

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM YORK COUNTY  
Court of Common Pleas

The Honorable Charles J. McCutchen

Appellate Case No. 2025-000705

James S. Patton,

Appellant,

v.

Kera R. Selzer and Dustin S. Selzer,

Respondents.

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**AMENDED RETURN TO RESPONDENT'S MOTION TO DISMISS**

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Appellant, James Patton, respectfully requests the Court deny Respondents' motion to dismiss because this case is not moot for several reasons.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, restraining orders are completed long before an appellate court can review the issues they implicate and present issues that are capable of repetition, yet evading review. See Curtis v. State, 345 S.C. 557, 549 S.E.2d 591 (2001); State v. Passmore, 363 S.C. 568, 583, 611 S.E.2d 273, 281 (Ct. App. 2005); State v. Simpson, 429 S.C. 83, 837 S.E.2d 669 (2020); Byrd v. Irmo High School, 321 S.C. 426, 431-32, 468 S.E.2d 861, 864 (1996); Nelson v. Ozmint, 390 S.C. 432, 434-35, 702 S.E.2d 369, 370 (2010).

**PROCEDURAL HISTORY**

On September 30, 2024, Respondents filed a Complaint and Motion for Restraining Order

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<sup>1</sup> Appellant submits this Amended Return because Counsel for Appellant inadvertently identified James Patton as Respondent, and the Respondents as Appellant in the body of the initial Return.

in the Bethel-Kings Mountain Magistrate Court alleging Appellant was engaging in Harassment, First Degree. Following a hearing on November 5, 2024, the Magistrate Court granted Respondents' motion and issued a restraining order.

On November 25, 2024, Appellant filed a Notice of Intent to Appeal in the Court of Common Pleas. The parties appeared before the Honorable Charles J. McCutchen on February 25, 2025, for appellate review of the Magistrate Judge's issuance of a Restraining Order. The Circuit Court filed an Order affirming the Magistrate's Restraining Order on March 12, 2025.

On April 11, 2025, Appellant filed a Notice of Appeal in this Court and subsequently filed the Initial Brief of Appellant on December 2, 2025. The Respondent filed this motion to dismiss on March 2, 2026, and its Initial Brief on March 4, 2026.

## LAW

An opinion from 1895 is generally understood to be the first United States Supreme Court decision directly addressing the mootness doctrine. Mills v. Green, 159 U.S. 651 (1895). Interestingly, Mills involved the election of delegates to a convention to revise South Carolina's constitution. Id. at 652. A South Carolina citizen filed suit, claiming the state's voter registration statutes unconstitutionally "abridge[ed], imped[ed], and destroy[ed] the suffrage of citizens of the state and of the United States." Id. at 651-52. While the case was pending on appeal, the date of the delegate election for the convention passed, the delegates were selected, and the constitutional convention was assembled. Therefore, the Court held that "the whole object of the [plaintiff's lawsuit] was to secure a right to vote at the election." Id. at 657. The matter was therefore dismissed. Since then, however, the Supreme Court has generally *declined to deem cases moot* that present issues or disputes that are "capable of repetition, yet evading review."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Kingdomware Techs., Inc. v. United States, 579 U.S. 162, 170 (2016); Turner v. Rogers,  
Page 2 of 8

The classic example of a dispute that is capable of repetition, yet evading review is a pregnant woman’s constitutional challenge to an abortion regulation. See Roe v. Wade, 410 U.S. 113, 125 (1973)<sup>3</sup> (quoting S. Pac. Terminal Co. v. ICC, 219 U.S. 498, 515 (1911)). Once a woman gives birth, abortion is no longer an option for terminating that particular pregnancy. However, almost any litigation of significance—especially if it involves an appeal—can rarely be fully resolved in a mere nine months. If a challenge to an abortion regulation became moot as soon as the challenger gave birth, “pregnancy litigation seldom w[ould] survive much beyond the trial stage, and appellate review w[ould] be effectively denied.” Id.

