

**RECEIVED**

**Apr 20 2026**

**SC Court of Appeals**

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
In The Court of Appeals

---

APPEAL FROM HORRY COUNTY  
Court of General Sessions  
B. ALEX HYMAN, Circuit Court Judge

---

Indictment No.'s: 2021-GS-26-01198; 2024-GS-26-03534

---

The State,

Respondent,

v.

Christopher Dontell,

Appellant.

---

---

EXPLANATION OF APPEAL

---

Christopher Dontell explains appealing his sentence after a plea in the above case. The sentence was imposed by Honorable B. Alex Hyman on July 14, 2025. This appeal is taken from the denial of the Appellant's request for a reasonable sentence.

This explanation and the factual basis for the issue which was raised below by way of a previously attached motion to reconsider the sentence and order denying the same.

Explanation/Argument:

The Trial Court Abused Its Discretion in Imposing the Maximum Sentence Despite Extraordinary Cooperation.

The trial court abused its discretion by imposing the maximum sentence following a guilty plea where the Defendant provided substantial and material cooperation to the State, including testifying as requested.

It is well-settled that, while sentencing is generally within the discretion of the trial court, that discretion is not unfettered. A sentence may be reversed where it is controlled by an error of law or reflects an abuse of discretion, particularly where the court fails to give meaningful consideration to relevant mitigating factors.

Here, the record demonstrates that the Defendant:

- Entered a guilty plea, accepting responsibility and conserving judicial resources;
- Fully cooperated with the State throughout the prosecution;
- Testified on behalf of the State, placing himself and his family at personal risk and providing assistance critical to the administration of justice; and
- Complied with all expectations and requests made by the prosecution.

Despite this extraordinary cooperation, the trial court imposed the maximum allowable sentence, effectively treating the Defendant as though no mitigation existed.

#### Failure to Consider Cooperation as a Mitigating Factor

A sentencing court must consider all relevant mitigating circumstances, including a defendant's acceptance of responsibility and cooperation with law enforcement. Cooperation, particularly testimony for the State, is widely recognized as a significant mitigating factor because it demonstrates rehabilitation and accountability; advances the State's prosecutorial interests; and often exposes the defendant and his family to potential retaliation.

By imposing the statutory maximum without meaningful acknowledgment of these factors, the trial court's sentence reflects a failure to properly weigh mitigation, rendering the sentence excessive and fundamentally unfair.

#### Disproportionate and Unreasonable Sentence

The imposition of the maximum sentence under these circumstances is disproportionate to both the Defendant's conduct and his post-offense behavior. A defendant who pleads guilty,

assists the State, and testifies truthfully, is categorically different from one who obstructs justice or refuses to accept responsibility. Treating both identically for sentencing purposes undermines the integrity of the judicial process and discourages future cooperation.

Abuse of Discretion

This Court has recognized that an abuse of discretion occurs where the trial court's decision is unsupported by the record, controlled by an error of law, or resulting in prejudice to the defendant. Here, the maximum sentence imposed despite undisputed, substantial cooperation falls outside the range of reasonable outcomes and constitutes an abuse of discretion.

Accordingly, the Defendant respectfully requests that this Court:

1. Vacate the sentence, and
2. Remand for resentencing before a different judge, with instructions to properly consider

April 20, 2026.

s/Aimee J. Zmroczek  
Aimee J. Zmroczek (SC Bar #77193)  
A.J.Z. Law Firm, LLC  
P.O. Box 11961  
Columbia, South Carolina 29211  
(803) 403-7750  
aimee@ajzlawfirm.com  
Attorney for Appellant

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
In The Court of Appeals

RECEIVED

Apr 20 2026

SC Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM Horry COUNTY  
Court of General Sessions  
B. ALEX HYMAN, Circuit Court Judge

Indictment No.'s: 2021-GS-26-01198; 2024-GS-26-03534

The State,

Respondent,

v.

Christopher Dontell,

Appellant.

PROOF OF SERVICE

I certify that I have served the Notice of Appeal on Mary Ellen Walter, other counsel of record, by depositing a copy of it in the United States Mail, postage prepaid, on April 20, 2026, addressed to her office at Location: 1301 Second Avenue, Conway, SC 29526.

Mailing:

P.O. Box 1276

Conway, SC 29528

  
Aimee J. Zmroczek (SC Bar #77193)  
A.J.Z. Law Firm, LLC  
P.O. Box 11961  
Columbia, South Carolina 29211  
(803) 403-7750  
aimee@ajzlawfirm.com  
Attorney for Appellant