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S.C. SUPREME COURT

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Supreme Court

On Writ of Certiorari to the Court of Appeals
Appeal from Chesterfield County
Court of General Sessions

The Honorable Donald B. Hocker, Circuit Court Judge

Opinion No. 2017-UP-037 (S.C. Ct. App. filed 1/11/17)
Appellate Case No. 2017-000718

THE STATE,

RESPONDENT,

v.

CURTIS BRENT GORNY,

PETITIONER.

RETURN TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

ALAN WILSON
Attorney General

V. HENRY GUNTER, JR.
Assistant Attorney General
SC Bar No. 102259

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

WILLIAM B. ROGERS, JR.
Solicitor, Fourth Judicial Circuit

Post Office Box 616
Bennettsville, SC 29512
(843) 479-6516

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENT

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STATEMENT OF ISSUE ON APPEAL

The Court of Appeals properly found the trial judge did not abuse his broad discretion in denying Petitioner's motion for a change of venue because conducting the trial in the Chesterfield County Courthouse did not deny Petitioner his right to a fair and impartial jury.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Petitioner was indicted in January 2014 for attempted murder and failure to stop for a blue light. In September 2014, he was indicted for two additional counts of attempted murder and one count of possession of a weapon during the commission of a violent crime. On October 20, 2014, Petitioner's jury was selected, and thereafter, defense counsel made a pretrial motion to change the venue of Petitioner's trial. (R. p. 1-47). The Honorable Donald B. Hocker tentatively denied the motion pending the presentation of case law, and the next morning, he denied the motion again, ruling there was no prejudice to Petitioner, no due process violation, and also noting he would instruct the jury to decide the case only on the evidence presented in the courtroom and admonish them not to undertake any independent investigation. (See R. p. 46-85). Thereafter, Petitioner was tried on October 21-22, 2014, before Judge Hocker and a jury. The jury found Petitioner guilty of all five offenses, and Judge Hocker sentenced Petitioner to twenty-five years, concurrent, for each of the attempted murder convictions, five years, consecutive, for the weapon charge, and five years, consecutive, for the failure to stop for a blue light charge.

On January 11, 2017, the South Carolina Court of Appeals unanimously affirmed Petitioner's conviction and sentence. State v. Gorny, Op. No. 2017-UP-037 (S.C. Ct. App. filed January 11, 2017). Petitioner subsequently filed a petition for rehearing, which was denied on February 21, 2017. Petitioner timely submitted a Petition for Writ of Certiorari, and this Return follows.

ARGUMENT

The Court of Appeals properly found the trial judge did not abuse his broad discretion in denying Petitioner's motion for a change of venue because holding the trial in the Chesterfield County Courthouse did not deny Petitioner his right to a fair and impartial jury under the facts of this case.

Background Facts

Olivia Weaver and Petitioner began a relationship in October of 2011, and as a result, Ms. Weaver became pregnant with Petitioner's child. (R. p. 91). Ms. Weaver and Petitioner ended their relationship in May of 2012, and their child was born on August 7, 2012. (R. p. 92; p. 106). At some point thereafter, Ms. Weaver initiated child support proceedings, and a hearing was scheduled at the Chesterfield County Courthouse on February 13, 2013. (R. p. 92-93). Ms. Weaver's acquaintance, Nikita Lockleer, drove her to the courthouse, and Johnny Nolan, her stepfather, rode with them. (R. p. 93). Petitioner did not appear at the hearing and an amount of child support was set in his absence. (R. p. 94). After she left the hearing, she encountered Petitioner as she was heading out of the front door of the courthouse. (R. p. 95). She advised him he was late and walked past him out the door and proceeded to the car, which was parked on Main Street in front of the courthouse. (R. p. 95-96). Lockleer and Nolan were waiting for her in the car. (R. p. 96).

Around the time Ms. Weaver arrived at the car, Petitioner drove up "out of nowhere," hastily parked his vehicle across three parking spaces, and began firing a gun at them. (R. p. 96). The first shot hit the hood of the car, and the second shot hit Mr. Nolan in the arm. (R. p. 120). Ms. Weaver tried to hide in the back seat of the car, but Petitioner nevertheless shot Ms. Weaver twice at "point range" in the back and in the chin area. (R. p. 97). He then fired a final shot at Ms. Weaver, but it missed her and struck the pavement instead. (R. p. 126). Both Ms. Weaver

and Mr. Nolan testified that no one in Lockleer's vehicle had a gun or threatened Petitioner. (R. p. 98; p. 120-21).

