

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
In The Court of Appeals

APPEAL FROM ADMINISTRATIVE LAW COURT

Shirley C. Robinson, Administrative Law Court Judge

Lower Court Case No. 16-ALJ-04-0641-AP
Court of Appeals Case No. 2017-000596

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SC Court of Appeals

William Allen, # 178666.....Appellant,

v.

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

FINAL BRIEF OF RESPONDENT

March 22, 2018

South Carolina Department of Corrections

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STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE ON APPEAL

I. 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 William Dale Allen (Appellant), an inmate incarcerated with the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC or Respondent). Appellant is currently committed to SCDC with a life sentence for murder. (R. dated 11/12/17, p. 1).

Appellant filed a Step One Grievance on May 6, 2016, claiming he is being illegally imprisoned because SCDC does not have a valid commitment order for the life sentence ordered by the trial court in 1991. (Supp. R. dated 3/9/18, p. “8 of 10”). SCDC investigated and denied Appellant’s Step One Grievance on June 23, 2016. (Supp. R. dated 3/9/18, p. “9 of 10”). Appellant filed a Step Two Grievance on June 30, 2016. (Supp. R. dated 3/9/18, p. “10 of 10”). SCDC investigated and denied Appellant’s Step Two Grievance. (Supp. R. dated 3/9/18, p. “10 of 10”). Appellant then filed a notice of appeal with the Administrative Law Court on August 22, 2016. (R. dated 11/12/17, p. 5).

After the parties filed briefs, the ALC affirmed SCDC’s final decision, finding that the SCDC has, on file, a facially valid sentencing order from a general sessions judge. (R. dated 11/12/17, p. 8-10).

Appellant now seeks review of 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 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. 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 during Appellant's appeal supports SCDC's decision. The record conclusively establishes that the "substantial evidence on the whole record" supports respondent's final agency decision. Appellant's sentencing order demonstrates that Appellant was sentenced to life in prison for Murder. (R. dated 11/12/17, p. 1). Further, SCDC is not empowered to make a determination regarding the validity of a sentence issued by a circuit court judge. See Jernigan v. State, 340 S.C. 256, 259-260, 531 S.E.2d 507 (2000). Therefore, the ALC correctly upheld the Agency's final decision.

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

Attorney for Respondent

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christina Catoe Bugelow", written over a horizontal line.

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CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL

The undersigned hereby certifies that the **Final Brief of Respondent** complies with Rule 211(b), SCACR, and also complies with the South Carolina Supreme Court's April 15, 2014, order entitled "Revised Order Concerning Personal Identifying Information and Other Sensitive Information in Appellate Court Filings."


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