The Supreme Court has deemed certain other controversies outside of the abortion context as capable of repetition, yet evading review as well. For example, in FEC v. Wis. Right to Life, Inc., an advocacy organization claimed that restrictions on “electioneering communications” established by the Campaign Reform Act of 2002 unconstitutionally prohibited the organization from broadcasting certain political advertisements shortly before the 2004 election. 551 U.S. 449, 457-60 (2007). Even though the case did not reach the Supreme Court until long after the 2004

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564 U.S. 431, 439-41 (2011); Davis v. FEC, 554 U.S. 724, 735-36 (2008); FEC v. Wis. Right to Life, Inc., 551 U.S. 449, 462 (2007); Norman v. Reed, 502 U.S. 279, 287-88 (1992); Int’l Org. of Masters, Mates & Pilots v. Brown, 498 U.S. 466, 472 (1991); Meyer v. Grant, 486 U.S. 414, 417 n.2 (1988); Honig v. Doe, 484 U.S. 305, 317-23 (1988); Burlington N. R.R. Co. v. Bhd. Of Maint. Of Way Emps., 481 U.S. 429, 436 n.4 (1987); Brock v. Roadway Express, Inc., 481 U.S. 252, 257-78 (1987); Press-Enter. Co. v. Super. Ct. of Cal. for Cty. Of Riverside, 478 U.S. 1, 6 (1986); Globe Newspaper Co. v. Super. Ct. for Cty. of Norfolk, 457 U.S. 596, 603 (1982); Democratic Party of U.S. v. Wisconsin ex rel. La Follette, 450 U.S. 107, 115 n.13 (1981); Gannett Co. v. DePasquale, 442 U.S. 368, 377 (1979); Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 526 n.5 (1979); First Nat’l Bank of Bos. V. Bellotti, 435 U.S. 765, 774 (1978); United States v. N.Y. Tel. Co., 434 U.S. 159, 165 n.6 (1977); Neb. Press Ass’n v. Stuart, 427 U.S. 539, 546-47 (1976); Gerstein v. Pugh, 420 U.S. 103, 110 n.11 (1975); Super Tire Eng’g Co. v. McCorkle, 416 U.S. 115, 125-27 (1974); Storer v. Brown, 415 U.S. 724, 737 n.8 (1974); Dunn v. Blumstein, 405 U.S. 330, 333 n.2 (1972); S. Pac. Terminal Co. v. ICC, 219 U.S. 498, 514-16 (1911).

<sup>3</sup> While Roe v. Wade was overruled last year, mootness was not addressed by the Court in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, 142 S.Ct. 2228 (2022).

election had passed, the Court nonetheless concluded that the case was not moot. Id. at 462-64.

The Court reasoned that the organization “credibly claimed that it planned on running ‘materially similar’ future targeted broadcast ads” in advance of future elections, and the period between elections was too short to allow the organization sufficient time to fully litigate its constitutional challenges sufficiently in advance of the election date. Id.; see also Davis v. FEC, 554 U.S. 724, 735-36 (2008) (rejecting mootness challenge in case whose facts “closely resemble[d]” those at issue in Wisconsin Right to Life).

South Carolina recognizes the “capable of repetition, yet evade review” exception. Byrd v. Irmo High School, 321 S.C. 426, 431-32, 468 S.E.2d 861, 864 (1996). For the exception to apply, “the action must be one which will truly evade review.” Sloan v. Friends of Hunley, Inc., 369 S.C. 20, 27, 630 S.E.2d 474, 478 (2006). The exception is most applicable in situations where the prejudice suffered by the complaining party is temporary and has ended by the time of appellate review. See Byrd, 321 S.C. at 432, 468 S.E.2d at 864 (finding short term student suspensions evade review because they are, “*by their very nature, completed long before an appellate court can review the issues they implicate*”) (emphasis added).

In Byrd, a student from Lexington-Richland School District 5 was suspended for ten days after coming onto campus after having consumed alcohol. Id. at 321 S.C. 426, 429, 468 S.E.2d 861, 863. After exhausting his appeals through the district’s policies, the family engaged counsel who filed suit at the circuit court.<sup>4</sup> Id. at 429-30, 468 S.E.2d at 863. Following the circuit court’s dismissal under Rule 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6), SCRCPP, the student sought an appeal, alleging three grounds of error against the circuit court. Id.

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<sup>4</sup> The student also petitioned our Supreme Court for supersedeas, which was denied. Id. at 430, 468 S.E.2d at 863.