Jamie Gibson, a pastor and also an employee at the Chesterfield Detention Center, was escorting some inmates into the courthouse when he heard shots. (R. p. 131-33). When he turned to look for the shooter, he saw Petitioner approaching Ms. Weaver and firing three shots at her. (R. p. 133; p. 135). Mr. Gibson ran toward the scene yelling. (R. p. 133). As he got closer, Petitioner ran back to his vehicle. (R. p. 133). Mr. Gibson then noticed Mr. Nolan lying down in across the front seat with his arm hanging down. (R. p. 133). Mr. Gibson attended to Ms. Weaver, who was lying on the ground, and comforted her until the ambulance arrived. (R. p. 134). Mr. Gibson saw no weapons in the vicinity of either of the victims. (R. p. 138). SLED agents who later processed the scene did not find any weapons in or around the victims' car. (R. p. 219).

A probation agent, Mark Funderburk, was working inside the courthouse when he heard gunshots and heard someone scream "he's gonna kill her." (R. p. 143). When he ran outside, he saw Petitioner pointing a gun over the hood of a car. (R. p. 143). As he got closer, he made eye contact with Petitioner, and at that point Petitioner turned around, got in his vehicle, and "sped off" at a high rate of speed. (R. p. 144-45). When he approached the victims' car, he saw Jamie Gibson trying to talk to Ms. Weaver and Mr. Nolan. (R. p. 147). One of the deputies in the vicinity reported the shooting to dispatch and 911. (R. p. 147-48). This officer also reported that Petitioner was the shooter. (R. p. 148).

Sergeant David Rainwater was in the vicinity when he heard about the shooting over the radio. (R. p. 152). Sergeant Rainwater caught up with Petitioner on Highway 9 going toward Pageland. (R. p. 154-55). His blue lights and siren were on the whole time. (R. p. 156). At that

point, Petitioner started speeding and weaving through traffic to try to get away. (R. p. 154-55). In fact, Petitioner eventually began traveling at a speed of more than one hundred miles per hour. (R. p. 176). Other officers became involved in the pursuit, and a “spike strip” was placed in the roadway near Douglas Machine Shop in an attempt to disable Petitioner’s vehicle. (R. p. 155-58). Although the spike strip appeared to damage one of Petitioner’s tires, he continued trying to evade the officers. (R. p. 158). At one point, Petitioner stuck his gun out of the car window and fired a shot at Sergeant Timmy Knight. (R. p. 177). Sergeant Knight testified he had “no doubt” in his mind that Petitioner was attempting to shoot him. (See R. p. 182). Later, Petitioner actually threw the gun out of the window. (R. p. 178).

Finally, after the pursuit had gone on for about seventeen miles, Lieutenant Spence Vaughn was able to force Petitioner off the road. (R. p. 179). Petitioner was then removed from the vehicle and, after a scuffle, was taken into custody. (R. p. 168-69; p. 180). Petitioner “never said a word” during this process, and Sergeant Rainwater transported Petitioner to the county detention center. (R. p. 169). Significantly, videotapes from three of the officers’ patrol cars were introduced into evidence without objection at trial. (See R. p. 162; p. 183; p. 195; see State’s Exhibits # 1, 2, & 3). Two guns were also admitted into evidence without objection. (R. p. 208-209). The first was a .357 chrome revolver found in the roadway after Petitioner dropped it out of his car window. (R. p. 206-208). The second was a nine millimeter handgun which was found in Petitioner’s vehicle. (R. p. 206-209). The SLED firearms examiner testified that several lead fragments and bullet jacket fragments found on the scene bore insufficient markings for identification and/or could not be conclusively matched with a particular firearm, but stated that three fired cartridge cases found in Petitioner’s vehicle were in fact fired by Petitioner’s .357

revolver. (R. p. 206-207; p. 258-66). He also noted that Petitioner's revolver was a "five shot," meaning five cartridges could be loaded into the revolver for firing. (R. p. 267).

