Marcos R. Lopez ithe public should wait for all the details to be revealed about the death of Jayden Baez, a suspected shoplifter killed by deputies last month. But the department says none of the officers involved in the incident were wearing body cameras.



By [Cristóbal Reyes](#) | creyes-rios@orlandosentinel.com | Orlando Sentinel
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A fired Osceola County deputy is accusing Sheriff Marcos Lopez of “a troubling pattern of selective enforcement and protection of his allies,” claiming Lopez made lewd comments to a subordinate who shared a nude photo of a fellow employee rather than disciplining him.

The accusations made by Samantha Sanchez emerge from a letter she submitted for an evidentiary hearing with an appeals board. This comes nearly a year after she [reported her ex-boyfriend and alleged Lopez friend Alex Valentin for domestic violence](#), for which he is now being prosecuted in Orange County.

Among her charges is that Lopez, a married man, told Valentin upon seeing the nude photo of a civilian employee that he would “f the crap out of her,” according to what appears to be a screenshot of a text conversation between the two men. It is a violation of state law to share such a photo without consent, although the recipient of the photo is not liable.

In a statement, an Osceola County Sheriff’s Office spokesperson said the agency’s in-house analysts “have serious questions about its authenticity,” but did not clarify in response to a follow-up question from the Sentinel whether they are questioning the authenticity of the woman’s photo or the screenshot of the conversation.

“The validity and possible political motivations of these allegations will be examined thoroughly, and any allegations of misconduct will be addressed appropriately,” the statement read. In response, Sanchez told the Orlando Sentinel that the agency is “obviously lying.”

“I have no doubt that if they pulled the phone records, they’d find those messages between Alex and the sheriff,” she added.

Sanchez’ accusations are the latest in the litany of controversy swirling around Lopez, [who faces a tough reelection battle this summer](#). He has been accused of mismanaging the department in some high-profile incidents including [deputies’ 2022 killing of Jayden Baez](#), and recently posted a [photo of a dead body believed to be 13-year-old Madeline Soto](#) on his Instagram page, for which [the state is investigating him](#).

The screenshot is part of the basis of Sanchez’s appeal of her Feb. 28 termination, which came over her alleged violation of the Osceola County Sheriff’s Office’s policy on truthfulness, according to records obtained by the Sentinel. Though that incident is unrelated, she accused Lopez of conspiring to get her fired because of her knowledge of his conversation with Valentin.

She offered no direct evidence to support that accusation.

“Now is the time to release it, and I have no fear about violating some policy because I don’t work there anymore,” Sanchez said when asked why she had

chosen to go public with the screenshot. Though her goal is to get her job back, “I don’t feel safe being in a room around him if I get rehired,” she said, referring to Lopez.

Sanchez further accused the Sheriff’s Office of selective enforcement against her, saying a deputy who may have similarly violated the truthfulness policy was assessed a lower-level offense. The Sheriff’s Office did not respond to questions about those claims.

Valentin’s lawyer also did not respond to a message for comment on the alleged conversation.



Samantha Sanchez, on Wednesday, July 3, 2024. Sanchez is accusing the Osceola County sheriff of making lewd comments after a deputy shared a nude photo of a civilian employee. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/ Orlando Sentinel)

‘The sheriff felt safe’

Sanchez said she had suspected Valentin, who was in the midst of a divorce, of cheating on her when she decided to look through his phone in March 2022. That’s when she said she found his conversation with Lopez, which from the screenshot appeared to show the two men exchanging photos of women.

“I’d f the crap out of her,” Lopez appears to say in response to the nude photo purportedly shared by Valentin.

“Yes she’s hot,” Valentin wrote back. Lopez replied, “Si.”

