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Aug 28 2026

SC Court of Appeals

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
IN THE COURT OF APPEALS

Appeal from Spartanburg County

Honorable Grace Gilchrist Knie, Circuit Court Judge

THE STATE,

RESPONDENT,

V.

JAMES CHRISTIAN WRIGHT,

APPELLANT

APPELLATE CASE NO. 2025-001678

ANDERS BRIEF OF APPELLANT

JOANNA K. DELANY
Appellate Defender

South Carolina Commission on Indigent Defense
Division of Appellate Defense
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ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

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Other authorities

Leslie E. Scott, Drug Decriminalization, Addiction, and Mass Incarceration: A Theories of Punishment Framework for Ending the “War on Drugs”, 48 N. Ky. L. Rev. 267, 270 (2021)	6
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STATEMENT OF ISSUE ON APPEAL

Whether the court erred in ordering Appellant's home detention sentences be converted to active terms of incarceration, where Appellant's only violation was drug use shortly after he was sentenced to home detention, since the order resulted in sentences which were disproportionate given the nature of drug addiction and Appellant's circumstances?

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Appellant was accused of several offenses in Spartanburg County: two counts of trafficking methamphetamine, 10 – 28 grams; possession of a weapon during the commission of a violent crime; and the commission of a violent offense while on bond for a violent offense. R. 8, ll. 1-16; R. 48 – 51. On February 19, 2025, Appellant appeared before the Honorable Grace Gilchrist Knie for a guilty plea hearing. R. 1. Appellant was represented by Joshua Schultz. Elizabeth Grenoble prosecuted the case. R. 7, ll. 18-21.

Appellant pleaded guilty to two counts of possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine first offense, reduced from two counts of trafficking methamphetamine. He waived presentment of those offenses to the Grand Jury. The State agreed to dismiss by nolle prosequi the weapons offense and the bond-related offense. The parties had negotiated a sentence of fifteen years suspended to three years of home detention, with the condition that a violation of the terms of home detention would result in a full, fifteen-year revocation. The court accepted the pleas and sentenced Appellant in accordance with the negotiations. R. 8, l. 1 – 15, l. 8.

On March 4, 2025, the State filed a motion to convert the home detention sentence to an active Department of Corrections sentence. R. 40. On May 13, 2025, the defense filed its return to the motion. R. 41 – 42. On May 20, 2025, a hearing was held before Judge Knie on the matter. Appellant was represented by James Farr. R. 17. The court heard arguments from the parties and took the matter under consideration. R. 19, l. 1 – 25, l. 15. On May 23, 2025, the court issued an order granting the State’s motion. R. 43 – 44.

On May 30, 2025, the defense filed a motion to reconsider the May 23, 2025, order. R. 45. On August 1, 2025, a hearing was held before Judge Knie on the matter. R. 27. The defense

presented letters from Appellant's family members.¹ The court heard arguments from the parties. The court took the order under advisement. R. 29, l. 11 – 35, l. 17. On August 11, 2025, the court issued an order denying the motion to reconsider. R. 46 – 47.

This appeal follows.

¹ Although the letters were not made exhibits at the hearing, the record reflects that defense counsel stated he was handing the letters up to the judge and the judge stated she would review them prior to issuing her order. The letters are thus included in the Record on Appeal. R. 31, ll. 12-14; R. 34, ll. 18-19; R. 37 – 39.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

“In criminal cases, the appellate court sits to review errors of law only.” *State v. Vick*, 384 S.C. 189, 197, 682 S.E.2d 275, 279 (Ct. App. 2009) (quoting *State v. Wilson*, 345 S.C. 1, 5-6, 545 S.E.2d 827, 829 (2001)). The appellate court is “bound by the trial court’s factual findings unless they are clearly erroneous.” *Id.* (quoting *Wilson*, 345 S.C. at 5-6, 545 S.E.2d at 829). The reviewing court “does not re-evaluate the facts based on its own view of the preponderance of the evidence but simply determines whether the trial court’s ruling is supported by any evidence.” *State v. Slocumb*, 412 S.C. 88, 91, 770 S.E.2d 436, 438 (Ct. App. 2015).