After the notice of appeal was filed, Irmo High School moved to dismiss the case as moot. Id. “It assert[ed] that Student’s suspension occurred in August and September 1994, that Student has since returned to school, and that the suspension has been cleared from Student’s record.” Id. at 430, 468 S.E.2d at 863-64. The Byrd opinion was issued approximately eighteen months after the suspension, yet our Supreme Court declined to apply the mootness doctrine and instead found the “capable of repetition, yet evading review” exception applicable. Our Supreme Court held that the student’s case was not moot because future suspensions could be concluded before *appellate judicial review* could be accomplished:

Applying this standard, we find that even if it is assumed that the issue in the present case is moot, it is an issue that is capable of repetition, but which will evade review. Short-term student suspensions, by their very nature, *are completed long before an appellate court can review the issues they implicate*. Therefore, we conclude that the present case clearly fits into the evading review exception of the mootness doctrine, even if it were not otherwise appropriate for the Court to address this appeal.

Id. at 432, 468 S.E.2d at 864 (emphasis added).

The short-term nature of the reincarceration has the potential for recurrence but will likely fail to last long enough to permit contemporaneous judicial review. See Nelson v. Ozmint, 390 S.C. 432, 434-35, 702 S.E.2d 369, 370 (2010) (“We find this issue is one that is capable of repetition, yet will usually evade review because most inmates will have served the year required by SCDC’s interpretation of the statute before the lawfulness of the interpretation can be reviewed.”).

In State v. Passmore, the appellant received a one-year sentence for criminal contempt. 363 S.C. 568, 611 S.E.2d 273 (Ct. App. 2005). On appeal, she alleged a constitutional violation based upon the lack of a jury trial. Id. Although she was no longer incarcerated at the time the opinion was issued, the Court of Appeals held the issue was not moot. Id. Much like the matter

*sub judice*, the state contended in Passmore “that even if Appellant’s sentence was unconstitutional, [the Court of Appeals] should affirm because she has served the sentence, rendering the case moot.” Id. at 581, 611 S.E.2d at 280. The Court of Appeals cited Curtis v. State, 345 S.C. 557, 549 S.E.2d 591 (2001) for the three primary exceptions to the mootness doctrine, including the capable of repetition but evading review exception. Id. at 582, 611 S.E.2d at 280. The Court found the “capable of repetition yet evading review” exception and another applicable and therefore refused to dismiss Passmore’s appeal as moot. Id. at 582, 611 S.E.2d at 281.

Applying a similar rationale as discussed above, the Court held:

[T]he State concedes in its brief: “the sentence was in fact too brief to be fully litigated through appeal prior to its expiration...” The issue, then, is whether the constitutional violation suffered by Appellant could be inflicted on a contemnor in the future. That the unconstitutional sentence was imposed here is evidence enough a judge could make the same error in the future.

Id. at 582, 611 S.E.2d at 281 (emphasis added). See Seabrook v. City of Folly Beach, 337 S.C. 304, 523 S.E.2d 462 (1999) and Sloan v. Friends of Hunley, Inc., 369 S.C. 20, 630 S.E.2d 474 (2006).

In Seabrook, Appellant Folly Beach imposed conditions on land in the Lowcountry. 337 S.C. 304, 523 S.E.2d 462 (1999). Following the advent of litigation, Folly Beach “voluntarily removed the conditions and approved Respondents’ plat and Respondents ... abandoned their taking claim.” Id. at 307, 523 S.E.2d at 463. Therefore, our Supreme Court concluded a ruling on the pending issues would have no practical effect. Id. Additionally, although the factual scenario was capable of repetition, according to our Supreme Court, “it does not evade review, and would have been clearly reviewable had Folly Beach not voluntarily removed the conditions and Respondents abandoned their taking claim.” Id.

In a FOIA case, our Supreme Court held that it did not fall under the capable of repetition, yet evade review exception. Croft as Tr. of James. A. Croft Tr. v. Town of Summerville, 433 S.C. 473, 860 S.E.2d 352 (2021). In doing so, the Court nonetheless reiterated that the scope of review includes appellate review:

The exception is most applicable in situations where the prejudice suffered by the complaining party is temporary and has ended by the time of appellate review. Even if the issues related to alleged FIOA and ordinance violations by the Board are capable of repetition, they do not evade review. Here, Petitioners' appeal became moot because the Developer decided to abandon the Project, not because Petitioners had insufficient time to challenge the Board's approval before the controversy ended.

