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Blair suspended, Emery Gainey named interim Marion sheriff



Marion County Sheriff Chris Blair was suspended by Gov. Rick Scott on Friday afternoon, May 20, 2016 after Blair's arrest and indictment on perjury and misconduct charges. (File photo)

By Amanda McKenzie, Reporter
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Marion County Sheriff Chris Blair is out of jail after being indicted for perjury and misconduct on Friday.

- Sheriff Chris Blair booked into Marion Jail on Friday
• Grand jury says Blair lied under oath about an arrest
• Gov. Rick Scott has suspended Blair, appointed interim Sheriff

All of this stems from an excessive force investigation into the Sheriff's Office.

Governor Rick Scott quickly appointed an interim sheriff, Emery Gainey. He was working in the Attorney General's Office as the Director of Law Enforcement, Victim Services and Criminal Justice Programs.

At a news conference on Friday evening, he said he wasn't given much notice. He got the call Friday morning and now he has to move from Tallahassee to Ocala to step in.

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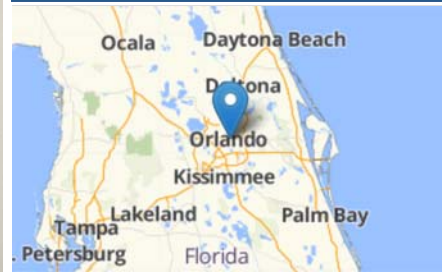
- Armed man opens fire on Marion County SWAT team (June 2, 2014)
• Grand jury indicts ex-Marion deputy on excessive-force charge (Jan. 28, 2016)
• Marion Sheriff orders excessive force investigation (April 20, 2016)

Meanwhile, the consequences of a 2014 standoff between deputies and suspect Dustin Heathman continue to haunt suspended Sheriff Blair. He was suspended immediately and charged with perjury and misconduct pending a further investigation by the state.

"Find out what the facts are and based off those facts, we'll make the appropriate decision in the weeks and

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months to come," Gainey said.

Accused of using excessive force on Heathman, deputies testified that the injuries to the suspect's face were from glass fragments when Heathman opened fire on the Sheriff's SWAT vehicle.

The indictment for Blair comes from testimony he gave about what he witnessed.

Blair swore under oath that he did not see the injuries to Heathman's face, and saw only the back of his head as he was escorted out of a patrol car.

But officials claim Blair knew that statement was false because when Heathman was originally escorted away, he was led in front of Blair.

Interim Sheriff Gainey said now the office needs to regain the public trust.

"We want to ensure you and the citizens that the Marion County Sheriff's Office is clearly full of outstanding, dedicated men and women," Gainey said.

Gainey said he will stay in this position until November for the general election.

Suspended Sheriff Blair posted bond within an hour of being booked into jail on Friday.



The mug shot of 35-year-old Dustin Heathman when he was arrested in June 2015. (Marion County Corrections)

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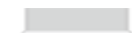


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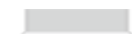
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# STATE OF FLORIDA

## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER 16-129

(Executive Order of Suspension)

**WHEREAS**, Chris Blair is presently serving as Sheriff of Marion County, Florida

**WHEREAS**, on May 20, 2016, Chris Blair was arrested and charged by Indictment with two counts of Perjury in an Official Proceeding, a third-degree felony in violation of section 837.02, Florida Statutes, and one count of Official Misconduct, a third-degree felony in violation of section 838.022(1), Florida Statutes; and

**WHEREAS**, Article IV, Section 7 of the Florida Constitution authorizes the Governor to suspend from office any county officer for the commission of a felony; and

**WHEREAS**, it is in the best interests of the residents of Marion County, and the citizens of the State of Florida, that Chris Blair be immediately suspended from the public office, which he now holds, upon the grounds set forth in this executive order.

**NOW, THEREFORE, I, RICK SCOTT**, Governor of Florida, pursuant to Article IV, Section 7 of the Florida Constitution, find as follows:




- A. Chris Blair is, and at all times material hereto was, serving as Sheriff of Marion County, Florida.
- B. The office of Sheriff of Marion County is within the purview of the suspension power of the Governor, pursuant to Article IV, Section 7 of the Florida Constitution.

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