

EXHIBIT A



NEWS / CRIME

5 Tampa Bay court cases to watch in 2025

Several high-profile cases are poised for trial or final hearings in the new year.



Gerald Declan Radford is escorted into the courtroom this month for his stand your ground hearing in Tampa. Radford is accused of shooting to death John Walter Lay in a Tampa dog park earlier this year. [DIRK SHADD | Times]

By **Dan Sullivan** *Times staff*

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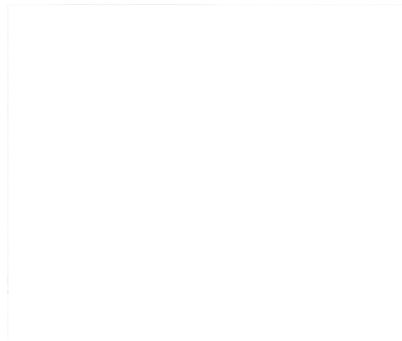
A fatal shooting in a Tampa dog park. A prominent media consultant accused of hacking Fox News. A doctor charged in a lawyer's slaying. They're among the Tampa Bay court cases that have captivated public attention in recent years. All are set to grab renewed interest next year as they head toward trial or final hearings.

Here are five court cases that are sure to make new headlines in 2025.

A hate crime or self-defense?

Gerald Declan Radford claimed it was self-defense when he shot and killed John Walter Lay in February in the Tampa dog park they both frequented.

Gerald Declan Radford sits in court this month during his stand your ground hearing.
[DIRK SHADD | Times]



He wasn't arrested right away, which drew concern among friends of both men. They found it difficult to believe Radford's claim that Lay attacked him. They said Radford had been harassing and threatening Lay for months. They said he seemed bothered by the fact that Lay was gay.

A murder charge came more than a month after Lay's death. Prosecutors labeled the case a hate crime.

In court this month, Radford took the witness stand and spoke publicly for the first time about what he said happened that fateful day at the park. He claimed immunity under Florida's stand your ground law, which says a person faced with a violent confrontation has no duty to retreat and can use deadly force if they reasonably believe it's necessary to do so.

A prosecutor argued that the angle of Lay's wound was inconsistent with Radford's account. A judge ruled in the state's favor, pushing the case

toward trial.

Radford's case is now set to go before a jury in February.

Tim Burke, Fox News and the First Amendment

Tampa media consultant Tim Burke says he was doing journalism when he accessed and published online videos, including some that featured [unaired Fox News footage](#). The government says what Burke did was a crime.

Tim Burke, center, exits the federal courthouse in Tampa with his wife, Tampa City Council member Lynn Hurtak, and attorney Michael Maddux on Feb. 22. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

Burke, who often breaks news and is known for his ability to find and distribute obscure content, argues that the case against him infringes on his First Amendment freedoms.

[Indicted in February](#), Burke is accused of using compromised computer credentials to access and save protected video streams, then publicly disseminating specific clips while masking where the videos came from and how they were obtained.

Burke's lawyers say he did nothing wrong. They say he accessed the videos using credentials that were publicly available. In efforts to get the case against him dismissed, they've criticized the government's handling of the search and seizure of his property, saying the actions violated press freedoms.

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major issues and events in Tampa Bay
and beyond as they happen.

The case is set for trial in June.

A lawyer's disappearance, a doctor accused

Tomasz Kosowski, an Ivy League-educated medical doctor, is accused of [killing Steven Cozzi](#), a Largo attorney.

Kosowski, 45, is a plastic surgeon who worked in Pinellas County and Miami. In 2023, he was representing himself in a lawsuit he filed over a medical billing dispute. Cozzi represented one of the defendants.

Tomasz Kosowski [Pinellas County Sheriff's Office]

The doctor and the lawyer had faced each other in a series of depositions, some of which reportedly became contentious. After one meeting, witnesses recalled, the doctor accosted the lawyer in a law office restroom.

Cozzi vanished one morning in March 2023 after showing up for work at his Largo office. Surveillance videos showed him arriving at the office, but never leaving. He did not call in to a telephone hearing in Kosowski's lawsuit scheduled for that morning, but Kosowski did.

A fellow lawyer found his phone and personal items at his desk, where his computer was open to the text of an unsent email. Investigators would find blood in the office's restroom. Videos also showed a person, who detectives believe was Kosowski, entering the law office that morning with a cart and later leaving with a large object on top of it.

Cellphone records, among other evidence, led authorities to charge Kosowski with murder. Cozzi's [body has never been found](#).

The doctor is set to face trial in May. If he's convicted, prosecutors plan to ask for the death penalty.

A judge faces discipline in a politically charged case

Nancy Jacobs won a blistering campaign in 2022 against then-Hillsborough Circuit Judge Jared Smith, whose [controversial decision in an abortion case](#) brought him a deluge of public criticism.

Smith's ruling concerned a 17-year-old girl who

Judge Nancy Jacobs [Courtesy
of Nancy Jacobs]

applied for a judicial waiver to have an abortion without her parents' consent. He denied her request, finding she didn't demonstrate the maturity, intelligence and other qualities necessary to make the decision. An appeals court panel voted 2-1 to overturn the decision, finding Smith abused his judicial discretion.

The ensuing public outrage made the race between Smith and Jacobs [unusually contentious](#).

Months after Jacobs joined the bench, the state Judicial Qualifications Commission [filed charges against her](#) in the Florida Supreme Court, alleging she violated rules governing judicial campaigns. The case centered on political statements and remarks she made attacking Smith during her campaign. They also took issue with her behavior on and off the bench.

Smith, meanwhile, got promoted. Ousted by voters, [he was appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis](#) to the newly created 6th District Court of Appeal.

Jacobs has acknowledged some mistakes, but continues to defend herself in a case that could result in her removal. Part of her defense rests on free speech arguments.

Her attorney has successfully challenged the appointment of some members of a hearing panel assembled to hear the case, noting their political leanings and ties to the governor, among other concerns.

The disqualifications and recusal of the panel members contributed to a delay in the case. A final hearing is now set for February.

A deputy's death

It's been more than two years since a Pinellas County sheriff's deputy was [killed in a late-night hit-and-run crash](#). A disagreement over the possible sentence for the man accused of causing the collision has stymied plea negotiations and pushed the case toward trial.

Juan Molina-Salles [Pinellas
County Sheriff's Office]

Deputy Michael Hartwick was directing traffic one night in September 2022 at a construction site on Interstate 275 near Roosevelt Boulevard when he was run down by a front-end loader.

Juan Molina-Salles, the construction worker who was operating the machine, kept driving and later fled the area on foot, according to

prosecutors. After a manhunt, Molina-Salles was arrested on a charge of leaving the scene of a crash involving death.

Complicating factors in the case include the fact that Molina-Salles, 34, a Honduran citizen, was not in the U.S. legally.

Earlier this year, his defense argued against adding “[victim injury points](#)” to sentencing guideline calculations. They reasoned that the crime of leaving the scene did not actually contribute to the deputy’s death, since the deputy had already died when Molina-Salles left the scene. That legal distinction could dramatically alter the amount of prison time he could receive if found guilty.

Prosecutors disputed the argument and a judge also rejected it. The case is now set for trial in March.

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NEWS / THE BUZZ ON FLORIDA POLITICS / ELECTIONS

A migrant killed a deputy. A DeSantis agency's probe was 2 pages.

The state contractor that employed the man who was in the U.S. illegally is now under federal investigation.



Investigators at the scene in the westbound lanes of I-275 near Gandy Boulevard on Friday, Sept. 23, 2022, in St. Petersburg, where Deputy Michael Hartwick, 51, was hit and killed overnight Thursday by a construction worker operating a front-end loader at a construction site, according to Sheriff Bob Gaultieri. [DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Times]

By **Emily L. Mahoney** *Times staff*
Justin Garcia *Times staff*

Published Nov. 20, 2023

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Three helicopters hovered above as deputies with bloodhounds searched for the driver of a front-end loader that struck and killed Hartwick as he directed traffic the night of Sept. 22, 2022.

Hours later, one of the hounds detected the man they were seeking, hiding in brush: Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, a Honduran immigrant in the U.S. without legal authorization.

For Gov. Ron DeSantis, the tragedy justified his policies cracking down on illegal immigration.

“We just had a sheriff’s deputy from Pinellas County killed by a twice-deported illegal alien who came across the border illegally,” DeSantis said in a gubernatorial debate a month later. “I didn’t hear any outrage about that.”



Immediately after Hartwick’s death, DeSantis’ administration promised to conduct an internal review of its multimillion-dollar contract with the road-building company that employed Molina-Salles: Archer Western-de Moya Group Joint Venture.

About a year later, the Tampa Bay Times asked Florida’s Department of Transportation for all records pertaining to the state’s review, to see what the state had learned about how a man was hired to operate heavy machinery on a state road project even though he had no driver’s license and, according to law enforcement, used a Social Security number that didn’t belong to him.

Reporters got back two pages.

E-Verify was a DeSantis priority

Since being elected governor in 2018, and in his current bid for the presidency, DeSantis has crafted a political brand around combatting illegal immigration.

He first ran for governor promising that he would require employers to use a federal database called E-Verify to check whether new hires have the proper documents to legally work in the U.S.

The proposal faced pushback from [some Republicans](#), as well as the state's construction, agriculture and tourism industries that often rely on the labor of people without legal status.

In 2020, the Legislature passed a compromise bill [expanding requirements for public employers and their contractors](#) to use E-Verify. Earlier this year, two weeks before DeSantis announced his run for president, [he signed a bill](#) to require private businesses with at least 25 employees to do the same.

He's said the crackdown is needed for public safety, calling President Joe Biden's border policies reckless and dangerous. He has vowed, if elected president, that suspected cartel members would be shot "stone cold dead" at the U.S.-Mexico border.

A year before Hartwick was killed, DeSantis' office took the unusual step of [reaching out to reporters in Jacksonville to highlight a murder case](#) there involving a 24-year-old Honduran man. "This horrific crime is the latest example of how unfettered illegal migration costs Floridians' lives," DeSantis said in a statement to News4Jax at the time.

When the Pinellas County deputy was killed in September 2022, DeSantis' office pledged to learn more about what happened.

"We are currently investigating the matter and looking to determine if illegal immigrants have utilized fraudulent information to obtain employment with contractors working with the State of Florida," [the statement read](#). "As we collect details and examine potential courses of action, we are reminded once again that illegal immigration is a serious and ongoing problem in the United States that has a multifaceted effect on Florida."

A federal investigation begins

The Pinellas case quickly raised questions about the contractor's hiring

practices.

Molina-Salles would tell law enforcement that he struck the deputy by accident. He was charged with fleeing the scene of a crash involving a death, a felony, and has pleaded not guilty.

One of Molina-Salles' co-workers helped him escape, Pinellas County Sheriff's Office investigators found. That man, Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zelaya, was also in the country without legal authorization.

Gomez-Zelaya was charged with being an accessory after the fact in state court, and has pleaded not guilty.

When deputies arrived at the site of the Florida Department of Transportation's Gateway Expressway project on Interstate 275, they discovered that "the majority" of the workers on site were not in the country legally, Pinellas Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said at a news conference at the time, saying it hindered the investigation because the workers were giving them fake names.

Speaking to a room full of reporters, Gualtieri asked how a state contractor could hire unlicensed personnel to do such dangerous work.