Petitioner testified at trial and claimed that he acted in self-defense when Ms. Weaver's acquaintance, Nikita Lockleer, began shooting at him when he pulled up to talk to Ms. Weaver as she was preparing to leave the court house. (R. p. 286-96). He claimed Lockleer fired at him but did not hit him, and stated he attempted to retreat but then returned fire because he was in fear for his life. (R. p. 291-94). Petitioner testified he had a firearm for his protection because "I've been known to carry large amounts of money." (R. p. 293). Initially, Petitioner testified he fired "two or three" shots at the courthouse scene. (R. p. 294, lines 20-25). Upon prodding from his attorney, he changed his story and said he was "sure" he fired only twice. (R. p. 295; p. 309). He could not explain how Ms. Weaver and Mr. Nolan were shot a total of three times. (R. p. 312-13). Petitioner claimed he was firing "random" shots and never intended to shoot anyone. (R. p. 304; p. 331).

Regarding the second set of charges including failure to stop for a blue light and attempted murder for firing at Sergeant Knight on Highway 9 during the pursuit, Petitioner claimed he did not intend to shoot at Sergeant Knight but that he was trying to "disarm" himself by "pulling [the gun] out the window" and the gun just went off. (R. p. 301). Petitioner claimed he was not sure what happened but "maybe the wind caught it or something and jerked my hand." (R. p. 301, lines 23-25). He testified that, despite the fact that he was plainly trying to escape from the police officers chasing him, he did not intend to fire at any law enforcement officer. (R. p. 302).

On cross-examination, Petitioner admitted that he armed himself when he returned to his vehicle after encountering Ms. Weaver near the courthouse doors. (R. p. 309-15). He also

admitted that he voluntarily stopped at the victims' car, parked beside them, and got out of his vehicle armed with his gun. (R. p. 309-16). However, Petitioner was unable to answer the solicitor's question about whether he merely wanted to have a "calm conversation" with Ms. Weaver while armed with his .357 Magnum. (R. p. 311). Petitioner also acknowledged on cross-examination that he never told any police officer at any point that Nikita Lockleer had supposedly been shooting at him and that he was merely returning fire in self-defense. (R. p. 321-22). The defense rested following Petitioner's testimony, and after deliberating for twelve minutes, the jury returned guilty verdicts on all five counts. (R. p. 332; p. 374-76).

Petitioner's Motion for Change of Venue

On October 20, 2014, Petitioner's jury selection took place. After eight jurors responded to questions relating to pretrial publicity, all eight jurors affirmed that they could be fair and impartial to both the State and the defendant. (R. p. 16-33). Defense counsel was satisfied with all voir dire questions asked by the judge and had no additional questions for the judge to ask the jurors. (R. p. 32-33). Defense counsel did not propose any voir dire questions related to the fact that part of the crime took place outside of the courthouse. (R. p. 20-33). Following jury selection, the judge heard Petitioner's motion for a change of venue. (See R. p. 41). The defense had filed a written motion to change the venue, along with an affidavit regarding pretrial publicity, on June 5, 2014. (R. p. 41). Defense counsel argued that venue should be changed due to the extensive media coverage of the incident and due to the fact that "the events that the solicitor is going to relay primarily occurred right outside the courthouse door right outside where the jurors are going to be walking, taking smoke breaks, taking lunch breaks, and coming into the courthouse, leaving the courthouse, and routinely the events are going to be (sic) remind and remind, and I think that could have a severe and substantial impact on their ability to be fair

and impartial to the matters that surround this case.” (R. p. 41, line 15 – p. 42, line 5). Defense counsel stated that, even if the court was not inclined to move the venue to another county, he was requesting that the trial at least be moved to the magistrate courthouse, which was “less than a quarter of a mile from here right on Main.” (R. p. 42, lines 6-13). He stated he believed it would be more proper and fair to all sides if “the events can be something that you can relay to the court and submit to the court rather than the jurors continuing going outside and examining the evidence, the evidence themselves.” (R. p. 42, lines 14-18).

The solicitor responded that, under State v. Manning, 329 S.C. 1, 495 S.E.2d 191 (1997), before a court can grant a change of venue due to pretrial publicity, there must first be an attempt to seat a jury. (R. p. 43). He stated it was obviously not impossible to obtain an impartial jury from Chesterfield County because the parties just did so. (R. p. 43). Regarding the second part of the defense motion, the solicitor stated there was no precedent for changing the location simply because the crime occurred near the courthouse. (R. p. 43-44). He also noted that the location of the courthouse was not relevant to any of the charges; in other words, the charges themselves did not arise out of the fact that the crime happened at the courthouse. (R. p. 44).

