

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
IN THE COURT OF APPEALS

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Appeal from Charleston County  
The Honorable R. Knox McMahon, Circuit Court Judge

**SC Court of Appeals**

Appellate Case No. 2014-001938

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THE STATE,

Respondent,

v.

ANTHONY BAILEY,

Appellant.

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**INITIAL BRIEF OF RESPONDENT**

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ALAN WILSON  
Attorney General

MARY W. LEDDON  
Assistant Attorney General

SUSANNAH R. COLE  
Staff Attorney

Post Office Box 11549  
Columbia, SC 29211  
(803) 734-3727

SCARLETT A. WILSON  
Solicitor, Ninth Judicial Circuit

101 Meeting Street  
Charleston, SC 29401  
(843) 958-1900

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENT

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## STATEMENT OF ISSUE ON APPEAL

The trial court properly found Victim was a public official within the meaning of S.C. Code Ann § 16-3-1040 (A), as Victim is a Designated Examiner for the Department of Mental Health, an appointed position with regulated qualifications in which she executes the sovereign authority of the State.

## STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On February 3, 2014, a Charleston County grand jury indicted Appellant for violating S.C. Code Ann. §16-3-1040, threatening the life of a public official, on August 28, 2013. The Honorable R. Knox McMahon found Appellant guilty but mentally ill in a bench trial September 4, 2014. Assistant Solicitors J. Ziegler and Nicholas Lewis represented the State. (T. p. 1.) Appellant was represented by Mary Ford, Esquire. Judge McMahon sentenced Appellant to five years' imprisonment, suspended upon the service of eighteen months, with five years' probation. (T. p. 94, 5-12.) This appeal follows.

## STATEMENT OF FACTS

Amy Cradock (Victim) is thirty-eight years old and has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work. (T. 19, 20-13.) She is employed by the Charleston/Dorchester Mental Health Center, a subsidiary of the Department of Mental Health (DMH). (T. p 20, line 1.) She was originally employed at the jail as a regular mental health counselor, but has since become the supervisor of the mental health team. (T. p. 21, lines 2-4.) She is also a Lowcountry hostage negotiator, which qualifies her to aid in the resolution of the jail's behavioral problems. (T. p. 21, lines 10-21.) She was appointed as a designated mental health examiner (DE), for which she attends probate court hearings to determine a patient's need for inpatient or outpatient hospital care. (T. p. 22, lines 5-10.)

As a mental health professional for the jail, she sees inmates for a variety of reasons. (T. p. 22, lines 23-25.) She also handles inmates on suicide watch and determines when involuntary commitments are necessary. (T. p. 23, lines 4-16.) She makes housing recommendations and often develops behavior management plans. (T. p. 25, lines 19-20.) As a mental health professional with the DMH, she is required to serve the clients as they are referred to her, and, she is unable to turn anyone away. (T. p. 31, lines 10-17.)

Debra Blalock, the executive director Charleston Dorchester Mental Health Center testified about the hierarchy of DMH. (T. p. 46, lines 23-25.) DMH is governed by a seven member commission, and those members are appointed by the Governor for five year terms. (T. p. 47, lines 1-9.) The commissioners select the state director of DMH, who is over the entire department of approximately 4,300 employees, including seventeen mental health centers; four hospitals, and four nursing homes. (T. p. 47, lines

1-9.) The director appoints deputy directors, of which there are three, and the deputies supervise the center directors. (T. p. 47, lines 15-21).

DMH has a contract with the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to provide mental health care to the Al Cannon Detention Center. (T. p. 48, lines 7-10.) Five employees are housed there, and one employee, supervised by Victim, serves as a liaison between DMH and the Detention Center. (T. p. 48, lines 9-13.) Victim is a Mental Health Professional 4, meaning she has a master's degree and three years of post master experience; and she serves as a chief, supervising all the administrative and clinical team at the Detention Center. (T. p. 49, lines 10-22). Victim's appointment as a DE was made by the DMH's medical director, through the authority granted to him by the Governor's Office. (T. p. 50, lines 6-12.) Victim assesses individuals to determine if they, and the public, will be safe in their placement. (T. p. 53, lines 13-18.) Her role is to determine the least restrictive level of care that will keep the patient and the community safe, including inpatient admission via the commitment process. (T. p. 54, lines 4-9.) Victim has a significant amount of discretion in her ability to initiate commitment proceedings. (T. p. 54, lines 16-23.)