"We've got a dead deputy," he said. "We got a guy who shouldn't be here. He shouldn't have been driving that thing. He shouldn't have fled. He shouldn't have done any of this and companies are out there doing that. Why are they doing it? Of course, that is a rhetorical question and I'll answer it: They're doing it because they are making money off of it."

Gualtieri also highlighted the fact that Molina-Salles, in an interview with law enforcement not long after he was found, said that his employer didn't train him on how to drive the loader because he had experience operating similar machinery in Honduras. Molina-Salles also said that he never saw Hartwick before he hit him, in part because a light on the loader's roof was broken.

The day after Hartwick's death, Jessica Ottaviano, a spokesperson for the state transportation department, [told the Times](#) that it appeared the contractor had followed proper hiring procedures of Molina-Salles and Gomez-Zelaya. She added that they cleared E-Verify.

Still, Ottaviano said the department would do "an internal review on this project contract."

Meanwhile, the case drew the attention of the federal government.

As Gualtieri later [confirmed to the Times](#), his office started working with

federal officials, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, on an investigation of the contractor within days of Hartwick's death.

So far, four construction workers, including Molina-Salles and Gomez-Zelaya, have been indicted on charges related to the use of other people's Social Security numbers.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement is helping in the federal investigation, according to a [September news release](#) announcing the indictments. But the state agency has not responded to multiple requests for information about the nature of its participation.

At least one of the indicted men, Allan Oseas Gomez-Zelaya, is in negotiations for a plea deal with the federal government, according to an exchange between his defense lawyer, Jason Mayberry, and a prosecutor during a recent court hearing in Tampa. Plea deals can sometimes, though not always, indicate that a person is cooperating with authorities.

The companies' relationship with the state continues

In the year since Hartwick's death, the state of Florida has continued to pay Archer Western-de Moya Group Joint Venture more than \$38 million in taxpayer money, records show. The Gateway Expressway is a high-profile project that includes toll roads connecting U.S. 19 and I-275, plus widening the interstate to create toll lanes from south of Gandy Boulevard to Fourth Street North.

The contractor is technically a partnership of two companies: The de Moya Group in Miami and Archer Western, a subsidiary of the Chicago-based Walsh Group. Neither company responded to emails and phone calls requesting comment.

Archer Western [has also been contracted by the state](#), along with another company, to build the new Howard Frankland Bridge.

According to campaign finance records, the de Moya Group contributed \$42,500 to DeSantis' political committee for his two races for governor. At least two of the company's top executives have written checks to DeSantis' presidential campaign.

Archer Western has rarely given to any individual candidates in Florida. Neither the company nor its parent corporation has given directly to DeSantis' campaigns for governor or president. But Archer Western has contributed tens of thousands in recent years to a Florida Transportation Builders' Association political committee, which in turn has donated

more than \$280,000 to DeSantis' bids for governor. The association is the primary lobbying group in Tallahassee for road builders.

The governor's office did not respond to emailed questions for this story, including about the transportation department's review or whether DeSantis was still confident in E-Verify as a tool to enforce the immigration crackdown laws he has pushed.

A year later, state officials say two pages — confirmation sheets from the E-Verify system confirming both men had passed the check — make up the entirety of the Department of Transportation's internal review of the project contract with the Archer Western-de Moya Group Joint Venture that it promised after the incident.

Those two pages confirm what the state had already said publicly a day after the 2022 incident when it pledged to conduct the review.

Michael Williams, a spokesperson for the Florida Department of Transportation, confirmed no additional records related to the internal review existed because it consisted of confirming the men had passed E-Verify.

The department "found Archer-Western complied with their contractual obligations to comply with federal law and the review was closed," he said in a statement.

Williams added that the department "is not an investigative body" and the question of whether the two men were using false identification was better suited for law enforcement.

Gualtieri said he understands that the Florida Department of Transportation is "very limited" because it does not have the same investigative tools that law enforcement does.

"That's of course what the investigation on our side is trying to uncover: Who, if anyone, and at what levels within the company had knowledge of it," Gualtieri said, referencing the hiring of workers without legal immigration status.

Two months ago, the Florida Transportation Builders' Association announced a slate of "Best in Construction" awards for various projects around the state. The winners are chosen from nominations by the Florida Department of Transportation.

Archer Western and the de Moya Group were among the 14 winners.



NEWS / THE BUZZ ON FLORIDA POLITICS

DeSantis says company not at fault after migrant killed Pinellas deputy

The Florida governor's comments were his most substantive yet on a company under investigation.



Construction workers walk from the scene in the westbound lanes of I-275 near Gandy Boulevard on Friday, Sep 23, 2022, in St. Petersburg, where Deputy Michael Hartwick, 51, was hit and killed overnight Thursday by a construction worker operating a front end loader at a construction site with a fork lift, according to Sheriff Bob Gualtieri. [DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Times]

By **Lawrence Mower** *Times staff*

Emily L. Mahoney *Times staff*

Published 4 hours ago

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someone in the country illegally.

However, DeSantis rarely mentions the fact that the man driving the machinery was working for a state contractor, Archer Western-de Moya Group Joint Venture, overseen by his administration.

Last week at an unrelated news conference, the governor defended the company, saying that it was the victim of an “interstate fraud ring” of people who created fake IDs to pass citizenship verification screenings, DeSantis said.



One of the people with a fake ID was Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, who was operating the front-end loader that hit Hartwick at a construction site on Interstate 275. There, Archer Western and its partner company were building the Gateway Expressway. Molina-Salles, who fled the scene, said it was an accident.

“It’s not a business’s fault,” DeSantis said. “If someone has bona fide documents and they pass it, I can’t blame the business at that point.”

DeSantis’ comments were his most substantive remarks to date about the incident. But they also represent an unflinching defense of a company with a history of hiring workers in the country illegally and whose safety protocols have been questioned since the deputy’s death.



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In 2021, Pinellas Park police reported Archer Western to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after another worker who was in the country illegally was struck and killed by a concrete pillar at the same work site, [the Times previously reported](#).

After Hartwick was killed a year later, Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri held a news conference in which he said investigators struggled because many workers were lying about their identities.

Molina-Salles told law enforcement that his employer didn't train him on how to drive the loader because he operated similar machinery in Honduras, Gualtieri said.

Molina-Salles also said that he never saw Hartwick, who was guiding traffic that night, in part because one of the loader's lights was broken.

According to depositions in the state case against Molina-Salles, Archer Western had a policy to instruct law enforcement officers working near construction sites to wear safety vests anytime they left their patrol cars.

But another officer often assigned to work the same site told lawyers that the company never instructed him on this policy, before or after Hartwick's death.

Gualtieri said Friday that he was not aware of an interstate fraud ring to make fake IDs, as DeSantis alleged.

Gualtieri forwarded his office's findings to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which reports to the president, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which reports to DeSantis. The Florida Department of Transportation's [internal review after the incident was two pages](#).

Gualtieri previously said [the federal investigation was trying to uncover](#) "who at what levels of the company knew what" about the hiring of workers in the country illegally.

At least 14 construction workers from the job site, including Molina-Salles, have been federally indicted for using Social Security numbers that weren't theirs in order to work while in the country illegally. Several of them reached plea agreements in exchange for helping the feds investigate, court records show.

The state's response to Hartwick's death [was criticized by Senate Minority](#)

[Leader Jason Pizzo, D-Miami](#), over the past three weeks during a heated debate between DeSantis and the Legislature over how to respond to illegal immigration.

Lawmakers eventually passed legislation that increases penalties for people in the country illegally, but [did nothing to crack down on businesses that hire them](#).

After signing the bills into law on Thursday, the Times/Herald asked DeSantis why the state didn't appear to have penalized Archer Western after Hartwick's death.

DeSantis said it "wasn't true" that the state didn't hold Archer Western accountable.

"We absolutely pursued," DeSantis said. "The reality was, it was an out-of-state contractor. There was a lot of shady things going on, but we absolutely did pursue that."

When asked twice how the state penalized Archer Western, DeSantis said, "What you're saying is totally false."

At a news conference the next day, DeSantis said that he didn't think the company was at fault.

The state has continued to pay millions to the contractor. Archer Western, in partnership with another contractor, Traylor Bros, is finishing up [the most expensive bridge project in Florida history](#): the \$865 million revamp of the Howard Frankland.

More information about the company's hiring practices could emerge soon in state court. The trial of Molina-Salles is scheduled to begin March 3. A pretrial hearing is scheduled for Wednesday.

He has pleaded not guilty to leaving the scene of a crash involving death, a first-degree felony with a sentence of up to 30 years in prison.

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NEWS / THE BUZZ ON FLORIDA POLITICS

DeSantis state contractor was reported to feds a year before deputy death

After the 2021 death of a worker, Pinellas Park police reported the company to immigration officials.



Archer Western-de Moya Joint Venture employees work on the Gateway Expressway project in Pinellas County on Feb. 27, 2019. [DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Tampa Bay Times]

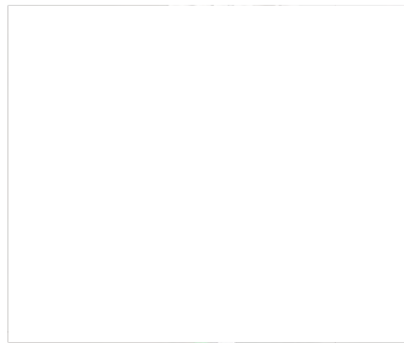
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Published Jan. 31, 2024 | Updated Jan. 31, 2024

Nearly a year before Pinellas Sheriff's Deputy Michael Hartwick was struck and killed by a construction worker who was not in the country legally, another man's death at the same work site prompted the company to be reported to immigration authorities.

The state contractor, a road-building company called Archer Western, as well as its partner company on the Gateway Expressway project, The de Moya Group, [are now under a federal investigation sparked by Hartwick's death](#), with multiple agencies focusing on the companies' hiring practices.

But police records show that Hartwick's September 2022 death was not the first time law enforcement flagged the immigration issues now at the heart of a federal probe.



In October 2021, Pinellas Park police responded to the death of a different man at the same job site, where two tolled roadways are being built [to connect Interstate 275 with U.S. 19 and the Bayside Bridge](#). Lonin Obando was struck by a concrete pillar weighing 18,500 pounds that was hanging from a crane, pinning him against a wall and crushing him.

Officers interviewed witnesses, including one man who had to "look up" his date of birth, according to a police report. After struggling to confirm the dead man's identity, police said his widow arrived at the hospital and told officers he had been in the country illegally.

Police reported Archer Western to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the officers noted in the 2021 report.

It's unclear whether Immigration and Customs Enforcement started an investigation. The agency didn't respond to multiple requests for comment. Sgt. Zachary Huff, a Pinellas Park police spokesperson, said the department didn't get more information from the federal agency.

That Archer Western had been flagged to federal authorities a year before

Hartwick's death has not been publicly reported. Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said he did not know about the previous case until informed by the Tampa Bay Times.

Gualtieri's office is working with federal investigators, as well as the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, on an investigation into Archer Western-de Moya Joint Venture that was launched after Hartwick's death in September 2022.

Hartwick was killed when Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, a construction worker who was in the country illegally, hit the deputy with a front-end loader. Molina-Salles would later tell officers the loader had a broken light and he didn't see the deputy. Hartwick was just [the second line-of-duty death for the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office in 110 years.](#)

Gualtieri said the fact that Archer Western had been reported previously to immigration authorities only deepened his suspicions about the company's hiring.

