

Racial Justice

Louisiana Deputy Who Slammed a Black Woman on the Pavement Was Named in Multiple Suits, Records Show

Julio Alvarado, a Jefferson Parish deputy who was seen on video violently dragging a woman by the hair, has been named in nine federal civil rights lawsuits, all involving the use of excessive force. This is the most of any deputy currently employed.



Julio Alvarado, left, and the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office complex, right. Photo illustration by ProPublica. Photos: Jeff Strout/The New Orleans Advocate, left, and Kathleen Flynn, special to ProPublica.

by Richard A. Webster, WRKF and WWNO, and Ramon Antonio Vargas, The Times-Picayune and The Advocate

Oct. 21, 4:30 p.m. EDT

Co-published with WRKF and WWNO and The Times-Picayune and The Advocate

This article was produced for ProPublica's Local Reporting Network in partnership with WRKF, WWNO and The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate. [Sign up for Dispatches](#) to get stories like this one as soon as they are published.

A Jefferson Parish sheriff's deputy with a long history of excessive-force complaints is the officer [seen in a viral video](#) on Sept. 20 slamming 34-year-old Shantel Arnold's head repeatedly into the pavement with such force it ripped several braids from her scalp.

Multiple sources who have reviewed the video's contents confirmed that the deputy was Julio Alvarado, a 16-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office. Alvarado has been named in nine federal civil rights lawsuits, all involving the use of excessive force, the most of any deputy currently employed by the Sheriff's Office. Two suits were settled, one of them involving the beating of a 14-year-old boy, and two are pending, with the remaining

dismissed.

The Sheriff's Office, in keeping with its usual policy, did not respond to a request to identify the deputy when asked Thursday. But the office has said it opened an internal probe into the deputy's actions shortly after the incident, though Arnold did not file a complaint. That's an action the Sheriff's Office often does not take, even in cases where citizens complain about the inappropriate use of force.

The probe remains open. At the same time, the office issued a statement on Wednesday saying the video had been "selectively edited." The statement asserted that Arnold was intoxicated and that she had been resisting arrest.

In that incident, Arnold was walking home around 2 p.m. when Alvarado pulled up in his vehicle and demanded she stop and talk to him, according to Arnold and two witnesses related to her, as well as their statements provided to a sheriff's investigator. She told him that she had just been assaulted by several boys from the neighborhood and wanted to go home, and she continued walking. Arnold is 4-foot-8, about 100 pounds and is missing her left eye from a car accident.

According to the two witnesses, Lionel Gray, 71, whom Arnold considers her stepfather, and Arnold's 55-year-old uncle, Tony Givens, Alvarado jumped out of his vehicle, grabbed Arnold and threw her to the ground, unprovoked. [The 14-second video](#) captures what happened next. It shows Alvarado dragging Arnold along the pavement. They briefly disappear behind a parked white vehicle. When they come back into view, Alvarado is holding Arnold by her braids, slamming her repeatedly onto the pavement. At one point, he whips her down so violently her body spins around and flips over.

The footage, which has sparked widespread condemnation both locally and nationally, ends as Alvarado crouches down and places a knee onto Arnold's back. She was not charged with a crime and was later taken to a hospital. She said she required treatment for the injuries she sustained during the struggle with Alvarado.

The Sheriff's Office said it had received a 911 call about a fight involving at least 25 people that afternoon. When Alvarado arrived on the scene, someone said Arnold had been involved in the fight, so he attempted to question her, but she refused to cooperate, according to the statement. Alvarado then tried to arrest her but she "pulled away."

"When this resistance occurred, the video is clear, it shows him flipping her by her hair into a prone position onto her chest," the Sheriff's Office said.

The Sheriff's Office also claims in its statement that Arnold admitted to being in a physical fight with "multiple parties" and that she was "intoxicated at the time of the incident."

This is not, however, what Arnold said, according to transcripts of her interview with sheriff's investigators, obtained by WWNO/WRKF and ProPublica. When asked whether she resisted, Arnold said to the investigator, "If you call asking what's going on resisting."

Gray and Givens also denied she resisted.

"She didn't have a chance to pull away because, you know, this guy was

strong,” Gray told investigators. “He grabbed her arm, and some kind of move he made, and she went down to the ground.”

