

Compare and Contrast: Four Palm Beach County Cases Involving Use or Display of Weapons

This summary reviews how the **State of Florida** handled four criminal cases in Palm Beach County. Each case involved a weapon and potential danger to others, yet the **State's response and sentencing were dramatically different**—depending on who the person was and how the event was framed.

1. Russell Byrd (2024) — Off-Duty Police Sergeant

- **Status:** *Active Riviera Beach Police Sergeant, off-duty at the time.*
- **Incident:** Byrd struck an unarmed man in the face with his Glock pistol during a personal confrontation.
- **Evidence:** Dashboard video disproved his self-defense claim.
- **State Response:** Charged with **Aggravated Battery with a Deadly Weapon (felony)**.
- **Outcome:** Accepted a **plea or diversion; no jail time** served.
- **Summary:** Despite clear video evidence showing misconduct with a firearm, Byrd received **leniency**—likely aided by his law-enforcement status.

2. Angela Goode (2019) — Civilian with Mental-Health History

- **Status:** *Civilian, previously Baker Acted and under a Marchman Order.*
- **Incident:** Threatened **eight deputies** with a machete in a closed city park, yelling she would kill them. Deputies used less-lethal rounds and a Taser to subdue her.
- **Evidence:** Multiple officer witnesses and recovered machete; no injuries.
- **State Response:** Initially **nine felonies** (aggravated assault on law enforcement, resisting arrest).
- **Outcome:** **Plea to a single misdemeanor**—served **77 days** in county jail.
- **Summary:** Despite the seriousness of the threats, the State **declined the felonies** and offered a misdemeanor plea, reflecting leniency and disregard for public safety.

3. James Harris (2025) — Off-Duty Sheriff's Deputy

- **Status:** *Active Palm Beach County Sheriff's Deputy, off-duty at the time.*
- **Incident:** Harris, intoxicated after leaving a nightclub, fought with bar patrons, retrieved his gun, and pointed it at civilians while shouting, “I’m Palm Beach Sheriff’s.”
- **Evidence:** Video footage, witness statements, and his own admission.

- **State Response:** Though evidence supported **Aggravated Assault with a Firearm (felony)**, the State **downgraded the case** after victims declined to cooperate.
- **Outcome:** Charged only with **Improper Exhibition of a Firearm (misdemeanor); no jail time.**
- **Summary:** Clear misuse of a firearm while intoxicated resulted in a **reduced charge**—another example of **prosecutorial leniency toward off-duty officers.**

4. Jerald “Jerry” Alderman (2019) — Off-Duty Sheriff’s Deputy

- **Status:** *Active Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Deputy with 17 years of service, off-duty at the time.*
- **Incident:** Alderman responded to reports of **car burglaries** near his own vehicle. Surveillance confirmed attempted break-ins minutes earlier. He identified himself as a deputy, ordered suspects to leave, and briefly displayed his firearm—tapping it on their car door but never pointing it.
- **Evidence:**
 - Multiple surveillance videos showing attempted burglaries.
 - A single 55-second cellphone clip confirming one brief, downward-muzzle firearm display.
 - No physical contact or injuries.
- **State Response:** Charged with **three felonies** (Aggravated Assault with a Firearm) and **one intoxication charge**, even though no sobriety test was done.
 - Additionally, WPBPD filed a **Risk Protection Order (RPO)** six days later to confiscate his firearms—normally reserved for individuals posing an imminent threat.
- **Outcome:** Convicted after a rushed retrial; sentenced to **nine years in prison (consecutive).**
- **Summary:** The only defendant prosecuted under both **criminal and civil actions (RPO).** Despite acting to address an actual crime in progress, Alderman received the **harshest penalty** of all four.

Comparative Overview

Case	Status of Defendant	Duty Status	Weapon Used/Displayed	Injury or Harm	State Handling	Outcome
Byrd	Active police sergeant	Off-duty	Struck civilian with firearm	Minor injury	Felony filed → lenient plea	No jail
Goode	Civilian (mental-health record)	N/A	Threatened 8 deputies w/ machete	None	9 felonies reduced → 1 misdemeanor	77 days jail
Harris	Active sheriff's deputy	Off-duty	Brandished gun at civilians while intoxicated	None	Felony declined → misdemeanor filed	No jail
Alderman	Active sheriff's deputy	Off-duty	Tapped gun on car door during burglary response	None	3 felonies + RPO + no test evidence	9 years in prison

Key Takeaways for the Public

1. All Three Officers Were Off-Duty, But Only One Was Punished Harshly

Byrd, Harris, and Alderman were all **active law-enforcement officers acting off duty** when their incidents occurred.

- **Byrd and Harris** committed acts of **unjustified force or weapon use**, yet both avoided incarceration.
- **Alderman**, who intervened in a **real crime**, received **felonies, a gun-seizure order, and a nine-year prison term**.

2. Civilian Case Received Leniency

Goode's machete attack on eight deputies—a far more dangerous act—ended with a misdemeanor plea and a short sentence.

3. Inconsistent Use of Power

Only Alderman faced both **criminal prosecution and a civil Risk Protection Order**, stripping his firearm rights before trial.

No such measure was used for Byrd or Harris, even though both **used firearms while off-duty and intoxicated or violent**.

4. Pattern of Unequal Justice

Across these cases:

- **Byrd and Harris:** Off-duty officers, **treated leniently**.
- **Goode:** Civilian, **treated leniently** despite obvious threat to public safety.
- **Alderman:** Veteran deputy, **treated punitively**, with both his career and rights eliminated despite lack of harm.

Conclusion

All four cases involved potential public danger and weapon misuse, yet outcomes were strikingly inconsistent:

- **Byrd and Harris**—off-duty officers—were protected.
- **Goode**—a civilian who threatened police—was spared.
- **Alderman**—also an off-duty officer responding to crime—was **punished most severely**.

To a civilian observer, these results raise serious questions about **fairness, proportionality, and selective prosecution** in Palm Beach County's justice system.