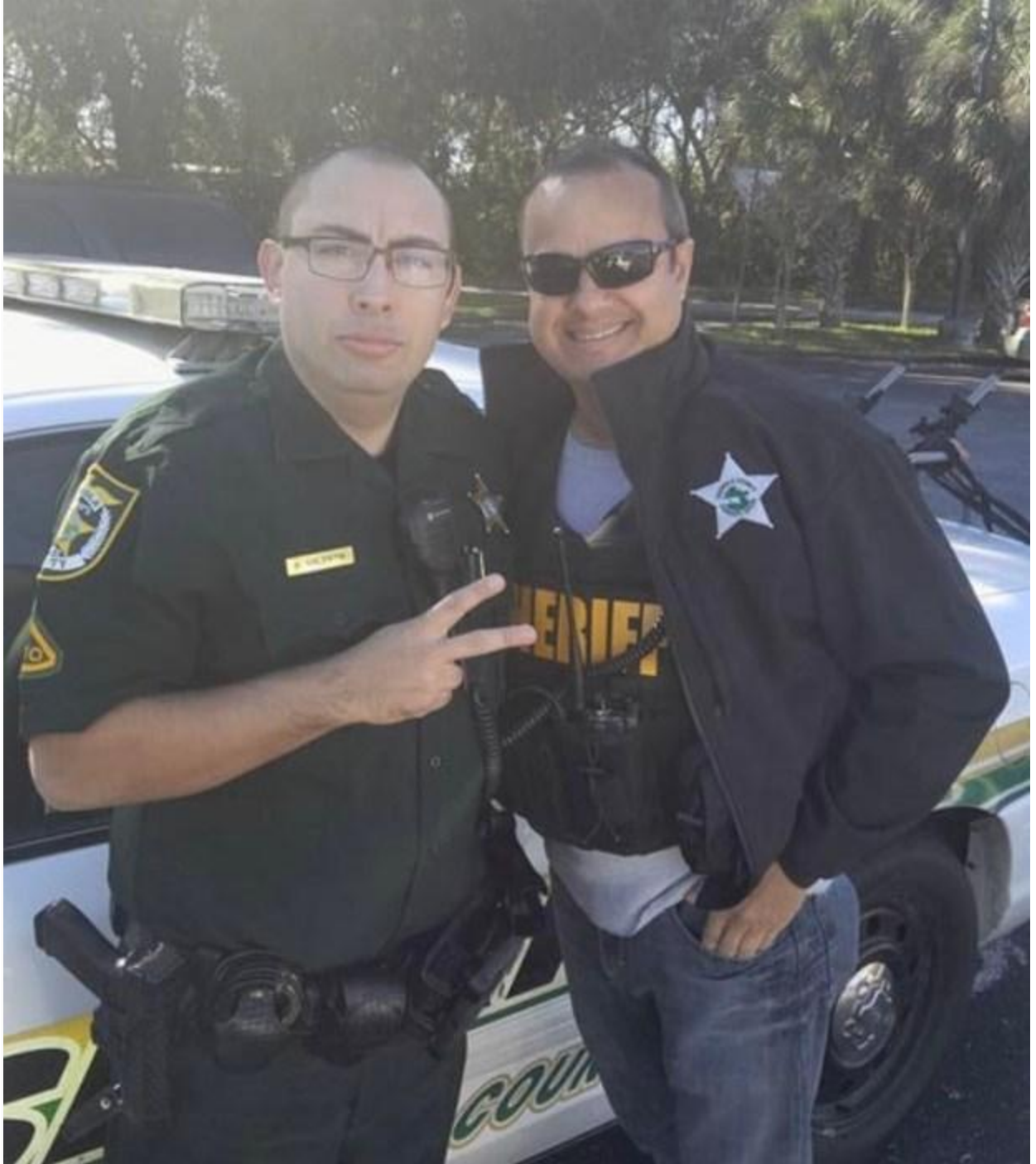
Sanchez said she saved a copy of the exchange. “I kept it to show him later how he was embarrassing me,” she said. “But I was shocked that the sheriff felt safe enough to respond with what he responded with.”

Sanchez said she later reported the conversation to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which she said did not move forward with it after the woman in the photo declined to prosecute. No internal investigation about the photo was opened.

In its statement, the Sheriff’s Office spokesperson confirmed FDLE looked into the photo, which “resulted in no findings.” FDLE’s media office did not respond to multiple messages about the matter.

Valentin was fired in July 2023 after Sanchez reported him to Orlando police, accusing him of attacking her multiple times throughout their on-and-off relationship that began in 2021.

The Sheriff’s Office had conducted an earlier investigation of Valentin for abusing Sanchez while both were on duty after receiving a report from another deputy. Cellphone records confirmed their reported locations for the incident. [But the office cleared Valentin](#), saying Sanchez had declined to cooperate.



Osceola Deputy Alex Valentin and then-Deputy Marcos Lopez (Courtesy: Samantha Sanchez)

The police investigation in Orlando, however, led to an arrest. Valentin has pleaded not guilty to three charges of domestic battery and two of false imprisonment along with an aggravated battery charge.

He is expected to be in court Aug. 2.

Selective outcomes?

Sanchez was fired as a Sheriff's Office deputy in February, after an internal investigation concluded she lied to a supervisor about her location on Dec. 10 as she was beginning her shift.

That day, Sanchez told her sergeant she was on Simpson Road and Osceola Parkway and was available to respond to an emergency call. In reality, she was at an apartment where she lived with another deputy on Simpson and Boggy Creek Road, about a mile from her claimed location, according to the investigative file.

Violating the Sheriff's Office's truthfulness policy is a high-level offense, per agency policy. Sanchez acknowledges she misstated her whereabouts, but says she believes she was targeted to be fired.

The other deputy at the apartment also misstated his whereabouts, according to a department report, but was handed only a 16-hour unpaid suspension for being late to work.

Sanchez' appeal was rejected upon initial review, and her termination is currently under a second appeal. This time she has included the accusations against Lopez regarding the photo, as well as additional allegations of Lopez playing favorites regarding job postings and promotions.

The incidents, she says in her latest appeal, underscore "Sheriff Lopez's lack of moral character and integrity, as he continues to wield his authority at the Osceola County Sheriff's Office to favor close friends and favorites rather than ensuring justice for those who commit heinous acts."

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