“A sentence will not be overturned absent an abuse of discretion when the ruling is based on an error of law or a factual conclusion without evidentiary support.” *In re M.B.H.*, 387 S.C. 323, 326, 692 S.E.2d 541, 542 (2010). “When considering whether a sentence violates the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition on cruel and unusual punishments, the appellate court’s standard of review extends only to the correction of errors of law.” *State v. Finley*, 427 S.C. 419, 423, 831 S.E.2d 158, 160 (Ct. App. 2019).

ARGUMENT

The court erred in ordering Appellant's home detention sentences be converted to active terms of incarceration, where Appellant's only violation was drug use shortly after he was sentenced to home detention, since the order resulted in the imposition of sentences which were disproportionate given the nature of drug addiction and Appellant's circumstances.

The Constitutions of the United States and the State of South Carolina protect persons from the imposition of unduly harsh punishments. S.C. Const. art. I, § 15 (prohibiting cruel, unusual, or corporal punishment); U.S. Const. amend. VIII (prohibiting cruel and unusual punishments). “A trial judge has broad discretion in sentencing within statutory limits.” *In re M.B.H.*, 387 S.C. 323, 326, 692 S.E.2d 541, 542 (2010) (citing *Brooks v. State*, 325 S.C. 269, 271, 481 S.E.2d 712, 713 (1997)). “A judge must be permitted to consider any and all information that reasonably might bear on the proper sentence for a particular defendant.” *Id.* (citing *State v. Hicks*, 377 S.C. 322, 325, 659 S.E.2d 499, 500 (Ct. App. 2008)).

[T]he general rule is that a sentence within the limits prescribed by law will normally not be disturbed by this Court because of alleged excessiveness. At the same time we have always recognized that even though within the statutory limits a sentence under the circumstances of a particular case may be so grossly disproportionate to the offense committed as to constitute cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Constitution of this State.

State v. Queen, 264 S.C. 515, 527–28, 216 S.E.2d 182, 188 (1975) (Bussey, J., dissenting). “A just sentence is imperative and must not be denied.” *State v. Kimbrough*, 212 S.C. 348, 358, 46 S.E.2d 273, 277 (1948).

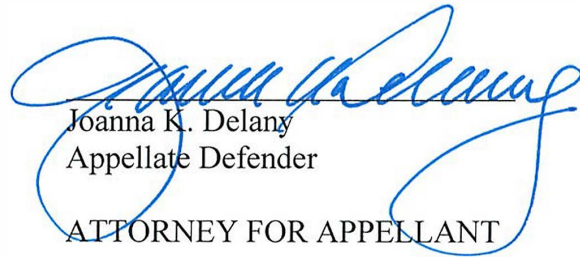
“[N]arcotic addiction is an illness.” *Robinson v. California*, 370 U.S. 660, 667 (1962). An “addict is under compulsions not capable of management without outside help.” *Id.*, 370 U.S. at 671 (Douglas, J., concurring). *See generally Linder v. United States*, 268 U.S. 5, 18

(1925) (drug addicts are “diseased and proper subjects for [medical] treatment”); Leslie E. Scott, Drug Decriminalization, Addiction, and Mass Incarceration: A Theories of Punishment Framework for Ending the “War on Drugs”, 48 N. Ky. L. Rev. 267, 270 (2021) (“changes to the brain’s structure and function as a result of long-term drug use rob [many users] of any true volition when it comes to drug-seeking behaviors and use”); *Powell v. State of Tex.*, 392 U.S. 514, 567 (1968) (Fortas, J., dissenting) (“Criminal penalties may not be inflicted upon a person for being in a condition he is powerless to change.”); *Manning v. Caldwell for City of Roanoke*, 930 F.3d 264, 283-84 (4th Cir. 2019) (where statutory scheme “effectively criminalizes an illness,” i.e., alcoholism, plaintiffs have stated a claim that the challenged statute violates the Eighth Amendment).