Id. at 480-81, 860 S.E.2d 352, 356 (internal citation omitted).

Our jurisprudence is replete with recent cases where courts have relied on exceptions to the mootness doctrine to reach the merits. Three years ago, our Supreme Court addressed mootness in a case involving a sentencing question. State v. Simpson, 429 S.C. 83, 837 S.E.2d 669 (2020). The Court found the question of Simpson's sentence moot due to his completion of the home detention portion of the sentence but found that the issue was capable of repetition and would generally evade review. Id. at 89, 837 S.E.2d at 672. Our Supreme Court also concluded in S.C. Pub. Int. Found. v. S.C. Dep't of Transportation, 421 S.C. 110, 121-22, 804 S.E.2d 854, 860-61 (2017), that the issue of whether SCDOT could inspect bridges inside private, gated communities is one that is capable of repetition yet will generally evade review.

If a decision by the lower court may affect future events, or have collateral consequences, an appeal from that decision is not moot, even though the appellate court cannot give effective relief in the present case. Curtis v. State, 345 S.C. 557, 549 S.E.2d 591 (2001); see also 5 AM.JUR.2D Appellate Review § 649 (1995). In State v. Passmore, the appellant made similar contentions regarding collateral consequences:

Although Appellant's time has been served, she may yet experience the repercussions of having been sentenced to a year in prison for contempt of court. For example, she might be obliged to indicate jail time served on an employment application. Thus, the sentence could affect her ability to obtain future employment. Likewise, she could be required to disclose the conviction on a credit application, thereby hindering her chances of securing credit. Further, drivers' license applications, voter registration applications, and other documents may mandate the divulgence of prior convictions. Hence, Appellant's unconstitutional conviction will continue to stigmatize and prejudice her. These significant collateral consequences are enough to surmount the mootness doctrine.

363 S.C. 568, 583, 611 S.E.2d 273, 281 (Ct. App. 2005).

### ARGUMENT

In this case, the Appellant respectfully requests that the Court deny Respondents' motion to dismiss. Specifically, this case is not moot because restraining orders are completed long before an appellate court can review the issues they implicate and present issues that are capable of repetition, yet evading review. *See* Curtis, 345 S.C. 557, 549 S.E.2d 591; Passmore, 363 S.C. at 583, 611 S.E.2d at 281; Simpson, 429 S.C. 83, 837 S.E.2d 669; Byrd, 321 S.C. at 431-32, 468 S.E.2d at 864; Nelson, 390 S.C. at 434-35, 702 S.E.2d at 370. Therefore, this Court should deny Respondents' motion to dismiss.

Respectfully Submitted,

s/ Dayne C. Phillips  
**Dayne C. Phillips, Esq.**  
PRICE BENOWITZ LLP  
1614 Taylor Street, Suite D.  
Columbia, SC 29201  
O: 803-272-4503  
C: 803-807-0234  
F: 803-380-8035  
dayne@pricebenowitz.com

**March 16, 2026**

ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

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**Mar 16 2026**

**SC Court of Appeals**

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM YORK COUNTY  
Court of Common Pleas

The Honorable Charles J. McCutchen

Appellate Case No. 2025-000705

James S. Patton,

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v.


Kera R. Selzer and Dustin S. Selzer,

Respondent.

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that I have this date served the within and foregoing Amended Return to Respondent's Motion to Dismiss by emailing and depositing a true and correct copy of the same via first-class mail, postage prepaid, upon all parties as follows:

Creighton Hayes, Hayes and Hayes, LLC, Post Office Box 904, Rock Hill, SC 29731

  
**Courtney Powers**  
*Paralegal*

1614 Taylor Street, Suite D.  
Columbia, SC 29201  
C: (803) 216-5561  
F: (803) 380-8035  
courtney@pricebenowitz.com

**March 16, 2026**

**PRICE BENOWITZ LLP**

1614 TAYLOR STREET  
SUITE D  
COLUMBIA, SC 29201

OFFICE: (803) 272-4503  
DIRECT: (803) 807-0234  
FAX: (803) 380-8035

DAVID BENOWITZ  
ADMITTED DC, MD & VA  
DAYNE PHILLIPS  
ADMITTED SC  
JOHN YANNONE  
ADMITTED MD & DC  
KERRI CASTELLINI  
ADMITTED DC, MD & VA  
KUSH ARORA  
ADMITTED MD & DC  
NICOLAS TORRES  
ADMITTED FL  
SEAN O-BRIEN  
ADMITTED IL  
PETER KENT ODOM  
ADMITTED DC, MD, VA, NH & GA  
RAMMY BARBARI  
ADMITTED DC & VA  
MARVIN OCHOA  
ADMITTED MD  
ARREN WALDREP  
ADMITTED DC, MD & SC  
KENNETH LADUCA  
ADMITTED DC, MD & VA  
JEFF STICKLE  
ADMITTED MD & DC  
FARRAL HABER  
ADMITTED FL, VA & DC  
PAULETTE PAGAN  
ADMITTED DC, MD & MO  
RYAN HUTTAR  
ADMITTED VA  
DONNA MURPHY  
ADMITTED VA & DC  
JEANNE BROWN  
ADMITTED VA & DC  
TAYLOR COMSTOCK  
ADMITTED MD, DC & VA  
ELIANE MAKHLOUF  
ADMITTED MD & DC  
TONY MUNTER  
ADMITTED DC, MA & MD  
DRAKE BIRNBAUM  
ADMITTED DC & MD

\*OF COUNSEL

409 7TH STREET NW, SUITE 200  
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

SETH PRICE  
ADMITTED DC & NY  
TAMMY BEGUN  
ADMITTED DC & MD  
KARIN RILEY PORTER  
ADMITTED VA  
SETH OKIN  
ADMITTED MD  
DENNIS SOMECH  
ADMITTED DC & VA  
ABIGAIL BEICHLER  
ADMITTED MD  
JOEL NIED  
ADMITTED VA, PA & GA  
MICHAEL LEE  
ADMITTED VA & CO  
CHAD PROPST  
ADMITTED SC  
DAMIEN SMITH  
ADMITTED DC & VA  
W. ANDREW PATZIG  
ADMITTED DC & VA  
SUKHPREET "VICK" SINGH  
ADMITTED SC  
KEN KOPPELMAN  
ADMITTED IL, DC & VA  
RAYAN MOMENAH  
ADMITTED DC & MD  
HANNAH AMUNDSON  
ADMITTED FL, DC & MD  
JUSTIN TURNER  
ADMITTED MD & DC  
KIMBERLY PHILLIPS  
ADMITTED VA & DC  
ANDREW LINDSEY  
ADMITTED VA  
EVA SWANSON  
ADMITTED VA  
ASHLEY WILSON  
ADMITTED VA & DC  
BRIAN MORRIS  
ADMITTED DC, TX & IL  
KEVIN KELLEY  
ADMITTED MD, SC & FL

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**Mar 16 2026**  
**SC Court of Appeals**

10505 JUDICIAL DRIVE, SUITE 203  
FAIRFAX, VA 22030

**March 16, 2026**

The Honorable Jenny Kitchings  
Clerk of Court, SC Court of Appeal  
P.O. Box 11629  
Columbia, SC 29211

**Re: James S. Patton v. Kera R. Selzer and Dustin S. Selzer**  
**REPLY TO INITIAL BRIEF OF RESPONDENT; AMENDED RETURN**  
**TO RESPONDENT'S MOTION TO DISMISS**  
**Appellate Case No. 2025-000705**

Dear Ms. Kitchings:

I have attached the original Reply to Initial Brief of Respondent and the original Amended Return to Respondent's Motion to Dismiss that I also emailed for filing today in the above-referenced case.

Thank you for your assistance with filing these documents. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

s/ Dayne C. Phillips  
**Dayne C. Phillips, Esq.**  
(803) 807-0234

cc: **James S. Patton**  
**Creighton Hayes, Esq.**

WWW.SCCRIMINALLAWS.COM

WWW.PRICEBENOWITZ.COM