"The ultimate question, which we still don't know the answer to, is who at what levels of the company knew what" about the hiring of workers in the country illegally, he said.

He said there was already a "huge red flag" after so many workers seemed to be lying about their identities when the Pinellas Sheriff's Office investigated Hartwick's killing. The IDs belonging to Molina-Salles also raised questions, Gualtieri said. Molina-Salles has pleaded not guilty to fleeing the scene of a crash involving a death.

"A kindergartner could figure out" that the documents weren't legitimate, Gualtieri said. "The photo, it was terrible. The whole thing looked fake. ... They checked the box. 'Give me something we can put in the file, that we can run through E-Verify and there we go.' But there's a difference between doing the thing and doing the right thing."

E-Verify is the federal online system that checks the immigration status of employees. The state requires companies that employ more than 25 employees to use it. Smaller companies, however, don't have to.

The partnership of the two companies issued a brief statement to the Times that said "for the duration of the Gateway Expressway project, Archer Western-de Moya Joint Venture II has abided by all applicable local, state, and federal laws relating to the hiring of its employees,

including utilization of the E-Verify process to verify employment eligibility for all newly hired employees.”

Since Hartwick’s death, the state has paid Archer Western-de Moya Joint Venture more than \$44 million in taxpayer money, records show. That doesn’t include the additional millions Archer Western and another company have been paid for a second contract to construct the new Howard Frankland Bridge.

The Times sent emailed questions to the Florida Department of Transportation about whether it was aware that one of its major contractors had been reported to immigration authorities in 2021.

“Upon initial research, the department is not aware of any hiring violations with this contractor on this project, and we are unable to confirm what communication may have transpired at that point in time,” spokesperson Michael Williams said in response. He added that law enforcement agencies would have “coordinated directly with the contractor.”

Bruce Bartlett, the Republican state attorney for the Sixth Judicial Circuit, which includes Pinellas County, said that Hartwick’s death, which he believes was an accident, should lead to action.

Bartlett said that federal officials can often be “tight-lipped” with the state during investigations. But now that the state is aware of problems with Archer Western’s hiring practices, Florida leadership should pay attention.

“You would think you would have some statewide intervention, maybe within the contracts,” Bartlett said. He later added: “It’s a bad situation, and you would think that something would be done.”

Gov. Ron DeSantis made cracking down on illegal immigration a core pledge of his failed presidential campaign. Earlier this month, he published [an op-ed in the Des Moines Register](#) in Iowa saying President Joe Biden “has failed to fulfill his constitutional oath to take care that the laws be faithfully executed” when it comes to immigration.

Florida requires all state-funded contractors to hire legal workers, something that DeSantis championed when he became governor.

The governor’s office did not respond to multiple emails requesting comment.

Last year, DeSantis signed into law what his office called “the strongest anti-illegal immigration legislation in the country.” In addition to

requiring E-Verify for employers with 25 or more workers, it mandated that hospitals accepting Medicaid collect information on the legal status of patients and made it a third-degree felony to “knowingly and willfully” transport a person without legal status into Florida.

But [questions have been raised](#) about the law’s effectiveness in preventing companies from hiring workers who lack legal authorization. Four workers from the Gateway Expressway construction site, including Molina-Salles, have been indicted since Hartwick’s death for using other people’s Social Security numbers, which may have allowed them to pass E-Verify. Two of the men have signed plea agreements, though Molina-Salles isn’t one of them.

In the case of Obando’s death, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration later found that the incident [could have been prevented by his employer, citing the contractor for inadequate training and damaged equipment.](#)

Williams, the Florida Department of Transportation spokesperson, did not directly respond to questions about whether the department monitors if its contractors are cited for federal safety violations.

“Loss of life is tragic under any circumstance, and it is especially sad to learn of incidents that occur within (Florida Department of Transportation) job sites,” Williams said. The state agency “consistently emphasizes a culture of safety to our contractors.”

Obando and Hartwick weren’t the only people to die at the Gateway Expressway construction site since it started in 2017.

In March 2023, 55-year-old Edward Wilson, a flagger directing traffic, was hit by an SUV. According to the Florida Highway Patrol, the SUV was going about 45 mph.

Times staff writer Juan Carlos Chavez contributed to this report.

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NEWS / THE BUZZ ON FLORIDA POLITICS

DeSantis takes action on immigration without going after businesses

A Democrat wanted to require all businesses to use E-Verify, but Republican senators ruled it “out of order.”



Florida House Speaker Daniel Perez and Senate President Ben Albritton watch Gov. Ron DeSantis sign legislation to address i Thursday, Feb. 13, 2025. [LAWRENCE MOWER | Lawrence Mower]

By **Lawrence Mower** Times staff

0:01 / 0:15

Published Feb. 13 | Updated Feb. 14

effort to bolster President Donald Trump's immigration agenda.

There's one topic that was off the table, though: Going after the companies hiring those migrants.

In bills [passed by the Legislature and signed by DeSantis](#) on Thursday, state lawmakers aren't requiring more companies to screen workers through E-Verify, the federal database that confirms an employee's citizenship status. They aren't assigning more resources to enforce it and aren't increasing penalties for companies who violate it.

Search for

Democrats seized on the omission this week, saying it runs counter to claims by DeSantis and Republican leaders that they were passing the "toughest" immigration laws in the nation.

"You're not a serious person, politician or public servant if you are not recognizing, identifying and doing something about employment," Sen. Jason Pizzo, D-Miami, said Wednesday.

"This is weak. Really, really, really weak," he added.

Florida lawmakers long resisted imposing E-Verify requirements on businesses, who overwhelmingly fund their political campaigns.

That changed in 2020, when DeSantis pushed lawmakers to require all public employers, contractors and subcontractors to screen new employees through E-Verify. In 2023, lawmakers expanded the requirement to private employers with 25 or more employees.

But it captures less than 20% of Florida companies and [can be circumvented by employers and employees](#).

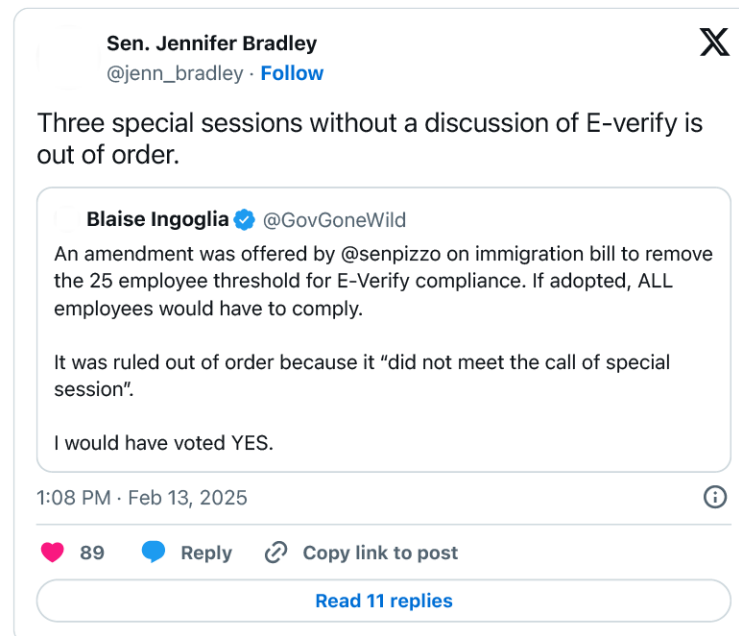
It's also far from the toughest in the nation.

Arizona, Mississippi and Alabama require all employers to screen workers. Georgia since 2013 has required all employers with 10 or more workers to screen them. (Employers in Georgia, with half the population of Florida, were the biggest users of E-Verify in 2023, [according to the federal program](#).)

None of the 32 bills proposed by lawmakers [or DeSantis](#) over the last month have proposed expanding it to more businesses.

On Thursday, Pizzo filed an amendment to require all businesses to screen employees through E-Verify, but Republican senators ruled it “out of order” to avoid taking a vote on it.

“Three special sessions without a discussion of E-Verify is out of order,” Sen. Jennifer Bradley, R-Fleming Island, [later posted on X](#).



DeSantis said Thursday that he supported expanding the requirements to all new employees in the upcoming legislative session, scheduled to begin March 4.

“When I proposed E-Verify originally, I wanted it for all employees,” he said.

Republican lawmakers this week said they would consider it.

In the meantime, some blamed DeSantis for not using the laws already on the books.

“We passed a bill about E-Verify. It hasn’t been particularly enforced,” said Sen. Randy Fine, R-Melbourne Beach.

Until two weeks ago, DeSantis’ administration had not taken any action against an employer for violating E-Verify requirements. The state [also took no action against a state contractor](#) after a Pinellas County sheriff’s deputy was killed by a man in the country illegally who was working for the company. (The worker and a colleague cleared E-Verify through out-of-state IDs.)

After Republican [lawmakers started asking questions](#) about the lack of enforcement last month, DeSantis’ administration issued warning letters to 40 companies.

The letters [blamed the Legislature for not funding E-Verify enforcement](#), which lawmakers dispute.

The legislation signed Thursday — part of a deal between DeSantis and state legislative leaders — does not include any additional resources for enforcement. (The bills do enhance penalties for people in the country illegally who commit crimes.)

Nor does the legislation enhance penalties for companies that violate E-Verify provisions. Companies [can avoid screenings by hiring workers as subcontractors](#), after those workers obtain a taxpayer ID number and establish a corporation or limited liability company.

Rep. Lawrence McClure, R-Dover, said lawmakers don’t know what steps to take with E-Verify because they currently have no data from DeSantis’ Department of Commerce to know how effective E-Verify is in the first place.

“If you’re not enforcing it, you can expand it until you’re blue in the face,” McClure said. “Start the evaluation process, get data and then adjust.”

Lawrence Mower is a Tallahassee correspondent, covering politics and the state capitol. Reach him at lmower@tampabay.com.

NEWS / PINELLAS

Feds investigating state-funded contractor tied to Florida deputy death

The DeSantis administration has paid millions to the firm since officials said one of its workers, who was in the U.S. illegally, killed a Pinellas deputy.



Tony Karlhofer, of Largo, places flowers near a makeshift memorial for Deputy Michael Hartwick, at the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office headquarters on Friday, Sept. 23, 2022, in Largo. [JEFFEREE WOO | Times]

By **Emily L. Mahoney** *Times staff*
Justin Garcia *Times staff*

Published Sept. 8, 2023 | Updated Sept. 8, 2023

Federal and local law enforcement officials are investigating a prominent construction contractor that hired several workers who were in the country illegally, including a man who was later charged in connection with the [death of a Pinellas County sheriff's deputy](#) last year.

Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri confirmed his office is involved in an investigation into the firm — technically a partnership of two construction companies, Archer Western and The de Moya Group. He said the investigation has been going on since September 2022, when Michael Hartwick died after being struck by a front-end loader operated by a construction worker at a roadwork site on Interstate

275.

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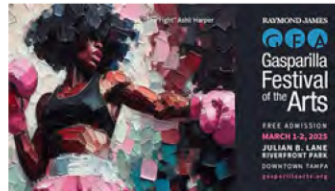
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federal charges are possible.

Gualtieri [previously](#) said the contractor had hired “a bunch” of migrants not able to legally work in the U.S., but the existence of the investigation has not previously been reported.

