

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM ADMINISTRATIVE LAW COURT

Administrative Law Judge S. Phillip Lenski

Case No. 13-ALJ-04-0192-AP

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SC Court of Appeals

Willie Roundtree, # 267355,.....Appellant,

v.

South Carolina Department of Corrections.....Respondent.

INITIAL BRIEF OF RESPONDENT

February 11, 2014

South Carolina Department of Corrections

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STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES ON APPEAL

- I. WAS APPELLANT AFFORDED ALL CONSTITUTIONALLY REQUIRED DUE PROCESS?**

- II. IS RESPONDENT'S FINAL AGENCY DECISION SUPPORTED BY SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE?**

STATEMENT OF CASE

This matter comes before this Honorable Court pursuant to the appeal of Willie Roundtree (“appellant”), an inmate incarcerated with the South Carolina Department of Corrections (“SCDC”). Appellant was convicted of the inmate disciplinary offense of possession of any communication device, offense 898 under SCDC Policy OP-22.14, Inmate Disciplinary System, following a disciplinary hearing. Appellant lost 60 days of good time due to the disciplinary conviction. (Disciplinary Report & Hearing Record).

Appellant filed a Step One Grievance on January 4, 2013, challenging his disciplinary conviction. This grievance was investigated and denied. (Step One Grievance). Appellant filed a Step Two Grievance on January 22, 2013, which was also denied. (Step Two Grievance). Appellant filed a Notice of Appeal in the Administrative Law Court (ALC), pursuant to Al-Shabazz v. State, 338 S.C. 354, 527 S.E.2d 742 (2000). (ALC Notice of Appeal).

The ALC affirmed SCDC’s final decision, finding the disciplinary hearing comported with due process, including notice, presence of appellant’s accuser, assistance of counsel substitute, a written statement of findings, a neutral and detached hearing officer, and sanctions based upon the nature and severity of the offense. The ALC also ruled appellant’s disciplinary conviction was supported by sufficient evidence. (Order filed Aug. 23, 2013).

Appellant now appeals the ALC’s decision. For the reasons that follow, SCDC respectfully requests that the ALC’s decision be affirmed.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-610(B) provides the applicable standard of review:

The review of the administrative law judge's order must be confined to the record. The reviewing tribunal may affirm the decision or remand the case for further proceedings; or it may reverse or modify the decision if the substantive rights of the petitioner have been prejudiced because of the finding, conclusion, or decision is:

- (a) in violation of constitutional or statutory provisions;
- (b) in excess of the statutory authority of the agency;
- (c) made upon unlawful procedure;
- (d) affected by other error of law;
- (e) clearly erroneous in view of the reliable, probative and substantial evidence on the whole record; or
- (f) arbitrary or capricious or characterized by abuse of discretion or clearly unwarranted exercise of discretion.

See also S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-380(5); Lake v. Reeder Constr. Co., 330 S.C. 242, 498 S.E.2d 650, 653 (Ct. App. 1998).

In an appeal of the final decision of an administrative agency, the standard of appellate review is whether the ALC's findings are supported by substantial evidence. See S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-610(B). A reviewing Court shall not substitute its judgment for that of the ALC as to findings of fact, but it may reverse or modify decisions which are controlled by error of law or are clearly erroneous in view of the substantial evidence on the record as a whole. Id. In determining whether the ALC's decision was supported by substantial evidence, the Court need only find, considering the record as a whole, evidence from which reasonable minds could reach the same conclusion that the ALC

reached. DuRant v. S.C. Dep't of Health & Environmental Control, 361 S.C. 416, 420, 604 S.E.2d 704, 706 (Ct. App. 2004). The mere possibility of drawing two inconsistent conclusions from the evidence does not prevent a finding from being supported by substantial evidence. Id.

