STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM THE ADMINISTRATIVE LAW COURT

Administrative Law Judge John D. McLeod

ALC Case No. 16-ALJ-04-0102-AP
Appellate Case No. 2016-000681

GEORGE CLEVELAND, III, # 357770,

APPELLANT,

v.

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS,

RESPONDENT.

INITIAL BRIEF OF RESPONDENT

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

CASES

STATUTES

STATEMENT OF ISSUE ON APPEAL

THE ADMINISTRATIVE LAW COURT PROPERLY DISMISSED THE APPEAL BECAUSE APPELLANT'S GRIEVANCE DID NOT INVOLVE A STATE-CREATED LIBERTY INTEREST OR PROPERTY INTEREST.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

This matter comes before this Court pursuant to the appeal of George Cleveland, III, an inmate in the custody of the South Carolina Department of Corrections. On March 20, 2015, Appellant submitted a Step One Grievance complaining that he did not receive a blanket when he stayed overnight at Perry Correctional Institution in January of 2015. Appellant followed up with a Step Two Grievance on November 20, 2015. On December 30, 2015, the following response was made to Appellant's grievance: "We have reviewed your complaint. Warden Cartledge appropriately responded to your requested action. Warden Cartledge implemented a new procedure to ensure overnight stays at Perry CI will be provided a blanket and sheets. Therefore, I consider this matter resolved." Appellant submitted a notice of appeal in the Administrative Law Court on February 4, 2016. On February 17, 2016, Administrative Law Judge John D. McLeod issued an order denying and dismissing the appeal. This order was filed on February 22, 2016. Judge McLeod's order concluded that dismissal was appropriate because Appellant's grievance did not involve a state-created liberty or property interest. This appeal follows.

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 the finding, conclusion, or decision is:
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> (a) in violation of constitutional or statutory provisions;
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> (b) in excess of the statutory authority of the agency;
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> (c) made upon unlawful procedure;
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> (d) affected by other error of law;
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> (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.

S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-380(5).

In an appeal of a final decision of an administrative agency, the standard of appellate review is whether the ALC's findings are supported by substantial evidence. S.C. Code Ann. § 1-23-610(B). "Substantial evidence" is evidence which, considering the record as a whole, would allow a reasonable mind to reach the same conclusion that administrative agency reached. Hendley v. S.C. State Budget & Control Bd., 325 S.C. 413, 481 S.E.2d 159 (Ct. App. 1996). A reviewing court shall not substitute its own judgment for that of the ALC as to findings of fact, but it may reverse or modify decisions that are controlled by errors of law or that are clearly erroneous in view of the substantial evidence on the record as a whole. Id.

ARGUMENT

THE ADMINISTRATIVE LAW COURT PROPERLY DISMISSED THE APPEAL BECAUSE APPELLANT'S GRIEVANCE DID NOT INVOLVE A STATE-CREATED LIBERTY INTEREST OR PROPERTY INTEREST.

The jurisdiction of the Administrative Law Court ("ALC") to hear this matter is derived entirely from the decision of the South Carolina Supreme Court in Al-Shabazz v. State, 338 S.C. 354, 527 S.E.2d 742 (2000). When reviewing SCDC's decisions in inmate grievance matters, the ALC sits in an appellate capacity. Id. at 377, 527 S.E.2d at 754. Subsequently, the Supreme Court clarified the ALC's appellate jurisdiction over inmate appeals in Sullivan v. S.C. Dep't of Corr., 355 S.C. 437, 586 S.E.2d 124 (2003). In affirming, as modified, the ALC's *en banc* decision of McNeil v. S.C. Dep't of Corr., 02-ALJ-04-00336-AP (September 5, 2001), the Supreme Court held the ALC's jurisdiction was limited to (1) cases in which an inmate contends prison officials have erroneously calculated his sentence, sentence-related credits, or custody status; (2) cases in which SCDC has taken an inmate's state-created liberty interest in major disciplinary hearings; and (3) cases in which an inmate's confinement implicates a state-created liberty interest. See Sullivan, 355 S.C. at 443, 586 S.E.2d at 127 (emphasis added).

Moreover, regarding categories (2) and (3) above, the Supreme Court has consistently emphasized that the liberty or property interest implicated must be one that is state created. See Wicker v. S.C. Dep't of Corr., 360 S.C. 421, 602 S.E.2d 56 (2004) (emphasizing that the ALC's jurisdiction extends only to those cases involving the denial of "state created liberty interests" and that the Court's holding [*i.e.*, in Wicker] "is not to be viewed as expanding the jurisdiction of the [ALC] in any other circumstance."); Slezak v. S.C. Dep't of Corr., 361 S.C.

327, 605 S.E.2d 506 (2004) (holding that the ALC "may summarily dismiss those appeals that do not implicate an inmate's state created liberty or property interest") (emphasis added).

In this case, it was proper for the Administrative Law Court to summarily dismiss Appellant's appeal because Appellant's complaint regarding his failure to receive a blanket during a visit to Perry Correctional Institution clearly does not implicate a state-created liberty or property interest. See Slezak, 361 S.C. at 332, 605 S.E.2d at 508. Therefore, Respondent respectfully requests that the order of the Administrative Law Judge be upheld.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Court should affirm the Administrative Law Court's decision below.

Respectfully submitted,

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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May 27, 2016