Gualtieri said Friday that the investigation into the company was “warranted” after the facts of the case prompted “concerns about their practices in hiring and verification and fictitious identification.” He added, “There were indications it was beyond just the limited circumstance” of the worker who was charged in connection with Hartwick’s death.



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Archer Western, a subsidiary of the Walsh Group construction company, is headquartered in Atlanta but has an office in Tampa. The de Moya Group is based in Miami. Neither company responded to requests for comment made by phone and email.

USF needs a new preside [Read More](#)

The Archer Western-de Moya Group Joint Venture does millions of dollars' worth of business with the state of Florida on various highway construction projects, and it has been paid more than \$37 million by Gov.



plus widening the interstate to create express lanes from south of Gandy Boulevard to Fourth Street North.

The joint venture employed Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, a Honduran immigrant in the U.S. without legal authorization, when law enforcement said he hit Hartwick with a front-end loader, killing him instantly. Hartwick was directing traffic away from the work crews near Roosevelt Boulevard.

Molina-Salles was charged with leaving the scene of a crash involving death, a first-degree felony that carries a maximum prison sentence of 30 years and a mandatory minimum of four years. Another worker, Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zelaya, also in the country without legal authorization, took Molina-Salles' construction vest and helmet and hid them in the woods while he ran away, deputies said. Gomez-Zelaya was charged with being an accessory after the fact, a felony. Both criminal cases are ongoing and both men have pleaded not guilty.

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DeSantis, who has made cracking down on illegal immigration a major part of his presidential campaign, attended Hartwick's funeral last year. He also referenced the killing during a 2022 debate as he sought reelection, saying he "didn't hear any of the outrage" about Hartwick's death while Democrats criticized DeSantis' move to charter [planeloads of migrants](#) to liberal cities like Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.

Logos for Archer Western can still regularly be seen at an active construction site in the same area as last year's incident, on I-275 in St. Petersburg.

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NEWS / THE BUZZ ON FLORIDA POLITICS

Republican lawmakers question DeSantis' immigration record

Lawmakers cited his performance on key initiatives.



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis listens to a question during a news conference Sept. 7, 2022, in Miami. [REBECCA BLACKWELL | AP]

By **Lawrence Mower** *Times staff*

Published Jan. 28

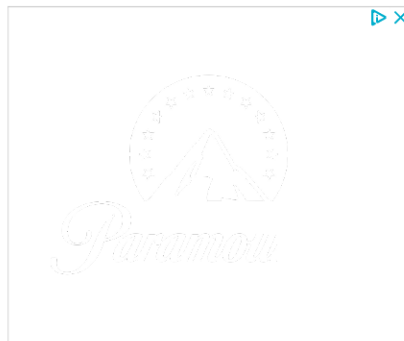
TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Ron DeSantis' call for a special legislative session to address illegal immigration has [exposed a long-simmering feud with](#)

x

transparency of two of his key immigration initiatives.

Over the last two days, Republican lawmakers have cited the performance of his migrant relocation program and E-Verify to justify stripping him of nearly all of his immigration enforcement powers and giving them to the state's agriculture commissioner.

State lawmakers in 2022 gave DeSantis \$12 million to transport migrants from Florida to other states, which he used later that year to fly about 50 migrants [from Texas to Martha's Vineyard](#).



The decision generated a blitz of headlines and outrage. He did one other flight, from Texas to Sacramento, California, in 2023. But since then, it's not clear what DeSantis has done with the money. As of March last year, [\\$9.4 million of it was unspent](#).

Top Republican lawmakers this week said they didn't know how many migrants, if any, were ever transported from Florida to other states.

"That's why we should have accountability," said Sen. Joe Gruters, R-Sarasota. "That's why having a single person, a single office and having a laser focus is going to help everybody."

Under the [legislation passed Tuesday night](#), the program would be given to Agriculture Commissioner Wilton Simpson, who would study the effectiveness of the program and decide whether it should continue, Gruters said.

The governor's office did not respond to questions on Tuesday about how many migrants it has relocated from Florida. The program is still active and run by a private company whose operations have remained secretive. The contractor, for example, operates under a fictitious name.

The performance of the program was cited by Republicans in rejecting DeSantis' request this week for \$350 million to expand the program to [fly migrants to other countries](#).

“I don’t think that the proposal we saw originally in the governor’s proposed ideas made a lot of sense, quite frankly,” Rep. Lawrence McClure, R-Dover, told lawmakers Tuesday.

Lawmakers also cited the performance of DeSantis' handling of E-Verify, a federal program that checks the legal eligibility of new workers.

DeSantis signed legislation in 2023 requiring all large employers to screen their employees through the program, part of a series of immigration laws that [he touted as the “strongest” in the nation](#).

Since then, his administration has yet to cite a single employer for violating it.

Gruters told lawmakers that the state has issued eight letters to companies for not complying with the E-Verify requirements. All of those letters were issued in 2022, according to the [website of the Florida Department of Commerce](#), which reports to DeSantis.

“Eight letters since 2022. Why hasn’t it been more?” Gruters said.

Department of Commerce spokesperson Emily Hetherington said Tuesday that it was “actively conducting more than one hundred investigations,” which “take time.”

The bill lawmakers passed Tuesday would put the program under Simpson and add 17 people devoted to E-Verify audits.

“We don’t have clarity out of the Department of Commerce or FDLE (Florida Department of Law Enforcement),” McClure said. “There’s not a lot of data there, which is concerning.”

Sen. Jason Pizzo, D-Miami, noted Tuesday that DeSantis didn’t hold accountable a state road contractor after one of its employees, a Honduran immigrant in the country illegally, killed Pinellas Sheriff’s Deputy Michael Hartwick at a construction site.

[The state’s review of the incident was two pages](#), the Tampa Bay Times found. Police had [also reported the company to federal immigration officials](#) a year earlier.

“The bottom line is, the governor is not good at this,” Pizzo said.

Sen. Randy Fine, R-Melbourne Beach, who has accused DeSantis of “flailing” in his final two years in office, said taking this off DeSantis' plate makes sense.

“I would say the governor has more to do than Wilton Simpson does,” Fine said. “He’s got a state to run.”

Times/Herald Tallahassee bureau reporters Ana Ceballos and Romy Ellenbogen contributed to this report.

Lawrence Mower is a Tallahassee correspondent, covering politics and the state capitol. Reach him at lmower@tampabay.com.



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NEWS / PINELLAS

'Victim injury' could guide penalty in Pinellas deputy's death

A dispute over sentencing calculations hangs up plea negotiations for a construction worker accused of leaving after hitting deputy.



Juan Molina-Salles is charged with leaving the scene of a crash involving death. Investigators said he fatally struck Pinellas sheriff's Deputy Michael Hartwick with a front-end loader at a construction site on Interstate 275 near Roosevelt Boulevard. [Pinellas County Sheriff's Office]

By **Dan Sullivan** *Times staff*

Published April 12, 2024 | Updated April 12, 2024

LARGO — If Juan Molina-Salles is guilty of fleeing from a late-night collision that killed a Pinellas County sheriff's deputy, did his criminal act result in the deputy's death? It is a delicate and legally nuanced question that hangs at the center of the construction worker's pending criminal case.

Molina-Salles faces a single charge of leaving the scene of a crash involving death for the September 2022 collision that killed Deputy Michael Hartwick.

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His attorneys don't dispute the tragic circumstances. But in court this week they argued against a notion that his departure from the scene of the accident that night contributed to the deputy's injuries. Rather, they argued the deputy was already dead when Molina-Salles left the scene.

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That distinction could dramatically alter the amount of possible prison time he might receive if found guilty. And it weighs heavily on his attorneys' efforts to negotiate a possible plea deal.

"I'm at a little bit of a loss in how to advise my client," Assistant Public Defender Maria Deliberato told a judge in a court hearing Thursday.

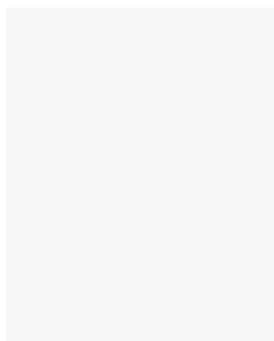
Molina-Salles, 33, tall and heavysset, stood quietly, his hands folded in front of him as a Spanish interpreter whispered.



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By Gasparilla Festival of the Arts

The legal argument was the latest turn in the case, which has since spurred [further investigations](#). They've centered on the construction company that employed Molina-Salles, an immigrant from Honduras who lacks proper legal documents. Several of his co-workers were also immigrants who were not employed legally.

The collision happened late the night of Sept. 22, 2022. Molina-Salles was driving a front-end loader at a construction site on Interstate 275 near Roosevelt Boulevard. Deputy Hartwick had blocked part of the road with his car and stepped out to direct traffic.



Hartwick, who was working off-duty and was in full uniform, was standing near the road's shoulder when the loader, moving at about 20 mph, hit him.

Deputy Michael Hartwick [The
Pinellas County Sheriff's Office]

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Molina-Salles kept driving to a parking lot about a quarter-mile away. Crying, he told another construction worker he'd killed a deputy, investigators said. His co-worker took his helmet and construction vest and hid them while Molina-Salles fled on foot.

Sheriff's deputies were initially given a false name for Molina-Salles, hampering the early search for him. They later found him hiding in some brush and thereafter learned his real name. He told investigators the loader had a broken light and he didn't see the deputy.


In a court paper filed this month, his defense asked a judge to exclude "victim injury points" in a score sheet the state uses to determine sentencing guidelines.

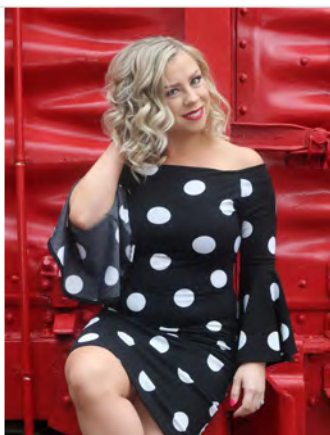
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The points, the defense argued, can only be a factor if Molina-Salles' criminal act contributed to the deputy's death. In this case, the criminal act was his departure from the scene. Citing case law, they argued that since the deputy's death was not a direct result of Molina-Salles leaving the scene, the points cannot apply.

Assistant State Attorney Elizabeth Constantine countered that Florida statutes have changed. The current law, she said, allows for such points in calculating a guideline sentence.

The defense asked for a judge to decide the issue, so that they could better advise Molina-Salles about his options for a potential plea deal.

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Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Judge Pat Siracusa sided with the state, concluding

that the law allows victim injury points to factor into sentencing guidelines in a case like this.

Deliberato said the defense had discussed a potential offer that would have Molina-Salles receive a 10-year prison sentence. But prosecutors said 10 years in prison would not be high enough.

Their counteroffer ranged upward of 20 years, Deliberato said. Such a sentence would be unusual for such a charge, she said.

Without the "victim injury points," state sentencing guidelines peg Molina-Salles' possible sentence at less than three years in prison. He has no criminal history. The criminal charge carries a mandatory minimum penalty of four years.

With the added points, though, the low end of his sentencing guidelines stand at a little more than 10 years.

The maximum penalty is 30 years.

Further legal arguments are expected ahead of a trial date, set for November.



Dan Sullivan is a criminal justice reporter. Reach him at dsullivan@tampabay.com.