Defense counsel responded that his concern was with “the jury taking it upon themselves to go examine the scene.” (R. p. 44). He stated the jurors would be walking back and forth through the “middle of the evidence,” that evidentiary issues would be “thrown right in their face,” and that it was just human nature for the jurors to be inquisitive and try to figure out “where those cars were parked.” (R. p. 44). He stated, “[t]hose are the kinds of things I think are prejudicial to this specific case.” (R. p. 45, lines 2-3). Counsel again requested that the trial be moved to the municipal courthouse down the street. (R. p. 45).

The solicitor briefly responded by pointing out that any issues with the jurors attempting to examine the evidence could be handled by the jurors being escorted by appropriate court personnel and/or by the court providing the jurors with an admonition not to conduct their own investigations. (R. p. 45, lines 10-17). He stated that between providing instructions and adding any safeguards the court might deem appropriate, the issue could be handled without the burden of physically relocating. (R. p. 45, lines 18-22).

The judge denied the motion as to the pretrial publicity issue, finding that all the jurors who responded to the questions about pretrial publicity informed the court that they could be fair and impartial. (R. p. 46, lines 2-13). As to the second part of the defense's motion, the judge stated he had never been presented with an argument regarding the location of one of the crime scenes being in close proximity to the courthouse. (R. p. 46, lines 14-19). However, he stated he was denying the motion unless the defense could present some authority for changing the location on these grounds. (R. p. 46-47). The judge noted he was not sure that changing the location to the courthouse down the street would be of any benefit to the defense because there would be nothing stopping inquisitive jurors from "walking a little bit further" and taking a look at the scene of the alleged crime. (R. p. 46-47).

The next day, the judge allowed Petitioner to revisit the venue issue, and defense counsel handed up a memorandum and case law. (R. p. 48). Counsel stated that in this case, the facts would show that a family court hearing was scheduled in the courthouse, and as Petitioner was coming into "the courtroom," his baby's mother was "coming out of the courtroom" and made comments to Petitioner and "immediately thereafter the victim allegedly is shot on the grounds of the courthouse." (R. p. 48-49). He argued that Petitioner's case was "identical" to a Missouri case wherein a family court hearing was scheduled at the courthouse and "the husband was shot

and killed, the opposing counsel as well as his wife.” (R. p. 49, lines 6-7; lines 17-20). He stated that the only difference between Petitioner’s case and the Missouri case was that “there was no killing.” (R. p. 49, lines 20-21). He stated that the Missouri defendant’s motion for change of venue was denied but the Supreme Court reversed “on the basis of the proximity of the events.” (R. p. 49, lines 22-24). He noted that the case to which he was referring was State v. Baumruk, 85 S.W.3d 644 (Mo. 2002). Defense counsel pointed out that the Baumruk case referenced certain constitutional protections and he then read excerpts from the case. (R. p. 50). He argued that this was not just a pretrial publicity issue, but a broader issue of “the impartiality of the adjudicator because of the environment in which the trial was held.” (R. p. 50, lines 22-25). He stated that “the location of the events of this particular case occurred right where we’re trying this case” and that it’s all put “in the juror’s face.” (R. p. 51, lines 2-4). He also argued that “[i]t puts the jurors in the shoes of the victims, alleged victims” and that Petitioner can’t have a fair trial in such a situation. (R. p. 51, lines 5-10).

After the judge asked for some clarification about where the actual shooting took place, the solicitor explained that the actual shooting took place “out on the street,” in “the parking spaces adjacent to the street.” (R. p. 51, lines 11-24). The judge noted that those parking spaces were open to the public and that parking there did not necessarily mean a person had “courthouse business.” (R. p. 52, lines 9-13). The solicitor then responded to the defense’s argument by arguing that the Baumruk case was distinguishable. (R. p. 53-54). He pointed out that in Petitioner’s case, the first shooting incident took place out on the street, and the second shooting incident took place seventeen miles from the courthouse. (R. p. 54). He also argued that Petitioner’s case would be different because the prosecutor in Baumruk made the courthouse building “central to their case,” whereas the fact that portions of Petitioner’s crimes took place in

the vicinity of the courthouse was not a significant aspect of this case. (R. p. 53-54). The solicitor also noted that there was no South Carolina authority supporting that a change of venue was appropriate in these circumstances. (R. p. 53). Finally, the solicitor asserted that the court could ensure that sufficient safeguards, such as appropriate jury instructions, could protect all of Petitioner's rights. (R. p. 55).