ARGUMENT AND CITATION OF AUTHORITY

I. APPELLANT WAS AFFORDED ALL CONSTITUTIONALLY REQUIRED DUE PROCESS.

Prison disciplinary cases are not criminal trials in federal or state courts. Instead, they are administrative hearings in an institutional setting. Therefore, Due Process in prison disciplinary hearings is substantially less than would be required in a criminal trial before a court. Due Process requires the following in prison disciplinary cases:

- a) notice of charges;
- b) disclosure of evidence against defendant (may be limited);
- c) opportunity to be heard;
- d) no right to confront and cross-examine adverse witnesses;
- e) neutral and detached hearing body;
- f) aid of counsel substitute or other substitute aid where inmate is illiterate or complex case (not attorney);
- g) written statement by the fact-finder as to the evidence relied upon.

Wolff v. McDonnell, 418 U.S. 539, 566 (1974).

The requirements enumerated in Wolff were complied with in this case. The Disciplinary Report and Hearing Record demonstrate that appellant had notice of the charge. (Disciplinary Report and Hearing Record). The record also reveals there was proper disclosure of evidence due to the fact that the Disciplinary Offense Report was read at the disciplinary hearing. (Transcript pp.1-2). Furthermore, appellant was afforded an opportunity to be heard at the disciplinary hearing. (Transcript pp.3-6).

There was a neutral and detached hearing body at the hearing, an SCDC disciplinary hearing officer. (Transcript p.1). Appellant was provided counsel substitute and disclosure of the written statement of the hearing officer's findings. (Disciplinary Report and Hearing Record).

There was ample evidentiary support for the disciplinary conviction. Mr. Birone reported appellant was caught using a cell phone by his immediate supervisor, Larry Pugh. (Transcript p.2). Based upon Brione's report and testimony, the disciplinary conviction was fully supported by the evidence. (Transcript p.6)

Because appellant's disciplinary conviction comported with all due process requirements, SCDC respectfully requests the decision of the ALC

II. RESPONDENT'S FINAL AGENCY DECISION IS SUPPORTED BY SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

A reviewing court will not disturb the findings of an administrative agency if those findings are supported by substantial evidence on record as a whole. Pearson v. JPS Converter & Indus. Corp., 327 S.C. 393, 489 S.E.2d 219 (Ct. App. 1997). "Substantial evidence" is evidence which, considering the record as a whole, would allow a reasonable mind to reach conclusion that the administrative agency reached to justify its action. Lark v. Bi-Lo, Inc., 276 S.C. 130, 276 S.E.2d 304 (1981). The possibility of drawing two inconsistent conclusions from the evidence does not prevent an administrative agency's finding from being supported by substantial evidence. Grant v. S.C. Coastal Council, 319 S.C. 348, 461 S.E.2d 388 (1995). Administrative agencies are afforded wide latitude in making decisions, as shown in the deferential standard of appellate review. Heater of

Seabrook, Inc. v. Public Serv. Comm'n, 332 S.C. 20, 503 S.E.2d 739 (1998).

All credible evidence presented at appellant's hearing indicates appellant was guilty of this disciplinary offense. The record conclusively establishes that the "substantial evidence on the whole record" supports respondent's final agency decision. The disciplinary hearing officer stated she found appellant was guilty based upon Brione's report and testimony. (Transcript p.6).

Appellant has not carried his burden of proving that the decision of the Department is clearly erroneous, or arbitrary or capricious, or an abuse of discretion. See Porter v. S.C. Public Serv. Comm'n, 333 S.C. 12, 507 S.E.2d 328 (1998). Consequently, SCDC's decision should be upheld.

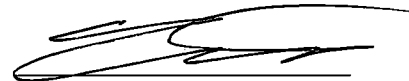
CONCLUSION

WHEREFORE, for all the reasons stated above, this Court should affirm the Department of Corrections' decision in this case.

Respectfully submitted,

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF
CORRECTIONS

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have served Appellant a copy of Respondent's Initial Brief
by depositing a copy of same in the United States Mail, postage prepaid, February 11,
2014 addressed to the Appellant as follows:

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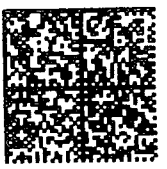
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