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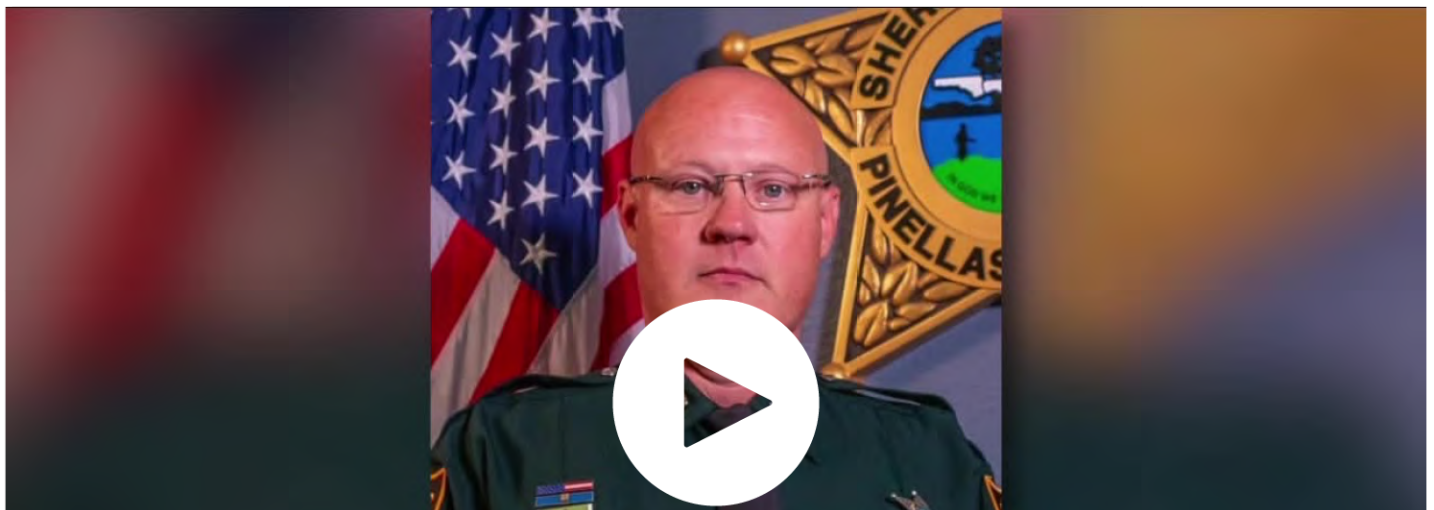
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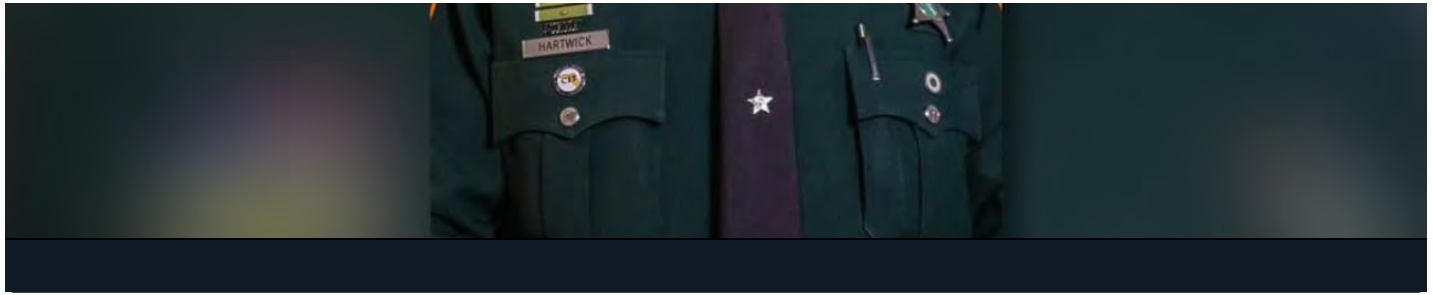
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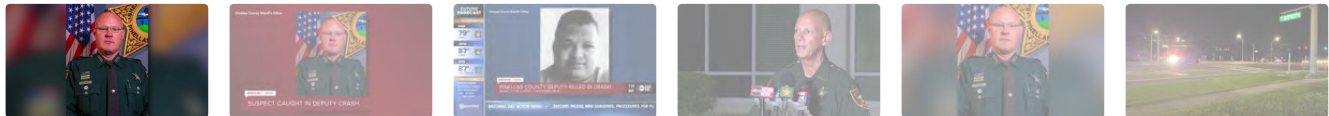
Undocumented worker accused of hitting, killing Pinellas deputy on I-275, sheriff says

I-275 was closed during the investigation





Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said the man suspected of a hit-and-run crash that killed a Pinellas County deputy Thursday night along I-275 was an undocumented migrant who was captured Friday morning. According to Sheriff Gualtieri, Deputy Michael Hartwick, 51, was working a traffic detail on I-275 to provide safety and security for the ongoing construction along the road. Gualtieri said Deputy Hartwick arrived at the location around 10:40 p.m. The PCSO said Hartwick got out of his cruiser and walked around the front of his car onto the shoulder of the road. Gualtieri said a few minutes later, a frontloader with forklift type arms passed by the area traveling approximately 20 miles per hour and escorted by a white pickup truck. <https://wfts.tv/3C2MKnu>

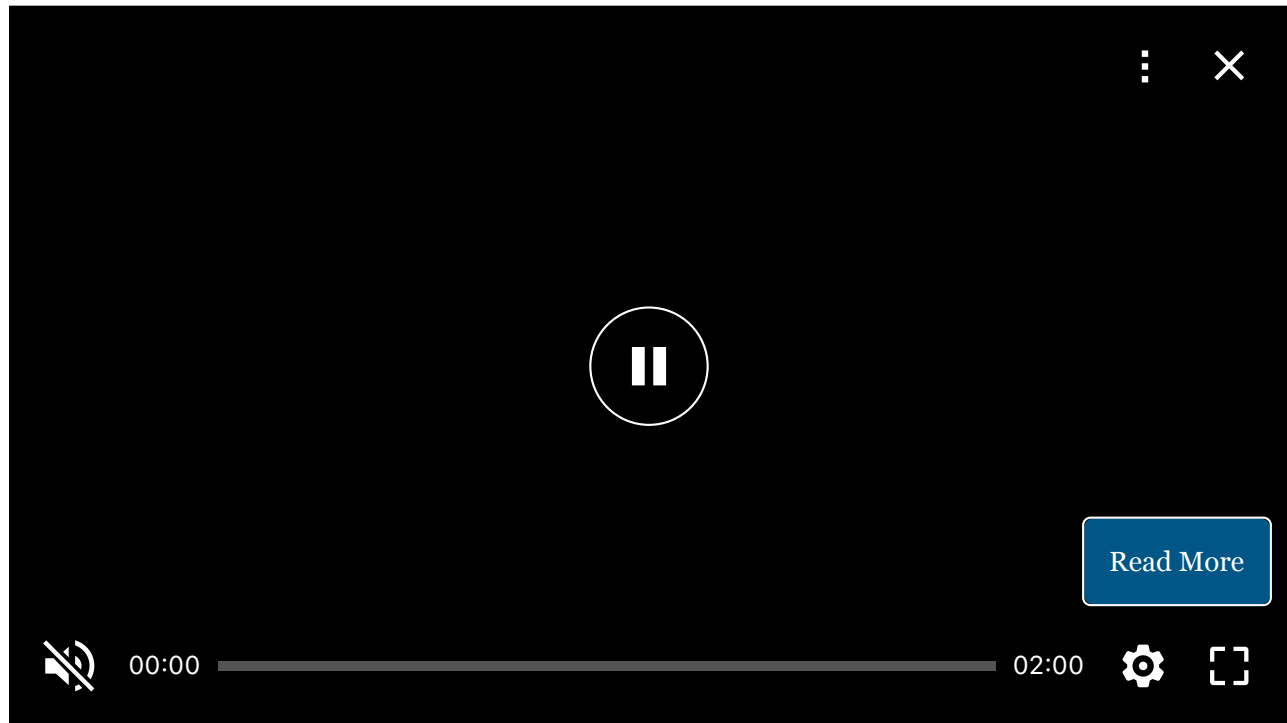


By: Emily McCain

Posted 4:59 AM, Sep 23, 2022 and last updated 11:28 PM, Sep 23, 2022

PINELLAS COUNTY, Fla. — Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said the man suspected of a hit-and-run crash that killed a Pinellas County deputy Thursday night along I-275 was an undocumented migrant who was captured Friday morning.

According to Sheriff Gualtieri, Deputy Michael Hartwick, 51, was working a traffic detail on I-275 to provide safety and security for the ongoing construction along the road. Gualtieri said Deputy Hartwick arrived at the location around 10:40 p.m.



The PCSO said Hartwick got out of his cruiser and walked around the front of his car onto the shoulder of the road. Gualtieri said a few minutes later, a frontloader with forklift type arms passed by the area traveling approximately 20 miles per hour and escorted by a white pickup truck.

PCSO said the front loader hit and killed Deputy Hartwick instantly. The truck stopped, but Gualtieri said the front loader continued down the road before eventually pulling off to the side of the road.



Deputy Michael Hartwick

E.O.W. September 22, 2022

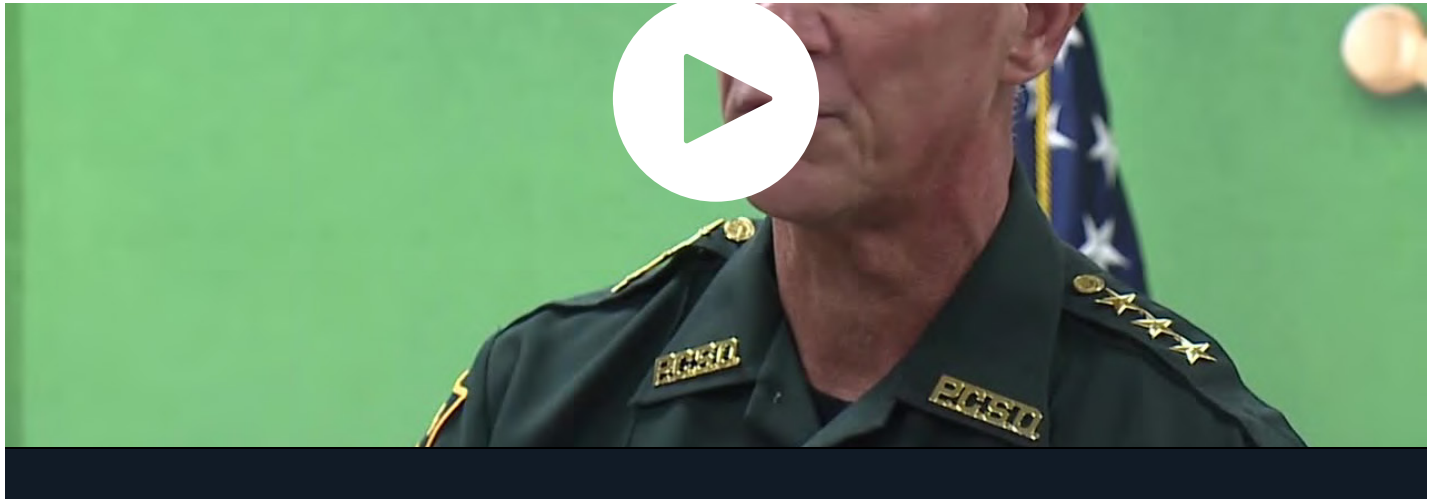
According to Gualtieri, the driver of the front loader is Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, 32, of Honduras. After stopping, Molina-Salles allegedly took off his construction vest and hat and gave them to another worker and asked him to get rid of both. Deputies said Molina-Salles then left the area heading north.