Arnold also told the investigator multiple times that she was attacked by several boys and was forced to defend herself. She did not say she was intoxicated, only that she drank a “whole daiquiri.”

Alvarado has a history of excessive-force allegations. A 2016 lawsuit claimed Alvarado grabbed a 14-year-old Hispanic boy by the neck and “slammed his head against the ground and concrete” as the child was screaming, “Why are you doing this to me?” Alvarado then threatened to have the boy and his family deported, according to the suit. The Sheriff’s Office, in court filings, said that Alvarado’s actions were “reasonable under the circumstances.” The case settled for \$15,000.

Two years later, a lawsuit claimed Alvarado and three deputies beat Atdner Casco, a Honduran native, and stole more than \$2,000 from him during a traffic stop, then conspired to have him deported. That suit was settled on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving last year for \$50,000.

One of Casco’s attorneys, Kenneth Bordes, said Thursday that he believed the plaintiff had a case worth much more. “I was fully prepared and ready to take it to trial and tell Mr. Casco’s story if that is what he desired,” said Bordes, who represented Casco along with Casey Denson and Casey Cowley.

But, Bordes added, Casco’s decision to settle “was made in consultation with his family.”

The Sheriff’s Office fired Detective George Kister after he failed a polygraph test when asked whether he stole Casco’s money, according to documents provided by the Sheriff’s Office. The Sheriff’s Office cited a policy mandating truthfulness from deputies. He was never arrested or charged with a crime, and the money was never returned.

Casco claimed Alvarado beat and choked him until he agreed to keep silent about being robbed. He also alleged that Kister and Alvarado brought him to his daughter’s school in handcuffs, paraded him in front of the campus and told him the state Department of Children and Family Services would be given custody of the girl.

At the time of the purported brutality, Alvarado’s rank was sergeant and he was detailed to Operation Stonegarden, a federal program that provides funding to local law enforcement agencies to cover expenses, such as overtime or travel costs, in exchange for cooperation in identifying undocumented people for deportation. Alvarado denied he used force against Casco, and other deputies present that day told investigators they did not see him hurt Casco.

Alvarado is also named in two pending lawsuits, including one filed by the family of Leo Brooks, who was shot to death by deputies in 2019. The Sheriff’s Office claims Brooks was reaching for a gun during a drug raid, while Brooks’ family says he was handcuffed and lying face down on a bed when deputies shot him. Alvarado was part of the raid but not named as the shooter in the lawsuit, which lists five additional deputies as defendants.

Alvarado is one of more than 20 sheriff’s deputies accused in a 2017 lawsuit of beating Jerman Neveaux during his arrest for the shooting

death of 50-year-old Deputy David Michel Jr. Initially, after video taken by a witness showed deputies punching him repeatedly, the Sheriff's Office released an undated mug shot of Neveaux, saying only that it had come from his criminal record.

Neveaux's mug shot from immediately after his arrest in Michel's killing surfaced in the excessive-force lawsuit that he filed some 11 months later. That image showed Neveaux's battered face swollen and covered in blood.

The suit alleges he suffered nerve damage, disfigurement and partial blindness in his right eye. The Sheriff's Office, at the time, said Neveaux was in possession of a gun and denied claims of excessive force. The lawsuit doesn't specify Alvarado's alleged role in the beating.

Of the lawsuits against Alvarado that were dismissed, one was thrown out because the plaintiff pleaded guilty to resisting arrest, which by law bars a person from seeking civil damages. Another suit, involving a man suffering from mental health issues who died while being restrained, was dismissed because it couldn't be proven that the use of force was excessive. The court wrote there is a "hazy border between excessive and acceptable force." The others were dismissed because of qualified immunity and procedural issues.

In January 2020, Alvarado was demoted from sergeant to deputy, according to his personnel profile, which does not include a reason for the demotion.

The ACLU of Louisiana, which has called on federal prosecutors to launch an investigation into the Sheriff's Office, said the continued employment of Alvarado, despite his history of excessive force claims, is part of a troubling pattern.

"We are talking about a police agency that is fully on notice that it is employing officers who engage in this type of misconduct, and yet knowingly and willfully turns a blind eye to that conduct, which means that civilians' lives are put in harm's way," legal director Nora Ahmed said. "And that is exactly what happened to Ms. Arnold."

Filed under —
Racial Justice