



STATE OF FLORIDA

JAMES UTHMEIER ATTORNEY GENERAL

May 12, 2026

The Honorable Monique H. Worrell
Office of the State Attorney
Ninth Judicial Circuit
415 North Orange Avenue
Orlando, Florida 32801

Dear Madame State Attorney:

I have been made aware of a recent spate of cases from your circuit indicating that your office abuses Florida's Youthful Offender Act to obtain unusually lenient sentences for very serious crimes. Your office recently agreed to youthful offender sentencing and a reduced prison term for an individual who shot and killed a teenager he planned to rob. Your office also agreed to youthful offender status and a shorter prison term for someone who ran a red light in a stolen car and killed someone. And a man your office prosecuted for possession of dozens of videos showing the rape and sexual abuse of infants and toddlers was also sentenced as a youthful offender to only three years in prison. These sentencing outcomes send a troubling but clear message: the people in your jurisdiction cannot expect justice for even the most vile crimes. You should immediately end what is clearly a policy of excessive leniency.

Florida's Youthful Offender Act provides an alternative sentencing scheme for deserving young criminal defendants to improve their chances of rehabilitation and community reintegration.¹ This is done by "providing them with enhanced vocational, educational, counseling, or public service opportunities" and by "preventing their association with older and more experienced criminals during the terms of their confinement."² A youthful offender's prison term cannot exceed six years.³ Courts may sentence as a youthful offender any person who is "at least 18 years of age," found guilty or pled nolo contendere to a felony "before the defendant turned 21 years of age," and has "not previously been classified as a youthful offender."⁴ Youthful offender sentencing is "not a fundamental right," and a "lower court is under no obligation" to sentence a defendant as a youthful offender "unless the lower court believes such a sentence would be appropriate."⁵

¹ § 958.021, Fla. Stat. (explaining that the purpose of the chapter is "to improve the chances of correction and successful return to the community of youthful offenders sentenced to imprisonment").

² *Id.*

³ § 958.04(2)(d), Fla. Stat.

⁴ § 958.04(1)(a)–(c), Fla. Stat.

⁵ *Jackson v. State*, 191 So. 3d 423, 427 (Fla. 2016) (quoting *Holmes v. State*, 638 So. 2d 986, 987 (Fla. 1st DCA 1994)).

Under your leadership, your office has resorted to youthful offender sentencing in the most unjustifiable circumstances. For example, Marcus Anderson was indicted by a grand jury for first-degree murder and robbery with a firearm for shooting and killing a 17-year-old he planned to rob. You could have sought a death sentence. Nevertheless, your office agreed to a plea deal that allowed him to be sentenced as a youthful offender to only four years in prison. This reduced sentence is grossly disproportionate to the seriousness of the offenses, especially in light of the irreversible harm suffered by the victim’s family. Youthful offender sentencing may be appropriate under certain circumstances, but its application in a case involving intentional homicide undermines the public’s confidence in the administration of justice.

In another case, Yaxiel Ivan Lebron-Flores ran a red light in a stolen car while driving without a license and struck and killed an innocent man returning home from work. He faced a maximum sentence of fifteen years in prison. Your office agreed to a plea deal that allowed him to be sentenced as a youthful offender to only six years. This lenient disposition does little to deter future criminal behavior, fails to deliver justice for the victim and his family, and falls short of affirming the value of the life lost.

In yet another case, Julian Vicente was charged with twenty-five counts of unlawful possession of child sex abuse material, scoring 330 months—more than 27 years—on his sentencing scoresheet. Still, Vicente was sentenced as a youthful offender to only three years but had his adjudication withheld to avoid any prison time. This case reflects a continued pattern of misusing the youthful offender sentencing scheme. Public safety depends in meaningful part on the credible threat of punishment. When those who exploit children face only a slap on the wrist, the safety of society’s most vulnerable is compromised. Mercy to the wolves is cruelty to the sheep.

The old adage that the punishment should fit the crime is not only true as a matter of justice, it is also a requirement of Florida law. Florida’s Criminal Punishment Code mandates that the “primary purpose of sentencing is to punish the offender” and that “[r]ehabilitation is a desired goal of the criminal justice system but is subordinate to the goal of punishment.”⁶ This view harmonizes with what we understand to be right and just.⁷ As C.S. Lewis explained, “to be punished, however severely, because we have deserved it, because we ‘ought to have known better’, is to be treated as a human person made in God’s image.”⁸ Prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment, therefore, is inconsistent with both Florida law and the basic demands of justice.

As Florida’s “chief state legal officer,”⁹ the Attorney General exercises “a general superintendence and direction over the several state attorneys of the several circuits as to the

⁶ § 921.002(1)(b), Fla. Stat.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 58, a. 1 (Fathers of the English Dominican Province trans., Benzinger Bros. ed. 1947) (“Justice is a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will.”).

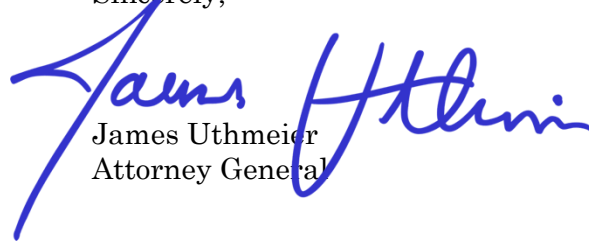
⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment*, *Twentieth Century: An Australian Quarterly Review* (1949).

⁹ Fla. Const. art. IV, § 4(b).

manner of discharging their respective duties.”¹⁰ Pursuant to that authority, provide to my office by May 29, 2026, a record of every case involving a forcible felony, as defined in section 776.08, Florida Statutes, where a defendant was sentenced as a youthful offender.¹¹ The scope of this request is limited to cases in which a sentence has been imposed after January 7, 2025.

Florida has zero tolerance for crimes involving extreme violence, loss of life, and exploitation of children. You should have prevented the plea deals that allowed two killers and a pedophile to be sentenced as youthful offenders to unjust prison terms. You surrendered multiple opportunities to prioritize justice and public safety. And this is not the first time your decisions have eroded the public trust. Your misjudgments—far too numerous and tedious to delineate—have undermined justice and endangered the innocent. I remind you that your conduct is not beyond oversight.¹²

Sincerely,



James Uthmeier
Attorney General

¹⁰ § 16.08, Fla. Stat.; see *U.S. v. Domme*, 753 F. 2d 950, 956 (11th Cir. 1985) (“Florida law further requires the Attorney General to supervise and direct all state attorneys.”).

¹¹ § 958.04, Fla. Stat.

¹² *Worrell v. DeSantis*, 386 So. 3d 867, 869–71 (Fla. 2024) (affirming the Governor’s suspension of Monique Worrell).