

**ARIZONA**

# An Arizona inmate accused officers of sexual assault before she died. Here's what we know

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Published 12:33 p.m. MT Dec. 30, 2019

Jordan Marie Simms died in a hospital room after she slipped out of her handcuffs and jumped from a moving sheriff's vehicle on Thursday, police say. She accused two officers of sexually assaulting her days before she died.

The Safford Police Department confirmed in a statement on Monday that Simms, 28, had made "an allegation" against arresting officer Jeremiah French and the department had placed French on paid administrative leave. The Graham County Sheriff's Office also confirmed on Monday that Simms also made an allegation against one of its detention officers.

Simms was being taken to the Mount Graham Regional Medical Center in Safford for an exam when she allegedly removed her handcuffs, belly chain and ankle restraints and jumped out of the Ford Explorer's rear driver's side door, according to the Graham County Sheriff's Office.

After a woman claiming to be Simms' aunt went viral on Facebook with a post about Simms and a GoFundMe was started to help her family financially, the Sheriff's Office downplayed "many of the social media posts" as "unfounded."

## Timeline of what happened to Jordan Simms

**Dec. 21:** Simms was arrested on Dec. 21 by the Safford Police Department on suspicion of shoplifting, according to the department.

She also had an outstanding warrant from Yavapai County, which was "theft and drug-related," with a \$25,000 bond.

**Dec. 23:** Simms accused the arresting officer of sexually assaulting her, according to a Facebook post from Crystal Barnett, who identified herself as Simms' aunt.

That day, the Safford Police Department started an internal and criminal investigation into the accusation.

Safford police took Simms to the Graham County Adult Detention Facility for a "specialized exam due to an allegation made by her against a Safford officer," the Graham County Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

**Dec. 24:** The Safford Police Department put French, the accused officer, on paid administrative leave.

Around 4 a.m., Simms was taken to the Graham County Adult Detention Facility again. At about 7:57 p.m. that day, she said the detention officer who dressed her around 4 a.m. also "sexually assaulted" her, according to the Sheriff's Office.

**Dec. 26:** The Sheriff's Office took Simms to an "advocacy center" in Sierra Vista for a "specialized exam."

The Safford Police Station, the Graham County Adult Detention Facility and Mount Graham Regional Medical Center are all within a few miles of each other, while Sierra Vista is about a two-hour drive south.

A medical professional in Sierra Vista recommended taking Simms to Mount Graham Regional Medical Hospital in Safford for more exams before taking Simms back to the detention facility.

As they were approaching the hospital in Safford, police say Simms jumped out of the moving Sheriff's Office vehicle.

She allegedly jumped out of the vehicle about two blocks from the hospital, Safford Police Chief Joe Brugman said. It's not clear how fast the vehicle was going.

Simms removed her handcuffs, belly chain and ankle restraints before jumping out, according to the Sheriff's Office. "Staff" loosened the ankle restraints after Simms complained about chafing, the Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

Officers found her jail-issued shoes in the back of the vehicle, along with an open bottle of shower gel, which was the same kind as the shower gel in the bathroom she used in Sierra Vista, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Simms allegedly jumped from the rear driver's side door and police say the child locks on that door were in the "off position."

Her alleged escape is being investigated by the Arizona Department of Public Safety's Investigation Division, according to DPS spokesman Bart Graves.

Simms was taken to the Mount Graham Regional Hospital with life-threatening injuries, including head injuries, and was later flown to Banner-University Medical Center in Tucson, according to the Sheriff's Office.

**Dec. 28:** Crystal Barnett, who said on Facebook that she is Simms' aunt, made a Facebook post detailing what she said were Simms' allegations and her family's questions about what happened to her.

Barnett said Simms died at 1:50 a.m. in the hospital.

The Graham County Sheriff's Office in a statement on Monday called "many of the social media posts ... unfounded, as is often the case when opinions, claims and random posts are made before an investigation is completed or is on-going."

The Sheriff's Office has said publicly that Simms was pronounced dead at Banner University Medical Center in Tucson, but a Banner Health spokeswoman told The Arizona Republic that the hospital has "no record of this person in our hospital directory."

**Dec. 30:** Arizona Department of Public Safety officials will continue the investigation into Simms' alleged escape and "events involving Jordan Simms," according to the Sheriff's Office.

Arizona Department of Public Safety will also continue to investigate the accusation against the Safford Police Department officer, according to Safford police.

## **Social media shows a community outraged**

Simms' story has gone viral.

Barnett's post detailing what happened to Simms in the hospital had gotten more than 6,700 reactions and 4,000 comments as of Monday morning. (Warning: Her post contains graphic photos.)

Deborah Sanchez posted on Facebook that she is Simms' mother and that Simms had three children. She posted, "If you know my daughter she is straight up a fighter and a heart of

gold."

Another woman, Cassidi Hall, said she was Simms' aunt and started a Facebook fundraiser for the family. Her original Facebook post accusing police of raping Simms, with the hashtag #JusticeForJorden, had been shared nearly 30,000 times and had 14,000 reactions as of Monday afternoon.

A Facebook page named "Missing Flowers: Missing Murdered Indigenous Women and Men" also shared the GoFundMe link and gave "condolences to Jorden Marie Simms family at this very hard, emotional, and sad times."

Neither Barnett, Sanchez, Hall, nor the GoFundMe creator responded to The Arizona Republic's requests for comment as of Monday afternoon.

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