

# Former Mississippi Officer Pleads Guilty to Using Excessive Force

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## **For Immediate Release**

Office of Public Affairs

A former Mississippi Bureau of Investigations Officer assigned to the U.S. Marshals' Gulf Coast Regional Fugitive Task Force pleaded guilty today to using excessive force against a handcuffed arrestee.

According to court documents and evidence presented in court, on Sept. 16, 2021, John Winstead was working as a federal task force officer when he willfully deprived arrestee K.K.H. of the Fourth Amendment right to be free from objectively unreasonable force. K.K.H. was arrested during the Task Force operation and was already handcuffed and in the process of being escorted safely by another officer when Winstead struck K.K.H. forcefully in the face, knocking him to the ground.

"Law enforcement officials in our country are entrusted with the responsibility to protect and serve communities, not to exploit and abuse them," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. "This defendant violently abused his power by using excessive force against an arrestee in his custody who was handcuffed and posed no threat. The Justice Department is committed to holding accountable officers who violate the civil and constitutional rights of people in their custody."

"Civil rights prosecutions are a priority for the Justice Department, and we work each day towards protecting the constitutional rights of every citizen," said U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Gathe for the Middle District of Louisiana. "I commend the local and federal partners who worked with our district in ensuring a fair and equitable resolution. May this serve as an example of how collaboration with the Justice Department provides justice in prosecuting the violators of our civil liberties."

"The defendant assaulted a handcuffed arrestee who posed no threat to him or to the other escorting officer," said Assistant Director Michael Nordwall of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division. "The FBI will not tolerate violation of anyone's civil rights, regardless of incarceration status."

"We trust law enforcement officers to carry out their duties honorably and with integrity," said Special Agent in Charge Eric R. Fehlman of the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General Southeast Region. "Winstead did just the opposite by using excessive force on a handcuffed arrestee. The Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (DOJ-OIG) is committed to bringing to justice federal law enforcement agents who abuse their authority."

A sentencing hearing will be scheduled at a later date. Winstead faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

DOJ-OIG and the FBI Jackson Field Office are investigating the case.

Trial Attorney Eric Peffley of the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Ellison Travis for the Middle District of Louisiana are prosecuting the case.