Following a recess and a discussion with the lawyers in chambers, the trial judge allowed the parties to make further arguments on the issue of venue. (See R. p. 60-72). Defense counsel handed up news articles from Texas and Illinois regarding cases in which venue was transferred where the crime in question occurred at the courthouse. (R. p. 63-64). Counsel again reiterated that the incident involving Petitioner took place "less than a hundred yards from where we are standing here and now" and that some of the events occurred in the courthouse building itself or in the immediate proximity of the entry doors. (R. p. 64, lines 6-11). Defense counsel argued this was a "novel issue in South Carolina" and that the trial court should look to the Missouri case for guidance. (R. p. 65). He also argued that jurors could not help but be "inherently prejudiced by the environment that we're in today" just like in the Missouri case. (R. p. 65).

The solicitor responded that defense counsel was not giving the jurors enough credit and that there are safeguards in place, including jury instructions, to ensure that jury verdicts are based upon the evidence presented in court. (R. p. 66-67). He also pointed out that this situation is not any different than if the crime had occurred at a convenience store two blocks from where a juror lived. (R. p. 67). The solicitor also pointed out that, although part of the crime occurred on property adjacent to the courthouse, another part of the crime took place sixteen or seventeen miles away from the courthouse. (R. p. 68). He argued that the court should not change the venue of the case because that would be saying that "a jury is too stupid to put that aside and

look at the facts of the case.” (R. p. 68, lines 13-17). He further argued that the true issue in the case was the defendant’s intent and that the location where the crime occurred was not in dispute and was not central to the case. (R. p. 68-69). The solicitor stated that he believed the jury would be able to look at the facts of the case outside of where it happened, and that the court could provide instructions to the jurors to maintain the integrity of the case and ensure the defendant receives a fair trial. (R. p. 69). He also noted that the defendant should not benefit from the fact that he decided to commit a crime outside the courthouse, and that he should not be permitted to “use the law to shield [him] from prosecution in the county where these victims are entitled to have venue heard.” (R. p. 69-70).

The judge stated he had carefully considered everything presented on both sides. (R. p. 70, lines 9-10). He stated he had also done some research on his own “in some other jurisdictions.” (R. p. 70, lines 10-11). He stated that taking everything into consideration, he did not believe the defendant would be prejudiced by having his case tried in the Chesterfield County Courthouse and did not believe the defendant’s due process rights would be violated by having his case tried there. (R. p. 70, lines 11-17). Accordingly, he denied the defense’s motion for a change of venue. (R. p. 70, lines 18-19). The judge noted that he would emphasize the standard instruction that the jury is only to consider the evidence produced in the courtroom, and stated he had already discussed with the lawyers that the State’s witnesses, including bailiffs and law enforcement personnel who may work in the courthouse, would have no direct or indirect contact with the jury. (R. p. 71, lines 6-18). Later, in his preliminary remarks, the judge instructed the jurors as follows:

You must decide this case based solely, 100 percent on the evidence presented here in this courtroom. This means that you can not consider anything whatsoever outside the four walls of this courtroom in reaching a decision in this case. That includes, certainly not limited to, includes your not being allowed to

conduct any independent research about this case on your own, the facts in this case, the evidence presented in this case, any of the individuals involved in this case. Please do not try to find out information from any source outside the four walls of this courtroom . . . It is important to keep an open mind and not decide any issue until all of the evidence has been presented to you from the witness stand, any exhibits that may be offered into evidence, the parties have made their closing arguments to you, and I have instructed you on the law in this case. It is your solemn responsibility, Madam Forelady and ladies and gentlemen of the jury, to determine the guilt or innocence of the defendant, and your verdict must be based solely on the evidence as it is presented to you in this trial and the four walls of this courtroom, and on the law as I instruct you at the close of this trial. (R. p. 83, line 18 – p. 84, line 20).

Defense counsel had no objection to the judge’s preliminary charge. (R. p. 85, lines 19-24).

Discussion

A motion to change the venue of a trial is addressed to the sound discretion of the trial judge and will not be disturbed on appeal absent an abuse of discretion. State v. Patterson, 324 S.C. 5, 12, 482 S.E.2d 760, 763 (1997); State v. Caldwell, 300 S.C. 494, 502, 388 S.E.2d 816, 820 (1990). An abuse of discretion occurs when the judge’s ruling has no evidentiary support. State v. Manning, 329 S.C. 1, 7, 495 S.E.2d 191, 194 (1997) (citation omitted).