On August 28, 2013, Victim was working at the jail and received a referral to see Appellant. (T. p. 27, lines 13-20.) She was informed Appellant threatened to kill a detention officer upon release, and she attempted to assess whether he needed hospitalization for "homicidal ideations." (T. p. 27, lines 23-25 and p. 28, lines 1-2.) She was escorted to Appellant's cell and introduced herself. (T. p. 28, lines 7-10.) Appellant became agitated and said he wanted to "shoot up the mental health center and kill everyone in the mobil [sic] crisis." (T. p. 28, lines 15-16.) Appellant told Victim she would be added to the list if she did not leave. (T. p. 28, lines 17-18.) As she was walking away, Appellant stated he

was going to kill her anyway. (T. p. 28, lines 21-23.) Victim knew of Appellant's prior history of dealings with the disciplinary unit, so she felt the threat was serious. (T. p. 29, lines 12-117.)

## ARGUMENT

**The trial court properly found Victim was a public official within the meaning of S.C. Code Ann § 16-3-1040 (A), as Victim is a Designated Examiner for the Department of Mental Health, an appointed position with regulated qualifications in which she executes the sovereign authority of the State.**

Victim, as a mental health professional who is a designated examiner for the Department of Mental Health, should be deemed a public official pursuant to §16-3-1040 (A) by the plain language of the statute, in accordance with the tenants of common law, and for the compelling policy reasons to protect those at risk who serve the public. To conclude otherwise would result in inconsistency in the application of the statute.

Appellant contests his guilt under S.C. Code Ann § 16-3-1040, threatening the life of a public official or employee, arguing Victim is not a “public official” within the meaning of S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-1040 (A). Appellant submits Victim is a “public employee” pursuant to § 16-3-1040 (B). The statute provides this distinction:

- (1) “Public official” means an elected or appointed official of the United States or of this State or of a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of this State.
- (2) “Public employee” means a person employed by the State, a county, a municipality, a school district, or a political subdivision of this State, except that for purposes of this section, a “public employee” does not include a teacher or principal of an elementary or secondary school.

S.C. Code Ann. § 16-3-1040 (E).

In State v. Bridgers, 329 S.C. 11, 13-16, 495 S.E.2d 196, 197-99 (1997), the South Carolina Supreme Court addressed the meaning of the term “public official” pursuant to S.C. Code Ann § 16-3-1040 (A). The court considered whether a highway patrolman was a “public official” for purposes of this statute when the defendant was

indicted for threatening to kill a patrolman who came to his house to investigate a traffic accident. Id. at 12-13, 495 S.E.2d at 197. When distinguishing between public officers and public employees, the court used the following criteria: (1) whether the position is created by the Legislature; (2) whether the qualifications for appointment are established; (3) whether the duties, tenure, salary, bond, and oath are prescribed or required; and (4) whether the one occupying the position is a representative of the sovereign. Id. at 14, 495 S.E.2d at 198. Though the court offered these guidelines, they also said, “no single criterion is dispositive and not all the criteria are necessary to find that an individual is a public officer.” Id.

The Court further elaborated a strong public policy basis for finding consistency in protecting those that serve the public. Because city police officers had been held to be public officials, it was nonsensical to treat Highway Patrol Officers differently. Id. at 15-16, 495 S.E.2d at 198, 199. These officers are similarly charged with protecting and serving the public at large. The court touched on this reasoning in Sanders v. Belue, 78 S.C. 171, 58 S.E. 762 (1907). An important factor in the Sanders analysis of the distinction between a public officer and an employee was that the public “is evidently concerned in the performance of these duties.” Sanders at 171, 58 S.E. at 764. Similarly, in State v. Thrift, 312 S.C. 282, 440 S.E.2d 341 (1994), the court concluded that a reading of the common law definition of public official shows the greater the duty to the public at large, the more likely the individual will be a public official.

In the instant case, the trial court properly found Victim to be a public official within the context of § 16-3-1040 by applying the standards put forth in Bridgers and Sanders, and with particular deference to the public policy argument. First, the position of

“Designated Examiner” is created and defined by the Legislature in S. C. Code Ann. §44-23-10 (4):

"Designated examiner" means a physician licensed by the Board of Medical Examiners of this State or a person registered by the department as specially qualified, under standards established by the department, in the diagnosis of mental or related illnesses.

