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### **MERRILL PLEADS GUILTY TO ATTACK ON OFFICER, SENTENCED TO 28 YEARS**

State Attorney Melissa Nelson announces that Joseph Merrill has pleaded guilty to numerous charges related to the 2023 assault on a police officer and was sentenced by the Honorable Mark Borello to 28 years in Florida State Prison. In a May 13, 2026, hearing, Merrill pleaded guilty to Aggravated Battery on a Law Enforcement Officer, Carrying a Concealed Weapon by a Convicted Felon, Resisting an Officer With Violence, Depriving an Officer of Means of Protection or Communication, and Felony Petit Theft.

On Feb. 23, 2023, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office responded to a Philips Highway business after Officer Jennifer Scott alert button went off. When they arrived, they found Scott had been attacked by Merrill in the parking lot after she approached him for shoplifting. Scott advised that when she approached Merrill, he suddenly punched her in the mouth, knocked her down, and got on top of her to continue his attack.

JSO Sgt. Steven Rudlaff was driving by the business at the time and saw Scott talking to Merrill then saw him punch her and knock her to the ground. Merrill ran when he saw Rudlaff but was taken into custody after a foot chase. Merrill made several incriminating statements at the scene; the attack was also captured on surveillance cameras.

The case was investigated by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and prosecuted by Assistant State Attorney Trey Atkinson.