In pretrial publicity cases, the relevant question is whether the jurors had “such fixed opinions” that they could not impartially judge the guilt of the defendant. State v. Tucker, 324 S.C. 155, 166, 478 S.E.2d 260, 266 (1996) (citation omitted). In other words, if jurors are found to have the ability to lay aside any impressions or opinions and render a verdict based on the evidence presented at trial, it is not an abuse of discretion to deny a motion to change venue. State v. Ayers, 284 S.C. 266, 268, 325 S.E.2d 579, 580 (Ct. App. 1985). In these types of cases, the moving party has the burden to show “actual juror prejudice” as a result of the pretrial publicity. Caldwell, 300 S.C. at 502, 388 S.E.2d at 821.

This issue being appealed in this case is not a pretrial publicity issue; however, the pretrial publicity cases are instructive because they illustrate that the primary concern with

regard to venue is whether jurors can be fair and impartial – that is, whether they can lay aside any impressions they may have about the case and render a verdict solely based upon the evidence presented in the courtroom. This is a question which must be answered on a case-by-case basis, based on an evaluation of the individual circumstances present, and reviewed using an abuse of discretion standard. In this case, the trial judge did not abuse his discretion by denying Petitioner’s motion to change venue because Petitioner failed to show the jurors could not be fair and impartial as a result of the trial’s location.

Initially, the State disagrees with Petitioner’s assertion that there was “inherent” prejudice as a result of trying the case in the Chesterfield County Courthouse. (See Petition for Writ of Certiorari, p. 7-9). As mentioned previously, all of the jurors affirmed during voir dire that they could be fair and impartial. Furthermore, there was nothing prejudicial about trying the case in the Chesterfield County Courthouse under the circumstances of this case. The shooting of Ms. Weaver and Mr. Nolan occurred not inside the courthouse, but outside in the public parking spaces on Main Street. (R. p. 96-97; p. 122). The other half of the crime – the failure to stop for a blue light and the attempted murder of Sergeant Knight – occurred on the highway out of town, several miles from the courthouse. (R. p. 152-59; p. 177). Significantly, neither victim died as a result of Petitioner’s attack, so the jurors were **not** trying the case at the scene of a tragic murder like in State v. Baumruk, 85 S.W.3d 644 (Mo. 2002). There was nothing about the courthouse location that would prejudice the jury against Petitioner.

Moreover, simply being in proximity to where part of the crime occurred told the jurors nothing that they could not have learned from the photographs of the scene that the State introduced without objection.¹ (See R. p. 75-76; see State’s Exhibits # 21-60, Photos). In other

¹ Notably, Petitioner made no suggestion that the photographs introduced by the State did not accurately represent the scene at the courthouse. Petitioner also did not dispute any of the testimony presented regarding the scene. (See

words, the disputed issue in this case – Petitioner’s state of mind at the time of the shootings – was not affected by holding the trial in close proximity to where a portion of the crimes occurred.² Finally, Petitioner’s concern about the jurors conducting their own improper investigations is unfounded because the judge instructed the jurors in no uncertain terms that they were to decide the case based “solely, 100 percent” on the evidence presented in the courtroom and that they were not to conduct their own investigation of the scene. (R. p. 83, line 18 – p. 84, line 20). It is presumed that jurors follow instructions provided by a trial judge. See State v. Grovenstein, 335 S.C. 347, 353, 517 S.E.2d 216, 219 (1999) (jurors are presumed to follow the law as instructed to them).

The Baumruk case – the Missouri case upon which Petitioner relied in his brief at the Court of Appeals – is totally distinguishable for many reasons and does not support Petitioner’s claim for relief. First, in Baumruk, the defendant killed his wife, and then shot six more people, *inside* the courthouse in a family court courtroom similar to the one in which the defendant was later tried. State v. Baumruk, 85 S.W.3d 644, 646-47 (Mo. 2002). Media coverage of the incident was “massive” and the reporters described the event as a “shooting spree” and a “rampage.” Id. at 647. Following the incident, the courthouse upped its security by doubling the

R. p. 89-90; p. 105-112; p. 116-17; p. 128-31; p. 138-40; p. 148-50; p. 238-39; p. 335-42). Petitioner’s cross-examination of Ms. Weaver and Mr. Nolan, the two courthouse victims, focused on trying to paint them as marijuana users. (See R. p. 105-12; p. 116-17; p. 128-31). Nothing about the physical location was disputed by Petitioner at trial.