[Editor's Note: The PCSO originally named the suspect as Victor Vazquez-Real, 35. However, Sheriff Gualtieri said at a Friday afternoon press conference that the original name given to law enforcement was fake.]

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office said that started a nine-hour manhunt with three helicopters, hundreds of law enforcement officers, and all the police K-9 units.

Gualtieri said the investigation was hindered from the very beginning as most of the construction workers were giving false names because many were also undocumented workers. The sheriff said the company employing the workers is Archer Western in Tampa and it is a contractor for the Florida Department of Transportation.





“They shouldn’t be out there and they shouldn’t be doing this,” Gualtieri said.

As the manhunt continued, Gualtieri said they requested the aid of Pasco County bloodhound units to find the suspect. Gualtieri said Molina-Salles at one point tried to get his roommate in Tampa to pick him up after the deadly crash. However, the roommate, also an undocumented worker, turned around and refused to come get him when that person saw the law enforcement presence.

According to the sheriff, the move to bring in the bloodhounds paid off and Molina-Salles was arrested around 8:45 a.m. Friday.

Gualtieri said sheriff’s deputies can’t do much with the company employing the undocumented workers or with the workers themselves due to immigration law. The sheriff said Molina-Salles had entered the country once illegally and was deported back to Mexico, but later returned through Eagle Pass, Texas and had been in Tampa since March.

The death of Deputy Hartwick is the second in a year and a half for the Pinellas

County Sheriff's Office.

"All I can say is, here we go again," Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said early Friday morning. "This is 18 months after Deputy Magli was killed. We go 110 years in the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office with no line of duty deaths — now we have two in 18 months."

Deputy Michael Magli, a 30-year-old deputy, was [hit and killed by a drunk driver](#) in Pinellas County in February 2021. The [suspect pled guilty earlier this month](#) and received a 35-year prison sentence.

Gualtieri said a procession is scheduled for Friday afternoon to escort Hartwick from the Medical Examiner's Office located at 10900 Ulmerton Road in Largo to the Thomas B. Dobies Funeral Home in Tarpon Springs.



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The procession will start around 3:30 p.m. It will travel eastbound on Ulmerton Road, north on U.S. Highway 19, and west on East Tarpon Avenue to the funeral home. Anyone who would like to pay their respects is asked to stage north of Republic Drive, on the east side of the road.

Sheriff Gualtieri said Molina-Salles faces a charge of leaving the scene of an accident with a death and it's punishable by up to 30 years in prison, with a minimum mandatory sentence of four-years in prison if convicted. Molina-Salles was scheduled to be moved to the Pinellas County Jail Friday afternoon. There's also an immigration hold on Molina-Salles if he is given bond on the local charge.

The construction worker who allegedly took Molina-Salles' gear is Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zalaya, 31, who was also an undocumented immigrant from Honduras. Gualtieri said he was charged with accessory after the fact.

FDOT released this statement:

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) offers our heartfelt condolences to Deputy Hartwick's family and the entire law enforcement community. From all accounts, Deputy Hartwick was a model law enforcement officer, and we stand willing and able to assist the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office in any way possible.

FDOT and its contractors follow strict hiring procedures. While it appears that these hiring procedures were followed, including a federal E-Verify clearance check, and the individuals in question

passed this federal clearance, the Department is initiating an internal review on this project contract. FDOT will also continue to support law enforcement efforts as investigations continue.

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Illegal immigrant arrested after hitting, killing Pinellas County deputy and fleeing scene

By FOX 13 News Staff | **Updated** September 23, 2022 4:12pm EDT | Pinellas County | FOX 13 News | 

Deputy killed by hit-and-run driver

Briona Arradondo reports

LARGO, Fla. - For the second time in less than two years, the [Pinellas County Sheriff's Office](#) is mourning the loss of a deputy.

Late Thursday night, Deputy Mike Hartwick was providing security at a construction site along I-275 when hit and killed by a man driving a front loader, who then fled the scene, according to the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office.

Hartwick's dashcam video shows him getting out of his cruiser and walking over to the shoulder of the road. About a minute later, the video shows a construction truck

passing southbound and then a front loader passes by at about 20 miles an hour.

Remembering fallen deputy Michael Hartwick

Aaron Mesmer reports.

The video shows it passing by the front of Deputy Hartwick's car and a white pickup truck was behind it escorting it. Then the white pickup truck abruptly stops because the front loader had hit and killed Deputy Hartwick.

The operator of the front loader kept going, according to PCSO.

Deputies say the driver of the front loader eventually pulled it over and told another construction worker that he had just killed a deputy.

He then took off his construction hat and his traffic vest. He handed the items to another construction worker, later identified as Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zelaya, and told him to hide them and get rid of them.

The suspect then fled northbound on foot.

A nine-hour manhunt across Pinellas County and Tampa ensued. The search involved all the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office K9s, three helicopters, Pasco County bloodhounds and hundreds of law enforcement officers.

Aerial view: Procession for deputy killed on I-275

Deputy Michael Hartwick was killed late Thursday night along a construction site on Interstate 275 in Pinellas County.

One of the K9s found the vest and the helmet, which the other construction worker dumped in the woods. A bloodhound that was given the scent on the items was able to track down the suspect.

Originally, the suspect told law enforcement officers his name was Victor Vasquez-Real. He said that he was 35 years old and from Puerto Rico. However, Gualtieri says that was a bunch of nonsense.

His real name, according to Gualtieri, is Juan Ariel Molina-Salles. He is 32 years old and Gualtieri says he entered the country illegally on October 25, 2021, in Eagle Pass Texas. He was turned around by border patrol and sent back to Mexico. Gualtieri says there is no record of him entering the United States legally.

Gualtieri says there were a lot of construction workers on-site and the majority of them lied to deputies and hindered the investigation by providing false names and information.

According to the PCSO, all the construction workers were employed by Archer Western, a contractor doing work for the Florida Department of Transportation out of Tampa.

"This company is employing a bunch of illegals and they are all out there lying and giving us fake names, fake IDs, a lot of fake IDs out of North Carolina that really frustrated this investigation. This guy that we have in custody is here illegally and he fled, as he said, because he became afraid after he killed the deputy. He clearly knew he killed the deputy because when he was hunkered down out there last night he had a cell phone on. We had some ways of tracking what he was doing with his cell phone and he actually called his roommate in Tampa who is another guy who is here illegally. He came over and tried to pick him up. He saw all of the law enforcement activity and called him back and said, 'I'm not getting involved in this', and turned around and went back to Tampa."

Earlier coverage: Suspect wanted for hitting, killing deputy on I-275 taken into custody

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office says a construction worker suspected of accidentally hitting and killing a deputy at a construction area on Interstate 275 late Thursday night has been captured after nearly 10 hours on the run.

He added, "You got a bunch of illegals working for this state contractor out there. They shouldn't be here and they shouldn't be working and they shouldn't be out here doing this. This guy was going, I think too fast, for this thing. Again, he knew he hit a deputy and as opposed to stopping, rendering aid, and accepting responsibility for what he did, we had to chase him around and sift through all this nonsense with all these people lying and providing fake IDs and we spent nine hours out there chasing this thing down."

Raw video: Pinellas deputy killed in hit-and-run

Law enforcement closed I-275 to search for the suspect

According to Gualtieri, Molina-Salles told the construction company he did construction in Honduras so they brought him on board. Gualtieri added that Molina-Salles gave the company a fake ID card.

"He didn't have a driver's license. He's got nothing. He shouldn't have been here to begin with and he shouldn't have been driving. He shouldn't have been working...He has no qualifications to drive a front loader," he explained.

"This is not victimless," Gualtieri said. "We've got a dead deputy. We got a guy who shouldn't be here. He shouldn't have been driving that thing. He shouldn't have fled. He shouldn't have done any of this and companies are out there doing that. Why are they doing it? Of course, that is a rhetorical question and I'll answer it. They're doing it because they are making money off of it. So, are they making money now off of a dead deputy? Is it worth it? Really?"

Previous coverage: Search for suspect who hit and killed Pinellas deputy on I-275

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office is searching for construction worker Victor Vasquez, who they say hit and killed Deputy Michael Hartwick with a front loader in a construction zone on I-275 as the deputy was helping to control traffic. Investigators say Vasquez then handed his helmet and vest to another worker and fled on foot.

According to Gualtieri, local law enforcement has no jurisdiction to enforce immigration.

"I can't put them in jail," he stated. "I can't do anything with them at all. The most I can do is what you can do –pick up the phone and call ICE and say you've got a guy who's here illegally."

Gualtieri says he has received a detainer on Molina-Salles, which means if he is released at some point in time, PCSO would not release him because of it. Then ICE would pick him up.

Molina-Salles is facing charges of leaving the scene of an accident involving death. It's a first-degree felony with a four-year minimum mandatory in state prison.

Gomez-Zelaya, who also lied about his identity, has been charged with accessory after the fact.

On Friday evening, [Governor Ron DeSantis'](#) Office told FOX 13 in an email statement:

"We are currently investigating the matter and looking to determine if illegal

immigrants have utilized fraudulent information to obtain employment with contractors working with the State of Florida. As we collect details and examine potential courses of action, we are reminded once again that illegal immigration is a serious and ongoing problem in the United States that has a multifaceted effect on Florida. If this individual's illegal status played into his decision to try to cover up this incident, it underscores just one of the harms that our state faces because of the federal government's open border policies. The State of Florida is not a sanctuary state and illegal immigrants are not authorized to work here. For reasons such as this, we will continue our lawful efforts to interdict and relocate illegal immigrants."

Sheriff: Illegal worker hit, killed deputy on construction site

Sheriff Bob Gualtieri press conference on fatal deputy-involved crash

FOX 13 reached out to Archer Western for a statement, but have not heard back from the construction company.

The Florida Department of Transportation told FOX 13 in a statement: "(FDOT) offers our heartfelt condolences to Deputy Hartwick's family and the entire law enforcement community. From all accounts, Deputy Hartwick was a model law enforcement officer, and we stand willing and able to assist the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office in any way possible. FDOT and its contractors follow strict hiring procedures. While it appears that these hiring procedures were followed, including a federal E-Verify clearance check, and the individuals in question passed this federal clearance, the Department is initiating an internal review on this project contract. FDOT will also continue to support law enforcement efforts as investigations continue."

"It's just sad," the sheriff stated. "It really is...I look at this like, really, this is two times in 18 months now. We go 109 years without a line of duty death and now you go two in 19 months, but it's the nature of the business...we got the bad guys in custody where they belong and that's out of respect for Mike."

In February 2021, [Pinellas County Deputy Michael Magli was killed by an accused drunk driver](#) who plowed into him while he was trying to stop the suspect. Magli was the first deputy in Pinellas County to be killed in the line of duty.

Deputy Hartwick served as a Pinellas County Sheriff's Office Deputy for 19 years, assigned to the Patrol Operations Bureau. He is survived by his mother and two adult children.