DMH Regulations, which are authorized by statute and are subject to the approval of the General Assembly, further delineate her responsibilities and qualifications:

**87-1. Designated Examiners.**

A. For the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the laws relating to the commitment of mentally ill persons, the South Carolina Mental Health Commission hereby establishes the following qualifications needed for persons to act as designated examiners:

...

(5) Any mental health professional as listed in subsections A(1) through (4) who has the appropriate license and education, who has at least one year of intensive full-time experience working with committed patients in a unit of a Department of Mental Health psychiatric hospital, who is certified by the chief of professional services and the director of the facility as being competent and qualified to serve as a designated examiner, and who is approved by the Department of Mental Health Office of Quality Assurance - Standards, Advocacy and Monitoring **may be appointed as designated examiner for examinations and hearings held within that facility.**

S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 87-1 (emphasis added). Thus, a DE satisfies the first two prongs of the Bridgers test, as the position is created by the Legislature and her qualifications for appointment are provided in the Regulations.

Victim testified that in the context of her employment at the detention center, she acts as a mental health professional in various capacities. (T. p. 22, lines 23-25.) On the

day of the incident, August 28, 2013, Victim received a written referral and a phone call indicating Appellant was making threats. She went to assess the situation to determine “whether or not he needed to be in the hospital for homicidal ideations.” (T. p. 28, lines 1-2.) During cross examination, this exchange occurred concerning her role that day:

Q. When you were seeing Mr. Baily that day at the jail, August 28<sup>th</sup> of last year, you were not seeing him as a designated examiner, correct?

A. No

Q. But if he raised a concern of being a threat to himself or others, you have the ability to make a referral, correct?

A. Yes.

Q. And then the probate court would – I guess they would get two designated examiners at that point; is that what happens?

A. No. If I felt like he was a danger to himself or someone else, then we would complete the commitment papers.

(T. p. 35, lines 5-17.) Though Victim testified she was not necessarily intending to see Appellant as a designated examiner that day, she also testified that had she determined it necessary to commit Appellant as a designated examiner, she had the ability to do so.

The Legislature mandated her duty below;

No person who is mentally ill or who has an intellectual disability shall be confined for safekeeping in any jail. If it appears to the officer in charge of the jail that such a person is in prison, he shall immediately cause the person to be examined by two examiners designated by the Department of Mental Health. . . . If hospitalization is ordered, the person shall be discharged from the custody of the officer in charge of the jail and shall be admitted to an appropriate mental health or intellectual disability facility.

S.C. Code Ann. § 44-23-220. Thus, despite Victim’s earlier testimony, she clearly was acting in her capacity as a designated examiner when she attempted to assess Appellant, as she would have begun the admission process had she deemed it necessary. Her duty,

outlined in part by S.C. Code Ann § 44-23-220, satisfies the third prong of the Bridgers analysis.

Victim's status as a public official for purposes of § 16-3-1040 is also supported by her actions as a sovereign of the state. See State v. Crenshaw, 274 S.C. 475, 266 S.E.2d 61 (1980), quoting Sanders v. Belue, 78 S.C. 171, 174, 58 S.E. 762,763 "one who merely performs the duties required of him by persons employing him under an express contract or otherwise . . . is a mere employee" In Sanders, the court also examined whether the job required the exercise of "sovereign power, either small or great, in the performance of which the public is concerned, and which are continuing, and not occasional or intermittent," Id. at 174, 58 S.E. at 763.

Victim makes determinations on matters of patient housing, refers appropriate treatment plans for inmates of the detention center and other clients of DMH, and is a member of the crisis response team. She initiates commitment proceedings through the probate court if she deems it necessary for the protection of the patient and the public at large.<sup>1</sup> She exercises discretion in making her recommendations; she does not merely perform duties required of her by her employer. By the standards set forth in Sanders and Bridgers, Victim's authority to initiate commitment, as granted by the Legislature, is clearly a function that concerns the public. Thus, she acts as a sovereign of the State when she makes treatment determinations. Victim is also bound by her obligations as a sovereign of the State, by her inability to turn away clients or refuse treatment to the public at large. That distinction from a mental health professional in private practice, who may opt to refuse to treat a patient, leads to the most compelling reason to find Victim is

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<sup>1</sup> This authority is somewhat analogous to an officer representing the State in magistrate's court. See In re Unauthorized Practice of Law Rules Proposed by the South Carolina Bar 309 S.C. 30, 422 S.E.2d 123.

a public official-- the high degree of public interest to protect the safety of mental health worker.