Appellant had a history of drug addiction and serious medical and psychological problems. R. 23, ll. 7-20; R. 30, l. 19 – 31, l. 3; R. 37 – 39. His criminal record reflected a history of addiction. R. 11, l. 25 – 12, l. 1. The facts of his offenses indicated addiction. Both times he was arrested for methamphetamines, law enforcement found paraphernalia for drug use with the drugs. R. 10, l. 21 – 11, 19. His family members expressed a willingness to help him get treatment for drug addiction. R. 37 – 39. His only violation of the home detention sentence was use of methamphetamines. R. 20, l. 7 – 21, l. 4. Case law and scientific literature recognizes that a drug addict is largely powerless to abstain. *E.g.*, *Robinson v. California*, 370 U.S. at 667. The court’s decision to activate the fifteen-year terms based only on an instance of drug use was an abuse of discretion. It resulted in a sentence disproportionate to the crimes on these facts, and thus it was unsupported by the facts and based on an error of law. Under these circumstances, the imposition of the active term was in violation of constitutional limits. S.C. Const. art. I, § 15; U.S. Const. amend. VIII.

CONCLUSION

Appellant respectfully requests this Court reverse the orders of the circuit court and remand for a new hearing.



Joanna K. Delany
Appellate Defender
ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

This 28th day of August, 2026.

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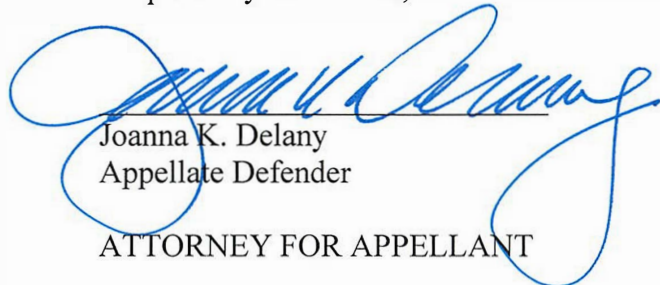
PETITION TO BE RELIEVED AS COUNSEL

Counsel for James Wright states:

1. She is an Appellate Defender for the South Carolina Office of Appellate Defense, and was appointed to represent appellant.
2. She has reviewed the record of appellant's plea before Judge Grace Gilchrist Knie, which was held on February 19, 2025, and, in her opinion, the appeal is without legal merit sufficient to warrant a new trial.
3. She has, pursuant to Anders v. California, 386 U.S. 738, 87 S. Ct. 1396 (1967), briefed an arguable legal issue which arose during the course of the trial.

Wherefore, she asks the Court to relieve her as counsel for James Wright.

Respectfully Submitted,


Joanna K. Delany
Appellate Defender
ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

This 28th day of August, 2026.

CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL

The undersigned certifies that to the best of my ability this Anders Brief of Appellant complies with Rule 211(b), SCACR, and the April 15, 2014, order from the South Carolina Supreme Court entitled “Revised Order Concerning Personal Identifying Information and Other Sensitive Information in Appellate Court Filings.”

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Appellate Defender

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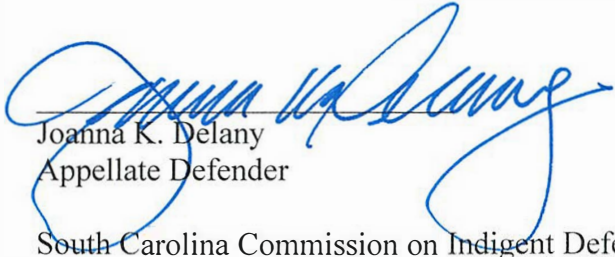
JAMES CHRISTIAN WRIGHT,

APPELLANT

APPELLATE CASE NO. 2025-001678

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

Pursuant to Rule 262(a)(3) and Rule 262(c)(3), SCACR, the undersigned hereby certifies a true copy of the Anders Brief of Appellant and Record on Appeal in the above-referenced case has been served upon Mark Farthing, Esquire, at the primary e-mail address listed in the Attorney Information System (AIS); and on James Wright, #397580, at Manning Correctional Institution, 502 Beckman Drive, Columbia, SC 29203, this 28th day of August, 2026.


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Outlook

2025-001678 The State v. James Christian Wright

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 3 attachments (4 MB)

2025-001678 The State v. James Christian Wright Anders Brief of Appellant.pdf; 2025-001678 The State v. James Christian Wright Record on Appeal.pdf; 2025-001678 The State v. James Christian Wright Anders Brief of Appellant Attorney General Letter.pdf;

Good afternoon,

Attached for service in the above-referenced case are the Anders Brief of Appellant and the Record on Appeal which will be filed today August 28th with the Court of Appeals via email filing.

Respectfully,

Catherine Walkup, Administrative Assistant

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