Pinellas County

Crime and Public Safety

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Don McLoud
Sep 27, 2022





A memorial to Pinellas County Deputy Mark Hartwick who died September 22, 2022, when he was hit by a wheel loader operated by an undocumented worker in a work zone on I-275 in St. Petersburg. Source: Pinellas County Sheriff's Office

The Florida governor's office and department of transportation report they are investigating how an illegal immigrant accused of running into and killing a deputy with a wheel loader in a work zone was hired and allowed to operate the loader.

Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, 32, was charged September 23 with running into and killing Deputy Michael Hartwick who was working traffic control for a work zone on the [Gateway Expressway](#) project in St. Petersburg.

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The 51-year-old Hartwick was a 19-year



veteran of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. He was struck by the large loader at about 10:30 p.m. September 22 soon after he had started his shift, according to Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri. Hartwick had blocked two southbound lanes of I-275 with his cruiser, and he was facing northbound while standing on the road shoulder.

Molina-Salles was going about 20 mph northbound in the loader and being escorted by another worker in a pickup truck when he hit Hartwick, who died instantly, Gualtieri said during a news conference. Molina-Salles' job was to pick up concrete barriers with the loader, which was equipped with a fork attachment.

After hitting Hartwick, he then rode farther up to a parking lot about a quarter-mile away where he met with another illegal immigrant worker on the project who helped him hide by stashing his hardhat and vest in some woods, according



Pinellas County Sheriff's Deputy Michael Hartwick

Source: Pinellas County Sheriff's Office

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Officers used bloodhounds and found the discarded items and about nine hours later found Molina-Salles hiding in some brush, Gualtieri said. He was charged with felony leaving the scene of an accident involving death. His case was also turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Gualtieri said Molina-Salles, of Honduras and living in Tampa, had entered the country illegally October 25, 2021, at Eagle Pass, Texas. He was caught by U.S. Border Patrol and sent back to Mexico. At some point, he re-entered the U.S. without detection and ended up landing a job on the Gateway project. The contractor on the \$545 million project is a joint venture of Archer Western of Atlanta and The de Moya Group of Miami. Archer Western is a subsidiary of the Walsh Group based in Chicago.

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Gualtieri said Molina-Salles had shown his employer a fake ID from North Carolina and had also provided a false name.

"He has no qualifications to drive a front loader," said Gualtieri. "What he told those people is that back in Honduras, he works some construction, and he knows how to operate this thing. So they said, 'Go ahead.'"

Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zelaya, 31, also of Honduras, was charged with accessory after the fact. He helped Molina-Salles by hiding the hardhat and vest, according to Gualtieri. He was also hired on the project, is in the country illegally and gave his employers false identity and name, the sheriff said.

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Under Florida law, state agencies and their contractors on public projects are required to conduct a federal E-Verify search to determine potential hires' immigration status. The Florida Department of Transportation, which hired Archer Western-de Moya for the project, said an E-Verify check was conducted, "and the individuals in question passed this Federal clearance."

"FDOT and its contractors follow strict hiring procedures," the agency said in a statement. It adds that "it appears that these hiring procedures were followed." The department says it is initiating an internal review of the matter.

The Florida governor's office said it is also looking into the incident and whether illegal immigrants are using fake documents and information to get hired by contractors.

Archer Western-de Moya joint venture released the following statement:

Archer Western-de Moya Joint Venture II ("the Joint Venture") is currently performing work as part of the Gateway Expressway project. On Thursday evening, September 22, 2022, a fatal accident occurred on the project site involving a Pinellas County Sheriff's Deputy.

Our deepest sympathy is extended to the family, friends, fellow law enforcement officers and co-workers of the deceased. The Joint Venture continues its investigation into the circumstances and details of this tragic incident. The Joint Venture is fully cooperating and assisting with the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office investigation.

This is the second death on the Gateway Expressway project in a year.

On October 6, 2021, [a 47-year-old worker died after being struck in the chest by a concrete pile that broke free from a crane](#), according to the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration. Archer Western-De Moya JV II was cited for four serious violations for total penalties of \$42,474.

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A funeral for Hartwick, who is survived by two adult sons, is scheduled for October 3.

"Mike Hartwick was a cop out there doing his job," Gualtieri said. "He was a good guy. He dedicated his 19 years of service to protecting the people of Pinellas County."



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State investigating how two undocumented workers arrested in Pinellas County deputy's death were hired

By Evan Axelbank | Published September 23, 2022 10:38pm EDT | Pinellas County | FOX 13 News |

Two men arrested in connection to hit-and-run

Evan Axelbank reports

LARGO, Fla. - The two men arrested in the death of Pinellas County Deputy Michael Hartwick were undocumented workers, both from Honduras. Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said both of them were working for contractor Archer Western but under false pretenses.

Both the governor's office and the Florida Department of Transportation said they are looking into how Juan Ariel Molina-Salles and Elieser Gomez-Zelaya were hired. Sheriff Gualtieri said there was no excuse for Molina-Salles to be behind the wheel of anything, let alone a front loader.

"Is that really what these contractors are doing? Is that how they're doing business?" asked Sheriff Gualtieri. "And they're just taking all these people who don't have a driver's license."

Archer Western is a massive contracting firm based in Chicago and Atlanta but with offices all over, including Tampa.

The sheriff said Molina-Salles told his bosses a tall tale, starting with a fake ID from North Carolina.

RELATED: Man in country illegally arrested after hitting, killing Pinellas County deputy and fleeing scene

"He has no qualifications to drive a front loader," said Gualtieri. "What he told those people is that back in Honduras, he works some construction, and he knows how to operate this thing. So they said, 'Go ahead.'"

"We are currently investigating the matter and looking to determine if illegal immigrants have utilized fraudulent information to obtain employment with contractors working with the State of Florida," the governor's office said.

A law Gov. DeSantis signed in 2020 requires all public employers and their contractors, to use E-Verify.

The Florida Department of Transportation released a statement Friday saying: "FDOT and its contractors follow strict hiring procedures. While it appears that these hiring procedures were followed, including a federal E-Verify clearance check, and the individuals in question passed this Federal clearance, the department is initiating an internal review on this project contract."

Archer Western did not respond to our attempts to ask about the hiring of the two workers, whether it was done through a subcontractor and how they will respond to the sheriff's assertions about the workers they spoke to who lied about their identities.

"Companies are out there doing it. Why are they doing it?" said Gualtieri. "Of course, that's a rhetorical question, and I'll answer it, because they're doing it, because they're making money off it."

In the E-Verify bill, there are allowances for contracts to be terminated if it is found that a contractor or subcontractor knowingly employed an undocumented worker.

FDOT did not respond to our questions about how often the state does business with Archer Western and how many active contracts it has.

The sheriff said it was not practical to charge everyone who lied to them about their identities because that kind of obstruction is a misdemeanor.

Pinellas County Crime and Public Safety

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Bill aims to designate portion of I-275 t...



PINELLAS COUNTY

Bill aims to designate part of I-275 to slain Pinellas County deputy

by: [Dylan Abad](#)

Posted: Jan 17, 2023 / 01:06 PM EST

Updated: Jan 17, 2023 / 01:50 PM EST

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PINELLAS COUNTY, Fla. (WFLA) — A Florida bill filed on Dec. 19 seeks to dedicate a portion of I-275 in Pinellas County to Deputy Sheriff Michael Hartwick, who died while on duty in September 2022.

The bill, filed under HB 63, would designate a stretch of I-275 in Pinellas County as the Deputy Sheriff Michael Hartwick Memorial Highway.

Construction worker who killed Pinellas deputy was undocumented, had fake name, sheriff says ➤

On Tuesday, the bill, sponsored by Rep. Linda Chaney (R-District 61), passed through the House Transportation and Modals Subcommittee.

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If given the ultimate approval, the designation would go into effect beginning July 1, 2023.

Deputy Hartwick, a 51-year-old father, was working a traffic detail in a construction zone when he was struck by a front-end loader with a forklift. Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said the front-end loader, which was used to lift concrete barriers, was traveling about 20 mph when it struck the deputy.

Hartwick died instantly.

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Bill aims to designate portion of I-275 t...

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office said the forklift operator, later identified as 32-year-old Juan Ariel Molina Salles, was in the country illegally at the time of the incident.

Pinellas deputy killed in hit-and-run laid to rest >

Deputies said the Salles continued driving about a quarter of a mile before he pulled into a parking area, got out of the vehicle, and ran off on foot. Salles was previously denied entry to the U.S. by Border Patrol at the U.S.-Mexican border and was sent back.

"He came back in through the Texas border, he is here illegally, and he's been here in the Tampa Bay area since March of this year," Gualtieri said at the time of the man's arrest.

Molina-Salles admitted to running away because he was afraid he killed Hartwick. According to Sheriff Gualtieri, Salles did not have a driver's license and should not have been driving or working in the country.

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Company leading Howard Frankland Bridge project had another fatality in 2021

Archer Western involved in several fatal workplace accidents since 2018

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ARCHER WESTERN FATALITY

- "Failed to follow safety standards, provide training for workers"
- "Recognize and avoid unsafe working conditions"
- Didn't use proper "hand signals" to communicate with "crane operator"
- Used "damaged wire rope swing"

Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said the man suspected of a hit-and-run crash that killed a Pinellas County deputy Thursday night along I-275 was an undocumented migrant who was captured Friday morning. According to Sheriff Bob Gualtieri, Deputy Michael Hartwick, 51, was working a traffic detail on I-275 to provide safety and security for the ongoing construction along the road when Hartwick was hit and killed by Archer Western employee Juan Ariel Molina-Salles. FULL STORY: <https://wfts.tv/3LFmQcz>



By: Michael Paluska

Posted 5:26 PM, Sep 23, 2022 and last updated 6:05 PM, Sep 23, 2022

PINELLAS COUNTY, Fla. — Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said the man suspected of a hit-and-run crash that killed a Pinellas County deputy Thursday night along I-275 was an undocumented migrant who was captured Friday morning.

According to Sheriff Bob Gualtieri, Deputy Michael Hartwick, 51, was working a traffic detail on I-275 to provide safety and security for the ongoing

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The company was cited for serious safety violations in 2021 after an employee was crushed to death by falling concrete. The death happened during the Pinellas Gateway Expressway project on October 6, 2021.

According to the [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#), a 47-year-old carpenter was working near a crane when a "twenty-eight-foot section of concrete fell onto and pinned the employee against the wall of the trench box. The employee was killed by chest injuries sustained."

The investigation concluded that Archer Western, "violated safety standards by allowing workers to remain in a crane load's danger zone."

The report stated that the victim was working with five other employees inside a trench box cutting concrete piles used to build footers for elevated lanes of the

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Director Danelle Jindra in Tampa, Florida. "Workers deserve to start each workday without worrying whether they will return home unharmed. Employers have an obligation to follow safety standards to protect their workers from all known hazards."

ABC Action News reporter Michael Paluska called and e-mailed Archer Western for comment Friday, but never heard back. At their office in Tampa, an employee said someone from Human Resources would come out and talk to us but never showed. They closed the blinds while we waited outside patiently for a comment.

In 2018, according to the Miami ABC affiliate, WPLG, Archer Western was cited after two workers died after a concrete barrier collapsed.