² It is hardly unusual, particularly in a small county, that jurors might be familiar with the location in which a crime occurs. The fact that a crime occurs on Main Street in a small town – an area with which jurors are invariably familiar – does not automatically prejudice a jury panel against a defendant. Instead, in the State’s view, the defendant must demonstrate there is a special reason why familiarity with, or proximity to, the scene of the crime would taint the jurors to the extent they could not possibly be fair and impartial. Notably, South Carolina law allows a jury to view the scene under certain circumstances, so it is clear that jurors simply having access to the scene does not result in *per se* prejudice to either party. See S.C. Code § 14-7-1320 (“The jury in any case may, at the request of either party, be taken to view the place or premises in question or any property, matter or thing relating to the controversy between the parties when it appears to the court that such view is necessary to a just decision . . .”). In that vein, a jury view of the scene is not even classified as “evidence” in a trial. See, e.g., Gossett v. State, 300 S.C. 473, 477, 388 S.E.2d 804, 806 (1990) (“Viewing the premises is not regarded as taking evidence.”). Instead, a jury view’s purpose is simply to enable the jurors to better understand the evidence already presented at trial. State v. Mouzon, 326 S.C. 199, 203, 485 S.E.2d 918, 921 (1997).

number of security guards and installing metal detectors. *Id.* Six years after the shootings, a poll conducted by a political scientist found that about 70% of county residents remembered the incident and over 80% of those people said the defendant was “definitely guilty” and 18% said he was “probably guilty.” *Id.* at 649. Further, sixty-three of the ninety-nine people who appeared for jury service admitted they had heard about the case in the media; eight of the twelve jurors who ultimately sat on the defendant’s jury said they remembered the incident; and one of these jurors acknowledged he believed the defendant was guilty based on the media reports. *Id.*

The Baumruk court held that “*the circumstances of this trial*, held where the shootings occurred, are inherently prejudicial and denied Baumruk his right to a fair trial under the 6th and 14th Amendments.”³ *Id.* (emphasis added). This was because the courtroom in which the case was being tried was the same as the crime scene; the building in which the jurors entered every day of trial was the scene of the “terrifying events;” the prosecutor emphasized the fact that the crime occurred “in this courthouse,” jurors entered the courthouse and went through the metal detectors that had been installed as a direct result of the defendant’s shooting spree; and jurors used the same halls, elevators, and stairwells as the “escaping victims.” *Id.* at 650. The court found that “[t]he association between the jurors and the crime scene in this case created a prejudicial environment which undermines the basic guarantee of trial by jury.” *Id.* The court also found that it was not possible to assure that Baumruk received a fair and impartial trial because “the jurors were influenced by pretrial publicity *and* by the atmosphere of the trial setting.” *Id.* at 651 (emphasis added).

The court was careful to point out, however, that Baumruk’s case was a “unique case” and that “[r]arely if ever is a trial court’s refusal to grant a change of venue disturbed on appeal

³ Baumruk was re-tried in 2007 and was again found guilty and sentenced to death. He subsequently died in prison of natural causes in 2012 before he could be executed. See <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/shooter-in-mo-courthouse-killing-dies-in-prison/>.

because of the broad discretion given to trial court judges to make the determination as to whether or not a fair trial is possible in the county.” *Id.* at 646, 651. Significantly, the court also limited its holding as follows: “This case does not stand for the proposition that venue is improper in *any* case where the crime was committed in the courthouse – only when circumstances surrounding that crime create a prejudicial atmosphere and there is extensive pre-trial publicity.” *Id.* at 653 n9 (italics in original). Additionally, three dissenting judges would have held that the passage of time allowed a fair trial in St. Louis County, that no juror would have felt like he or she was in the shoes of the victims, and that there was no “inherent” prejudice.⁴ *Id.* at 652-53.

While the events that took place on Main Street in Chesterfield County on February 13, 2013, were certainly traumatic for the victims and should not be diminished, they were a far cry from the “rampage” in Baumruk where the defendant killed his wife and then shot at multiple, random people inside the courthouse building. Again, the shooting of Ms. Weaver and Mr. Nolan took place outside in the parking spaces on Main Street, and neither victim died. The other half of the crime took place miles away from the courthouse on Highway 9. Further, while there was certainly media coverage of the incident, only eight members of the jury panel were exposed to pretrial publicity or prior knowledge of the events, and all of these jurors affirmed that they could be fair and impartial to both parties despite such exposure. (R. p. 16-32).