The courts have shown a preference for policy reasons for the inclusion of professionals particularly at risk in their capacity to protect and serve the public. In Bridgers, the court recognized the public interest and concern for highway patrol officers, and as the trial court concluded, a similar “public concern in the area of mental health, particularly those that may deal with a population of individuals, inmates in jail, clients if they are transferred to the Department of Mental Health, because of the potential for those individuals to harm themselves or others.” (T. p. 80, lines 14-19.) Victim distinguishes herself from other employees of the Department of Mental Health in this regard. Unlike an administrative assistant or even general counsel for DMH, Victim’s service as a designated examiner and mental health professional puts her on the front line with the patients and inmates who need her services. Whereas private practice professionals may refuse to treat dangerous patients, Victim has no such option and instead is dependent on the safety measures of the facility as well as the punitive deterrent of the statute to protect her from harm.

Lastly, Victim is entitled to the protection of §16-3-1040 (A) because, in her role as a designated examiner, she is subject to the same risks and serves the same protective function of the public at large as other correctional officers. Carter and Bridgers demonstrate the court’s inclination to find consistency in the application of the statute. In Bridgers, the court took issue with treating city police and patrolmen differently: “An individual may threaten the life of a city police officer and violate the statute, while no violation of the statute would occur if that individual made the same threat to a Highway

Patrol officer. No rational basis exists for this inconsistency.” State v. Bridgers, 329 S.C. 11, 13-16, 495 S.E.2d 196, 197-99 (1997) The trial court found this reasoning persuasive:

the law is also very inconsistent where the same threat could have been made to a correctional officer in the detention center, and he could have been charged with a violation of a threat to a public official, and the threat having been made to a mental health professional and designated examiner, that charge could have been made under Subsection (B).

(T. p. 81, lines 15-22.) To conclude Victim is an employee under §16-3-1040 (B), but a corrections officer is a public official under §16-3-1040 (A), would lead to an absurd and unjust result. Any ambiguity in a statute should be resolved in favor of a just, equitable, and beneficial operation of the law.” Bennett v. Sullivan's Island Bd. of Adjustment, 313 S.C. 455, 458, 438 S.E.2d 273, 274 (Ct.App.1993). Courts will reject a statutory interpretation that would lead to a result so plainly absurd that it could not have been intended by the Legislature or would defeat the plain legislative intention. Town of Mt. Pleasant v. Roberts, 393 S.C. 332, 342-43, 713 S.E.2d 278, 283 (2011).

Thus, Victim, as a mental health professional who is a designated examiner for the DMH, should be deemed a public official pursuant to §16-3-1040 (A) by the plain language of the statute, in accordance with the tenants of common law, and for the compelling policy reasons to protect those at risk who serve the public.

**CONCLUSION**

For all the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully submitted that the judgment and conviction of the lower court be affirmed.

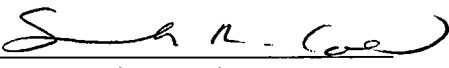
Respectfully submitted,

ALAN WILSON  
Attorney General

MARY W. LEDDON  
Assistant Attorney General

SUSANNAH R. COLE  
Staff Attorney

SCARLETT A. WILSON  
Solicitor, Ninth Judicial Circuit

BY:   
Susannah R. Cole  
Bar # 68383

Office of the Attorney General  
Post Office Box 11549  
Columbia, SC 29211  
(803) 734-3727

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENT

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**PROOF OF SERVICE**

I, Anne Mueller, certify that I have served the within Initial Brief of Respondent and Designation of Matter on Appellant by depositing two copies of the same in the United States mail, postage prepaid, addressed to:

Kathrine H. Hudgins, Esquire  
S.C. Commission on Indigent Defense  
Division of Appellate Defense  
Post Office Box 11589  
Columbia, SC 29211

I further certify that all parties required by Rule to be served have been served.  
This 22<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2015.

  
ANNE MUELLER  
Legal Assistant

Office of the Attorney General  
Post Office Box 11549  
Columbia, SC 29211  
(803) 734-3727