

Nov 10, 2023

Contact Kylie Mason

Phone (850) 245-0150



OFFICE OF THE
ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Stands Up for Victim's Family and Files Murder Charges in Case Where Former Rogue Prosecutors Would Not



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Standing united today for justice, Attorney General Ashley Moody, Orange County Sheriff John Mina and State Attorney Andrew Bain announced criminal charges for a man suspected of killing an Orange County teenager. Deandre Eugene Florence now faces first-degree murder, racketeering and other charges for the death of a 15-year-old student, shot while walking to school. Former State Attorney Monique Worrell and former State Attorney Aramis Ayala refused to file charges in the 2018 case. The victim's family and local law enforcement urged Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution to take over the case.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "In order to protect the public, it is absolutely imperative that we prosecute criminals. Lax criminal justice policies have no place in our state and that is why we are standing up for this victim and filing criminal charges. It is long overdue. We will continue working with our great law enforcement partners and State Attorney Bain to ensure justice for Alex Vargas."

According to the investigation, Florence was part of a dangerous criminal enterprise known for patterns of racketeering activity. In just a few months, authorities found Florence involved with

four grand thefts of automobiles, three commercial burglaries, two murders and one armed robbery. The enterprise used stolen automobiles to target persons and businesses to obtain electronics, including cell phones, computers and more. The suspects then sold the items for profit.

Shortly before Christmas in 2018, the enterprise targeted Alejandro Vargas Martinez while walking to school and talking to his mother on the phone. The suspects tried to steal Vargas' cellphone and, during the robbery, shot the teenager. Florence admitted to being present to the homicide and said the motive for the murder was to rob Vargas for the cellphone. Even with law enforcement's strong investigation and the victim's family requests for justice, Worrell and Ayala did not file charges in the case.

In August, Governor Ron DeSantis suspended Worrell for neglecting her duty to prosecute crime in the Ninth Judicial Circuit. From January 2021 to January 2022, Worrell dismissed or did not prosecute criminal cases against more than 16,000 adult defendants—43% or almost half of all defendants arrested in the Ninth Circuit. Worrell dismissed charges, or did not file cases, against defendants at a higher rate than any other prosecutor in any other circuit in Florida.

Florence faces several criminal charges, including racketeering, first-degree murder, robbery, dealing in stolen property and multiple counts of grand theft. Since the suspension of Worrell, State Attorney Andrew Bain has assisted with the case and cross-designated attorneys with the Office of Statewide Prosecution. Attorney General Moody's Statewide Prosecutor Richard Mantei will handle the case.

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