According to [WPLG](#), federal officials said a construction company did not do enough to protect its workers before a concrete barrier collapsed and killed two men along Interstate 95. The Florida Highway Patrol said Abel Orlando Zuniga-Fajardo, 37, and Osman Aldubin Montalvan-Ardon, 33, were in a trench repairing drainage pipes around 3 a.m. on February 4 when one of the cement retaining walls fell on top of them.

The Florida Department of Transportation has not responded to requests for comment on Friday's death or about Archer Western.

According to Gualtieri, the driver of the front loader, Molina-Salles, 32, of Honduras. Molina-Salles is an undocumented immigrant and faces a charge of leaving the scene of an accident with a death. It's punishable by up to 30 years

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Gualtieri said the Archer Western workers at the construction site [lied to law enforcement and gave fake names](#).

"There were a lot of people out there; the majority of them were lying to us. They were giving us false names and hindering the investigation," Gualtieri said. "You got a bunch of illegals working for this state contractor out there who shouldn't be here and shouldn't be working and shouldn't be out there doing this."

Archer Western has not responded to multiple requests for comment. When we went to their office in Tampa they closed the blinds and turned off the lights.

According to OSHA:

Archer Western – De Moya JV II is a joint venture between Chicago's The Walsh Group, it's subsidiary Archer Western of Atlanta and The De Moya Group Inc. of Miami. The Florida Department of Transportation Pinellas Gateway Expressway is one of the largest Tampa Bay area construction projects to date. The two-part project consists of constructing two new two-lane elevated tolled roadways that will provide direct connections between U.S. 19 and I-275 and between the Bayside Bridge north of 49th Street North and I-275 in Pinellas County.

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Undocumented worker charged with hitting, killing Pinellas deputy scheduled to be arraigned

Co-defendant also scheduled for arraignment

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Photo by: WFTS



By: Rebekah Nelson

Posted 5:28 AM, Nov 14, 2022 and last updated 5:49 AM, Nov 14, 2022

PINELLAS COUNTY, Fla. — The man charged with a hit-and-run crash that killed a Pinellas County deputy in September has been scheduled to be arraigned on Monday, followed by a second suspect.

According to Sheriff Gualtieri, on September 23, Deputy Michael Hartwick, 51, was working a traffic detail on I-275 to provide safety and security for the ongoing construction along the road. Gualtieri said Deputy Hartwick arrived at the location around 10:40 p.m.

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The PCSO said Hartwick got out of his cruiser and walked around the front of his car onto the shoulder of the road. Gualtieri said a few minutes later, a frontloader with forklift-type arms passed by the area traveling approximately 20 miles per hour and escorted by a white pickup truck.

PCSO said the front loader hit and killed Deputy Hartwick instantly. The truck stopped, but Gualtieri said the front loader continued down the road before eventually pulling off to the side of the road.

According to Gualtieri, the driver of the front loader is Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, 32, of Honduras. After stopping, Molina-Salles allegedly took off his construction vest and hat and gave them to another worker, and asked him to get rid of both. Deputies said Molina-Salles then left the area, heading north.

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office said that started a nine-hour manhunt with three helicopters, hundreds of law enforcement officers, and all the police K-9 units.

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“They shouldn’t be out there, and they shouldn’t be doing this,” Gualtieri said.

As the manhunt continued, Gualtieri said they requested the aid of Pasco County bloodhound units to find the suspect. Gualtieri said Molina-Salles, at one point, tried to get his roommate in Tampa to pick him up after the deadly crash. However, the roommate, also an undocumented worker, turned around and refused to come get him when that person saw the law enforcement presence.

According to the sheriff, the move to bring in the bloodhounds paid off, and Molina-Salles was arrested.

Gualtieri said sheriff’s deputies couldn’t do much with the company employing the undocumented workers or with the workers themselves due to immigration law. The sheriff said Molina-Salles had entered the country once illegally and was deported back to Mexico but later returned through Eagle Pass, Texas, and had been in Tampa since March.

Sheriff Gualtieri said Molina-Salles faces a charge of leaving the scene of an accident with a death, and it’s punishable by up to 30 years in prison, with a minimum mandatory sentence of four years in prison if convicted. There’s also an immigration hold on Molina-Salles if he is given bond on the local charge.

The construction worker who allegedly took Molina-Salles’ gear is Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zalaya, 31, who was also an undocumented immigrant from

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PINELLAS COUNTY

Gateway Expressway Project halted, governor's office investigating after Pinellas deputy's death

by: [Nathaniel Rodriguez](#)

Posted: Sep 23, 2022 / 04:07 PM EDT

Updated: Sep 23, 2022 / 05:43 PM EDT

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TAMPA, Fla. (WFLA) — Work on the Gateway Expressway Project has been halted after [a construction worker killed a Pinellas County deputy while driving a front end loader](#), according to a release.

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office said Thursday night, Deputy Michael Hartwick was struck with a front end loader carrying a forklift operated by Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, 32, of Tampa, killing him instantly.



FDOT documents said the \$595 million project began on Aug. 21, 2017, [The project was meant to build](#) two new elevated four-lane rolled roadways, SR-686A and SR-690, and two new toll lanes of I-275 south of the Howard Frankland Bridge.

SR-686A was to extend between Bayside Bridge and just west of I-275, with construction focused in the median of Roosevelt Boulevard. SR-690 was supposed to be constructed from US-19 to west of I-275.

Work on the project has been halted as a result of Hartwick's death, according to a statement by the Joint Venture.



Juan Ariel Molina-Salles, left, and Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zelaya, right (Credit: Pinellas County Sheriff's Office)

"Our deepest sympathy is extended to the family, friends, fellow law enforcement officers and co-workers of the deceased," the statement reads. "Work has been halted on the project site while the Joint Venture continues its investigation into the circumstances and details of this tragic incident. The Joint Venture is fully cooperating and assisting with the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office investigation."

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BREAKING NEWS

Construction worker who killed Pinellas deputy was undocumented, had fake name, sheriff says

by: [Athina Morris](#), [Nathaniel Rodriguez](#)

Posted: Sep 23, 2022 / 04:38 AM EDT

Updated: Sep 23, 2022 / 06:28 PM EDT

SHARE



TAMPA, Fla. (WFLA) — Two road construction workers are facing charges after one allegedly ran into a Pinellas County deputy with a forklift, killing him, and fled the scene.

The collision occurred just after 11 p.m. Thursday in the area of Interstate 275 and Roosevelt Boulevard.





Deputy Michael Hartwick. Source: Pinellas County Sheriff's Office

Pinellas Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said Deputy Michael Hartwick, a 51-year-old father, was in a construction zone, working a traffic detail when he was struck by a front end loader with a forklift.

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Hartwick had parked his cruiser to block two inside southbound lanes and was standing on the shoulder of the road, facing north when he was hit.

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The forklift operator allegedly continued driving for about a quarter of a mile before he pulled into a parking area, got out of the vehicle and told another construction worker about what happened. He gave the worker his helmet and vest and ran off on foot, Gualtieri said.

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The sheriff said they initially believed the forklift operator was named Victor Vazquez of Puerto Rico, but it turned out “Victor” was a 32-year-old undocumented immigrant named Juan Ariel Molina Salles, who was previously denied entry to the U.S. by Border Patrol at the U.S.-Mexican border and sent back.

“He came back in through the Texas border, he is here illegally, and he’s been here in the Tampa Bay area since March of this year,” the sheriff said.

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Gualtieri said about 100 officers and K9 teams spent hours searching the area for Molina-Salles.

"After a nine hour manhunt conducted by local law enforcement agencies, PCSO K9 and our flight unit, Molina was located by the Pasco County Sheriff's Office bloodhound hiding in a brush area," the sheriff's office said in a release. "He was taken into custody and charged with one count leaving the scene of a crash involving death."

However, the investigation was hurt by workers who were lying to authorities or not answering their questions.

"All of these people are working for Archer Western, which is a contractor apparently doing work for the Florida Department of Transportation out of Tampa," the sheriff said. "This company's employing all these illegals, and they're all out there lying, giving us fake names, fake IDs, a lot of fake IDs out of North Carolina."

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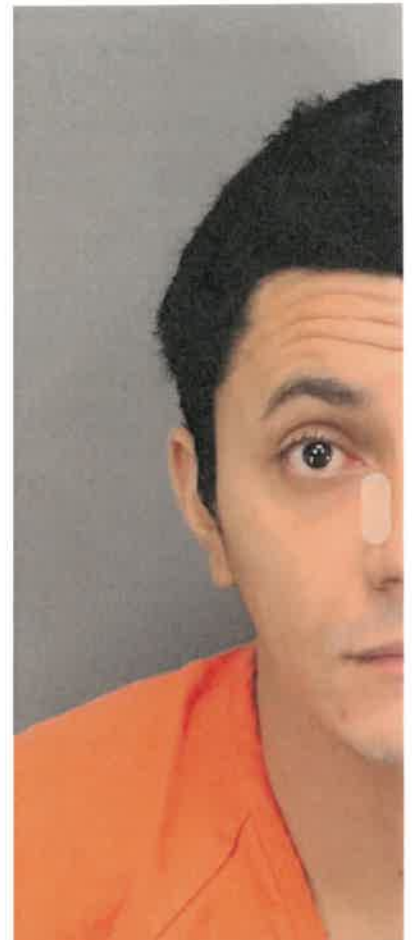
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According to Gualtieri, Molina Salles fled because he was afraid after he killed Hartwick. The sheriff said the suspect also didn't have a driver's license and should not have been driving, much less working.

"He has no qualifications to drive a front loader, and he said what he told these people is that back in Honduras, he worked some construction, and he knows how to operate this thing so they said go ahead," he said. "Is that really what these contractors are doing? Is that how they're doing business?"

Gualtieri said the migrant didn't even give the employer a driver's license, just a fake North Carolina ID card.



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Gateway Expressway Project halted after Pinellas deputy killed by construction worker: release >

Gualtieri said Hartwick had worked for the sheriff's office for 19 years. He was assigned to the patrol division, and worked the night shift for the North District Station.

He is survived by his mother and adult children, according to the sheriff.

"All I can say is here we go again. This is 18 months after [Deputy Magli](#) was killed," Gualtieri said. "We go 110 years in the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office with no line-of-duty deaths, now we have two in 18 months."

Masonic fraternity brothers pay respects to slain Pinellas County deputy >

St. Petersburg Ken Welch said he was saddened by Hartwick's death and expressed his condolences to the deputy's family.

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"These men and women put their lives on the line day in and day out and it's imperative to us avoid avoidable accidents that caused this tragedy," Welch said. "Our entire St. Pete family sends our love and prayers to Deputy Hardwick's friends and family may your PCSO family remain strong and protected."

Archer Western – de Moya Joint Venture II, the company handling the Gateway Expressway Project, said it is cooperating with the investigations. Gualtieri said ICE would be notified of the situation as well since the sheriff's office has no jurisdiction on undocumented immigrants and homeland security matters.

The Florida Department of Transportation issued the following statement in response to the Deputy's death.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) offers our heartfelt condolences to Deputy Hartwick's family and the entire law enforcement community. From all accounts, Deputy Hartwick was a model law enforcement officer, and we stand willing and able to assist the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office in any way possible. FDOT and its contractors follow strict hiring procedures. While it appears that these hiring procedures were followed, including a federal E-Verify clearance check, and the individuals in question passed this federal clearance, the Department is initiating an internal review on this project contract. FDOT will also continue to support law enforcement efforts as investigations continue.

- FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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