Similarly, Petitioner’s comparisons of the current case to Turner v. Louisiana, 379 U.S. 466 (1965) are inapposite. In Turner, the two principal witnesses for the State were Vincent Risonse and Hulon Simmons, both of whom were deputy sheriffs. *Id.* at 467. Because of a sequestration order, the deputies were in close and continual association with the jurors, driving

⁴ There are seven judges who sit on Missouri’s Supreme Court. The only judge referred to as “justice” is the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

them to a restaurant and eating with them every meal, conversing with them, and driving them to their lodging each night. Id. Hearings on a motion for a mistrial established Response and Simmons freely mingled and conversed with the jurors in and out of the courthouse during the trial. Id. The trial judge denied the mistrial motion on the grounds there was no showing the deputies discussed the case with the jurors. Id. at 468-69. Following the denial of the mistrial motion, the court did not direct Response or Simmons to no longer associate with the jury, and the record demonstrated the association continued for the rest of the trial. Id. at 469. The Court found:

It is true that at the time they testified in open court Response and Simmons told the trial judge that they had not talked to the jurors about the case itself. But there is nothing to show what the two deputies discussed in their conversations with the jurors thereafter. And even if it could be assumed that the deputies never did discuss the case directly with any members of the jury, it would be blinking reality not to recognize the extreme prejudice inherent in this continual association throughout the trial between the jurors and these two key witnesses for the prosecution. We deal here not with a brief encounter, but with a continuous and intimate association throughout a three-day trial-an association which gave these witnesses an opportunity, as Simmons put it, to renew old friendships and make new acquaintances among the members of the jury.

Id. at 473. The Turner situation is immediately distinguishable from the instant case, as there is no showing of continuous and intimate association between a principal witness and the jury. Petitioner's argument makes the dangerous and inaccurate presupposition that courthouse employees regularly discuss the facts of a case with the jury. There was no showing whatsoever in Petitioner's case of any discussion between the jury and deputies or courthouse employees. Petitioner's arguments concerning inherent prejudice similar to that in the exceptionally unique case of Turner are therefore unconvincing.

Considering the circumstances present in Petitioner's case, the trial judge did not abuse his discretion by denying Petitioner's motion to change venue.⁵ Petitioner received a trial by fair and impartial jurors, and his convictions were properly affirmed by the Court of Appeals. This Court should deny certiorari.

⁵ At trial, the judge pointed out that only two of the attempted murder charges occurred in proximity to the courthouse and indicated he was assuming defense counsel's motion to change venue pertained only to those charges. (R. p. 55-56). Defense counsel did not object or attempt to clarify the judge's understanding on this point; therefore, it is now the law of the case that the motion to change venue pertained only to the attempted murder charges regarding Ms. Weaver and Mr. Nolan. Accordingly, even if this Court were to conclude that Petitioner's issue was meritorious and he was entitled to relief, his convictions and sentences on the remaining three charges would remain undisturbed.

CONCLUSION

For all the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully submitted that the petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.

Respectfully submitted,

ALAN WILSON
Attorney General

V. HENRY GUNTER, JR.
Assistant Attorney General

WILLIAM B. ROGERS, JR.
Solicitor, Fourth Judicial Circuit



V. HENRY GUNTER, JR.
S.C. Bar No. 102259

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

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENT

May 9, 2017

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S.C. SUPREME COURT

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE SUPREME COURT

Appeal From Chesterfield County
The Honorable Donald B. Hocker, Circuit Court Judge

Appellate Case No: 2017-000718

THE STATE,

Respondent,

v.

CURTIS BRENT GORNY,

Petitioner.

PROOF OF SERVICE

I, Anne Mueller, certify that I have served the Return to Petition for Writ of Certiorari on Petitioner by depositing one copy of the same in the United States mail, postage prepaid, addressed to his attorneys of record:

Wallace H. Jordan, Jr., Esquire
P.O. Box 2010
Florence, SC 29503

Melvin W. Cockrell III, Esquire
Barrister Bldg. Olde Towne Ctr
159 Main Street
Chesterfield, SC 29709

Sarah C. Campbell, Esquire
159 Main Street
Chesterfield, SC 29709

I further certify that all parties required by Rule to be served have been served.

This 9th day of May, 2017.



Anne A. Mueller
Legal Assistant
Office of Attorney General
Post Office Box 11549
Columbia, SC 29211
(803) 734-3727